

NASCAR, Prayer and an Inmate-Turned-Worship Leader

When they step away from the roar of the engines, the hairpin turns and the adrenaline-fueled competition, you might be surprised at how **NASCAR drivers** spend their spare time.

Furniture Row Racing's Regan Smith will be driving the #78 National Day of Prayer car at Talladega Superspeedway this coming weekend.

"The Furniture Row racing team has been great in sponsoring a National Day of Prayer car since 2006," said chairperson Shirley Dobson in a recent interview. "We are grateful to the owner, Barney Visser, his fantastic team and his driver Regan Smith. We hope to continue that relationship through the years."

Richard Andrew, who leads worship for NASCAR in conjunction with the ministry Motor Racing Outreach, says prayer is always a focus in the drivers' chapel services—and MRO chaplains will do the opening prayer for each of this weekend's races.

Worship and prayer. Prayer and worship. Twin foundations for men who risk death each time they pull onto the track—and Andrew would know. The singer/songwriter who was named the 2010 CMA (Christian Music Awards) Independent Artist of the Year spends a lot of time in and out of the pit stop with NASCAR drivers.

In fact, Andrew teamed up with Blake Koch, Trevor Bayne, Ricky Stenhouse, Josh Wise and Mike McDowell—and RRT chaplains Ginger and Dennis Sanders—during the Texas tornado outreach.

Sharing his memories of that experience, Andrew said, "My first interaction with the teams from the Rapid Response Team and Samaritan's Purse was at home base. As they shared why

they were there, I could see how kind and generous they were. The volunteers have an obvious passion to help people in need. They walk with people in their darkest hour. They truly are the **hands and feet of Jesus.**”

When he was working alongside Ginger and Denny Sanders, Andrew met 83-year-old Jay, the man the RRT chaplains had been encouraging for several days.

“On Saturday, when we gave him a Bible with handwritten notes from the volunteers, the RRT chaplains and all the NASCAR drivers, Jay broke down and cried and received Jesus into his life right then.

“Ginger and Denny are so compassionate,” Andrew added. “You can just see the love of Jesus in them.”

The love of Jesus is one of Andrew’s favorite topics: “It’s at the heart of my story,” he explained.

And what a story it is. In late 1993, Andrew was far from NASCAR and even farther from the Lord as he paced the floor in the chapel of a California State Prison (CMC)—the road to which seemed to be scripted by a Hollywood screenwriter.

“I was a runaway, a high school dropout, a homeless person, a drug addict, a drug dealer, a teenage father and finally, a convicted felon,” said Andrew. “Inside prison walls, I fit right in.”

Not looking to find God, Andrew nonetheless read greeting cards that an unknown Christian sent him over the course of two years—and something sunk in.

When he walked into the prison chapel in 1993, his heart was ready. “They were worshipping God, so I just closed my eyes,” Andrew recalled. “I could see the faces of my two daughters and began to evaluate my own life.”

Within moments, Andrew was weeping. Even stranger, he found

his feet taking him forward when a preacher invited those present to accept Christ as their Savior.

After his release in January 1994, Andrew immersed himself in praying and reading God's Word daily. He played the bass guitar as a teen and had strummed a guitar occasionally over the years, so he offered what little he knew on this instrument to the service of his new church.

With a handful of guitar chords and a passion for worship, Andrew joined his church's worship team. The next thing you know, he was asked to sing. Reluctantly agreeing, he sang his way through a worship service for the very first time

Andrew has been singing ever since.

Now an accomplished independent artist, he has taken his live ministry to the main stages of both Spirit West Coast music festivals in 2009, working with artists like Third Day, Barlow Girl, Toby Mac, MercyMe and Kutless. He also shared the Stand & Be Counted Festival stage with Big Daddy Weave, Aaron Shust and KJ52; and co-headlined the I AM LOVE 360 Music Festival with Seventh Day Slumber and Todd Agnew.

And although Andrew now leads worship for Motor Racing Outreach and at The Rivers Edge Church in Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., he is also a powerful speaker. Visitors to his website have commented that Andrew's testimony is compelling and thought-provoking: He "effectively prepares the soil of people's hearts, thus opening the door for the gospel."

With the heart of an evangelist, Andrew always extends an altar call after each engagement—which have been filled with people from all walks of life—not just ex-cons or people who have battled addiction.

"At the heart of my story is God's love," Andrew repeated. "And everybody wants to be loved."

Read the original article at the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.