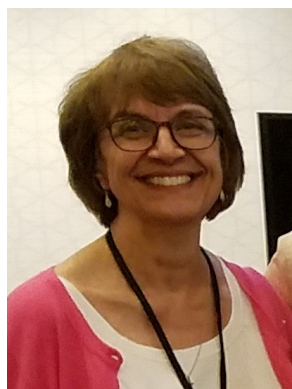


CSD Newsletter – Winter, 2022

Outside Looking In

When I last wrote this newsletter, I assumed that by this time we would be back to business as usual with worship and Bible study in the prisons; however, the roller coaster of COVID outbreaks still seems to be going up and down.



Last summer, we hoped to resume worship once vaccines had made us all safer and brought down COVID cases. With warm weather bringing new possibilities, we advocated for returning to worship and proposed that we do what other churches have done with outdoor worship and creative use of technology, but we could not receive DPSCS permission to go forward. Then the Delta variant hit.

By Fall, it seemed that vaccines had indeed done the job in suppressing the virus and again we could get in. After re-submitting paperwork and attending re-orientations, we were ready to go back in December, but the Omicron variant of COVID shut things down again. We were only able to get permission to go back to MCIJ and CMCF for one worship service in December before being shut out again. Due to a lack of communication from the DPSCS administrations with the residents, the attendance was small at these worship services but, oh, the joy of reunion with those there was a gift! What a roller coaster of joy, disappointment and hope!

We were so disappointed to be shut out again. But, God is good, and always finds a way to reach God's people – and ministry continues.

Through all this time, we have continued our mail ministry. Once a week, all our siblings in faith associated with the Community of St. Dysmas have received something in the mail – devotional materials, Bible studies, sermons, articles, worship resources and folders, and, most appreciated, letters from their fellow Lutherans in “outside” churches. I asked our December worship service attendees, “What has gotten you through these almost two years now?” They all replied: “Mail came to my cell door each week from the Community of St. Dysmas. I knew I'm not forgotten.”

So, we begin 2022 with uncertainty about what will happen next. Certainly, our ministry will need to re-build with new parameters, as have so many other ministries. DPSCS has imposed many restrictions on worship, and we are having to look at what that means and how can we effectively advocate for the rights of the incarcerated.

Meanwhile, we step forward in faith and in service to our CSD siblings who are enduring this pandemic in incarceration. We continue our mailings and we are so very appreciative of all you who have faithfully sent notes of encouragement for us to pass on. We continue to explore ways to advocate for the incarcerated and their rights.

Most of all, we hold on in faith that God is at work in this ministry. Jesus quite clearly gave us a mandate to visit those in prison (Matthew 25:36), and we know that where he gives a directive and where we are willing to follow, there will be a way forward.

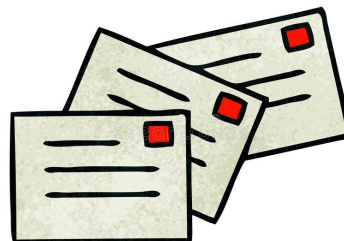
Peace, joy, faith, and hope to you,

Pastor Susan✠

Letters, We Write Letters!

We've been asking Lutherans and ecumenical partners to submit notes to our office that we can mail to individuals who are a part of the CSD family. In these difficult times, these letters are quite literally a God-send for them. The Department of Corrections has rules for writing to inmates, so if you or anyone in your congregation would like to write a note, here are the guidelines for writing:

1. Use only white or plain lined notebook paper. No stationary or greeting cards. Notes can be handwritten or printer generated.
2. Blue or black ball point pen, no color or markers. Line drawings are welcome but no color.
3. Greeting should be generic such as "Dear friend in faith," "Hello, my sibling in Christ," etc.
4. Do not give identifiers such as your name, location, etc., *but please say what church you are from*. This helps our people know they are part of the larger church.
5. Generic messages of encouragement, Bible verses or prayers in the body of the note are very much appreciated.
6. Sign with a term such as "Your friend in Christ," "A fellow Lutheran," "A sister/brother in faith," etc.



Please send the letters to our office and we will distribute them to the members.

Community of St Dysmas
905 Frederick Rd
Catonsville, Md 21228

Or email them to: pastor@communitystdysmas.com

On behalf of our Community of St. Dysmas folks, thank you very much!


Letters from Our Folks

Any CSD volunteer will tell you, we are ministered to much more than we minister to our incarcerated siblings in faith. This continues to be true, even as we can't be there in person! Here are a couple of the letters we have received from our folks "on the inside."

PASTOR SUSAN, TERRY, AND MY WHOLE LUTHERAN FAMILY,
I APOLOGIZE FOR TAKING SO LONG TO RESPOND
TO YOUR POSTCARD, I AM GETTING THE WORSHIP
MATERIAL PASTOR SUSAN IS SENDING ME AND I
DO ENJOY SPENDING TIME READING IT AND THE
LUTHERAN MAGAZINES AND DEVOTIONALS, PRAYING
AND SPENDING TIME READING GODS WORD. I 100%
BELIEVE THAT GOD ANSWERS OUR PRAYERS, IT
CAN BE A PRETTY HOSTILE ENVIROMENT IN HERE
AT TIMES AND FORGINNESS AND KINDNESS CAN
BE TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF AND PAINTS A TARGET
ON OUR BACKS AS CHRISTIANS. THERE ARE TIME
WHEN IT'S LIKE SATAN USES PEOPLE IN HERE AN
SITUATIONS TO UTTERLY DESTROY US AND EACH
TIME I SOMEHOW ESCAPE UNHARMED AS IF I
HAD A GUARDIAN ANGE(LS) PROTECTING ME, IT MAKE
ME WONDER IF OUR PRAYERS FOR EACH OTHER
ARE HEARD AND ANSWERED, WHEN IT FEELS LIKE
IM DEFEATED AND THE DEVIL HAS ME CORNERED
WITH NO ESCAPE, DIVINE INTERVENTION PROVIDE
A WAY OUT AT THE LAST SECOND. IT MAKES ME
THANKFULL TO HAVE A "CHURCH" FAMILY LIKE YOU
GUYS PRAYING FOR ME AND TO BE CONSIDERED A
CHILD OF GOD, WHAT IF I WAS TO TELL YOU GOD HEARS
AND ANSWERS OUR PRAYERS, I KNOW THIS FOR A
FACT HE DOES. I WILL KEEP YOU IN MY PRAYERS
BECAUSE YOU ARE MY FAMILY AND YOU ARE LOVED.
S

S. YOU CAN USE ANY LETTERS I SEND TO SHARE W/OTHERS AND PRAYING SERVICES WILL BE
STARTING SOON I CHECKED LUTHERAN TO SEE IF THEY HAVE ENOUGH GUYS FOR A SERVICE.

To my Community of St. Dysmas

I want to write to say {THANKYOU} for the love, Lessons, Letters I get God is so Good. Even with Mistakes he is my Shield No harm of the world Seem to get me. I feel that between me all SCORN and indignity is a strong Shield I now practice this until nothing has the Power to Spoil my INWARD peace and I KNOW a marvelous Victory will be won, yes I still wonder how I am permitted to make so many mistakes when I so truly want to do his will But as time goes by I say these are no mistakes my lessons can't be learn without difficulty and this all was to be needed to teach me. And the Lord said I would overcome a promise given to you and me what Joy Sister or Brother So I will attain peace in my surroundings as well in my heart I am gonna learn quickly. Im getting short can get the Box soon Nothing easy for me but in time I will be free I wish to share more but thats not important I did write Brother (Lcs) I Hope to Meet you all and to be apart of the Community I Need you all forsure
Your Brother 

Artwork Behind the Walls

A creative spirit flourishes in many of our CSD siblings; some of them have used artistic work to pass the time during COVID. Below are a few examples that they have been kind enough to share with us.

A Reflection on Finding Peace by a Sister

Tenderly Held

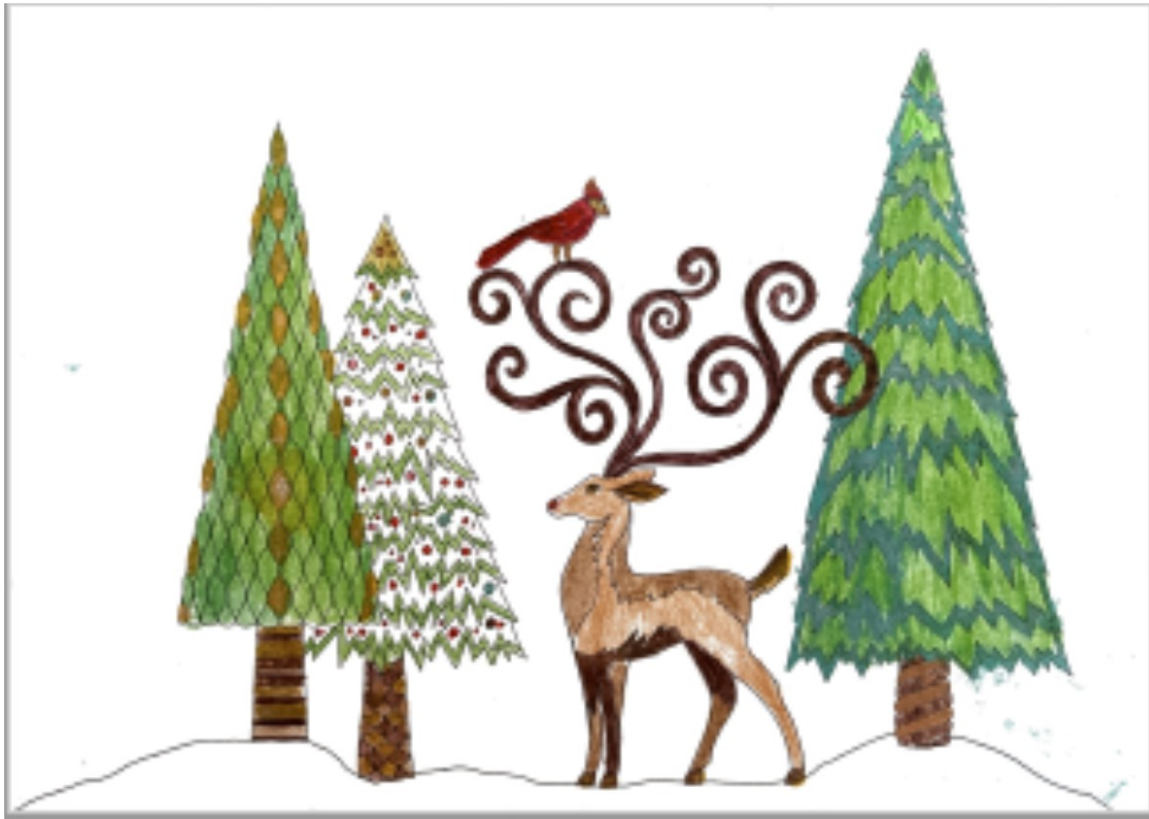
Often we feel lost and confused trying to understand why things happen as they do.

Beyond our limited knowledge, beyond our understanding lies a well of all wisdom, and within that wisdom is the Abode of All There Is.

When my heart is heavy, and I feel tired from all the weight on my shoulders, I quietly succumb to the silence within my own being, and within that silence I find a calm that brings peace to me. And for a moment I can see beyond my limited view. And, in that moment of insight, I see light.

Light that touches my human life, and gives my spirit freedom, freedom to soar the heavens, gliding across Eternity surrounded by love, and wrapped tenderly within the Hands of the most High God.

A Picture Decorated for Us by a Sister



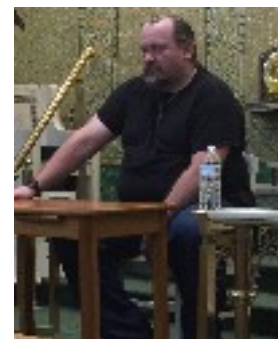
A Doxology to be Sung to the Tune of “Edelweiss” from a Brother

May The LORD, Mighty God
Bless and keep you forever,
Grant you peace, perfect peace
Courage in every endeavor.
Lift up your eyes and see His Face,
Know His Grace forever.
May The LORD, Mighty God
Bless and keep you forever.

May The Lord, Mighty God
Bless and keep you forever,
Grant you peace, perfect peace
Courage in every endeavor.
Lift up your eyes and see His Face,
Know His Grace forever.
May The Lord, Mighty God
Bless and keep you forever,

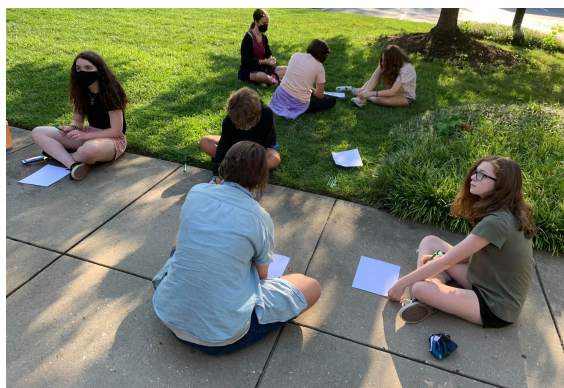
Returning Citizen Video

One of our returning citizens who was released in 2021 asked us if he could make a video to help people understand the prison experience and how families might be better equipped to help loved ones who have been incarcerated. Last September, he taped an eloquent video in the sanctuary at Salem Lutheran in Catonsville with the technical support of Salem videographer, Guy Davis. The video is called “Coming Home”, and you can see it on our Facebook page or [here on YouTube](#).



Making the Video

Girl Scout Project



Drawing and Enjoying the Fresh Air

Last Fall, Pastor Susan was invited by middle school Girl Scout troop # 632 and their leader, Karen Stysley, to talk about prison and justice issues. We delved into topics such as racial and economic issues that can lead to incarceration as well as the challenges that people face when released from prison. The girls wanted to do a service project to help, so they made line drawings for the women at MCIW. They also are discussing a fund raiser to buy gift cards for returning citizens to be distributed through the Baltimore Area Aftercare program.

Looking for a Supply Pastor?

Pastor Beck would be delighted to preach, participate in an adult forum, or to meet with your council, social ministry committee, or other interested group anywhere in the Delaware-Maryland or Metropolitan Washington DC Synods. To schedule a time for her to visit please contact her by phone at 443-326-1115 or email pastor@communitystdysmas.com .

Food Baskets from St. John's

Again in 2021, St. John's Lutheran church in Pimlico made holiday miracles happen. Both the weekend before Thanksgiving AND the weekend before Christmas, they assembled over 100 food baskets, complete with turkeys, hams, vegetables, boxed staples and other items. Each time, about 10 baskets went to Community of St. Dysmas returning citizens. In addition, St John's members included Christmas gifts for the households of each returning citizen. What a blessing for our CSD folks to have bounteous holiday meals from Pastor Lynell and her amazing congregation!



Pastor Susan and Pastor Lynell



We Have Turkeys!



Baskets Being Filled

Aftercare Program News

I've been blessed to volunteer with the Baltimore Area Aftercare Program (BAAP) the last couple of years. BAAP is an organization dedicated to working with people coming out of prison or jail. We have coordinated with St Dysmas to provide support for returning citizens who have been active with St. Dysmas. Executive Director Brother Les Roberts brought BAAP to Maryland to expand on successful work in the Loudoun Aftercare Program. Currently our volunteers come from Episcopalian and ELCA Lutheran traditions, but we are open to volunteers from varied traditions.

In 2021 BAAP assisted 11 participants in meeting their basic needs upon their release from prison. In addition to this support with basic necessities (crisis management) that we call "Project Makeover", we also seek to support returning citizens through longer-term faith-based mentoring, called "Partner for Success". Will the Spirit someday lead BAAP to provide housing for returning citizens?

Lutheran Seminarian Melody Hession-Sigmon worked with us in 2021, as did the Rev. Deacon Amy Shimonkevitz. We are currently only 2-5 volunteers working on a shoe-string budget and seek to find more volunteers and resources. We are blessed to partner with St. Dysmas and Pastor Susan Beck to meet the needs of these children of God. You can learn more about us or make donations at www.baap-matt25v36.org. Gift cards to grocery stores or Walmart are particularly useful. If you feel you may be called to volunteer with us, contact Brother Les Roberts brotherles@baap-matt25v36.org.

In Christ,
Rev. Paul Collinson-Streng,
BAAP Board Member & Retired ELCA Pastor

Join Us With Your Financial Support

Unlike other Lutheran congregations, The Community of St. Dysmas receives no internal financial support. The necessary goal of CSD's Council is that every congregation of our Synod and as many individuals as possible become financial supporters of The Community of St. Dysmas. The best way your congregation can do this is by putting St. Dysmas in your budget. This shows intent on your part and lets us know we can count on you for support. Other possibilities might include special offerings either monthly or during special services such as Lent, unique fund raisers, or having St. Dysmas offering envelopes available for your people. If you come up with special ideas to raise contributions for The Community of St. Dysmas, we would love to hear about them!

The Community of St. Dysmas is an Amazon Smile charity. Please consider supporting CSD in this way.



Another way to support CSD is with Thrivent Choice Dollars. Through this program, eligible members are allocated Choice Dollars, based on insurance premiums, contract values, and Thrivent Financial volunteer leadership. Check to see whether

you are eligible to direct your Thrivent Choice Dollars to CSD on the Thrivent website. Your dollars for CSD help to support this ministry and to bring God's Word to many who so desperately need to hear of God's grace, love and forgiveness.

In 2018, Gifts of Hope added CSD to the organizations that they support. Gifts of Hope is a ministry sponsored by the Metropolitan Washington DC Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). It is a family of volunteers, congregations, donors, the Synod, and 19 beneficiary organizations. In 25 years they have raised and disbursed over \$3,370,000 to their varied beneficiary organizations. These funds have helped the homeless, the hungry, the job-seeker, the young, the elderly, immigrants, refugees, seminary and college students, and those seeking to improve their lives. They also support the work of companion synods in Namibia, Slovakia, and El Salvador. Gifts of Hope touches the lives of thousands of people—locally and globally. Gifts of Hope serves as an intermediary between donors and organizations serving individuals and families in need. For more information, see [their website](#). Gifts may be given year-round at [the website](#); however, the program's primary focus is during the Christmas holidays, including the season of Advent.



Now you can also donate through the [Delaware-Maryland Synod website](#). Click on "Give Online!" and then select Community of St. Dysmas from the "To" menu.

Minutes of the 2021 St. Dysmas Annual Meeting January 8, 2022

Values of The Community of St. Dysmas

VALUE ONE: We are a Christ centered ministry that honors the teachings of the Bible
= FOCUSED ON WORSHIP & BIBLE STUDY IN EACH CORRECTIONAL SITE

VALUE TWO: We believe that no life is beyond reach since all are created in the image of God
=FOCUSED ON MEMBER EVANGELISM & SHARING MISSION/VALUES TO ALL

VALUE THREE: We rely on congregations and volunteers to accomplish and enhance the ministry=
FOCUSED ON MARKETING; FUNDRAISING; VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT

VALUE FOUR: We use faith stories to connect and enrich the lives of congregations, volunteers and persons incarcerated = FOCUSED ON SHARING FAITH STORIES

VALUE FIVE: We hold ourselves accountable to excellent management for the ministry including time, talent, and treasures = FOCUSED ON MANAGING MINISTRY

VALUE SIX: We are committed to a continuum of ministry and support in and outside the Institution = FOCUSED ON AFTER-CARE

Present: Lois Carrigan, Susan Beck, Linda Fleischer, Bob Harvey, Myra Keel, Susie Jordan, Terry Lockridge, Cheryl Hollar, Gary Tartanian, Alan Ramsey, Linda Smith, David Kaplan, Charles Frederick, Timothy Grayson, Dave Simpson, Paul Collinson-Streng (guest)

Welcome and Introductions by Lois Carrigan

- Reminded attendees that CSD Council meets every month via Zoom
- Expressed appreciation for Pr. Susan's extraordinary efforts to maintain our presence in the facilities

Opening Prayer – Pr. Susan Beck

Approval of 2020 Annual Meeting minutes

- Moved by Alan Ramsey and approved by acclamation after one correction (add Linda Smith to attendees).

Pastor's Report by Pr. Susan

- Pr. Susan read a letter from a member at MCIW who thanked us for the written communication and reminded us how important our outreach is. She looks forward to the return of worship to the facility.
- CSD ministry continues through the mailing of sermons, devotionals and letters from the community to member congregations and inmates in other institutions who request our support. Linda Fleischer tracks the location of each inmate and addresses the envelopes for Pr. Susan each week. Upon our return to worship, there will be inmates in facilities not affiliated with CSD and we will continue mailing to them.
- Pr. Susan expressed her appreciation to Salem Church in Catonsville for its ongoing support and facility use.
- There are continued difficulties in communication with DPSCS administrators and cooperation with facility staff. A memo was issued by DPSCS on July 3 that announced the return of religious services in the prisons. She outlined the steps taken to schedule worship which did result in services held at MCIJ and CMCF in December. Access was again limited in January when the variant of COVID, Omicron, emerged and suspended all visitation.
- Limitations have been set by DPSCS that include one visit per month to each facility. That includes worship and bible study. Each facility has different procedures so navigating access is complicated.
- Pr. Susan is attempting to establish a congregation at RCI. There is a requirement for eight men to express interest and we now have seven. She is hoping to gain traction there.
- Intern Melody Hession has been working with Pr. Susan and is very interested in prison ministry. It appears as if the importance of this ministry is recognized by younger pastors.
- We have lost many volunteers and will need to recruit new ones. All volunteers will have to complete orientation upon their return.
- In summary, there are no plans to resume worship in the prisons at this time so we will continue our outreach through mailing material. There will be a challenge to rebuild our membership since many have been released. Pr. Susan is confident that our faithful members who remain will lift us up and move us forward.

Pr. Susan introduced Pr. Paul Collinson-Streng (retired). He is working with Br. Les Roberts and the Baltimore Area Aftercare Program (BAAP).

- He described current efforts to provide resources, housing and support for returning citizens.

- Many men and women are connected to CSD and need reentry services that are absent in the community.
- Employment is a huge challenge for this population and the ability to assist in transition is a goal of BAAP.
- He expressed appreciation for the opportunity to complement CSD mission with aftercare support.

Financial Report and 2021 Budget review by Bob Harvey - available on request

- Our budget is in excellent shape. Contributions in 2021 decreased but other assets remained stable.
- We contribute \$500 each quarter to the BAAP for their support of CSD returning citizens.
- The 2022 budget includes an increase in Pr. Susan's salary and other small changes.
- Susie Jordan moved to approve the 2022 Budget and it was approved by acclamation.

Questions and comments

- Charles Frederick is leading the Adult Forum on May 22 at Christ Lutheran, Inner Harbor, and asked if Pr. Susan would participate in a presentation on CSD. She agreed and will see if Pr. Les could attend as well as a member who has been released.
- Terry Lockridge commented that the Delaware-Maryland Synod website lists 22 programs with links to send financial contributions. CSD is not on the list. He asked Bob if CSD could be added. While we do get money from Synod every month, we are not on the website list for public contributions. Bob will follow-up.

Lois thanked everybody for attending and supporting our mission.

Final thoughts and closing prayer by Reverend Susan Beck, CSD Pastor.

Meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Linda Fleischer
01/10/22

The Community of St. Dysmas

A Lutheran Congregation within the walls of the Maryland Department of Corrections

Pastor Susan Beck

CSD Council

Email: council@communitystdysmas.com

Deacon Linda N. Smith, Administrator

Council Members

905 Frederick Rd.

Lois Carrigan, Chair

Catonsville, MD 21228

Bob Harvey, Treasurer

Phone: 443-326-1115

Linda Fleischer

Email: pastor@communitystdysmas.com

Myra Keel

Website: www.stdysmasmd.org

Alan Ramsey