

THE COMMUNITY OF
ST. DYSMAS

I was in Prison & You Came To Visit Me



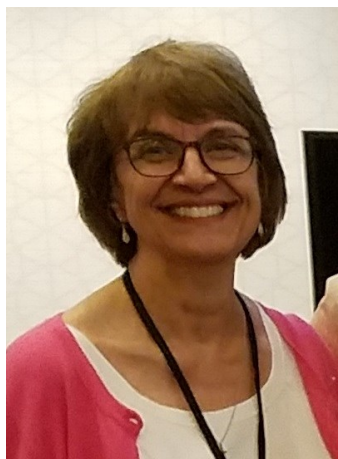
May, 2019

Newsletter

Inside Looking Out

It's the season for graduations, weddings and other life events—and we at the Community of St Dysmas have our own celebrations to mark! Just this past week, three of our members have “graduated” from one phase of life to another.

A faithful CSD member is being released Friday after a long incarceration, and one of our volunteers is going to pick him up and drive him to his transitional housing. Last Monday night at MCTC, we had a “Farewell and Godspeed” litany for him. I read from Isaiah, where God promises to be with us through whatever life throws at us, and I wrapped a prayer shawl around his shoulders as the other members of his congregation there laid hands on him and prayed. What a blessed send-off!



Pastor Susan Beck

Another of our former MCIJ members who was released last October signed a lease for his own apartment two days ago—a big step back into society. His journey to life post-release has been a complicated one, with his home plan falling through at the last minute, a transition to a shelter, relationship issues to work through, a heart attack. Through a volunteer, we got him the basics to set up housekeeping. He's on his way!

And one of our former members from MCTC has today, with our help and help from Pr Dave Asendorf from Salem Lutheran, successfully found a place to stay in a stable shelter near support of family and our facilities. What a solid new start!

While many of us are celebrating life events of friends and family this season, we at CSD do the same with our members and alumni. Through God's work in the midst of lives that have been marked by mistakes and challenges (and that pretty much describes all of us), new lives appear.

This is what the Jesus story is all about. God works through human flesh to make divine miracles happen. The good work that begins in the weekly worship

From Pr. Beck (continued)

services inside the walls continues on the outside. There are fits and starts and set backs of course (as, again, describes all of our lives) but God's purpose moves forward to bring us closer to God's will for us.

In this season of celebrations, transitions and new beginnings, I thank God for God's work among us, and for all our siblings in Christ, inside and outside the walls, who participate in that process. If you would like to be a part of this exciting ministry as a volunteer who helps with worship inside or to transport and support our folks when they are released, please contact me at 443-326-1115.

To God be the Glory!

Pastor Susan

Congratulations!

Speaking of celebrations, the Community of St Dymas is pleased to announce that, for the second year in a row, the most exemplary volunteer in the Delaware-Maryland Synod is one of ours! Susie Jordan received the Social Ministry Award at the Celebration of Lay Ministry banquet on May 5 at Carroll Lutheran Village. Susie is our administrative assistant at CSD and has also served in a volunteer capacity for over 20 years. She has faithfully volunteered weekly at the Maryland State Correctional Facility for Women, ministering to the women through leading worship and Bible Study. But her service is more than faithful—it is *joyful*! Her work is truly a labor of love that comes from the heart. She cares deeply about this ministry and each of the ladies who are a part of our congregation on the inside. Susie also serves on the CSD board and has taken a key role in the growth and development of this ministry. We thank God for the blessing Susie has been to us and are excited to see her get this well-deserved recognition.

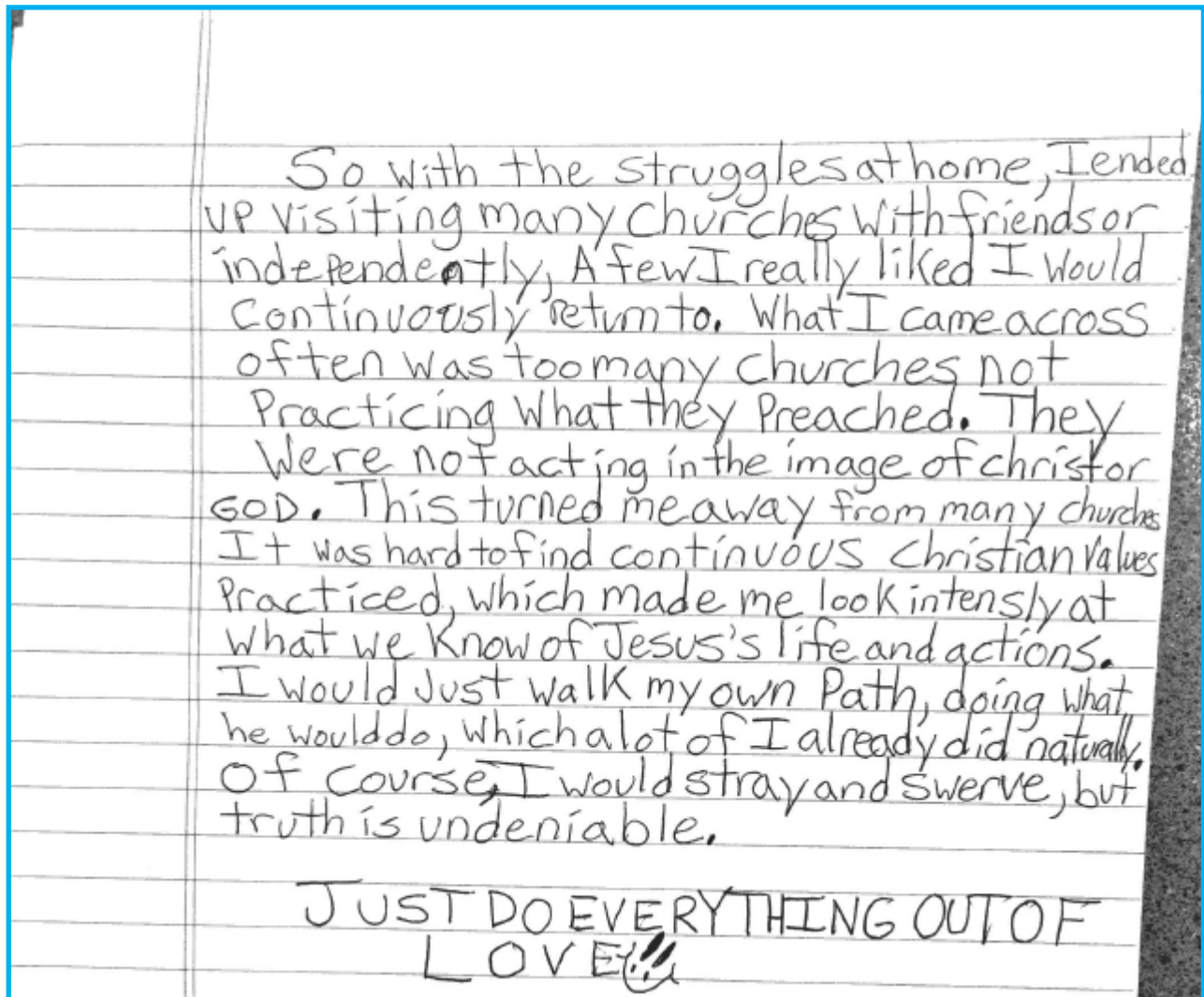


Sundays With CSD

Looking for something different? In addition to the worship and Bible studies conducted within the prison walls, the CSD Speakers Bureau is available and delighted to attend conference meetings, to worship with your congregation, to lead an Adult Forum, or to meet with your council or social outreach committee anywhere in the Delaware-Maryland or Metropolitan Washington DC Synods.

Why not have a special **CSD** Day at your congregation! To schedule a Sunday or other time for Pastor Beck or someone from our Speakers Bureau to visit your congregation to preach, to participate in an adult forum, or to meet at some other time, please contact us by phone at 443-326-1115 or email pastor@communitystdysmas.com.

Testimony from a Member



Community of St. Dymas Aftercare Program

Aftercare is the array of services and support that the Community of St. Dymas (CSD) can provide members of the congregation beginning while they are still incarcerated and continuing after they are released. Aftercare helps facilitate the transition from prison so that our members successfully return to the community. While a common measure of success is whether men or women return to prison after their release, better measures are whether they have decent places to live, are earning a living, and are addressing other needs and concerns from healthcare to reuniting with family members to spiritual support.

CSD has worked on aftercare for many years. Recently, we decided to create a more robust program. The goal is to build a program that can meet the most important needs of CSD members thereby increasing their re-entry success.

When CSD members are released from prison, they need a way to get from where they are released to where they will be living. The intent of the aftercare program is to develop several transportation teams of at least two people who are available statewide to take CSD members from wherever they are released to their chosen housing. These transportation teams need to be flexible and patient to accommodate the uncertainties associated with release schedules.

The ultimate goal of the aftercare program is to have men and women fully integrate into their communities and become productive and contributing members of those communities. a potentially lengthy and complex process. Many prison ministries in the U.S. and Canada use aftercare teams to provide support for a year or longer. Much of the work of becoming part of the community will depend on the viability of the connections that individual CSD members make and maintain with the community-based agencies that provide direct services. CSD can reinforce these connections and provide additional support to transitioning members by creating aftercare teams based in congregations who provide ongoing, hands-on care to these men and women.

Another aspect of the CSD aftercare program is establishing regional coordinators who can facilitate the transition of CSD members from prison to the community. These coordinators would work with congregations to welcome CSD members to the community and be a source of information on the many community resources available to those re-entering the community from prison.

This CSD aftercare program will depend on volunteers who can be regional coordinators, members of transportation teams, or members of congregational teams who will work with returning CSD members. If you or your congregation are interested in helping with the CSD aftercare program, contact Pastor Susan Beck, the CSD pastor, at 443-326-1115. or pastor@communitystdymas.com.

Testimony from a Volunteer

Many years ago, in the 1980's I was interested in prison reform and I became a literacy tutor in a women's prison. I also joined a small group of Lutherans from Salem and other nearby churches who worshipped inside the prison as part of a mission congregation developed by the ELCA – a congregation started within the prison; not simply visited by a chaplain from the outside. The women were building their own congregation, church council and all. A full-time pastor was called to St. Dymas, named in memory of the repentant criminal crucified with Christ.

I was among the early guests – a visitor, a stranger from outside who came to their church to share in worship. There were a number of us from my home congregation, Salem, who came on Saturday nights for the service and social fellowship afterwards in the prison dining room. Again, as I had in all my volunteer work and social ministry interests, I felt I was doing God's work there, reaching out and serving in a way God wanted me to – sort of like being a candy striper in a hospital as I'd been in high school. Visiting those needy folks in prison was also constructive, a good thing to do. And then came trouble. My husband and I separated and the time came for us to divide up our belongings. Wouldn't you know he, as pastor, got our home church. And, so, for the first time in my life, I was without a congregation, the core of my social life and community.

I felt homeless, church homeless. I was a stranger wherever I visited. I had no church – except that prison where I regularly visited inmates. And that became my congregation for a year when I as a stranger had nowhere else to go that felt like home. I was comfortable there and felt entirely welcomed. The women treated me not as an outsider or intruder or mere visitor, but as a sister who needed the same kindness and care that they craved. I realized that I could have been one of them, that I WAS one of them. I, too, had experienced anger and hurt that could have led to violence that many of them had endured or inflicted.

I had been engaged all my life with church activities and welcoming the stranger, but the greatest lessons I've ever learned about welcoming those in need came from the women at MCIW, the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women on Route 175 in Jessup, Maryland. Some of their prayers and songs sustained me through a very rough time in my life. We sang "I Shall be Released" with a vigor and poignancy I had heard nowhere else before – and have not heard since. I learned that there are all kinds of ways to be imprisoned and all kinds of ways to be released. I learned about gratitude for the many small things in life as I listened to prayers that usually began, "Thank you God for waking me to another day I do not deserve." I learned that I was really no different from these other lonely girls and women – wives, mothers, sisters, girlfriends – who had somehow fallen into a dark, dark place but who still had the grace to feel sympathy for me and to feel my pain right along with their own. I was welcomed, welcomed, welcomed into their confidence and trust. I learned to be less judgmental, less smug, more willing to see people differently and not just by what they appeared to be. I responded deeply and was not a stranger among them. I was another part of broken humanity, needing a community to serve and help and save us all. I learned by their simply welcoming me, once a stranger, lost and homeless. And so I moved on, enriched by my grief and loss. And I continue to pray that they have, too, every one of those women who blessed me in my time of trouble, and in theirs. Amen.

A Lolly Tale

On April 12, 2019, David and Sue Pumplin and I experienced an amazing grace-filled moment while at Maryland Correctional Institute of Jessup. I like to call these little holy moments “God Winks.” This is when a child of God experiences a profound and extraordinary expression of love and with an automatic certainty says “Yes, that is you God!”

We were on our way out of the chapel, and it had started to rain, so we were moving through the drops at a quicker pace than when we came in. We reached the main building and a voice called out from behind us. No, it was not the voice of God, but then again it very well may have been. The voice said “Wait, hold up!” I had no idea why we were being stopped less than five feet from the door. A series of questions filled my mind: “What did we do wrong? Did we forget something? Did we step over a line we were not supposed to cross?”

I know in following Jesus, we travel the road less traveled and I wondered what the consequences may be this night. I turned around to see one of the officers looking at us, and she said “I want to give you something”. She reached into a bag and produced a red lollipop for each of us. She said, “These are a thank-you gift for our volunteers.”



I was really touched by this little gesture and this gift. In my walk with God, I have learned to expect the unexpected in ways I could never fathom. This was a “God Wink” for three disciples who said yes that night to the voice of Jesus calling us to MCIJ. This little message or “wink” from God was assurance that we were living out our baptismal callings through the Community of St. Dysmas.

I give thanks to God for the Community of St. Dysmas in our Synod. It has truly transformed my walk with the Lord in humility and in love. If you had told me 10 years ago that one day I would be volunteering and representing CSD in a

Correctional Facility, I would have never believed you. But this is exactly what the Gospel does daily in our lives. This is Gospel living, following the way, the truth, and the life found in Jesus.

I had read and heard the passage in Matthew 25 about visiting the Lord in prison, but that Scripture comes alive once you step out of the boat into the water to where Christ is calling. I realized that my faith journey is intertwined with these men and women of CSD and that through them, the Holy Spirit has been transforming me. Humility reveals that it's not about me, but about the one who is at work in these encounters and relationships behind barbed wire and locked doors. I know this ministry is not for everyone, but it is one that I would strongly recommend to any seminary student or seasoned minister who wants to stand on the front lines to face poverty, the marginalized, the poor in spirit, those living in the wilderness and darkness and looking for hope. Here is where we stand in solidarity as volunteers of CSD to be the hands and feet of Christ for our neighbor and love one another for the sake of the Gospel. We are partners in bringing forth the kingdom of God.

On this special night, God said thank you in the form of a lollipop and it was good, because God is good. Thank be to God for grace, mercy, love and lollipops. God says through this message of mine to thank each of you, the volunteers of the Community of St. Dymas. You are beloved and blessed and it is well-pleasing what you do for your neighbor. May you continue in your ministries with God's blessing and Spirit in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

In faith, hope, and love,

Don Helfer, O.S.S.D Deacon & Child of God



2018 Annual Meeting
Sunday November 17, 2019,
at 3 PM
Salem Lutheran Church,
Catonsville MD

Come join us as we share the good news of the work of the ministry, elect new officers and share fellowship with our volunteers and staff.

Need more information?

- Check out our website www.stdysmasmd.org or our Facebook page
- Call 443-326-1115
- Email us at office@communitystdysmas.com

Join Us With Your Financial Support

Unlike other Lutheran congregations, The Community of St. Dymas 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. Dymas. The best way your congregation can do this is by putting St. Dymas in your budget. This shows intentionality 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. Dymas offering envelopes available for your people. If you come up with special ideas to raise contributions for The Community of St. Dymas, we would love to hear about them!

The Community of St. Dymas 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 go far 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. Recently, a devout Roman Catholic lady used Thrivent Choice dollars to gift the ministry of St. Dymas. Thank you (and as the old saying goes, "What Rome throws out, the Lutherans pick up.")

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 many and 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.



Join Us With Your Financial Support (continued)

Gifts of Hope serves as an intermediary between donors and organizations serving individuals and families in need. Gifts may be given year-round at www.giftsofhopedc.org; however, the program's primary focus is during the Christmas holidays, including the season of Advent. You can contact Gifts of Hope for more information by emailing director@giftsofhopedc.org.



Tino's Fundraiser

Our next fundraiser at Tino's Italian Bistro and Wine Bar in Columbia is on Tuesday, September 3, 2019. Please save this date! Ten percent (10%) of the total proceeds for the day will be donated to the St. Dymas AfterCare Program. This includes **ALL** catering, takeout, lunch, and dinner orders. Tino's is located at 8778 Centre Park Drive, Columbia, MD 21045. To see the menu and get directions, check out [Tino's website](#).



The call committee has met several times this spring. We have written a job description and hope to begin interviewing candidates for the new pastor of the Community of St. Dymas soon.

Get Involved!

There are several ways you can be involved with this meaningful ministry to God's children behind bars. Please consider praying for us, worshiping with us, and supporting our ministry with your contributions. If you feel a calling to lead worship, participate in the music ministry, or simply to add your presence, please contact us by phone at 443-306-1115 or by email at pastor@communitystdymas.com.

Pray for and with the Community of St. Dysmas

Please be with my family and friends and all their needs. Watch over them as well as all the women here. Be with all the volunteers and their families. Thank you for all your blessings. Prayers for all the women coming up for parole. May your will be done.

Please bless my family, the women at MCIW, our volunteers and Jen Lawson's family. Please bring me home soon.

Prayer for all the ladies at MCIW that are dealing with the loss of loved ones and family members who are ill or hospitalized. Keep them safe. Also pray that I'll return home to my children soon. Thank you for your continued blessings.

Please pray for all the people in my world who are grieving or in pain. Thanks for a blessed visit with my dad and sister. Pray for discernment for Andy and Amy as they make plans for after graduation.

Please protect the abused addicted and homeless. Please watch over my kids and grandma. Thank you for your blessings and our wonderful volunteers.

LORD, IN YOUR MERCY, HEAR OUR PRAYER



Do you have a memory or inspiring story of an experience with CSD? Of so, please share it with us, and we'll include it in a future newsletter!

The Community of St. Dysmas

A Lutheran Congregation within the walls of Maryland Correctional Institutions

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