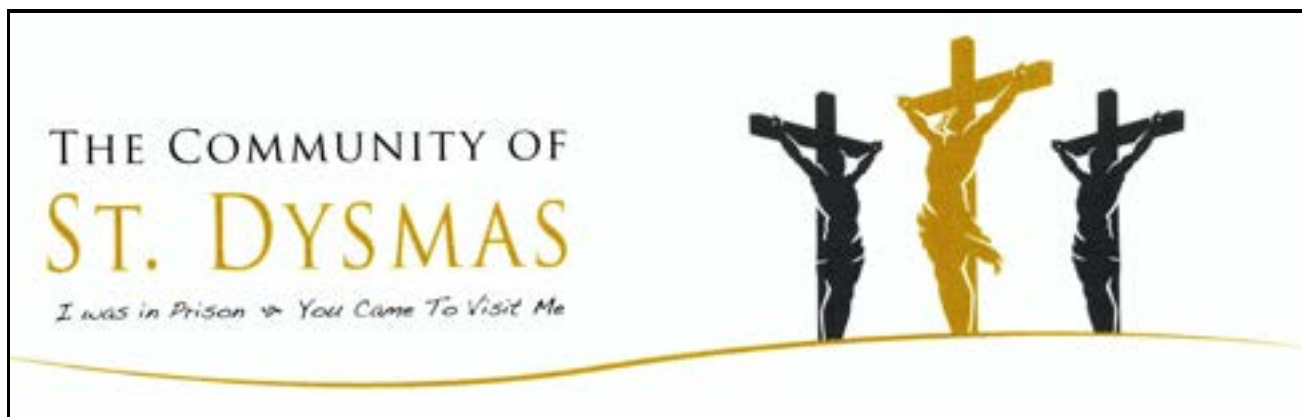




CSD Newsletter – Fall, 2026

Outside Looking In The Blessing of Community

This past month, we received another donation from one of our returning citizens. He isn't the only one who donates, and while we are blessed by and so grateful to many very generous donors, the donations we get from our siblings in faith who were part of our congregations are particularly precious. When I called to thank him, he said "As soon as I was making some money, I had to donate to you. You were my family when I couldn't be with my family. You made me feel loved and like I belonged."

There's a reason we're called the Community of St. Dysmas. We are not a prison ministry that comes in and does ministry for them; we are ministry with our incarcerated siblings. We worship with, we listen, we talk, we affirm, we love. We create relationships, and I know I speak for all our volunteers when I say we think about and pray for our congregation members not just when we're there, but all the time, and we know they are thinking of and praying for us. We are community.



This is the best witness of God's love—to genuinely care for each other. It's the model that the first Jesus followers lived—sharing each others' burdens and joys.

One of our dear incarcerated siblings said, "I left church as a young person because all they did was tell me how I'm a sinner. I already knew that! I couldn't hear it anymore. But when I came to this service, I found out I'm loved. That changes me. I want to hear more. I still don't trust church because of the experience I had but I'm coming back."

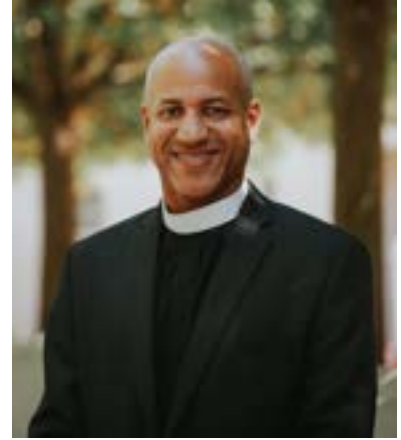
No one is ever genuinely transformed by the promise of heaven or the threat of hell. We are transformed by knowing that we are loved unconditionally by God. We are transformed by the love we see in Jesus. Those of us who are part of this ministry find ourselves transformed as well.

Blessings to you as you live out God's transformation in your own life.

Pastor Susan✠

Reentry Report

When I was in seminary, I often felt out of place and wondered where I belonged in the church and in ministry; I kept trying to determine where I fit and what God was calling me to. Then I had an opportunity that changed everything. As part of a seminary class assignment, I was asked to worship several times with the Community of St. Dysmas (CSD) at Maryland Correctional Institution, Hagerstown. That experience had a profound impact on my call to ministry. I encountered a community of faith that was real, honest, welcoming, and deeply grounded in the Gospel. I often wonder where I would be today without that experience.



Years later, I find myself returning to that community, this time as the Reentry Minister with CSD. I began this ministry in April, and one of the most meaningful parts of these first few months has been realizing that, in many ways, I have come full circle. I came into this work thinking about what I might be able to offer. Then I started listening. As I listened to people's stories, their questions, their struggles, their hopes, and their faith, I realized something: my title may be *minister*, but much of the time I am the one being ministered to. It's pure grace!

Since beginning this work, I have heard and witnessed some unbelievable and powerful stories. Stories of reconciliation. Stories of people rediscovering their faith. Stories of people finding strength in Christian community while living through circumstances that are difficult for most of us to imagine. Over and over again, I have encountered the power of God and God's love. Through conversations, letters, visits, and gatherings I have been reminded that God is present certainly among people whom our society forgets or condemns forever.

I think often about something John, a coworker and former member of the incarcerated community, said to me. John spent more than 15 years in prison and now works as a reentry expert. He described the reentry process as a "disjointed" mess. People are released and essentially sent out to accomplish what can feel like a nearly impossible mission. The more I learn, the more I understand what he means.

Imagine leaving prison after 10, 40 or 50 years and needing to get identification, find housing, secure employment, access health care or treatment, and navigate a maze of agencies and organizations. Now imagine trying to do all of that without easy access to technology, money, transportation, or a strong network of people to help you. It can feel like *Mission Impossible*.

This is where I believe CSD and the Christian community have an important role to play. We can begin building relationships and connections before release so that people do not have to start over alone. At this time, much of my work right now is about listening, learning, and building relationships. I am meeting with community organizations, service providers, volunteers, and people with lived experience of incarceration. CSD and its reentry partners are beginning to imagine an intentional reentry pipeline that starts on the inside and continues when someone returns home.

We want people to leave prison with more than a list of phone numbers or a stack of paperwork: we want them to leave with relationships and a community already waiting to receive them.

- This means connecting people with the **basic resources** they need, including safe housing, food, identification, transportation, employment, health care, and other essential services.
- It also means building **community** and connections with congregations, mentors, volunteers, and communities where returning citizens can experience friendship, dignity, belonging, and spiritual support.
- And it means **voices of faith** acting for changes to the policies and systems that create unnecessary barriers to rebuilding a life after incarceration.

The goal is not simply to help someone survive the first few days after release; it is to help create the relationships, resources, and conditions in which people can truly flourish.

As I have listened and learned, I have become even more convinced that one of the greatest gifts and sources of support we can offer returning citizens is a place to nurture their faith, a Christian community to surround them. Safe housing, employment, transportation, health care, and other basic needs are essential, but people also need relationships; they need people who know their names, hear their stories, pray with them, encourage them, and walk with them when life gets difficult. They need communities where they are not defined by their incarceration, but are known as beloved children of God with gifts, hopes, and a future. With God's help, I look forward to making these things come alive.

At a time when our world is deeply divided, I find tremendous hope in this ministry! I am grateful to be working alongside Christians and other faith traditions. We have vast differences, yet all are willing to come together to serve some of the most forgotten and excluded members of our community. There is much work ahead, but there is also tremendous hope. Thank you for your prayers, your encouragement, and your support. I am excited to see what God is already doing through this ministry and what God will continue to do through all of us who are part of it. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Lamar

Could We Help?

The Community of St. Dismas is committed to making sure that Lutheran and other mainline Protestant incarcerated individuals have their spiritual need for liturgical, grace-filled, Eucharist-centered worship met. If you have a loved one or friend who is currently in the state prison system, please let us know. While we are not allowed to proselytize or invite, it's helpful to know where those are who need this spiritual support. Please email pastor@communitystdismas.com or call 443-326-1115.

Synod Assembly 2026

The Delaware-Maryland Synod Assembly was held June 5 and 6 at First Lutheran Church in Ellicott City. It may not have been one of the more debate-filled ones, but it was a wonderful celebration of who we are as a synod and what we can accomplish together.

The defining resolution discussed and passed at the assembly was the Authentic Diversity Initiative. This will be lived out by naming diversity, inclusion, and intercultural ministry as central to our mission, by training both lay and ordained leaders, and encouraging congregations to engage, in particular by reaching out to their community contexts.

CSD was well-represented by Linda Fleischer and Pastor Susan, who connected with many folks from western Maryland to the Eastern shore to bring the latest new from our ministry. People may have come to our table for the chocolate we gave away, but they stayed for lively conversation about how we're growing to meet the needs of our incarcerated siblings in faith.



Our Display Board



Re-Entry Support Ministry



Pr. Susan and Linda Fleischer
at Our Booth



Pr. Susan & Pr. Kelsey Green
of The Table

A Poem

One of our members at CMCF was encouraged by his mother to write poetry to help him process his feelings, and often shared his poems with the congregation. It inspired us all! During Holy Week, Pastor Susan encouraged him to write about what the resurrection means when you are incarcerated. We hope that you, too, are inspired as you read his words.

"LIFE RESTORED"

I was asked what did the resurrection mean to me while being incarcerated

I struggled w/ the thought of writing about it w/ very little expectation

But I realized the resurrection is when all things became anew

And I realized that's what God is doing for me during this incarceration. I'm going thru

The death of our Lord Jesus Christ was to wash our sins away

To fulfill the prophecies, to glorify the Father & give him all the praise

I prayed for a new life, a fresh start, for God to give me a new beginning

Not knowing that when I got arrested, that's exactly what God was giving.

When Jesus Christ was crucified, died, and buried that's when life was being restored

And knowing that's what God did for me, makes me follow him even more.

When I think of the resurrection, it reminds me of second chances
And knowing that's what has been

given to me, I'm thankful for my situation.

God has bigger plans for me, this incarceration is just a stepping stone.

God is preparing me to be a better father, loving husband, & a God fearing man for when I get home.

He's restoring me to fulfill His purpose, to serve him & others in my life.

To love others as he loves me & be willing to make that sacrifice.

Just like your son, you have raised me from the dead.

And just like your son, for you, my blood I would shed.

Not only have you restored me, you've made me so much better.

You've begun to rebuild me & patiently put me back together.

This was the time I needed, to see things from your point of view.

So thank you Dear Heavenly Father for your resurrection & giving me life anew.

Amel'26

2026 Liberian Lutheran Alliance Dinner

Pastor Susan and Pastor Lamar were honored to attend a dinner event celebrating the strong ties that the Delaware-Maryland Synod has with the Liberian Lutheran church, August 15 at Zion Lutheran in Baltimore. It was a festive evening of fellowship, music, good food and recognition of the gifts our Liberian siblings in faith bring to God's work.

The pastors were able to connect with several bishops to talk about the Community of St. Dysmas, including our own Bishop Gohl and presiding Bishop Curry. The energy that both Bishop Gohl and Bishop Curry brought to the event demonstrated how blessed we are to have leaders like them.



Presiding Bishop Curry
addresses the attendees



Presiding Bishop Curry and Bishop Gohl in traditional Liberian clothing

CSD Council Retreat

On Saturday, July 18 the CSD Council met at Salem Lutheran Church in Catonsville for its first council retreat. Council president, Lois Carrigan, led us through an agenda that allowed the leadership team to step away from daily activities, focus on our mission, and establish goals. It was an excellent opportunity to embrace our new Reentry Minister, Pr. Lamar Bailey, and clarify his role. We also welcomed our newest Council member, Krista Hudson.

The retreat began with a discussion of our “Ministry in Action”. We were asked to:

- Reflect on who we are and why we serve; and
- Identify our individual gifts and how to use them to serve God and our congregation.

Lois gave each member a stone with a word and bible verse. My verse was “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.” (Psalm 119:1) A rich discussion followed where we shared our verse and guiding word. My word was *blessed* and that was how I felt when I left that day.

Pr. Alejandro Mejia, the Assistant to the Bishop for Evangelical Mission, was able to join us and send greetings from Bishop Gohl. Pr. Mejia is a passionate supporter of the CSD mission and advocates for us on the Synod level to keep our funding secure and helps to clarify our purpose and impact on our congregation. He assured us that we are valued as a congregation in the Maryland prison system. He also understands that we cannot measure success the same way that traditional congregations can.

Prior to lunch, council members were asked to brainstorm plans for the upcoming Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon on October 3 at Calvary Lutheran Church. Lois set the rules and asked us to throw out any ideas we had for the event – no matter how unrealistic. We ended with a list of fun things to consider and practical needs for an event designed to lift up our amazing volunteers.

The time went too quickly. We finished most of the agenda items but could have easily spent more time together as we worked to strengthen our ministry and enjoy the fellowship. I personally left with a deeper understanding of the ways we have served God but the knowledge that there is so much more we can do to fulfill His mission to our brothers and sisters behind bars.



Strategic Ministry Plan

As a strategic ministry, we are grateful for the support that enables us to continue to bring the life-transforming Good News of God's love inside the prison walls. And, with Pastor Lamar Bailey joining our ministry, we're excited to be expanding our ministry to the "outside," bringing the same spiritual and practical support needed for our members to move forward.

We have a tremendous advocate at the synod level, Pastor Alejandro Mejia, assistant to the Bishop caring for the synod's strategic ministries. With his help, we developed a strategic ministry plan for the Community of St. Dysmas and submitted it to churchwide last Spring.



Pr. Alejandro Mejia

This plan clearly outlines our goals and a timeline for completing specific action items. The areas of mission include building the leadership base, being grounded in Word and Sacrament, Christian formation, sustainability and stewardship, service, and connection with the synod. At this point over halfway through the year, we have made good progress towards the goals delineated in the plan.

We've brought on a Reentry Minister and that ministry is developing with Pastor Lamar's dedication and vision.

We've added a new member to our council and had a council retreat in July that built connections between us. We have another potential council member who may be joining us soon.

We have strong "on the inside" leaders/mentors within our congregations who support other members between our gatherings.

Our finances are stable. Our congregations "inside" connect with the wider church "outside" through prayers and artwork they do that is distributed to people in outside churches who need it, for example, shut-ins. For the last couple years, our congregations have supplied handmade Christmas cards for the Seafarers' Mission Christmas baskets.

We have a strong and dedicated volunteer base that makes sure weekly worship and Bible studies go on reliably. We will have a volunteer appreciation luncheon in October.

God has sustained us through all kinds of challenges and continues to keep us going! We're looking with excitement to the future as we build on 40+ years of this ministry. If you would like to see the strategic ministry plan in full detail, contact Pastor Susan at pastor@communitystdysmas.com.

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. 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!

Would You Like to Help?

We are looking for people to serve on the Community of St. Dysmas board. We're a friendly group that meets by Zoom the 2nd Wednesday of the month at 7 pm. You'll help with the running of this ministry, and you'll leave the meeting with a smile on your face and inspiration in your heart. Please email pastor@communitystdysmas.com or call 443-326-1115.

Help 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 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. 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!



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. Dymas from the "To" menu.

Looking for a Supply Pastor?

Pastor Susan 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 Pr. Susan to visit, please contact her by phone at 443-326-1115 or email pastor@communitystdymas.com.

Prayer Requests for Our Community

Please pray for

- our incarcerated siblings who need healthcare, especially C, J, G, and K, that they might get the care they need
- Mike's family and friends as they mourn his passing
- our returning citizens, that they may continue to grow in faith and find the support they need to deal with the challenges of returning to society
- patience for our incarcerated siblings who are waiting for long-delayed paperwork to be processed.
- opportunities to start worshiping communities in new locations
- all those dealing with addiction



Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

The Community of St. Dysmas

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

Pastor Susan Beck
Phone: 443-326-1115
Email: pastor@communitystdysmas.com

Pastor Lamar Bailey, Reentry Minister
Email: pastorlamar@communitystdysmas.com

Mailing Address
905 Frederick Rd.
Catonsville, MD 21228

Website: www.stdysmasmd.org

Linda Fleischer, in-office administrator
Deacon Linda N. Smith, remote administrator

CSD Council
Email: council@communitystdysmas.com

Council Members

Lois Carrigan, Chair
David Roberson, Treasurer
Alan Ramsey, Assistant treasurer
Linda Fleischer, Secretary
Krista Hudson, Member at Large
Myra Keel, Member at Large
Mary Ann Ruley, Member at Large