

THE COMMUNITY OF
ST. DYSMAS

I was in Prison & You Came To Visit Me



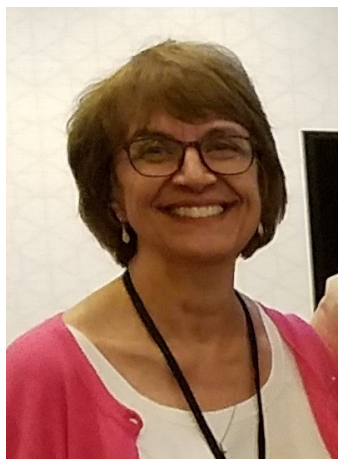
December, 2018
Newsletter

Inside Looking Out

Advent Greetings to all our friends,

For most of us, this is a busy time of year, but a joyful one—full of traditions and memories where our calendars fill up quickly with those activities that mark the celebration of Jesus’ birth. So much of “Christmas” revolves around the home—the decorations, the baking, the wrapping, the meals. I have a pillow I set out this time of year that says “All hearts go home for Christmas,” and there’s even that well-known song “I’ll be Home for Christmas.”

That’s part of what makes this a difficult time of year for our Community of St. Dysmas congregation members. They are not home for the holidays; they are incarcerated, and while we will preach, teach and sing about Christmas in our worship services, for the most part, this time of year will not be much different from the rest of the year. It’s at this time of year that we hear from them the most longing—to see family, to enjoy the tree trimmed in lights, to taste that ham or turkey Mom or Grandmom always makes—to be “home for the holiday.”



Pastor Susan Beck

But if we look at the narrative of Jesus’ birth in scriptures, we see that, actually, no one involved was “home for the holiday.” Mary had to pack up and travel in late pregnancy when most women would be home coping with their achy bodies and swollen feet. I’m sure she yearned for the comfort of her own bed and the security of family around for her soon-to-be-delivered child. She probably wanted her mother, really badly. Joseph had to leave home with a pregnant fiancée in tow, probably very nervous about what he as a carpenter, not a doctor, would do when the time came. The young family doesn’t get to go home after the birth either—they must flee for the borders to save their baby’s life and become refugees in a foreign land.

The shepherds, the first to hear the Good News of Jesus’ birth, weren’t home either. They were out in a field, exposed to the elements, spending the night on duty at work taking care of the sheep that were in their charge. They probably would have liked to have been home that night too. The Magi, who bring

From Pr. Beck (continued)

gifts to the baby Jesus, are also not at home. They see celestial evidence of the birth of a king and undertake an indeterminate voyage off to the “east” somewhere, crossing the territory of the hostile King Herod. I wonder if they ever wished along the way that they could simply turn back and go home.

And Jesus—the baby himself, is not in the heavenly home, but in the real world he came to redeem, a world of cold, hunger, genuine human need and ultimately a cross.

Like our CSD congregants, no one there is “home for the holidays.” But it’s that homeless baby at the center of it all that gives everyone—all of those who were not home that night, all our incarcerated sisters and brothers, and each of us—genuine assurance of God’s presence wherever we are. Jesus is God-with-us, so there is always a home that we have—because where we are, Jesus is there with us.

Blessings of this season to each of you.

Pastor Susan

New Financial Support Opportunity

In 2018 Gifts of Hope added CSD to their organizations that they support. Gifts are available year-round at www.giftsofhopedc.org. You can contact Gifts of Hope for more information by emailing director@giftsofhopedc.org.

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 our 19 beneficiary organizations. In our 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. We also support the work of our companion synods in Namibia, Slovakia, and El Salvador. Gifts of Hope touches the lives of thousands of people—locally and globally.

Gifts of Hope is an alternative gift-giving program that serves as an intermediary between donors and organizations serving individuals and families in need locally and internationally. Gifts are available year-round, however, the program’s primary focus is during the holidays, including the liturgical season of Advent.

Through sales at the Synod’s congregations and benefit concerts, Gifts of Hope has raised and dispersed more than \$3.37 million to two church camps, three Lutheran student ministries, three international companion synods and ten area social service agencies affiliated with the Metro DC Synod.

CSD's 2018 Annual Meeting: A Time of Thanksgiving

On Sunday, December 2, 2018, the Community of St. Dymas held its 2018 Annual Meeting at Salem Lutheran in Catonsville. To say that our meeting was blessed and well-attended, would be a gross understatement. In fact, Pastor Gerry Rickel stated that this Annual Meeting was a record breaker, according to his past experience. I believe it is easy to surmise that our attendance numbers had a lot to do with our guest of honor. This particular gathering was about more than annual reports; it was an opportunity to celebrate the ministry of CSD's former Pastor, the Reverend Gerry Rickel.

This CSD Annual Meeting started, as most others, with an update on the ministry and the approval of the budget for the coming year, but then expanded into a traditional CSD Worship Service, led by Pastor Rickel. This was an opportunity for CSD supporters and "outside" volunteers to experience what CSD worship is like on the inside. Mrs. Viola Noffsinger, a faithful CSD musician, brought her beloved, and well-traveled, keyboard to provide worship music for the service.

After worship, we had a reception in honor of Pastor Rickel. Many people wanted the opportunity to express how Pastor Rickel's ministry has impacted their own faith walk. I am included in that ever-growing community of Rickel fans. His passion and love for CSD is what attracted me to this ministry.

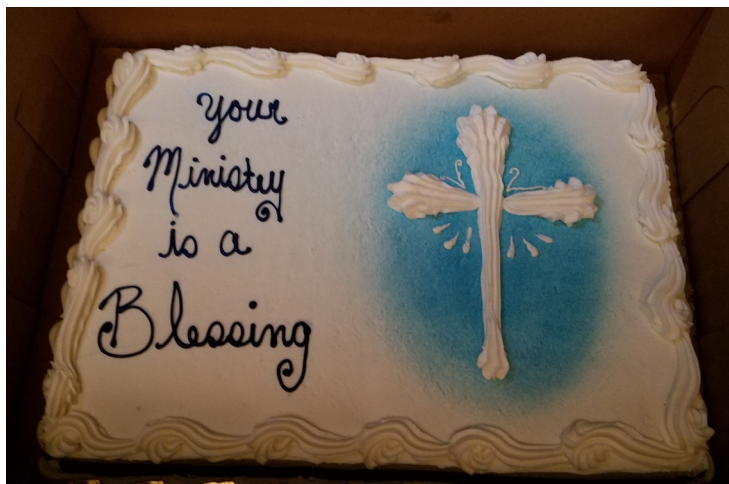
It was clear to see that most of us in attendance at this particular annual meeting were there because of our need to say thank you. As President of the CSD Council, it seems only fitting to say it here, as well. Thank you, Pastor Rickel, for your continued commitment to CSD. We are grateful that your ministry continues, as a faithful CSD Volunteer, even as you have answered the call to serve our brothers and sisters at Holy Spirit Lutheran in Eldersburg. Our congregations are blessed by your ministry and your devotion to your faith.

In Christian Love and Thanksgiving,

Pr. Lois Carrigan
CSD Council President



Pr. Rickel Presiding



Cake in Honor of Pr. Rickel

Outside Looking In

On Tuesday November 20, Pastor Susan and Chaplain Rachmiel Tobesman, chaplain at CMCF and covering other prisons as needed, represented the Community of St Dymas at a Community Thanksgiving Interfaith Service. This annual event was held this year at St. Francis of Assisi Roman Catholic, and the theme was “welcome.” Representatives from Jewish, Muslim, Latter Day Saints, Catholic, Lutheran and Presbyterian faiths all participated in an evening of worship, prayer and song, followed by a time of refreshments and fellowship. Pastor Susan spoke about welcoming the incarcerated, and Rabbi Tobesman, a certified *maggid* (storyteller) told a story of a king and a broken gemstone to illustrate how our differences can create beauty and strength when we welcome each other. Chaplain Tobesman and Pastor Susan have co-led one interfaith service at CMCF and are hoping to plan another soon.



Pastor Susan and Chaplain Tobesman in the procession

Pastor Susan speaking



Sundays With CSD

The St. Dysmas council has developed a Speakers Bureau for the Community of St. Dysmas. Our speakers are available to preach and lead an adult forum or bible study. Our ordained leaders are available to preach and preside. Why not have a special **CSD** Day at your congregation! To schedule a Sunday or other time for Pastor Beck or one of our Speakers Bureau to visit your congregation to lead worship, to participate in an adult forum, to lead a day or evening bible study, to speak to a council or other interested group or simply sit down and chat, contact her by phone at 443-326-1115 or pastor@communitystdysmas.com.


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 participate or 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@communitystdysmas.com.

Watch this space for information about the work of our After Care Task Force as they put together an orientation program for our returning citizens.

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 intentionality on your part and allows us to 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 through Thrivent Choice Dollars. Through this program, eligible members are designate 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. Dysmas. Thank you (and as the old saying goes, "What Rome throws out, the Lutherans pick up.")





Tino's Fundraiser

Our next fundraiser at Tino's Italian Bistro in Columbia is on Tuesday, February 5, 2019. Please save this date! To see the menu and get directions, check out [Tino's website](#).

Pray for and with the Community of St. Dysmas

Please help with all my anxiety to know You've got this & things will work out. Please be with my family so they know peace and happiness.

I would like to pray for my family and my children. I would also like to pray for my overall well being and my sanity. I pray for all the mayhem and negative energy here on this compound with officers and inmates. I pray there will be peace and understanding amongst us all. Amen.

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

Please watch over our volunteers & bless them. Give strength & hope to the homeless and addicted & abused. Please keep my children and loved ones safe & healthy. Please ease my irritability & anxiety and give me peace of mind.



LORD, IN YOUR MERCY, HEAR OUR PRAYER

The Community of St. Dysmas

A Lutheran Congregation within the walls of Maryland Correctional Institutions

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