

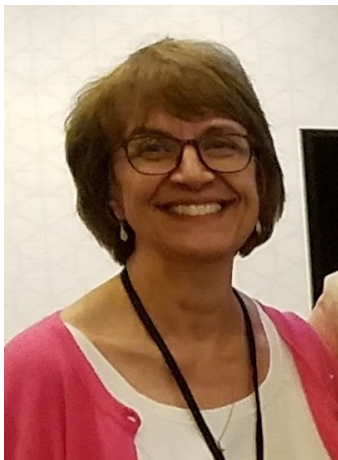


## Inside Looking Out

### Finding the Manger

Most of our facilities don't allow us to do worship services right on Christmas Eve for various reasons such as staffing issues. But last year the chaplain at CMCF told me he felt strongly that Christians should have Christmas Eve worship on Christmas Eve and invited me to do an ecumenical worship for all Christians there that evening.

I've served churches where the sanctuary was brilliant with lights for the holiday, where candles gave off their lovely glow and fragrance, where music from a magnificent organ and grand choirs filled the sanctuary, where the scent of greenery mixed with the aroma of coffee and cookies from the social hall. Last Christmas though, I drove up to the same scene that you see year round in a prison: tall fences entwined with razor wire; gates that rattle shut; and the colorless walls of the entry. While even the most modest churches are transformed into places of beauty and celebration for Christmas, prisons stay pretty much the same all year.



Pastor Susan Beck

So, I did the usual entry procedure: shoes in one bin; coat, sweater, watch and keys in another; first my violin, then me through the metal detector; and then the usual frisking. The officer on duty seemed weary, and when I commented on how it was tough she had to work on Christmas, she said "I work today, tomorrow, all the time. It's all the same."

But—when I walked into our worship area I got a Christmas surprise. Usually the men are there setting up the chairs and table before the service, but instead, three of them were standing side by side grinning. Then they nudged each other with their elbows and began to sing Christmas carols in three part harmony. Turns out, they had been practicing since October so that they could surprise me by caroling when I walked in.

## From Pr. Beck (continued)

I've never heard a sweeter choir—an angelic chorus, comprised of convicted felons. I listened as tears filled my eyes, then grabbed my violin and played along, a spontaneous pick-up gig that took us all—inmate and pastor--out from behind the walls, and brought joy that transcended the surroundings.

No tinsel, no trees, no twinkling lights, no candles, no cookies—just Jesus, born into the most unlikely of circumstances. I had been to the manger, and it was the best Christmas Eve service I've ever been a part of.

Blessings to all the friends of this ministry for Advent, Christmas and the light of Epiphany. May you be so blessed as to find yourself at the manger this year.

Peace,  
Pastor Susan



# Minutes of the 2019 St. Dysmas Annual Meeting

## November 17, 2019

### 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, Dave Roberson, Myra Keel, Br. Les Roberts, Susie Jordan, Alan Ramsay, Steve Dooley, Phil Curran, Sue Pumplin, Ray Toy, Elizabeth Fixsen, Terry Lockridge, Gerry Rickel, Laruen Muratore

**Musical Devotion** by Steve Dooley

**Welcome and Introductions** by Lois Carrigan

**Pastor's Report** by Pr Susan available on request

**Deacon's Report** by Ray Toy available on request

**Keynote presentation** by Pr. Lauren Muratore

- Reconciling In Christ program explanation and process

**Financial Report and 2020 Budget** by Bob Harvey available on request

- Motion to approve 2020 Budget by Alan Ramsay and seconded by Liz Fixsen approved by acclamation with the following amendments:
  - ◊ Add \$4000 to After-Care support line. Moved by Dave Roberson. Passed by acclamation.
  - ◊ Add a donation to Prison Congregations of America in the amount of \$150 annually. Moved by Gerry Rickel. Passed by acclamation.

Lois made the following motions:

- That the slate of council members be approved. Approved by acclamation. Council members are: Lois Carrigan (chair); Bob Harvey (treasurer); Linda Fleischer; Susie Jordan; Myra Keel; Alan Ramsay; and Dave Roberson.
- That the CSD board would start the process of becoming a Reconciled In Christ congregation. Approved by acclamation.

Final thoughts and closing prayer by Gerry Rickel

Respectfully submitted,

Susie Jordan

11/20/2019

## Reconciling In Christ

At our annual meeting, we voted to begin the process of becoming a designated “Reconciling in Christ” congregation--that is, a congregation that is open and affirming to all our LGBTQ siblings.

We already *are* that welcoming place within the walls, so why seek out that designation? Because that process of becoming RIC speaks to our intent and deepens our sense of who we are.

It’s one thing to say all are welcome, but quite another to *live* that welcome in our being. It’s important to examine our and our culture’s attitudes, prejudices, and evolving feelings on the issue so that our welcome and affirmation is as wholehearted as our words are.

This will involve study of the theological and Biblical underpinnings of attitudes toward the LGBTQ community, both inside our congregations and among our board and volunteers. We are cognizant that ours is a particular and unique ministry context, where attitudes toward those who aren’t gender- or orientation-conforming could have repercussions for our members, so we intend to proceed with discernment and care. Being officially “RIC” affirms the stance we have already taken, and we look forward to the renewed awareness and growth this process will bring.



# 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.



Gifts of Hope serves as an intermediary between donors and organizations serving individuals and families in need. Gifts are may be given year-round at [www.giftsofhopedc.org](http://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](mailto:director@giftsofhopedc.org).

## 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](mailto:pastor@communitystdysmas.com).



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

## 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@communitystdysmas.com](mailto:pastor@communitystdysmas.com).

# Pray for and with the Community of St. Dysmas

Lord, thank you for my endless blessings. Please continue to guide me, hold up my family and work my way home. In Jesus Name. Amen.

Lord, please watch over me and keep all negative vibes and spirits out of my way. Also bring all positive vibes my way. Keep everything going as planned and watch out for the people who are leaving this week. Stay with them always. Keep me focused on the right path and stay doing good in my life here. Lord I love you and keep the devil away from me. Please Lord watch over Amy when she leaves, keep her focused and get her back to her family. Thank you Lord. Amen.

Father God, I thank you for another day and I pray that you continue to show me your way. I only want to walk in your truth and do right by you. I thank you for my many blessings and also for the ones still to come. Please continue to be with my children and my family and to touch every fiber of my being with your purity. I'm so glad I found you Father God and you are all I need. I will forever praise you and worship you. I know my time is coming and I think you for everything. I pray this in your Son's name, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I want to pray for all the women here at MCIW and that they have a good upcoming holiday. Also I would like to pray for my family that they stay in good health and spirits. Also I want to thank you God for all my blessings. Amen.

Thank you for my many blessings. Prayer for my children & family - keep them safe and healthy. Prayer for strength, patience and guidance. Steer me away from temptation & help me remain focused on what's important...you & getting out of here to return home to my kids. Amen.

LORD, IN YOUR MERCY, HEAR OUR PRAYER!



## The Community of St. Dysmas

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

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Deacon Raymond Toy

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Susie Jordan  
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