

## ***Third Cross Quarterly*** ***a Publication for Friends and Supporters***

**A NETWORK OF MINISTRY FOR SOUTH DAKOTA INMATES**

***Fall 2015***



*Pastor Bob Chell wrote the following reflection for the "From the Pulpit" column in the Sioux Falls Argus Leader. We thought it was worth sharing.*

Each morning they are reminded of the worst thing they have ever done, their deepest regret constantly before them, their shameful secret public knowledge. Such is the life of those in the congregation I serve, the men of St. Dysmas Lutheran, behind the walls of the South Dakota State Penitentiary. Twenty four hours a day, six days a week, and twenty two hours the seventh, they are known by their surname or DOC (Department of Corrections) number. The food is bland, the rules oppressive, the routine interminable. Yet, it is the constant reminder of the worst moment of their life, whether it spanned three minutes or three decades, which is soul crushing.

"St. Dysmas is my life." Words spoken by a 'lifer', his crime will keep him behind bars till his days are over. The two hours he spends in Hope chapel are his sole release from the reminder of his crime and the routine of prison life. The chapel is well named. St. Paul tells us faith, hope and love abide but love is

the greatest. Yet only hope is essential. It is hope which sustains parents who grieve the death of a child, patients undergoing chemotherapy, and couples rebuilding shattered relationships. It is hope alone which sustains us all when life is shattered, love is absent and faith anemic.

At 6:15 on Thursday nights the bell rings, cell doors open and a hundred men, perhaps a handful more or less, begin the long climb up the steps to Hope chapel. I like to think they are climbing out of prison into God's promises and, in fact, I believe they are. Jesus spoke of those who follow him being in the world but not of the world. In my mind Hope chapel is in the prison but not of the prison. When the men walk through that door they are men first and inmates second, children of God before wards of the state. They are known by their Christian name, their first name, and enjoy casual conversation with outside visitors from local congregations. It is the only conversation all

week many, perhaps most, will have with someone who is not paid to talk with them.

Worship is respite, a day off, vacation and holiday. Of these, worship alone is theirs. There are no vacation or days off and holidays are spent in their cells as shops are closed and staffing reduced. There is an effort made to acknowledge holidays, Bingo perhaps, but the small efforts sharpen the pain of incarceration as much as they relieve it. More than vacations or holidays, which break the routine in our lives, Thursday evenings are Sabbath. Sabbath is more than vacation or holiday, more than a break in the routine of life. Sabbath is embracing that which heals and renews; that which gives meaning and purpose and joy, even in this place.

As men and women find Sabbath from a life of deprivation may we, on this side of the walls, find Sabbath from our abundance. May the Sabbath enfold you, may hope sustain you, for you, too, are a beloved child of God.

## Becoming Present to Re-Entry

This past month, St. Dysmas had the pleasure of catching up with two former alumni of the South Dakota Department of Corrections. To protect those individuals' identities we will only refer to them by their first names: Bob & Floyd. The purpose of this meeting, over breakfast at the local Fry'n Pan, was to see how these two are doing post re-entry to society and how St. Dysmas played a role in their lives.

Sitting down with Bob and Floyd we asked questions about public perceptions of former inmates and what actions churches and individuals can take to welcome people back into their communities after their release.

### **What do you think is the biggest misconception with persons re-entering society after completing their sentence?**

Bob and Floyd both said, "One of the big misconceptions that society has is that the State has resources available upon release. Floyd mentioned that you receive \$50 upon release and the pos-

sessions you came in with. "When you're out the door, you're not their problem anymore" noted Floyd. "The system is not necessarily setup for success".

### **What role did St. Dysmas play in your lives while you were both serving your sentence?**

"When you go in, life stops", said Bob.

"The whole system dehumanizes you", Floyd stated. "St. Dysmas provided a normality that didn't exist in there. Going to church [at St. Dysmas] made prison life seem normal during the time of service."

Bob and Floyd discussed how St. Dysmas played a role in making them feel normal once again and the significance of having a human encounter with outside visitors at St. Dysmas.

"We were treated like individuals", both mentioned.

### **What would make re-entry "easier" for former inmates?**

Bob and Floyd both agreed it would be well worth it to have programs in place to help former inmates successfully reintegrate and for churches, to be welcoming to former inmates.

Floyd mentioned forgiveness.

"Forgiveness is important because if you don't have it, it's like an anchor is still on you."

As we finished our final sip of coffee that morning, we asked what is the one thing churches can do for former inmates. For Bob and Floyd, St. Dysmas set up ways for both to meet people while they were serving their sentence. If there's one thing churches can do for its members, both discussed, it is to support their members as they re-enter society.

Visit [StDysmas.com](http://StDysmas.com) or contact Pastor Bob Chell on ways to become involved with St. Dysmas and how you can support those who are incarcerated while they are in prison and after they are released.

### **THRIVENT FINANCIAL/THRIVENT CHOICE DONATIONS**

#### **May**

Jenean Aadland  
Reid Christopherson  
Joan Eitrheim  
Elizabeth Goodart  
Margaret Greene  
Mark Gronseth  
Mark Hinkley  
Susan Howlett  
Gerald Iverson

#### **June**

Tracey Braithwaite  
Carla Downs  
Myron Downs  
Joy Hagen  
Erika Iversen  
Correen Major

#### **In Memory of**

Marvin Peterson by, Mary Montoya

#### **July**

Raymond Cheney  
Dennis Ellingsen  
Sandra Ellingsen  
Julie Fedeler



### **St. Dysmas Sunday**

Congregations are invited and encouraged to celebrate our 25th anniversary in their congregation by lifting up prison ministry.

One way to do this is with "Called to Hear" the new study guide to the ELCA statement on criminal justice. The 5 session guide and accompanying DVD are available at [www.ELCA.org/socialstatements](http://www.ELCA.org/socialstatements) by clicking on the criminal justice link. Please encourage your congregation to utilize this resource.

# Supporting St. Dysmas

*By Reid A. Christopherson, Past-President, St. Dysmas Associate Council*

Life was simple for me as a Norwegian-Lutheran kid growing up in a middle class neighborhood of Sioux Falls. Dad had a good job and mom was at home waiting for us kids to walk home from school for lunch, and there again for us when school dismissed at the end of the day. Out-of-school time was filled with Luther League, YMCA sports, Boy Scouts and eventually part-time jobs. But as I became an adult, life became more complex and more confusing. A man, who when I was a kid, was a hero to me would later struggle with addiction issues that ultimately paved a path to imprisonment. As years would progress, a second friend, then a third, then more would be held accountable for poor decisions made during the influence of

chemical, sexual and financial addictions. These were not bad people. They are really good people that made poor choices and decisions while their life was spiraling out of control. It is these men, and many other wonderful friends that I have made since, that form the St. Dysmas congregations in Sioux Falls and Springfield. Some of these men had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ our Risen Savior and Lord on the outside. Others first heard the gospel story on the inside. Together they support one another and find the personal strength needed to grow in faith one day at a time. I consider my opportunity to have served alongside these men in their St. Dysmas faith journeys and leadership roles to be one of the major blessings of my life. From these Brothers in Christ I have learned so much. Geographic demands of my recently changed career no longer make it possible for

me to regularly serve in an active role on the St. Dysmas Associate Council. My thoughts and prayers; however, are with you and the ministry of St. Dysmas. I pray that you continue to grow in faith, provide witness to those around you, and continuously work to support Pastors Bob and Kwen as your lives reflect the wonderful love and grace of our Lord. And, to the wonderful St. Dysmas volunteers and supporters on the outside I pray that you will continue to uplift this very special ministry, to visit when possible and to generously support St. Dysmas with the financial gifts that have been entrusted to you. Shalom!

## Are you a Thrivent member?

Thrivent is changing the way it supports ministry by the creation of Thrivent Action Teams. Every Thrivent member is encouraged to initiate two projects a year with \$250 funding support from Thrivent. Projects can be in the areas of Service, Education or Fundraising.

Service grants could cover travel costs to visit St. Dysmas, Education costs could provide meals to view and discuss the ELCA's new resource, "Called to Hear" about the criminal justice service. Fundraisers could supply yarn for men who knit caps donated to the needy or to provide a special meal or event in our congregations.

We would love to partner with you! Let us know how we can help.

### Thrivent Choice

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans members, please direct Choice Dollars to St. Dysmas of South Dakota.

Either: (1) Log into [Thrivent.com/thriventchoice](http://Thrivent.com/thriventchoice) and select "Get Started;"

Or: (2) Contact a representative from the Member Connection Center at 800-847-4836 and, when prompted, say "Thrivent Choice." When next prompted, say, "Choice Dollars."

**St. Dysmas of South Dakota**  
**1300 E 10th St**  
**Sioux Falls, SD 57103-1779**

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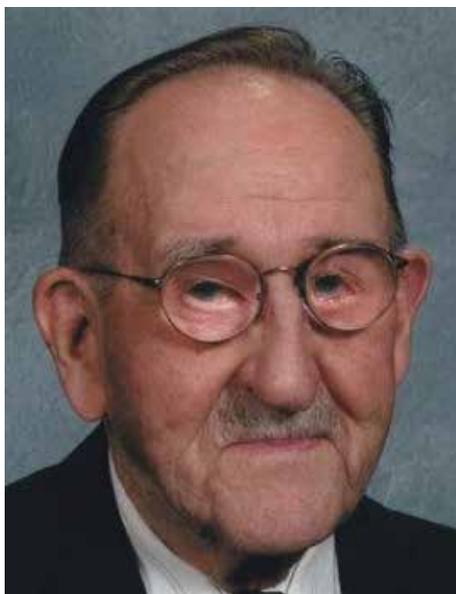
## **Prayer Corner - Please pray for these concerns**

- Continued growth of St. Dysmas presence at Yankton
- Reaching out to inmates across the State of South Dakota in after care
- Monetary donations for the ministry
- Continued development of St. Dysmas Sundays throughout South Dakota
- Continued blanketing of the inmates in South Dakota with St. Dysmas presence

**For more information about  
St. Dysmas:  
call Sioux Falls - 605-338-1735  
[www.stdysmas.net](http://www.stdysmas.net)**

If you need to change the number  
of newsletters you currently receive  
call 605-338-1735

## **A Lasting Legacy**



We want to honor Edwin Erickson, of Howard South Dakota whose long life of commitment to ministry, included St. Dysmas in his estate plan. His gift will enable congregations to build and grow by providing low interest loans and those loan payments will also supplement our prison ministry. Edwin, and his wife Selma, were awarded the Shepherd's staff award by the SD Synod in 1991, recognizing years of commitment to Christ's church. They loved the land and people of SD and were also recipients of Soil Conservation Awards. Selma passed away in 1991 and Edwin in 2014.

Lutheran Planned Giving (LPG) of SD will assist you in estate planning at no cost to you, and with no pressure to give to St. Dysmas, or other ministries. Effective planning can ensure a lasting legacy while ensuring your heirs and the ministries you care about are both supported. Tax savings from gifts of stock, livestock, grains or property can benefit both heirs and ministries. Contact LPG at <http://www.lpgsd.org> or call them at 605-274-4023.

**For information about attending a  
St. Dysmas worship service  
or supporting the ministry  
call 605-338-1735 • [www.stdysmas.com](http://www.stdysmas.com)**