

His Hands

Summer 2016



Prison Ministry

Go directly to jail

Sarah Owens has been a Deaconess with Institutional Ministries since 1993, ministering to hurting and struggling youth, adults, and elderly. Her current ministry takes her to four county jails in Wisconsin.

"Go to jail. Go directly to jail. Do not pass go. Do not collect two hundred dollars." For Monopoly players, that means a temporary setback in a board game. For two other groups of people, those words have signaled the start of either a nightmare or an incredible journey.

For the first group, those words may have followed a domestic dispute with their boyfriend or a traffic stop for drinking and driving. They may have been spoken by a probation officer after an angry friend made an accusation, landing the woman back in custody.

Sometimes it happens quite mysteriously. One pregnant woman knew those words were an answer to her prayer. She had told God that she would not have the courage to continue her pregnancy unless something like this happened. After being released on bail just before her healthy baby boy was born, she thanked God for



WELS Special Ministries

Look inside for these articles, addressing areas where Special Ministries seeks to help those who face barriers to regular worship.

Prison Ministry

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the order: "Go directly to jail." Another knew that, had she not heard those words, something much worse was likely to happen, as she had spent the last month killing herself with drugs and seeing friends die of overdoses.

To such women, "Go directly to jail" means that their freedom is suddenly taken away, their choices are very limited, and they are abruptly torn from their family, friends, and life as they knew it. This separation will extend for an unknown period of time. For some, visits and phone calls will be possible and money will be put "on the books." Others will be left all alone. Either way, going directly to jail may mean missing holiday celebrations and children's birthdays. It may mean missing funerals and grieving without family support. It may mean very painful withdrawal in uncomfortable, bleak surroundings.

Between 1980 and 2014, the number of incarcerated women in the United States soared from 26,378 to 215,332, an increase of more than 700%. ("Incarcerated Women and Girls." 2015 November. Retrieved from SentencingProject.org)

And going directly to jail means the "not knowing" begins: Not knowing what charges may be pressed and which may be dropped; when court may be scheduled; when the process will be completed; what the final sentence will be. Not knowing if the visit will actually happen; whether any mail will come; whether the destination will be state prison, county jail, or if God wills, back home.

The need for patience, hope, and prayer becomes evident to many. Having a good and gracious God as a Rock in a place of sinking sand brings hope and peace. It may be all one has to keep going—knowing that there is a purpose and that Someone sees, knows, cares, forgives, saves.

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But there is another audience who may hear, "Go directly to jail." It is those who are called to take the hope and peace of Jesus into such an institution. Upon hearing the call, they may ask, "Why me? Do I know God's Word well enough? Will I be received despite not having the same experiences as the women?"

Still, the directive echoes: "Go directly to jail." One woman had done other volunteer work, but the thought of studying God's Word and praying with and for hurting women was so intriguing. She has now been going to jail weekly for nearly ten years! For another woman, visits didn't fit her schedule, or perhaps the doors in her county were not yet open. Instead, she became a pen pal, regularly sending words of encouragement to incarcerated women.

Some women find that praying for female inmates is their gift. Some have the resources and heart to financially support the ministry. This allows chaplains and volunteers in the three Wisconsin districts of WELS to minister in various prisons, jails, hospitals, nursing homes, and treatment centers. Institutional Ministries relies on gifts from individuals, congregations, and grants to continue reaching out to those in institutions with the saving love of Jesus.

The call is heard in Jesus' beautiful words about the Good Shepherd who will "go after the lost sheep until he finds it." It is heard in his passion as the Servant of sinners and as the Doctor for the spiritually sick. Jesus' beautiful heart for the sick and hurting transforms our hearts as well.

May God give us compassion for those who hear "Go directly to jail" and are locked up. And may God give us wisdom to know how to respond when he tells us "Go directly to jail" with the keys that unlock the prison bars of sin.

For more information about Institutional Ministries, the Wisconsin partner of WELS Prison Ministry, visit their website at <http://im.life>

Reaching the mission field for 47¢

Kim does mission work from her home in Milwaukee, Wis.

Becoming a Prison Ministry pen pal started as a very timid attempt to fulfill the commitment I wanted to make to do what Christ asked: go into the mission field and share the Good News.

At first, I had no idea what I was getting into or what to expect, but nearly a decade later, I am still part of this incredible ministry and am more committed to it than ever. It is not always easy to correspond with complete strangers, and I have had my share of stumbles along the way, but what a privilege and a blessing to share God's Word and friendship with those who need someone to hear them!

Most of my pen pals have families who have deserted them and friends who have abandoned them. They are alone in a dark and hostile environment where anger and resentment abound, and hope is all but gone. A letter is a ray of hope, a yearned-for and badly needed connection to someone—anyone—who cares about them. Tears have often filled my eyes at the humble thanks and heartfelt joy sent back to me by someone who is excited because they actually heard *their* name at mail call. And I now appreciate how much sending a birthday card can mean to someone.

I have been blessed to have pen pals who, for the most part, already have faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. A few can

quote the Bible with an elegance that I can only hope to achieve one day. Others have many questions about their faith. One pen pal sent a list of questions with each letter. He studied the Bible with a thirst that was amazing to witness, and as I helped him learn, I learned too, and my own faith deepened.

But my letters are not always received with thanks. Sometimes it's a wall of pessimism, and I've been accused of living with an unrealistic view of life. Some don't want to hear God's Word so much as they want to share a friendship. Yet because my faith is important to me and I become important to them... it is an awesome thing to watch God work! He truly does change hearts.

These pen pals are lonely and lost and want some sense of normalcy in their lives, but it's not a one-way street. My letters are written to help and encourage and share God's love, but I have found I get the same back tenfold. Sometimes I wonder: Who is helping whom?

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To God be the glory!

You, too, can encourage inmates through correspondence. Contact WELS Prison Ministry for details, including a list of guidelines and precautions. Call 507-354-3130 or e-mail prisonministry@wels.net.



Committee on Mental Health Needs

Reject, Resist, Recover from pornography

Mike Novotny serves as chairman of Conquerors through Christ.

I got an e-mail the other day from a Christian who feels so weak with a smart phone in his hand. Decades of Christian education. Read the Bible cover to cover. Yet he ends up in website places he shouldn't be.

He's not the only one. The Barna group recently published *The Porn Phenomenon*. It's the largest study ever done of porn use in America. And it will keep you up at night. 14% of senior pastors studied confessed that using porn is a current struggle. If those numbers were true in the WELS, 195 active pastors would be currently struggling. If Barna's numbers hold true for our synod,

20,726 confirmed WELS members would admit to viewing porn every week!

You get the point. People are losing the battle to porn. God's people. Our people. And I'd bet my favorite Bible that some of you can relate. You know all about the shame, all about the secret, all about the habit.

But there is hope. If King David's psalms and the woman-at-the-well's joy and the stones that didn't stone the adulteress are any proof, God loves sexual sinners. If Isaiah meant it when he said "our iniquities" and porn is an iniquity, then the Savior was pierced for porn users too. And if Paul knew what he was talking about, then grace can teach us to say no to worldly passions and live self-controlled lives.

That's where Conquerors through Christ comes in. CtC is the WELS gospel-driven purity ministry that helps God's people reject, resist, and recover from porn. Whether you want to reject your next click, teach your kids to resist their first click, or help a broken marriage recover from the last click, CtC is here to help. If you haven't been to conquerorsthroughchrist.net, we just revamped the website with more resources to help you and those you love.

May I ask you today to do one of three things?

1. If you're on Facebook, would you like CtC today? Liking CtC will make sure that we have the chance to encourage you and keep purity on the front burner of your thinking.
2. Would you support CtC financially? The requests for materials, presentations, and help are skyrocketing and we don't want funding to stop us from helping. You can donate at wels.net/special-ministries/donate.
3. Would you bring up CtC at the next Bible study/council meeting/faculty gathering you attend? Show others the CtC website and brainstorm ways you can help protect God's people from the wreckage of porn.

Would you pick one of those three? Because she needs you. I got an e-mail at 3:17 a.m. from a woman who couldn't sleep (yes, women struggle too). The guilt. The shame. Could God love someone who struggles so much? she wondered. I told her yes. I typed and typed the gospel at her. It helped. But she'll need more help than that. She'll need to find a church family that talks about porn, opens its arms to porn users, makes it okay to confess the stuff that's not okay. She'll need you.

Because she needs you. . . The guilt. The shame. Could God love someone who struggles so much? she wondered. I told her yes.

I know porn can be awkward to talk about, but let's bring it into the light so that grace can have the last word.

Health and Wellness Committee

His Hospice Hands

Dan Krause, LPC, MDiv, is a grief counselor with Heartland Hospice in Fond du Lac, Wis.

Meet Bill. At 48, he has lived an active life of sports and outdoor activities. He has a black lab, numerous friends from his community and his alma mater. He is also diagnosed with terminal cancer.

Since there is no treatment for his disease, he has chosen to receive hospice care. This care includes pain control and preparation for death. Under the direction of a physician, his hospice care team includes a nurse, a nursing assistant, a medical social worker, a volunteer, and a counselor (me). Bill has declined a spiritual care coordinator, a/k/a a chaplain. Bill explains he is done with church after years of Sunday school and confirmation as a youth.

As a hospice counselor, my role is to identify the patient's resources or strengths to help him deal with the inevitable decline. In addition to social, emotional, and physical resources, I also ask about spiritual assistance. Bill was initially resistant to this inquiry, and it is unethical within the profession to pressure him into any such discussion.

However, as the weeks and visits passed, his physical condition worsened. I suggested to him that many people in his condition find strength in a relationship with God. He didn't disagree, so I offered to read him some Scripture. He agreed! I shared the basic message of Christ's love, forgiveness, and invitation to eternal life. He listened, accepted my offer to pray for him, then joined me in the Lord's Prayer.

Only a couple more visits took place before his death. Bill lost his ability to speak, but on the last visit his lips mouthed an "Amen" in response to the devotion.

While hospice is typically funded by our government as a Medicare or Medicaid benefit, it includes spiritual care as an option and recognizes this discipline as therapeutically beneficial. There are many Christians in the vocation of hospice caregivers because they find it an expression of their faith: "I was sick, and you looked after me" (Matthew 25:36).

My then 20-year-old daughter volunteered with hospice. At the bedside, this college student encouraged the dying with her presence, conversation, Bible reading, and hymn singing. She brought joy and a Christian witness to the dying and their families. It was through her role as a volunteer that I was introduced to Juan, who then specifically asked for Christian care. He too had fallen away from his relationship with Jesus, and the Holy Spirit provided the opportunity to serve him with the Word in his final days on earth.

There are Christian hospice organizations, but like most of our medical agencies, hospices tend to be secular organizations. In

each program, nonetheless, there is an option for spiritual care and a venue for Christians to provide a message of hope and eternal healing.

Hospice volunteers typically bring to the patient's room a deck of cards, an approved pet, a book, or other activities, but the Christian visitor also blesses the room with their presence, prayer (at least silently), and a potential witness of life that never ends.

Hospice organizations recruit volunteers and are required by government standards to include them in their programs. Hospice is another avenue for God's people to be "His Hands," touching the dying in the closing days of their time of grace.



Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Ministry

Rockin' Camp Phillip with songs of joy

Lindsey Bowden lets her light shine as an ICU nurse at St. Clare's Hospital, Weston, Wis.

"Sing a song of joy with me. Come on and shout it out loud!"

Sing, shout, and praise we did for five amazing days in the middle of God's creation at Camp Phillip, near Wautoma, Wis. Staff,





counselors, and junior staff joined several adult volunteers to put on a special week of programming (Theme: ROCK ON!) for participants of Jesus Cares Ministries programs. With just over 50 special needs campers, the week required all hands on deck to make the week ROCK!

As one of two nurses at camp, my days started early and ended late, but the stuff in the middle made it all worth it. Where else can a nurse pass morning medications while warbling "I Am a Crocodile"? Or sing "Siyahamba" on the way to the waterfront with that one camper who agreed to go only if the nurse went too?

While those memories will last a lifetime, the genuine faith of these special campers is what brings me back each year. Watching them proclaim their faith in words, songs, and actions is truly amazing. The Holy Spirit is present, active, alive.

Each year there are a few "new" campers that come with friends, and some have never heard the Good News. The counselors quickly go from nervous about caring for someone with special needs to sharing stories of Jesus and showing the love our Savior brings. Mimi Richmond, an adult volunteer, agrees: "It's what keeps bringing me back. Everyone is so excited to praise the Lord and hear about their Savior. The love shared between the young counselors and the campers is nothing short of amazing!"

"What do you do at camp?" This question comes up a lot. I was responsible for the 28 female campers and their medications, which takes up most of my time. I support the counselors, most of whom have very little background in special needs. The rest of the time is spent having fun and interacting with the campers. They have many activities throughout the day where an extra set of hands is always welcome. Morning praise, Bible time, crafts, campfire...the list goes on! This is where the other adult volunteers focus their time. Some lead the classes and activities; others lend a helping hand where needed.

One of the favorite activities is always waterfront. Camp Phillip has a beautiful area where campers can be found swimming, splashing, and having fun. The shouts of glee are contagious, like the cheers for "BELLY FLOP!" as campers call out each counselor to perform their best dive. The rowboats and paddleboats also get put to good use. Several campers opt to just sit on the shore and enjoy the beauty of God's creation.

With a theme like "ROCK ON!" one can expect a lot of singing. The days began and ended with the campers belting out songs of joy, quickly learning the actions to go with them. The Spirit was present, the love of the Savior contagious. "He's the ROCK of all Salvation, LORD of all creation. Alleluia, ROCK ON!"



Military Services

Shoulder to shoulder

Paul Ziemer is WELS National Civilian Chaplain to the Military.

"I left Vietnam. But Vietnam never left me." This veteran's lament is not uncommon from those who have spent part of their life defending our nation.

He might have also said, "I left the military, but the military never left me." Whether in times of peace or war, military service leaves an imprint upon a person's life. The young submariner, who had the assignment of pushing the button to release a nuclear



weapon, came away a different person – even if he never did push that button.

America tends to view itself as a civilian nation with a small percentage of its citizens in the armed forces. WELS congregations tend to view themselves in the same way. Many congregations would say they have no military members. That would be wrong. They forget the great number of WELS members who have the uniform packed away in an attic and memories stored in their minds.

Once a person has taken off the uniform, we classify him as a civilian, just like the rest of us. But he isn't. Neither is she. Just ask anyone who lives with a veteran Marine.

Starting with basic training, a bond has been forged with others who have risked their lives, and some who have lost their lives, to protect the civilians who don't understand what this means. The line between active duty and veteran is very narrow. The bond is very tight.

As a synod, it is difficult to find evidence that we have recognized this fact or have responded to the needs and opportunities this brings.

There are WELS members who return to war every night in their dreams. Some return with every loud noise. Other WELS members daily launch from flight decks to drop weapons on faraway places. Some work in the silence of ocean depths. Some watch over valleys and deserts. Some plan and prepare and strenuously train, just to be ready. All are tied to one another.

Those who served years ago now march in their minds with those who wear the combat boots today. A veteran Marine once said: "Only those who have served know the needs of those who still serve, and they are best equipped to meet those needs."

The Lutheran Military Support Group (LMSG) has arisen to meet that challenge. Organized by veterans, made up of veterans, they have stepped forward with a "Can do!" attitude to support the ministry to all who wore, or still wear, the uniform.

The Lord has blessed their efforts in amazing ways. Close to 250 congregations in both the ELS and WELS have joined their ranks. Within each congregation is a squad volunteering to serve their Lord by serving their military brothers and sisters.

The list of financial grants for ministry to the military is a long one. But more important is their emotional and spiritual support. They understand. They care. They pray.

In support of those who know what it means to defend a nation, they stand shoulder to shoulder.

Check out their website at lutheranmilitary.org. To learn more about WELS military ministry or to refer military personnel, visit wels.net/military.



Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Ministry

Special Needs Network: Christian fellowship with other parents "in the trenches"

Wendy Heyn and her husband Juerg have three young children.

When my son was born and later diagnosed with profound disabilities, our life changed drastically.

A life dealing with play dates, housework, temper tantrums, car seats – all the usual things that young families deal with – now involved therapies, supplemental oxygen, deep suctioning, swallow studies, feeding teams, and adjusted expectations. Our friends and family love us and made valiant efforts to support our family, yet I yearned to connect with others who truly understood some of what we were dealing with.

I had made friends at therapies and in the hospital who could advise me about doctors, therapies, and life with special needs. Some of those friendships have been incredibly valuable over the years, but I longed for friends who understood the difficulties of mothering a child with special needs and could also encourage me with eternal hope and a mutual focus on Christ.

My first instinct was to search for those connections within my new church home, St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis. As we met new families, I noticed that several had a child with special needs and I found myself wishing to connect with them more. I knew that our pastor and his wife, Lorna Leyrer, have an adult son with Down



syndrome, so I spoke to her and we came up with a plan for a fellowship group.

For the first couple of years our group met in a room at church. We recently began meeting at a nearby coffee shop. Both the church and coffee shop are centrally located for Milwaukee residents and very near Children's Hospital (a familiar area for many of the parents). We welcome parents with children or adult children who have any sort of special needs – physical, cognitive, medical, emotional, or social.

The focus has shifted over the years. In the early years we invited presenters: disability advocates, therapy dog agencies, etc. We realized, though, that parents were getting those types of things from the community.

What we were really seeking was spiritual encouragement from Scripture and from our Christian family. So these days we focus on spiritual encouragement and connections with other believers. "Praise be to...the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).

We meet at City Market café at 9:30 on one Saturday morning each month. One of us arrives early to get a table; as the rest arrive, we can each purchase a coffee and snack. We visit and share some hugs, then a devotion or devotional activity and prayer. After that we take time to talk. These mornings have become a cherished time of fellowship, truly being "in the trenches" with other parents who face similar challenges and celebrate similar joys. We always welcome new faces!

For more information, call St. John's church office at 414-258-7831. Parents can find more resources at wels.net/specialneeds.



Prison Ministry

Grace abounds in a women's prison

Vi Schrupp is a retired WELS teacher and a member at Faith, Excelsior, Minn.

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

March 7, 2010, was an important day to four (soon to be six) volunteers who would lead their first Saturday morning Bible class at the Women's Correctional Facility in Shakopee, Minn. Over 650 female inmates have access to many educational and job-training opportunities, but may also join various religious groups such as Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Native American, even Wiccan.

I needed to push aside the early "what if" concerns and focus instead on the "new door" of opportunity the Lord had opened to share the gospel. It's a privilege that we get to do it! We can trust the Lord is walking through that new door with each of us volunteers.

God's grace was seen very quickly. First, when the Lord provided a fine Christian friend and co-teacher who fills in the gaps where I am weak. We encourage one another and share the joy. More grace appeared in the trust and support we receive from the facility staff and chaplain.

Grace again and again: when women request more Bible study materials; when they invite roommates and friends to class; when they share what the Holy Spirit has taught them through their personal study of God's Word. There is even an occasional request for baptism from someone who now understands the blessings God gives in the sacrament.

As questions arise, we search Scripture together for God's answers. When God is very clear and human reason doubts, we point to Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." When curiosity prompts questions without Biblical answers, we know God will share what is needed when we reach heaven, or we may find those questions won't matter to us any longer. Meanwhile, we focus on Jesus and the cross as revealed in Scripture for our salvation.

Six leaders with different personalities, gifts, and approaches to Bible study. Dozens of inmates with different personalities, gifts, knowledge of Scripture, and burdens to carry. Yet all are God's children, under God's grace, and being led by the Holy Spirit to trust in Jesus as their Savior. Even to women in prison, Jesus brings his forgiveness and eternal life, as he promises: "My word...will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11).

It doesn't get any better than being messengers of God's grace. All praise to him who reigns forever!

Curious about bringing the freedom of Christ to the incarcerated? The Jail Ministry Training Team equips volunteers for ministry in correctional facilities. Call Pastor Rick Tuttle at 320-420-1414 or e-mail rick.tuttle@wels.net.

Are you ready to welcome an ex-offender?

Brad Price is Administrator of WELS Prison Ministry.

Recently, President Obama commuted sentences for a record-breaking 214 inmates in one day. To date, he has granted clemency for nearly 600 prisoners across the United States since he took office. While this number may sound large, it pales in comparison to the large number of those released from prison each day. According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 650,000 inmates are released each year. That is an average of nearly 2,000 every day!

As citizens, we might be intimidated meeting one of these 2,000 individuals. But as Christians, we are called to welcome them. Is your congregation ready for this opportunity? Are you personally ready? Knowing about the challenges and resources available can help you and your congregation be prepared.

There is great joy in helping those who have been impacted by incarceration. At WELS Prison Ministry, each week we receive letters from inmates who share their personal stories of how Jesus has freed them from their guilt of sin.

There is great joy in helping those who have been impacted by incarceration. At WELS Prison Ministry, each week we receive letters from inmates who share their personal stories of how Jesus has freed them from their guilt of sin.

With this joy there is also a great challenge to help these returning citizens. As crazy as it may sound, for those incarcerated for more than just a few years, prison can be more welcoming than being "free." While released inmates are happy to see family and friends again, there remain challenges, such as finding employment and housing, or dealing with advances in technology that make it difficult to acclimate successfully. Understanding these personal challenges is a big step in being mentally prepared to serve this special group.

Having adequate resources and training for both released inmates and members is also important. WELS Prison Ministry has several resources specifically written to help returning citizens. *Facing Freedom* is a booklet that addresses the issues of change, stress and worry, starting over, and becoming self-sufficient, with motivation from God's Word. Another resource is *Water of Life*, a collection of Bible studies that a mentor can use in conjunction with *Facing Freedom*. *Friends in Christ* is a training program for mentoring men and women who are re-entering society.

Beyond WELS Prison Ministry, Conquerors through Christ (conquerorsthroughchrist.net) offers help for those struggling with pornography, and Freedom for the Captives (freedomforcaptives.com) addresses issues that afflict victims of childhood abuse.

A valid concern for congregations is how to handle sexual offenders who desire to attend services or join the congregation. The *Congregational Guidelines for Dealing with Sexual Offenders* handbook, available online at the WELS Resource Center (csm.welsrc.net), addresses many of these concerns. This valuable booklet also outlines procedures congregations can implement to keep members of all ages safe from sexual predators while on church property.

The challenges involved with ministering to returning citizens are

certainly worth the effort. We were all lost sheep at one point, until Jesus came looking for us. Jesus died and rose for these sheep as well.

For more information on this topic, please contact Brad Price at prisonministry@wels.net.



Hand in Hand with WELS Special Ministries

To learn more about WELS Special Ministries or donate to Special Ministries projects, visit wels.net/special-ministries.

To subscribe to the email version of *His Hands*, visit wels.net/subscribe.

To refer military personnel, prisoners, or people with developmental disabilities for Special Ministries resources, visit wels.net/refer.

Seniors to meet in Omaha

The Organization of WELS Seniors (OWLS) invites all seniors in our WELS and ELS churches (retirees and / or over 50) to the October 11-13, 2016 convention at the Ramada Plaza Hotel and Convention Center in Omaha, Neb. The keynote speakers will share inspiring messages about how the harvest is being enlarged through Home Missions (Pastor Keith Free, WELS Missions), through missions in Russia and eastern Europe (Pastor Michael Ewart, former missionary), and through WELS Military Services (Pastor Paul Ziemer, WELS National Civilian Chaplain). Registration information can be found at wels.net/owls.

Nurses to meet in Fond du Lac

WELS Nurses will meet at St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Fond du Lac, Wis., on Sat., Oct. 22, 2016.

- Dr. Jennifer Londgren of Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service will speak on "Caregiving: Struggles and Strategies for Coping."
- Debbie Dietrich of The Lutheran Home will address how parish nurses can function as volunteer coordinators for nurses serving in retirement.

Register after September 1 at welsnurses.net.