

Prison Ministry

Vol. 5, Winter 2017



A Devotional Thought

O Little Town of Bethlehem

By Rev. Jim Behringer, Director, WELS Special Ministries

Long before the Christmas card paintings of a quaint village, the real Bethlehem was nothing special. For the patriarch Jacob, it was the cemetery of his beloved Rachel. The prophet Micah thought Bethlehem was rather small to be Messiah's birth place. Yet, God's Son was born in the humblest building in little Bethlehem: the stable.

It's hard to imagine that the Father would send his Son into such a lowly birth place. He could afford better! He had the power to send his Son on a golden space ship. He passed up the chance to use the Internet for the good news of Jesus' birth. He chose Bethlehem and the stable.

WELS Prison Ministry continues the work of Jesus in the same humble way. There is nothing glorious about prison cells. But in those cells our brothers and sisters have learned that Jesus is their Savior. The lounges where inmates complete our Bible studies have torn cushions and stale coffee. Our Bible studies are inexpensively printed. But in those humble places sinners read the gospel of Jesus, and find the golden crown of eternal life. "So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heav'n."

Correctional facilities may appear unlikely cathedrals, but God has come to visit his people in jail cells and in solitary. In God's Word, offenders learn that the Lord sent a Savior because of his love and his desire to save them. The gospel assures them that God is not keeping a record of their wrongs. Instead God offers them forgiveness in his Son.

Jesus comes in humble circumstances. It may be a bed in the nursing home or a park bench or a cell bunk. It may be in the long hours of the night as we worry. God does not pass by us – he comes to us in his Word. The outward surroundings may not be much, but in our hearts, the hope of heaven is born.

Thank you for your support of WELS Prison Ministry. May the coming year bring many more people the hope of heaven through knowing God's forgiveness in Christ. It doesn't have to be fancy. It just has to be the gospel, the pure Word of God.

Announcement:

We are sad to announce that our Prison Ministry Administrator, Mr. Brad Price, has resigned from the ministry. The Prison Ministry Committee has begun the process to call a new administrator.

Get to know the Prison Ministry Committee members



Pastor Jim Behringer works at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry and is the director of Special Ministries. He has an advisory and supportive role to WELS Prison Ministry, overseeing the finances and offering the resources of the WELS for planning, recruitment and promotion of our work.



Leon Brands lives in Belvidere, Ill. and is chairman of the Prison Ministry Committee (PMC). He has worked in jails/prisons for over 18 years. As chairman of the PMC he conducts the quarterly meetings, usually via videoconferencing, that direct the activities of

Prison Ministry. He keeps in contact with the Special Ministries' director, Pastor Jim Behringer, and with committee members and others who have specific duties and responsibilities for Prison Ministry. The team strives to carry out the PMC mission, which is: *WELS Prison Ministry shares Jesus with people impacted by incarceration.*



Thomas Koepsell - Tom served in WELS ministry from 1966 – 2013 as a teacher/principal and then in staff ministry. He became involved in jail ministry when he had an opportunity to train and lead a team that visited men in Dane County Jail, Wisconsin. He then served in a brief call to Institutional Ministries (IM) as a part-time chaplain and became part of the Prison Ministry Committee. His work there has involved him with training and initial development of face-to-face ministry. He currently serves as committee treasurer.



Rev. David Sellnow's ministry training included leading a congregational evangelism team during his vicarship in Houston, Tex., and inner-city outreach as part-time vicar at St. Marcus and Garden Homes churches in Milwaukee, Wis. He served as a home missionary in Owassa, Okla., (a suburb of Tulsa), and then pastored a small, mission-oriented congregation in Lubbock, Tex., where he also was very active in student ministry and outreach on the campus of Texas Tech University. Since 2000, Sellnow has been a professor of theology, philosophy and history at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

Prof. Sellnow has served as a doctrinal content editor and general editor for Prison Ministry books since 2006, and authored the Prison Ministry/Multi-Language Publications book, *The Lord Cares for Me: Stories and Thoughts on Psalm 23*. Since March 2016, he has been chairman of Prison Ministry's publications committee.



Pastor Robert Pasbrig, who lives in Hartford, Wis., serves Institutional Ministries (IM) in a semi-retired position. He serves as an advisor to the Prison Ministry Committee.



Pastor Philip Henselin serves as the Executive Director of Institutional Ministries (IM), overseeing and facilitating development for chaplaincy ministry. IM chaplains serve the institutionalized in healthcare, mental health facilities, adult and juvenile correctional

facilities, rehab centers, and extended care centers, as well as offering post-institutional and PTSD support.

Chris Joch served a variety of positions in education for 25 years. He currently is an administrator for the State of



Wisconsin. His wife and he live in Burlington, Wis. and are active members at First Lutheran in Lake Geneva. Chris serves as secretary for the PMC.



Pastor Roger Knepprath develops educational opportunities in connection with jail/prison visitation ministry. He is presently teaching an online course through Martin Luther College as part of the Chaplain Certification program. His class on Ministering to the Incarcerated and their Families is an elective.

Office volunteers

Nearly two dozen volunteers enter our New Ulm office each week, looking to help however they can. We appreciate every one of our office volunteers for what they contribute to make what we do easier and running more smoothly than it would without them.

Mail Openers: Each day, one or more volunteers comes in to open that day's mail. They open, read, and help evaluate what needs to be done for each inmate that contacts us through the mail. After Beth and Amy enter the mail into the database, the volunteers also help to write inmate addresses on the envelopes and stuff them with the next booklet that needs to be sent. Some days have so much mail, that not much more than that can get done in the time we have with our volunteers. On other days, mail openers are asked to do things such as stamp envelopes with our return address, stamp Level 2 books with our contact information, help with special mailings, prepare donated Meditations and cards for mailing, and whatever may come up with which we need help.

Our Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday mail openers collaborate to send over 100 Time of Grace sermons to inmates across the country each and every week. Tuesday openers also send out bibles to inmates upon request and prepare tests to send to correctors. Our Wednesday opener also prepares our Spanish materials to be sent when ordered by chaplains and makes sure the shelves in our mail room are stocked with booklets to be sent to inmates.

Our ministry has been blessed with donations of large amounts of postage stamps. When we receive those in our office, they need to be sorted and counted. It is most often our mail openers who help do that, as well, after which they take the time to adhere those stamps to the envelopes being mailed. This is a time consuming job yet well worth

the time in the amount of postage saved over the last several years.

Certificate Writers: Each day there are packets of tests that are returned to our office from our test correctors. Beth and Amy assemble each test with the matching certificate to prepare them for Tuesdays. Each Tuesday we have a larger group of volunteers come into the office to write out each certificate with the inmates' names and the date. The certificate writers then also hand write the inmates' addresses on each envelope. They then stuff, seal, and apply postage so each envelope is ready for the mail. Each week we have approximately 150-200 envelopes with corrected tests and certificates that are sent back to inmates.

All of the work these office volunteers do is extremely important to our ministry. We are forever grateful for their faithfulness!

Bible-based letters to Bible study readers

In a New Testament course at Martin Luther College, students examine the epistles (letters) to the churches. In some sections of that course, students have also been writing letters of their own. Beginning in the spring of 2017, Prof. David Sellnow (a member of the Prison Ministry Committee) has tasked MLC students to write responses to questions submitted by readers of Prison Ministry books. Some of the students who've been involved in this project share their thoughts about this work:

- These prison ministry letters were beneficial on a few fronts. First of all, the inmates were benefited. They had their questions answered and the gospel message shared with them. In addition, the WELS Prison Ministry organization had their load lightened by delegating some of the work to future ministers of the gospel. Finally, the students who participated benefited by gaining ministry experience. While there are many forms of pre-ministerial experience, this assignment was unique. It allowed the students to see the faith that exists in Christians who have made mistakes in their lives. Even Christians are capable of falling into grievous sins that require punishment from the civil laws. These mistakes do not cancel out faith or grace. Working with inmates may present different challenges than working with other believers, but they are still redeemed children of God who need Christian support. Overall, this assignment brings to life an issue and area of ministry that we as students had not previously thought about. I believe that all parties involved benefited from this assignment. - **Aaron Bush**



- I very much appreciated having the opportunity to respond to questions from inmates. It was a really cool assignment because rather than coming up with answers to hypothetical questions we'd discuss in class, we were answering real questions from real people. We were challenged to think in a different way, from someone else's perspective. Plus, the fact that we were responding to real questions made it seem much more important that we do the proper research and make sure we were communicating answers in the best way possible, wanting to improve someone's understanding of God's Word in all its awesomeness. It was really cool to see everyone getting a taste of that very important ministry. Often people don't even know Prison Ministry exists until a friend invites them to get involved. The gospel is for everyone. . . and we literally have people asking for a better understanding of God's Word. It's just the perfect opportunity for evangelism. - **Hannah Ruehrdanz**
- Helping out with WELS Prison Ministry letters was edifying and encouraging in many ways. It opened my eyes to another ministry in our synod that I had heard of but didn't actually know very much about. It was a great opportunity to reach out to persons who are looking to find the fulfillment that is missing in their life. The topics and questions that were brought up by the Prison Ministry readers gave me an opportunity to revisit my beliefs and ideas about those topics, which gave me an opportunity to dive into God's Word and be further strengthened in my faith. Finally, this project was great real life ministry experience that will benefit me in my preparation to be a pastor. It gave me a chance to share the good news of the gospel with a group of people who are a part of the "all nations" mentioned in our Savior's great commission. - **Jeremy Fluegge**



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Remember us with prayers, service, and gifts

We walk in faith, trusting that God will move the hearts of His people to continue to support our ministry in any way possible. To volunteer your time as a pen pal or a test corrector, please contact us in New Ulm at pmsec@wels.net or 507-354-3130.

WELS Prison Ministry now receives a small subsidy from our synod. Our ministry continues to write grants in hopes of receiving money for funding operational costs, printing books, and traveling to promote and train new volunteers for jail ministry.

If you desire to support ministry, you may send your gift to:

WELS Prison Ministry
N16W23377 Stone Ridge Drive
Waukesha, WI 53188-1088

Or you may donate online at wels.net/sm-donation, click on "Designation" and choose: "Prison Ministry."

Our ministry wishes to thank all of you for the many hours you give us. We are blessed to have such a large group of volunteers sharing their faith in so many different ways.

May the Lord continue to bless you as you serve Him.

In Christ,
WELS Prison Ministry Staff
