

# Prison Ministry

Fall 2018



*Sharing Jesus with those impacted by incarceration*



## A Devotional Thought

Thanking God for nothing...and everything.

*By Dave Hocmuth, administrator, WELS Prison Ministry*

<sup>17</sup> Though the fig tree does not bud  
and there are no grapes on the vines,  
though the olive crop fails  
and the fields produce no food,  
though there are no sheep in the pen  
and no cattle in the stalls,  
<sup>18</sup> yet I will rejoice in the LORD,  
I will be joyful in God my Savior.

*Habakkuk 3:17-18 (NIV)*

Most of us have far too many blessings to list. I cannot remember the last time I went to bed truly hungry. Except for some backpacking trips I have always slept with a roof over my head. I have so many clothes I can't remember when I last wore many of them. I'm living when medical technology has reduced an otherwise life-threatening illness to a relatively easily managed condition. I have so much to be thankful for, and yet my natural inclination is to complain to God about even small difficulties or inconveniences.

Then I think of those behind bars. I get up each Sunday to be fed Word and Sacrament. Inmates can go months without access to clear gospel teaching or receiving the assurance of forgiveness in Christ's body and blood. I have Christian family, friends, and coworkers who create an environment that helps me to remember God's love and promises. The environment behind bars can be corrosive to living for Jesus; even a small



show of kindness can be impossible to find. I choose what to eat, what to wear, how and where to spend my time. Nearly every aspect of inmates' lives is dictated to them.

But Habakkuk speaks a vital truth. How many, incarcerated or otherwise, could lose every earthly blessing and still be able to "rejoice in the Lord" and "be joyful in God my Savior?" On our own, none of us. Through Spirit-worked faith, any of us. We know that Jesus' perfect life in our place and willing death on our behalf has removed all guilt. God sees us as perfect, no matter how ugly our failures have been. Jesus has punched our ticket to a glorious eternity and no one can take it from us. "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." Romans 8:18.

Until then, many must deal with a lack of earthly or

*The WELS studies are absolutely amazing. Full of valuable practical information to help me grow in Christ. Thank you so much! - Mattie*

spiritual blessings. Inmates know that feeling firsthand. But each of us has a role to play in bringing both spiritual encouragement and earthly assistance to people who desperately need and want it. Thanks to all who support this effort with your prayers, your time, or your financial resources. Look for opportunities to continue or expand your support. We'll continue to send the gospel behind bars via our publications. We pray more will train to go into institutions to personally share God's Word. We also pray more people will train to assist released inmates reintegrate as productive citizens and help them live lives worthy of the calling Jesus has given us.

## *Breaking into prison (ministry, this is)*

Know anybody who is eager to get into jail or prison? Meet two men who are: David Hochmuth and Darren Green. They are WELS Prison Ministry's new administrator and chairman, respectively.

### **New administrator**

For Dave Hochmuth, life in prison ministry begins at age 60. Raised in a WELS parsonage in California, he realized that he possessed neither the gifts nor the desire to follow his father into pastoral ministry. So he studied engineering and spent 23 years in that field. Meanwhile, he served in a variety of church offices and as a Bible study leader.

Preparing to teach was God's way of teaching the teacher, and Dave found his passion. He enrolled in the staff ministry program at Martin Luther College and was assigned in 2007 to St. Andrew, Middleton, Wis., as Minister of Spiritual Growth.



Left to right: Jim Behringer—WELS Special Ministries director, Dave Hochmuth, and Darren Green.

In 2011, a bombshell dropped: his brother was arrested. Over the next few years, Dave visited several prisons to encourage his sibling. As his fear of the unknown eased, he learned the ropes of the prison system, the need of inmates for consistent spiritual nurture, and the impact of incarceration on families. He volunteered with Conquerors through Christ, a WELS ministry to those addicted to pornography, and others took note of his gifts.

But he never expected the divine call to enter prison ministry full time. "If you had told me 20 years ago that I would someday be in this position," he admitted, "I would have laughed at you." Now he sees how God has been preparing him.

Hochmuth acknowledges the challenges ahead. "The size of the opportunities compared to the size of our human resources is sobering. But if Jesus could work with five loaves of bread and two small fish..."

His priorities include reinvigorating the publications program, recruiting more volunteers for face-to-face ministry, serving inmates after their release, and getting ex-offenders involved in kingdom work. "We need to set a clear direction, establish priorities, and then get at it," he says.

*This course gave me the confidence I was lacking and the faith I was steering away from. Not only did it help me, but it helped me help others. It gave me another reason to appreciate God and Jesus Christ our Savior. I would like to thank you and would appreciate if you sent more books and courses like this. Once again, Thank you!!! – Terrance*

Dave and his wife Mary have been a team since 1989, raising three children. Now they are partners in another field, since Mary has become involved in ministry at the Dane County Jail. They share a heart for those who are locked up. "We're all sinners. Some of our sins may be more socially acceptable, but we're all the same before God," Hochmuth observes. "People in prison are blood-bought souls, too, and Jesus told us to reach them."

Hochmuth will visit the WELS Prison Ministry facility in New Ulm, Minn. frequently, but unlike previous administrators, his office will be at the Center for Mission and Ministry in Waukesha, Wis. Contact him at 414-256-3243 or e-mail [prisonministry@wels.net](mailto:prisonministry@wels.net).

One of my favorite parables by Jesus is [the] "Father & Two Sons." I can't wait to share this with my little boy Henry...I love reading God's word and doing these Bible Studies because it develops a better understanding of things I found difficult. My wife Diana sends her thanks as well. She loves hearing my enthusiasm about the Word and it has bound us closer than ever before...I would greatly appreciate [additional studies] and use them as a sharing tool to spread God's love and message. - Benjamin

### New chairman

Darren Green, 50, has assumed duties as chairman of the Prison Ministry Committee, succeeding Leon Brands, who served faithfully for the past twelve years.

A 1994 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Green was assigned to the mission field in Russia. He has also served parishes in Nebraska, Colorado and, since 2006, St. Peter in Monticello, Minn. He married Naomi in 1992, and their marriage has been enriched by two children.

Beyond the congregation, Darren was elected as Special Ministries Coordinator, first for the Nebraska District and later for the Minnesota District. But his involvement with the incarcerated became personal when his brother was sentenced to prison. Spurred by this family crisis, and encouraged by WELS Prison Ministry, he has taught a weekly class at the St. Cloud State Prison for the past ten years.

As Green's passion for souls behind bars has grown, he has identified other opportunities for ministry: helping families deal with the stresses of having a loved one incarcerated; ministering to ex-offenders when they are released; addressing the spiritual needs of prison staff and their families, who face their own stress.

"Jesus died for all of them," says the veteran of soul care. "He ate with sinners and offered water to the woman at the well, who had her own 'issues'."

He may now be "Chairman Green," but his heart remains in serving the lost. "I love the verse in Hebrews: 'By only one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being sanctified' (10:14 EHV). Then it quotes Jeremiah 31: 'And I will not remember their sins and their lawlessness any longer.' That beautiful gospel is the message that inmates need to hear, and our mission is to bring it to them."

To share your thoughts with Pastor Green, call 763-295-5315 or e-mail welsne@gmail.com.

## Learning from "Fred"

Jail or prison ministry can be a daunting thing. It takes some getting used to. Heavily locked door after door loudly latching behind you as you make your way to the inmates. Feeling out of place because you are NOT wearing bright orange. Being in an environment where kindness is rare and weakness is preyed upon. Having to be extremely careful to follow the rules of the institution so I don't lose the privilege to minister there. But the blessings I receive from my service far outweigh the challenges. Opportunity after opportunity to share law and gospel with eager listeners helps bolster my own faith. And every once in a while, an inmate teaches me something big.

One such inmate was Fred (not his real name). Like any population, inmates have health issues. Fred was in a bed in the prison infirmary. I had been visiting with him for a few weeks. We had many conversations about God's Word and about our Savior. One morning I noticed him wearing a handmade cross necklace. Both the cross, an inch or two tall,



I am going to use this booklet, along with the Bible, to bring the gospel to those who do not know the saving power of Christ Jesus. I thought this was an excellent study, and it proves how all of us need a Savior. God's Word shows us how time and again God's people need a Savior and how we still need a Savior today. Thanks be to your ministry and to God Our Father for putting together this treasure trove of truth about God's plan for the world! – Brian

and the necklace string appeared to be made of white and red plastic. Fred explained that he had made the necklace out of tightly woven garbage bags. I was impressed both by the craftsmanship, especially given the innovative use of materials, and his willingness to witness to his faith in an environment that can be hostile to believers. "Can you make one for me?" I asked.

"Oh Chaplain, you can have this one," he offered. I tried to refuse, but he insisted. Carefully removing the necklace from behind his neck and lifting it over his head, he handed the precious gift to me.

Almost without thinking, I set the necklace down on my Bible sitting on the cart that I push through the jail. Immediately he said, "If you're not going to wear it, give it back."

*I really enjoy receiving the Scripture Passages & Prayers devotional books you sent. The women here really enjoy them. The publications that you send tend to leave our distribution racks rather quickly. I am so glad your words are touching many women's lives. Thank you and have a very blessed day. – Debra (a prison chaplain)*

I was embarrassed and put the cross around my neck. Why didn't I do it right away? Perhaps as the chaplain I was a little ashamed, embarrassed, or judgmental. But none of the reasons I came up with made me feel any better. They all made me realize that I was just ashamed of my Savior.

In one quick comment, Fred preached God's law to me. Who am I to call myself a minister of the gospel when I lack the boldness and eagerness to make even a silent testimony to my trust in Jesus? But putting on that cross reminded that I too had a Savior who was eager to forgive my thoughtless hypocrisy. My sins may not have landed me behind bars, but the freedom from guilt and shame Jesus gives is no less Fred's than it is mine. We both desperately need that gift.

Later I smiled as I walked back to my car, thanking God for Fred and his words, thanking God for Jesus my Savior and the ability to proclaim him to others. I still smile every time I see that cross and tell the story.

For those who choose to bring the gospel behind bars, or wherever we bring the message of the gospel, be prepared to

have your faith tested and strengthened by the Spirit through the words and actions of those you strive to serve.

*Matt Brown is pastor at Abiding Word in Houston, Texas, and regularly brings God's Word to inmates in the Harris County Jail.*

## *Remember us with prayers, service, and gifts*

We walk in faith, trusting that God will move the hearts of His people to support our ministry in any way possible. Please pray that Prison Ministry would continue to share Jesus with more people impacted by incarceration. Also, we are blessed to have such a large group of volunteers sharing their faith in so many ways. To volunteer as a pen pal or a test corrector, please contact us at [pmsec@wels.net](mailto:pmsec@wels.net) or 507-354-3130. To explore visitation or mentoring opportunities, email [dave.hochmuth@wels.net](mailto:dave.hochmuth@wels.net) or call 414-256-3243.

WELS Prison Ministry now receives a small subsidy from our synod. We continue to write grant requests in hopes of receiving money for funding operational costs, printing books, and traveling to promote and train new volunteers for visitation or mentoring ministry. But most of our financial support comes from people like you. If you desire to support this work, please send your gift to:

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

Or donate online at [wels.net/sm-donation](http://wels.net/sm-donation), click on "Designation" and choose: "Prison Ministry."

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

In Christ,  
*WELS Prison Ministry Staff*

*God has been with me and watching over me every single moment of every single day of my incarceration. Although I lost everything I worked so hard to achieve and nearly everyone I have ever loved and cared about in this world, I have gained so much more in my relationship with my Father in heaven and my Lord, Savior, Rock and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. – Jeff*