

PRISON MINISTRY

SHARING JESUS WITH PEOPLE IMPACTED BY INCARCERATION

SUMMER 2020 NEWSLETTER



2020 IS A GREAT YEAR

Dave Hocmuth, Administrator, WELS Prison Ministry

What? How can you say that? Virus fears. Civil unrest. Violence. Economic uncertainty. Lost celebrations. And the list goes on. But what if we view this year through the eyes of faith? Consider Old Testament Joseph. After being sold into slavery by his older brothers and later spending years in prison on a false charge, he could still forgive his brothers because he saw that "You [his brothers] intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." Genesis 50:20, NIV84. Note how Joseph praises God

whose suffering accomplished the greatest good of all, the rescue of the world from guilt for an eternity of untainted joy. And as Paul encouraged the Roman Christians, so he encourages us: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28, NIV84 Note that the good God is working for in "all things," even bad things, may be someone else's good, not ours. Our patient, even cheerful endurance of painful trials may give us an opportunity to give a reason for the hope that we have. God can use that testimony to lead others to place their trust in Jesus.

So, what does all this mean for prison ministry in 2020? Let's see it as an opportunity rather than a disaster. God is already in every one of our tomorrows and knows exactly what good he is doing through all of this. Let's redouble our efforts to reach God's lost sheep with our prayers, our volunteer time, and our financial gifts. Here are three encouragements to do so.

First, thanks to the extra efforts of our New Ulm Mailing Center staff and volunteers, we've been able to maintain our ministry-by-mail efforts safely (Bible study booklets and pen pal letters) with little adverse impact from the measures implemented to combat the pandemic. God's Word continues to go where he sends it and is not returning empty.

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not for the good that came to him personally, though surely Joseph was thankful for that, but for the good that came to others through his suffering.

Can we adopt that same attitude? With the Spirit's help, absolutely. In Philippians 2, the apostle Paul encourages us to have the same attitude as Jesus,

Second, the Prison Ministry Committee authorized an outreach effort to reconnect with thousands of facilities that have not recently submitted book orders or tests. In this time of limited personal visits to inmates, we wanted to offer our ministry-by-mail as an alternate way to encourage and support inmates. We pray God richly blesses this effort, which would generate a much greater need for test corrector and pen pal volunteers, as well as booklet inventory replacement.

Finally, amid the anxiety around us, let us celebrate the joy that both giver and receiver of our ministry efforts experience. That joy is clearly captured in an inmate's poem based on the widow's gift at the temple (Luke 21:1-4):

With Willing Heart

As poor widow of long ago
Gave all to do your work;
So too open my heart dear Lord,
Willing to give and to serve.
Make my heart always generous,
Noble as hers that day;
Trusting fully in your promise,
Every need taken care.
As I receive your blessings,
Let first be given to you;
Not with grudging heart,
But with joy unmeasured.
(Lawrence Palubecki)

REACHING OUT INSTEAD OF PULLING BACK

Paul reminds Timothy (and us): "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." We really need that encouragement these days, as do those we serve. It is in this spirit that the Prison Ministry Committee authorized a significant outreach effort to offer our Bible correspondence self-study booklets to over 2,000 correctional facilities because of the interruption in personal visits. Here are some quick facts about the effort and steps you can take to further the effort.

- We mailed a sample booklet and a brochure to the chaplain, activity director, or program coordinator describing our booklets and inviting them to order free copies for the inmates at their institution. We

**"FOR GOD DID NOT GIVE US A SPIRIT OF TIMIDITY, BUT A SPIRIT OF POWER, OF LOVE AND OF SELF-DISCIPLINE"
(2 TIMOTHY 1:7).**

chose the booklet "A Broken-hearted Father" based on Jesus' story of the prodigal son as a great example of God's overwhelming love for his lost children.

- Our mailing list consisted of facilities with which we have had interaction in the past. Over 75 percent of the facilities we sent a mailing to have not received booklets in over two years. The breakdown is as follows:
 - ▶ County Jail/Detention Center – 955
 - ▶ State Correctional Facility – 1044
 - ▶ Federal Correctional Facility – 111
 - ▶ Immigration and Customs Enforcement Facility – 22
 - ▶ Youth/Juvenile Offender Facility – 46
- Please pray that the mailing will find receptive staff members at the facilities, that many books will be ordered, that many tests will be returned, but most importantly, that many souls will be touched by the gospel and faith created or strengthened.
- Consider giving a gift (see p. 4) that will help us print many more booklets so we can fill the orders with which God blesses us.

FINDING ALTERNATIVES FOR JAIL OR PRISON VISITORS

During the current pandemic, personal visits to share the gospel with inmates are severely restricted or prohibited altogether. Individuals and groups that previously visited these lost sheep in person may seek alternatives, such as:

- **Supply Bible self-study books** – Consider contacting the chaplain, activity director, or program coordinator for the facilities you normally visit and encouraging the use of WELS Prison

Ministry booklets. Download an order form and send it to the corrections official.

- **Replace in-person visits with video visits** – Trained jail visitors may explore whether the facility you serve has either onsite or remote video visits for individual inmates.
- **Replace in-person visits with other communication** – Electronically delivered devotions from WELS Prison Ministry or our partner Institutional Ministries are available to some inmates.

If you wish to explore these alternatives further or share other ideas, contact Administrator Dave Hochmuth at dave.hochmuth@wels.net or 414-256-3243.

QUOTES FROM INMATES

When I came to jail 18 months ago I was lost. While I still find myself struggling with my faith, believing in Jesus...has really done something. I've seen my prayers get answered. It's been life changing. – **LeeAnna**

That [study] hit home for me! For 30 years I have been trying to know if I could be forgiven and WOW here it is! Thank you! I needed this study most. God Bless you all!! I will be keeping this study to take home. Love your studies. Keep them going. – **Earl**

I enjoyed the reading from start to finish. My first one. I am hungry for more of these lessons. Very easy to understand and even though the lessons were short and quick, it was big on knowledge about God. I want more! Thank you so much for this lesson! :) – **Cynthia**

...the mentors/graders have been a huge blessing of positive encouragement and I truly am thankful for every one that continues to be that kind of positive example of how a Christian should be. – **Martin**

PEN PAL PIPELINE

We love to hear that upon release, there are inmates who would like to attend a WELS church, if possible. Occasionally they will be located too far away to attend a WELS or ELS church in person, but other times, there is one close by they can attend. It's great that these inmates have connected with our church body and the message we bring—that they are forgiven through the blood of Jesus!

When pen pals have connected with inmates through letters, it's not uncommon that an inmate will share in a letter that they would like to attend a WELS church upon their release. We ask that if your inmate pen pal shares this with you, please send that information to us so we can make a connection between the inmate and the pastor of the church. Our Reaching Behind the Bars Volunteer Guidelines state: "When you hear that your inmate will be released, contact the WELS Prison Ministry office. We will refer him or her to the closest WELS or ELS congregation. Please do not make referrals yourself." We make this request so that we can better follow up with the inmate and congregation and ensure that the inmate gets both spiritual and practical support while reentering society.



To get WELS Prison Ministry news and updates delivered straight to your e-mail inbox, subscribe at wels.net/subscribe.

THREE WAYS TO SUPPORT OUR MINISTRY

- 1. Pray** – As God’s redeemed children, our prayers are powerful and effective. Current prayer requests: bless our outreach mailing and allow us to touch many more souls; move God’s people to support this ministry in this difficult time, especially when God’s blessing leads to a greater demand for booklets.
 - 2. Serve** – All our ministry efforts are driven by volunteers motivated by Christ’s love. To volunteer as a pen pal or a test corrector, please contact us at prisonministry@wels.net or 507-354-3130.

To explore jail visitation or post-release mentoring opportunities, call 414-256-3243 or send an e-mail to dave.hochmuth@wels.net.
 - 3. Give** – We thank our Lord and you for your helpful special offerings to Prison Ministry which support our efforts to share Jesus with people impacted by incarceration!
- To provide additional gifts for Christ’s work through Prison Ministry, send to:
WELS, Attn. Gift Processing
N16W23377 Stone Ridge Drive
Waukesha, WI, 53188
(Make checks payable to WELS and list Prison Ministry in the memo line.)
 - Donate online at wels.net/donate-prison-ministry
 - Give through your IRA charitable distribution, appreciated assets or your will or estate plan. Contact WELS Ministry of Christian Giving at 800-827-5482 for assistance.
 - Direct your Thrivent Choice dollars (if you are a Thrivent member) to WELS Prison Ministry. Contact Thrivent Member Care Services at 800-847-4836 for assistance. Your 2020 designation is due by March 31, 2021.

COMING SOON TO WELS PRISON MINISTRY

- Our 24th Level 1 Bible study booklet: “Parenting from prison”
- Online video training: “Mentoring returning citizens”
- More resources for congregations, pastors, and lay volunteers doing prison ministry

Your support makes sharing Jesus with people impacted by incarceration possible.

LATE BREAKING NEWS...

Our “Reaching Out” mailing (p. 2) is generating many new book orders. In the first two weeks the response has been nearly 18,000 booklets ordered by chaplains or others. To keep our booklet inventory stocked, we will need a significant response by God’s people to fund printing and shipping. Please consider a gift for this fruitful effort. On average booklets cost about \$1 each to print so every gift helps.