

PRISON MINISTRY

SHARING JESUS WITH PEOPLE IMPACTED BY INCARCERATION

WINTER 2020-21 NEWSLETTER



CAN YOU IMAGINE?

Pastor Darren Green, chairman, WELS Prison Ministry Committee

AN ANGEL OF THE LORD APPEARED TO HIM IN A DREAM AND SAID, "JOSEPH SON OF DAVID, DO NOT BE AFRAID TO TAKE MARY HOME AS YOUR WIFE, BECAUSE WHAT IS CONCEIVED IN HER IS FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT. SHE WILL GIVE BIRTH TO A SON, AND YOU ARE TO GIVE HIM THE NAME JESUS, BECAUSE HE WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS." (MATTHEW 1:20-21, NIV)

Imagine the range of emotions and thoughts that went through Joseph's mind. As you think about Christmas this year, put yourself in the shoes of those who were there. Consider Joseph as he saw Mary after she returned from visiting Elizabeth. She had been gone for a few months and when she came back, she was visibly pregnant. Joseph knew it was not his child! This was not right, but being an honorable man who cared for Mary, he was going to quietly divorce her. BUT then, the angel came to him in a dream explaining that this was from God.

Picture Joseph going to Mary and telling her about having an angel come to him. "Me, too!" Mary may have responded. "I was so scared, but the angel told me, 'Do not be afraid!'" Think of her telling about Elizabeth, silent Zechariah, and John the Baptist leaping in Elizabeth's womb! I would encourage you to read through Luke chapter 1 and 2. As you read the accounts that Luke records, consider the words of

Mary, Elizabeth, and Zechariah. Put yourself in their shoes, visualize what the shepherds saw, heard, and witnessed. Think about the words Zechariah and Mary use in their songs. These words give such comfort: forgiveness, peace, and mercy. Zechariah sang: "to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins." (Luke 1:77).

Jesus did come, as the angel told Joseph, "to save his people from their sins." You are part of the world that Jesus came to save! You are part of the "generation to generation" (Luke 1:50) that know sin and darkness. Jesus came to give you light, forgiveness, and peace! In Jesus, the words of the angel mean just as much to us, "Do not be afraid!"

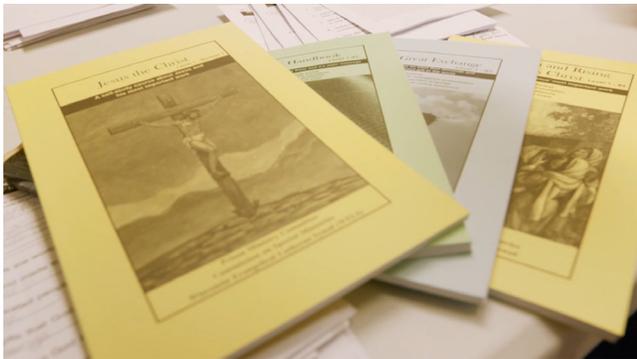
Mary and Joseph were human beings just like you and me. They witnessed God fulfilling his promises, all the miracles and amazing wonders. Jesus was true God, coming down to save his people to give them

the knowledge of salvation! This HIS-story is your story of salvation so that one day you too will witness with your eyes Jesus in heaven with all the angels. He gives us his Word! The angel even told Mary, "For nothing will be impossible for God." (Luke 1:37 EHV). The Lord goes with you, just as he did with Mary and Joseph! Do not be afraid, rather rejoice – your Savior has come, my friend!

This salvation story fills us with peace and gives us a voice to share. God used the angels to proclaim this message of peace then but has called us to proclaim his message now. God help us share this message with all that are imprisoned by their sins and guilt. Jesus has come to save people from their sins. We have this message that truly does the impossible and opens hearts and eyes to know and see Jesus. What a gift! A gift that keeps on giving!

Have a blessed Christmas, and know your new year is in Jesus' hands.

REJOICE WITH THOSE WHO REJOICE



Since we last checked in with you, God continues to bless our COVID-19 outreach. In the four months since we invited 2000 facilities to join our ministry-by-mail Bible studies, we have received orders for over 50,000 Bible study booklets. To give you some perspective, in recent years we have distributed about 40,000 booklets per year. Our total for 2020 is estimated to be twice that.

Both chaplains and inmates alike have expressed great thanks for these self-studies that have helped take the place of visitation and in-person Bible stud-

ies that are currently on hold because of the pandemic. Here are some sample comments they have shared.

I've struggled with forgiving myself of my sins and this really helped me realize that God has forgiven me and has separated my sins from me "as far as the East is from the West." That's so awesome!! Also, thank you so much for the cards signed by the kids. They really touch my heart and make me very happy! God bless you all!. - Charles

Like all of your previous courses, I enjoyed this one as well. I've learned a lot about who I really am now. I am an adopted child of God. That makes me special and makes me relevant. I never thought I mattered before, but now I know that I am one of his dear children and he loves me. Thank you for your course. – Antonio

I just wanted to send you a note of thanks regarding the receipt of the Bible studies for prisoners. I reviewed them and found them to be something we definitely will be using and distributing to the inmates. I did a "test run" today when I visited the dorms and in just one dorm, half of the stock was given out! So, WELS should be anticipating some completed studies soon. I am sending in another order as we have 13 dorms. Our institution has been on lockdown since April due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The men can't leave the dorm, no programs are taking place, etc. They are in need of new material and your material has been an answer to prayer. Thanks again and continued blessings on your ministry! – Chaplain

Thank you for your generous offer to help the prisoners here at WCC. We are grateful for your material that gives the word of God to men who suffer from not having it available to recall from their heart. You help put it into effect! – Chaplain

"THE WORDS I SPEAK ARE LIKE THAT. THEY WILL NOT RETURN TO ME WITHOUT PRODUCING RESULTS." (ISAIAH 55:11)

What an opportunity we have been given. Our materials are now available to thousands of inmates who did not have access previously. Not only that, but we have God's promise that "The words I speak are like that. They will not return to me without producing results. They will accomplish what I want them to. They will do exactly what I sent them to do." (Isaiah 55:11 NIV) God's Word is going into places we can't go and is accomplishing the results he wants. What joy we have by being part of this effort.

A CLOSER LOOK AT MENTORING

Editor's note: Jesse Zart, a member of the Minnesota River Valley Mentoring Program, gives us an update on their activities. He gives us a great look at ways Jesus is working despite COVID-19. WELS Prison Ministry teams with this mentoring program and desires to foster similar programs in other communities. Jesse makes clear that mentoring has a wider application than just released inmates.

Although the current pandemic has limited the ability of WELS Prison Ministries and others to have in-person inmate visits, God's work is still very much in action through the efforts of the Minnesota River Valley Mentoring Program (MRVMP), New Ulm, Minn.

The MRVMP and WELS Prison Ministries collaborate frequently because we have similar missions—we both share Jesus with those in need. For instance, WELS Prison Ministry is about to release an online video training course called, "Mentoring Returning Citizens." The MRVMP provided insight, experience, and consultation for the materials and subject matter for this project. The result will provide churches and individuals basic training that prepares them to effectively mentor those in need. Although this training is titled "Mentoring Returning Citizens" (that is, inmates released from prison or jail), it is also valuable for mentoring anyone in need.

We have shown that one doesn't need to be an expert to be an effective mentor who shares Jesus'

love. Whether former inmates or not, many mentees (the persons we serve) struggle with basic life skills like budgeting, meal planning, and searching for jobs. Others suffer from addictions like alcohol, drugs, pornography, and more. Others still have anger management or anxiety issues that create relationship and employment difficulties. We are not trained psychologists, therapists, or counselors. We are self-professed learners who admit we don't have all the answers. Yet as average, caring Christian human beings we see God blessing our efforts.

We partner with a few groups to best help those in need and refer to professional resources when necessary. One partner is a local Survivor's Group that has volunteers trained to be a primary safe point of contact for survivors of domestic abuse. They also lead group sessions that create mutual support opportunities. We have found this partnership to be mutually beneficial as some volunteers are suitably trained to assist in either of our respective programs. Our programs also act as feeders for each other.

Another partner is Resilient Recovery, a Christ-based version of Alcoholics Anonymous that specializes in group sessions for many addictions, not just alcohol. Their program enables individuals to meet in group sessions that have their own unique benefits. This allows MRVMP to focus on the individual mentoring. Once again, our respective programs can also act as feeders for each other.

There are many opportunities to serve, and God's work is still very active. The "cloud" of not getting to have in-person meetings has the "silver lining" of time to build out and develop other programs that will help even more people going forward. God bless your efforts to share Jesus with others, whether it's being a mentor, communicating with inmates as a pen pal or test corrector, or supporting the work these volunteers do.

VISIT [WELS.NET/TOGETHER](https://wels.net/together) TO HEAR WELS PRISON MINISTRY ADMINISTRATOR MR. DAVE HOCHMUTH TALK ABOUT HOW COVID-19 IMPACTED PRISON MINISTRY WORK.

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

CORRECTOR'S CORNER

Our test correctors have a very important role in our ministry. Their encouragement is a key factor in motivating inmates to continue in the program and thereby be blessed by God's Word. We ask that our correctors "include lots of gospel, encouraging words, and positive comments on each test (at least 2-3 sentences)." Many inmates have not spent time in an environment where God's Word was considered valuable or useful. Their biblical knowledge may be limited or clouded by mistaken ideas from previous religious experiences. As a result, some test questions are answered incorrectly. While we do want inmates to know the truth by indicating the correct answer, we understand that growth in faith is a time-consuming process. The gospel-affirming, encouraging comments let the inmates know that we care about their growth in knowledge and trust in Jesus, even when that knowledge is incomplete or not yet in keeping with Scripture. For some inmates, the care and concern our volunteers express is the only positive feedback or expressions of worth they receive. They learn that Jesus loves them not only in God's Word, but through the actions of their brothers and sisters in Christ. We pray that the gospel encouragement motivates them to want to grow more.

THREE WAYS TO SUPPORT OUR MINISTRY

- 1. Pray** – As God's redeemed children, our prayers are powerful and effective. Current prayer requests: Thanksgiving for the significant response to our COVID-19 outreach and a petition that more facilities respond; ask that God send many generous donors of small and large gifts to allow us to print many books to keep up with the demand; ask, according to God's will, that the pandemic may ease and that inmates might again receive in-person visits.
 - 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:
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.