

# PRISON MINISTRY

SHARING JESUS WITH PEOPLE IMPACTED BY INCARCERATION

FALL 2021 NEWSLETTER



## FINDING PEACE

*Dave Hochmuth, WELS Prison Ministry Administrator*

How do you define the word “peace?” There are many ways, including “the absence of conflict,” or “a feeling of serenity,” or “quietness.” So what does Jesus mean when he says: “I leave my peace with you. I give my peace to you. I do not give it to you as the world does. Do not let your hearts be troubled. And do not be afraid. (John 14:27 NIV).

The second half of the verse gives us Jesus’ meaning. He doesn’t want us to be troubled or afraid. So why does it seem I’m almost always anxious or fearful about something? That’s because I still carry around my original sinful nature that hates following Jesus. Apostle Paul talked about this in Romans 7:19, “I don’t do the good things I want to do. I keep on doing the evil things I don’t want to do.” I don’t want to be anxious or afraid, but part of me can’t help it. It’s always going to believe the devil’s lies that God does not love me, isn’t strong enough to help me, or just doesn’t care.

But Jesus shows us his way out. Let’s turn to Roman’s 7:24-25: “What a terrible failure I am! Who will save me from this sin that brings death to my body? I give thanks to God who saves me. He saves me through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Jesus doesn’t just give us peace; he IS our peace. When fearful thoughts attack you,

and they will, remember two things. First, remember how much Jesus loves you. My favorite verse for this is Romans 5:8: “But here is how God has shown his love for us. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Second, remember the trouble is temporary. I have two favorites for this. John 16:33b “In this world you will have trouble. But be encouraged! I have won the battle over the world” and 2 Corinthians 4:17 “Our troubles are small. They last only for a short time. But they are earning for us a glory that will last forever. It is greater than all our troubles.”



God says “Don’t be afraid” over 300 times in the Bible. He knows we need to hear it constantly. It has been said: “Courage is not the absence of fear, but the ability to act despite the fear.” Let’s live our lives for and with Jesus despite any fear in our hearts. What

are some actions that can help focus on Jesus instead of fear? Here's a few:

- Live one day at a time (Matthew 7:34). Plan, but don't dwell on worst case "what ifs." Focus on serving Jesus today and cross tomorrow's bridge when you get there.
- Trust Jesus to provide the grace needed to endure any temptation to fear, but not until you need it (1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Corinthians 12:9).
- Memorize scripture to recall when you need to replace fearful thoughts with Jesus' promises. Some candidates include the verses above, Psalm 23, Romans 5:3-5, 8:18, and 8:37-39, Hebrews 13:5-6 or use your own personal favorites.

He will give us true peace as we need it now, and perfectly in eternity.

## CHECK OUT NEW RESOURCES FOR VOLUNTEERS AND CONGREGATIONS

The Prison Ministry Committee has made several resources available recently to people who desire to get involved with or make others aware of our ministry. Here's a quick summary.

- **NEW TRAINING MODULE: MENTORING A RETURNING CITIZEN**  
This video-based training resource helps church leaders prepare their members to mentor people returning to the community from incarceration. Mentoring returning citizens can be an effective way for a Christian to put faith into words and actions. It can be found at [welscongregationalservices.net/mentoring-a-returning-citizen](http://welscongregationalservices.net/mentoring-a-returning-citizen).
- **PRISON MINISTRY AWARENESS & COMMUNICATE TO THE NEXT GENERATION**  
We completed two resources recently that are available at: [welscongregationalservices.net/prisonministryawareness](http://welscongregationalservices.net/prisonministryawareness).
  - **Worship planning resources for a Prison Ministry Sunday emphasis:** A planning

sheet is available for a service focused on Prison Ministry with suggested hymns, psalm, and prayers, together with a sermon on 2 Corinthians 5:16,17. A few stories and comments from inmates that have benefited from our Bible studies are included at the end of the sermon sheet.

- **Sunday School/Lutheran Elementary School lesson** based on Onesimus and Philemon to emphasize welcoming into God's family those with troubled backgrounds. The lesson contains student and leader sheets for four grade levels (PreK- Grade 6).

These new materials work well for a Prison Ministry Awareness Sunday or event at your congregation or school. The promotional resources make both adults and children aware of the mission potential of WELS Prison Ministry and to cultivate concern for the lost. Church or school leaders may use them as part of a mission project where offerings will be designated for this work.

These promotional resources can also lay the foundation for preparing congregation members to serve the people in a local correctional facility with the Word, or to mentor people returning to the community from incarceration. More resources to assist congregations with awareness and acceptance are under development and will be added to the WELS Congregational Services website soon.

## GOLDEN OPPORTUNITIES

The Prison Ministry Committee (PMC) understands that our ministry is at a crossroads. Methods used to deliver the gospel to inmates are changing. Inmates are communicating less frequently via US Mail. More inmates are being given access to electronic communication (similar to e-mail) as well as other services such as book or music downloads to tablets that the inmates own. Our ministry needs to adapt to this new environment. Frequent opportunities to share Law and Gospel with many more inmates nationwide are available if we can adapt our efforts to this new reality.

- Produce devotions that support outreach to people with little if any biblical knowledge.

## NOTES FROM NEW ULM

**TEST CORRECTORS:** Several of our booklets have been updated and reprinted with new final tests. Amy and Beth in the ministry mailing center are making sure everyone has all the necessary answer sheets. Because many booklets are mailed in bulk, it can take a long time for all of them to be given to inmates. The answer sheet packets being sent contain each version of the test answers. Thanks for taking care to ensure that the inmates get the best possible experience when they submit a test. Using the correct answer sheet is vital so you can comment positively when you need to kindly redirect them to correct answers that they miss.

**PEN PALS:** Some newer volunteers may not be aware that we urge them to resist the desire to send stamps or other items of value with your pen pal letters. Although this may seem like a simple kindness, some facilities consider these items contraband. Because the letters come through WELS Prison Ministry to safeguard your personal information, our whole ministry of sharing God's Word with inmates at those facilities could be jeopardized. Your discipline helps us continue to share "the one thing needful."

**LOCAL DONATIONS:** Some donation drop-offs still occur at the Washington Street location that may soon be removed. Please drop off any donations in the bench outside our current office. Call 507-354-3130 between 8:30 and 11:30 a.m. on weekdays for our office address.

- Implement a system for distributing the devotions using electronic messaging services to inmates, such as JPay.com, GTL.net or CorrLinks.com (annual cost/inmate is \$30-\$120)
- Test and implement a system using electronic messaging services to collect Bible study tests, return corrected tests, and exchange pen pal letters with inmates.

These opportunities will take an investment of both time and financial resources to develop. While we are seeking grant money from foundations to help,

in the long term, individual designated gifts still form the backbone of our support. Your gifts are greatly encouraged and appreciated.

Finally, the WELS convention in July passed a resolution directing WELS to seek to fund a larger portion of WELS Prison Ministry from regular operating funds (Congregation Mission Offerings). This resolution does not guarantee more synodical funding for our work. It starts a process of discussion with the Synodical Council (SC), which oversees all synod spending and must approve any increase in support. The SC will give us an opportunity, probably in November, to make the case for increased support from the synodical budget or other sources. The SC could reduce support of some other ministry to fund prison ministry, find some other way to help, or decline to increase our support.

With changes in the environment of our ministry, we are grateful that the Lord continues to provide generous gifts from donors and organizations to meet the new opportunities for outreach right now. Only Jesus knows whether we will receive a future increase in budgetary funding, but it's his ministry. We are excited and press on with the work!

## INTRODUCING MARK SALZWEDEL



Meet Mark Salzwedel, the newest member of the Prison Ministry Committee. Mark replaces Leon Brands who served on the committee for several years (Thanks, Leon!).

Mark is a graduate of the WELS Congregational Assistant Program and has served a number of leadership positions at his home congregation in Eden Prairie, Minn. He has been involved in coordinating and teaching incarcerated individuals for over ten years at a nearby prison in Shakopee, Minn. Mark's professional background in software development brings key insight to the Prison Ministry Committee as we seek to enhance our ministry to inmates using digital delivery systems, such as messaging and video, while keeping our ministry-by-mail strong.

**"I HAVE LEARNED SO MUCH MORE ABOUT OUR LORD AND SAVIOR AND MY RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM HAS GROWN THANKS TO YOUR WITNESS TO ME THROUGH YOUR STUDIES... THE GRADER ADDED A PERSONAL TOUCH BY WAY OF COMMENTING AND GIVING ME ENCOURAGEMENT ON THE TESTS. ALWAYS GIVING PRAISE AND GLORY TO GOD...THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR LOVE AND DEDICATION." – DEBORA**

To get WELS Prison Ministry news and updates delivered straight to your inbox, subscribe at [wels.net/subscribe](https://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: guidance for efforts to communicate with inmates digitally; for continued improvement in the pandemic situation so that personal visits to correctional facilities become commonplace; for blessings on the newly released mentor training; for continued designated gifts to fund all our ministry activities.
  - 1. Serve** – All our ministry efforts are driven by volunteers motivated by Christ's love. To volunteer as a pen pal, please contact us at [prisonministry@wels.net](mailto: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](mailto:dave.hochmuth@wels.net).
  - 2. 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](https://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 2021 designation is due by March 31, 2022.