

PRISON MINISTRY

SHARING JESUS WITH PEOPLE IMPACTED BY INCARCERATION

FALL 2022 NEWSLETTER



RESISTANCE AND STRENGTH

Mr. Dave Hochmuth, Prison Ministry administrator

Finally, let the Lord make you strong. Depend on his mighty power. Put on all of God's armor. Then you can remain strong against the devil's evil plans. Our fight is not against human beings. It is against the rulers, the authorities and the powers of this dark world. It is against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly world. Ephesians 6:10-12 (NIV)

When trying to build bodily strength, resistance is needed. Whether it is a world-class athlete or a struggling patient in physical therapy, physical movement must be opposed to build strength in the targeted muscles. And that resistance can be very painful. As the saying goes, "No pain, no gain."

In a similar fashion, God sometimes uses opposition to build spiritual strength in his followers. And that opposition can be painful and look overwhelming at times. Paul reminds us that our opposers are in fact overwhelming to humans on their own. In trying to share Jesus with others, none other than Satan himself and all his allies, both spiritual and physical, line up to try and stop what we are doing.

So what are we to do? Cower in fear? Give up at the first (or second or third) sign of difficulty? Not at all. In God's typical incomprehensible fashion, he both gives and builds strength in his followers. Paul says it clearly, "Let the Lord make you strong. Depend on his mighty

power." Yet God also wants us to exercise our faith so that we "can remain strong against the devil's evil powers." And what enables us to do that? God's armor. The following verses describe the helmet of salvation, the belt of truth, the shield of faith, and the sword of God's Word, among other pieces. We cannot expect to sit around and have God fight our battles for us. God makes it clear that we are part of his spiritual army that takes on hell itself.

These verses are a great encouragement as our ministry continues to face challenges and opposition. The list



of facilities that require special mail handling continues to grow. This has caused significant increases in our returned mail and delays in delivering booklets and tests to inmates. Fewer institutions accept greeting cards, which historically have provided much encouragement to inmates. Some faithful chaplains who have been longtime supporters of our ministry-by-mail efforts are retiring. Another recent challenge has been booklet printing. Printers have had difficulty finding paper and, like everything else, the price has increased significantly. In addition to ministry-by-mail challenges, many institutions have been slow in opening back up to personal visitation and Bible studies led by volunteers.

We are not surprised by these growing challenges because we know the good things God's Word does when it is sent out. Lives are changed and souls are saved for eternity. Confident of this, we redouble our efforts to find solutions or workarounds for our difficulties. You can be part of this. Join us in praying for courage, wisdom, and strength for our ministry's leaders and volunteers. Consider a special gift to Prison Ministry to help offset the increase in our costs. Explore involvement in a visitation or mentoring ministry to touch lives personally. Instructions for these actions are presented in "Three ways to support our ministry" on page four. Also see the mentoring article in this issue.

Institutional Ministry Association (LIMA) for an outreach effort to every correctional facility we can identify in Minnesota (LIMA's home) and Iowa. So far we have reached out by telephone to every Minnesota facility listed in a national database. As a result, chaplains and others have ordered over 1,000 booklets from approximately 50 facilities in Minnesota, many of which we had not dealt with previously. We are deeply grateful for the efforts of Emily Bartsch, a new temporary staff member, who has dedicated many hours to calling and recalling these facilities.



Our next step is to complete a similar effort in Iowa. In addition, we want to seek more Iowa recipients for digital devotions sent by another partner, Institutional Ministries (IM). IM has developed an effective system for distributing devotions six days per week via CorrLinks.com. This system is available to inmates in both the Wisconsin and Iowa Department of Correction facilities, among other places. Please pray for success according to God's will.

DECADES OF SERVICE... AFTER REACHING RETIREMENT AGE

This past summer, Elisabeth Newell, one of our faithful test correctors, celebrated her 100th birthday. We're not sure exactly when Elisabeth began her service, but we believe it was at least 20 years ago. She is so thankful to have had this avenue to exercise and share her faith. She is also thankful that God has graciously preserved her mind and physical abilities so that she could continue to serve. Just recently Elisabeth was concerned that an inmate didn't truly understand that faith is a gift and not something he does. She contacted our administrator to

"COMPLETING YOUR BIBLE STUDY COURSE [DEALING WITH DEPRESSION] HAS ENRICHED AND IMPACTED MY LIFE IN UNEXPECTED WAYS! I APPRECIATE EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOU! YOUR TIME AND EFFORTS HAVE NOT BEEN WASTED. THANK YOU AND GOD BLESS!" – DENNIS

NEW TEAMMATES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In response to the challenge of finding facilities willing to accept our self-study Bible correspondence courses, WELS Prison Ministry has teamed up with the Lutheran

make sure she provided clear feedback to the inmate on a test response that was ambiguous. Elisabeth still derives joy in serving. Another recent test packet contained 23 tests, all by the same inmate. Among all the test questions there were only one or two incorrect answers, which was a great encouragement to Elisabeth.

Join us in thanking all our test correctors and pen pals for their compassionate service as they encourage troubled souls. As we mentioned in previous issues, for the time being we have enough regular test correctors. But we still have opportunities for new pen pals. If you would like to explore being a pen pal, please inquire at our office (prisonministry@wels.net or 507-354-3130).

PEN PAL PIPELINE

Because of changing mail restrictions in a limited number of cases, we may have to modify our return address to be able to send the letters from our office to the inmate. If you don't hear from us, you can assume that the procedures for you and the inmates you write to have not changed. We will contact those pen pals who may have to put their letters to inmates in different envelopes (with a different return address). The outside envelopes that are addressed to our office will not change. Again, unless you hear from us, continue to follow the procedures outlined in our Volunteer Guidelines. Also, all pen pals should remember to check with your inmate before sending any greeting cards. Many facilities are no longer allowing inmates to receive them.

JOIN OTHERS TO LEARN: ARE YOU MENTOR MATERIAL?

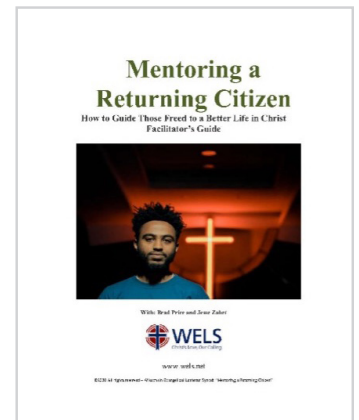
WELS Prison Ministry recently completed our first online training session for potential mentors of returning citizens, that is, formerly incarcerated individuals. We had eight students from South Dakota, Texas, Arizona, and Iowa. The initial feedback has been very positive. Everyone who responded to our post instruction survey indicated they either agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend the

course to someone who was considering mentoring. Here's a few comments by participants:

- I thoroughly enjoyed the time and looked forward to Zoom each week.
- I do feel better equipped and know that I can refer to the book for guidance as well to stay on track.
- The time flew by! Questions seemed to be answered with lots of side bits of food for thought.

While visits to correctional facilities are still hit and miss in many areas because of COVID, there is a steady stream of inmates who are being released upon fulfillment of their sentences. This is a huge opportunity to share the love of Christ where it is really needed and a potential harvest field.

Our next online offering of our training course Mentoring a Returning Citizen will be in the spring of 2023. Prison Ministry Committee member Tom Koepsell is tentatively scheduled



"I ABSOLUTELY LOVED THIS COURSE [JOB]. IT ANSWERED QUESTIONS FOR ME THAT I WAS AFRAID TO TALK OUT LOUD ABOUT. IT LET ME KNOW I WAS NOT A BAD PERSON FOR HAVING DOUBTS, FOR BEING ANGRY AT [GOD], FOR HOLDING HIM RESPONSIBLE IN ALLOWING SUFFERING IN MY LITTLE GIRL'S LIFE. IT HELPED ME FEEL COMFORTABLE IN BEING HONEST WITH MY FEELINGS. OVERALL, IT HELPED BREAK DOWN A WALL I HAD AND BRING ME A LITTLE CLOSER IN TRUSTING AND BELIEVING IN HIM. THANK YOU"
– REBECCA

to facilitate. The training course will help you evaluate whether you have the gifts and abilities to serve as a mentor and, if so, equip you to begin your service. Taking the course does not mean you are committing to serve as a mentor. You'll find, however, that you can use the skills that are taught and practiced in many areas of your life, including parenting and interacting with people. So the time you invest will be well spent regardless of whether or not you decide to pursue this ministry.

To obtain more information about the class, contact Prison Ministry Administrator Dave Hochmuth at dave.hochmuth@wels.net or Tom Koepsell at tgkoepsell45@gmail.com.

DONATION REMINDER

Because of the stricter policies for what can be sent to an inmate, we are unable to use the normal quantity of greeting cards that we send to inmates. For the time being we have an abundance in stock and do not need new donations. We do still accept bookmarks for inmates. We also still welcome donations of *Meditations* that are less than a year old, in good shape (not curled up), and no stickers or writing on or in them. Call the New Ulm office for further details.

To get WELS Prison Ministry news and updates delivered straight to your 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: for blessings on our outreach efforts to new facilities; gratefulness for our first mentor training course; for blessings on the additional planned mentor training and new mentor ministries; 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 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.

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.
- 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 2022 designation is due by March 31, 2023.