

# THE COMMUNITY OF ST. DYSMAS

*I was in Prison → You Came To Visit Me*



## **FROM THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN**

Explaining Luther's Seven Marks of the Church is not most exciting task I've ever been asked to do. Especially when my audience is a confirmation class consisting of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders.

Trepidation became excitement for me on Sunday the 18<sup>th</sup> of March at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Bel Air when I spoke with their confirmation class. Pastor Teal asked me to share with the young people how the 7<sup>th</sup> Mark of the Church – compassion and suffering – relates to the congregation called The Community of St. Dysmas. NOW THAT IS EXCITING!

The ELCA Social Statement on Criminal Justice says this about the 7<sup>th</sup> Mark of the Church: such burden bearing appears in ministry and compassionate suffering, or as Luther calls it, "in the possession of the sacred cross". To love compassionately requires the ability both to discern the needs of another and to know what gifts lie within oneself that could be well given to the one in need.

The young people of Good Shephard rightly discerned the needs of another. After our time was completed on the Marks of the Church, they gifted me with household items for members of St. Dysmas upon their release.

Thank you to the young people of Good Shepherd, all the folks of Good Shephard in Bel

Air, all God's people who rightly discern and for Martin Luther for giving us the Seven  
Marks of the Church!

Marked with the Cross!

Gerry Rickel

Pastor of The Community of St. Dymas



## Road to Rehab, A Lenten Walk

by Pr David Kaplan

The beginning could not have been more frustrating. Pr. Rickel had previously given me a letter he had received from “Rich,” an inmate at MCTC, who was an on and off (most recently off) participant in our CSD worship in that institution. Rich was about to be released and planned to settle in Hagerstown. The letter was actually a shopping list of personal items that he would need to begin again his life on the outside. Since I live in the Hagerstown area, would I be able to go shopping with Rich (or find another willing volunteer) to purchase those items? Without a great deal of enthusiasm for a request that struck me as somewhat manipulative, I agreed to do so. As Pr. Rickel and I discussed, grace is what we do best at CSD.

As the release date of March 1 approached, another request surfaced – this one from Rich’s MCTC work supervisor. Could we transport Rich from the prison to DSS in Hagerstown? I was about to refuse that request – the first Thursday of the month is the date of our Conference Pastors’ meeting – but that irritating “nudge” inside wouldn’t let me do so. So dutifully in the midst of wind and rain (March 1 was a dark and stormy day) I went to MCTC only to discover that several minutes before my arrival, Rich had secured another ride (“I wasn’t sure you were coming” he would later explain) from a kindly Correctional Officer who happened to be going into town. The destination had also shifted from DSS to the Hagerstown Office of the State Department of Parole and Probation. I decided to go that office to see if I could still meet with Rich. When I asked the receptionist if he was still there, she replied, “I can’t tell you if he’s still here or whether he’s been here at all. It’s a public safety policy.” Angry with the policy, angry with the Spirit for leading me on what I regarded as a wild goose chase, fully convinced that Rich had slipped through our ministry

never to be heard from again, and already an hour late, I hurried to the Conference meeting. There I unloaded my frustration on my pastor at Haven Lutheran Church in Hagerstown, Linda Alessandri. As always, she listened patiently and was graciously reassuring. "If by any chance he should call Haven," I added, "you can give him my land line number."

Next morning Pastor Alessandri called on my cell phone with an interesting story. Rich had indeed gone to the DP&P (in fact was there when I stopped by), which had arranged for him to stay at the REACH Shelter. When he went there, he was greeted by Ed Distad, a volunteer coordinator at the shelter, who just happens to be a member at Haven. Ed gave Rich Haven's number; and when Rich called Haven and spoke to Pr. Alessandri, she gave him my land line number. "He'll probably be calling you soon," she told me as we concluded our conversation. As if on cue, at that very moment my land line phone rang. Rich and I had reconnected. What's even more remarkable is that I was home to receive both calls. The Hagerstown Lions Club to which I belong had scheduled a book distribution that morning at a local elementary school. It was so windy, however, that schools were cancelled for the day. As a result, I was available to answer the phone personally. Rich apologized for yesterday's confusion and wondered if Pr. Rickel had said anything about a list..."Yes, Rich, he gave me your letter."

"Well, is there a good time...?"

"Rich, I just happen to have an unplanned free morning. Pick you up in 20 minutes for Walmart." I took along some gift cards for Panera which I had received at Christmas but hadn't yet used. I think it was about then that I experienced again a feeling that in my more perceptive moments I've harbored deep within: that when we don't shut the door completely, followers of Jesus are like pawns on some giant chessboard being moved about we know not where and often where we do not wish to go (John 21:18), but always to the right place at the right time.

We purchased the items on his list without difficulty, enjoyed lunch together, and talked about worship at Haven. I often lead worship for vacant congregations in the area, but I happened to be free on March 4 to drive Rich to Haven. He's attended every Sunday since and has become active in the adult Sunday School class, which I teach. Ed Distad has also helped with transportation.

## SUNDAYS WITH CSD

Looking for something different? Would you like to plan an outreach event – a ministry event – or a day of community awareness for your congregation? In addition to the worship and Bible studies conducted within the prison walls, Pastor Rickel is available to worship with your congregation, to lead Adult Forums, or to meet with your council or social outreach committees in congregations of the Metropolitan Washington DC and Delaware–Maryland Synods, and to attend conference meetings.

Why not have a special **CSD** Day at your congregation! To schedule a Sunday or other time for Pastor Rickel to visit your congregation to lead worship, to participate in an adult forum, or to meet at some other time, *contact him* by phone at 443-306-1115 or [pastor@communitystdysmas.com](mailto:pastor@communitystdysmas.com).

SAVE THE DATE

JOIN US AT TINO'S ITALIAN BISTRO

TUESDAY JUNE 23

WATCH THIS SPACE FOR MORE INFORMATION

## GET INVOLVED

There are several ways you can be involved with this meaningful ministry to God's children behind bars. Please consider praying for us, worshiping with us, and supporting our ministry with your contributions. If you feel a calling to participate or lead worship, participate in the music ministry, or simply participate to add your presence, please contact us at [pastor@communitystdysmas.com](mailto:pastor@communitystdysmas.com) or call 443-326-1116.

## PLEASE PRAY FOR AND WITH THE COMMUNITY OF ST. DYSMAS

Pray for all children abused, born addicted, lonely and hungry. Fill their souls with all you Lord.

God, please help me to surround me with people who I can learn your word from. Hold my mom and son in your hands and give them peace and your love.

Thank you for all good things in my life. Please help my loved ones who are ill and hurting. Watch over all the people struggling in the world. Watch over the ladys and their families of MCIW and all the vo

LORD, IN YOUR MERCY...HEAR MY PRAYER

## **JOIN US WITH YOUR FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

Unlike other Lutheran congregations The Community of St. Dysmas receives no internal financial support.

The necessary goal of CSD's Council is that every Congregation of our Synod and as many individuals as possible become financial supporters of The Community of St. Dysmas. The best way your congregation can do this is by putting St. Dysmas in your budget. This shows intentionally on your part and allows us to know we can count on you for support. Other possibilities might include special offerings either monthly or during special services such as Lent, unique fund raisers or include St. Dysmas offering envelopes available for your people. If you come up with special ideas to raise contributions for The Community of St. Dysmas we would love to know!

## **JOIN US WITH THRIVENT CHOICE DOLLARS**

Thrivent Choice Dollars offers another way to support CSD. Through the Thrivent Choice Program, eligible members are designated Choice Dollars, based on insurance premiums, contract values, and Thrivent Financial volunteer leadership. Check to see whether you are eligible to direct your Thrivent Choice Dollars to CSD on the Thrivent website

[www.thrivent.com/thriventchoice/program/index.html](http://www.thrivent.com/thriventchoice/program/index.html)

Your dollars for CSD go far to support this ministry and to bring God's Word to many who so desperately need to hear God's grace, love and forgiveness.

Recently a devout Roman Catholic lady used Thrivent Choice dollars to gift the ministry of St. Dysmas. Thank you (and as the old saying goes, "What Rome throws out, the Lutherans pick up.").

## WHO WE ARE

**CSD** – The Community of St. Dysmas – a Lutheran Congregation within the walls of the Maryland Correctional Institution.

**PASTOR** – Rev. Gerry F Rickel

**DEACON** -- Raymond Toy

+ Please share this information with your congregation. +

*I was in prison, and you came to visit me. Matthew 25:36b*

The Community of St. Dysmas

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