

THE COMMUNITY OF ST. DYSMAS

I was in Prison & You Came To Visit Me



CSD Newsletter – Winter, 2021

Outside Looking In

When I need encouragement, I tend to go to my old friend the prophet Isaiah, who always has words for what is in my heart.



Isaiah lived in tough times and had the unenviable job of bringing both admonition to God's people when they needed to get their act together and comfort, as well, after years of exile and destruction of all they held dear, when they needed to be assured of God's love, presence, and devotion to them.

We are in a sort of exile right now. The last year has been one of anxiety, fear, and reckoning for us as a nation. We have seen the awful consequences of what happens when individuals put their own "right" above the common good and refuse to wear a mask or give up social gatherings. We have witnessed the horrifying 8 minutes and 46 seconds that it took for the breath to be crushed out of George Floyd and the sacrilege of a Bible used as a prop for a photo op. We all eagerly greeted the new year hoping that things would somehow turn around as we turned over our calendars, but shortly into the new year we watched in horror as our nation's Capitol was overrun by a mob and our elected officials placed in danger. COVID-19 rates continue to climb.

We are in need of hope.

Isaiah's words in chapter 40 verse 31 are a lifeline to a people holding on by a thread:

But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

I don't know about you, but this year has made me very weary indeed. I suspect that a lot of you feel the same way. And when you're tired, the best thing to do is to lean on something you know will hold you up. I'm leaning on Isaiah's words.

The Community of St. Dysmas has continued to witness to just how much we can lean on God's promises and renew our strength. Our congregations and the "diaspora" (those who have been transferred to facilities where there is not currently an active congregation) have

endured a lockdown of 23 hours out of every 24 all this time. I can't imagine how they cope! But if ever there was a witness to just how steadfast God's presence and promise is, it's those who wait in prison cells and eagerly read whatever Bible studies or devotional materials we send and find hope! There is a strength and "soaring" above their circumstances that can only come from outside our human strength.

There is real hope on the horizon, thanks to the many scientists and doctors who have worked to create vaccines in record time. I anticipate – I hope! – that we will be back "inside the walls" within a few months. Meanwhile, our hope in God gives us strength and keeps us moving forward.

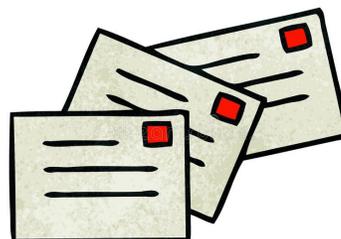
To all you, our siblings in faith who keep us going in this ministry: blessings and HOPE!

Pastor Susan

Letters, We Write Letters!

We've been asking Lutherans and ecumenical partners to submit notes to our office that we can mail to individuals who are a part of the CSD family. In these difficult times, these letters are quite literally a God-send for them. The Department of Corrections has rules for writing to inmates, so if you or anyone in your congregation would like to write a note, here are the guidelines for writing:

1. Use only white or plain lined notebook paper. No stationary or greeting cards. Notes can be handwritten or printer generated.
2. Blue or black ball point pen, no color or markers. Line drawings are welcome but no color.
3. Greeting should be generic such as "Dear friend in faith," "Hello, my sibling in Christ," etc.
4. Do not give identifiers such as your name, location, etc., *but please say what church you are from*. This helps our people know they are part of the larger church.
5. Generic messages of encouragement, Bible verses or prayers in the body of the note are very much appreciated.
6. Sign with a term such as "Your friend in Christ," "A fellow Lutheran," "A sister/brother in faith," etc.



Please send the letters to our office and we will distribute them to the members.

Community of St Dymas
905 Frederick Rd
Catonsville, Md 21228

Or email them to: pastor@communitystdymas.com

Thank you!

Letters from Our Folks

While we can't go into the prisons for in-person Bible study or worship, the ministry continues by old fashioned snail mail! We send devotional materials, worship resources, sermons and your notes of encouragement weekly and they are very much appreciated. Here are some quotes from letters we've received in return from our CSD brothers and sisters:

"I would like to take this time to thank you for writing to me. Keep me in your thoughts and prayers. This pandemic has really taken a toll on all of us and as soon as I receive your mail it instantly brightens my day."

"We are in our cells 23 hours a day and I am starting to feel my age 37 LOL! The letters, postcards and religious material have truly helped. St. Dysmas has become part of my life. Your compassion and consistency has touched me to the core. You have made me want to be a better person."

"Please stay safe during this pandemic. Our Savior will protect his children and we shall always walk with our Lord. I genuinely appreciate every piece of mail I receive from everyone. You all are such a blessing and I thank God for you. We are each others' keepers."

"I just got your letter and it touched my heart. Thank you for your prayers. I'm praying for you and your families two [sic]."

"Thank you for all the letters, lessons, inspirational messages and just getting mail!" It means a lot and renews my faith in fellowship and people. Someone cares!"

Looking for a Supply Pastor?

Pastor Beck would be delighted to preach, participate in an adult forum, or to meet with your council, social ministry committee, or other interested group anywhere in the Delaware-Maryland or Metropolitan Washington DC Synods. To schedule a time for her to visit please contact her by phone at 443-326-1115 or email pastor@communitystdysmas.com .

Aftercare/Re-entry Program News

Our aftercare partnership consists of: Brother Les Roberts, the director of the Baltimore Area Aftercare Program (BAAP), and his team; Pastor Lynell Travels and her volunteers from St John's Lutheran Church in Pimlico; Seminarian Melody Hessian; and Pastor Susan. The group has been getting together monthly to coordinate efforts to meet the needs of our returning citizens. While applications for BAAP have been slowed because we haven't been able to go into the prisons to promote the program, there are a few CSD folks in the pipeline who will be released in the spring and who will benefit from this program. We continue to follow up with another who was released several months ago. At our February meeting, we will be joined by Dawn Cobb, of Return Home Baltimore, which maintains a database of resources for returning citizens in the area.

In October, St John's held a festive, socially-distanced, and masked grand opening of their resource center for returning citizens. There is a clothing closet, a food bank, a computer room, and volunteers and resources to help returning citizens navigate the path back into society.



Pr. Susan Speaking



Pr. Susan, Pr. Lynell, and Bp. Bill Gohl



Cutting the Ribbon

Aftercare/Re-entry Program News (continued)

The holiday spirit was alive and well at St John's on November 21 and December 19 when around 200 baskets of food were prepared by the amazing folks there. On both days, volunteers from St John's, Seminarian Melody Hessian, and Pastor Susan delivered some of them to several of our returning citizens. Blessings abounded for all involved!



Hard at Work



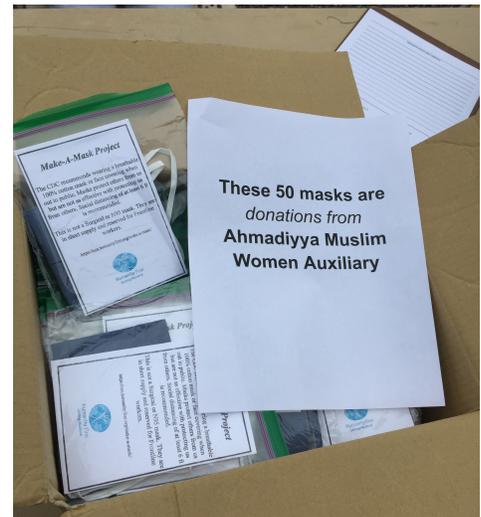
Ready for Delivery



The Crew

Interfaith Event for CSD

On September 26, 2020, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Olney held a day of service to help our Community of St Dysmas returning citizens. This was a joint effort along with the women of Temple Isaiah synagogue in Fulton and Baitur Rehman Mosque in Silver Spring. All in all over \$1500 in gift cards and over 200 handmade masks were donated to us. It was a true interfaith endeavor! As one of our returning citizens who received help said, “This is what real religion looks like.”



Volunteers at the Day of Service

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 intent on your part and lets us 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 having 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 hear about them!

The Community of St. Dysmas is an Amazon Smile charity. Please consider supporting CSD in this way.



Another way to support CSD is with Thrivent Choice Dollars. Through this program, eligible members are allocated 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. Your dollars for CSD help to support this ministry and to bring God's Word to many who so desperately need to hear of God's grace, love and forgiveness.

In 2018, Gifts of Hope added CSD to the organizations that they support. Gifts of Hope is a ministry sponsored by the Metropolitan Washington DC Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). It is a family of volunteers, congregations, donors, the Synod, and 19 beneficiary organizations. In 25 years they have raised and disbursed over



\$3,370,000 to their many and varied beneficiary organizations. These funds have helped the homeless, the hungry, the job-seeker, the young, the elderly, immigrants, refugees, seminary and college students, and those seeking to improve

their lives. They also support the work of companion synods in Namibia, Slovakia, and El Salvador. Gifts of Hope touches the lives of thousands of people—locally and globally. Gifts of Hope serves as an intermediary between donors and organizations serving individuals and families in need. Gifts are may be given year-round at www.giftsofhopedc.org; however, the program's primary focus is during the Christmas holidays, including the season of Advent. You can contact Gifts of Hope for more information by [emailing the director](#).

Minutes of the 2020 St. Dymas Annual Meeting January 16, 2021

Values of The Community of St. Dymas

VALUE ONE: We are a Christ centered ministry that honors the teachings of the Bible = FOCUSED ON WORSHIP & BIBLE STUDY IN EACH CORRECTIONAL SITE

VALUE TWO: We believe that no life is beyond reach since all are created in the image of God = FOCUSED ON MEMBER EVANGELISM & SHARING MISSION/VALUES TO ALL

VALUE THREE: We rely on congregations and volunteers to accomplish and enhance the ministry = FOCUSED ON MARKETING; FUNDRAISING; VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT

VALUE FOUR: We use faith stories to connect and enrich the lives of congregations, volunteers and persons incarcerated = FOCUSED ON SHARING FAITH STORIES

VALUE FIVE: We hold ourselves accountable to excellent management for the ministry including time, talent, and treasures = FOCUSED ON MANAGING MINISTRY

VALUE SIX: We are committed to a continuum of ministry and support in and outside the Institution = FOCUSED ON AFTER-CARE

Present: Lois Carrigan, Susan Beck, Linda Fleischer, Bob Harvey, Dave Roberson, Myra Keel, Br. Les Roberts, Susie Jordan, Terry Lockridge, Viola Noffsinger, Cheryl Hollar, Louis Tillman, Gary Tartanian, Bishop William Gohl, Rev. Amsalu Geleta, Ann Roberson, Alan Ramsey, Jeff Jordan, Linda Smith

Welcome and Introductions by Lois Carrigan – Zoom etiquette, meeting procedures and Council news

- Linda Smith is the new CSD Administrator.
- Deacon Ray Toy resigned his position.
- Dave Roberson is no longer on Council.

Opening Prayer – Pr. Susan Beck

Musical Devotion by Viola Noffsinger

Approval of 2019 Annual Meeting minutes

- Moved by Lois Carrigan, seconded by Alan Ramsey and approved by acclamation after one editorial change.

Pastor's Report by Pr. Susan - available on request

- Pr. Susan summarized the challenges of the pandemic and ways in which she has adjusted her ministry to reach our population. She answered questions and expanded on issues in her report.

- She expressed appreciation for the support received by many individuals and groups.

Br. Les Roberts, Baltimore Area Aftercare Program,

- Br. Les described program goals - to satisfy the emergency needs of returning citizens immediately after release in conjunction with spiritual mentoring and longer-term support.
- He appreciates the ways in which CSD complements and supports their mission.

Financial Report and 2020 Budget by Bob Harvey - available on request

- Our budget is in excellent shape. Expenses have shifted due to the increase in Myrapostage and office supplies.
- Motion to approve the 2021 Budget by Lois Carrigan, seconded by Susie Jordan, approved by acclamation.

Final thoughts and closing prayer by Rev. Susan Beck, CSD Pastor

Meeting adjourned at 11:02 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Fleischer

01/18/2021

The Community of St. Dysmas

A Lutheran Congregation within the walls of the Maryland Department of Corrections

Pastor Susan Beck

CSD Council

Email: council@communitystdysmas.com

Deacon Linda N. Smith, Administrator

Council Members

905 Frederick Rd.

Lois Carrigan, Chair

Catonsville, MD 21228

Bob Harvey, Treasurer

Phone: 443-326-1115

Linda Fleischer

Email: pastor@communitystdysmas.com

Myra Keel

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Alan Ramsey