



CSD Newsletter – Summer, 2022

Outside Looking In

We are back!!! Worship at CMCF, MCTC and MCIW resumed in February. We are working with ecumenical partners and the head of DPSCS to get back into MCIJ. There is a substantial group of Lutherans at RCI, and we are hoping to start services there as soon as they have a chaplain again. Lutheran pastors in the Allegheny synod in Pennsylvania will soon be on the rotation to do Community of St. Dysmas worship in the Federal Correctional Facility at Loretta, a new branch of this ministry. There are different faces and different protocols. We are not quite where we were pre-pandemic, but we are back in person doing the ministry that Jesus mandated in Matthew 25:36.



Each first post-pandemic worship was a joyful reunion of brothers and sisters in Christ! We lost many of our members to release (happily!), and others were transferred to facilities where we don't have a congregation. But in each place there was a holy remnant we can grow from.

I must admit to some sleepless nights wondering what would become of our congregations during the pandemic. We are not allowed to proselytize or invite. We cannot communicate with our congregations about the when and where of worship.

Oh me of little faith! As we do God's will and step forward in faith, God answers those middle of the night prayers and leads us where we need to go.

At CMCF, the first evening we were allowed back we had one brother show up to worship – no one else knew about the service – but it was delightful to see and catch up with this old friend. And he had good news – he would be released the next week. A blessing for sure!

But what would become of our congregation without someone there to spread the word? The following week I went in wondering if anyone would be there. No one was, except for the resident whose job it was to mop the floor in that area. He asked why we were there, since there

had been no notice of any activity going on that evening. When I said we were there for worship and he was welcome to worship with us, his face lit up and he said, let me go get my buddy!

The next week, the two of them had invited another man, who was also set to be released in a couple weeks, but he had invited another man. Now we have over a dozen men in our congregation—not because of anything we did to reach out, but simply because one person invited another. The Spirit quietly but inexorably moved to bring the Good News of the love of Christ where it was needed.

In the first chapter of John’s gospel, Philip encounters Jesus and tells Nathaniel to “come and see” this Jesus of Nazareth who is the Messiah sent from God. Nathaniel balks at the idea that anything good could come out of a place like Nazareth. But, he checks it out, and finds that the love, forgiveness and grace that comes from Jesus is irresistible. Prison may seem like the last place that anything good could come out of, but ask any Community of St. Dymas volunteer good, God’s good, comes all the time!

The Spirit is always moving in our lives to bring us the Good News. There is not one among us who doesn’t need to hear it, whatever side of the razor wire fences and steel bars we live on. May you recognize that glorious Spirit moving in your life!

Pastor Susan✠

News from the Delaware-Maryland Synod Assembly

For the first time in two years, we gathered in person for the Delaware-Maryland Synod Assembly May 12-14 in Ocean City, and it was one for the books! We re-elected Bishop Bill Gohl by an overwhelming majority, an affirmation of his stellar leadership in this synod. There were painful issues to discuss, such as the allegations of racism in the Sierra-Pacific Synod, and times of joy as we heard how God is at work in our congregations in creative and life-giving ways. Seminarian Melody Hession, principal author, and Pastor Susan introduced a resolution asking congregations to support those in their midst who have been or are involved in the justice system, citing concrete ways churches can be places of healing for all. The resolution passed unanimously, and we are excited that our churches are determined to be places of welcome and restoration for all our siblings in faith!



Linda F. and Pastor Susan at the CSD Display



Pastor Susan and volunteers at Synod Assembly

Mail Ministry Continues

With the help of our new in-office administrator, Linda Fleischer, we are continuing our mailings ministry to our Community of St. Dymas “diaspora,” those of our folks who are in a facility where we don’t currently have an active congregation. Though this was originally meant to be a way to minister during the pandemic while we weren’t able to go in person, we have found that these mailed worship and devotional materials, as well as (and especially!) the notes from fellow Lutherans, are indeed God’s love sealed and stamped in an envelope!

One brother wrote to us, “I want to thank you for all the devotional materials and the letters from fellow Lutherans. You have lifted my spirits beyond explanation (sic) and I look forward to our continued correspondence.”

Others have spoken of the joy they feel knowing that they are not forgotten by their church, and some have said that it’s often the only mail they receive. So please continue to send in notes that we can include to the 30 some siblings in Christ that are on our ever-expanding mailing list. Here are the Department of Corrections 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

On behalf of our Community of St. Dymas folks, thank you very much!

Looking for a Supply Pastor?

Pastor Susan 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@communitystdymas.com .

From One of Our Members

This poem was written by Patrick, one of our Community of St Dysmas brothers. He wrote it a few days after the passing of his brother-in-law in 2020, and it speaks beautifully of the hope we have of new life in Christ. Note: "Comme il faut" is French for "as it should be," meant here as "amen."

"A Blessed Birth"

This is your birthday commemoration,
Where God planned for us to be.
I received his divine invitation,
To share my stories and memories.
My loving Brother in Jesus,
One more thing I have to share,
"Comme il faut, comme il faut",
This is a proper and fitting affair.

This is your birth day inauguration,
God's formal plan to begin anew.
Far beyond our comprehension,
Of what he has in store for you.
So, my Loving Brother in Jesus,
Your new life will be blessed with care.
"Comme il faut, comme il faut",
Only fitting that you're going there.

This is your birthday incarnation,
For what our Savior had sacrificed.
It is your Holy Rejuvenation,
That Divinely bonds your body in Christ.
So my Loving Disciple of Jesus,
As He resolves years of your despair.
"Comme il faut, comme il faut",
To this most fitting and pristine affair.

This is your birthday transfiguration,
A most spiritually eternal change.
That brings us to this celebration,
God, for centuries had prearranged.
Oh, my Loving Brother in Jesus,
As your Spirit and Soul now ascends,
"Comme il faut, comme il faut",
Happy Birthday, you are now Born Again!!

Lifting Labels: Changing Lives One Stitch at a Time

Lifting Labels is a unique business enterprise that opened in Baltimore two years ago after many years of its founder, the Rev. Chester France, hoping, dreaming and working to make this happen. (He can be seen below at the back of the room in the bottom picture.) Lifting Labels hires returning citizens to create custom liturgical and academic wear, giving employment and skills-learning opportunities so that our sisters and brothers who have paid their debt to society can find meaningful employment. The Community of St. Dymas has long shared Chester's dream, and Pastor Susan is now on the board. The pictures below are from an open house which Lifting Labels held on May 5. Pastor Susan was one of the speakers. If you are looking for beautiful and unique vestments, see www.liftinglabels.org for information.



2022 Mid-Year Report for the Baltimore Area Aftercare Program

Brother Les Roberts, the Executive Director and President of the Baltimore Area Aftercare Program (BAAP), was ordained to the Sacred Order of Deacons in the Episcopal Church by the Rt. Reverend Eugene Sutton the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland on June 4, 2022 at the Cathedral of Incarnation in Baltimore. See the story with pictures on the next page!

We are actively working with three primary returning citizens at this time. There are over ten people in the application process or approved and waiting for release.

BAAP's Partner for Success Program pairs returning citizens with churches and mentors. It was successfully launched with a former member of the Community of St. Dysmas. We have provided over \$2000 for a phone and phone service, food assisted (groceries), temporary housing, clothing, transportation (bus passes), and medications. The pastor of the church, the mentor, and the mentee are reporting good success.

Our Project Makeover is an emergency needs program which has helped two former members of the Community of St. Dysmas this year.

- One person contracted COVID and required temporary lodging support at a hotel, rent assistance, food support, childcare support, and personal hygiene items totaling over \$1000 this year. She sent an email to BAAP stating, "Baltimore area after care program has helped me tremendously. I have dealt with Covid and now cancer. They have helped with my 2 year olds daycare as well as my rent.. if not for them I would be homeless with a 2 year old. They were an answer to my prayers, true angels on earth. I can not thank them enough!"
- Another former member of the Community of St. Dysmas who was released last fall required primarily food and clothing assistance. He received over \$1,500 in aid.

BAAP is requesting donations to help replenish its funds to help those returning to society. You can donate via credit card, debit card, or PayPal by clicking the Donate button at <https://www.baap-matt25v36.org/about-us>. If you prefer to use a check, please mail it to this address:

Baltimore Area Aftercare Program
c/o Trinity Episcopal Church
7474 Washington Blvd
Elkridge, MD 21075

Thank you for supporting this important ministry.

The Ordination of Brother Les Roberts

On June 4th, our partner in ministry for aftercare, Brother Les Roberts, director of the Baltimore Area Aftercare Program, was ordained as an Episcopal deacon at the Cathedral of the Incarnation in Baltimore. What a glorious day to affirm the calling of Brother—now Reverend—Les! The Community of St. Dysmas was well represented by Pastor Susan, who carried forward the elements for communion, Vicar Melody Hession who carried in our banner, and Kris Brown, a former CSD member at MCTC who served as an usher. Pastor Paul Collinson-Streng (retired) and Pastor Zach Wright (Bethel, Northeast), who are working with BAAP, also represented the Lutheran contingent. We pray blessings upon Deacon Les as he continues to live out his calling to Matthew 25:36.



Brother Les at the altar



Pastor Susan and Vicar Melody



Deacon Les and Pastor Susan

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 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. For more information, see [their website](#). Gifts may be given year-round at [the website](#); however, the program's primary focus is during the Christmas holidays, including the season of Advent.



Now you can also donate through the [Delaware-Maryland Synod website](#). Click on "Give Online!" and then select Community of St. Dysmas from the "To" menu.

Meet the Administrators



Linda Fleischer is the in-office administrator for CSD. She says, “When I retired 3 years ago after working 43 years in the criminal justice system, I was asked to join the Community of St. Dymas Council. I quickly found my niche and am the recording secretary for Council meetings. I enjoy supporting CSD in the office at Salem (my church) and am glad to assist Pr. Susan as needed.”

Linda Fleischer

Linda Smith is a rostered deacon in the ELCA who retired in November, 2020. She was a volunteer at CMCF for almost four years beginning in 2016. She became the CSD administrator in March, 2020, and worked in the office for three weeks before the pandemic shut things down. She serves as the CSD remote administrator, doing computer-based work from home.



Deacon Linda Smith

The Community of St. Dymas

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

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Catonsville, MD 21228

Phone: 443-326-1115
Email: pastor@communitystdymas.com
Website: www.stdymasmd.org

Linda Fleischer, in-office administrator
Deacon Linda N. Smith, remote administrator

CSD Council
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Council Members
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Bob Harvey, Treasurer
Linda Fleischer
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