

CSD Newsletter – Fall, 2023

Outside Looking In

Works in Progress

We live in a world that wants instant results—we pace in front of the microwave for the 30 seconds it takes to heat up our leftovers; we get impatient when that little circle goes round and round as a website loads.

We want quick and unequivocal answers to our prayers, and wonder if God has heard and if our prayer “has worked” when no solution is forthcoming. We love to hear about a miraculous transformation of a life.

But God doesn’t always work like that. More often than not it seems that God works through a process that starts and stops, moves forward a step then goes back a step or two. My hunch is that God works that way because God knows that’s what we human beings need. We are so often tricked into complacency by thinking there is a quick fix when what we really need is a process.



We Community of St. Dysmas folks often joke that we are the only church who wants to see our members leave, and we want never to see them again! But, sometimes we do—a dear sibling in Christ is released; we give them a fond “Farewell and Godspeed,” and we send them off to the outside world with our love, prayers, and blessings. But then we find out that they are re-incarcerated, sometimes years, months, or even just weeks later. It’s easy to feel disheartened when that happens.

But, we look at circumstances in human ways, and in a human timeline, not how *God* sees it and certainly not how God works.

One of our Community of St. Dysmas congregational pillars is a brother to whom other men turn for spiritual guidance and strength. He mentors others in the faith and is a rock solid support for the other men as they weather the crises of imprisonment. His words and

presence are God's own, and he is an immeasurable blessing to our congregation. He is currently incarcerated with no release date in sight.

He shared with us that he has been locked up, released, and locked up again at least a half dozen times in his 60+ years of life. All along, God worked in his life, but it has taken decades of process for him to be at the place where he is now. He told us, "I have been like a dirty house, every room cluttered and filthy. Over the years, over the mistakes and terrible things I've done, over all the times I got locked up, God was at work. It was like one room at a time, God cleaned out that house. I feel like finally now the house is getting cleaned out and I can be who God wants me to be. But I still have a ways to go."

This brother is a work in progress—God's work in progress! So am I--and so are you, I bet. So is our Community of St. Dymas ministry, as we strive to expand our congregations into prisons where we know God's word of grace is so very needed. Let's take a lesson from our Community of St. Dymas brother and trust in the sure, slow work of God.

Peace and all good to you,

Pastor Susan✠

Delaware-Maryland Synod Assembly 2022

Lay and rostered leaders of the Delaware-Maryland Synod assembled at Grace Lutheran in Westminster on June 9 and 10 to connect our congregations and have meaningful conversations on what it means to "walk together." Many thanks to Alan Ramsey who was our lay delegate. Pictured here is our Community of St Dymas display and a few of our volunteers who came by to greet each other.



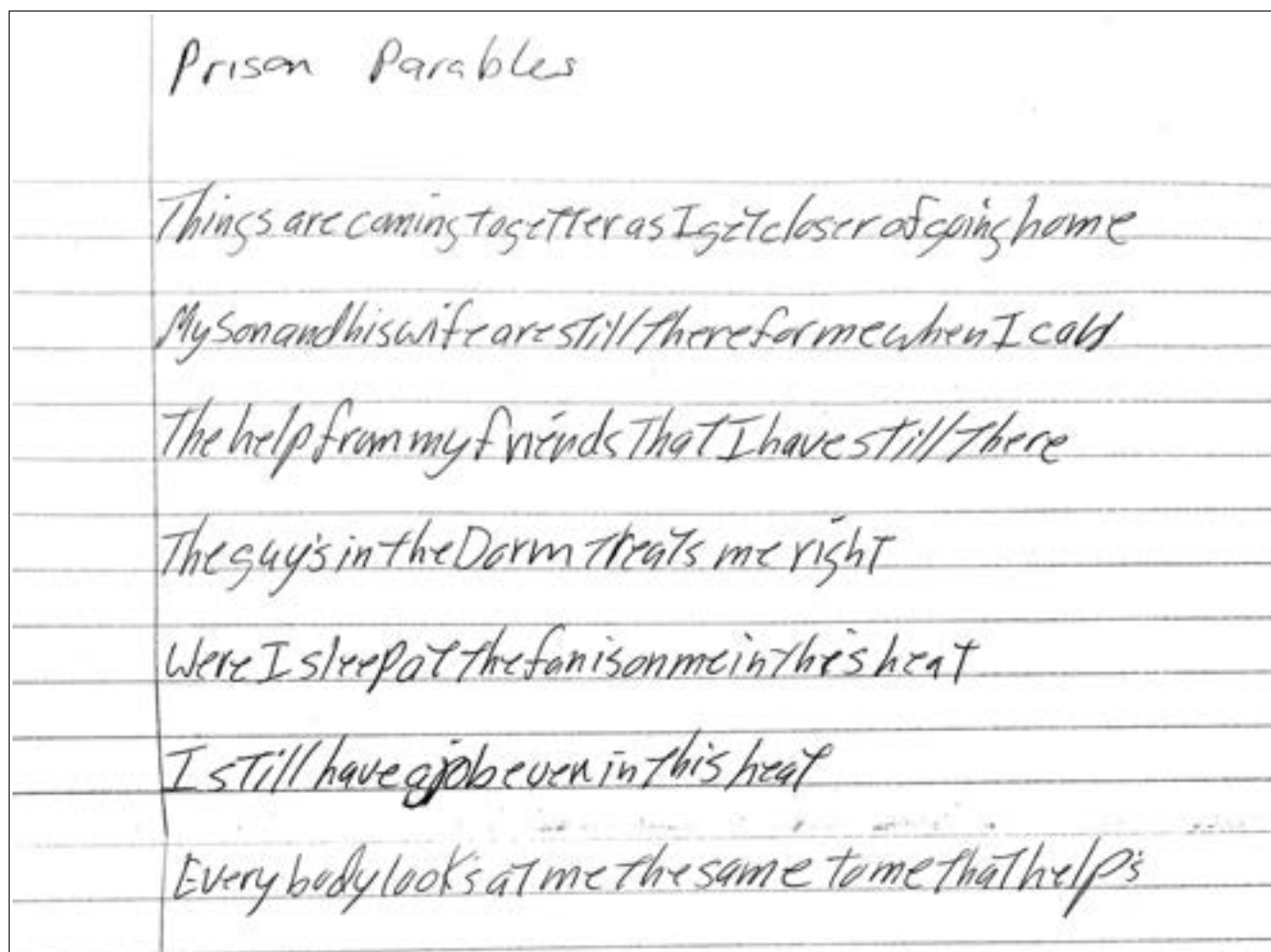
Ordination of Melody Hession

What a joy-filled day on July 2, 2023 at Joy Reigns Lutheran Church in Edgewater, Md., as Melody Hession, a volunteer with the Community of St. Dysmas, was ordained into the ministry of Word and Sacrament! Pastor Melody will be serving at Christ Lutheran in Washington, DC, where both she and Pastor Susan were interns during seminary. The church – and our ministry--is blessed to have such a dynamic, gifted, and faith-filled pastor.



Prison Parables

This lectionary year, we've heard parable after parable from the gospel of Matthew. As we've talked about them in our worship and Bible studies, our CSD siblings have remarked how those stories Jesus told to communicate sacred and eternal truths, are really simply stories of everyday life. I challenged them to come up with parables that show God's grace in their everyday lives of incarceration. Below is what one member wrote.



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@communitystdysmas.com.

Peace-A-Pizza Fundraiser

On May 26, 2023, we held a fundraiser at Peace-A-Pizza in Catonsville—and the Community of St. Dymas folks know how to put the fun in fundraiser! Volunteers and supporters enjoyed good pizza, lively conversation, and a great time. We are very grateful to Peace-A-Pizza for their support.



Baltimore Area Aftercare Program (BAAP) Happenings

Trinity Episcopal Church in Elkridge was awarded a United Thank Offering Grant in June, 2023, by the Episcopal Church to support BAAP's Partner for Success program. The program is a faith-based mentoring program designed to help those who are incarcerated make a smooth transition back into society in the greater Baltimore area; participants are matched with a mentor and a worship community to establish short- and long-term plans of action for successful reentry back into society.

BAAP's Partner for Success program is the only known faith-based post-release mentoring program in the Baltimore area. The National Institute of Justice reports 44% of the individuals released return the first year out of prison and 77% within five years. In 2022, Maryland's three-year recidivism rate was 40.5%. A ministry in Virginia similar to BAAP's Partner for Success has an overall 92% success rate; that is, the recidivism rate is 8%, as opposed to the national average of 77%.

With the help of the grant, Rev. Amy Shimonkevitz, Deacon was hired in August to lead BAAP's Partner for Success Ministry. Rev. Amy will work with chaplains in Federal, State, and county penitentiaries and jails and with the Community of St. Dysmas to identify individuals interested in returning to productive status in society through the Partner for Success Program. She will also be working with worship communities to identify those willing to participate in the ministry, either as mentors or as providers of needed items for the newly released individuals.

If your congregation is interested in participating in the Partner for Success program or having Rev. Amy or another BAAP representative speak, please send us an email at info@baap-matt25v36.org.



Rev. Amy

Partnership with the ELCA Foundation

The Community of St. Dysmas has recently partnered with the ELCA Foundation, whose mission is to support and sustain ELCA ministries by enhancing gifting capacity and stewarding. It will help CSD donors provide long-term and sustained support for the ministry by providing assistance with gift and estate planning, endowments, trusts, and non-cash gifts. You can learn more about the ELCA Foundation by watching "[ELCA Foundation: Make a Plan. Change the World.](#)" by visiting its updated website at foundation.elca.org or by contacting our regional gift planner, Pastor David Shank, at david.shank@elca.org or (410) 716-4204.

Howard County Pride Festival

A brisk breeze made the weather chilly, but the hearts were warm at the Howard County Pride Festival October 16 at Symphony Woods in Columbia. As part of the Howard County Clergy Alliance, Pastor Susan welcomed people to the first annual Interfaith Pride Worship, invoking Psalm 139: 14 to lead the assembled crowd in acknowledging that we all bear the image of God. In addition to the Community of St. Dymas, participating congregations included Abiding Savior Lutheran Church, The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Columbia, Channing Memorial Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Kittimaqundi Community Church, Beth Shalom Synagogue, and Temple Isaiah.



CSD Mailings Ministry

What began as a “temporary” means to provide for and connect with our CSD folks during the pandemic lockdown has grown into a ministry that is its own blessing. We currently mail to 40-50 folks twice a month. The recipients may be incarcerated individuals who have been transferred out of a facility where we have a congregation or anyone in any facility (including out of state) who requests devotional and worship materials. Along with those materials, we include notes from Lutherans and ecumenical partners “on the outside.” Knowing that they are remembered by fellow Christians is a source of great encouragement for our incarcerated siblings in faith and a very tangible sign of God’s love. One recipient recently wrote:



“I was elated and felt loved when they called my name and told me I had mail. I thank God for you and the Community of St. Dymas.”

If you or anyone in your congregation would like to write a note, here are the guidelines for writing to incarcerated persons:

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 fine but no color.
3. Greetings 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!

Help Us With Your Financial Support

Unlike other Lutheran congregations, The Community of St. Dymas 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. Dymas. The best way your congregation can do this is by putting St. Dymas 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. Dymas offering envelopes available for your people. If you come up with special ideas to raise contributions for The Community of St. Dymas, we would love to hear about them!



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. Dymas from the "To" menu.

Prayer Requests from Our Members

Lord, please watch over all our brothers and sisters, especially those who are grieving. Let them know that they are not alone and are loved.

Please be with my family and friends in their time of need.

Lord, please watch over Crystal's son while he is fighting cancer.

Lord, please be with our brothers and sisters who have been released.



The Community of St. Dysmas

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

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Council Members
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Bob Harvey, Treasurer
Rufus Berry
Linda Fleischer
Myra Keel
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