

THE COMMUNITY OF ST. DYSMAS

I was in Prison & You Came To Visit Me



CSD Newsletter – Fall, 2025

Outside Looking In Locusts and Restoration

"I will restore to you the years
that the swarming locust has eaten,
the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,
my great army, which I sent among you
You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
and praise the name of the LORD your God,
who has dealt wondrously with you"

Joel 2:25-26

These words from the prophet Joel have always intrigued and encouraged me. All of us who have had more than a few years on this planet know the feeling—there have been times when we keenly felt losses and couldn't imagine the restoration of what has been lost.



Last March worship and Bible study at one of our congregation sites was canceled because our attendance had dropped. The flu had hit the prison hard, and there had been some releases and transfers that also diminished our congregation. I was told that when our attendance improved, we would be restored, but, that seemed to be a "catch 22" – as I pointed out, with our services cancelled, attendance is 0! We have had a congregation in that facility for decades, with members who have been with us almost as long, all who grieved this loss.

Many times I rolled those verses from Joel over and over in my head. It was as if our mission field had been "eaten by locusts," and there was no apparent way to get back what had been taken away. All of us on the dedicated volunteer team grieved deeply not worshiping with our brothers there.

But God restores the years the locusts have eaten! Through a series of "chance" encounters, conversations happened and our congregation there has been given the go-ahead to start up again. This wasn't chance! This was God at work.

Challenges continue to come along for all our congregations, not only in Hagerstown, but in Jessup and Sykesville as well. There are prominent voices in these times that would deny the beloved-ness of our marginalized siblings, and that voice is emboldened in these times. Sometimes it seems as if the fields have been eaten bare by locusts.

But, hold on in faith! Remind yourself always—we have a God of restoration, always at work beyond our comprehension.

Blessings to you who read this. God is working and constantly restoring through friends like you.

Pastor Susan✠

CSD Annual Meeting

The Community of St. Dysmas Annual Meeting will be held on Saturday, January 17, 2026, at 10 am via Zoom. More details will be available as the date approaches. Please mark your calendars now so you won't miss it!



On the Way to Ordination in the ELCA



Congratulations to Rev. Randy Terry, a Christian Methodist Episcopal minister who is seeking ordination to Word and Sacrament ministry in the ELCA!

This August, he completed a dual internship with St. Johns Lutheran Church, Sweet Air, Pastor Lisa Arrington supervising, and the Community of St. Dysmas, Pastor Susan Beck supervising. The internship committee, which included Pastor Dave Kaplan and Viola Noffsinger, long time volunteers with the CSD, commended Rev. Randy on his leadership skills, pastoral presence, dedication in the face of obstacles, and deep faith in God.

Rev. Randy is currently completing his academic requirements and seeking a site for Clinical Pastoral Education. He continues to minister at St. Johns and volunteer with the CSD. We pray for him as he completes the rigorous work to be an ELCA pastor and we look forward to his ordination.

Synod Assembly 2025

Our Delaware-Maryland Synod assembly was held May 30-31 at Grace Lutheran Church in Westminster—a great gathering of Lutherans from two states! A highlight was a presentation from Gerry Kimble, a Community of St. Dysmas brother. He gave a speech about his experience in prison as part of the CSD congregation that met at Central Maryland Correctional Facility that brought tears and a standing ovation from the gathered assembly. Here is an excerpt from his talk:

But the problem with me, and with I imagine all of us, was that this cravings and desire to do what was opposed to God was that it was never satisfied. It wasn't until later, until after I had really hurt and abused someone I was supposed to love and protect, that I realized what a stronghold sin and lust had on me

It all came to a head when one night I was confronted with the things that I had done. Now I don't think that I made many right choices at that time except one thing... I confessed to everything. I don't know why I told the truth, I'm sure part of me wanted to lie and keep it hidden to protect myself. But I believe that deep down I was tired of carrying the weight of hiding all the things that I had done. It's strange but in that moment, even as my world was crashing down around me, after the confession I felt like 1000 pounds was lifted off of me, even as I was heading to jail. The words "and the truth will set you free" took on a new meaning after that...

I asked God to please keep me from Prison! I bargained with Him saying my life will be different from now on, I promise!...

God didn't answer that prayer the way that I wanted, but He did answer it the way that was best for me. I spent the next 5 years in prison.

God was with me during those years, working on me and in me, growing me, drawing me closer to Him! I want you to know this... God is changing lives even behind those walls! I have met some of the most genuine God-fearing, joy filled Christians in prison.... It was in prison that I met Pastor Susan and Charlotte and became a member of the Community of St. Dysmas. I got to see, through the Community of St. Dysmas, a real example of the body of Christ. Pastor Susan and her team were, and still are, dedicated to sharing the gospel with people like me... people that most of the world had cast out and would probably rather forget about. I thank you for that and for what you have done and continue to do for me and many others like me!

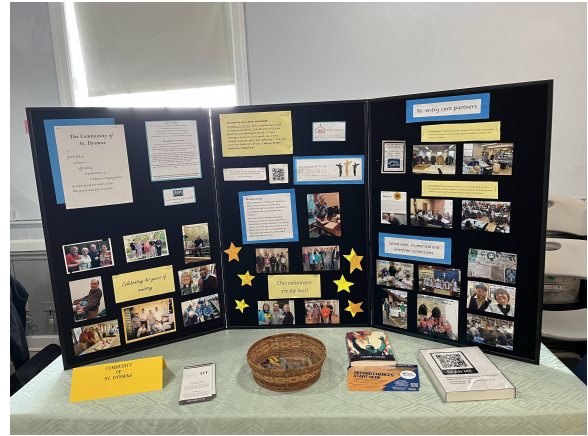


Gerry Kimble Addressing
the Synod Assembly

At Synod Assembly



Linda Fleischer, Pastor Susan,
Rev. Randy, and Paula Thistle



The CSD Display

Lay Leadership Award

Community of St. Dysmas volunteers are the best! Each year the Delaware-Maryland Synod recognizes individuals and groups involved in lay ministry across the Synod with the Celebrate Lay Ministry Awards. This year Sue Marshall, long-time volunteer at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women, was honored at the awards dinner at Carroll Lutheran Village on May 4. She follows in the footsteps of Viola Noffsinger and Charlotte Symms, who were honored in previous years. Well-deserved, Sue!



Liz Fixsen, Pastor Susan, and Lois Carrigan
with Sue Marshall at the awards dinner.



Sue receives her award from Bishop Gohl

Volunteers Recognized

On April 26, Pastor Susan, Lois Carrigan, Liz Fixsen, and Gary Tartanian attended the Volunteer Appreciation Day at MCIW, the women's prison in Jessup. What a festive event that included recognition of many groups, dance performances by the residents, speakers, and plenty of food! There was even a chance to get up on the dance floor and join in the steps. We felt very appreciated indeed.



The Assembled Volunteers!



Pastor Susan and Lois with Virginia Ngugi,
Volunteer Activity Coordinator



Recognize anyone?

Guidelines for Writing to CSD Members

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” or “Hello, my sibling in Christ”.
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”.

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

Community of St Dysmas
905 Frederick Rd
Catonsville, Md 21228

Or email them to: pastor@communitystdysmas.com

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

Gatekeepers

Gatekeepers is a well-established re-entry program that supports returning citizens as they navigate life outside of prison. Under the leadership of Bill Gaertner, they have been a presence in the Hagerstown area for many years, providing food, clothing, a cell phone and other immediate needs upon release.

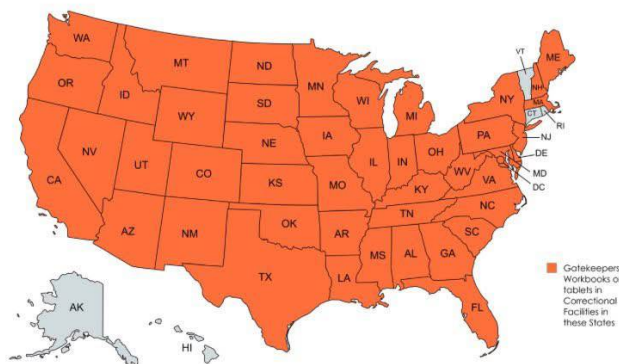
Their ministry begins with a pre-release course available on incarcerated individuals' tablets called “The Business of Living” to prepare ahead of release. After release, Gatekeepers has weekly Saturday morning support groups at Trinity Lutheran Church in Hagerstown, where participants receive support for physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs.

Each July, they have a cookout for the volunteers and participants where the public is invited to see what the Gatekeepers ministry is doing. It's a joyful celebration of good food, music, conversation and fellowship. Pastor Susan attended again this year and can attest to what a fun event it is! A highlight was meeting the new executive director, Keith Roys, who is assuming the role of executive director as Bill Gaertner retires.

And there is new and wonderful news coming from Gatekeepers. Under the leadership of Steven Albright, they are expanding their ministry to be able to support returning citizens who are settling in the Baltimore City and County areas. To learn more about Gatekeepers, go to <https://www.gatekeepersmd.org/>.



Gatekeepers



Our mission is to **Motivate, Empower, and Encourage** Returning Citizens

What we do

Gatekeepers is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping justice-involved individuals successfully reintegrate into the community. We walk alongside those returning from incarceration offering practical resources, compassionate guidance, and a pathway to going home and staying home.

Our Services include:

- **Basic Needs assistance (e.g., rental assistance, clothing, hygiene items, cell phones)**
- **Help with IDs and government benefits**
- **Job readiness and employment support**
- **Housing referrals and transportation assistance**
- **Gatekeepers curriculum**
- **Mentorship and peer support**
- **Weekly resource clubs and community connections**

The Business of Living

The Business of Living Workbook, available in English and Spanish, is designed to help participants identify and overcome challenges they may face after incarceration by focusing on their goals in four areas of their life – Occupational, Educational, Personal, and Spiritual. **Gatekeepers** strives to empower individuals to overcome barriers. **Gatekeepers** created the **Business of Living Workbook** (available in hard copies or virtually through tablets) and uses it to help current and former inmates chart their re-entry path to success. **Gatekeepers** works with men and women currently incarcerated to get them started on their re-entry planning. **Gatekeepers** will then meet them at the gate on their day of release (if needed) and get them immediately started on implementing their re-entry plan. **Gatekeepers** has presented the **Business of Living Program** to thousands of men and women at local detention centers, state prisons, federal penitentiaries and recovery houses.

Our Impact



Our Impact

\$197,444 in basic needs assistance provided in 2024



Resource Club

Weekly meetings with an average of 80+ attendees



Gatekeepers on Tablets

Accessible in **1,214** facilities with **10,306** completions

Angels on the Trail

Over the past two summers, I've hiked 2,200 miles on the Appalachian Trail between Georgia and Maine. Along the way I've encountered countless generous strangers—people who offer free food and drinks, a lift into town, or tips about local resources. These helpers are known as “Trail Angels”, and they're a welcome sight for long-distance hikers who are often unfamiliar with the areas they pass through.

One Angel stands out in my memory: Tara, whom I met while trekking through the Blue Ridge Mountains. When she discovered that my power bank was damaged and could no longer hold a charge, she didn't hesitate. She offered to drive me to the nearest store the next morning for a replacement. After we picked up a new battery, Tara treated me to lunch and then dropped me back at the trailhead. I could have managed without her assistance, but her willingness to go out of her way for a stranger left a lasting impression. I'll never forget her kindness.

Do you have an “Angel” in your life? Have you ever been an Angel to someone else? As Jesus reminds us, we are called to be friends to strangers, and becoming a Trail Angel is one tangible way to answer that call.



David at the pond on Mt. Greylock

David Roberson, CSD Treasurer

(We're looking forward to hearing more about David's adventures in the next newsletter!)

Would You Like to Help?

We are looking for people to serve on the Community of St. Dysmas board? We're a friendly group that meets by Zoom the 2nd Wednesday of the month at 7 pm. You'll help with the running of this ministry, and you'll leave the meeting with a smile on your face and inspiration in your heart. Please email pastor@communitystdysmas.com or call 443-326-1115.

Could We Help?

The Community of St. Dysmas is committed to making sure that Lutheran and other mainline Protestant incarcerated individuals have their spiritual need met for liturgical, grace-filled, Eucharist-centered worship. If you have a loved one or friend who is currently in the state prison system, please let us know. While we are not allowed to proselytize or invite, it's helpful to know where those are who need this spiritual support. Please email pastor@communitystdysmas.com or call 443-326-1115.

Help 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!



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.

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 Pr. Susan to visit, please contact her by phone at 443-326-1115 or email pastor@communitystdysmas.com.

Prayer Requests from Our Members

Please pray for our incarcerated siblings who need healthcare, that they might get the care they need.

Please pray for our returning citizens, that they may continue to grow in faith and find the support they need.



The Community of St. Dysmas

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

Pastor Susan Beck
Phone: 443-326-1115
Email: pastor@communitystdysmas.com

Mailing Address
905 Frederick Rd.
Catonsville, MD 21228

Website: www.stdysmasmd.org

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

CSD Council
Email: council@communitystdysmas.com

Council Members
Lois Carrigan, Chair
David Roberson, Treasurer
Alan Ramsey, Assistant treasurer
Linda Fleischer, Secretary
Myra Keel, Member at Large
Mary Ann Ruley, Member at Large