



# Third Cross Quarterly

a Publication for Friends and Supporters

A NETWORK OF MINISTRY FOR SOUTH DAKOTA INMATES

4th Quarter 2015

## A Prison Reunion By: Pastor Bob Chell

"Pastor", the kite\* read, "I took confirmation classes a long time ago but was never confirmed..." Now an adult, his faith had been rekindled and he was anxious to say for himself what others had said many years earlier.

I wasn't able to call him up to my office right away. I had fallen and snapped a bone in my foot two weeks earlier and was unable to visit the five-tiered cell hall.

I got his second kite on Wednesday, just before our Bible study. I talked with him briefly and told him I would call him up the following week so we could arrange for his confirmation. We talked a bit and I asked him where he was from on the street. He named a small town in South Dakota where Pastor Ed Nesselhuf, the founder of Prison Congregations of America, had been pastor. He thought Ed may have been his pastor but wasn't certain. He told

me he would check with his Mom. In the meantime I checked with Pastor Ed who remembered him. His mom confirmed it. The connection was made.

I called him up to my office and we talked of God's promises and his faith journey and how God had found him in this place. Plans were already in place for Pastor Ed to be at Thursday evening worship at St. Dysmas. As a part of our 25th anniversary celebration this year we are honoring a special guest each month for their role in the success of our congregation. October is Ed's month to be honored and the men who know Ed are eager for his visit.

It didn't take long to figure out this was the right time to take care of this unfinished business from many years ago. Ed delivered more than a sermon that night. He and his student will have finished a journey they began 27 years ago.

Pastor Ed asked if he intends to live among God's faithful people, hear the Word of God and share in the Lord's supper, proclaim God's promises in word and deed and service to others and strive for justice and peace. He answered, "I do, and I ask God to help and guide me."

It is a promise that will take the rest of his life to live out, a promise God has been keeping all along — helping, guiding, forgiving, and calling. We celebrated a confirmation long delayed, a reunion of pastor and confirmand, and yet another assurance that God's promises sustain us wherever we wander, calling us home.

May God's promises sustain you on your life's journey.

\*prison jargon for a note

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St. Dysmas worship service  
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HOLY BIBLE

## “What If?” A 25th Anniversary Reflection By: Retired Bishop of SD, Norm Eitrheim

As I contemplated what to write, the phrase “WHAT IF” kept popping in my mind. Twenty-five years ago, I, as a bishop, had been involved with the decision to start a congregation at the SD State Penitentiary in Sioux Falls. I wondered if there ever would have been a St. Dymas if Pastor Ed Nesselhuf had said “no” to the call to start a congregation at the prison at Jessup, MD. What if Ed had not come back to South Dakota with a passion to have a congregation started in the prison and pushed the SD Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to plant a congregation? What if Pastor Leroy Iseminger or other qualified pastors had said “no” to the call to be the pastor of this unique congregation? A congregation made up of prisoners was a new idea. Would it work? What if it failed?

Thoughts ran through my mind. What if inmates had refused to come to worship in

a drab, white, institutional room? What if inmates had not converted that room into the beautiful worshipful space with stained glass windows, comfortable chairs and chancel furnishings that it is now? What if inmates wouldn't come because recreation was an option at the same hour? (But they did come to church, in even a greater percentage than men outside the walls)

Whenever I attend Thursday night worship, two parts of the worship service impress me. One is the passing of the peace, which is as enthusiastically shared as in any congregation. The other is the singing of about 100 men, and most of them are young. What if I, and literally hundreds of visitors from congregations in the last 25 years, had never participated in this Thursday evening worship experience. We would have been robbed of a meaningful spiritual experience and lived with some fears and stereotypes

that inmates are different. I had found that I could chat with them just as I do with my grandsons and friends.

The Spirit of God moves in mysterious ways. There are few things that have impacted congregations in the SD Synod in the last 25 years more than St. Dymas. The physical presence of other Christians in our lives is essential. Any person in need, a prisoner, a sick person, sees in the friendship of a Christian person the presence of Christ. Both the visitor and visited recognize in each other the Christ who is present in people. We thank God for the gift of His presence. Thanks be to God for the gifts that St. Dymas brings to the church outside the walls.

### Recommended Reading

*Cain's Redemption: A Story of Hope and Transformation in America's Bloodiest Prison*  
by Dennis Shere

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Angola Prison, in Louisiana, is a Maximum Security prison housing 5,000 inmates; most until the end of their lives. The warden is Burl Cain, from whom the book gets its title. The prison's reputation was notorious and violent. In 1995, Warden Cain came to Angola Prison, with a deep Christian faith, and the belief that God wanted him there. He believes no one is beyond God's redemption, rehabilitation only happens when the heart is changed, and change happens when Jesus begins to work in a person's heart.

To remind everyone of that truth and hope, Philippians 3:13-“Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are ahead”- is carved in stone at Angola's front gate.

The warden's challenge to the inmates is that they are in a community, and if they want a good community, it is up to them. The prison provides opportunities, but it is, ultimately, the inmate's decision what to do with those opportunities. (It echoes Jeremiah 29:7- “Seek the prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray for it; for if it prospers, you will prosper.”)

This is what prison ministry is about: giving opportunities to each inmate to become the person God created, redeemed, and sanctified them to be. Change begins within the mystery of God working in a person's life. I will be pondering this book for days to come. Read it! I'd be interested to hear what God says to you through the book.

Pr. Kwen Sanderson, St. Dymas/MDSP

# Supporting St. Dymas

By: Pastor Bob Chell

I have been astounded at the generosity of individuals and congregations the two years I have served St. Dymas. I know the single most important reason for this strong support is the same as the single most important reason for our congregations' success behind the walls. What both share in common is the outside visitors who join us for worship each week.

Pastor Kwen and I work hard to proclaim a gospel of grace and forgiveness in our sermons each week but it is the visitors who transform our words into reality. The men hear about grace and acceptance from our sermons, but they experience both from an outsider who shakes their hand, engages them in conversation, and listens to their story. Those weeks when conflicts or weather prevent visitors from attending the worship is noticeably flat. Visitors are crucial to sustain and grow our congregation behind the walls.

I know, too, the hospitality visitors experience opens their hearts. Many, if not most, of those incarcerated do not receive cards, letters or visits. This is why they are so appreciative and thankful to have visitors. For most, it is the only unfamiliar face they will see all week, the only outsider they will speak with who is not paid to talk with them. And, when 100 men's voices raise to sing "I'm So Glad Jesus Lifted Me" with gusto I know I'm not the only one with goosebumps. Visitors come for many reasons; returning visitors come because the Spirit is at work in St. Dymas.

The relationship between our congregations and visitors is symbiotic, each enriching the other. I want to say a special word of thanks to those of you who have faithfully sustained St. Dymas in our 25 years of ministry. To say, 'We couldn't do it without you' is not hyperbole, but fact. One third of our support comes from congregations and two

thirds from individuals. None comes from the ELCA, the SD Synod, or Prison Congregations of America. They support us in other ways, but not financially.

One change I hope to make during my tenure as pastor is to increase support from online giving. I want to do this to even out our cash flow and broaden our base of support. If you are interested in supporting us this way please contact me or visit our web page, [www.stdymas.com](http://www.stdymas.com), and click on 'support' and then 'give online.' If you haven't supported us before, prayfully consider a gift of money on a \$10 per month basis. Is this something God is moving you to do? Your gifts in any amount are welcome, cherished and appreciated.

## Are you a Thrivent member?

Thrivent is changing the way it supports ministry by forming Thrivent Action Teams. Project areas are Service, Education, and Fundraising. Each Thrivent member is being encouraged to initiate two projects per year, with \$250 support from Thrivent.

There are projects that could be done to help the St. Dymas congregations or your own congregation. Following are some ideas:

**Service:** a grant to cover travel costs to visit St. Dymas

**Education:** funds to cover a meal for your congregation to gather, watch, and discuss the new resource materials regarding the criminal justice system, "Called to Hear."

**Fundraising:** money to supply yarn for those at St. Dymas who knit caps for the needy; or perhaps to sponsor a special meal or event within the prison walls

We would love to partner with you. Please let us know how we can help by contacting us at (605) 338-1735 or email us at [info@stdymas.com](mailto:info@stdymas.com).

## THRIVENT FINANCIAL/THRIVENT CHOICE

### In Memory of

Mary Montoya in memory of Marvin Peterson Family  
James and Bonnetta Mattison in Memory of Wes Johnston  
Alma Holm & Mark and Karen Ceisel in memory of Elvira "VaVi" Aamodt  
Forrest & Shirleen Wixon in memory of Earl Bostrom  
Mary Flemming in memory of Lisa Doyer, wife of Roger Kramer  
Charles Schriver in memory of Kate

### August

Margaret Blume  
Elizabeth Goodart  
Kwen Sanderson  
Kari Schoefish  
Norma Shumaker

### September

Glenn Sellevold

### October

Marc Christofferson  
Jeffrey Clark  
James Gardner  
Gail Opoien  
Wanda Swenson

Address Service Requested

## Prayer Corner - Please pray for these concerns

- Continued growth of St. Dysmas presence at Yankton
- Reaching out to inmates across the State of South Dakota in after care
- Monetary donations for the ministry
- Continued development of St. Dysmas Sundays throughout South Dakota
- Continued blanketing of the inmates in South Dakota with St. Dysmas presence

For more information about  
St. Dysmas:  
call Sioux Falls - 605-338-1735  
[www.stdysmas.net](http://www.stdysmas.net)

If you need to change the number of  
newsletters you currently receive  
call 605-338-1735

## Reflections A 25th Anniversary Reflection By: Pastor Robert Hansen

My involvement with St. Dysmas came at the request of Del, an inmate at the Springfield State Prison, now the Mike Durfee State Prison. Del had participated in the St. Dysmas ministry at the Sioux Falls Prison with Pastor Leroy Ismeniger and wanted the opportunity for himself and other inmates to continue participating in St. Dysmas worship services at Springfield. After visiting with Del and through conversations with prison administration, the St. Dysmas ministry at Springfield began in the fall of 1993. Worship services began in a meeting room in the library and later moved to the chapel.

The Springfield State Prison was co-ed when I started with St. Dysmas with 48 female inmates and 350 male inmates. Educational opportunities were a major part of the program at Springfield and I was able to teach classes in the afternoon along with worship services in the evening. Being co-ed created interesting dynamics in worship and classes. The only time any physical contact allowed between male and female inmates was during the passing of the peace during the worship service which was an ongoing concern for security but the warden understood that was a vital part of worship and allowed it to take place. Music

was special with Deb on the piano and Bob on the organ, and assisted by a band. Today, all the women inmates are at the women's prison in Pierre and Springfield has all male inmates.

As participation grew, we were also blessed with outside visitors and partnership support from congregations; which was and still is such a vital part of the St. Dysmas ministry today.

### Thrivent Choice

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans members, please direct Choice Dollars to St. Dysmas of South Dakota.

Either: (1) Log into [Thrivent.com/thriventchoice](http://Thrivent.com/thriventchoice) and select "Get Started;"

Or: (2) Contact a representative from the Member Connection Center at 800-847-4836 and, when prompted, say "Thrivent Choice." When next prompted, say, "Choice Dollars."