

St. Dysmas of South Dakota



Easter 2015

Dear Friend of St. Dysmas,

Easter joy to you and greetings from your brothers at St. Dysmas in the SD State Penitentiary in Sioux Falls and Mike Durfee State prison in Springfield. Their greeting is heartfelt and genuine. I believe one of the reasons our congregations flourish is the Prison Congregation model they are built on, welcoming visitors from outside congregations to join us each week. Because many, if not most, of the men do not receive visits, mail or phone calls this is the only opportunity they have to speak with someone who isn't a fellow inmate or paid to be there. Pastor Kwen and I work hard to proclaim God's promises clearly each week. However, even a good sermon can't speak to a person's heart as effectively as experiencing grace from another person. Your visits make God's promises real.

I know it isn't possible for all who receive this letter to visit and you know, of course, that your financial support is crucial to our continued ministry. I have been astounded and humbled by the generosity of those supporting St. Dysmas since I began 18 months ago. We ask for your continued support.

Recently I visited an inmate, a lifer, who had been taken to the hospital here in Sioux Falls. Another inmate told me he may have had a stroke. When I arrived he told me that, indeed, he had been unable to speak but had since fully recovered and was feeling fine. When he told me he couldn't speak I raised my eyes to the heaven's and said, "There is a God!" joking because he likes to talk more than most. He laughed, as I knew he would, but then turned serious. He had tears in his eyes when he said, "Pastor, it doesn't matter what you say, you're here and that says it all." It was the beginning to a rich conversation. I felt so privileged to be there on behalf of the church.

I thought about the visit all day and recalled one of my first jobs. It was with the Youth Servant Corp, a program of the Lutheran church, in the summer of 1969. I, and ten other High School students, earned \$5 a week to live and work at the state hospital in Redfield, SD with those who were developmentally delayed. Our job description was simple. We were to give some individual attention to the residents, letting them know someone loved and cared for them. It was a job which changed the trajectory of my life. I gained more than those I served. It occurred to me that as I approach the end of my career my work is much the same (although the pay is much better).

My Easter prayer for the men of St. Dysmas, for those of you reading this letter, and for myself, is that we would be alert for the opportunities God provides us each day to be fully present to others. St. Francis of Assisi reportedly said, "Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words." The Bible is the history of God's relentless pursuit of people who kept wandering off. Finally God himself, in Christ came to walk with us and stand by us so we would know of God's love and care. One of the great blessings and opportunities which faith provides is for each of us to stand with another on Christ's behalf. My all of us have eyes to see, and courage to grasp these opportunities.

Easter joy to you!

In Christ,

Pastor Bob Chell

P.S. Please check out our new website: www.stdysmas.com