

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Grace and peace to you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen!

Greeting from your sisters and brothers in Christ at St Dysmas Lutheran Church!

There is an old saying that the only constant is change; and 2023 lived up to that statement. Working inside the walls, especially in 2023, has seen some significant changes to policies, visitation requirements, and schedules. What we see as stumbling blocks, God uses to his glory. Even amidst the many challenges, God has been at work in amazing ways in the lives of people inside and outside the walls.

Firstly, thank you for your support to insure that the ministry of St Dysmas stays vibrant and active. We do not exist without the support and engagement from you. St Dysmas is YOUR ministry to those experiencing incarceration; and we are grateful for your partnership.

Here are a few highlights for this year:

- On any given day, there are approximately 3750 people incarcerated in the South Dakota Department of Corrections system. In 2023, we worked with and saw attendance of approximately 574 individuals to worship, Bible studies, and one-on-one pastoral care visits. Worship and Bible study attendance has steadily increased over the year at each site.
- We had 31 baptisms of adult men including 3 affirmations of baptism.
- We were able to hold special worship on Easter and Christmas Eve inside the facilities.
- Our Reformation Festivals took place at both Sioux Falls and Springfield on Reformation Weekend in October. A special meal was served at Springfield, and inmates were allowed to share the meal with their family that could attend.
- The annual special meal was held in Sioux Falls in August sponsored by Peace Lutheran Church in Sioux Falls.
- Worship switched to Tuesday evenings from 5:00 to 8:00 at Springfield. We have seen great participation by visitors to Springfield since this change occurred.
- Worship in Sioux Falls changed to Wednesday afternoons from 1:30 to 3:30. While this is not ideal, we have still had visitors attend very regularly.
- We have seen increasing engagement and attendance with our reentry work on the inside. Mitch Wilson worked with 244 individuals preparing to be released from incarceration.
- Accompanied 156 individuals once they were released to help them transition back into life on the outside.
- Mitch also worked in the Minnehaha County jail with 541 individuals housed there.
- Worked with the Department of Corrections and St Francis House to accompany 36 treatment women into work release.
- Over 3700 Christmas Treat Sacks were distributed the week before Christmas. Every person in the South Dakota Prison System received a sack, also people in the Minnehaha County and Yankton County jails.
- The Sioux Falls congregation again took up the challenge to support a ministry outside of themselves. All inmate offering goes to this fund, and for 2023, they will give Church on the Street a check for \$2271.
- The Springfield congregation took up the same challenge. They will distribute their funds after the January Inside Council Meeting. They will have approximately \$750 to distribute.
- I was able to visit 46 congregations to tell the story of St Dysmas and worship together.

These are just a few of the ways God has been at work through St Dysmas. I give thanks to God for the many gifts that he has entrusted to us. Through the faithful partnership of many of you, we continue to be able to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to this who need to hear it most; “setting the captives free...”

Grace and peace to you always,



Pastor Jeff Backer
Senior Pastor/Development Director