



REMEMBER ME

DISMAS MINISTRY
P.O. BOX 070363
MILWAUKEE WI 53207

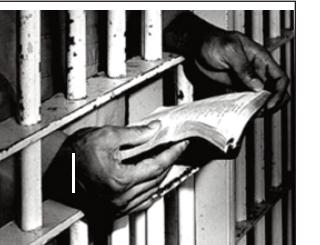
A Newsletter
Published by
DISMAS MINISTRY
A National Catholic Outreach for Inmates, Victims, their Families, the Released from Prison, and for the Community

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2015 Marks the 15th Anniversary of the U.S. Bishops' Statement on Criminal Justice

The past decades in the U.S. have seen a trend toward more imprisonment than most other countries. The U.S. Bishops felt that the Jubilee Year 2000 offered an opportunity to focus on an approach to criminal justice based on *restorative justice—healing for the victim, rehabilitation and re-integration for the offender, and safety and stability for society*. Then Pope John Paul II wrote in his 2000 Message for the Jubilee in Prisons: “*What Christ is looking for is trusting acceptance, an attitude which opens the mind to generous decisions aimed at rectifying the evil done and fostering what is good. Sometimes this involves a long journey, but always a stimulating one, for it is a journey not made alone, but in the company of Christ himself and with his support.*”

The Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 was an opportune time to revise our nation’s criminal justice system, in a way that would restore relationships between crime victims, criminal offenders, and all of society. The Bishops wished to re-evaluate the traditional emphasis on retribution that manifests itself in an over-reliance on incarceration and use of the death penalty. In the spirit of John Paul II they hoped to balance corrective punishment with efforts at healing, forgiveness, and rehabilitation. Fifteen years ago their statement entitled **Responsibility, Rehabilitation and Restoration** represented their attempt to foster a Catholic perspective and a fresh approach on our criminal justice system that focused on *restorative justice, one that encompassed the victim, the offender and the entire community.*



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Remember me.
Luke 23:42

The Story of St. Dismas

One of the criminals hanging in crucifixion said, “*We are only paying the price for what we have done, but this man has done nothing wrong.*”

He then said, “Jesus, remember me when you enter upon your reign.”

And Jesus replied, “I assure you, this day you will be with me in paradise.”

Luke 23: 39-43

REMEMBER ME

ADVENT 2014

A NEWS LETTER FOR THE FRIENDS OF DISMAS MINISTRY
A National Catholic Outreach for Inmates, Victims, their Families & the Community.

“In one word... Awesome!”

A Report from a Prison Ministry Volunteer



That describes the enthusiasm that I've noticed with the inmates at the Correctional Center for Dismas Ministry's faith study course, A Reason for Hope.

I now have five inmates fully engaged and their discussion is pulling in other inmates. I suspect that the others (up to seven additional inmates) will feel the “pressure” of the Holy Spirit to join.

A Memorial Gift

Honor the memory of a loved one with a gift in their name to Dismas Ministry.

Contact us to request a Memorial folder. When you receive it, fill it out and present it to whomever you wish. Then send your gift to support the work of Dismas Ministry in honor of the person named.

To request a Memorial folder write to:

Dismas Ministry
PO Box 070363
Milwaukee, WI 53207

or email:
dismas@dismasministry.org

I go to the Correctional Center once a week and the process involves picking up the answer sheets, then delivering them to a “study buddy” (a local Catholic Church parishioner) who grades and then mails back to the inmate the answer sheet with comments. This process engages both inmates and parishioners at our church. I suspect that the inmates getting mail will also encourage those other non-participating inmates to consider taking the course.

My prison ministry also includes another Correctional Center where I visit once a month – the first Tuesday. At the visiting priest's recommendation, I will be talking with these inmates regarding that same course and process. I can assure you that I will probably have ten inmates willing to take that course.

Our priest at the local Catholic Church where I'm a member is also using the series at the Navy Brig. The Brig services the Navy and Marine Corps in the area. Father currently has two candidates that are using your Faith series in conjunction with their RCIA. He has just started that process.

So, as you can see, we are pretty much engaged (and sold) on the benefit of Dismas Ministry's material, and we are bringing people closer to God – inmates and parishioners.”

Michael, A Ministry Volunteer, Virginia

From Christ's Body behind bars...

From Chaplains and Ministries

"Thanks for the prompt response to my request for bible study materials. The institution where I volunteer, was changed in status to a Level 1 (meaning all inmates will eventually have the opportunity to leave prison). What a change we've seen! We went from 1-3 in our weekly Catholic Bible Study to now 18, and from 4-6 in our weekly Mass or Communion Service to now 33-36. Since there are about 100 Catholic inmates in the facility, this represents about 1 in 3 inmates-a very good number! I just wanted to tell you what big smiles I saw on the faces of several new guys when I gave them a book and they were able to immediately feel like part of the group." A Ministry Volunteer, Michigan

"As usual you promptly sent the "Pray in the Spirit" books I requested, and even included the Spanish versions that I forgot to include. When I mentioned at last night's service I had more books, they were so happy. Even the Religion Clerk, and inmate who helps the chaplain and is not Catholic, said she took one for herself as she so likes the prayers! So they are blessing many lives. I appreciate what your ministry accomplishes and I pray God will continue to provide for all of your needs. Abundant Blessings to each of you!" A Ministry Volunteer

From Inmates

"I wanted thank you from the bottom of my heart. From my first letter you have all been very kind, generous and helpful. Yesterday I got the Miraculous Medal that you sent me. I can't begin to tell you the joy you brought me. You are truly members of God's family. Thank you so very much. I want to wish you all the best in everything that you do, and I'd like to mention you and your ministry in my prayers. Thank you, and God bless you." An Inmate, Indiana

"First I would like to say thank you for sending me the Bible and prayer book. I'm writing to you again in hopes that your ministry would be able to send my son a Bible. He is 23 years old and presently incarcerated. He wants to start praying and reading a Bible. Where he is they do not give out any, and he wants to start changing his life. I would love for him to have one so we can pray together, he so needs to find some kind of spiritual guidance in his life. Please can you send him a bible and a prayer book for inmates?" An Inmate, New York

"Thank you for the copy of the Catechism and I would very much like to start the correspondence course A Reason For Hope. I will always keep you in my prayers as I do all my Christian brothers and sisters. Bless you for helping me--finally I have found my true calling in the Catholic Faith." An Inmate

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A Message from the Director

"Remember me only in the light of your love" Psalm 25: 7



Dear Friend of Jesus,

I'd like to share some thoughts on Psalm 25 with you. It reflects so well what could have been the words that Dismas, the good thief, prayed while hanging next to Jesus on the cross. He was in agony of body and soul as his life of crime was nearing an end. The words "remember me" are repeated throughout this psalm. It is a deeply moving cry from the heart composed by someone thousands of years ago. Yet, it's words deeply move our hearts today.

You and I are a *Dismas* – because each of us is much like the "good thief." Although his failings were publicized on the placard above his head, we realize that we must rely entirely on God's mercy as we face all our failings, seen and unseen. We feel the weight of living at times, especially when we find ourselves repeating the same mistakes again and again. The prayer of the good thief is also our prayer, as we appeal to Jesus to "remember me." We need to hear the unhesitating words of Jesus that comfort and heal us – "*This day you will be with me.*"

It is as if Jesus says to our friend Dismas, and to us, "*Even though I know all your failings you are welcome in my company.*" As Jesus declared elsewhere in the gospels, "*I reject no one who comes to me.*" Jesus was the same at the end of his life as he was during his ministry. Very often he came under severe criticism because he "*ate and drank with sinners.*" At the end, he was seen for the last time between two criminals. Like Peter we could say with a misplaced humility, "*Depart from me Lord, I am sinful!*" But that is not what Jesus wants to hear. As a "church of mercy" he wants us to accept his offer of mercy and share it with others who also need it. Once again the words of the psalmist apply like healing balm on our hearts, "*Remember me only in the light of your love.*"

As we accept the immeasurable gift of God's mercy, let's also turn with compassion to our sisters and brothers in prison. Walk with us in this ministry as we remember the incarcerated with compassion and the spiritual care they deserve as members of Christ's body—and therefore our members. Help us through this ministry to offer them another chance. God's grace is at work behind bars – we see it constantly in the letters we receive, in the words of the incarcerated themselves:

"An inmate next to me slid a paper about Dismas Ministry under my door. I was always wanting to learn more and become more active. But the strange part is, I was just thinking about my son who is not even one year old, and his name is after my favorite Bible story about the criminal named Dismas, who asked Jesus to remember him. I never knew anyone who also knew the man who died next to Christ." (A Montana inmate)

Here at Dismas Ministry our prayer is that you too will be "*remembered only in the light of his love.*"

Thank you,
Ron Zeilinger
Director.