



Remember Me

Spring 2019

A National Catholic Prison Ministry

Dear Friends of Dismas Ministry,

I love the phrase *Life is a journey, not a destination*. Though each of us travels a unique path, we are not alone in this world. And, through our Catholic baptism, we are called to be missionaries of the Church...to live and share the Gospel message as we walk with and serve her people.

As we launch the first eNews issue of *Remember Me*, our theme is service to others. We are called to serve the poor and marginalized in our midst. For us, love has no boundaries and faith becomes stronger when shared with generosity.

Through your friendship with and support for Dismas Ministry, you show your faith in action. Your prayers and generous support give hope to the imprisoned who seek to build or renew a relationship with God and the Church.

Your loving kindness has a lasting impact on others whom you will likely never meet or know in this lifetime. And, that is part of the journey...helping others and expecting nothing in return. In the end, we are all part of one Church family...and one human family. And, we are all invited to share in God's love and mercy no matter where we are on life's path.

Please continue to pray for us and those we serve. We need your prayers and financial support to continue walking with the imprisoned. Together, the love and kindness we share today will lighten the way for those who feel isolated, broken and hopeless.

We are praying for you and your loved ones during this season of Lent. May the Risen Christ give peace and hope to all, and be the compass for those embarking on a new or renewed spiritual journey.

With gratitude and peace,

Tyler Curtis
Executive Director



Tyler Curtis, Executive Director

Franciscan Friar Receives Award Posthumously for Service to the Incarcerated



From left to right: Ron Zeilinger, founder, Dismas Ministry, Sr. Rose Rita Huelsmann SSND, board member, Dismas Ministry, and Rev. Thomas Nairn, OFM, provincial minister, Franciscan Province of the Sacred Heart, Order of Friars Minor.

The St. Dismas Award is given annually, by Dismas Ministry, to persons in recognition of their outstanding service to the incarcerated. The very first award was presented posthumously in honor of Rev. Christian Reuter, OFM.

Although in a hospital bed, Fr. Chris was doing what he did for many years – ministering to the incarcerated and their families. He died on June 30, 2018, following complications from back surgery. He was 79.

During the award ceremony on February 14, 2019, at the St. Anthony Friary in St. Louis, MO, Provincial Minister Rev. Thomas Nairn, OFM, told the family, friends, friars and representatives of Dismas Ministry gathered for the award ceremony: “When I went to see him in the hospital, he was still carrying on with the ministry. As I entered his room, I found him in bed talking on the phone with a woman whose son was in prison. He waved me in as he finished telling her: ‘I can’t visit him – I doubt they will let me out of the hospital. But I will find someone who can see him.’ He spent the next several minutes making calls until he found someone who would fulfill his promise.”

After being ordained as a priest in 1966, Fr. Chris served for 35 years in the Archdiocese of Chicago as a teacher and then, as principal of Hales Franciscan High School. Serving a predominantly African American Catholic community in the Archdiocese of Chicago, he was also the pastor of Corpus Christi Parish. This experience in the city of Chicago gave him a unique glimpse into the criminal justice system. “Church ministry in that environment often took me into police stations, courtrooms, prisons, and parole hearings,” he recalled.

Eventually, Fr. Chris decided to become involved in prison ministry, and in 2002 he arrived in East St. Louis, Illinois, to start his new work. When he first began in prison ministry, he was challenged by the grim prison setting, as well as bare prison chapels. Nevertheless, as he performed his ministry in the seven prisons of southern Illinois, he discovered that caring for prisoners brought light into an otherwise dreary environment.

He always kept in mind Luke 10:5, where Jesus teaches his disciples to say, “Peace to this house,” when they visit a home. Fr. Chris once shared, “I say it every time I pass through the bars and razor wire of a prison gatehouse.”

A few years ago, Fr. Chris and a number of lay and ordained prison ministers created Our Brothers’ Keepers of Southern Illinois, a reentry project to assist returning citizens when they leave prisons in the Diocese of Belleville.

“During my time as director of Dismas Ministry, he was a great mentor. I could always turn to him for help. He had a huge heart and that is where we found our common ground and our friendship. He listened to the heart of Jesus and truly cared for the outcast, marginalized and imprisoned,” said Ron Zeilinger, founder of Dismas Ministry.

According to Sr. Rose Rita Huelsmann, SSND, board member, he truly was a presence and an advocate for those in prison. He did his research and knew the justice issues.

Fr. Chris was beloved by many people, especially the friars, family and friends who gathered to celebrate his life and ministry to the poor.

A Gift of Art

Just as “every picture is worth a thousand words,” the original art created for the St. Dismas Award has its own unique story.

The compassion Jesus Christ had for Dismas – the repentant thief – is beautifully depicted in this bas relief sculpture and displayed on a rustic wood surface. The inspiration for the design came from the painting, *The Pardon of the Good Thief*, by artist Jacques Tissot.

This special artwork is a generous gift of Milwaukee-area artisan and craftsman, Gianfranco Tassara. Owner of Inspired Artisans studio, Tassara commissioned this piece in Ecuador.



“Our work is to listen to the liturgical art needs of clients, which could be a parish, cemetery, school or hospital – and come up with a sketch and design for what needs to be accomplished,” said Tassara, who has been involved in this work for 36 years.

In designing the art for the St. Dismas Award, he mentioned it was crucial to show the connection between Dismas and Jesus.

“I hope the art will inspire hope and compassion,” said Tassara. To learn more about Inspired Artisans, please visit: <https://www.inspiredart.com>



The Society of St. Vincent de Paul has partnered with Dismas Ministry

Dismas Ministry works in collaboration with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul members who work in prison ministry every day. In 2017 alone, they made 16,322 visits to our incarcerated brothers and sisters. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) states that during Lent, we are asked to devote ourselves to seeking the Lord in prayer and reading Scripture.

Thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor, we have the opportunity to share the Bible with people in prison. The Society has partnered with Dismas Ministry to provide free Catholic Bibles, as well as prayer books and Bible study courses for the prison ministers to distribute to their inmates and use in their work. These materials are provided in both English and Spanish.

These resources for inmates are tools to strengthen the faith they retain or help them rediscover the faith they lost along the way. A truly spiritual rehabilitation will serve our brothers and sisters well, whether they stay in prison or are released back to their communities. Vincentians find the Bibles and materials are welcomed by those in prison.

“Jesus, remember me when you enter your kingdom” ~ Luke 23:42.

From the Heart

In February, Dismas Ministry Board Member Joshua Stancil was invited to speak to middle and high school students and their parents at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Macon, GA.

Stancil spoke from the heart about his incarceration and how faith transformed his life.

"The Lord spoke through Joshua in such a beautiful way. Our youth and all who attended were very moved," said Sarah Hanks, team leader in youth ministry.



A Message of Gratitude from a Prisoner We Support

Thank you for the Web of Life correspondence course you sent to me. It was a great lesson and I learned a lot.

Father Joe said in a recent homily that joy could stand for Jesus, others and you. J. O. Y. Jesus. Others. You. That is our social teaching in a nutshell. Everything we do teaches everyone else and it will come back and touch us. So, if we focus on loving God by loving others, that love will come full circle and we will be in love. Just as St. John spoke about, "We know we love God when we love others." (1 John 2:3-11)

I thank you and may our God bless you for your service to Himself through the prisoners you show his love to.

Sincerely, James (-Jim)



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A newsletter published by Dismas Ministry, a national Catholic outreach for prisoners, victims, their families, the released from prison, and the community. Dismas Ministry is registered as a nonprofit corporation in Wisconsin, and listed in the US Catholic Directory as a religious, tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) organization. All gifts are tax deductible.

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Prison Ministry Presentation

In March, St. Kilian Parish in Hartford, WI was the first parish in the area to host the Prison Ministry Module presented by Ron Zeilinger, founder and former executive director of Dismas Ministry.

Fr. David LaPlante, pastor, provided fresh-baked pies for the parishioners to enjoy during a social gathering prior to the talk. The PowerPoint presentation has been developed by Dismas Ministry for use in parishes and schools to explore what is often referred to as the "forgotten work of mercy" – visiting the imprisoned.

The presentation includes an overview of U.S. incarceration, and why outreach to our brothers and sisters behind bars is an important ministry for the Church.

"The presentation has great potential for initially inviting Catholics to reflect on some of the many problems, questions, and opportunities regarding prisoners, the prison system, and spiritual help for the incarcerated," said Fr. David.

