



*a Synodically-Authorized Worshipping Community (new start ministry)*

The ministry of Breaking the Chains Church (BTCC) aims to provide consistent and life-giving spiritual care for incarcerated men at the Felmers Chaney Correctional Center (FCCC); a minimum security, pre-release facility in Milwaukee, operated by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections. Prior to BTCC there was no consistent spiritual care provided at FCCC. We connect the residents with a faith-based community prior to release and seek to maintain supportive pastoral relationships with its returning citizens post-release in an effort to help them successfully re-enter the community. Our relationships aim to model God's unconditional love, grace, and mercy as we accompany the men in their journey to become productive and contributing members of the communities to which they return, and to avoid reincarceration.

Ever since the COVID pandemic impacted all of our lives in March of last year, FCCC and other Department of Corrections facilities have been under lock down. Visitors and volunteers have been prohibited from entering WI correctional facilities.

Starting in the summer of 2020, we began recording a weekly worship service on DVD that we delivered to FCCC with bulletins. We invited the men to worship by watching the DVDs, and reflect on God's saving Word on their own. At the beginning of 2021, we were invited by the administration of FCCC to once again join the men for worship every Saturday evening via an on-line Zoom meeting. Since then, members of our steering committee and other volunteers have been joining the pastor on a weekly basis to worship together with our friends at FCCC. The men who join us for worship report that while they miss in-person worship, they look forward to being with us weekly on Zoom. Loneliness and isolation are real challenges for the men, and even more so during these challenging times. They often tell us that they give thanks to God for BTCC because worship is one of the highlights of their week.

Some of the men who have recently been released back into the community have come upon hard times as a result of the pandemic. Some were the first to lose their jobs when our economy declined and as a result, it has been difficult for them to keep up with rent and still have enough left over to buy food. We have continued to accompany them as they getting back on their feet by offering them ongoing spiritual care and occasional financial assistance for life's necessities.

We are hopeful that we will soon be able to rejoin our friends in Christ at FCCC for both in-person worship and for weekly Bible study. We also look forward to being able to pick up some of the men up to complete their community service requirements and to worship on Sunday mornings at Hephatha Lutheran Church under our care.

In Christ,

Pr. David Rebey & the Steering Committee of Breaking the Chains