

**Report to the Greater Milwaukee Synod (GMS)
from the Prison Ministry Task Force**

March 31, 2019

The GMS Task Force on Prison Ministry was officially called into existence through action taken at the 2018 Synod Assembly. The Task Force has since encouraged involvement of all GMS congregations in any aspect of Prison Ministry.

A. The Task Force has met on the following dates:

2018- March 6, April 24, June 4, September 27 2019 - February 21, March 18, April 29

B. The Task Force has sponsored workshops at three different Synodical events.

C. The Task Force has begun disseminating relevant and current information and resources to all interested congregations and individuals through a dedicated, voluntary e-mail list.

D. The Task Force has shared invitations to events and pertinent information on the Synod Listserve.

E. With representation from at least 25 congregations, Synod staff and several not-for-profit organizations, the Task Force has identified three different ad hoc groups detailed below. Each gives an estimate of the individuals actually involved *in* ().

1) Supporting ministry inside prisons (85 going inside + 200 outside)

- a. Over 200 Synodical Congregational members are letter writers to persons incarcerated, have sung Silent Night just outside the fence at the Department of Corrections (DOC) facility named the Felmers Chaney Correctional Center (FCCC) or have assembled Christmas bags for the FCCC staff and residents. Others have given in-kind donations to Breaking the Chains Church (BtCC).
- b. 18 Congregations have invited BtCC to preach at a Sunday worship and/or lead a forum.
- c. The Task Force is facilitating interaction between House of Prayer Lutheran Church, Franklin and the Milwaukee County House of Correction facility.
- d. Encouraging and supporting congregations to establish a relationship with their corresponding county facility.

2) Supporting re-entry ministry for returning citizens (100)

- a. Creating and training for Circles of Support in urban congregations. Current sites are at Hephatha, Project RETURN and downtown Milwaukee at St. Ben's Capuchin Services and Community Advocates.
- b. Networking resources between Project RETURN and congregations
- c. Arranging presentations in congregations by Project RETURN staff members

3) Promoting prison policy reform through advocacy (300)

- a. Adult Forums were held at 14 congregations (*as of 3/31/19*), sharing information regarding the three facets of prison ministry, as well as legislation reform issues nationally and in the state of Wisconsin.
- b. A day of action was attended by over 50 people in Madison (*3/2/19*).
- c. The Task Force has been sharing information from the various *WISDOM* campaigns.
- d. The Task Force is providing timely information on expungement, adjudication and sentencing bills. Encouraging citizen input in support of the corresponding State Budget needs for the Assembly & Senate of Wisconsin.

Recommendations to the Greater Milwaukee Synod:

- 1) Ask all Congregations to share with members the helpfulness of using the language of “*formerly incarcerated persons*” or “*citizens*” in place of “*ex-offender*,” “*a felon*,” or “*former prisoner*.”
- 2) Invite the *Synod Task Force on Prison Ministry* along with *Breaking the Chains Church* and *Project Return* to come to any and all Congregations, Social Concerns & Justice Committees, confirmation classes or Community Organizations to lead a conversation regarding the many aspects of Prison Ministry.
- 3) Advocating for the humane treatment of incarcerated persons, including, but not limited to, contacting legislative representatives regarding just legislation for sentencing and release.
- 4) Advocating for full citizenship rights upon completion of one’s sentence as well as restoration of voting rights upon release from prison, while still under community supervision.
- 5) Educating all congregational members regarding the issues surrounding the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility (*MSDF*) and possible closure of the facility.
- 6) Creating and supporting additional *Circles of Support* groups in any community to which formerly incarcerated persons are or will be released.
- 7) Encouraging participation in prison reform task forces of the four *WISDOM* affiliates in the Greater Milwaukee Synod area: *MICAH* (Milwaukee), *RIC* (Racine), *CUSH* (Kenosha), and *SOPHIA* (Waukesha).

Congregations currently participating (*not an exhaustive list*):

Adoration (*Greenfield*), Advent (*Cedarburg*), Ascension (*MKE*), Breaking the Chains Church (*MKE*), Christ the King (*Port Washington*), Cross (*MKE*), Faith (*Cedarburg*), Hephatha (*MKE*), Holy Cross (*Menomonee Falls*), House of Prayer (*Franklin*), Immanuel (*Cedarburg*), Living Hope (*Saukville*), Lutheran Campus Ministry (*MKE*), Mt. Zion (*Wauwatosa*), Our Savior’s (*West Bend*), Redemption (*Wauwatosa*), Reformation (*MKE*), St. Luke (*Slinger*), St. Luke’s (*Greendale*), St. Matthew’s (*Wauwatosa*), St. Olaf (*Rubicon*), St. Stephen the Martyr (*Greenfield*), Spirit Alive (*Kenosha*), Trinity (*South Milwaukee*).