

## Weekend Reports

### CHARIS OF MINNESOTA INCORPORATED



## FCI SANDSTONE #43: Connie Buelow

From our very first team meeting, there was a strong sense of unity and bonding, and it continued on through all of our meetings and throughout the weekend. Our inside team – those serving in the Palanca Chapel and as table leaders – were invaluable, as there were so many weekenders and only 25 outside team members.

Over and over, I heard, “Charis #43 was absolutely awesome – the best ever!” I would have to agree that it was a phenomenal, Spirit-filled weekend, with 100+ men in attendance, and over half of them attending for the first time. Right from the beginning, on Friday evening, the men were cooperative and attentive. They caught on to the “raised hand” almost immediately and quickly quieted down and paid attention. The table families seemed to bond almost from the beginning too. And, how blessed we felt to have very few empty chairs throughout the weekend.

Our music was wonderful, and during our worship/healing service Sunday night, the Spirit of the Living God came down on the chapel in a mighty way. The men didn’t hold back when it came to singing, getting in line for prayer and anointing by our four Spiritual Directors, and when Pastor Harold asked if we should have an altar call, I said, “Absolutely, go for it!” At least five men (probably more) received Christ that evening. Our weekend verse: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him.” I Cor. 2:9 seemed so appropriate for that evening, as we all felt we had a little taste of what He does have prepared for us!

We had an exceptional number of dynamic talks during the weekend, with several team members giving testimonies that touched the hearts of the men. Many of them remarked how impressed and blessed they were by the outsiders’ openness and honesty.

The closing on Sunday was well attended, and we heard many testimonies of what the weekend meant to the new 4<sup>th</sup> Dayers. They were reminded that the weekend was “just the beginning” and that they should be sure to start grouping, to come to the reunion on the 28<sup>th</sup>, and to make it a priority to be at the chapel Tuesday evenings.

Our reunion was also very well attended by a group of extremely enthusiastic men. The music provided by a large number of both insiders and outsiders was AWESOME – we rocked that place! The sharing and fellowship that evening was also a huge blessing.

Once again, Chaplains Dan and Randy, as well as Candace, showed their appreciation of the Charis ministry, and we’re so thankful for their support, their obvious love of the Lord, and the respect and fairness they show to the men at FCI Sandstone.

Being part of Charis #43 was an honor and a privilege and one I’ll never forget. God was certainly in control, and we praise and thank Him for the outpouring of His amazing grace all weekend.

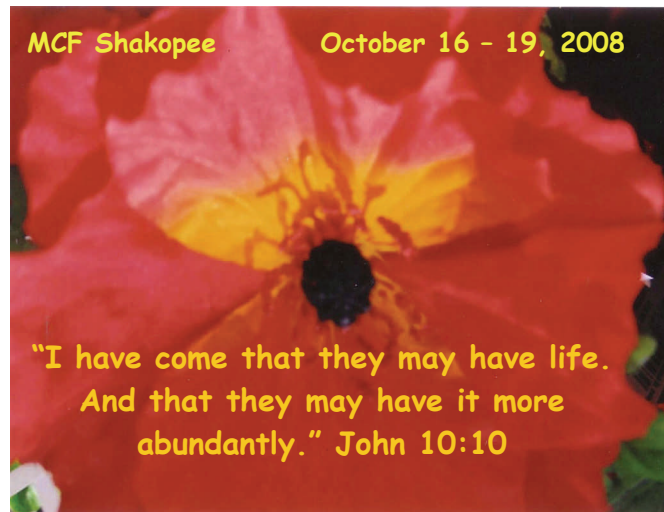
## MCF Shakopee #32: Reo Uran

When God calls the shots, stand back and watch him move. He called a team from all over Minnesota and Wisconsin and united us as a community in only four meetings before he set us loose in MCF Shakopee. He had a game plan and said it was already finished and he asked us to just walk in it.

The opposition was strong but we knew the playbook. As His team, WE WIN! Where else can we be assured of God's victory over the enemy?

Starting Friday morning, with an hour and fifteen-minute situation delaying the schedule and eight more situations to come that day, we knew we were under attack. (A situation is when something negative is happening in the prison and all movement ceases until the situation is resolved.) The Palanca and Support teams kept the reinforcements of prayer covering the Community Room and Chapel, allowing the team and weekenders to continue pushing through all the turmoil. On Saturday there were only five situations and by Sunday, only three. On a typical Charis weekend we have never seen more than one or two such situations.

Our job was to listen, listen, love, love and tell our stories and share the love and forgiveness of Jesus to these precious women for whom Christ had died. He did the rest. Now 36 beautiful women have recognized His forgiving grace in their lives and now have a hope for a new beginning with Christ as their Lord; with the hope of Christ walking beside them as they leave and have a fresh start in their future.



At the end of the weekend it became clear why we were under such attack. God had literally snatched a dear precious soul out of the hand of Satan. She had been a witch for 12 years and was in a Wicca group at the prison. When she encountered the love of Christ through our team and spiritual directors she came home to Jesus. Praise God for His victory! Please lift her in prayer as she continues to fight the good fight to stay on Christ's team. Indeed, please pray for all the wonderful women He brought back with our weekend verse from John 10:10.

*The thief does not come except to steal and to kill and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*

Indeed He did!

### MCF Faribault #5: John Ryan

I knew it was going to be a great weekend because I had been getting signs. Just the week before the weekend in February, my roof started leaking like a sieve from several ice dams that had built up in four corners, troublesome employee problems had plagued me the entire week, and the day before I was scheduled to head to the prison my car developed an oil leak. I figured if someone wanted to go to that much trouble to keep my mind distracted, then I knew FOR SURE this would be the best weekend ever.

I said yes to leading and God sent the best to serve with me. I want to thank the team for their dedication, hard work, great attitude and their willingness to serve the Least of the Least. They were the personification of Listen, Listen - Love, Love. What other ministry can plant the seed of God's Good News on a Friday morning and THREE DAYS LATER see that seed rise up out of the ground into full bloom? I know that every saint who works a weekend feels it is the best ever, and that certainly was the case with this weekend. It definitely was the best ever!

I had a short talk with Chaplain Tony after the weekend. He told me that he was very pleased with how well the whole weekend went. He was relieved that the new facility proved to be more than adequate. He also related that the Lieutenant in charge of security heard from his staff that they were very pleased with how cooperative and accommodating everyone was during the weekend. Tony also shared with me his thoughts about the men expressing thanks to all of us. He said that hearing the words "thank you" from an inmate is something that **very rarely happens** at Faribault. He feels that their thanking us was a healthy and wonderful expression of the positive impact this weekend had on each one of them. So I guess a few words of thanks are OK after all, as long as these words are backed up with talk from the heart.

### Rochester #39: Bill Frank

The note written below was from one of the insiders and was presented to us during the closing of Charis #39 at Rochester FMC. This is why we outsiders do what we do for Charis. I have nothing to add to this other than to humbly thank each member of the Charis #39 team that came together and gave of themselves unselfishly so that others could see, hear, smell, taste and touch the agape love that God offers all of us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Shalom.

*There are no words I could even try to come up with to express my overwhelming joy that I feel deep within my heart. The Psalms say, "The joy of the Lord is my strength." I can testify to the truth in this because with the joy I now have in me I feel as if I could run the New York City Marathon.*

*In all of the time I've been in prison, no one, let me say that again, NO ONE has treated me with such Agape Love as I have felt, both from outsiders as well as those insiders here. You all personify verse 12 of John 15 that says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."*

*I've tried to think of how I can shrink down the last few days into a few short paragraphs, but all I can come up with is – WOW! Nothing I have been through in my 41 years on this earth or even the past 28 years as a Christian has prepared me for the outpouring of love from you all. To say, "Thank you," is not nearly enough, I can only promise you that you will be blessed by Christ Jesus. You're in my prayers. May the Lord, our Savior, Jesus, keep you safe and whole.*

## **Shakopee #33: Ruth Book**

I was feeling a little frantic because of the short time I had to pull a team together due to holidays. Then during a sermon in church, listening to a talk our youth pastor was giving about Luke 1:37, the God light bulb came on. "For nothing is impossible with God." I knew that would be the verse for the weekend AND that the weekend would be His completely! I decided right then that I would enjoy the experience of leading Charis #33 and turned the weekend over to the care of God.

At MCF Shakopee we are able to interview the applicants for the inside Palanca, Support, and Agape teams. It worked out perfectly that all those leaving before the next weekend and all who had never had the opportunity to work on an inside team, were able to be on this team. Just another example of God's perfect plan.

100 women applied to go through the weekend but because of room limitations only 36 women were selected. Because I wanted God to choose the table leaders and assign which six women would be at each table, I wrote down the names on slips of paper, put the slips in a bowl, prayed over them, and pulled the names accordingly. At first I wondered about some of the combinations, but decided that God had chosen them, so that was how it would stay. "For nothing is impossible with God." By the end of the weekend, all were saying how great the match-ups were.

**Got Junk?  
Nope!**

The Stations of the Cross was es-pecially powerful on Friday and this night proved to be tough for a few of the weekenders. Thoughts about not continuing were on the minds of a couple of women. However, prayer is powerful, and the Holy Spirit was alive and working on their hearts. Saturday morning, all 36 returned, and after the Agape dinner, their tears of joy and smiles were evidence that they were happy they stayed. The forgiveness service was powerful and a turning point for many. As I held the forgiveness slips for the Palanca and Support teams, I verbally gave them up to God, and as I laid them at the foot of the cross, the Holy Spirit overcame me, and I wept. It was truly a Holy moment felt by many others.

At the Sunday morning service, one of the team members shared that as she was driving to the prison that morning, she saw a truck sitting along the road that said, "Got Junk?" She thought to herself "NOPE!"

Sunday was upbeat as the day moved along according to God's plan. At the closing when the weekenders shared what the Charis experience meant to them, several turned to their community and remarked, "We can change this place; we can make a difference; we need to find a way to stay connected." It was powerful and spoke volumes to the strong feeling of community that was built during the weekend.

The positive feedback from the Charis #33 team continued for weeks after with everyone saying how unforgettable the weekend was and how the presence of the Holy Spirit was evident during the team meetings and the entire weekend. This weekend truly had the hand print of God on it.

### **Help Wanted:**

MCF Shakopee is in need of volunteers to supervise a small group of 12 women who meet twice weekly to crochet and knit. The sessions last for two hours and are scheduled for Tuesday, 5:30-8:30 PM and Saturday, 3-5 PM. You do not have to know how to crochet or knit. The volunteer is responsible for handing out the knitting/crocheting needles and getting/returning a scissors from the guard. Institution training is required. It's a great opportunity to meet with the women in a casual setting. To volunteer contact Deloris Host at MCF Shakopee, [Deloris.Host@state.mn.us](mailto:Deloris.Host@state.mn.us). Even if you can only volunteer one time per month it would be a blessing. If you'd like to know more about this experience you can contact a current volunteer, Janet Leck at [janetmleck@gmail.com](mailto:janetmleck@gmail.com).