

THE OLIVE BRANCH



CHARIS OF MINNESOTA INCORPORATED

A Message from the President

Greetings from the President, Dick LaSell, and the Board of Directors.

What a joy it is to see our Lord at work. The first weekend at MCF - Faribault was a great success with 36 enthusiastic attendees. There are already another 40 on the waiting list for the next time. It is encouraging to get off to such a good start at a new facility.

There are so many men and women who thirst for our Lord. If you live in southern Minnesota and want an exceptional experience with the Lord, consider volunteering for monthly Ultreyas or the next weekend at MCF

Faribault. We particularly need clergy and more musicians for all our institutions.

Continuing success stories are being repeated at the other institutions. FMC Rochester, FCI Sandstone, MCF Shakopee, and FCI Waseca all have had weekends in the past several months. It is a joy to watch the Lord at work changing these people month to month, year to year. Lives are being changed one by one.

This ministry is such a blessing to our incarcerated brothers and sisters; however increased security needs and budget constraints have

caused major cut-backs in federal and state institutions. This is at the same time they are experiencing overcrowding and projected increases in population.

We are feeling the cut backs. There are reductions in the number of weekends allowed. Sandstone has cancelled the February weekend. Several institutions have reduced the number of volunteers that are allowed inside at one time. FCI Waseca has cancelled the Charis program completely.

We have competition. There are as many as 40 different religious groups in some of the institu-

tions and they must have equal treatment by the administration. New rules also require that a staff member be in the room at all times with volunteers and inmates, adding to the work load.

We can only compete for institution resources with God's help and grace. Our strongest weapon is prayer. Join us in prayer for our incarcerated sisters and brothers.

Please pray also for the Charis ministry, the board of directors, and the weekend leadership.

We Praise the Lord for calling us to this worthy ministry and allowing us to see His good work.

Board News

The Charis Board meets on the third Thursday of each month at the office of Make Old Things New in Minneapolis.

The Board is currently working on revising the manual to make it a more effective "how to" guide. Feedback from past Lay Directors has been very

helpful as we work on this action. Other action includes the launching of the Charis website.

Communicating with Charis volunteers continues to be a priority for the Board. A sub-committee has been formed to explore the best practices for

communicating with volunteers - the who, the what and the when.

Board members are also in the process of discernment for new Board members. This is a working Board so a strong servant leadership attitude is a vital part of the job description.

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Charis Board

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Rochester

Charis #31 was held at Rochester from February 18-21, 2005. A team of 53 dedicated volunteers (29 outsiders and 24 insiders) modeled a Christian community in action.

One of the goals for the weekend was for the men to get some understanding of what God's plan might be for their lives and to commit to following it. "Dennis" is a prime example of how this goal was fulfilled during the weekend. He thought he had decided to

come because he "had nothing better to do." He quickly realized that "something was happening" to him. It started with a desire to begin reconciliation with his father and grew into a realization that God had placed him in prison at this particular time in his life to reveal to him his desire for him to accept Christ as his Savior and to become a Christian, like his wife. Dennis had not been to church since his return from Viet Nam in the '60s. He now has a new plan for his life.

The closing was well attended. Among the visitors were FMC Warden LeBlanc, who was attending his first Charis closing, and U.S. Congressman Mark Kennedy. Both men were invited to speak.

Warden LeBlanc spoke of how Charis brought a human touch to the men in prison. Congressman Kennedy told them that only the person who has Christ in his life is truly "free" and "rich."

Faribault

Good turnout continues each month at MCF Faribault with the inside community being very faithful. No date has been set for the next weekend, but we working on this. Watch the Charis website for further information. The Charis Board encourages Waseca volunteers to consider serving a weekend at this facility. Fill out

an application and it will be forwarded to the next Lay Director.

The Charis ministry had the distinction of being included in The Voice, a publication by and for the offenders in Faribault. Two full pages of weekend highlights were featured complete with lots of pictures. Chaplain Tony

was full of praise for the Charis ministry saying that it is by far one of the most effective programs he's seen in all of his years of prison work. He went on to say how impressed he was with the high quality of the content of the materials. He was even amazed that all who attended stayed to the end of the weekend!

Waseca

We are saddened to report that FCI Waseca is discontinuing the Charis Pathway program (as well as all other religious volunteer programs) effective March 27, 2005. At that time they will implement a revised schedule to accommodate the requirements of Federal Bureau of Prison policies.

The Chaplain's office was quick to report that this discontinuation was in no way a reflection of the value or importance of our ministry but rather a response to changing security needs.

The Charis ministry remains committed to this facility and we ask for your prayers

during this time of change at Waseca. The Chaplain's office did hold out a glimmer of hope that should there be a change of policy they will consider bringing back some of the volunteer programs. Please keep this institution, and the Chaplain's office, in your prayers. God is still here!

Sandstone

FCI - Sandstone, like all the correctional institutions, has recently undergone a number of mandated changes in the religious programs due to staffing, security, budget issues, and a concern to treat all religions equally. The challenge was to consolidate all activities yet maintain a strong Christian program. The new requirements call for one Christian program per week.

The Charis portion of the program by necessity has been cut back. We now have one weekend per year rather than two. However, the federal system does not limit the number of inmates so we still can minister to as many men as wish to attend. We are looking forward to the next weekend, October 7-10, 2005.

The basic Christian program takes place every Tuesday

evening. The first Tuesday of the month is the Charis Ultreya. The other three Tuesdays are a Bible study and discussion session conducted by the Chaplain with Charis volunteers in attendance as part of the small group discussions.

This new program format has brought increased interest and attendance by the inmates. God continues to work at FCI - Sandstone.

Rush City

Dedicated Charis volunteers continue to go to MCF Rush City on a monthly basis. Although the volunteer numbers have been cut back to ten, the program continues to thrive.

At the urging of the Charis Board, volunteers re-structured the monthly Ultreya to include a talk

from the Charis weekend. They are following the regular progression of the Charis weekend.

What is taking place is an awesome testimony to the grace and power of God. After starting this format, the numbers of offenders who attended each month began to increase. At the

January Ultreya over 60 offenders attended! And this is at a facility where no weekend has been held in over two years!

This continues to be a lesson to us as we once again realize that God is sovereign over all. His will and grace cannot be stopped by human rules and regulations.

Shakopee

Preparations are well under way for the next Charis weekend at MCF Shakopee. The weekend will take place from April 28 - May 1. The team is led by Becky Yonts, a veteran of many weekends at this facility. Becky welcomes your prayers for the weekend and hopes to have an outside team committed to praying all

during the weekend. Please consider making a commitment to pray for an hour, or even 10 minutes each day of the weekend.

Monthly reunions at the prison continue to go well, with meetings held on the third Tuesday of each month. Veterans from past weekends, as well as the

current team continue to be faithful in their attendance.

The inside population comes in force as well, with 75-100 insiders attending each month. Inside and outside testimonies continue to encourage all who attend. The thirst for God's word is strong at MCF Shakopee!

**Wanted:
Testimonies
from our
Charis
volunteers for
future
newsletters.
Send your
contribution,
marked to
Newsletter
Editor, to:**

**Charis of MN
P.O. Box 97
Excelsior, MN
55331**

**Prayers
Needed:
Please pray for
the team as
they prepare
for the next
weekend at
MCF
Shakopee.**

**Dates are April
28-May 31,
2005**

Charis Website

We are pleased to announce the launching of the official Charis website. Please check it out at www.Charismn.com.

At this time the site is still a work in progress but over the next few months we hope to use it as a way to communicate with the Charis volunteers. Please continue to visit the site and give us your feedback.

Let us know what you think is important to hear - both from the Charis board as well as information from the Charis community that you'd like to know about.

A team application has been included on the website, so if you'd like to continue to be involved in the community, please fill this application out and send it to the Charis post

office box. Your application will be forwarded to the appropriate Lay Director for consideration in future Charis weekend teams.

Other plans for the site include a calendar page that will list the upcoming team weekends, and dates for monthly reunions.

Please check it out and let us know what you think!

WWW.CHARISMN.COM

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