

# THE OLIVE BRANCH



**CHARIS OF MINNESOTA INCORPORATED**

## A Message from the President: Dick LaSell

It's a pleasure to again be able to report on Charis activity. I am particularly excited as we have recently completed many highly successful weekends.

The Spirit was really at work. There were record turn outs at all facilities. At FCI Sandstone we were told that on Saturday morning there were more people in the Chapel than ever before in the history of the building. The inside attendees were faithful in attendance and attentive.

At Faribault we recently completed the second weekend and they are already asking when we can do the next weekend. An inside Palanca team graced the weekend.

Rush city has not had a weekend for several years, yet the men keep coming to our monthly gatherings and fill the room. Often some are turned away because of the limit set by the fire marshal for the room.

I believe we are seeing major evangelism going on in our prisons. We are not doing it; we

are only an instrument of the Holy Spirit. The insiders are bringing others from the compound. Only they, with the Holy Spirit, can invite the others. It is wonderful to see how many of the men bring someone new with them. Praise the Lord!

The tightening restrictions placed on us by the institutions are still in place, but we are learning to work with them. The Lord works it all out. We are greatly restricted at FCI Waseca and cannot present weekends there or at MCF Rush City. But we are still visiting these facilities and continue to pray we will again be welcomed for a weekend. Our goal is to also be accepted at MCF Stillwater and MCF St. Cloud.

One problem we are facing is a shortage of volunteers. It has been difficult to put together teams. The team at Sandstone was the smallest ever; Faribault also had difficulty making up a team and was at less than full strength. To staff these teams, it was necessary for some volunteers

to serve on more than one of the weekends, which were only two weeks apart.

The need is greatest for Clergy and musicians. In these past weekends, we had only one musician at Sandstone and were blessed to be able to use three inmates. The head Spiritual Director for Sandstone was also the head Spiritual Director two weeks later at Faribault.

There is also room for volunteers to attend the monthly Ultreyas during the year. At Sandstone, there have been occasions with only two or three outsiders in attendance. If you have not been active recently, I ask you to look into your heart and pray about the need. Consider volunteering for an upcoming weekend. Talk to your Cursillo friends about the ministry and encourage them to investigate this worthy and rewarding ministry. Applications may be downloaded on our website. Our incarcerated brothers and sisters are counting on you to help them find our Lord.

In other areas, the Charis board has contracted to send devotionals written BY prisoners FOR prisoners into the Minnesota institutions on a bi-monthly basis. These monthly devotionals are sponsored by Kairos of Ohio, who are deeply appreciative of our support. The funding to purchase these devotionals comes from you - the dedicated Charis volunteers. We bless you for your support.

Please continue to pray for our Charis ministry and our incarcerated brothers and sisters and listen to their cry. Perhaps God is calling your name to become more active.

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## Rochester: #31, Vicki Limesand

God did it again! Charis #32 at FMC Rochester was blessed with the presence of the Holy Spirit. God was definitely in charge because the team was finally together for the first time on the Saturday of the weekend.

As the weekend progressed, the Holy Spirit moved. We had 16 scheduled for spiritual counseling, with seven signed up by the time we processed out on the first day. The men were allowing God to work and the Spiritual Directors were definitely used by God the entire weekend.

There were about 45 first time weekenders attending, with a total of 74 for the weekend. We had 13 Spanish speaking men who all sat together at a double table.

The weekend was held on October 21-23, 2005. Our scripture verse was James 2:5 "Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?"

The weekend was a huge success and glorified God. The Charis #2 team consisted of 27 outsiders and 5 insiders. There were 40 new insiders that completed the whole weekend. Our Spiritual Directors were kept very busy with 21 personal

They really felt God's love even without a translator. They spoke some English and they helped each other understand. It was so exciting to see them stay for the entire weekend.

Some of the comments made by the men were:

- "I have a family. I am loved. These are all my brothers."
- "I want to thank God for His love, and Jesus for being so brave and giving his own life for you and me - how wonderful He was."
- "I don't have much to give you all but my prayer to God, keep working hard. God is looking on everything from heaven and all of you are going to be

blessed"

- "I came alone. Nobody invited me. I now know some faces and feel that I have some brothers in Christ"

As lay director, I felt honored and blessed to work for the Lord. It was a joy to serve God and watch His Spirit make a difference in lives. The Lord gave me a verse for the weekend that definitely reminded all of us how wonderful God is:

**1 Peter 1: 8-9**

"Though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him, and **are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy**, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

## Faribault: #2, Joe Illitschko

counseling sessions during the weekend.

When I see Faribault, I see a prison with too many young men in it. One of my greatest joys of the weekend was to watch them on the first day as the uneasy, apprehensive young men sat down with their assigned table families. I could see the slow transformation and filling of joy in them, their smiles turning to laughter, and the twinkle in their eyes coming back as the weekend progressed.

The closing of the weekend brought some of the

outsiders who had been praying for the weekend. Included in their number were Warden Connie Roehrich and her husband. This support is so very important and appreciated.

During the closing we joined together in singing a rousing rendition of "Wade in the Water" which is a traditional black gospel song. This was followed by testimonies of what the weekend meant to the weekenders. Hearing these testimonies gave witness and glory to God's work in their hearts.

## Sandstone: #40, Dick LaSell

The recent Charis #40 Weekend at FCI Sandstone was the best attended weekend in our history there. We arrived with one hundred candidate badges and ran out the second day. A large percentage of the men were there for the first time and they stayed through the weekend.

I believe this growth has happened in large part due to a partnering of Charis with the Chaplin to establish an overall program that melds the Charis program into the institution's overall Christian program. The program features a one hour prayer session and a two hour Bible study/sharing program each week. Charis volunteers are involved in both these programs. The faithfulness and leadership

of the Charis volunteers and inside fourth day community is what drew the record number of insiders.

We had a small team with only one outside musician. This may have been one of the strengths of the weekend because three insider musicians came forward to take some ownership of the weekend and made it all work. We had only one musician in the Palanca Chapel. He was an insider and he was wonderful. There were eleven insiders on the Palanca team. They put on one of the most moving live Stations of the Cross I've ever seen. The insiders designed the effort and represented all the models. The Spirit was in that place.

The most moving moment may have been the forgiveness service. The men and the team heard a wonderful message about why we need to forgive our brothers and sisters. Over 100 of us filed by the burning bucket to drop in our list and pray to forgive. We then formed a large circle that barely fit the large chapel. The Spiritual Directors served the Act of Remembrance and anointed each person with the sign of the cross and then gave each person a hug - all 100+ of us.

The weekend demonstrated the power of our weekend verse I Cor. 15:58; "Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor is not in vain."

## Shakopee: #27, Becky Yonts

When we're called to do God's work, it's humbling, exciting and frightening all at once. Humbling, because you want to serve God and do it just right, exciting to think that even one life might be changed and frightening because it's so very important to do God's will especially in a prison with so many rules and regulations to follow.

Those were just some of the emotions that start to describe the Charis weekend last May. God's hand was in the creation of a wonderful team full of His Spirit with a heart for the women at Sha-

kopee. As the women filed in I wondered if they knew our Lord at all. Some of them were curious, some were taking a break from work, and some were searching for a better life and a better way. It was awesome to see lives touched by tears of pain, stories they could relate to, kindness and love from strangers that came to share the good news of Jesus Christ with them.

It was nearly the time for the closing service to begin when we heard that Governor Pawlenty would attend. The energy and ex-

citement was overwhelming. The Governor arrived with an entourage of armed guards. He listened intently as women took their turns sharing the impact that the weekend held for them. They shared what it meant to feel loved and to know that God is always there for them - even in prison.

Then it was the Governor's turn. He spoke eloquently, respectfully and with the love of one Christian to another. He stayed much longer than any of us expected, shaking hands and extending a word of encouragement and faith to all.

### Address Change:

**Charis of MN Inc.  
PO Box 581031  
Minneapolis, MN  
55458**

**As a reminder, DOC regulations state that there is to be NO written correspondence between offenders and volunteers. This could result in a volunteer being banned from the institutions.**

### Calling All Volunteers!

**Team applications are being taken for the upcoming Shakopee weekend, June 1-4, 2006. There will also be a weekend in November.**

**Please send applications to:**

**Maret Ryan,  
4737 Eastwood  
Road, Minnetonka,  
MN 55345**

## More good news!

In response to a Department of Corrections suggestion that we make substantive changes to our weekend retreat, Charis Board members and Charis volunteers have spent the last few months meeting, praying and strategizing about the future of the Charis weekend at MCF Shakopee. The institution's position was that we, as members of Charis, should determine what was core to our program and they invited us to come back to them with a proposal. Much of this need was driven because of the part-time chaplain's position at that facility and the additional workload our weekend put on her and the facility.

But God is so good, and worked through all the details. A full-time chaplain position has recently been filled and at a February meeting the prison asked that we not make those substantive changes to our weekend, and to instead add a second weekend to the year. With a backlog of over 100 women wanting to participate, we are more than happy to accommodate this need.

The first weekend will take place in June, with a second weekend to follow in November. Now the call is out for more volunteers. If you haven't been to Shakopee for a while, you will be amazed at the difference - women are coming with greater need of forgiveness and are taking the weekend much more seriously. Please consider working a weekend. An application can be downloaded at any time from the Charis website.

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**PERIODICALLY CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE AS WE BEGIN TO USE IT AS  
A COMMUNICATION TOOL - [WWW.CHARISMN.COM](http://WWW.CHARISMN.COM)**

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