

THE OLIVE BRANCH



CHARIS OF MINNESOTA INCORPORATED

A Message from the President

As I write this message, four weeks have just concluded with wonderful reports of God working in the hearts of many men and women, including team members. Please take the time to read each Lay Director's report in this issue of The Olive Branch.

There are so many things to be thankful for! I thank God for each one of you who share your talents, time and treasures with our incarcerated brothers and sisters. I'm thankful for each board member who also serves the Charis Ministry so faithfully. I'm thankful for the Chaplains and staff who support this Ministry. I'm thankful for the dedicated and faithful Clergy who serve us so well.

Since our last newsletter we've had another Board retreat, brainstorming and talking about issues and the future of the Charis Ministry. It's a work in progress; continue to pray for God's direction and leading.

Another challenge we continue to deal with is finding enough clergy for each weekend. I continue to help in the recruitment of clergy but, with my new responsibilities as President, time constraints have been an issue.

A committee has now been formed to bring forward nominations for new Board members for the next

term starting June 2007. Vice President Dean Allen is the Chairperson of that committee. If you have individuals, especially clergy (we don't have any ordained clergy on the Board) who you feel would be good Board candidates, please let Dean know.

Very shortly, we will be celebrating the good news of the birth of Jesus Christ! That is what this ministry is all about. I encourage each of us to keep that as the center of our activities and this ministry. Again, I thank you for your support and the work that you do through the Charis Ministry.

On behalf of the Charis Board, may you have a wonderful Thanksgiving, a Blessed Christmas and a joy-filled new year!

In His service,
Bob Olson

Charis Board Members:

President: Bob Olson

Vice President : Dean Allen

Treasurer: Bruce Kemper

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Chuck Odegaard

Steve Ricker

Satoru Sudoh

Loren Wolfe



Change of Address:

Charis has a new post office box. Please update your records. All correspondence should now be sent to:

**Charis of Minnesota
PO Box 102
Hopkins, MN 55343**

Inside this issue:

President's Message	1
Board of Directors	1
Sandstone Report	2
Faribault Report	2
Rochester Report	3
Shakopee Report	3
Board Action	4

FCI Sandstone: Jacki Warren

Over the past years the percentage of men returning to each weekend at Sandstone was high; new attendance was not. Concern was expressed that this Charis would be lower in attendance because many of the veterans had left the facility.

God was not concerned however. And we saw MANY new faces at Charis #41. God did a mighty work of changing hearts and lives. We, as the outside team, were blessed to be able to share and experience His grace.

Sitting back and watching it all happen was amazing: the table families coming together, the new guys receiving God's grace,

the realization of what God is really about, the veterans showing grace and mercy to the new guys — all becoming Jesus with skin on.

Every weekend has their miracles and this was no exception. Racial barriers were torn down and men confessed to how they had never before touched a person of another race, but now considered them brothers. We watched gang members soaking up the talks, and blessing us all with their witness.

The team was totally formed by God. When I gathered my list of names, I sat down with God to determine who He wanted. When people I wanted to have on the

team were not able to serve, God replaced them with people I came to know and care about, and I am so grateful for that. And God was so present in every joy-filled person who served. Each one on the team brought a spirit of joy and playfulness.

The reunion was full, with not an empty seat. Many of the men who came back shared their walks and the time they spent with Christ since the weekend.

The whole experience left me feeling that the angels were rejoicing — indeed, lives were changed. These words were resounding in my head, “Well done good and faithful servants!”

MCF Faribault: Dennis Pedersen

As I reflect on the weekend, I am amazed at how such a diverse group of people became so unified on this team. There was such an overwhelming feeling of cooperation and of supporting one another. There was a real sense of people, mature and comfortable in their faith, pulling together in the same direction.

God amazed us as we:

- Watched the weekenders turn their lives over more fully, or for the first time, to God.
- Heard the Assistant Warden remind the weekenders to take what they have learned and experienced in the Charis weekend and use it: in five minutes, in

five hours, in five months, and finally in five years — to recall those feelings and to remember how it worked for them and to use these tools to continue the change in their lives.

- Witnessed the Holy Spirit in action touching the hearts of so many during the Healing Service. It was very obvious the guys were touched by the healing words and prayers from the SD's.
- Observed the inside team responding so generously with their time and efforts, pitching in wherever needed, with a sincere heart for what was going on. It was motivating for the rest of the team to watch them take their role so seriously.

- Were inspired and comforted by the kindness exhibited by the offenders to one another. The “pushers” who helped the guys in wheelchairs get from their units to the Chapel and then back again. The prayer requests for each other's needs demonstrated a spirit of caring that was so real and showed the true hearts of the men.

- Reflect on the blessing of Chaplain Tony to the rest of the institution. He is a “Godsend” to the Charis community. With his attention to detail, he allowed us to avoid stumbling. His genuine love for God and for the offenders is demonstrated by the respect he is shown by all. We are grateful for his support.

FMC Rochester: Susan Vandenheuvel

I often describe the weekend as being similar to that of preparing for a great holiday meal. There is so much thought, planning and preparation that go into those meals and it seems that within minutes, it's over. It's the same for each Charis weekend. It was so wonderful to "sit" (I use that term loosely!) back and watch the Lord move during the weekend. We did everything we could do, in and of ourselves, and God did the rest.

We had 54 new men come through for the first time! What a praise report! It is such a blessing to watch these men change from Friday to Monday. God loves these men and uses this ministry

to change lives and mend broken hearts. Some of the testimonies that we heard were of how the Agape Dinner made them "feel like a human." Someone commented on how he was confused about "religion" but after Charis he now "knows who God is and what Jesus did for him."

The Scripture for the weekend was found in Luke 5:5. "But at Your word I will let down the (my) net." We all carry "nets" that are filled with hurts, disappointments, betrayal, anger, etc. We live in a cold world and these men are no exception to that. This team prayed that "nets" would be lowered and that these things would no longer be a burden to

these men. And, after having lowered them, they would find forgiveness, peace, joy, wholeness, and life. I think anyone who served on this weekend would say that God moved and these men are in fact now carrying a lighter load!

What a privilege to be used by God in this way. Charis #34 was made up of a great body of believers. Our Lord blessed me with four wonderful Spiritual Directors and 24 team members. Having said that, it's never about who served, who the Lay Director was, who gave what talk or who the Spiritual Director was. It's always and forever about Jesus Christ. Please continue to pray for these men.

MCF Shakopee: Mary Wolfe

Charis #28 at MCF Shakopee was the "best ever!" After months of prayer and preparation, the weekend arrived and our team went in ready and willing to serve our awesome God. Our scripture verse for the weekend was Jeremiah 33:3: "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things which you do not know." We called, God answered, and we saw great and mighty things all weekend long.

God was visible in many signs of our Christian Community in action. Some of these were:

- From the very beginning, the weekenders all showing a very caring nature for one another

- A very deep level of sharing at chapel time
- Women who never felt loved, knew they were loved
- Women who could not forgive, are now working on it
- The amount of one-on-one's with the S.D.'s (many)

We were blessed to have a new chaplain with us this weekend. After weeks of training, Chaplain David Berg started working full time at MCF Shakopee on Oct. 30th. With only a few days on the job, we came in to start our weekend. I am sure it was a bit overwhelming at times. He was very helpful and courteous. He was around whenever we needed him. He observed what we did, listened

to a talk, attended a Palanca send-off, was present at the Agape dinner, and spoke at the closing.

At the closing I was able to read a letter from Governor Tim Pawlenty who attended a weekend two years ago. He encouraged the women to "take the road that leads upward to a more rewarding life." He told them of a friend who had counseled, "When life shatters, God can put it back together, but you have to give Him all the pieces." His letter gave them encouragement and hope.

I thank God for this opportunity to have seen His love, grace, and mercy fill this weekend. What a mighty God we serve!

Your Charis Board in Action

The Charis manual has been revised! If you have any old manuals in your files, please throw them away. A team of four Board members met for one year to revise the manual to make it a more functional tool for the Lay Directors. No part of the manual was left untouched. Utilizing comments from past Lay Directors, the manual now offers practical information culled from the institution weekends and is organized in a more orderly fashion. Beginning with the Shakopee weekend last May, all teams are now using these manuals.

Day 1 Day 2 training materials are currently being revised. Team teachings and training tools have been added to make this a more useful tool for Lay Directors. We want to take advantage of this face-to-face opportunity to give our Lay Directors more practical training.

Board members met for a half-day to begin a planning process for the future of Charis. What are your hopes for this ministry? Are there any burning issues you would like the Board to discuss? Contact any one of us!

Communication continues to be a Board priority, and utilizing the website will be one tool we hope to use more. Please check it out often. You should find something new every month or so.

As always, there is a **GREAT NEED** for Spiritual Directors. Charis community members: Please work on recruiting your own clergy to serve in this very important ministry. The weekends will suffer unless we all do our part and **recruit, recruit, recruit!**

**CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE FOR THE LATEST INFORMATION ON
THE CHARIS MINISTRY - WWW.CHARISMN.COM
UPDATES COMING OFTEN!**

Here's our new address:

**Charis of Minnesota Incorporated
P.O. Box 102
Hopkins, MN 55343**

NEW!