

THE OLIVE BRANCH



CHARIS OF MINNESOTA INCORPORATED

A Message from the President

Henri J.M. Nouwen wrote, “Ministry is service in the name of the Lord. It is bringing the good news to the poor, proclaiming liberty to captives and new sight to the blind, setting the downtrodden free and announcing the Lord’s year of favor (Luke 4:18). Spirituality is attention to the life of the spirit in us; it is going out to the desert or up to the mountain to pray; it is standing before the Lord with open heart and open mind; it is crying out ‘Abba, Father.’ Hope prevents us from clinging to what we have and frees us to move away from the safe place and enter unknown and fearful territory. It is an act of discipleship in which we follow the hard road of Christ, who entered death with nothing but bare hope.”

The purpose of Charis of Minnesota is to present God’s reconciling love in Jesus Christ to inmates in correctional institutions and community correctional agencies in and near the State of Minnesota.

Reflecting on the weekend that just ended in Rochester, I was reminded of our call and commitment to Jesus Christ and

sharing “The Good News” with those around us. Seeing first-time team members out of their comfort zones but trusting God to guide them in this new adventure was a blessing. Experiencing forgiveness, healing, new or re-birth of the insiders during the weekend, was awesome! You have experienced it yourself; you know the routine.

As a Board, we have discussed the whole area of team formation, the balance between new and veterans, insuring that we don’t become exclusive serving on dual teams in the same year, and how to get new people involved. We all have a passion for this ministry, which is to be commended, but is this passion blocking the opportunity for others to share in this ministry?

If you were to ask individuals how they were introduced to Jesus Christ or how they became involved in church, a high percentage would respond that someone personally asked them. I have to believe the same is true with the Charis ministry. When was the last time you invited someone to get involved on a Charis weekend?

The vitality of the Charis ministry will continue as we allow Christ to direct and lead us. We will be having our third Board retreat on Saturday, May 19. Please uplift us with your prayers, that God may give us discernment and wisdom as we spend time together.

On behalf of the Charis Board, I thank you for sharing your talents, time and treasures and having a wonderful passion for this ministry. During this Lenten period, may we all reflect on the passion of Jesus Christ and celebrate a Living Lord on Easter Sunday!

Serving with you,
Bob Olson

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Team Selection: using all our volunteers

To better use volunteers, and to create a healthier environment where the Charis ministry can grow and flourish, the Board of Directors has spent time reflecting on fairness in team selection. Lay Directors are ultimately responsible for selecting their team, but are being asked to consider the following as they prayerfully discern:

- Are volunteers serving too frequently resulting in others not being able to serve? If a volunteer has already served on one weekend during the year, perhaps they should step aside and gracefully allow others the same opportunity to serve.
- Are volunteers needed for key leadership areas such as music, palanca, Spiritual Directors, etc? If not, please be open to new faces.
- Are volunteers willing and able to make the commitment? Does their record of volunteering demonstrate this monthly commitment? If it does not, then it is time for them to step aside.
- Are people being selected and assigned to areas for their training as future leaders? Or are we using the same people over and over again?
- Are you stepping out in faith believing that God is indeed calling the team or are you selecting only those people who are your closest associates?
- Are you making every effort to first use people who have sent in applications or called about team openings (especially if they are new to Charis)?
- Are you contacting all who applied and acknowledging their application?
- Are all team members aware that they are required to attend all team meetings as well as monthly reunions for the year following the weekend?
- Are you aggressively seeking new volunteers? Each team should have a balance between veterans and new volunteers. A suggested guideline is 70% veterans, 30% new volunteers. The long-term health of Charis depends on recruitment of new members.
- Do you have a balance of denominations – honoring what unites us and not what separates us? It is important to take care to insure that denominational practices do not become part of the Charis ministry.

This & That

Did you know team applications can be downloaded from the website?

Upcoming Weekends

MCF Shakopee
 April 19-22, 2007
 Lay Director: Lee Peterson
 Team roster has been filled.

FMC Rochester
 October 13-15, 2007
 Lay Director: Glenn Springer
 Team applications are now being accepted.

FCI Sandstone
 October 13-25, 2007
 Lay Director: Jerry Janiak
 Team applications are now being accepted.

MCF Faribault
 October 19-21, 2007
 Lay Director: TBD
 Team applications are now being accepted.

Board Nominations

Nominations are being taken for the Charis Board of Directors. The requirements are as follows:

- Honor the Charis guidelines and policies.
- Be willing and able to serve a three year term.
- Attend monthly meetings on the third Thursday of each month.
- Serve on a sub-committee as needed.
- Attend board retreats as scheduled.

An application and interview with the Charis Board will be part of the process. If interested, please call Dean Allen at 763-689-1244.

Rush City Needs More Help!

The dedicated group of volunteers that enter MCF Rush City each month can use more help!

Although there has not been a Charis weekend at this facility for over two years, a small group of volunteers enter the prison on the fourth Tuesday of each month. And each month the maximum number of insiders faithfully attends the reunion. This response from the insiders continues to be a witness to their thirst for God's word.

Only ten outside volunteers are allowed in each time. Please call Satoru Sudoh at 651-739-3050 if you are able to attend on a monthly basis, or even a semi-monthly basis.

Your efforts will be appreciated!

FMC Rochester: Curt Bocchi

I often get a chuckle when reading the reports of Charis weekends where the comment is, “It was the best weekend ever!” Upon reflecting on this, I believe the weekends are always the “best ever” because the experience of God’s grace is always fresh and renewing. It can become familiar to us but we will never have to worry that it will diminish in its impact or shine. How could it when it reveals God’s presence with us?

The Charis #35 at FMC Rochester was a grace filled weekend. Due to the zealous efforts of the insiders, 82 men signed up for the weekend. Over 30 of these experienced the weekend for the first time. For some it was a time to investigate what Charis is about. For others it was a desire to revisit the communion they had experienced during previous weekends. For all it was a time where they could experience fellowship in God’s love through song, worship, table discussions, skits, and highly personal and impressionable events like the Stations of the Cross, the Agape dinner, and the Forgiveness and Healing Service. During the closing more than one insider testified that the reason they had come to the weekend was to get a pal off their back and quit asking them to come. These comments were universally followed by an expression of how meaningful the weekend had been to them.

God often works just in time to meet our needs. This was

especially true for one of the first time weekenders. At the monthly reunion just three days after the weekend, he told team members that his father had died the day after the weekend and that it was the persistent joy he was experiencing that prevented him from falling into deep despair. Our hope is that the seeds planted with the weekenders will continue to be nurtured and to grow.

The experience of God’s grace is always fresh and renewing. It can become familiar to us but we will never have to worry that it will diminish in its impact or shine. How could it when it reveals God’s presence with us?

The verse for our weekend was Mark12:30: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” If there is a single comment I can make about the team, it is that they all showed their love for God and an enthusiasm to serve him.

Our team at FMC had 28 members, 9 of them new to Charis. I am amazed at the work of the Spirit in providing the boldness of faith and the accuracy that spoke to the needs of the insiders through the meditations, talks, and table discussions. All on the team

were instruments in showing God’s love and grace through their attention, words and actions.

Our team was richly blessed through the loving care of our 4th day community. I am grateful for the efforts of our team angel who prepared and served meals for us at our pre-weekend team meetings. During the weekend, we would return to the church each evening to review the day’s activities and prepare for the next day. Here we were surprised and welcomed by wonderful meals and treats in a relaxing atmosphere prepared for us by their 4th day community. These expressions of love exceeded our needs and served to reinvigorate us after long days.

During the Closing, Warden Anderson, Dr. Westrick, Chaplain Ricardo, Sister Emilie and Volunteer Coordinator Amy Burdick all spoke words of encouragement to the insiders. Rev. Jim Arends presented the closing message telling the weekenders not to be shy about being on their knees before God to ask for his help in whatever they are experiencing.

At the end, several visitors who had not witnessed the closing before had comments like: “It wasn’t as scary as I thought it would be” and “Now I’m wondering how I can be on a team.”

What’s left to say except: “This was the best weekend ever!”

Board Member Roles & Responsibilities:

President: Insures that the actions of the board remain true to the mission and vision of the Charis ministry. Sets the monthly agenda and leads the monthly meetings.

Vice President: Fills in for the president as needed.

Treasurer: Receives all donations, tracks weekend expenses, reimburses approved expenditures, and files all reports to the State and IRS.

Secretary: Keeps all the Board minutes, handles all correspondence, visits the post office box, receives and disburses applications, maintains the Charis archives.

Communication: Determines what information should be sent out to Charis volunteers and insures that the Olive Branch, the website and any additional materials are updated on a regular basis.

Director: Attends monthly meetings, works on sub-committees as needed.

Liaison: Coordinates the Charis program with the Institution, works with new Lay Directors, offers suggestions and guides them through the planning process for each weekend. Other duties include: provide Day 1, Day 2 training, present a monthly status report to the Board, attend monthly reunions, resolve any issues of inappropriate volunteer conduct.

Manual: Periodically reviews and updates all Charis training materials, including the manual and Day 1, Day 2 training.

Nominations: Seeks nominations for the Board.

Outreach: Promotes the Charis ministry to the outside Cursillo-type ministries.

Supply Coordinator: Purchases the general supplies needed for each weekend, keeps an inventory of these supplies, and maintains the storage facility.



Here's our address:

Charis of Minnesota Incorporated

P.O. Box 102

Hopkins, MN

