

# THE OLIVE BRANCH

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT, STEVE RICKER



As I write this article, Lenten and Easter seasons are nearing and I find myself eager to see springtime arrive. The new life, spring rains and warmth will be a welcome renewal for me as it seems this year's snowy and long winter is becoming a "desert" experience.

I am reminded of the prayer of the Holy Spirit used before our weekend talks. "Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your spirit and we shall be created and you shall renew the face of the earth." Yes, the spring time, Lenten season, the Holy Spirit, and Easter season will surely renew my spirits, but what about the Charis Ministry?

A new weekend in Waseca Federal Prison which houses over 1000 women is scheduled for October. This means we will hold four Charis retreats in October at four different Minnesota prisons. We currently hold a total of seven weekend retreats per year and this could increase to nine for 2012. I am wondering how God will provide enough leaders, clergy, musicians, and team members. Is there anyone you're feeling called to invite to serve with Charis?

We have five members of the Charis Board up for election annually in June. Currently we will for sure have two members leaving the Board and three will hopefully run for another term. If anyone is feeling called to serve, please contact me over the next few months for further information. Elections are in June.

One of our Board members, Gail Weems has been diagnosed with terminal cancer and we as a Board are praying for her. She has served many years of dedicated service with Charis and we miss her at recent Board meetings. Please keep Gail and her family in your prayers.

Janet Leck will be leaving the Board this year after serving two terms. We give thanks for Janet and all she has given to Charis. Will God continue to have Janet coordinate supplies or will it be someone new? Yes, you need not be on the Board to help with supporting Charis in areas of website, communications, supplies, manuals, and more. Interested in helping? Please contact us.

We continue to struggle with having bi-lingual English/Spanish team members so we can do a better job of ministering to those inmates who only speak Spanish. If a Spanish weekend were possible, I am wondering how we would find enough Spanish speaking Charis members. The population of Spanish speaking inmates is often close to 33% of Federal institution population. The Waseca prison has a large Spanish speaking population and the women are thirsting for programming. A Charis Spanish coordinator would be a great help for weekend leaders...just a thought. Know anyone you could invite to Charis with the bi-lingual gift?

The African American population in the prisons is significantly higher than the numbers of those on our teams. We could use more minority team members to more effectively relate the Love of Christ, but then God's will still seems to be getting done. I am wondering how God will provide for our needs or has He already provided?

Financially, God continues to provide for our needs through your donations; however, we do spend more annually than we receive. We have no plans this year to do another fundraiser and thank all for your past and continued generous giving. Your financial gifts are always welcome.

In closing, I wish all a blessed Easter and may you be renewed in the Spirit with the coming of spring.

## The Charis Board Needs You!

Nominations are now being taken for the Charis Board elections with new terms beginning July 1. The following is asked of each candidate:

- Honor the Charis guidelines and policies
- Commit 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



An application and interview with the Charis Board will be part of the process. Please contact Steve Ricker at rekcir7@hotmail.com if you are interested in serving.

### Why Are Team Meetings So Important?

Everything we do in Charis starts with, and builds on, a sense of trust. From that first step we take by saying yes to serving on a team, we are trusting in God to mold us and fashion us into the team He needs for the weekend. The team meetings help us learn about each other, learn from each other, and then learn that we can indeed rely on each other throughout the weekend. It's at the team meetings where the Spirit of the weekend takes hold.

It then makes it possible for the weekend to develop and flow. We know who we are, we know whose we are and we come to know that we can count on each other. It's the same model we use on the weekend: we assign weekenders to table families in order to develop a sense of community and learn to trust in a small group. From that initial trust weekenders can learn to trust others and most importantly to trust God.

God designed us for community, to walk together with other disciples. We hold true to that same model as we build the team—coming together to celebrate what unites us, putting aside our differences and making ready to do the work that is necessary. We come together to share what has been heard (discovery), discern where God is in our lives (spirituality), and to take responsibility for our own spiritual journey (action) as we build the foundation for the weekend. At the beginning of a team preparation, we may start out as a group of strangers, but as the team meetings progress, this group of strangers grows in its ability to trust and share, and by the start of the weekend, if we fully participate, each team member deeply feels that they are a special part of a family. And that is why so often we hear from the weekenders that they are just sure we have all been friends for years and must go to the same church. How else could we be so close?

It's the Charis method carried out through the teachings and role modeling of Make a Friend, Be a Friend, and Bring a Friend to Christ.

And this is why your attendance at each and every team meeting is so important.

Excerpted from the Charis training materials.

## Back to the Future FCI Waseca

Maret Ryan

### A LITTLE HISTORY:

Way back in 1997 the first Charis weekend was held at FCI Waseca, with Daryl Sandberg serving as the first lay director. At that time the prison was a medium level men's facility, with inmates coming from across the country to spend time in Minnesota's pastoral farmland. Charis held 12 retreats at Waseca until 2004 when changes were made to the federal system regarding volunteer programming.

Beginning in 2005 The Bureau of Prisons instituted significant changes governing the number of volunteers allowed to enter the prison. Citing security issues, it was determined that ten was the maximum number of volunteers that could enter the prison at one given time for any program. With that decision, the Charis retreats at Waseca ended.

### A CONTINUING PRESENCE:

What many people may not realize is that over these past few years, at which time no weekends were held, a handful of Charis volunteers faithfully entered the prison once a month and continued to hold monthly reunions. Most importantly they continued to keep the Charis name alive at Waseca. These volunteers often times felt that their actions were futile and during some low points even wondered if Charis should continue being a presence in this prison. Because there were no yearly retreats, eventually the number of inmates attending each month started to decline. After a few years, even the number of volunteers started to decline, but throughout all this a handful of faithful volunteers kept making the trek to Waseca.

Also during this time the Charis Board had frequent discussions about whether Charis should continue

being a presence in this prison—but the final answer always came back to this: 'Let's keep the door open.' It was felt that if we left the prison, we would never get a chance to come back.

But during all these years something else was happening.... a special something called prayer .... and with that faithful prayer, a spirit of hope. The Charis Board never gave up hope that one day God would open the doors of Waseca. And many, many other people also lived with that hope, and sent their prayers to the One Who Hears Everything. *For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord.*

GOD IS ONCE AGAIN  
CALLING US.

SEND YOUR PRAYERS!

JOIN THE TEAM!

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE!

### BACK TO THE FUTURE:

In December of 2010 the Waseca chaplain contacted a Charis Board member with the good news that the prison would like to again see Charis weekends being held. Big changes have once again come to the prison population—it's no longer a men's prison. The prison is now serving all women, again from around the country, and programming is a priority. This upcoming weekend will be a full 3-1/2 day experience, complete with all the elements that Charis holds dear. The weekend date is set for October 7-10, 2011. Team meeting dates are set for 8/27, 9/10 and 9/24 to be held at Colonial Church of Edina, with Maret Ryan the Lay Director.

Since this is the first time back in so many years, we are asking for experienced, wise, mature volunteers to serve on this team. If you are interested in letting your light shine at Waseca please send your team application to [MaretRyan@gmail.com](mailto:MaretRyan@gmail.com).

*Let your light shine  
before others that they may see your good works and  
glorify your Father in Heaven. Mt. 5:16*

**Return Address:**

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**CHARIS OF MINNESOTA INCORPORATED**

Charis Weekends:  
coming soon to a prison near you

**FMC Rochester**  
October 7-10, 2011

**FCI Waseca**  
October 7-10, 2011  
Maret Ryan, Lay Director

**MCF Faribault**  
October 14-16, 2011  
Dan Hartinger, Lay Director

**MCF Shakopee**  
October 20-23, 2011

CHARIS #43, ROCHESTER FMC, FEBRUARY 18 -21, 2011  
Laura Ricker – Lay Director

The community room was full with 47 “wonderful, nearly perfect” new brothers, who spent the weekend in fellowship and basking in God’s agape love. The team of 26 insiders and 26 outsiders, (a blessed balance!), gave their hands and feet to be Christ with skin on for four days. The table families remained engaged in long discussions after each talk, and posters were merely a visual aide to summarize heart-felt sharing. The inside table leaders were trained at a team meeting and took ownership of their role. We were able to introduce Chaplain Rice, new to Rochester in December 2010, to the Charis ministry. All of us, both inside and out, agree that we were flooded with God’s grace as we were formed into a new Charis community.