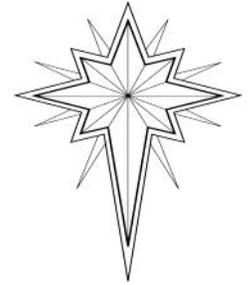


# THE OLIVE BRANCH



## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT:

### CLIFF JOHNSON

#### Charis is a Joyous Season!

There's not a lot of joy in prison. That thought occurred to me recently as I participated in the Grand Reunion at MCF Faribault.

As our team and the 48 weekenders were re-united three weeks after Charis #9, there clearly was joy in the room as we celebrated 11 baptisms, seven talks, group singing and small group discussion. I felt privileged to be part of "the joy team," even though our time together lasted only for a day.

Joy has been on my mind, and heart, as we approach this Advent and Christmas season. Joy is the second fruit of the spirit and it's one of the marvelous gifts that Charis brings to the dark corridors and cells of Minnesota's prisons and to the hearts of Minnesota prison inmates.

Experiencing joy requires some effort and nurture on our part. Joy is available every day of our lives, but too often we get bogged down in tedium and worry and we miss opportunities to experience and pass along joy.

At our reunion, Karin shared that she felt joy when she woke up following her back surgery. Jerry told the men that it's a joy for him and the rest of the team to come into the prison. I (and many others in the room) had tears of joy as we watched 11 men kneel and be baptized.

I've heard myself saying more than once in recent years that the three best days of my year are always the three days I spend in prison helping to present a Charis weekend. I'm sure that sounds mighty weird to a lot of people, but it's true because of the joy that always fills my heart during a Charis experience. Praise God!

If you haven't been on a Charis team for a while, maybe it's time to sign up for a prison near you. I guarantee that you'll find joy there. Bringing joy into a prison is a rare and privileged gift. Thanks be to God.

#### Message From a Mom

*I just want to thank you and ask God to bless your ministry. My son, a tall red head, was part of your weekend meeting and he just called me all excited about the chance to fellowship. I told him before he accepted the plea bargain that God had a purpose for him going through this miserable experience and that we may never know why this has happened to him. It was enough to get him through the night. We love him very much and are thankful you shared time with him this weekend. Praise God. Thank you, Mary*

#### Remember Charis in Year-end Giving

Does Charis make a difference in the lives of prison inmates? Based on responses at Charis closing services, Charis definitely brings about spiritual growth and commitment. Recently, Charis received a different kind of response that speaks volumes about the impact the ministry had on one individual.

On the second day of Charis #9 at MCF-Faribault, one of the 48 men participating in the weekend approached one of the team leaders with a rather urgent question, "Is it possible for me to donate money to Charis?" Not sure of Charis policy, several team members discussed the request and later advised the man that there was no policy or reason he couldn't make a donation and then provided him with the Charis post office box address.

A few days after the close of the weekend, a check arrived at the post office box for the maximum-size gift allowed by the Minnesota Department of Corrections. Based on the going wage of prison jobs, it was truly a generous gift.

As you approach end-of-year giving decisions, please consider making a donation to Charis of Minnesota. We continue to need financial support for supply storage, printing, large-print bibles, crosses, retreat supplies, Prisoner to Prisoner devotionals, and more.

Make checks payable to: Charis of Minnesota Inc. and mail to: P.O. Box 102, Hopkins, MN 55343.

Right from the beginning Charis weekend #2 belonged entirely to the Lord. I was very reluctant to accept the lay director position until the day I read the II Corinthians verse where Jesus says, "My Grace is sufficient, for my power is made perfect in weakness." So it seemed to me to right there and then that I needed to belong entirely to the Lord. There were good prayer warriors who started covering me and the weekend in prayer. That was invaluable. A number of Waseca #1 team members agreed to be on the team but it took until May to find a musician and until July to find the third spiritual director. By then one of the assistant lay directors had backed out and needed to be replaced. The last team member was added in early August and I thought it completed the team.

After our final team meeting it felt that all was in place for the weekend. Leadership was planning to select 42 women as weekenders at our September monthly reunion but for reasons beyond our control, 52 women had been sent acceptance letters! What to do? Should we add an eighth table or increase the number of people at each table? Well, the Lord had everything figured out because we then lost three team members! Thankfully, two people had been trained and were standing by as back-ups. Again, the Lord provided and once again it felt like the team was set.



But as it turned out, once again that was not the case. Another team member dropped off the team on the very first night. And again, because the Lord provides, one of the spiritual directors agreed to also serve as a table leader. (He is our Good Shepherd, we shall not be in want - how true is that?)

Fifty-two women arrived on Friday evening. Four people on the list did not show up, but four others came in their place, and said they also had acceptance letters. Again the Lord provided and I truly believe these four were supposed to be there. We learned that while there was a lot of excitement to sign up for Charis and anticipation for it to begin, there was also a lot of spiritual warfare as the women were being led to not come back the next day. But again the Lord provided and the women did attend and praise God not one dropped off

Another way that I knew the weekend was all under the Lord's control was from the talks. Yes, I did assign talks, but the sharing and the witnessing from each talk was truly amazing. One team member spoke of a blind friend and how he came to be humbled by this friend, and ended up asking, "So which one of us was really blind?" And the Christ Among Us talk was given by someone who had another talk prepared and had to grow and stretch to prepare this talk. Again the talk so fit the speaker and it was so meaningful that I knew the Lord had ordained it. The Christian Community talk - given by a male - included a blanket apology to the women for any and all abuse suffered at the hand of a male. A huge impact! Without exception they were all like this. The Purpose talk was given on the first evening and it included a powerful witness of forgiveness which had a huge impact on all. At the closing, one woman shared that because of this talk she was now finally able to get past the male abuse she had suffered and was now ready to begin the process toward healing.

New this year was an inside Palanca team, filled with 11 women who were SO excited to be picked and their enthusiasm was evident all weekend. They truly were prayer warriors and very willing workers. They tirelessly made flowers for the serenade, decorated the envelopes for Palanca notes, helped with Stations, Agape dinner, Prayer is a Dangerous Thing, were angels to each speaker, and they prayed heart-fully. We were truly blessed to have them.

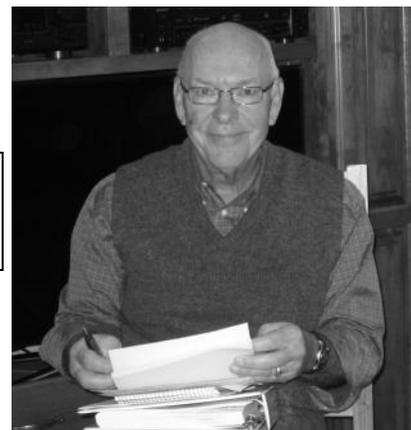
Chaplain Longanecker was with us the whole weekend and he showed his comfort level with us when he picked up his guitar and joined the musicians for a few songs. He also spent time ministering to team members.

A highlight for me was during the few minutes we had for fellowship after the closing. A weekender said thanks for giving her three days of feeling like she was out of prison. Yes indeed, the Lord our Shepherd, provided us with a weekend full of all we needed!

## Board of Directors Retreat



Pictured at left are Carol Anderson and Paul Tesarek, Directors and liaisons to FMC Rochester



Pictured at right is Charis President Cliff Johnson who is also liaison to MCF Faribault.



Pictured at left are Directors Barb Dickie, liaison to MCF Shakopee and Rev. Darlene Stensby.

One function of the Board of Directors is to hold annual retreats to discuss pressing issues facing the Charis ministry as well as to vision for the future. Allowing extra time in a retreat-type setting allows Board members the time to really dig into a topic. On November 10, twelve Board members came together at the home of Board member Shirley Boeser to discuss a variety of topics including the Act of Remembrance, talk revisions and spiritual counseling. Board members walked away from the morning feeling that they had enough time to fully discuss each topic and come to consensus as a group.



Pictured above are Directors Paul Tesarek, Dan Hartinger and Vice President, Maret Ryan.



Pictured above are Directors Karen Troyer and Maria Thielke, MCF Shakopee Liaison.

The manual committee presented revised versions of all 13 talks and came away from the retreat with refreshed energy and enough direction to complete their task. Changes to the model for the Act of Remembrance were discussed, with Board members satisfied they now have a ritual in place that is truly Biblical in nature without embracing any one theology. One-on-one spiritual counseling was also discussed with Directors emphasizing the valuable experience this provides on a weekend but noting the need for more guidelines in this area. Mentoring for new Spiritual Directors was also discussed and agreed upon.

**Return Address:**

**Charis of Minnesota Incorporated**

**P.O. Box 102**

**Hopkins, MN 55343**



**CHARIS OF MINNESOTA INCORPORATED**

**HELP WANTED: PALANCA COORDINATOR**

The Palanca Coordinator is retiring and would love to see someone take her place for this worthwhile endeavor. The main role of this position is to solicit Palanca for all the Charis weekends as well as send our Palanca to other 3-day weekends throughout the year.



Getting Palanca from other Cursillo-type weekends is relatively easy and is handled on-line by registering our weekends on a website. Palanca can be sent directly to liaisons, so the work becomes a snap! In addition, when you receive a request from other weekends, you will then forward our Palanca to them. Liaisons are responsible for creating Palanca from each prison, and will forward this to you.

Skills needed: access to a computer, some Microsoft Word/PDF experience, and a love for the Charis ministry. No need to attend any meetings—no need to live in the twin cities. This can all be handled via computer. Training would be provided. Time commitment is 1-2 hours per month, with a little more time spent just before Charis weekends.

Would you be an angel and give this volunteer opportunity some thought?

Contact Cliff Johnson at [cliffjohnson1@mac.com](mailto:cliffjohnson1@mac.com) to offer your services!