

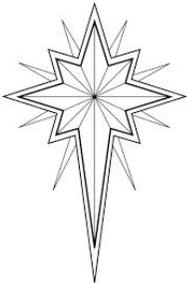


CHARIS OF MINNESOTA INCORPORATED

# The Olive Branch



**Charis President:  
Cliff Johnson**



**Our Mission:**

**Presenting  
God's  
reconciling love  
in Jesus Christ  
to inmates in  
correctional  
institutions in  
Minnesota**

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

### Shining the light of Jesus in our prisons

It was quite an October for Charis of Minnesota!

We staged four weekends during the month: MCF-Faribault (men), FCI-Waseca (women), FMC-Rochester (men) and MCF-Shakopee (women). You can read highlights of the weekends in this newsletter.

I was given the gift of leading Charis #10 at MCF-Faribault and the experience was one of the high points of my journey with Jesus.

Once every eight months, it's my turn to deliver the homily at MCF-Stillwater to the 50 men who attend Sunday worship there. My turn came the Sunday following the Faribault weekend and I was still filled with the Holy Spirit. Unlike previous homilies, I decided not to write this homily until after the Faribault weekend.

I told the Stillwater men stories from the weekend and described how the Holy Spirit touched men's hearts, enabling them to open up to each other, to trust each oth-

er, and to talk about their deepest feelings, hurts and hopes.

Of the dozen or so homilies I've given at Stillwater over the years, I can't ever recall having 100% attention during the entire talk. The take-home message for me was a statement in one of our Charis weekend talk outlines -- that deep down, every human being has a need to be known, accepted, needed, wanted and loved.

What has me still shaking my head in wonder is how 48 strangers can show up the morning of Day One of a Charis weekend, nervous, scared and skeptical, and by the end of Day Three they're full of joy, they're shedding tears with each other, and they appear as life-long friends.

Charis weekends continue to shine the bright light and love of Jesus Christ into Minnesota's dark and depressing prisons. That is good news. Thanks be to God!

Incidentally, my involvement at MCF-Stillwater is as

a member of a Colonial Church worship team. Since Stillwater is a Level IV security prison, limiting visitors to a maximum of 10 volunteers at one time, we are unable to stage a Charis weekend there due to the size of our teams (25-30 volunteers).



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, weekend supplies, Prisoner to Prisoner devotionals, and much more.

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

Thank you for your generosity.

## Surely the Lord Was in this Place

**Just as the wise men, we follow the star— wherever it leads — because we know that’s where we will find Jesus. Whether it’s to the rolling farmlands of southern Minnesota or the forests of northern Minnesota, we know, with certainty, we will find Jesus.**

**Charis #10 MCF Faribault**  
Cliff Johnson, LD

Charis weekends always fill me with a feeling of awe. I watch and listen to offenders talk and laugh at the closing service and shake my head in wonderment: Are these the same 47 men who entered the room so tentatively and skeptically just three days earlier? How could they have been transformed so completely and profoundly in just three days? I can only rejoice that I was given the gift of being part of God’s team that helped to help make it happen.

I was struck by three strengths of the Charis method during Charis #10.

Teams love unconditionally. It’s only by asking for this gift, and submitting ourselves to God to be his instruments of grace, that we are able to truly love this way.

The Charis model works. We simply need to trust the method, to follow the outline, to work the plan. It’s always tempting to try something new, to innovate, to experiment, but when we simply execute God’s plan, the amazing transformation of human hearts happens.

Forgiveness is the key. The instruction to write that forgiveness list sounds crazy and implausible at first, and in just hours, that list grows to become the most important document men and women ever write. And then, when that list is dropped at the foot of the cross, a miracle happens, and a new life begins.

**Charis #48 FMC Rochester**  
Polly Olson, LD

This time when I was asked to be a Lay Director the timing was perfect. After saying “no” to being a lay leader four times in the past, God had a clear path for me to lead. It was an honor and privilege to lead the team and watch the wonderful progression of the men opening up and knowing the real love of the Lord.

The Chaplain informed us that Charis would be restricted to max of 60 inmates, including inside team. Our prayers were answered with the smaller group of men because it allowed us to not be rushed and made it easier to manage the break times and movement between the community room and chapel. Most of all, the men were bonding together and building that community inside the walls.

During the healing service, as men went forward to drop the forgiveness slips, one inmate in a wheelchair was determined to go forward so we cleared chairs out of the way so he could drop it in himself. After, as he wheeled to the back of the room, tears were rolling down his face with a smile a mile wide he said, “Thank you, Jesus.”

At the closing, one man stated that he had not been in a chapel or church ever before and now he will be attending the chapel and Charis events. The Chaplain says that happens after every weekend. Praise God, it was the best weekend ever.

**Charis #3 FCI Waseca**  
Karen Troyer, LD

After a year-long absence, having only attended a couple of ultreyas during that period, I was touched by the dramatic difference at FCI Waseca—the inside 4th Day community has depth and experience that is having an impact on their environment. The waiting list was as long as the final roster!

Thanks to meticulous planning and a year of prayer, we find community at Waseca strengthened and maturing. The chaplain was accommodating and helpful, and when possible, he joined our musicians on the piano or guitar. He helped facilitate our “burning bucket” and made a video that was shown to the sisters at the Monday morning chapel time and then allowed us to post it on the Charis Facebook page. His participation was a gift.

52 women completed the weekend. The chaplain allowed us to accept or turn away any persistent latecomers. After filling in vacancies from the wait list, three additional seekers each came back one more time and were invited to join us, and in each case, experienced transformation and healing. The depth of experience on our team allowed the weekenders to reach a place of trust on our first evening together, when extra time allowed our newly-acquainted table families to spend 30 minutes in prayer before the women were released. These new sisters in Christ blessed our socks off!



## Closest Moments from MCF Shakopee

Each Closing on a Charis weekend demonstrates the deep feelings experienced by the weekenders. Here is taste of Charis #41 at MCF Shakopee..

“Up until today, my motto has been ‘be invisible’ - I wear my hair long so I can hide behind it. I borrow baggy clothes from other inmates so I can hide. I’m leaving here in four weeks and I have no family. I have a child, in a college in a different country, and I can’t go there because I’m a felon. After today, I do have a family. And on Wednesday I have a hair appointment. Maybe I’ll get bangs.”

“Thank you Lord for this beautiful place I am spending my time in.”

Inmate looking at the audience, “I see smiles. Jesus is smiling back at me. I see smiles. I get it.”

“First time I was able to share my story, and I found kind and loving people loving me.”

“Pastor Rosemary says, ‘Clean up as you go’ - no one is judging me.”

“I found peace in the middle of my storm.”

“If the Spirit touches you, you can’t run fast enough.”

“Jesus has been in me all along and I didn’t know it.”

“Why would they do all this?”

“I don’t have family in the state of Minnesota. I do today.”

“I cried more in the past three days than I have in the past five years.”

“Thank you for reminding me that my childhood was not my fault.”

“There are many angels among us all. I am leaving with a family.”

“I was tired of judging myself. I know He will help me stop judging.”

“I am back now on the ladder to Heaven and I promise to reach back to help another one.”



## Why We Do What We Do

This letter was received from a grateful inmate and it speaks so eloquently as to why we do what we do.

### What a Privilege to Get to Attend Charis!

To All Charis Christians, Thank you for letting God use you to lead me to salvation and acceptance because the Holy Spirit knew that (I would).

I’ve always, all my life, studied people intently—a habit. And because of your actions and words, I could see what you all had was real, not put on. You guys led me to the door and then, due to a lady’s testimony, she opened the door for me.

Now for the first time in my life, starting on February 19, 2012, I feel accepted, just as I am. Now for the first time I feel loved. I lived an existence for 71 years, now I have life. I had no family, now I have brothers and sisters that

**My body is in prison, but my spirit is free. Now I know I have a purpose for life.**

come to visit every two weeks. Praise God.

I came from extreme poverty to far more wealth and power than you can believe. But now, for the first time

ever, I am truly happy, content, and excited daily because you all introduced me to my Father God, my Savior Jesus and the Holy Spirit who lives in my heart. My body is in prison, but my spirit is free. Now I know I have a purpose for life. And all because you Charis Christians prayed relentlessly for souls to be saved at that retreat meeting.

I’m writing to encourage you all in your God-given purpose driven life. God sent you all as if I were the only one to accept Him.

God bless you all and the Charis program. Thank you all so much for the example you set for everybody.

Signed, an inmate

**BECAUSE YOU CARE**  
*many have turned to the Lord*

**BECAUSE YOU CARE**  
*many have hope renewed*

**BECAUSE YOU CARE**  
*families are strengthened*

**BECAUSE YOU CARE**  
*you have made a difference*

**BECAUSE HE CARED**  
*you care*

Charis of Minnesota Incorporated  
PO Box 102  
Hopkins, MN 55343



**Charis Grand Reunion coming next spring. Watch for details!**

## **We are Thankful!**

### **Meeting With the DOC**

Charis Board President Cliff Johnson and board member Rev. David Hibbison presented the Charis story to Minnesota Department of Corrections Commissioner Tom Roy in October. Also attending the meeting were DOC Assistant Commissioner John King and DOC Deputy Commissioner Terry Carlson.

“We were pleased to discover that Commissioners King and Carlson had a strong familiarity with the Charis program and are very supportive of Charis,” Johnson said. “Commissioner Roy wasn’t as familiar with Charis, but he asked questions and all three DOC officials thanked us for the Charis ministry and congratulated all Charis volunteers for their service.”

The DOC officials were particularly interested in Hibbison’s re-entry ministry (New Life in Christ) and said the DOC is working to strengthen its re-entry programs.

### **Hosanna**

by Lori Kemper

Months ago I invited our Hosanna Outreach Pastor, Tim Hatt, to a Charis retreat closing in the hopes that I would be able to persuade Hosanna to support the Charis ministry. He is hard to pin down since he travels the world regularly on behalf of many outreach ministries. On the way to Rochester, I spent time giving Tim a complete overview of the Charis program and method.

On our drive home, he shared with me that our Charis program is exactly what ministries need to be doing. He elaborated that he was impressed with the deep level of volunteer commitment and with the time we spend - the year-long commitment, the training, and the team meetings. He was most touched by the weekender comments and as he listened I heard him whisper, “Wow.” I believe he even had tears in his eyes at one point. He told me he was able to see that lives were changed with Christ, and that healing and forgiveness are a major component of Charis. He emphasized that these are the kinds of ministries Hosanna wants to support.

I am happy to report that Pastor Tim has given his approval and commitment that Hosanna will officially support Charis and in addition, he recommended that I apply for a Charis Affiliated partnership with Hosanna, which I have already completed! This means they will provide meeting space as requested by a Hosanna member AND they will put Charis and a link to Charis on Hosanna’s website! (There is no financial support from Hosanna). He indicated this will direct people interested in volunteering, to our link. Tim said he wants us to feel both his and Hosanna’s support for what we are doing. Thank you Tim and thank you Jesus.