



CHARIS OF MINNESOTA INCORPORATED

# The Olive Branch

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



**Charis President:  
Maret Ryan**



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

Dear Friends:  
Recently I was reading a blog, based on Psalm 71, titled Growing Old God's Way. The blogger talked about how our work for God really doesn't have an 'end' time. The author went on to write about how to prepare for old age citing the fact that you will be then what you are becoming now. If you are not becoming a person of faith now, you will not be a person of faith then. If you are a negative, grumpy person now, you will not be a positive cheerful person then. If you aren't developing a walk with God now, you won't have one then.

The bottom line of this blog seemed to be this:  
**God's way to grow old is to develop a walk with Him now.**

It's no secret many of our volunteers have been around a number of years—and Charis wouldn't be the ministry it is today without their dedication and commitment. Three things in the blog struck me because they seemed to epitomize our Charis volunteers and their faith-filled walk over the years.

**A person needs to develop a deep knowledge of God.**

Psalm 71 is permeated with a deep personal understanding and practical knowledge of the Lord God. The psalmist knew God as His refuge and righteous Savior. He realized that God delivered and restored him. God was the source of his comfort in his trial. His testimony was filled with praise for God's glory and righteousness.

Like the psalmist, YOU all know God. It is obvious from your walk you have known Him for years. It did not take a blind leap of faith for you to demonstrate how much you all know God in a personal, practical, proven way.

**A person needs to glorify the Godly habits of trust, praise and hope.**

A habit is developed by frequent repetition over a period of time. Once it's in place, a habit becomes almost involuntary. The habits we develop in our younger years tend to take us further in that direction as we grow older. Friends, you have the habits of trust (71:14), praise (71:6) and hope (71:14).

**A person needs to develop a lifestyle of ministry for God.**

The psalmist could have kicked back and said, "I deserve the rest. I've done my share, let the younger ones take over." Where in the Bible do we find a magical retirement age?

As Christians we never earn the right to do what we want with our own time. We never have the right to live selfishly. We are continually called to reach out to others, out of our bounty and with joy.

You, our Charis volunteers are living examples of praise and trust and hope - and you show the inside community that as long as a person has breath and life, they can sing and tell of the greatness of God to the next generation.

It is such an honor to serve alongside all of you and I hope we are all called to do so for many, many years.

In this season of giving and receiving, I can't think of any more special gift than the one you all give, so unselfishly, year in and year out.

May God bless you all!

Merry  
Christmas.  
Maret



## Reflections on a Weekend: Charis #11 at MCF Faribault

### A Roller Coaster Ride

by Kristin Ploetz, Lay Director

My experience as lay director of Charis #11 at Faribault was a bit like riding a roller coaster. There was excitement and anticipation of what was to come and all that God would have in store for the team and the men we serve. There was also fear as things progressed and we faced difficulties and the downhill ride, not sure when we would "hit bottom" before we headed back up again. Of course, as a new and first time lay director I was sure I had the perfect plan (*insert snicker here*). We were praying that God would prepare us for a 'big haul' as we became fishers of men so I began planning for a large team. Knowing there would be the inevitable attrition that comes with unforeseen changes to people's lives and schedule, I decided I would begin early to build the team larger than would be needed. What I wasn't expecting, was just how much attrition we would experience and the flexibility required to ensure we kept the focus on God and on the men we would serve. What started out as an over-sized team of 31, and a target team size of 28, slowly dwindled down to 24, with the last person resigning from team just two weeks before the weekend. Twenty-four team members is the minimum we could have in order to serve the most number of weekenders allowed to participate.

When team members began to drop off the team for one reason or another, I felt a little like Gideon may have felt as God was "right sizing" the army for what we were about to do. After much prayer and some doubt, one message came to me very clearly. The team would succeed in delivering God's message because of what God was preparing to do through His power and not because we would have a large team or "extra" helping hands to serve during the weekend. God crafted the exact body of Christ that was needed for this group of men, for this weekend, and for His message. Praise God it was the best weekend ever!

We were blessed to have 48 men sign up and attend the weekend. We had veteran spiritual directors who despite serving on their "umpteenth" team, still managed to show up with great expectations and provided the weekenders with fresh, new and enthusiastic messages with each talk, meditation and sermon.

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### Best Three Days of My Year

By Cliff Johnson, Team Member

I've thought a lot about why I am drawn to prison ministry. I've been serving on Kairos and Charis weekends since the early 1980s. My latest was Charis #11 at MCF Faribault in early October.

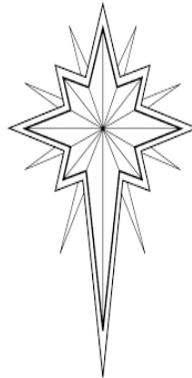
I don't have a personal story of brokenness – of hitting rock bottom and being restored – that so resonates with prison inmates. What I've concluded is that God has given me, for whatever reason, a spirit of acceptance and of being non-judgmental.

I sat at the Self-Control table with six offenders. They shared their stories in bits and pieces over our three days together. They were heart-breaking stories. J getting kicked out of his home at age 7. G losing his mother and father last year while he was in prison. E's concern for his kids as his wife serves her sentence at MCF-Shakopee. T's heart-wrenching anguish over whether to begin following Jesus and reject his street gang.

I am always in awe of how the Holy Spirit touches and transforms hearts through so many different moments and experiences on a Charis weekend. One of my guys said "the words of that song just stabbed my heart and made me realize what I had to do with my life." During a rare downtime on Day 2, I sat at my table with another of our guys and listened to him describe how his life got derailed and how he let his family down. We each had tears streaking down our faces as we held hands in prayer.

Our daily chapel visits were times of powerful sharing and prayer. I thought as the eight of us took turns holding the cross and speaking that maybe this was the first time ever that some of these men had opened their hearts and allowed themselves to be vulnerable and cry in public. The pathos and beauty of watching one offender reach down to pull a tissue out of a box and hand it to his brother can't really be described with words.

About five years ago I realized that my three days each fall serving on a Charis team are the best three days of my year. Although there's still a little time left of this year, I think I'll be able to make the same statement on New Year's Eve as I look back on 2014.



## God Never Stops Calling You: Janet Leck

When I was asked to serve as lay director at MCF Shakopee, my first reaction was to say, "No! I'm too old. My life of service is over. I'm in the November/December stage of life." And then I realized that perhaps I was saying no too quickly so I began keeping a journal to help me with the decision.

And then a friend brought me words from Scripture, Psalms 71:18, "Even when I am old and grey, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, Your might to all who are to come." As we read the scripture that day, we discovered that there is no mandatory retirement in God's work. We prayed and cried (surely a sign of the Holy Spirit).

Following this, I prayed, read Scripture and devotionals, seeking an answer. I came across this prayer by E. Stanley Jones:

### A PRAYER FOR THE JOURNEY

O Christ, do not give me tasks equal to my powers, but give me powers equal to my tasks. For I want to be stretched by things too great for me. I want to grow through the greatness of my tasks, but I shall need your help for the growing.

I was so busy protecting myself and searching for excuses that I wasn't even stopping to consider that this leadership request was from God. I slowly realized that it was His call, and I had to rely on His Promises to me; His enabling Grace to do His will.

Leadership is an opportunity for Spirit-filled people to serve on this roller coaster of life. My prayer became, "Lord lead me to be a leader, teach me to be a teacher, help me to be a helper, and bless me to be a blessing."

The Sunday sermon in the center of my decision-making process was titled: "The Joy of the Lord is Your Strength." Nehemiah 8:10 burst into my heart. Yes, Lord, I will answer your call, with your enabling strength, not mine. We'll take this task on together.

As the weekend preparations got more difficult and challenging, I leaned so much on the Holy Spirit's wisdom and my friends in Christ. Yes, frustrated, but also stretched, I learned new things. I grew more humble, more patient, and I spent more time in conversation with God.

God chose the team. The first 20 people I called were not available, so the ones who served were God's choice. And because of all the prayers, God sent us weekenders eager to hear His words to them through our JOY TEAM.

We all grew in His Grace with reverence and joy. I was stretched and I grew stronger in my faith in God's faithfulness and was so blessed.

Say "YES!" the next time God calls you to be blessed to be a blessing — no matter what your age.



**Coming soon ... to a prison near you!**

**Four Charis weekends scheduled for President's weekend in February 2015.**

**Looking for an inspirational 3-day weekend away from the hustle and bustle of the busy world?**

**This is your opportunity to relax and enjoy fine company and dining.**

**Both FCI Sandstone and FMC Rochester will be celebrating their 50th weekend!**

**Go to [www.charismn.com](http://www.charismn.com) and download your application today.**

**Lay directors are standing by to take your call! Reservations are going fast!**

**Hurry, call today.**

**This opportunity won't last.**

Charis of Minnesota Incorporated  
PO Box 102  
Hopkins, MN 55343



*Charis needs you—every single one of you . Yes, I am talking to you!  
In February there will be four Charis weekends which means teams need to be filled. Lay directors are waiting for a call from you. The inside communities need the gift of hope that only God can bring through you!*

### **A Roller Coaster Ride (continued from Page 2)**

The closing ceremony was full of smiles, laughter, tears and heartfelt responses to what God gave them in those three days. The Warden attended and professed his Christian faith, support and encouragement for the men to continue on the path and share what they learned. Below are some of the standout details we heard:

“Thank you God, for letting me forget where I was for a while and realize I can be free no matter where I am.”

“I have been in a gang and I am in one here at Faribault. I know that is risky to say, because the warden is sitting right there. Last night, I went back to my unit and told the leader that I am out. I can no longer be in the gang. God wants me to follow Him and that’s what I am doing.”

“I came here searching; searching for answers, for truth. I have been involved in many different things (religious pursuits) including Buddhism and cults. I found the truth here and I give my life to Christ.”

*Update: We learned in weeks to follow, this man stood up for his beliefs, and denounced his involvement to the group he had been with (Wiccan) and said, “My life belongs to Christ.” This is a bold step and decree in a place where such a statement can invite criticism and trouble. Praise God!*

“...we came here on Friday morning, like the walking dead. Our hearts were dead, our minds were dulled. We found hope, love, joy, peace, understanding and grace. We leave here men who are fully alive because of Christ and what He did to save us.”