



CHARIS of MINNESOTA INCORPORATED

The Olive Branch

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT: First we pray; then we plan



**Charis President:
Maret Ryan**

What an outstanding year it has been for the Charis ministry! While we continue to have our usual struggles—will we have enough team members, where can we find more musicians, and please God, would You send us more spiritual directors—our ministry seems stronger than ever. And here’s why:

Our leadership is solid, with a core group of board members who don’t hesitate to tackle the hard issues facing the Charis ministry. We have committed volunteers who spend countless hours in the prisons and do it because the light of God is shining through and in them.

And speaking of board members, I am so grateful that, in unity and with great enthusiasm, they agreed to participate in 40 days of prayer for the Charis ministry. When we ended the prayer journey, we realized that God whispered the same messages into each board director’s ears. These whispers from God during our prayer journey have led us to five main themes for the future.

The first thing that was made clear is that we as a board need to **Make Prayer a Priority**. Certainly prayer is an important part of every activity, but we want to now

ensure that we intentionally pause to listen to God. Following His lead will be our number one goal for the coming year. Our prayer journey also taught us to pray boldly and with confidence—but it all starts with first listening to God.

The second message we all heard was that **Recruiting and Marketing** needs to be part of everything we do. Strengthening our base and engaging our volunteers is a key issue. Every action we take going forward as a ministry must contain a recruiting component. In fact, each board member has now been tasked with the duty of “recruiting”—it’s too big a job for just one person. And as we increase our marketing efforts, our hope is that new volunteers will come forward.

The third message that came through loud and clear is to **Strengthen Charis Inside the Prisons**. Our ministry is based on relationships and it’s in the prisons where these begin. Our Charis weekends will remain our main focus because that is where the transformation of the heart begins. We stand on the shoulders of so many dedicated volunteers who have gone before us, and we treasure the vision they all had. We know with certain-

ty that God has used Charis inside the prisons to make lasting and permanent changes to so many. And this also means strengthening our relationship with prison staff and officials.

We also feel that God is calling us to **Expand Charis Outside the Prison**. This is a tricky area because of the DOC and BOP rules prohibiting any contact with offenders after release. However, that may soon be changing, but only at the State level. Read more on page 3 about an exciting opportunity that has recently opened up for Charis.

Collaboration and Outreach is the fifth main theme that came out of our prayer journey. “Iron sharpens iron” and there are many great ministries and organizations who work with offenders. We certainly don’t want to reinvent the wheel, nor do we want to take away from the work we do inside the prisons, but we want to be open to God’s leading in this area. Getting to know who else is out there and what they do will help us guide the offenders after release.

What an exciting time for Charis—I hope you all will be part of the journey.

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

Six Places We Need Your Help

by Cliff Johnson



1. Prayer

In many articles of this type, prayer is often listed last, kind of as an afterthought. So, here it is listed first. Please pray for the Charis board, for the fall weekends at three prisons, for the weekenders, for the team meetings, for safe travel of team members, for strength, wisdom and compassion for team members, for the prison chaplains and administrative staffs and especially for God's protection of the Charis ministry.

2. Help in Re-Entry

Both the DOC (state) and the BOP (federal) are stepping up efforts to help ex-offenders re-enter society "on the outside." The Charis board is considering how Charis might become more involved in re-entry. If you feel led to help in re-entry programs, there may be assignments and tasks that need your help.

3. Serving on a Team

Some teams fill fast, while other teams head to prisons in need of a few more team members. Contact us if you are interested in serving on a future Charis team at one of the five Minnesota prisons (Sandstone, Rochester, Waseca, Shakopee and Faribault). Especially needed are musicians and spiritual directors.

4. Personalized Palanca

Palanca is introduced by a spiritual director during the fourth talk of a Charis weekend (You Are Not Alone). On most weekends, the SD presents a half dozen palanca posters/letters that are personalized for that specific weekend. Too often, palanca contributions are sparse, or somewhat generic and not personalized with the prison name and weekend #. If you and your women's/men's group, renewal group or Sunday School class could prepare a single-sheet palanca poster/letter, it would be much valued and appreciated. You can find Charis weekend dates on the Charis website (charismn.com).

5. Recruit Younger Team Members

There's nothing wrong with Charis team members who have lived to their sixth, seventh or eighth decade. Often they're still filled with the Holy Spirit and have wisdom to spare. But at some point, Charis of Minnesota is going to need to recruit some younger (i.e., ages 30-50) men and women. We encourage you to talk about Charis to some younger believers and light a spark of interest in serving Christ in Minnesota's prisons. Send us some names!

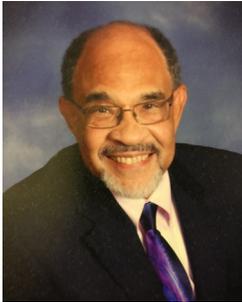
Several additional categories of team members in short supply are Hispanic and African-American men and women, as well as ex-offenders who are cleared to re-enter the prison system. If you know any team candidates who might be interested in serving on a Charis team, please let us know.

6. Charis Weekend on the "Outside"

A requirement for serving on a Charis team has always been completion of a Cursillo-type weekend. Since there are fewer and fewer Cursillo-type weekends offered in Minnesota, the Charis board is considering staging a Charis weekend "on the outside" for possible future team members. Contact us if you have an interest in serving on an outside Charis team.

If you have comments on, or an interest in any of these six ideas, contact: maretryan@gmail.com

Meet the New Board Members: We thank you for your service.



Frank Wells has worked many weekends over the years at Sandstone, Shakopee, Faribault and Waseca. He has served in every position from lay director to musician. Frank is also active in his church and with FreedomWorks. A gift he brings to the board is his strong interpersonal communication and listening skills.



Li Petersen has served on the past three teams at Faribault and is currently serving as an assistant lay director for the October weekend. One of the gifts she brings to the board is a passion for encouraging people to take responsibility for personal growth and development. She has pursued Elijah House training in inner spiritual healing and is also a prayer minister.



Laura Ricker first served in 2000 on a Waseca men's weekend. Since then she has served on several Rochester weekends, including serving as a lay director. She is currently active at Waseca as well as in her community. A gift she brings to the board is a strong desire for recruiting and collaboration with other like-minded groups.



Rev. Dee Moore has been active in Charis for over 30 years, serving primarily in women's prisons. She has also served at Rochester and Rush City. Currently she is active at Waseca. The gifts she brings to the board include her relationship and journey with God, her seminary education, clinical pastoral education and work as a hospital chaplain. She is a gifted and wise spiritual director.

Our New Adventure

by **Maret Ryan**

It started out as a simple invitation by an ex-offender—come and hear me speak at a monthly support group. From there, it turned into a journey that had surprising results. That evening the board members not only heard a powerful message by a person determined to heal, but they also learned of a workshop for mentor training being offered through the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC).

And that's where the whole thing became a new adventure for the Charis ministry. Three board members attended the mentor training workshop, and while there, were able to meet the DOC Re-entry Director and the Re-entry Coordinator. It is there that they first asked, "Would it ever be possible for Charis to minister outside, as well as inside, the prison?" In response to that question, DOC Re-entry Coordinator, Lee Buckley, attended a Charis Board meeting, and then a few more meetings were held. Going through the channels took a while, but approval was sealed when the Shakopee Warden signed off on the venture. Charis of Minnesota is pleased to announce the start of a monthly outside support group (ultreya) for women ex-offenders. God also opened one more door when Rev. Randy Romsdahl of St. James Lutheran Church in Crystal offered his church community as a partner.

In September Charis Connects will host the first outside fellowship for women offering encouragement, support and help on the journey to their new life. Volunteers have come forward to lead this new venture, all of whom have attended special training. This is a pilot program, meaning contact outside this meeting is NOT allowed, but it is a great first step. And it's one more thing to keep in your prayers.

CHARIS CONNECTS

A ministry of Charis of Minnesota & St. James Lutheran Church in Crystal

Unsure of your next steps?
We will walk beside you.



Join us for a fellowship for women offering encouragement, support and help on the journey to your new life.

3rd Tuesday of Each Month
St. James Lutheran Church in Crystal
6700 46th Place North
Fellowship Hall • Lower Level

Each Fellowship Includes:

- Dinner from 6-6:30 pm
- Program 6:30-8:30 pm
- Spiritual Guidance & Prayer Support
- Other Resources as Available

"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer..."
Romans 12:12

Contact:
612-910-1124 • Charisconnects@gmail.com

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We added up the numbers and here's what we found: Charis volunteers have donated at least 109,633 hours in the past five years to prison ministry. This translates into a value of over \$2.7 million. Thank you volunteers for your loving and generous hearts!

Be a Prayer Warrior for Charis

Chaplain Dan Pulju of FCI Sandstone recently remarked that the only reason Charis is in the prisons today is because of prayer. Prayer got us into the prisons in the first place, and it is prayer that is keeping us there.

We stand now on the shoulders of those who went before us, those who stepped out in faith and prayerfully answered God's call. Mark Batterson is his book Draw the Circle, wrote that "When we hit our knees, we pick a fight with the enemy. And the enemy will fight back He has no jurisdiction in our lives if we are covered by the blood of Jesus, but we also need a prayer covering."

Just as Moses needed a prayer covering—and people to hold up his arms—we who serve in Charis need that same prayer support. We need people who will hold this ministry in prayer, day after day, praying specifically for Charis with intensity and consistency, asking for God's protection and leading in all we do. Will you be that person? If you answer yes, there will be no forms to fill out, and no place to sign up—you simply make a commitment to pray daily for the Charis ministry.

Thank you for being a blessing!

Help break the chains



**Serve on a Charis weekend.
Team members
urgently needed!**

**Download a team application
at www.charismn.com**