



CHARIS of MINNESOTA INCORPORATED

The Olive Branch

PRESIDENT’S LETTER: Embracing Change



**Charis President:
Maret Ryan**

Change is inevitable and it is happening all around us. In our families—with each new birth, death, illness, job change, marriage, new home—comes change and with it, new challenges. Just as we must adapt to change in our own lives, so must Charis be ready to adapt to the changes and challenges ahead. The good news is this: **“While the world may change; our God does not.” Hebrews 13:8**

Changes are occurring in our prisons as well. FCI Sandstone has two new chaplains on board and a new warden coming soon. FCI Waseca has replaced the entire executive staff, from Warden on down and a new chaplain is coming soon. This prison has not allowed a Charis weekend since 2014 which has impacted both volunteers and inside attendance. FMC Rochester has seen a dramatic reduction in the number of inmates due to early release, which has impacted attendance at the monthly reunions.

To meet the challenges facing our ministry, the Charis Board set five new goals to work on over the next year.

As a result of this planning, financial procedures have

been strengthened. The Board is committed to being wise stewards of our limited funds, but with fewer weekends our donations are down. Fortunately we were able to cut costs to offset this decrease in funding. New treasurer, Laura Ricker, brings a wealth of knowledge and energy to this position.

Our goal of strengthening relationships with the Bureau of Prisons and Department of Corrections can be met by becoming better volunteers at each prison and educating our own Charis volunteers on the issues facing offenders after release. A list of resources has been placed on the website to help us better understand the prison population and how we can help reduce recidivism.

A new Speaker’s Bureau is planned whose job it will be to spread the good news about the Charis ministry. Materials and talks are being developed. Now all we need is an audience. Contact us if your church or organization would like to host a professional speaking team on the transforming power of God in the prisons and the complex issues facing offenders.

Hosting our own Charis weekend on the outside is

planned for 2017. We hope to fill the weekend with friends and families of Overcomers, as well as new volunteers interested in serving in the prisons. In addition, a gathering of the Charis community is tentatively planned for this year. Please watch for more information in the days ahead.

Prayer remains the single-most important priority of Charis. The Board is committed to ensuring that every meeting, every weekend, and every team formation is bathed in prayer. It is only because of prayer that Charis was first allowed in the prisons and it is only through prayer that we will continue there.

Increased collaboration with other like-minded ministries is also a priority. As Vice President, Karen Troyer, stated: “We share front row seats with several hardworking ministries that impact lives in the prisons alongside us. Using our combined efforts, God is filling the empty places with His love and salvation. We need to be aware of who these ministries are and leverage our best efforts to expand God’s reach in/out of the prisons.” Please pray for God’s blessing on any group that works with Overcomers.

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



Pillar of the Charis Community: Janet Leck by Karen Troyer



Janet Leck has been a friend and mentor since our first meeting in 1986. She prepared the flowers for our wedding and for many others, as well as sharing countless hours as a volunteer, a prayer warrior, and a sister in Christ. Many of us in the Charis community have served alongside Janet and her late husband D'Arcy on weekends at Sandstone, Shakopee, Faribault and Waseca since the early 1980s. She is a trusted and wise friend—a Proverbs 31 woman—and one of the oldest women I know :) She inspires me daily. I met with Janet on June 2nd in her Edina home.

D'Arcy and Janet Leck attended their first Cursillo weekend, an Episcopal Cursillo, in 1979. They were part of a group that would organize the first Lutheran Cursillo community in Minnesota, later renamed Via de Cristo, which held its first weekend in 1980 with a list of 300 waiting to participate. It felt like a time of revival in the church and the Lecks were leaders in the movement. In 1985, with D'Arcy's encouragement, Janet joined the Kairos Community inside Sandstone Federal Prison. She and D'Arcy served in the Palanca Chapels and Rollo Rooms at Sandstone, Rush City, Faribault and

Shakopee—at least one, sometimes two weekends every year—until D'Arcy's death in 2002. Janet has continued to serve inside on a regular basis, adding Waseca to her resume in 2012. She was Lay Director of Shakopee Charis #43 in 2014 when she was 83—one for the Charis record books.

When I asked Janet for a few highlights from all those weekends, she recalled being a witness to the presence of the Holy Spirit in many small and large ways. Watching two known enemies end up at the same table, and reconcile over the course of 3 days; to observe a change of heart, in the eyes and the tears and smiles, and to see that change take root in the Word, and with prayer and fellowship, become the promise and hope for new life; to experience God's love overtake a weekend and change the atmosphere to one of forgiveness and compassion and JOY—when even the guards notice!

“But the best is being part of the Charis family. My Charis friends are my family. They are my closest and dearest friends. When we come together on the inside, with those brothers and sisters, and we pray and sing and watch God change lives, we are all part of a divine bond. Christ is our mutual love and respect and all are welcome and encouraged to join us in the family of God. It is such a blessing to watch relationships begin on the weekends—old and young praying together, 20+ year renewal groups begin there, new seekers joining in and then getting out. Men and women, praying and crying and laughing and praising God together. The Holy Spirit is present when we come together in Jesus' Name.

“The Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners.”
Isaiah 61:1

“D'Arcy and I were called to prison ministry and we recognized the call in Isaiah 61:1, ‘...the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners.’ Those words were meant for us. Prison is a wonderful place for couples to minister together. It is not for everyone, but for those called to Charis, God reveals Himself in the miracle of changed lives. And I will forever praise and thank Him for calling me to this ministry.

“I am thankful for God's many blessings, large and small, that are signs of His awesome love for me. And I will continue to pray that Charis will thrive and keep changing lives for Christ. Most churches don't teach the basics of Christianity anymore. That's what Charis does and the Cursillo method is a blessing for both the church and the unchurched. The Cursillo energized our faith and the call to action and community brought us into prison. I am so grateful.

“For myself, I would ask for prayers for renewed health. I have recently had heart and lung issues and I am using oxygen to assist my breathing. Please pray that the pacemaker and new meds will help me to regain my strength and that I will no longer need oxygen. Thank you to all the great prayer warriors in my Charis family!”

Charis Team Participates in Race for Second Chances



Team Charis: (L to R) Carol Anderson, Maret Ryan, Renee Dixon, John Ryan, Donna Richardson, Karen Troyer Gail Estling, Elisabeth Swanson, Jan Jabs, John Troyer and (in front) Violet Johnson.

Charis volunteers, sporting hats donated for the event, came out in force for the inaugural 5K Race for Second Chances held on May 1 sponsored by Prison Fellowship, the Department of Corrections and the Second Prison Project.



Many Charis Board members participated, including director Don May who even recruited five family members. Also racing on Team Charis were many *Overcomers*, the term we use to describe our Charis alumni. Races were also held simultaneously in three Minnesota prisons.

The purpose of the event was to raise awareness of the people who, having paid their debt to society, are still trapped in a second prison of legal and social barriers. Join us next year for an even larger Charis presence.



Walking in Fellowship on the Outside

Charis Connects is the Department of Corrections approved outside ministry formed last September in partnership with the community of St. James Lutheran Church in Crystal. The group is open to any women released from prison who desires to walk in fellowship with a strong Christian community. The group meets monthly and is steadily building a sense of trust and hopefulness.

Most of the women who attend Charis Connects are released from prison with very limited financial resources. Their primary focus is first getting a job and then hopefully finding a place to live. They face difficulties and discouragement in each of these areas because of their past. The best way we in Charis Connects help them is by offering friendship and encouragement. Another way we help is by providing a few personal care items to stretch their very limited financial resources.

The Charis community is full of generous and caring people—which is why we are asking for your continued help. Would you consider asking your church group, work group, women’s group or prayer and share group to donate personal care products? This simple small step will provide unexpected encouragement. A list of needed items in on the Charis website. Please pray about it and contact Karen Troyer at 612-910-1124 or email her at charisconnects@gmail.com.

The Volunteer Creed

by Tom Krause

Though my troubles and my worries
Are sometimes all that I can see —
Still I always must remember
Life’s not only about me.

Other souls are also hurting
And I know it’s a Higher Power’s plan
To reach out to help another —
To extend to them my hand.

With this purpose as my focus,
To be a comfort to a friend
All my troubles and my worries,
Seem to fade out in the end.

It is one of God’s true lessons
How my walk is meant to be.
True happiness I find when
Life’s not only about me.

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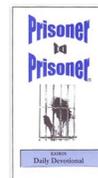
Charis was recently invited to participate in the Transition Fair at MCF Shakopee. This fair is open to inmates who are within 15 months of release and it is a place for them to gather information about resources that could help them transition to their life on the outside. We were pleased to be able to offer information about Charis Connects. We had a great response from the attendees and also were able to connect with other like-hearted ministries. It was a great day.



Warden Paul presenting the Volunteer of the Year Award to Maret Ryan in appreciation for outstanding volunteer service.

Volunteer of the Year Maret Ryan

Congratulations to Maret Ryan who was presented the Volunteer of the Year award at FCI Waseca on April 13, 2016. Maret first began volunteering in this prison in 1998. She was also the first lay director to serve on the Charis women's weekend held there in 2011. Many changes have occurred at FCI Waseca over the past 18 months with an entirely new executive team in place, from the Warden on down. Hopefully a new chaplain will soon be joining them. Please keep this prison in your prayers.



PRISONER
to
PRISONER

"Prisoner to Prisoner" is a daily devotional written and edited **BY** prisoners and **FOR** prisoners. For many years, Charis has been blessed to provide these devotionals to the five prisons in which we are active—and where we are told they are quickly snapped up by the inmates. We are looking for individuals to help defray the cost of these devotionals *could you be that person?* If yes, please send a donation to Charis MN, PO Box 102, Hopkins, MN 55343.

May God bless your generous hearts!