



Remember Me

Winter 2020

"A National Catholic Outreach supporting the spiritual lives and rehabilitation of prisoners."

Someone at the Gate: Bill Gaertner 2020 St. Dismas Award Recipient

As a former college basketball coach, Bill Gaertner had seen his share of contests won and lost on the court. More importantly, he helped young adults strive to reach their full potential as student athletes. Over a career that spanned 15 years, Bill made an impact on the lives of others.

Today, he continues to make an impact by helping ex-offenders rebuild their lives through Gatekeepers – the nonprofit he founded in Hagerstown, MD in 2014. He personally conducts inside-the-walls programs at several facilities and, outside the walls, Gatekeepers meets released inmates at the gate and provides them with immediate and long-term resources.

Re-entry seminars are presently being held at the Washington County Detention Center, the Federal Penitentiary in Cumberland, and state correctional facilities in Hagerstown. Mentors help ex-offenders navigate the critical first few weeks after each one is released. Program participants are then exposed to Gatekeepers Business of Living Program that is a combination of learning and doing to prepare and equip each person for positive growth and success.

Bill knows well the challenges of being "outside" and trying to start anew after spending time in prison. Following a series of events that led to his incarceration at the age of 61, he had hit rock bottom. "During the first five months at a jail facility, I was trying to kill myself," he explained. But, a letter from his friend, Ed Ionni, changed all that. He had a renewed purpose. "One guy turned my life around. Eddie was the shining light. I thought 'if I ever get it going, I'm going to do that for other people,'" said Bill. Through rediscovering his Catholic faith, meditation, and encouragement from friends, Bill was determined to help others.

"Jumping back into my faith, I never realized what it meant to perform the spiritual and corporal works of mercy – to realize what it means to be Catholic," he said, adding that it took sitting in the rat-infested, third story of a penitentiary to reflect on his life.



St. Dismas Award Artwork

Sitting alone in his cell, Bill focused on a hole in the wall that held his gaze while he meditated. "I can still see it in my mind," he said. "Prison was an ugly place that had more beauty than I ever imagined. It was there that positive things started to happen for me."

From an early age, he struggled with alcohol addiction. "I didn't really know who I was. Now, every day, I wake up and have a purpose. And, I say, 'Jesus, I trust in you.' I pray, I think, and I laugh. I'm still in recovery. I'm aware of this every day, but I am doing as much as I can for other people in honor of those I've hurt," said Bill.

Throughout his coaching years, and then partnering with a few IT companies, Bill made a lot of business contacts. "I didn't realize there were people with whom I

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From the Director

Dear Friends,

This year, Dismas Ministry is celebrating 20 years of serving our brothers and sisters behind bars. Over the past two decades, the vision for this ministry has remained the same. It is, quite simply, to deliver free Catholic resources to the imprisoned. And, together, we have.

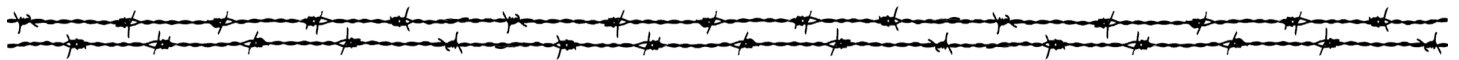
In founding Dismas Ministry, Ron Zeilinger responded to the call from prisoners yearning for Catholic bibles, prayers, and resources to allow for a deeper study and understanding of the faith. Through Ron's own strong faith in action, this special ministry was born. From those very early days to the present, Dismas Ministry has been blessed with support from many people along the way.

As we celebrate "20 in 2020," I wish to recognize every staff member, volunteer, board member, vendor, and benefactor – both past and present – who have contributed to our shared ministry. It is said that "many hands make light work" and this is true. It is through our collective hearts and hands that we have made a difference. In 2020, we celebrate each of you, and thank you for sharing your many gifts.

Through your continued prayerful and financial support, you give hope to those in need of God's love and mercy. Thank you for keeping us on course these last 20 years, and walking with us as we go forth.

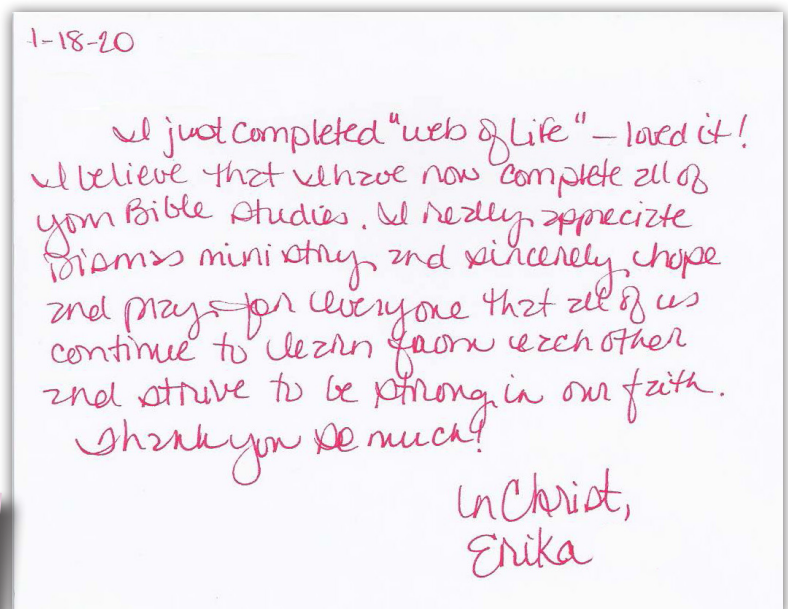
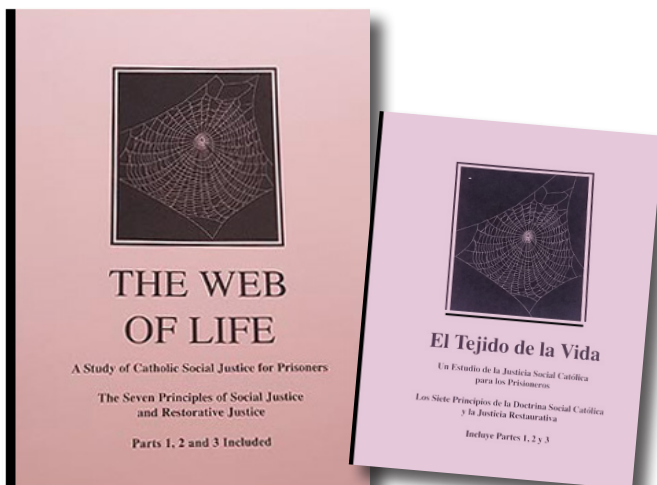
With gratitude,

Ms. Tyler Curtis
Executive Director



This is a very special letter we received from a prisoner who took part in *The Web of Life* study course – a correspondence course for prisoners on Catholic social teaching and restorative justice.

Please consider a donation today, and sponsor a prisoner's enrollment in this course. Visit:
www.dismasministry.org.



Dismas Ministry offers four unique study courses for prisoners. All are available in both English and Spanish. Learn more at www.dismasministry.org/shop.

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can use my tools,” said Bill, of his life after prison. “I didn’t realize there were so many people in this world working with people on the margins.”

With limited resources at Gatekeepers, Bill shared that they need people helping people. “I work with people coming out of prison and addiction houses. Anyone coming out of prison has mental health issues, because it’s so rampant. Each person feels so alone, which is why we need someone at the gate,” he added. To recover from anything, there is a spiritual component that is necessary for success. And, it takes time, love, and forgiveness.



The resource club (pictured above) at Gatekeepers typically hosts small groups of 8 to 12 people who meet on a regular basis to talk about job searching and career goals. (This photo courtesy of Gatekeepers.)

“We’ve given each of them a platform. I’m so lucky to do this, and the key is to convince each person that it works and ‘you must allow us to coach you.’ As a young coach, I learned this,” said Bill.

No matter what, Bill encourages this approach when seeing or working with ex-offenders: “Don’t judge others whose sins are different than yours.”

In prison, everyone called him ‘coach.’ Formerly on the sidelines, but now at the gate, Bill continues to encourage and help others achieve their goals in life.

Congratulations to Bill Gaertner on being named the 2020 St. Dismas Award recipient. This award will be presented by Deacon Seigfried Presberry, a representative of the Dismas Ministry Board of Directors, on March 26, in Baltimore, MD.

New Year, New Decade, New Offices

Dismas Ministry has relocated its operations to the campus of Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee, WI. The move to the university coincides with the start of Dismas Ministry’s 20th anniversary.



CARDINAL
STRITCH
UNIVERSITY

Cardinal Stritch University began as a teaching institution for the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi in 1937. Today, Stritch offers more than 60 undergraduate and graduate degree programs that help students develop new skills, gain career-related experience, and build professional networks.

The work of Dismas Ministry is done by a very small, dedicated team, and the organization’s presence on campus is an opportunity to engage more volunteers, especially students.

“We are blessed to work alongside those who live in the Franciscan tradition. Our missions find common ground as we live and share the Gospel message of peace and justice for everyone – especially the poor and marginalized,” said Tyler Curtis, executive director of Dismas Ministry. “This is a new chapter for the ministry, and our team is energized by the collaboration that is already taking place on campus.”

In recognition of the **Feast of St. Dismas, March 25**, please join us in a day of prayer. The Board of Directors, staff, and volunteers will pray in solidarity on this day – for you and those we serve.

Please send your prayer intentions to:
prayers@dismasministry.org





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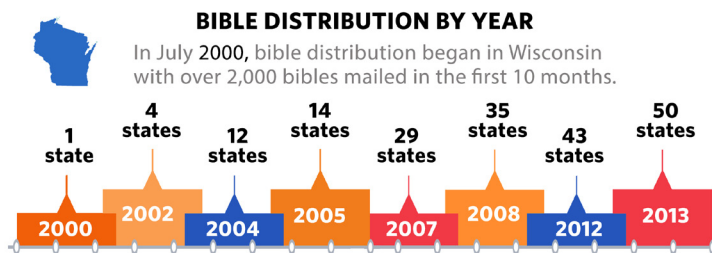
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Join Us in Celebrating 20 in 2020

This year, Dismas Ministry is celebrating 20 years of serving our brothers and sisters behind bars. We invite you to celebrate our 20th anniversary with us. Please stay connected by checking our website, and watching for updates through email and social media. And, learn the ways you can get involved in helping us celebrate 20 in 2020!



In 2013, Dismas Ministry expanded its distribution services to all 50 states!



Your support of our mission has made a difference in the lives of many people. Please visit our website, www.dismasministry.org/20in2020, and see how, together, we have made an impact.

Would you consider a gift of just \$20 a month throughout 2020?

Your recurring gift of \$20 will provide four bibles to prisoners each month. Your gift will truly make a difference for those we serve.

Visit www.dismasministry.org/20in2020.

Thank you for your support!