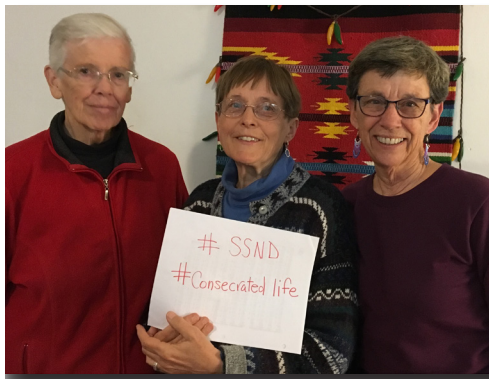




“A National Catholic Outreach supporting the spiritual lives and rehabilitation of prisoners.”

Ministry on the Margins By Karen Heuberger

For Sr. Lucy Nigh, SSND, there are no barriers to ministering at the U.S.-Mexico border. She lives 10 blocks from “the wall” that divides Douglas, AZ from Agua Prieta in Mexico. From there, she is able to cross the border and help in a migrant resource center with a shelter.



Sr. Lucy Nigh (center)

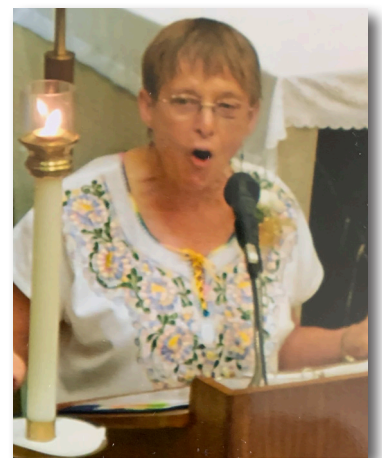
She has lived in Douglas for the past 10 years, since her religious congregation, the School Sisters of Notre Dame, formed a community there to be advocates on issues of immigration. Sr. Lucy is a volunteer, not a paid employee, and fully supported by her community. Since July 2015, she has been a member of the Dismas Ministry board of directors.

Soon after she began her ministry at the border, volunteers were needed to help prepare prisoners for the Sacrament of Confirmation at the Arizona State Prison Complex nearby. It had never occurred to her to do prison ministry. But because she had helped with high school Confirmation retreats and had been a hospital chaplain in Wisconsin, she thought she could help. She is now the coordinator of Catholic outreach to the four units of the complex, which only housed men. In December 2019, a unit reopened for women due to overcrowding at another facility.

Most volunteers go into prisons to conduct communion services. Because her group started as RCIA preparation for prisoners, Sr. Lucy’s experience in the system has always been in a class format. Once a month she attends Mass, which may draw attendance from a lot of prisoners, but her classes are smaller and for those who want to learn and share.

She goes in weekly with other volunteers (women always have to have a partner when they go in to minister), and is present for an hour with one unit. Then they go into a different unit for another session on the same night, which could be a faith- or bible-study class. She was hoping to do an intensive RCIA in one of the units when the pandemic hit, and the program has been temporarily shut down.

“In prison, the men have to come to grips with their reality, who they are, and the decisions they’ve made. We all share about our own life journeys,” she said. “It has strengthened my own relationship with God in dealing with the ups and downs in my life, and it’s a real blessing to be invited into their lives.” ...continued on page 4



In-Kind Donations

Thank you for thinking of Dismas Ministry when considering where to make in-kind donations. Unfortunately, at this time, we are unable to accept books, publications, prayer cards, artwork, and rosaries. Please consider offering these items to other organizations in your local community.

Thank you!

From the Director

Dear Friends,

It is May. It is springtime. The trees are budding, and the early season's flowers are making their debut. These are signs of a new season, a new chapter. These are signs of life.

Yet, here we are caught in the middle of a global health crisis. COVID-19 has impacted every person in the world. It has changed our everyday lives. In this season of rebirth, and of new life, it is a paradoxical moment in time. Together, we grieve countless losses and, most importantly, those who have died from this pandemic. There is more than enough sadness, fear and uncertainty for all of us right now.

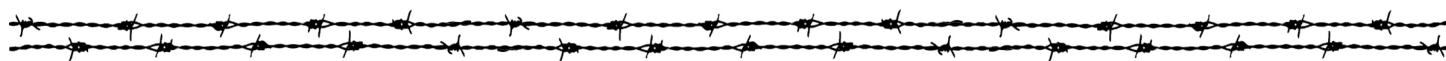
The pandemic has changed everything, except perhaps an unwavering faith. And, for some, the tumult of this time may even strengthen that faith.

In times like this, I think of Mary, Our Mother. We honor Mary, the one whose own faith saw her through times of uncertainty and pain and loss. Mary stands for faith, hope and love in the best of times and, right now, in the most trying of times.

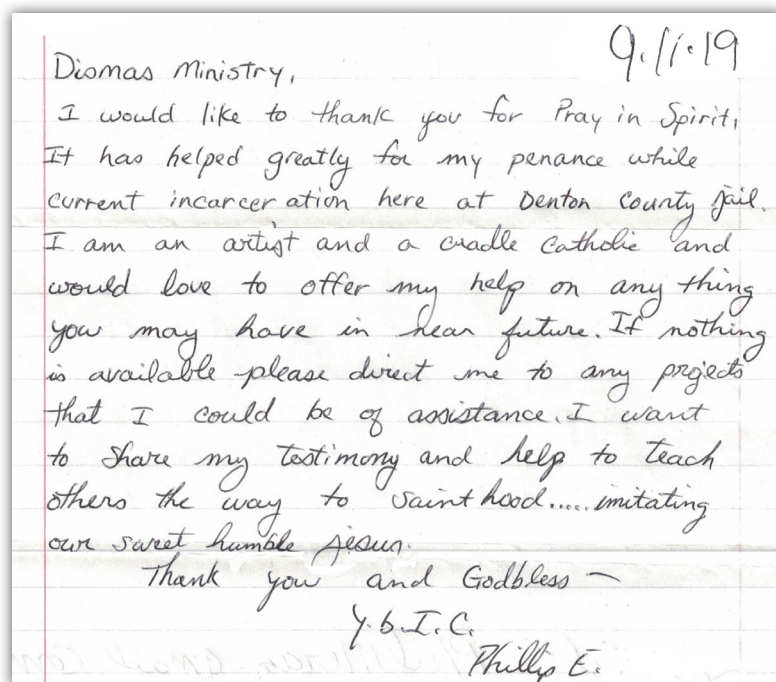
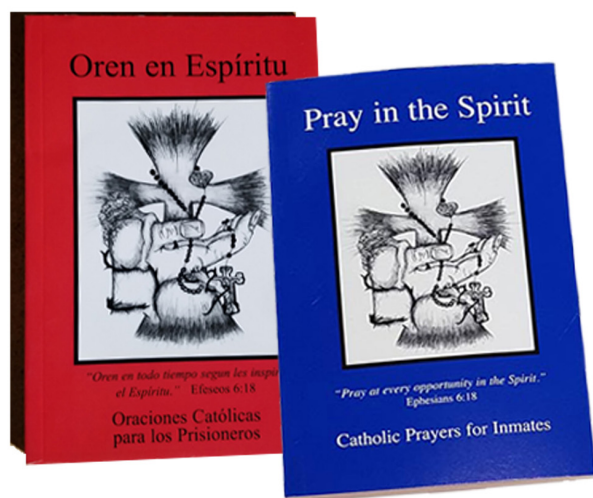
Mary is the patroness of Dismas Ministry and, today, I invite you to pray for her intercession, so that we may continue to bring hope and healing to all those who are suffering and struggling in the world – especially those we serve. Please know of my prayers for you and your loved ones, too.

With gratitude,

Ms. Tyler Curtis
Executive Director



From Prisoners...



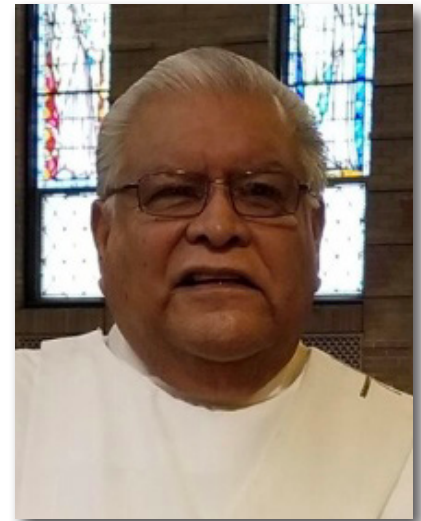
Pray in the Spirit, Catholic Prayers for Inmates is available in English and Spanish and can be ordered on our website at www.dismasministry.org/shop.

Volunteer Spotlight: Sharing Love, Faith and Hope

By Karen Heuberger

After 30 years, Deacon Roberto Fuentes retired from the J.I. Case Company in Racine, WI. A new chapter began when he was invited by his parish to get involved in prison ministry. Deacon Roberto felt called to this ministry, and knew he would not be going into the prison by himself. He was going with Jesus. That first week, only one prisoner came to meet with him, but the group grew from one to 27 in a just a few weeks.

Because of his ministry, he decided to enter the diaconate program, and was ordained in 2002. He served at Cristo Rey Parish in Racine, and continued his ministry to the incarcerated in the Racine County Jail, Youth Detention Center, and the Racine Correctional Institution. His wife, Lorenza, would always go with him to do the prison ministry. Since Cristo Rey and St. Patrick Parishes merged, he has served as deacon at St. Patrick's, assisting at Eucharist, baptisms, weddings, funerals, and quinceañeras. His main ministry, currently, is taking care of Lorenza due to her health issues.



Deacon Roberto Fuentes

Early in Dismas Ministry's history, founder Ron Zeilinger invited Deacon Roberto to serve as a volunteer. Since then, he has helped with letters and correspondence courses for Spanish-speaking prisoners. As with his work in the prisons, Lorenza was again by his side, helping with the courses and the letters. Together, they invited others to join them in ministry. A group of parishioners would meet every other week to send out correspondence courses and provide pastoral responses in Spanish. Upon completion of the courses, they would send a certificate of completion which means a lot to prisoners. While other volunteers have come and gone, Roberto and Lorenza faithfully continue fulfilling the ministry.

"My favorite part of volunteering with Dismas Ministry is the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others, especially those who have strayed from God," said Deacon Roberto. "I get to know prisoners through their letters. Through my responses, I can give them hope and offer support as they make needed changes in their lives."

He still gets letters and cards from prisoners even after they are released. One day, he received a call from an ex-prisoner who had been deported to Mexico after serving 18 years in a U.S. prison. "He was calling just to say 'thank you.' The man's mother even got on the phone and thanked me. Experiences like these help me stay strong in my faith," he added.

Right now, he struggles knowing that his time in service to Dismas Ministry is coming to an end. The incarcerated men have helped him to make his life a conversation of love, faith, and hope, but he knows it is time to pass this ministry on to someone else: "When I first went into the prisons, I asked Jesus to show me that He is present in my life. Jesus did – through the men in prison. Now it is time for others to encounter Jesus in their lives through the prisoners."

According to Deacon Roberto, the materials offered through Dismas Ministry help satisfy the prisoners' hunger and thirst for God. Many do not have communication with their family members. "I encourage them to get back into a relationship with God first, then back into relationship with family and others. Those who do this, see changes in their lives," he added.

In encouraging others to get involved with Dismas Ministry, he says, "If you want to encounter Jesus, do this ministry. God has given us a mission of salvation and a mission to proclaim His Word. We need to accept the mission in our lives and put it into practice, and we do that in service to others. Dismas Ministry gives us the opportunity to experience God and His love and mercy."

Thanks to Deacon Roberto and Lorenza for supporting the faith lives of prisoners.

**For more interviews like this, follow our
20 in 2020 Mission Minute: PROFILES IN PRISON MINISTRY Blog Series!
Start reading now at www.dismasministry.org/blog**



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Ministry on the Margins continued from page 1

She ministers with people at a Mexican shelter who then go into immigrant detention centers, which are separate from the state prison. She shared Dismas Ministry resources with the chaplain there, and at the prison, and Bibles and prayers books can be requested for the people as needed.

“Incarceration can be a time of transformation and conversion, an opportunity for prisoners to grow in their faith. Dismas Ministry provides materials to help prisoners do just that. When people who are in the ‘time out’ of a prison sentence get serious about who they want to be, the ministry’s material strengthens their minds and hearts. It connects them to spirit, and allows them to come out as the people God called them and created them to be,” said Sr. Lucy.



She encourages people to get involved with prison ministry by being a pen pal or sending Christmas cards through established programs. Receiving mail brings great joy to prisoners. Also, returning citizens need support finding jobs and housing.

“I urge local parish communities to be inviting and welcoming to those re-entering society by inviting them to be part of their outreach and action within the parish. This gives people a sense of purpose and belonging,” she added.