



## Thank you!

Thanks to our friends at Our Sunday Visitor Institute (OSV) for their generous in-kind donation – 10,000 copies of our Spanish prayer book, *Oren en Espíritu*.

Dismas Ministry provides all of our materials in both English and Spanish, and the pocket-size prayer book is one of our most requested publications. With increased interest in and need for our materials, it is important that we have ample quantities available – especially for those prisoners and detainees whose first (or only) language is Spanish.

**Thanks, OSV, for your support of Dismas Ministry and those we serve!**

Chaplains and volunteers may place an order for these prayer books at our store [www.dismasministry.org/Store](http://www.dismasministry.org/Store), or by completing the contact form on our website: [www.dismasministry.org/Contact](http://www.dismasministry.org/Contact)

### *With God, from page 1*

having traveled from Methodism to fundamentalism, I discovered I was now a thoroughgoing agnostic.

The religious question still nagged me, though. In college I started spending a lot of time in the campus library, studying the Church's history and teachings. I eventually sought out a priest, took instruction, and entered the Church in 1992, four years before my arrest. The collapse of my life had not been preceded by the collapse of my faith. I had never stopped believing everything the Church taught; but neither had I ever really let it invigorate my life. From the start, my faith had been wholly cerebral. With prison, though, and the companionship of many friends, it became a lived experience.

### **Q: What would you say to encourage others to learn more about “visiting the prisoner”?**

JS: Next time you go to confession, really think about the implications of the sacrament. Christ didn't have to institute it. He could've arranged to wipe our sins clean through baptism and then leave us to white-knuckle it through the remainder of our lives. But He gave us this sacrament, and the implications are profound – and comforting. We're going to fall. We're going to sin, and often grievously. But our sins don't stop Him. He visits us in the prison of our limitations and weaknesses, and He assures us that we're forgiven, that we're still His. I think the more we appreciate the sacrament of confession, the more we'll see ourselves as fundamentally united to men and women in prison.

*Joshua Stancil is a Dismas Ministry board member, a published author, and a native of North Carolina. A frequent speaker at restorative justice conferences in both America and abroad, his writing has appeared in Magnificat, Traces, and Convivium. This October, he will moderate two prison-related discussion panels during the eighth annual Festival of Friendship, which for the first time will be held completely online. Visit [www.RevolutionOfTenderness.net](http://www.RevolutionOfTenderness.net) to see the entire program schedule. All events are free but require registration. Joshua can be reached via [joshua.stancil@drm.media](mailto:joshua.stancil@drm.media)*



## Dismas Ministry

PO Box 070363  
Milwaukee, WI 53207  
[www.dismasministry.org](http://www.dismasministry.org)

A Newsletter published by Dismas Ministry  
A national Catholic outreach for inmates, victims, their families, those released from prison, and the community.

DISMAS MINISTRY is registered as a nonprofit corporation in the State of Wisconsin, and listed in the US Catholic Directory as a religious, tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) organization. All gifts are tax deductible.

### Follow us on social media!

[www.facebook.com/dismasministry](https://www.facebook.com/dismasministry)  
[www.twitter.com/dismasministry](https://www.twitter.com/dismasministry)  
[www.linkedin.com/company/dismas-ministry](https://www.linkedin.com/company/dismas-ministry)  
[www.pinterest.com/dismasministry](https://www.pinterest.com/dismasministry)  
[www.instagram.com/dismasministry](https://www.instagram.com/dismasministry)  
[www.youtube.com/user/dismasministry](https://www.youtube.com/user/dismasministry)



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

## With God, All Things are Possible

*A Conversation with Joshua Stancil*

Joshua Stancil is a passionate writer and multi-media specialist. As a public speaker, he humbly shares about his life – which includes time served in prison – with adults and young people in faith-based and school settings. While his life changed course, due to his incarceration, he embarked on a renewed faith journey. Joshua's story is inspiring and gives hope to others who seek a new path, and a positive future.

**Dismas Ministry Executive Director Tyler Curtis talked recently with Joshua about his faith journey. Their Q&A session follows:**

### **Q: How did you live and grow in your faith life behind bars?**

JS: At first it was extremely difficult. Prison has, thankfully, progressed from the days of rock-pile hammering; nevertheless, the experience is emotionally and spiritually crushing in ways that are difficult to describe. Plus, being a Catholic inmate in a Southern prison presents challenges of its own. There's a well-known cultural bias against Catholicism, but there's also another, less well-known geographical problem: your prison may be in a county that has no Catholic parish and thus no priest. Christ was very merciful to me and arranged one of those miracles only He can bring about: I met – quite unexpectedly – some people with the Catholic movement Communion and Liberation. We became friends, and they accompanied me – through visits and letters and phone calls – during the final 12 years of my sentence. And we're friends to this day. They helped me understand the Church as companionship, as the continuation of Christ's physical presence in history.

**Q: Were Dismas Ministry materials available to you during your time of incarceration? If so, which publications helped you on your faith journey?**

JS: I didn't discover Dismas Ministry till relatively late in my sentence. The *God With Us* and *A Reason For Hope* studies were tremendously helpful, though. There's a rather stunning dearth of Catholic resources for inmates, which is why Dismas Ministry's work is so vital.

### **Q: Were you raised Catholic or did you convert to the faith while in prison?**

JS: My family was nominally Protestant, but for most of my childhood we only went to church for weddings and funerals. My parents divorced and remarried other people, and it was at that point – around age 13 for me – that we started attending church on a weekly basis. My brother and I enrolled in Sunday school and a year-long confirmation class, at the end of which we both were baptized. For some odd reason, following our baptism, my parents gradually stopped attending. I was too young to drive and attend on my own, but I still felt a religious pull, so I checked out lots of books from the public library. Unfortunately, with no one to guide me, I found myself unable to discern between the truth-claims of the various Christian denominations and soon grew frustrated. By the time I graduated high school, continued on page 4



*Dismas Ministry Board Member Joshua Stancil*



From the Director

Dear Friends,

As you know, Dismas Ministry was founded 20 years ago with a very simple mission: to provide free Catholic materials to prisoners and the chaplains who minister to them. We continue to do so whenever and wherever there is a need, and in all 50 states.

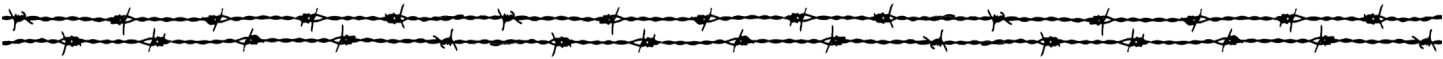
For more than six months, federal and state authorities suspended visits to corrections facilities in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. While requests for our materials from chaplains and volunteers waned, a steady stream of letters from prisoners continues to arrive. In fact, the daily volume of mail hit an all-time high.

With a reduced staff working in an alternate location, we kept up with the inmate requests as best we could. Because of their increased isolation, it became even more important for Dismas Ministry to fulfill its mission to provide Catholic resources to the imprisoned.

It is because of your prayerful and financial support that we continue to do this important work... now back on the campus of Cardinal Stritch University. Thank you for your faith in our mission. You will never know the recipients of your kindness and generosity, but they know you. You are light in their lives, and that gives them hope.

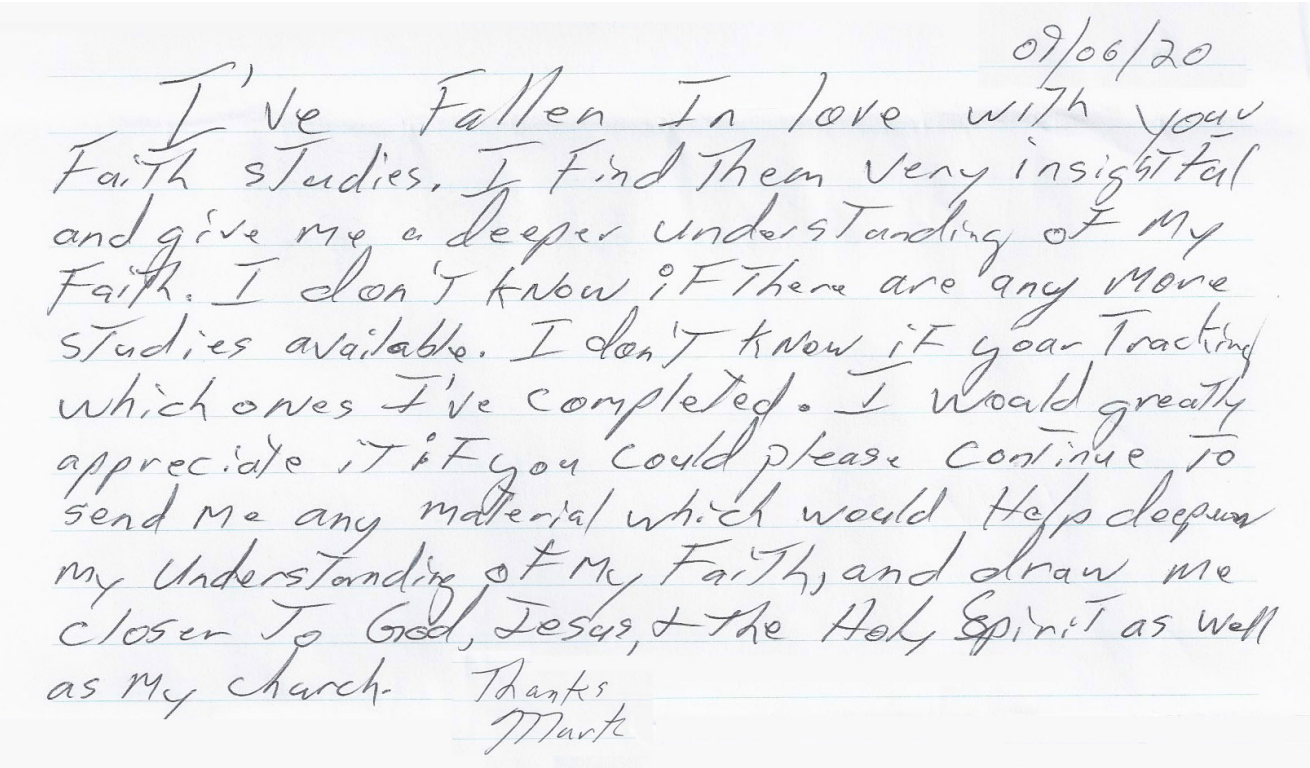
With gratitude,

Ms. Tyler Curtis  
Executive Director



From Prisoners...

We receive letters from prisoners every day asking to take part in our study courses. When we receive notes like Mark's, we know that the work we do makes a difference in the lives of our brothers and sisters behind bars.



Volunteer Spotlight: Small Acts of Kindness

By Tyler Curtis

“It is a kingly act to assist the fallen.” – Saint Teresa of Calcutta

Located on the west side of Milwaukee, in the St. Margaret Mary Parish Center, a small group of volunteers coordinates the Dismas Ministry faith study course, *A Reason for Hope*. Karen Valente, Sue Giza, and Mary Blinkhorn have done this important work in their quiet, humble manner.

You may ask: how does a prisoner enroll in the study course program? To start, a prisoner must write to Dismas Ministry to obtain the registration form for him or her to enroll in any of our study courses. As soon as we receive the completed authorization form from the inmate, the enrollment process begins.

The volunteers play an integral role in processing new enrollments and making sure each person receives the complete instructions with each section of the three-part course. Each course part concludes with a test, which the prisoner completes and mails back to Dismas Ministry. Volunteers meet weekly to review and grade the completed tests, and offer comments or notes of encouragement back to each prisoner. A certificate of completion is issued for each part of the study course.

According to Mary Blinkhorn, parish secretary and liaison to Dismas Ministry, a previous faith formation director brought the program to the parish almost 15 years ago. “We had at least five or six very eager volunteers come and help each week. Eventually it dwindled down to Sue and Karen. I was, and still am, very passionate about helping the disenfranchised. I have learned a lot about why people become incarcerated and how much of a cycle it is. I was particularly struck by how most females who are incarcerated were abused growing up,” said Mary.

For Karen, Sue and Mary, each one of them is happy to support this ministry to the imprisoned, and help: introduce or reintroduce people to God; be present as someone on the outside who cares for them; truly evangelize about what it means to be a Christian; and give them an opportunity to grow and learn about God and their other fellow Christians.

“It has succeeded by the grace of God, and because of loving volunteers who really care about those who need help the most. These are such small acts of kindness that travel far and wide,” said Mary.

Thank you, Karen, Sue, and Mary for sharing love and kindness with those we serve – our brothers and sisters behind bars!

In addition to the faith study, *A Reason for Hope*, which is managed by these volunteers, Dismas Ministry also offers three other study courses: a bible study, *God With Us*, a prayer study, *Pray Always*, and social justice study, *The Web of Life*.

You can find all four study courses at our store at [www.dismasministry.org](http://www.dismasministry.org)



Volunteers Karen Valente, Mary Blinkhorn, and Sue Giza truly give prisoners a reason for hope.

Dismas Ministry Catholic Study Courses



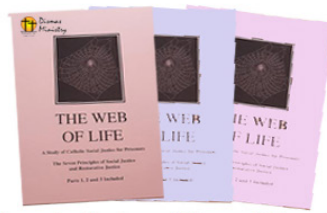
Bible Study



Faith Study



Prayer Study



Social Justice Study

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](http://www.dismasministry.org/blog)