



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

The Day He Walked Out

By Tyler Curtis

It was September 13, 2015.

For most people, it might have been an ordinary Sunday in late summer. But, for Curtis Gibson, it was the beginning of his next chapter. It was the day he walked out of a minimum security prison in Oregon.

"I had a rough experience," said Curt. During his four-and-a-half years behind bars, he went through a painful divorce and annulment of his marriage. Curt also lost both parents while he was incarcerated.

His mother's passing was swift and unexpected. She contracted a virus and died just three days later. Curt's father was losing his battle with bladder cancer, and his remaining days were spent in hospice. A prison minister named Ariel Fauley had been visiting Curt throughout all of these trials and helped him obtain the permission he needed to see his father one last time.



Curtis Gibson, Dismas Ministry Board Member

Shackled and wearing an orange jumpsuit, Curt was escorted to the hospice care facility to say his last goodbye. While waiting in an adjacent room to his father's, he could hear the voices of his children on the other side of the wall. He was not permitted to see or interact with them. The room was cleared of all visitors, and it was only then that Curt was allowed to enter. He had just 20 minutes with his dad before being transported back to his prison cell to grieve in isolation.

"Prison wrecked my family and the people I loved," said Curt. "But, I needed to go to prison. I was the 'winner' in this scenario. I was miserable, but it gave me time to pause and reflect on who I was and who I needed to be."

While Curt was incarcerated, his three children experienced some turbulent times. His daughters moved out of their mother's home. Curt's son became addicted to heroin but is now, thankfully, seven years clean. "You don't realize how far removed you are in prison," he said. And, the pain of so much discord and loss is a heavy load to bear.

"Ariel was a friend to me. She was a rock. Ariel led me through Bible study and prayed with me. She listened and talked through things with me. I don't know what I would have done without her," said Curt. Ariel Fauley passed away in March 2021 after a long battle with breast cancer, and the loss of this friendship has had a profound impact on Curt.

Now that he has been out of prison for more than five years, he is eligible to go back as a prison ministry volunteer. He must meet certain requirements in order to be granted permission to volunteer, but Curt is determined to carry on Ariel's good work 'inside.'

"Ariel built up a pretty good ministry. I know firsthand the impact she made on me and others. I want to be able to pick up where she left off," said Curt. "With her help and guidance, I was set on a new, positive path for myself and my family. There isn't a day that goes by when I don't think of her."

For more than a year now, visits to prisons and jails have been banned due to the pandemic. This means that prisoners are even more isolated and forced to go without certain programs, services, and visits from loved ones.

Some prisoners have been very sick, and some have died as a result of the virus. "No visitors are allowed. Often, it takes a long time to get mail. Church services are suspended. All the things that kept me sane when I was in prison are gone," he added. *Continued on p. 3*

From the Director

Dear Friends,

Each day, I receive a variety of messages from people affiliated with Dismas Ministry: chaplains, prison ministers, volunteers, benefactors, family members of the incarcerated and, of course, prisoners. Most often, these are handwritten notes of gratitude for our programs and spiritual support of the imprisoned.

The Dismas Ministry family is comprised of many different people who share in our commitment to help incarcerated men and women across the country.

This collaboration of all who “visit the prisoner” through the sharing of time, talent and treasure has helped weave a most brilliant tapestry of kindness and compassion. I am grateful for each one of you, and celebrate your role in lighting a path for those most in need of God’s love and mercy.

With gratitude,

Tyler Curtis
Ms. Tyler Curtis
Executive Director



Thanks to Our Mercy Circle Donors



Since we established Mercy Circle in 2019, more than 60 people have enrolled in this monthly giving club. Their decision to entrust regular gifts to Dismas Ministry strengthens our efforts to provide for the spiritual needs of our brothers and sisters behind bars.

These recurring gifts help sustain our monthly fulfillment of the mission, and bring peace of mind to staff and volunteers engaged in this important work.

Thanks to the following individuals* – and all members of Mercy Circle – for making the commitment to support the ministry in this way. We welcome others to consider joining our monthly giving club for a convenient way to support Dismas Ministry throughout the year.

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**As of April 2021, these monthly donors gave permission to include their names in this issue of the newsletter. If you are a monthly donor, and want your name to be included in a future issue of Remember Me, please call 414-486-2383 or email dismas@dismasministry.org. Thank you!*

To learn more, visit www.dismasministry.org/mercycircle

Volunteer Spotlight: Catholic Beliefs Connect Us All

Thanks to students from Cardinal Stritch University for their volunteer service to Dismas Ministry throughout the 2020-21 academic year.

A dozen student volunteers through the Franciscan Servant Scholars (FSS) program assisted the ministry. Through this program, students are required to perform six hours of approved service or ministry a month (minimum of 24 hours of service per semester).

According to the program director, Akua Kankam, the goals for the students are to be able to: discern God's calling within their personal and professional lives, learn what it means to be and "live" in community as a group, and apply the lessons learned from their time in the program to their lives once they leave the university.

"As a Franciscan Servant Scholar volunteering at Dismas, it has been a unique experience. It has helped me come closer to the Franciscan values of creating a caring community, showing compassion, and reverencing all creation at Cardinal Stritch. Volunteering at Dismas during Covid helped grow the sense of what it means to live in community. The prisoners are one of the most vulnerable groups during this pandemic, seeing as there are limited resources to prevent the spread, causing the limited interactions they once had to almost be extinct. It helped me see that prisoners, regardless of their past, are still a part of our community and the Catholic beliefs connect us all," said Yolotzin Mendez Benitez, FSS volunteer.

This year, due to restrictions because of the pandemic, the students were unable to complete service hours with other nonprofit agencies. Dismas Ministry's presence on the Stritch campus provided a collaborative opportunity for everyone involved.

Thanks to these Franciscan Servant Scholars for giving their time in support of those we serve!

Jorge Andrade, Christos Antonopoulos, Nicholas Bailey, Jasmine Barker, Jacob Evanish, Mireya Fonseca, Sophia Hey, Emily Levina, Ismael Luna, Yolotzin Mendez Benitez, Tristan Reynolds, Myha Sprifke



Franciscan Servant Scholars, Cardinal Stritch University (archive photo, 2017)

The Day He Walked Out continued...

According to Curt, there is no GED preparation, no Bible study or other classes. He believes it's a rough situation for inmates right now.

"To say that 'the punishment fits the crime' is not fair," he added. Those who are imprisoned have been denied opportunities to better themselves and have gone without ways to cope with the increased tensions and fears caused by the pandemic. Curt's friends on the 'inside' report a lot of fights, guys sent to 'the hole,' and increased hostilities. This is in addition to dealing with the loss of fellow inmates who died from COVID-19.

Curt believes the resources provided by Dismas Ministry are so vital for prisoners right now. Receiving materials through the mail provides prisoners with something to read that stimulates them and leads them in a positive direction. "It's all they have: a letter from a loved one, study material, a Bible," he said. "What Dismas Ministry is doing is filling the void, and these faith materials mean so much to people."

In reflecting on life after prison, Curt said: "I've been very blessed with my children, my career, my faith, and even some of the bad things I experienced. It took me a long time to get my life back on track, but I had a place to live, family support, and a friend who gave me a job."

He added: "There are a lot of remorseful people in prison and they want help. They are the most willing to learn, and the most willing to change."

Curtis Gibson is a Dismas Ministry board member and a native of Oregon. He is often invited to share his story of incarceration, and re-entry experience through speaking engagements. Curt is the Controller and Fund Manager of Riggins Investments LLC, based in Clackamas, Oregon. When not working or volunteering, Curt enjoys spending time with his three adult children. And, he anticipates the opportunity to "pay it forward" by ministering to those behind bars.



Welcome to the Team!

Suzanne Wilson-Davis, Ph.D., pictured on left, has joined Dismas Ministry as a contracted professional whose experience in corporate and foundation relations will enhance the fundraising endeavors on behalf of the organization.

During her three decades of fundraising experience, Suzanne has raised tens of millions of dollars for a variety of organizations in the higher education, healthcare, and cultural sectors. "I have had the privilege to represent many causes throughout my career. Those dearest to me are the organizations that serve marginalized members of society who are in need of special care," said Suzanne. "Because of Dismas Ministry's focus upon the imprisoned and its foundation upon Catholicism, I embrace this opportunity to become involved."

Suzanne received her B.A. from Agnes Scott College in Atlanta, Georgia, and her M.A. and Ph.D. from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. Her husband, Garry Davis, is a Professor of Linguistics at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. They have two grown children: a son who is a Utility Arborist in California and a daughter who will begin pursuing her post-secondary studies in De Pere, Wisconsin this fall. Suzanne's hobbies include playing the harp, traveling to Europe and Southeast Asia, and spending time with her family at their summer home in Door County.

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Dismas Ministry

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