



Remember Me

Fall 2021

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



Dismas Ministry Board Member
Fr. Richard Deshaies, SJ

That All May Know Jesus

A conversation with Fr. Richard Deshaies, SJ

Fr. Rich Deshaies is a Catholic chaplain to the imprisoned in the greater Boston area. While he is engaged in other important ministries of the USA East Province of the Society of Jesus, of which he is a member, he is a strong advocate for the spiritual needs of men and women behind bars. He currently serves as a contract Catholic chaplain with the Middlesex Sheriff's Office at the Middlesex Jail and House of Correction in Billerica, Massachusetts.

Dismas Ministry Executive Director Tyler Curtis talked recently with Fr. Rich about his ministry to prisoners.

TC: What have you learned from your work with prisoners?

RD: There are common misconceptions about the incarcerated. They are very much like those in free society. They share the common concerns about work, career, and raising children. They come from every conceivable background. Most are U.S. citizens, but a growing number are migrants from other countries.

TC: What are some of the challenges you face in this ministry?

RD: This is definitely a type of mission work. As an institution, our Church has struggled in her outreach to Catholics behind bars. With ever-decreasing numbers of priests and deacons, there is a need for more involvement from parish laity and more support at the diocesan level. The lack of material and human resources, and an increasing unfamiliarity with our faith tradition have created barriers. The challenge is often not with inmates, but with prison and jail administrations, correctional officers, and society.

TC: What do you want others to know about the struggles of the imprisoned?

RD: The men are extremely grateful and say, “Thank you, Lord, for sending Fr. Rich.” They are especially grateful to not be forgotten. They want religious services and faith-based materials. I am a pastor to them and offer other guidance, too. Sometimes they need help explaining themselves in court. I often say, “What about telling the truth, and being a person of integrity throughout the adjudication of your case?” However, the truth is not always completely clear when dealing with mental illness or extenuating circumstances. Also, they might not always grasp the impact of their actions on others, and sometimes have difficulty admitting their crimes. When they realize they have done something abhorrent, there is self-loathing and despair. But the truth is not solely about about what we *do*; it's about the love of God. And God forgives. And they want us to pray for them, especially when they go to court. I tell them, “God has a purpose for you and still values your life.” God does not spurn the lowly; He honors the lowly and hears the cry of their prayer. In this ministry, I am helping people return to a normative community after they have committed a reprehensible crime, often against themselves, as in the case of drugs. They want to be forgiven by society but don't know how to pursue this. To be forgiven enables reparation of their misdeeds and sets them solidly on the journey of moral and spiritual rehabilitation.

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From the Director

Dear Friends,

In Wisconsin, where Dismas Ministry's central operations are based, the vibrant colors of autumn are a recent memory as we edge closer to the cold, grey days of winter. Anywhere we experience the four seasons, we know that the ever-changing landscape can be beautiful and inspiring – and sometimes dark and dreary.

No matter the season or landscape before us, we are blessed to see mountains or lakes or forests or even skyscrapers and taxi cabs speeding by as we go about our daily routines. Like the backdrop of a theatre production, the visual display that surrounds us often impacts the rhythm of life in that moment.

For prisoners, the backdrop of their everyday lives remains the same. When we 'visit the prisoner,' we enrich their lives. Through writing letters, leading a Bible study group or teaching an online class, we color their world. Each time we do or say something positive, it brightens their days. It gives them hope.

At Dismas Ministry, we provide Catholic spiritual resources to enrich the faith lives of prisoners. Our mission is to provide these materials free-of-charge and to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve. Your kindness and generosity encourage them to know they are not forgotten.

Thank you for all you do for our brothers and sisters behind bars. Together, we are light on their darkest of days.

With gratitude and peace,



Ms. Tyler Curtis
Executive Director



The Power of Prayer

Everyone knows a prayer circle, friends or fellow parishioners, who faithfully prays for the intentions of people in their community.

In the early days of Dismas Ministry, we started our Union of Prayer – a group of individuals who commit to pray daily for prisoners, and those who minister to them. Since then, this quiet army of prayer warriors has grown to more than 800 people. They pray for all those affected by incarceration: prisoners and victims, the families of both, and the greater community.

Union of Prayer members pray for each other and everyone in the Dismas Ministry family during the Eucharist and every year on March 25, the Feast of St. Dismas, the Good Thief.

All are welcome to join the Union of Prayer. It's free! Simply complete the Contact form on our website: dismasministry.org/union-of-prayer



Thank You

We are grateful to these grant-making organizations, and others, who wish to remain anonymous.

- ACTA Foundation
- The Catholic Community Foundation - Milwaukee, WI
- Ray & Kay Eckstein Charitable Trust
- Greater Green Bay Community Foundation

Volunteer Spotlight - Faith Can Build a Bridge

Every month, Dismas Ministry Board Member Dan McCarthy coordinates a group of volunteers who visit our operations located at Cardinal Stritch University. This crew on campus is comprised of members of the Milwaukee chapter of the Order of Malta.

Dan serves in the role of Hospitaller with the Federal Association of the Order of Malta, a lay religious order of the Catholic Church. The Order is active in 120 countries, caring for people in need through its medical, social, and humanitarian works. These projects provide sources of support for forgotten or excluded members of society.

Since May 2021, this dedicated group has been helping package Catholic scripture, faith, and prayer resources for delivery to prisoners and to chaplains and volunteers who minister to them. When asked what they like most about volunteering with Dismas Ministry, Dan said: “We feel we are helping those in prison strengthen their faith or maybe even establish their faith for the first time.”

In serving prisoners and supporting chaplains, the volunteers help support those on the margins. “Just knowing that we are supporting those in prison, and in prison ministry, makes us happy,” added Dan. “The Gospels tell us to serve those in need, and specifically calls out those in prison. And, our support of Dismas Ministry’s efforts helps us demonstrate our commitment to our faith.”

According to Dan, the packaging work they do is pretty straightforward. They take great care to ensure that the packages contain the right materials and the correct quantities requested. The packages are then sealed and mailed to jails and prisons located throughout the United States.

This volunteer team encourages others to learn more about Dismas Ministry and get involved. “The hardest decision is to start. Once you get past that you will find the work a great first step in helping those in need,” said Dan.

Thank you to Board Member Dan McCarthy and the Order of Malta volunteers who help us. Their contribution to the mission of Dismas Ministry is invaluable.



The Order of Malta volunteers include, from left, Steve DeGuire, KM, Mary Cesarz, Mike Cesarz, KM, Dan McCarthy, KM, Hon. Beth Hanan, DM



Life on Campus

It has been two years since the Dismas Ministry operations moved to the campus of Cardinal Stritch University, located north of downtown Milwaukee, WI.

We are grateful to Dr. Daniel J. Scholz, president, and his leadership team, for supporting our presence and the growth of our operations on campus. And, we thank the Stritch staff and faculty for welcoming us into their community.

“We are especially grateful to the students who have joined our ministry team since our arrival on campus. They have made a difference in the lives of prisoners, who are poor and marginalized. We look forward to continued collaborations with students and other members of the Stritch family,” said Tyler Curtis, executive director of Dismas Ministry.

If you live in the area or you are planning a visit to Milwaukee, and you’d like to schedule a tour of our operations on the Stritch campus, please contact student ambassador, Camillia Washington, at 414-410-4318 or by email at camillia.washington@dismasministry.org. **We hope to see you soon!**



Remember me.
Luke 23:42

Dismas Ministry

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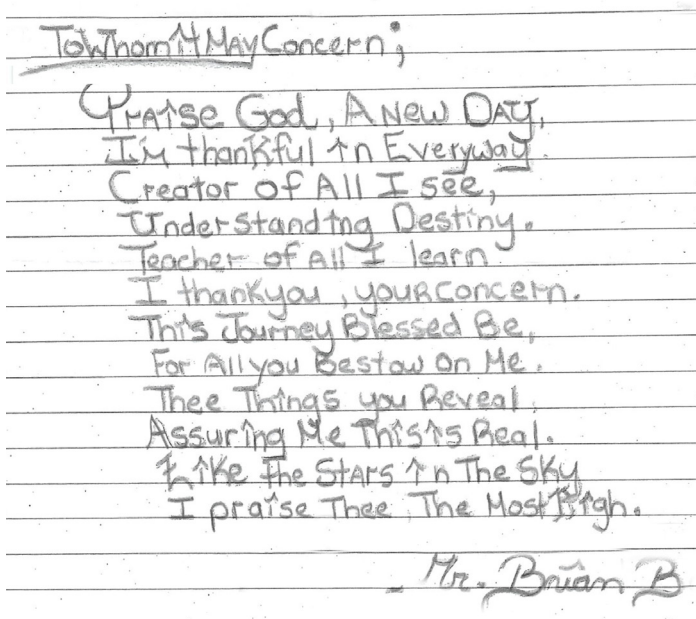
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From Prisoners

Thanks to Brian, a prisoner served by Dismas Ministry, for sharing this poem and message of gratitude.



That All May Know Jesus continued...

TC: What can we do to help support our brothers and sisters behind bars?

RD: Through financial donations, which helps us get faith-based materials into the hands of those who need it. Pray for these men and women and their families. Also, pray for correctional staff and for criminal justice reform. Provide help to those reentering society. And invite others in the Church to engage in this “forgotten” work of mercy. We need to elevate prison ministry as a special missionary endeavor of our Church.

A Jesuit priest, Fr. Richard Deshaies, SJ, is a Dismas Ministry board member based in Boston, MA. Born and raised in Connecticut, he entered the Society of Jesus in 1982. Fr. Rich has served in a variety of ministries in the United States and Jamaica throughout his priesthood. A dedicated chaplain to the incarcerated of greater Boston for 10 years, he helped develop a national forum for Catholics in criminal justice and prison ministries – the Catholic Prison Ministries Coalition (CPMC). Fr. Rich is also a member of the American Correctional Association (ACA) and the ACCA (American Correctional Chaplains Association).