A Newsletter from Dismas Ministry

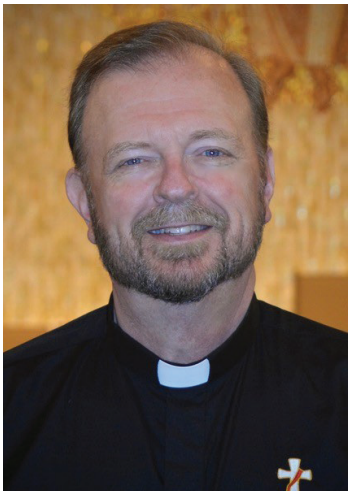
Fall 2026

Remember Me

Remember me.
Luke 23:42

A national Catholic outreach supporting the spiritual lives and rehabilitation of prisoners.

God Opened the Door, and He Walked Through It



Dismas Ministry is pleased to welcome Deacon Jim Matthias to our Board of Directors. Jim began his service on the Board in April 2026, bringing with him more than 15 years of experience in jail and prison ministry and a deep commitment to the dignity of every person.

A permanent deacon since 2018, Jim currently serves in the Diocese of St. Petersburg and ministers at the Hillsborough County Jail in Florida. He previously served for many years in jail and prison ministry in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

Jim's journey into prison ministry began somewhat unexpectedly. While serving in hospice ministry, Jim once remarked to his wife, Rhonda, that he never thought he could do something like hospice care. It was outside his comfort zone. Then he added, "At least it's not prison ministry."

That very same week, a man called Jim and asked if he would consider becoming a prison minister because they needed more volunteers.

"I guess God has a sense of humor," Jim says. "I've been doing prison ministry ever since."

"The men are welcoming and enthusiastic about opening the Word of God."

For Jim, visiting those who are incarcerated is more than a ministry opportunity. It is one of the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy: to visit the imprisoned. The Corporal Works of Mercy call Christians to respond to the physical and spiritual needs of others. Jim sees prison ministry as a very tangible way to live out that Gospel call.

For more than 15 years, Jim has served in jails and prisons, including the Waukesha County Jail, where he brought Holy Communion, led Bible studies, and spent time simply listening to men who were seeking hope and a deeper relationship with Christ. His ministry has also included work with several correctional facilities and Catholic volunteers throughout southeastern Wisconsin.

People sometimes ask Jim if he is ever afraid to walk into a jail or prison. "Honestly, I think it's more dangerous driving to and from the jail than it is being inside," he says. "The men are welcoming and enthusiastic about opening the Word of God. I hope it is as inspiring for them as it is for me."

That mutual encounter is at the heart of Jim's ministry. He has learned that prison ministry is not simply about bringing faith to individuals ...*Cont'd page 2*

Voices of Those We Serve

"I have made the decision to become Catholic and am requesting any materials that you might have to aid me in this process of converting. I have already learned the Our Father, Hail Mary, and am working on the Apostles Creed.

I also have been baptized but have not yet done or learned how to do a confession.

I have been imprisoned for a year now and have felt a specific calling to convert but haven't had the tools to really begin until now. Thank you for any assistance in this journey."

In Christ, Jordan M,
an inmate from Illinois

This letter is a powerful reminder of why our work matters. When someone feels called to deepen their faith, Dismas Ministry can provide the resources and encouragement they need to begin that journey.

"I was in prison and you visited me." ~ Matthew 25:36

A Message from Our Executive Director

Dear Friends,

God is not finished with any of us yet.

That message comes through again and again in the stories we hear from behind prison walls. A person's past may explain where they have been, but it does not determine where God can still lead them.

That is why the work of Dismas Ministry matters. A Bible, prayer book, rosary, or faith study can become an invitation to begin again. We have seen faith take root in extraordinarily difficult places, reminding us that hope can grow even through the hardest ground.

We also see that hope through the dedicated prison ministers, chaplains, and volunteers who show up week after week to walk alongside individuals who are incarcerated. They listen, pray, teach, encourage, and remind people that they are seen, valued, and still part of the Body of Christ. Our resources become even more meaningful when placed in the hands of those who accompany others on their journey of faith.

And so we keep going. We keep answering letters. We keep sending resources. We keep supporting prison ministers. And we keep reminding our brothers and sisters behind prison walls that they are not forgotten, they are seen, they are heard and that their story is not finished.

With Peace and Gratitude,

Juliann Joerres

Juliann Joerres
Executive Director

A special THANK YOU to the following granting foundations

Catholic Community Foundation of Eastern SD
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God Opened the Door, and He Walked Through It *cont'd from p. 1*

who are incarcerated. It is also about allowing God to work through the people Jim encounters.

Jim has served the Archdiocese of Milwaukee as Director of Jails and Prison Ministry and Director of Respect Life Ministry. His work in respect life ministry further deepened his conviction that every human person possesses God-given dignity and is worthy of care and accompaniment.

In 2026, Jim retired from his work with the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, and he and Rhonda moved from Wisconsin to Riverview, Florida, to be closer to their children and grandchildren. The move opened a new chapter in his ministry as he began serving in jails and prisons in Florida.

What draws Jim particularly to Dismas Ministry is its simple but powerful message: "Remember me." Those are the words of St. Dismas, the Good Thief, who turned to Jesus in his final hours. Jim sees that same need every time he walks into a jail or prison: the need for individuals to know that they are not forgotten, that they still possess God-given dignity, and that God's mercy is still available to them.

Dismas Ministry makes that message tangible by placing Catholic Bibles, prayer materials, faith formation resources and encouragement into the hands of individuals behind bars, while also supporting the priests, deacons, chaplains and volunteers who accompany them.

"For someone who is incarcerated, receiving a Bible or a letter of encouragement can mean far more than we might realize," Jim says. "It can be a reminder that God has not forgotten them and that their story is not over."

At the heart of Jim's ministry is a simple belief: no one is beyond the reach of God's mercy. For him, prison ministry has become one of the unexpected blessings of his diaconate. "I never planned on doing prison ministry," he says. "But God opened the door, and I walked through it. And I've been blessed ever since."

Prison Ministry Cannot Stop Where Segregation Begins

Jim Rundell, a prison minister from Wichita, Kansas, knelt beside a man who was incarcerated during one of his first visits to a prison Mass. Together, as the congregation prepared to receive the Eucharist, they prayed the familiar words: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed." In that moment, those words took on a deeper meaning for Jim.

Here they were, kneeling side by side before Christ. One was a prison ministry volunteer. The other was serving a prison sentence. Yet before the Eucharist, there was no distinction. Both belonged to the same Body of Christ. That moment helped Jim understand prison ministry in a new way. It was about encountering Christ and recognizing one another as members of the same Body. What began as a single visit became something much more.

Jim began regularly attending prison Masses and catechism classes. His ministry then took him to a place few volunteers ever see: the segregation units of a maximum-security prison. For approximately a year and a half, Jim regularly visited men living in segregation. When the facility later prohibited non-uniformed personnel from entering those units, Jim faced a difficult question: How do you continue accompanying people you are no longer allowed to visit? His answer became Spiritual Formation in Segregation Ministries (SFS).

Men in segregation may spend months, even years, separated from the general prison population. While they may receive mail, have limited access to tablets, and interact with correctional staff, they cannot attend Mass, visit the library, participate in programs, or experience the ordinary human interaction available to others in the facility. Jim knew they could not simply be forgotten.

Unable to visit the men personally, he created a monthly community letter containing spiritual reflections and Catholic faith formation. Those letters eventually inspired additional resources, including two books: In Solitary with God, which Jim authored, and Praying Out of the Darkness, which he co-authored. Technology opened another door. Through partnerships with Catholic International University and Edovo, SFS made spiritual materials available electronically.

Catholics living in segregation were still Catholics. Their confinement did not erase their need for the Eucharist, Reconciliation, or pastoral care. When efforts to gain access were denied because of security concerns, Jim persisted. He wrote to Church and correctional leaders, including the bishop, the Secretary of Corrections, and eventually the governor. The effort, with assistance from the U.S. Department of Justice, resulted in a pathway for Catholic individuals in segregation to receive Holy Communion and have access to confession.

Jim's persistence eventually allowed him to resume monthly visits, working with approximately 18 to 20 individuals at various stages of Catholic study and faith formation. His experience offers a roadmap for others seeking to understand how advocacy can open doors that once seemed permanently closed.

During our conversation, one message from Jim surfaced again and again: Do not forget the people in segregation. Prison ministry naturally tends to focus on the general population, where volunteers can gather people for Mass, Bible studies, classes and other programs. Those living behind another locked door, however, can easily become invisible. Yet they may be the very individuals most in need of spiritual companionship and meaningful human connection.

Jim challenges Catholic prison ministers to ask a simple question: Who are we not reaching? Jesus did not say, "I was in prison and you visited me, except when it was difficult to gain access." He simply said, "I was in prison and you visited me."

Spiritual Formation in Segregation Ministries will be closing its operations, but Jim's message remains urgent: Do not forget the people in segregation. Through a cell door, a community letter, a tablet, a book, the Eucharist, or persistent advocacy, he has spent years finding ways to reach individuals who might otherwise be overlooked. As this chapter closes, his work challenges the Church to continue asking who is still waiting to be reached.

"Who are we not reaching?" Jim Rundell's challenge to prison ministers

Jim welcomes questions from prison ministers who want to learn from his experience advocating for individuals in segregation. You can reach him at jarrose803@gmail.com.

Remember me.
Luke 23:42

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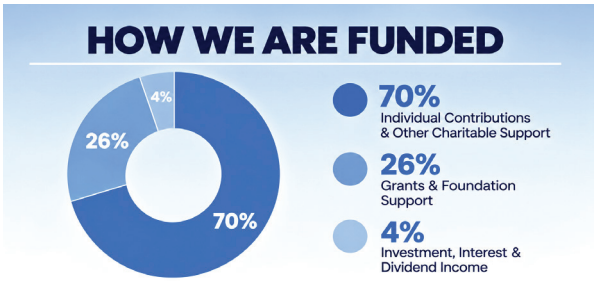
Fiscal Year 2025–2026 Impact Report is Now Available

13,884	5,016	13,825	8,088	4,803
PRISONERS SERVED	BIBLES PROVIDED	ROSARIES MAILED	PRAYER BOOKS	STUDY COURSES

Every number tells a story. Behind each Bible, rosary, prayer book and study course is a person seeking faith, hope and a deeper relationship with God. This past year, Dismas Ministry continued to bring the Catholic faith to individuals who are incarcerated across the country, both through the mail and through an expanding digital presence.

The numbers on this page offer just a snapshot of that impact. Our Fiscal Year 2025–2026 Annual Impact Report shares more about the people we served, the resources we provided, the partnerships that made this work possible, and the generosity of those who support our mission.

See our full Annual Impact Report at dismasministry.org/impact-report-2025-26.

1,561	52,418	$466,000
FACILITIES SERVED THROUGH DIGITAL CONTENT	PRISONERS SERVED BY TABLET USE	TOTAL DONATIONS FY 25-26