

Your Mission Support at work!

Do you ever wonder what becomes of the money that goes to Mission Support to the Minneapolis Area Synod? Let me tell you a story.

On a sunny day inside the sanctuary at St. Dysmas of South Dakota, you can see the bars outside the stained-glass windows. The members of the congregation are all convicted felons at the South Dakota State Penitentiary.



St. Dysmas is a mission congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Funding comes from local and national mission partners, including congregations like **Christ the King Lutheran Church of Bloomington**. When you forward a portion of your income to the Minneapolis Area Synod as Mission Support, St Dysmas is one of many ministries you support.

The members of the prison congregation selected its name. By tradition Dysmas was the name of the thief who, hanging on the cross beside Jesus, asked to be remembered. Congregation members hoped that when people heard the name, they would remember those in prison who often feel forgotten and abandoned.

Since December 2005 attendance at St. Dysmas has tripled, from about 35 worshipers to 100. Meanwhile the Bible study group has grown from 12 to 40 inmates. One-on-one outreach and evangelism is a key to the growth of the congregation, which worships in an auditorium refurbished by the inmates.

"We experience hope and joy here, but at the same time, we don't ignore the seriousness of our pasts," said William A. Hamill, the pastor of St. Dysmas. The key to it all, Hamill says, is the constant message by the congregational council and the core members: "Repentance leads to forgiveness, and even *you* can be forgiven."

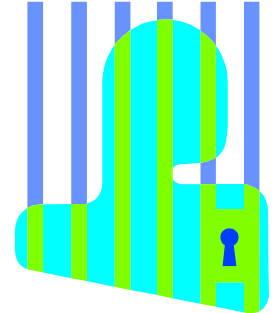
One of the high points in worship is a special hymn sung in honor of prisoners finishing their sentences and preparing to leave. The pastor says that's when "I get to give them the speech that I *never* want to see them in my church again!"

Your Mission Support offering helps provide these moments of grace.

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