

The Community of St. Dysmas is a multi-site Lutheran congregation of the Delaware Maryland Synod located within the walls of the Maryland State prison system. Since 1984, we have had active congregations “within the walls,” and currently have congregations with weekly services and Bible Studies at MCIJ (men’s prison Jessup), MCIW (women’s prison Jessup), MCTC (men’s prison Hagerstown) and CMCF (men’s prison Sykesville).

Our congregations are dynamic in every sense of the word. The population is constantly changing as congregants are released or transferred, new folks are constantly coming in as they are invited by other CSD worshippers, and we may be able to add congregations or have to lose congregations as support or issues from the Department of Corrections allow.

Our worship is lively and spirit-filled—these are folks for whom the Good News of the love of God and the forgiveness offered through Christ is really that—good news! Our congregants own the service as much as possible—by setting up and clearing down the worship space, by leading prayers and readings, and by frequently offering testimony to the power of the Gospel in their lives. On more than one occasion, I’ve heard “This is the only place I feel like a human being in here.” That’s what we hope to achieve, that the transforming power of Christ’s love helps them see themselves as a child of God and a sister and brother Lutheran to the congregations on the outside. We are also an inclusive, safe and welcoming congregation for those individuals who may feel excluded by other worshiping groups because of who they are or whom they love.

We depend heavily on volunteer worship leaders, musicians and Bible study teachers to make sure that we can continue with our ministry, and we have a cadre of dedicated and passionate people who serve in this capacity. We also support our faithful CSD congregants upon their release to the extent that DOC regulations, and our resources, allow. We are establishing a program of trained volunteers to provide much needed support in the weeks and months after release.

Congregations and individuals who want to help support this ministry, can do so in many ways. Most of all--by prayer. Our CSD congregations on the inside are praying for you, and we need your prayers as well. Financial support helps us continue our mission, as does inviting the pastor to speak at your church. We are always looking for volunteers as well: ordained or consecrated leaders to lead worship, musicians to play at the services, lay or clergy to teach Bible study, and volunteers who have the time and flexibility to provide transportation or support, within guidelines, to our returning citizens.

Our theme verse is Matthew 25:36, (Jesus said) “I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” We at the Community of St Dysmas are excited and privileged to follow his mandate.