

Quarterly Newsletter Jottings October 2023

Our mission - *Onesimus Ministries exists for the purpose of introducing prison inmates, ex-inmates and their families to the lifechanging good news of Jesus Christ, as well as spiritually supporting and assisting anyone in becoming faithful in their daily walk as Christ's disciples.*

Announcements/Events

Phil
Taylor

Banquet Reminders!

With less than 2 weeks until the annual Onesimus Ministries annual banquet, we are thrilled to announce our special guest speakers:

- Mr. Lennie Spitale
- Mr. Pete Zandona

The Banquet will be held on Friday, October 27th at Mt. Vernon Christian Church in Kirkwood, PA. *Hors d'oeuvres* start at 6:00 PM & dinner commences at 6:30 PM.

This is a blessed time of food, fellowship, and gratitude for the saving work our beloved chaplains, Rhonda & Heinrich do inside each Chester County Prison in ministering to both the men and women inside. With the resumption of services recently, this year's event will be a celebration of God's faithfulness in ministering to the inmates as the Lord's hand and feet once again thanks to the generosity of our benefactors.

This event is the primary fundraiser for the ministry, and so we hope many will come to share a meal, hear updates from the chaplains, as well as an inspiring message on prison ministry from this year's guest speaker, Lennie Spitale. Lennie will share the transformative power of God's grace on his journey from inmate to a captive of Jesus Christ. He'll be joined by a gentleman that he's mentored, Pete Zandona, who is carrying on Lenny's legacy in walking in newness of life from criminal to productive citizen after giving his life to Christ.

Kindly confirm your attendance by October 23rd by either:

- Email: pastorvern@gmail.com
- Text: 610-209-0154
- Call: 610-932-4429

Be sure to specify the number of attendees, or if unable to attend, you can support this ministry by going to our website: www.onesimusministries.org and click on the "Donate Now" button.

We hope to see you on the 27th. Thank you!

The Joy of Serving

If my memory serves me correctly (and oft times it doesn't anymore), on Friday August 4th all of us who had been serving on Monday nights for Prison Fellowship received the long awaited green light email: Chester County Prison is open again to religious volunteers. After 3 ½ years of waiting and wondering, we could resume ministering to hurt and broken men in desperate need of the Gospel, whether for the first time or a fresh reminder of what Jesus had done for them.

We had three days to scramble and prepare to go in and share the love of God. We could serve again!! What had been a great joy interrupted by a terrible catastrophe was now going to be experienced again. The routine that had become such a part of our lives for so many years, replaced by a different routine, was now back.

So, what makes serving such a great joy? How can it be joyful to serve in such a dark place as a prison? I know if you asked any of us who serve in this ministry, we would tell you we would much rather serve somewhere else. Not because we don't want to be there, but because we don't like to see anybody in pain and hurting and in a place where there is little they can do to remedy their circumstances. We understand the harsh realities of a sinful, fallen world. We listen to their stories and testimonies and these men are in pain, but many of them not without hope. Our joy is to bring them the hope and promise of the Gospel, of the eternal relationship they can have with Jesus.

The joy we find in serving in Prison is a multi-faceted joy. One of the joys is that we get to dig deeply into God's Word to share the Good News with them and it enriches our souls as well. We are inspired to read, meditate and speak God's Word to men who need it and so do we!! I love the way God's Word opens to me as I prepare a message and I know I speak for all in this Ministry that this is a great joy!

We get to pray for the hurting. We find great joy in communicating with our Heavenly Father, asking Him to help these guys knowing, in faith, that He will. We serve our God who is loving and caring beyond measure!

We also experience being ministered to by our brothers when we're struggling with something as we pray for each other. It is so comforting to know that there are men serving along side us who have each other's backs. There are also numerous people who pray for us. Thank you! It is joy to know we are not alone in God's work. During my walk as a Christian, I have been ministered to and helped by brothers and sisters who serve along side me. Following Jesus is not meant to be a solitary experience.

Finally, there is the joy of the power and help of the Holy Spirit. There's no way we could do any of this on our own. My first time going back into CCP was delayed several weeks due to various commitments. That first evening was a real struggle as I had just lost my mom a few days prior and was dealing with grief, uncertainty, and feeling very overwhelmed and physically exhausted. I was tempted to cancel, but I knew that in difficult times the Holy Spirit will meet us and help us in powerful ways.

As we progressed through the first service, I began to experience the refreshment of my soul and the invigoration in my body. I am responsible for leading the second service and by the time it started I could barely contain my excitement in sharing the love of God. I had to stop myself as I was in danger of beginning to "preach" and it was not my turn that evening. What an amazing moment!

By the time the service ended I was wide awake, excited and feeling more peaceful than I had felt in days. God is so good!! If you are currently serving then I hope this is a fresh reminder of who you serve and why we serve and thank you for serving! I know the Lord is pleased. If you are not serving, please pray and consider how the Lord can use you to advance His kingdom. If you feel ill-equipped, trust me, he will empower you to do things you never dreamed possible. It will indeed, be your joy!

Chaplain Jottings



Heinrich
Botes

DEE-EYE-EFF

Death in Family (known in prison as a *DEE-EYE-EFF*) is probably one the most difficult situations chaplains need to deal with.

The news of the death of one of an inmate's close family members is usually conveyed to the chaplain by a distraught member of his/her family. They either leave an emotional voice message or reach the chaplain directly. (Whenever I enter my office and see the red light that indicates an unheard voice message, my first thought usually is "*Is that a DIF?*")

DEE-EYE-EFF has a way of completely changing my day...just as it completely changed the life of a family "on the outside". Death is so final...there is no re-play button, irrespective of how it came about. This is true for all humans, but receiving that message while in prison, adds another dimension...that of amplified regret.

"If only", "Why Now?", "What now?" and a host of such questions are asked...usually accompanied by heart wrenching cries and uncontrollable tears. Men who appeared tough when they enter the office with a big question mark on their faces, melt like babies when they hear that a loved-one passed away.

Responses to this news varies...from stunned silence, wailing, cursing and violent anger that have created situations where I, the messenger, have been closest to being assaulted in prison. The focused training and support of professional correctional staff have been "my saving grace" in many cases. Inmates breaking their fists on my desk, wrecking furniture or trying to escape into the building occurred...but the inevitable truth eventually sinks in..."*they're gone and I'm here in prison*".

This crisis creates incredible opportunities to share the "GOOD NEWS" of a Savior who overcame death, the grave, sin, and Hell. Pointing distraught and broken men and women to the Lord Jesus Christ is really all we can do. Sadly, this door does not remain open for too long before "it's business as usual" and living life with a fatalistic worldview where there is hardly any "good" news.

Pray for us as chaplains to handle every DEE-EYE-EFF in a Christ-like manner and in obedience to the Holy Spirit, our ever-present Counselor.

Chaplain Jottings



Rhonda
Soland

Good Things Come

The saying, "Good things come to those who wait" has proven true in the case of the re-opening of our chapel for services. We waited and waited; then we waited some more. We even waited a bit more after that. Now, after 3 ½ years, our chapel has re-opened and we have re-commenced holding church services for the men and women of Chester County Prison! And for that we are rejoicing and giving thanks to God.

It has been wonderful to welcome the men and women back into our chapel, which for too long had sat quiet, dark, and empty. We are not yet where we used to be as far as the number of services we offer or the number of church volunteers coming in to minister, but we ARE open—and hopeful of gradually working our way back to our pre-Covid schedule.

The women (and men) have been streaming in, also happy to have services again. There truly seems to be a new level of attentiveness and engagement on their part. We are seeing steady, good attendance. Even one day when "Church!" was called at the same time as "yard time", the women chose to come to church, forgoing their precious outdoor time on a beautiful sunny day.

In the services, the women have been very engaged and interactive; asking questions and offering comments. Many times, I have heard of the friendships and bonding happening between them; as they reach out to help and support one another. When I ask my typical opening request, "Give me one thing you're grateful for today", I've often heard the answer, "the women on my quad", which is a beautiful thing.

They've developed the healthy habit of gathering with other women on the block who are seeking God, choosing to find their fellowship and friendship there— voicing a dislike of the prevalent tendency to gather for gossip, negative talk or disruptive behavior. God is moving in the hearts of these women and I pray He continues. It has been a complete joy being able to meet face-to-face with them again.

So, good things do come to those who wait— but I would amend the saying to, "Good things come to those who wait, especially when we trust God and are patient to wait on His timing."

Treasurer Report October 2023

"And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart." Galatians 6:9

We're thrilled to see what the Lord has in store as we continue to serve the needs of the souls in the Chester County prison and are thankful for all of the donors who give towards the efforts of Onesimus as needs continue to be satisfied. As we prepare to enter the time of year where families gather for holidays and expect to give toward their loved ones, we want to encourage you to think of ones within the prison who have yet to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as He is the greatest Gift ever given! If you feel the Spirit of God touching your heart to help reach any lost souls at Chester County through volunteer work or giving financially, then please reach out to us at Onesimus Ministries. You can give online by clicking the "Donate" button and following the instructions on our web page or a gift can be mailed to 145 Bethel Road Oxford, PA 19363.

As a reminder, our annual banquet will be held on October 27 and if any church or organization would like to sponsor a table at the banquet, please send in a gift of \$500 and reference "Table Sponsor". We look forward to seeing many of you at the banquet where we can encourage each other in the Lord as we celebrate His faithfulness to the ministry as lives are touched.

Monday Night Fellowship

Dan
Turley

Back In Jail

It may sound goofy, but it's really good to be back in jail! I did a recent calculation and I have been inside Chester County Prison a total of 1,250 times plus a few more. That's 50 times a year for 25 years plus a few times to counsel with an inmate who wanted to talk with me one on one during the week.

I think it is safe to say that I have a basic understanding of the security inside that place and those directing their anger and vitriol toward the staff inside there have none. The Correctional Officers inside Chester County Prison are the best you will find anywhere. They are not just smart; they are street smart too. They are tough and professional and those of us who are allowed inside to share the Gospel rely on them.

A Tribute to Andy Leatherman

We were disappointed that one of our longest serving board members, Andy Leatherman, submitted his resignation from the Onesimus board recently.

Andy cited some of the inevitable challenges of being an octogenarian...though you'd never know it to look at him...as the reason he felt he could no longer serve the board.

Thankfully, Andy plans to continue as a Prison Fellowship volunteer on Monday nights at Chester County Prison for as long as he can. Ironically the message he preached at this past week's service may have been the finest and most impactful sermon that he ever shared. The men who attended were deeply moved, and heartily applauded Andy's message.

I've had the pleasure of knowing Andy for almost 25 years, dating back to December of 1998, when I was an inmate at CCP. To me, he and his beloved Dorothy epitomize what being true Christians are all about. Their thoughtfulness, kindness and service to their church in even serving a refugee family (among, no doubt, numerous instances of giving of themselves over the years) will no doubt result in crowns that we'll all be envious of one day.

No doubt many would join me in sharing such testimonies of Andy's faithfulness.

"Well done, good and faithful servant!"

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God bless your day!



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145 Bethel Road
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