Paving the way for a better future

by Pastor Norm Arnold

I am incredibly blessed to be used in ministry to God and neighbor behind the walls of Washington Correction Center (WCC) in Shelton, WA. I never would have chosen to be a prison minister and yet I know I am exactly where God wants me. And I ONLY want to be where God wants me. For years I was involved in churches that performed prison ministry in one way or another. I never attempted to go inside and see how I could serve. Now I now view these times as missed opportunities.

Maybe you want to help but are unsure how. I would love to have you come and join me and the men of Living Stones on a Saturday evening for our worship.

If you aren’t able to make this commitment, there are many ways to help change the lives of men through visible signs of showing Christ’s Love.

Living Stones works in coordination with WCC to better prepare men for the challenges they currently face and those they will face in the future. We do this through a number of programs. Below are examples of the coordinated efforts and how you can participate in enriching lives for the better. I know you will be blessed.

**LIVING STONES collaborates with WASHINGTON CORRECTION CENTER**

Please contact Pastor Norm, livingstones@gsolympia.org or 253-740-9007 for transfer of collected items to the prison.

**FREEDOM BACKPACK PROGRAM**

(Re-entry—read about this program on pg. 3)

- Toiletries/hygiene items (toilet paper, travel-size shampoo, soap, comb, brush, toothpaste, toothbrush, tampons, and feminine pads)
- Ziploc-type Bags (quart and gallon-sized)
- Ponchos
- Tarps (approx. 8’x9’)
- Hand towels
- Socks
- Underwear
- Used plastic grocery sacks (used to make bedding mats)

**STRING INSTRUMENT MUSIC PROGRAM**

Serviceable string instruments (violins, violas, cellos, double basses)

**ART PROGRAM**

Art supplies (paint, brushes, drawing pencils and paper, and canvases)

**CLOTHING LOCKER**

Serviceable clothing (shirts, jackets, pants, underwear, shoes, and socks)

**BIBLE PROGRAM**

Skill-Building Unit
- Children's Bibles
- General Population
  - Master Builders Bible for Men (NIV) - Lutheran Men in Mission

**QUILTING PROGRAM**

All things quilting (material, batting, thread, machines)
Re-entry into the community

Re-entry starts from the moment of incarceration. This often means developing workplace and social skills necessary for positive long term outcomes. When inmates complete their sentences and are ready to live on the outside again, they may elect to participate in Living Stones 180 Project. The goal of LS180 is successful transition into the community. All too often they are released with just the clothes on their backs and little money to obtain shelter and food. Many who are without families have no place to go and some are forced to live on the street. Most are eager to find work and begin living normally, but there are several challenges that make transition difficult for those just released from prison.

Members of the faith community can play a crucial role in helping former inmates. During their incarceration inmates experience loneliness, isolation, rejection by society and a lack of self-worth. A welcoming and non-judgmental faith community can help former inmates cope with emotional aftermath of these experiences by offering hope through practical assistance, restoring trust through genuine friendship and healing of spiritual and emotional wounds.

And, like the early church, these men need more than just our prayers, acceptance, and fellowship in worship. They need practical material help as well, such as food, shelter, clothing, job opportunities and a worshipping community to make their lives better as returning citizens with their faith intact.

We are looking for those who would like to learn more about the Living Stones 180 Project. Pastor Norm and the Living Stones board are reviewing the mechanics of our re-entry program. We are researching other prison ministry re-entry programs to learn from those that have been successful. If you or your church is interested in joining the Living Stones 180 Project, please contact Pastor Norm, livingstones@gsolympia.org or 253-740-9007, Pam Deacon-Joyner, pamdj27@gmail.com or 253-590-8068, or Sandi Nolte, malivingstones@gsolympia.org.

Passionate people sought for transition assistance task force

This task force is a group of people who have one or more of the following: keen knowledge of Living Stones Prison Ministry/history, specific familiarity with the Washington State Department of Corrections as it relates to inmate re-entry, first-hand knowledge of inmate mentorship (either individual or congregational), and/or a special God-appointed passion for those inmates who truly want to serve the Lord with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Current members are: Pastor Norm Arnold, Pam and David Deacon-Joyner, Sharon Peterson and Carol Porter. (Both Sharon and Carol are charter members of the Living Stones Board and have a rich history and exceptional understanding of men and women returning to society after incarceration, what the Department of Corrections provides, and what is needed for a successful re-entry. We are grateful that they have accepted the call.) If you are interested in helping with re-entry or are interested in joining the task force, please contact Pastor Norm, livingstones@gsolympia.org or 253-740-9007, or Pam Deacon-Joyner, pamdj27@gmail.com or 253-590-8068.
Living Stones was recently recognized in Washington State Correctional Industries Newsletter for our work with the Freedom Backpack Program.

Ninety-eight percent of all persons incarcerated in Washington State will be released back into society. Approximately 20-30 percent of those released from Washington Correction Center will be homeless or going to unstable housing situations. Fourteen hundred men were released from WCC last year. With this in mind, it is not a matter of if, but when those in prison will be released, and how can we help ensure a healthy return to society.

Last fall Vinland Lutheran Church in Poulsbo asked about a program to provide bags to releasing inmates. This idea morphed into the Freedom Backpack Program.

Inmates make backpacks from donated material during a time when other work is not being performed. Scarves, hats, and gloves are also made by the men. Incarcerated men at Stafford Creek Corrections Facility weave mats from used plastic grocery sacks to create a ground-covering mat that is washable and insect-resistant. Toiletries and hygiene items are collected by Living Stones Prison Congregation through Southwestern Washington Synod ELCA churches. Items are collected and packed into a backpack by men at Washington Corrections Center and offered to men releasing from WCC. Women’s items are sent to women’s corrections facilities (Mission Creek and Washington Corrections Center for Women).

While the motivation is to help those who are releasing to potential homelessness by providing them with a simple sign of care from their fellow human beings, we hope this act is a first step in moving towards a life of care and productivity with their neighbors. We never know when a small act of kindness might change the life and actions of another. This is one very small action to increase stability of one who has very limited options.

Living Stones Prison Ministry first annual fundraising event

“Our Father’s Day”
Sunday, June 21
2 to 4 p.m.

Proceeds to benefit Living Stones Prison Ministry Re-Entry Program
Silent auction with baked goods that dad will love—Raffle items with father in mind.
Enjoy jazz piano with David Deacon-Joyner.
Learn how we serve the incarcerated; hear about the importance of re-entry and how to help.
at The Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, 1601 North Street SE, Olympia, WA
http://www.livingstonesprisoncongregation.com
Livingstones@gsolympia.org * 253-740-9007

Thank you for your donations!
We give thanks for the generous support of these congregations:
Family of God, Bremerton—multiple items for LS180 Freedom Backpack Program
Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Olympia—administration
Vinland Lutheran, Poulsbo—Jackets for the WCC Clothing Closet
First Lutheran, Tacoma—25 “Big Books” for AA program and clothing for WCC Clothing Closet
St. Andrew, Vancouver—newsletter printing
St. Paul, Vancouver—communion set
I always look forward to Easter. It’s an awe-filled holiday with epic meaning and great symbolism set within a favorite time of year for me. I’ve also come to enjoy the season of Lent, with its emphasis on self-denial and the recognition of the great debt I owe the Author of Life.

This year the transition from Lent to Easter held special meaning and opportunity for me, for Holy Saturday was my most recent opportunity to be within the prison walls of the Washington State Corrections Center in Shelton. I wasn’t there because of an infraction. And I wasn’t there to serve a sentence. I was there voluntarily, to worship with other Christians on the eve of Easter within the figurative tomb of concrete and steel that houses twelve hundred or so of the nearly nineteen thousand inmates that are currently incarcerated in Washington State.

And as on virtually every other visit to worship at the prison, I kind of didn’t want to be there. I spend more time on the road getting there than I like to spend, and I get home later in the evening than I tend to enjoy. But, like literally every other visit to worship at the prison, I was grateful that God had let me worship with those fellow Christians that evening.

It was a wonderful way to usher in Easter. I was blessed to witness four baptisms and an affirmation of baptism (not a rare event at this church, by the way). The music was led by their in-house band and delivered enthusiastically with active involvement from everyone gathered. And the sermon was well-delivered and meaningful on numerous levels.

If you’ve not yet been blessed to worship with the men of the Living Stones Prison Congregation, please know that I think you’d be glad if you did. I hope you’ll make the trip!