



St. Dysmas of South Dakota 2017 Report to congregations

Our ministry is growing as we move into the new year. You may already be aware we are asking congregations to consider increasing their support of St. Dysmas to support our new Reentry and Reintegration Program. This program was approved by the Synod Council following the 2016 Synod Assembly with the provision we have funds committed to support the program for three years before implementation. We are approaching our goal and hope to achieve when congregations have approved their budgets for 2017. We asked congregations to consider an increase of \$1,000 a year for three years but your gift in any amount, one time, or spread over three years is appreciated. We know all congregations are not the same.

This fall I met a college friend for coffee. He was interested in my work as Pastor of St. Dysmas and as I was telling him about our new program to assist men transitioning to life on the street, said, “I wonder if we have any ex-offenders in our congregation?”

I mumbled something in reply. Had I been quick enough I would have replied with something I read recently which said, “The only difference between an orange jump suit and a Brooks Brother’s suit is one bad day.” That isn’t completely true but many visitors to St. Dysmas do comment on how the inmates seem ‘just like us.’ Of course, they do, they were your neighbors, your children, your friends before they were incarcerated.

The reason I mumbled something in reply to my friend was because I didn’t want to speak the words which had popped immediately to mind which were, “Why don’t you ask your pastor about that?” The reason I didn’t want to say them was because I knew his pastor had been incarcerated and while the pastor doesn’t make this a secret, it isn’t my story to tell. (The pastor did give me permission to include it here.)

When I visit congregations I preach a different sermon nearly every week. However, I nearly always feel compelled to say, “None of us is defined by the worst thing we have done, on either side of prison walls.” This is because our biggest regret is not the most important thing about any of us. The good news I proclaim each week is that God defines us in baptism as beloved children. This is who God says we are. Good news for all of us who live with regrets.

May God bless you and your congregation in 2017.

Pastor Bob Chell
on behalf of the Men of St. Dysmas in Sioux Falls and Springfield