

"LOVE IN ACTION" LENT



Can you believe Lent is quickly approaching? Ash Wednesday is February 22, marking the beginning of Lent and ends April 6th. Freedom in Christ would like to once again ask congregations to have a special "pass the plate" offering for the ministry. Your support through prayers and financial gifts allows us to continue the work at Montana State Prison that is so desperately needed.

We would also like to invite you to participate in Zoom chats with Pastor Marlow and Bea. They are available to connect with your congregation during worship services, or group events to discuss and update you on Freedom in Christ. A "Freedom in Christ Sunday" would be a perfect time to visit!



**Freedom in Christ
Prison Ministry**

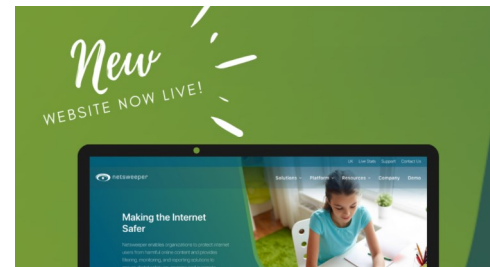
PO Box 617, Anaconda, MT 59711-0617

Website: ficprisonministry.com

Email: info@ficprisonministry.com

We would like to invite you to visit our new website! We are looking forward to keeping you updated through the website with information not only on FIC activities, but other information of interest surrounding prison ministry. We're excited to have a new home on the web and hope you will join us there often - the door is always open!

ficprisonministry.com



A PUBLICATION FROM FREEDOM IN CHRIST PRISON MINISTRY // WINTER 2023

THE KITE

BEHIND THE BARS WITH CHRIST

RENEWAL

2023 is all about renewal!

The word 'renewed' in Greek is
ANANEOO

which means to be renovated by an inward reformation.



I don't make New Year's resolutions. I only break them after a few weeks, and in some instances in a few days. I do, however, try to come up with one word that I can work on all year long. For me, this year, that word is renewal. Personally, life has been full of challenges with several life-changing situations these past couple of years and this year promises to be one of renewal.

As I look back on the last couple of years for Freedom in Christ, this year, too, I feel will be one of a renewed, or renovated spirit.

Inside you will read about our new pastor who is coming on board the middle of February. We are excited to hear about his ideas for this ministry.

The Board has been hard at work this past year. New administrative processes are now in place for processing gifts and communicating with you, our supporters. A brand new, bright and sparkling website is live and operational! We have new governing documents and procedures for operations. Now we turn to strategic planning to keep the ministry viable well into the future.

And we thank you for supporting us these past ten years. Our 11th year appears bright and exciting!

We are embracing renewal and all it has to offer this year. We hope you will continue the journey with us and celebrate your own renewal also!



**2 Corinthians
5:17-18**

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God.....



Planting Many Seeds

2 Corinthians 7-9

⁷...God loves a cheerful giver.
⁸And God is able to shower
all kinds of blessings on you.
In all things and at all times
you will have everything you
need. You will do more and
more good works. ⁹It is
written,

“They have spread their gifts
around to poor people.
Their good works continue
forever.” (Psalm 112:9)

2022 Supporters

We give many thanks to you! Without your financial support, we would not be able to bring hope and light to a dark place. Your gifts allow us to provide a pastor behind the wire to give support and encouragement to the men incarcerated at Montana State Prison. We are able to walk alongside them in their faith journey by providing one-on-one counseling, bereavement support, worship services, and Bible studies. We can show them there is hope, people that care about them, and the sustaining love and grace of God.

Your prayers are equally important; for the men; for the staff at the prison; and for the FIC ministry.

We hope you will continue to walk the faith journey with us and the people at Montana State Prison showing them that God loves them no matter what, and that transformation is possible through the power and presence of Jesus Christ.



“So strengthen one another, and build each other up...”

1 Thessalonians 5:11

Freedom in Christ Prison Ministry at MT State Prison

An additional thank you to Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Polson who sends copies of the quarterly devotional booklets. These booklets are some of the first to go off the shelf at the Religious Activities Center!

We also want to thank all of you for your prayers supporting the men and this ministry at Montana State Prison.

\$10,000 +

Janette Turbak

\$3,000 - \$9,999

Pella Lutheran - Sidney
David Young

\$600 - \$2,999

Northridge Lutheran - Kalispell
First Lutheran - Glasgow
St. Paul Lutheran - Missoula
Good Shepherd Lutheran - Polson
Zion Lutheran - Lewistown
Bethlehem Lutheran - Kalispell
Our Savior's Lutheran - Bonner
Malta Lutheran - Malta
St. Paul Lutheran - Fairfield
Zion Lutheran - Glendive
First Lutheran - Havre
Harold & Shirly Klinker
Peace Lutheran - Billings
Trinity Lutheran - Cody, WY
Barbara Davis
Redeemer Lutheran - Great Falls
Greg & Carrol Karlsgodt
Melanie & Ron Martin-Dent
Paul & Kathryn Hanson

\$300 - \$599

Atonement Lutheran - Missoula
Faith Lutheran - Hamilton
Roxanne Hoblitt
Ron & Betty Brumwell
All Saints Lutheran - Big Sky
Zion Lutheran WELCA - Glendive
Our Lady of the Valley Parish - Helena
Peggy Paugh Leuzinger
Henrietta Jarecki
Hope Lutheran - Bozeman
Our Savior's WELCA - Columbia Falls
Caleb Ball
Delphia Blumenthal

Kristina Mitzman
Kremlin Lutheran - Kremlin
Bethlehem WELCA - Kalispell
John & Gwynn Munding

\$100 - \$299

Charles & Sandy Russ
Messiah Lutheran - Red Lodge
Wayne Pris
Judy Lamb
Doris Bishop
Christ the King Lutheran - Bozeman
St. John's Lutheran - Great Falls
Dawn Petty
Dan & Betty Rude
Immanuel Lutheran - Westby
Doug Anderson
George & Marilyn Sorensen
Patricia Bueling
Barbara Gwynn
First Lutheran WELCA - Glasgow
Bethlehem WELCA - Billings
Ft. Peck Lutheran - Ft. Peck
Kim Lemke
Our Savior's Lutheran - Thompson Falls
Our Redeemer WELCA - Nashua
Leo & Dorothy Heath
Our Savior's Lutheran - Laurel
Loren & Nancy Sasser
Leif & Teresa Anderson
Bradley Green
Allen & Suzi Hansen
Robert & Susan Leaverton
Cal Fuss
Ebenezer WELCA - Culbertson
Bonnie Grimes
New Hope Lutheran - Great Falls
Colleen Nelson-Walker
Dave Peters
Marjorie Wilder
Thom & Ruth Webb

\$1 - \$99

Pr. Ellen Ayers
John Trangmoe

Sharon Russell
Harlan & Patricia Orham
Sumer Pellett
Gerald & Judy Aaker
David Steinberg
Ronald Mueller
Leo Miller
Valerie Webster
Tom Wynia
Michael Lawson
Connie Campbell-Pierson & Roxanne Klingensmith
Gloria Dei WELCA - Butte
Greg & Dawn Field
James & Linda Tibbets
Shields River WELCA - Wilsall
Lauris Byxbe
Harold & Dorothy Everson
Leslie & Margaret Nelson
Christine Whiteside
Melissa Fontenez
Deborah Gabse
Cynthia Sparing
Mark Chase
Rod & Sandy Herrick
First Lutheran - Plains
American Lutheran - Billings
Saco WELCA - Saco
Teresa Kinley
Sherrie Nash
Mike & Dorothy Borge
Bethlehem Lutheran - Billings
Janet & Charlie Young
Nancy & Ron Osborn
Kathy Spritzer
Celeste & Rod Pogachar
Kerry Rassmussen

Prayer Book Fund

Sumer Pellett

Devotions Book Fund

Barbara Gwynn
Caleb Ball

Worship & Study Supplies

Barbara Gwynn



Introducing Our New Pastor!

2022 - A Look Back

2022 was a year of starts and stops. In March, after a long absence in the prison due to Covid, Pastor Rob was able to go back inside for pastoral visits. Prior to that, he was doing these visits via the telephone.

In April we were able to begin having worship services again, but only with small segmented groups, which limited the men's participation in religious activities. Then there was the shortage of staff which has further limited our activities inside the prison. This has not only been frustrating for us, but also for the men and the staff at the prison. On a good note, one-on-one pastoral visits have continued. We are hopeful our activities will increase during 2023.

Bea and Pastor Rob attended the Montana Synod Assembly and got to say hello to old acquaintances and make some new. It was a good time and we enjoyed seeing everyone again after a two-year absence.

Pastor Rob attended the State Employees Charitable Giving Campaign kickoff held at the Capitol Rotunda in Helena in September. He spoke to many state employees about the ministry and even got to meet the governor and discuss prison ministry.

So, while 2022 was not all we expected, we were able to do more activities than in the past couple of years. Hopefully, it will continue to improve as we go into 2023.

Bea took on the challenging job of changing and updating our administrative and accounting systems along with a brand new

website during the year. We left WordPress, and Mail Chimp behind and switched over to an app called Tithe.ly, which is specifically geared toward church and ministry management. This app combines our website, giving platform, donor management, and email service all under one roof and works in tandem with each other, thus streamlining workflows.

We also switched our accounting program from Flockbase to Quickbooks, which is streamlining the financial workflow as well, and it, also integrates with Tithe.ly. All of this will hopefully free up much needed time to devote to other areas of the ministry and improved communications with you, our supporters. This upgrade was a much-needed improvement that took the majority of the year to complete.

After ten years as Pastor and Mission Developer, Pastor Rob Nedbalek retired from his position. We give thanks for his ten years to the ministry and wish him well in his retirement.

Also during 2022, the Board continued to work hard reviewing ministry processes, developing procedures and looking into the future for Freedom in Christ. A related article appears later in this newsletter highlighting their work during the year.

Happy New Year to you all. May 2023 be a year full of grace and peace.

Good day to you friends of Freedom in Christ,

These last few years have been interesting have they not? I don't know about you, but I became a new person through Covid. I especially became a different pastor. Slowly I stopped wearing my alb. I memorized my sermons. I stopped working from the office. I started to focus on relationships and community and our place within community. And that's where my general thoughts started going, who are we, who are we in community, who are we in Christ, and who does Christ call us to be?

While I looked at community and my place in it, I began to discern where God was calling me to and began to look back at what called me to become a pastor in the first place. I first went to seminary with

Military Chaplaincy in mind. I had served in the Army for nearly a decade and I felt I was going right back to the uniform with a little cross on my chest. Since I graduated from Wartburg I have served as a pastor in multiple parishes and as a chaplain for the Military, Hospices, Sheriff's Departments, and multiple hospitals throughout my ministry, and I am excited to head out to act as pastor and chaplain at MSP.

There is joy in following the call from Matthew 25: 35-36: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 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. ...Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." You live out this calling by supporting this

ministry and any others you are a part of.

I thank you for the opportunity to enter this ministry and serve God's people inside MSP. Remember that Christ is with us all, wherever we are, in our darkest places and the places filled with light. Let us fill MSP with the light of God and the joy of our Savior.

We will get to know each other better over our time together and I hope to meet all of you. I thank you for your generosity and your willingness to serve "the guys" in Montana State Prison.

In Christ,

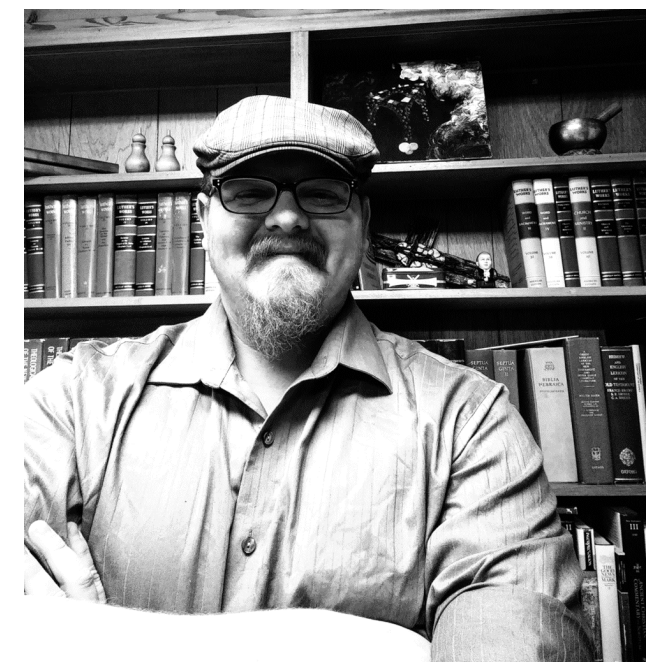

Rev. Marlow Carrels
FIC Lead Pastor

The Board and staff of Freedom in Christ Prison Ministry (FIC) is pleased (and very excited) to introduce you to our new Lead Pastor

Pastor Marlow was raised in Belgrade, Montana and left the Gallatin Valley twenty years ago. Since then, he has been around the world a time or two thanks to the Army and the travel bug. He is married to artist, author, and business owner Nikki and father to two awesome girls. He is a graduate of Montana State University – Bozeman (English Literature), Wartburg Theological Seminary (Master of Divinity), and is currently working on his thesis project for a Master of Sacred Theology at the Institute of Lutheran Theology.

Pastor Marlow brings a wide variety of ministerial history to FIC. Previously he has served as an Army Chaplain, Sheriff's Chaplain, Mental Health Chaplain, Hospital Chaplain, and was Pastor of Gold Hill Lutheran Church of Butte, MT and Westby Lutheran Church of Westby, MT. He is a Stephen Minister, has sung opera professionally, is an Army vet, and avid fisherman, hiker, camper, skier, museum goer, and bibliophile who reads way too much!

Pastor Marlow is excited about the future of FIC and hopes to bring fresh ideas and a new perspective to this wonderful ministry.



Statement of Purpose

Section 2.01 Nonprofit Purpose. This corporation is organized exclusively for charitable, religious, educational, and scientific purposes, including, for such purposes, the making of distributions to organizations that qualify as exempt organizations under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

Section 2.03 Specific Purpose. The specific objectives and purpose of the Corporation are, but not limited to:

- a. Support a 24/7 on-call pastoral presence inside Montana State Prison at Deer Lodge who provides worship, pastoral care, Bible study, bereavement support, and counseling from a grace centered perspective for the sake of the inmates.
- b. Provide/Support public advocacy in the State of Montana around the topic of incarceration and re-entry.
- c. Provide education for congregations and organizations regarding incarceration, re-entry, and social justice.
- d. Cultivate productive relationships with prison administration and staff to fulfill collegial relationships for the safety of the ministry to and with the inmates.
- e. Support family involvement for the sake of the inmates.
- f. Provide/Support theological education with the prison system.
- g. Consider expansion of ministry services with the Montana prison system.
- h. Coordinate with volunteers who come into the prison to participate in worship services and study groups.
- i. Encourage/Facilitate FIC Board members to receive training to be MSP volunteers to gain access to the prison.



Hard at Work!

For the last two years, the FIC board of directors have spent many hours working on strategic planning and re-organization of the ministry. In 2020 FIC underwent a comprehensive ministry review. Stake-holders, donors, key prison officials, and staff were all interviewed to get a feel of where we are at and where we need to go. The consensus was that we needed to have some hard, honest conversations about where changes needed to be made.

In 2021 Covid interrupted the process and progress of the reorganization discussions for FIC. 2022 brought renewed vigor, and the board brought in a consultant to help lead us through the changes we identified that we needed to make. Two board retreats were held in Deer Lodge - one in the spring and one in late fall.

Job descriptions were scrutinized and re-written, the Constitution and By-Laws were re-written and combined into one document that will govern the ministry. We wrote a Statement of Purpose for the ministry which is included in our new By-Laws. Communication processes were discussed, and business procedures were outlined.

Many discussions were held about where the ministry wants to go into the future. Hypothetical questions were asked and in-depth discussions resulted. Questions like: What, if any, kinds of programs can we expand to include in what the ministry can offer? Where can we expand funding? How can we improve communications with our supporters? There's still much work to be done.

In 2023 the Board will focus on strategic planning. This will include plans for now and plans well into the future to sustain this ministry.

We believe Freedom in Christ is an important and much-needed ministry to serve our incarcerated population in Montana. Our mission statement was developed when we first began eleven years ago this year:

Transforming lives at Montana State Prison through the power and presence of Jesus Christ.

We still wholeheartedly believe this is the mission of Freedom in Christ. But we also believe we can do more to help meet that mission. We hope you will continue the journey with us!

On February 10th, Board members attended volunteer training at Montana State Prison. They are now approved volunteers that can enter the prison to attend activities at the Religious Activities Center.

Way to go, team!

Our Board of Directors

- Rev. Kris Mitzman, Chair (Billings)
- Allen Hansen, Vice-Chair (Roberts)
- Rev. Paul Anderson, Secretary (Hamilton)
- Michael Johns, CPA (Deer Lodge)
- Rev. Doug Anderson (Missoula)
- Rev. Peggy Paugh Leuzinger, DEM, MT
- Synod Liaison (Livingston)
- Rev. Marlow Carrels, Lead Pastor (Butte)
- Bea Rosenleaf, Executive Secretary (Anaconda)

We are looking at expanding the board by four more members, for a total of nine members.

If you are interested in serving on the Board, or any subcommittee (once we get them set up), please contact Bea. She can direct your name to the Board for consideration. Please note that you do not have to be an ordained minister to serve on the Board!

We are also looking for people interested in volunteering as Ambassadors for the ministry. This would include talking to groups about prison ministry and Freedom in Christ, help with social media, helping with local events, etc.

Pictures Top to Bottom: Allen Hansen; Pr. Peggy Paugh Leuzinger; Pr. Doug Anderson; Dennis Trotter, Consultant; Pr. Kris Mitzman; Right: Pr. Paul Anderson; Pr. Marlow Carrels, Pr. Rob Nedbalek, Dennis Trotter, Allen Hansen

Kogudus Retreats

On November 4, 5 & 6, 2022, Freedom in Christ hosted Kogudus Renewal Ministry's presentation, BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING at Montana State Prison in Deer Lodge. There were 9 volunteers, including myself, and 29 men. We sang, we laughed, we cried, we prayed and we worshiped.

As small groups, at tables, identified with the churches of the first century, like Corinthians, Galatians etc. our Bible studies focused on thematic passages:

- CREATED TO CARE - Genesis 1:26-31, Psalm 8:1-9, Psalm 72:1-14
- CALLED AND BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING - Genesis 12:1-3
- PARABLE OF THE TALENTS – Matthew 25:14-30
- PARABLE OF THE WORKERS – Matthew 20:1-16
- PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN – Luke 10:25-37
- PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL – Luke 12:13-21
- PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL – Luke 15:1-2 & 11-31

We made posters based on our studies. Here are a few of them. I will leave it to you to decide who the long-haired guy, holding the Bible at the prison window is supposed to represent.

The guys had a great time, and partook of some great food, including fresh apples, bananas and oranges, which are no longer served in the dining halls.

Since the retreat, I met with several of the guys in either pastoral visits or Lutheran study, or just in passing, and they all said that the retreat was AWESOME, and they can't wait to do it again. Retreats are only permitted once a year for each group, and Kogudus is working on another retreat in April of 2023.

~ Pastor Rob Nedbalek

Sitting at a table with three inmates and Pastor Paul Anderson, from Faith Lutheran in Hamilton was a powerful experience. From Friday evening through Sunday noon, the five of us engaged in conversations. The topics were guided by the retreat focus, but each of the men shared with increasing openness about the circumstance that led to their incarceration and their challenges, struggles, grief and pain at their situation. Our shared humanity, our bonding in our brokenness, our ability to experience community in relationships was transformational.

I have shared with some people that I found myself in the days after joining in the Kogudus Retreat thinking about my time inside with the men

and wondering at how the tears rolled down my cheeks. It occurred to me several days later that there was a way in which I felt like I was in, as the Celtics would say, a "thin space" – that the separation between God and humanity was different inside. I have visited men in jail and in prison over the years and have almost been unable to describe my emotions in making those visits.

Through this longer period of time, and a chance to share more deeply in the context of the Kogudus retreat, I experienced the presence of God as I joined in community with these men. These men knew that the world outside the wire considers them to be outside the realm of God's love and grace, yet inside the wire, there was a

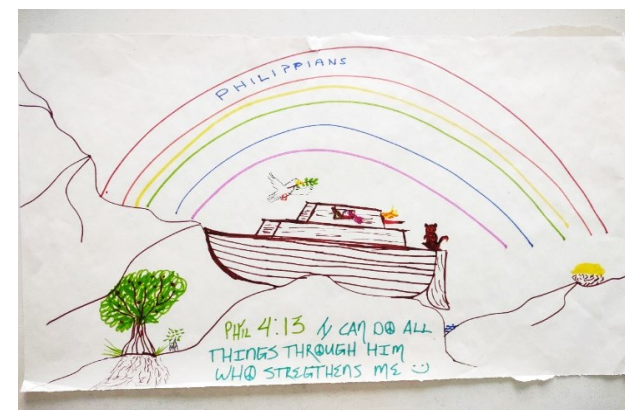
clear joy in receiving grace, acceptance and love as embodied by the Kogudus volunteers.

I give thanks to God for the opportunity to share in being agents of God's grace but also receiving again a sense of that grace for myself, too.

~ Rev. Peggy Paugh-Leuzinger
D.E.M. and Board Liaison
Montana Synod, ELCA



Kogudus Artwork



What is

Kogudus Renewal Ministry



Kogudus is an Estonian word for fellowship or a Christian gathering. As an organization, Kogudus has a rich history and has touched the lives of many people. The following is a brief summary of its beginning and continued development.

Participants at the first retreat in 1969 were twelve men from First Lutheran Church in Glasgow, Montana. This event was a response to the 1968-69 emphasis on evangelism in the American Lutheran Church and was aimed to provide a retreat experience for the men of the congregation.

The second Kogudus involved pastors and laity from the congregations of the Ft. Peck Conference. Each of the following retreats included people from different communities in Montana and then from other states.

Continue reading more information on their website:

<http://www.kogudus.org/>

To participate in a Kogudus retreat at either Montana Prisons, contact Rev. Greg Karlgodt at gk@kogudus.org or 406-544-1699.

Blessed *To be a* *Blessing*

But what seemed to resonate with them all was the very Lutheran concept of grace, the unconditional love and forgiveness demonstrated in action and Word. They were unaccustomed to that treatment and welcomed it.

Allen Hansen

This was a new event to me, and I am totally serious when I say it was a privilege.

I look forward to doing this again this year.

Pastor Kris Mitzman

Hi, I'm Pastor Paul, I am on the Freedom In Christ ministry board. I was blessed to be a part of the Kogudus team that held a retreat at the men's state prison in Deer Lodge, Montana, last November.

As the music director, I led the music for the group. We sang, and praised God together. Some of the inmates also participated in leading some of the songs.

We are all called to be "salt and light" in our communities and world from Matthew 5. It was so wonderful to listen to the stories and experience of God at work through these brothers in Christ, and how we were all being salt and light to each other.

Please pray for our Kogudus team as preparations are being made for more retreats in both the Men's and Women's prisons in Montana.

Maybe God is calling you to be a part of a Kogudus retreat, as a prayer warrior or a participant on a retreat. If interested please contact Greg Karlsgodt.

~ **Pastor Paul Anderson**
FIC Board Secretary



In September, I had the privilege of participating as the Retreat Pastor at the Kogudus Retreat inside the Montana State Women's Prison. This was a new event to me, and I am totally serious when I say it was a privilege.

We had around 20 women participate along with our ten volunteers; they came for lots of reasons. Some were there to break the monotony of the long days and some for the tasty cookies. Many of the women there take their Bible study very seriously, and I was impressed with how well some of them study and know their scripture, and are hungry for new insights.

Our discussions were deep and often profound, and some chose to share their very difficult stories, either in their small groups or in front of the whole groups. The Holy Spirit was present throughout.

We laughed, cried, prayed, sang, and shared...I look forward to doing this again this year.

~ **Pastor Kris Mitzman**
FIC Board Chair

Kogudus Retreat – Women's Prison

Some Thoughts from a Kogudus Retreat "Blessed to be a Blessing"

Susan Hedahl, in Working Preacher, describes joy as a radical, emotional effect of radical human action to fulfill Jesus' commandments. She calls this joy 'a holy hilarity'!

Having no sense of humor, as noted frequently by colleagues, and uncomfortable with the types of 'spiritual exercises' so frequently used at assemblies, workshops, and meetings, it was, indeed, ironic to be 'invited' to be one of the Holy Hilarity leaders at the most recent Montana Women's Prison (MWP), "Blessed to be a Blessing" Retreat – my first ever experience with Kogudus. The punchline of my first joke was, "Who signed me up for this?" Of course, the answer is, "The hand of God!"

Kogudus is radical human action. And my first Kogudus experience was, by every metric, a holy hilarity. No, it was neither the quality of the shared jokes, although many of participant's jokes were quite good, nor the conduct of the spiritual exercises provided by Kogudus that filled us with joy. It was the unfettered openness, willingness to share, and welcoming nature of the twenty inmate participants that made our MWP visit so very special. According to participants, it was the selfless acts of leadership and service of the dozen volunteers that gave them hope, filled them with joy.

I wondered how many inmates made the connection between the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, "...filled with compassion and ran and threw his arms around him," and the reception they might receive when released from MWP. I think they did. And many realized through the Parable of the Talents that we, inmates and Kogudus leaders, are all entrusted with 'talents' so they did take risks and share their gifts of perspective in a spirit of service and thanksgiving.

Several of the participants were currently unchurched or had never experienced church. Some came from faith community experiences. Many were raised with indigenous (40% of the participants were Native/Indigenous as are Montana's inmates in general) expressions of belief. Some, especially from evangelical backgrounds, had incredibly and firmly established faith. But what seemed to resonate with them all was the very Lutheran concept of grace, the unconditional love and forgiveness demonstrated in action and Word. They were unaccustomed to that treatment and welcomed it.

Michael, one of the Kogudus leaders, quoted a passage from Hebrews 13 – "Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them." Perhaps this is the greatest lesson I carried away from my experience. I could not understand until I got close enough to the inmates' experiences, their lives, their despair, and their loss to make them mine. Now I hope for them, I pray for them, I wish their burdens lifted and their hope restored. And, as soon as Greg and crew organize another retreat, sign me up!

~ **Allen Hansen**
FIC Board Vice-Chair

