

# Not Forgetting Those in Prison

Pastor Kevin Jud of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Hamilton, Ohio, heard of the need for a Bible study in the Butler County Juvenile Detention Center (JDC) from a teenage girl whose brother attended Immanuel's school. This teen was sentenced at the Department of Youth Services in Scioto, Ohio, and was baptized at their facility by Pastor Jud. She spoke of the need for those in prison not to be forgotten. People in prison need to hear the Gospel, too.

Pastor Jud requested permission to start a Bible study at the Butler County JDC. This Bible study has now been going on for over 12 years. Pastor Jud brings cookies every Monday night, and the hour he spends teaching is known as the "cookie church."

The Bible study takes place from 6:30-7:30 p.m. and often goes later if someone wants to talk. Pastor Jud alternates weeks with three different units. The congregation provides cookies, Bibles to distribute, and copies of Sunday's sermon and bulletin. In addition to the ministry at JDC, the congregation keeps in touch with inmates in jail and prison through weekly "Jail Mail" that contains a copy of the Sunday sermon, the bulletin, a Bible study and a Sudoku puzzle just for fun. Contact is also maintained through email, Christmas cards and books sent from Amazon.

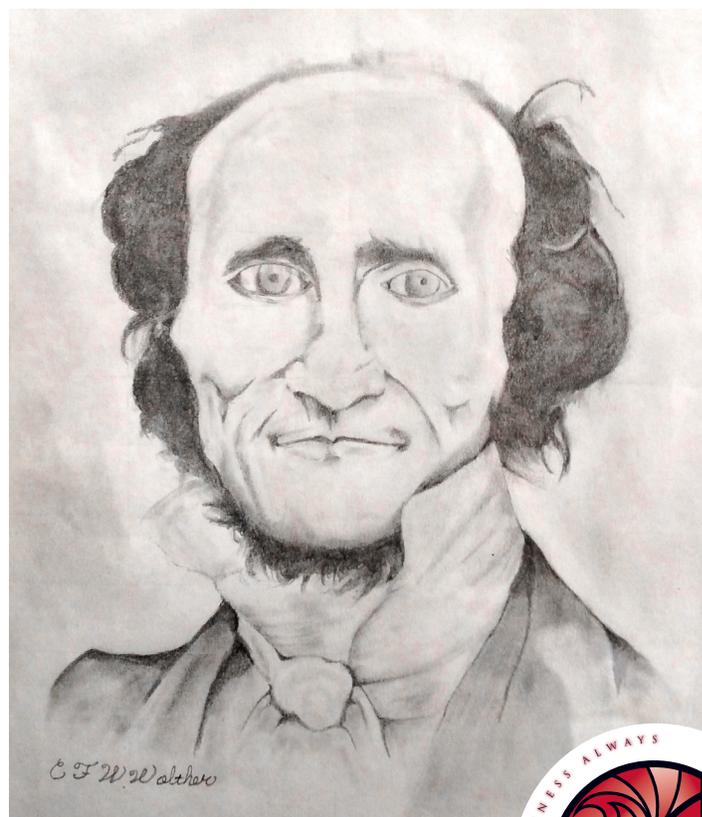
Pastor Jud has found that it takes patience to help those in prison, so there are not many quick-fix success stories. It takes time to get know the inmates' situations. Many of the prisoners were under the influence of alcohol or drugs when they committed the crime. Also, many were not in healthy, loving relationships. They were entangled in bad circumstances, which led to hurtful decisions and their consequences. But Pastor Jud has found that the prisoners' obstacles to a new life in Christ are not that much different from anyone else's. Everyone needs to have a seed of God's grace planted and then nurtured by His Word.

In his 12 years of ministering to those at JDC, jail and prison, Pastor Jud has found some tidbits of wisdom that he can pass on to other LCMS congregations that are thinking of starting a prison ministry. Here they are, in no particular order: We care for others but not beyond what they are willing to care for themselves. We can help initiate direction and be there in following up with goals,

but we can't do things for people that they are not willing to do for themselves. In helping others where they are, there has to be a balance of empathy. We do believe that the Gospel changes people's lives, but there are no silver bullets as to how that is done. As President Harrison has observed, we need to think of creative ways to reach people with the love of Christ.

The most important thing to remember is not to forget those in prison, for they too are part of the Body of Christ. Pastor Jud has baptized prisoners; a prisoner found a Bible that was left behind and started reading it; another prisoner became a member of Immanuel. Although he can't come to worship, he is still connected by doing art work for the bulletin. This inmate is currently in Ohio's Supermax prison in Youngstown, Ohio, and he drew a portrait of President Harrison that was sent and warmly received. There is often great talent behind the prison walls.

Remembering those in prison is a work of our Lord, and by God's grace through Immanuel Lutheran Church and Pastor Jud, this work is thriving in Hamilton, Ohio, at the Butler County Juvenile Detention Center, the Butler County Jail and Ohio prisons.



This bulletin artwork was drawn by a prisoner and member of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Hamilton, Ohio.