

Prison Congregation Task Force
Montana Synod of the ELCA
2415 13th Ave. S.
Great Falls, MT 59405

October 20, 2008

Dear Friend in Christ,

The Montana Synod Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and its Outreach Committee have directed a task force be formed to lay the ground work to establish a congregation at Montana State Prison (MSP) open to all inmates. We embrace this task and are inspired by the opportunity. MSP no longer has a Chaplain. In fact, state prisons throughout the country have been abolishing their chaplaincy programs and replacing them with "Religious Activity Coordinators" (more in keeping with the separation of Church and State). Without a resident Chaplain to provide spiritual guidance and care, the inmates and prison staff suffer the loss.

Did you know that:

- more than 13,000 offenders are supervised by the Montana Department of Corrections?
- the annual cost to house an inmate at MSP is more than \$33,000, about 2.5 times the annual tuition costs at a Montana University?
- 95-97% of inmates at MSP will someday be released back into our communities where transitional resources, services and assistance are limited at best?
- studies reveal that where faith communities work with inmates while in prison and during their transition back into communities, recidivism rates are four to five times lower than state and national rates.

Prison Congregations of America (PCA), a ministry founded and directed by Rev. Ed Nesselhuf, has what we believe is the answer: establishing a congregation in the prison and calling a pastor to serve it! The enclosed brochure will give you an idea of the mission and scope of the PCA in establishing a congregation.

Why be involved in prison ministry? Reasons are many; however we as Christians have a moral, ethical and Biblical imperative. It is a win-win for all. Inmates transformed by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit become productive, contributing members of society. Please prayerfully consider what you can do to make this prison congregation a reality. Your prayer support is needed and appreciated, and your financial support is vital to help make a prison congregation in Montana a reality. Please see the enclosed gift response card for ways to contribute to Montana's prison congregation.

Sincerely,

Karyl Viste & Chris Flohr
Task Force Co-Chairs