

LA CROSSE COUNTY JAIL MINISTRY
P.O. Box 2675
La Crosse, WI 54602-2675

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MESSAGE FROM AMY JO



Dear Friends,
Encouragers,
and Supporters
of La Crosse Jail
Ministry,

I am writing
to update you
on our efforts
to minister to
inmates during
the Pandemic.

In the early weeks of the shelter-in-place order, Chaplain John David continued ministering in-person to inmates in the County Jail. He conducted library visits, prayer services, and worship services, and more. To help keep everyone safe from COVID-19, cell blocks participated in religious activities within their own units instead of gathering together. Rooms where inmates met were wiped down after each use, and library materials sat for 72 hours before returning to circulation.

All religious programming ceased in the Jail by mid-April. From then through June, Chaplain David focused on other projects for La Crosse Jail Ministry: communicating with ministry partners, establishing storage for ministry donations and materials, and beginning to integrate Circles of Support with La Crosse Jail Ministry. He also developed contact lists, fundraising resources and a chaplain’s handbook. We are deeply grateful for his efforts and diligence with all these projects.

By mid-summer, several factors led to Chaplain David’s concluding his

employment with La Crosse Jail Ministry. John, you will be truly missed. May God bless you richly in all your future endeavors!

Despite all that has happened this year, many inmates received ministry. Distribution of Bibles continued, and dozens of inmates met together in trying circumstances to seek comfort and find solace in religious programs. Before the shelter-in-place order, a number of inmates attended local congregations upon release from jail to keep growing and making positive connections. These accomplishments are a result of your financial support and volunteer efforts, along with the work of the chaplain and the Jail Ministry Board, to make our community stronger and better.

As we look to the future, we know those incarcerated within the Jail will still need care and support as they face some of the hardest days of their lives. The La Crosse Jail Ministry remains committed to ministering to all in a dignified and uplifting way. We will continue to integrate Circles of Support within our ministry to offer as much encouragement for growth and lasting positive change after release.

The Board has begun to assemble a committee to search for our next chaplain. May God shine favor on our efforts to find the right person to work with our excellent jail staff and volunteers and to offer spiritual ministry to God’s most vulnerable children inside and outside the County Jail.

Please consider investing in this vital effort to make the La Crosse Jail Ministry more effective than ever to serve our community to its fullest potential. These

past months have threatened to shake us. But with your help, together we can find firm footing for a brighter future for all in our community. Thank you,

Amy Jo Van Arsdall
La Crosse Jail Ministry Board Member

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JAIL MINISTRY
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Inspiring, thought provoking art from inmates on display in

THE PEN PROJECT EXHIBIT

Article featured in the La Crosse Tribune on Nov 4, 2019

By Emily Pyrek

Whether the medium is paint, printmaking or prose, the arts have a cathartic quality that extends to both creator and viewer, conveying emotion and fostering connection between two individuals who may never come face to face or voice to voice.

A universal language, art conveys not just beauty but a message, and through The Pen Project that message is one of faith, purpose and even atonement, with each work created by an at-risk or incarcerated individual.

On Friday evening, a collection of 40 paintings, sketches, poems and pencil drawings from the Eau Claire-based The Pen Project were unveiled at the La Crosse County Administration Building, 212 Sixth St. N., where they will remain on display through the end of February 2020.

A collaboration among the La Crosse County Arts Board, La Crosse County Jail Ministry and The Pen Project director Keri White, the exhibit is the first of its kind in La Crosse. Traveling Pen Project displays have previously appeared in Eau Claire, Chippewa Falls, Omaha, Neb., and Wheaton, Ill.

"We're excited to bring this very powerful project from Eau Claire County to La Crosse County," said Doug Weidenbach, chair of the city of La Crosse Arts Board.



Don Campbell, La Crosse Jail Ministry Board President viewing assorted artwork.

The Pen Project was founded under the ministry 513Free, which offered concerts and worship experiences to criminal offenders.

When inmates at Jackson Correctional Institution Black River Falls requested



Kathy and Matt Allen of La Crosse view assorted artwork on display for the Pen Project exhibit, picture by Peter Thomson, La Crosse Tribune

music sheets so they could sing along, it sparked the idea to create a lyric book, which morphed into a sharing of artistic endeavors among those in custody.

When inmates at Jackson Correctional Institution Black River Falls requested music sheets so they could sing along, it sparked the idea to create a lyric book, which morphed into a sharing of artistic endeavors among those in custody.

In 2016, their creations were first compiled into a magazine, and since then five additional issues of The Pen Project have been printed.

More than 2,500 copies of the October 2019 edition have been distributed to more than 55 correctional and treatment facilities in a dozen states, featuring work submitted by individuals both in-state and across the country.

"Creative outlets allow people to reflect on, expose and express emotions and messages which might otherwise be suppressed," says White. "Suppressing and internalizing trauma and emotions can be damaging, so creating healthy opportunities for incarcerated and at-risk individuals to express themselves through art and writing is essential for healing to occur."

Having their artistic contributions, and the life stories their words and figures convey, recognized and

appreciated helps instill a sense of value in individuals who may feel ostracized, worthless or written-off.

"This exhibit speaks to the humanistic qualities of the seven million men, women and youth who are navigating the U.S. Justice System," White says. "So often, the public hears stories of a negative nature about prisons, jails, treatment centers and the like. This exhibit comes

with a positive and powerful message that may shake up the stereotypes and misperceptions that community members may have."



The works are profound and, Weidenbach says, of incredible quality. Agrees White, "We often receive submissions in the mail that leave us in awe."

Continued from page 2

Among The Pen Project's printed pieces have been a zebra, rendered in colored pencil, with two birds perched on its back; an ink-rolled print of Jesus in a crown of thorns; and a drawing of a furrowed brow and two eyes, blue streams flooding from the rim, accompanied by prose:

"The eyes show many things ... compassionate tears show the will, the want, and the need to push through and find my purpose, weapon or tool. It's pitiful. The bags under the eyes show endless and sleepless nights in search. The wound, the cut made from trials and errors. The blood that drizzles turns to ink — ink! ... My purpose was in my hand all this time. My pens are my tools ... they help me learn about myself and improve at the same time."

For some, the acrylic portraits and free-flowing sentiments scrawled on loose-leaf paper are a form of reparation, a request for clemency from those they have harmed physically or emotionally. Transformational acts of repentance, received with forgiveness, are possible even within prison walls, White notes.

"People use this as any opportunity to not only apologize to victims but ask, 'How can I atone for my actions?'" Weidenbach says. "Or to let themselves know why something they did was wrong and to understand the repercussions."

Weidenbach hopes La Crosse County will adopt something like The Pen Project, moved by the words and works has seen from the traveling exhibit.

As one poem, submitted by a man named Eric, reads:

"I can soar, I am more. I am not what happened before. I am broken. Therefore open. I am not just baggage I am holding. I have done wrong. Now I do right. I am not giving up without a fight. I am my future. Not just my past ... I'm more of my ending than my beginning."

For more information on The Pen Project, visit www.thepenproject.org.

Emily Pyrek can be reached at emily.pyrek@lee.net.

Continued on page 3



WE ARE HIRING!

JOIN OUR TEAM.

The Position for chaplain for the La Crosse Jail Ministry is open for applicants. If you know of someone who might be interested, please share the following position announcement with them.

POSITION ANNOUNCEMENT-CHAPLAIN

The La Crosse Jail Ministry Board is initiating a search for a full-time or part-time chaplain. The chaplain provides pastoral care to women and men incarcerated in the La Crosse County Jail and, when requested, to their families and to correctional facility staff.

Required Qualifications

- High school diploma or equivalency
- Successful completion of ministry training, e.g., bachelor's degree, certification, or clinical pastoral education
- Ordained or commissioned to function in ministry by an appropriate religious authority
- Faith group endorsement

Desired Qualifications

- Masters' degree in theology from accredited institution or equivalent

- Ministry or chaplaincy experience in a jail or prison setting

Compensation

- Commensurate with experience
- Three weeks personal time off
- Additional time for continuing education

For a detailed position description or additional information about the position, contact Harvey Witzenburg, Search Committee Chair, harvpella@gmail.com. (608) 385-5422

Candidates should submit:

- Letter of application, detailing interest in and qualifications for the position,
- Resume,
- Names and telephone numbers of three professional references,
- A letter of recommendation,
- Faith group endorsement from religious authority.

E-mail application materials to: Harvey Witzenburg, Search Committee Chair, at harvpella@gmail.com.

Screening will begin on November 2, 2020 and continue until the position is filled.

WE HAVE A NEW LOGO TO SUPPORT OUR MISSION!

James Bushman's Design Fundamentals class of 16 students at Western Technical College took on our project to refresh our logo. Mr. Bushman is an Instructor in Digital Media Production. The class is a community based learning project helping students use their creative skills to develop marketing and communication products.

We asked students to reflect the spirit of Jail Ministry's goals of hope, second chances, new opportunities, uplifting, encirclement and support.

Jail Ministry Board provided feedback to the students to help them develop their skills. Objectives of the class include learning good strategies for giving and accepting critiques of their own and others work.



The design of Samuel R. Edwards was selected. Sam is now in his last year at Western TC in the Digital Media Production program. Growing up, he watched his sister become a graphic designer and that inspired him to consider that profession too. He hopes to get a job after college in sound design/engineering or graphic design. He has our recommendation and appreciation!

Thank you to the WTC students and their instructor, and also Kari Reyburn, Director of Equity, Inclusion, & Community Engagement who helped us arrange this project.