



Dismas Ministry Resources

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Description:

This webinar tells the story of Dismas Ministry, which seeks to provide numerous Catholic faith and prayer resources for persons who are incarcerated and those who minister to them. It walks through the different resources, all of which are available in English and Spanish versions.

The Presenters:

The presenters are:

- **Tyler Curtis** - Ms. Curtis is Director of Dismas Ministry and has extensive experience in working with Catholic non-profits.
- **Ron Zeilinger** - Mr. Zeilinger is Founder and former Director of Dismas Ministry.

To learn more about Dismas Ministry, please [click here](#).

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Transcription:

Ron Zeilinger: Hello, everybody. It is good to be with you all, and thanks for tuning in with us. Ron and Tyler here with Dismas Ministry. It is a bit awkward for me talking to people that I can see. So, you have the advantage of this time. I think you can see us in the slides, but we cannot see you. And I am going to talk a little bit about myself and tell some stories in the beginning here. And, I don't have the advantage of my friend, Father Byron who when we are in crowds, and I'm telling stories, if I start to tell a story that you folks have heard before, he puts two fingers on his cheek and that says, this is the second time I'm telling the story. So, if I, if some of you have heard these things, I apologize and you know, just ask you to hang in there.

Ron Zeilinger: yeah, I want just to go back and talk a little bit about myself at first because something I learned when I lived and worked with the Lakota people in South Dakota was just to go ahead and explain who you are to your audience. It is not a thing of pride. It is a thing of humility that they need to know who you are. And it is not bragging; it is just passing along information that is a courtesy. So that is what I am trying to do here today. I was born and raised here in Wisconsin and, on a dairy farm and the neighborhood, the area was, populated by all descendants of Austrian immigrants, Austrian Tap Clicks. So, I attended the country school in the country, parish, Holy Rosary and my, neighbors on all sides where my aunts, my uncles, my cousins, and I grew up in an atmosphere that was immersed in the Catholic faith.

Ron Zeilinger: And that has been, I guess, my, my basis, my foundation, and my strong point throughout my entire life. The people that I knew, mainly, I remember my grandmother was such an intense devotion to Jesus and the Eucharist. Her devotion had a profound effect on me that I have carried throughout my life. And, and throughout the ministry. I am incredibly grateful for that history and the graces that were given to me in that way. At that time, if you were interested in being a priest, you were encouraged to go to the seminary and give that a try. And so, I did. I joined the priests of the Sacred Heart. And I went to the minor seminary, the novitiate, three years of college and graduate school. And, although I earned a master's degree in theology or a master's degree in divinity, I decided that lay ministry would be the path that would be best laid out for me.

Ron Zeilinger: So, at some, at one point, then I did leave the seminary, but I took with me all the richness of that training and, especially the spirituality of the Priests of the Sacred Heart. That has also been very formative. I had terrific models and mentors in the order. Even now, I remember talks Father Leo, the founder of the priests of the Sacred Heart, gave to us. He talked about the meaning of the Heart of Jesus, and related devotion to the Sacred Heart to social justice issues and social outreach in both his talks and his writings.

And then, the mentors in the order that would talk to us about the spirituality were that we were, aligned with the Heart of Jesus. And whatever it was dear to the Heart of Jesus would be, precious and dear to us.

Ron Zeilinger: And that is where we would focus. We read the gospels to come to know the heart of Jesus. It became clear to us that He always stood on the side of the little ones, the outcast, the rejected, and those in need. And Jesus advocated for them.

I'd like to quote to you from the constitutions of the Priests of the Sacred Heart to show you how well these formative themes and thoughts all apply to a prison ministry. So, they were, focusing on all the forms of poverty. And as we know from Mother Theresa well, there's physical poverty, spiritual poverty, and emotional poverty. But, we were primarily focused on those who were without resources to live and to hope. And so, Dismas ministry tries to focus on creating and sharing resources that bring a message of hope. We will share a little later about how we decide what to offer.

Ron Zeilinger: after I left the seminary, I still stayed aligned with the ministries of the priest of the Sacred Heart. So, I spent ten years in South Dakota working with native Americans at Saint Joseph's Indian school. And then the children that came to that residential school were from the Lakota reservations that Lakota tribe throughout South Dakota.

And I had a pleasant ten-year stay there and formed friendships and associations with many Lakota staff at the school. We reviewed religious education throughout the reservation. We looked at the religious education materials and the liturgies. We revised them to adapt them to Lakota culture and spirituality and enrich the lives of the children that we were teaching. That opportunity to engage in rewriting material that would make spirituality and theology understandable in more simple terms so that the children could grasp these things was a great gift for me. I learned then that I could

take what I learned in my master's degree, and I could translate it into something more understandable for the children or anyone. I remember I had a professor in theology who said after the end of the class, after a very, intricate and lofty, examination of some concept, he said, okay, now explain that to your grandmother.

That was always the challenge. And I have been able to bring those gifts into this ministry. So, I am also incredibly grateful for that. Following the period of the ten years with the Indian school, I transferred to Milwaukee and to Hales Corners, where the Priests of the Sacred Heart have their headquarters and their main fundraising office. And I was employed there for a while. My role there was to do graphic design, marketing, artistic consulting, and to help with what was called a pastoral response.

Ron Zeilinger: They would receive many letters each week, each month, throughout the year from a lot of people looking for particular, assistance, or some kind of feedback or information. And I would review those letters and try to help answer those as best I could. Gradually among those letters. I noticed that a good amount came from Catholic chaplains in prisons and other people in prison ministry as well as from Catholic prisoners themselves. And a lot of times, what they were looking for was scripture, faith, and prayer materials that were Catholic. And that would be three because nobody in prison had any money. Yeah. Including many chaplains who were often without budgets. So, I thought, well, I will take a look. I will survey in those days. You did not Google, but that would have been nice if I could. But I did check around to find the best that I could on the Catholic prison scene. I looked to see what were the available materials.

Ron Zeilinger: I thought surely there would be something like the Catholic Gideon's Bible association. And, lo and behold, I did not find much. And that was really to my surprise, and I thought that you know, here is a real gap, in ministry to the imprisoned. And, at the same time, I did not want to duplicate by any chance things that were out there. So, I went through the Catholic directory, and I found, you know, quite a few hundred people who were already, coordinators of prison ministry or were chaplains in prisons and jails. And I put together a survey, and I wrote a cover letter and sent the survey response card to them. And I just simply asked if there were such a ministry that provided Catholic publications to you, what would you need? How would it look? What do you want? And it was their responses that helped to form what Dismas Ministry does today.

Ron Zeilinger: They wanted Bibles, faith formation materials, study courses, and prayer resources like rosaries and other items. So, that seemed to indicate that I could go ahead and start a ministry that would not be duplicated anywhere else.

In the meantime, I was corresponding with a prisoner who was in federal prison in Colorado, and his name was Jim. He was a good and solid Catholic. And I think he was in prison for about four years or so. He has been out now for many years. We struck a perfect correspondence during which he explained to me what the needs of the Catholic in prison are. He shared what kind of things are not available and what they would like to have. And he was an excellent guide in helping me put this ministry together.

So, in many ways, I look at Jim as the cofounder of Dismas Ministry. He may be humble enough not to think that, but in my estimation, he was. He grounded me. He helped me realize what the realities of prison life are like and what it means to be a Catholic behind bars and to have almost no resources or help from the outside.

Ron Zeilinger: So, I think at this point, I'll be handing over to Tyler. Before I do, what I want to say is about Dismas Ministry is that it is publications and mailing ministry and that we provide free scripture, faith, and prayer resources to Catholics in

prison as well as to their chaplains. And we also tried to the best of our ability to assist, any local, regional, Catholic. There are ministries out there that also need these materials as they walk in and do their visits. So, that is, in a nutshell, what Dismas ministry is. Okay. Thanks.

Tyler Curtis: Hello, and thank you for joining us today on the webinar. My name is Tyler Curtis, and I am the new executive director of Dismas Ministry. And I will briefly share a little bit about my background. I am a native of Milwaukee, and I have lived here all my life, and most of my career has done in working in communications and fundraising for Catholic organizations. And so, I have been the executive director since March 1st of this year. And this is a time of transition in leadership to the organization. And I am very blessed to work with Ron right now and through the rest of the year and learn from him, as he mentioned. Ron is the founder of the ministry and who better to learn from than him. So, I am incredibly grateful for this opportunity. It is also a unique opportunity for our team at Dismas ministry to work together, along with our ministry partners, to further the mission of providing spiritual care to our brothers and sisters behind bars.

Tyler Curtis: It is a new chapter with a lot of new and positive collaborations, such as working with the Catholic Prison Ministries Coalition. And all of us must be working together to strengthen the services that we provide.

Now. Ron, we will begin by sharing an overview of the materials that we offer through Dismas ministry. And I should note that most of these materials are original resources that were either developed or written by Ron himself. So, at any point in time before we begin, if anyone has validated resources that they would like to share, please send us those messages in the comment's opportunity there. And we will share any of those resources with others who are listening today. So, I turn it over to Ron.

Ron Zeilinger: Okay, thanks, Tyler. I am just going to preface first of all, what I will say that all the materials that we provide are both in Spanish and English versions. So, and that goes for other resources beyond what is available for the prisoners. Some of the other publications that you have, I have to kind of explain, I'm not the author of these materials. First of all, I'm going to start with the Bible.

As you know, I didn't write that! The translation that we chose to distribute early on in the ministry was the New American Bible, the Catholic version. The Board decided this, under the leadership of Bishop Stillbirth, our board president at the time. The Bishop was a scripture scholar in his own right. The board felt that the translation that we would make available to prisoners should be the same translation used in the lectionary for liturgies.

Ron Zeilinger: That way, if they were doing Bible study and they were going to be listening to or encountering that passage in the readings for the liturgy the next day or the following weekend, that it would be seamless. Also, the New American version has a lot of extra reading material in it with background, developments in scripture study over the last century or so. And then also before each book, there would be explanations of the book, the author, the historical background, cultural background, and then even throughout each of the books—a lot of footnotes that would explain vocabulary or again, other pertinent, cultural and historical items. Sometimes we provide links to the Catholic Catechism of the Church. So, we thought this an extraordinarily rich Bible that we could give the prisoners.

Ron Zeilinger: There are other versions that we have provided. The Good News version has been popular with some, particularly in jail ministry, where the turnover is very rapid. They may not be engaging in a whole lot of Bible study or taking one of our courses. And also, it is a very readable version as well. The New American Bible is readable, but also the Good News was intended for, a more accessible reading of the Bible. And so that has also been one that we have provided. And then sometimes there are languages beyond English and Spanish that we have provided. Sometimes, a Vietnamese Bible, they are rare and hard to get hold of what we do. And then, throughout the history of Dismas Ministry, you have sometimes distributed Russian, German and French bibles. They will not always be Catholic Bibles because sometimes those translations are not available in the Catholic version, but we thought at least they would have some scripture to study in their language.

Ron Zeilinger: Next, after the Bible, we have a unique little pocket-sized prayer book called Pray in the Spirit. And, this is very popular with prisoners because they'll find themselves in prison and they have had some experience with the Catholic faith, maybe, years ago, or for whatever reason, they abandoned their faith, or they just were not trained in their faith. But these would provide this; this pocketbook would give all of the Catholic common Catholic prayers that they would need to know as a Catholic. So, it would be the sign of the cross, the, our father, the hail Mary decree. If there's also a chapter in it with a map of that shows you how to progress through the rosary, what the mysteries are about, a little bit of history of why and how the Catholic church has a devotion to the Mother of Jesus.

Ron Zeilinger: There is also a section on how to pray the Stations of the Cross. And then there is a section that was authored by prisoners themselves. We had invited them to send back to us their prayers in their own words. So, things that they wanted to pray for prayers that they composed, and you would find in therefore in this pocketbook pocket per book, prayers while waiting in line, prayers for their family who are absent, prayers for their victims. Many other types of prayers that they offered and sent to us. And we included in this prayer book. And then finally, there is a section that is about the lives of saints who have been in prison. And that is particularly interesting and impressive for prisoners to realize that there have been a lot of saints who spent time in prison or jail.

Ron Zeilinger: This includes the experiences of Saints Peter and Paul and up to Maximilian Colby. So, this book, along with the other materials that we will introduce next, are intended to be apologetic. What we came to understand was that a lot of Catholic prisoners are in positions where they are called upon to defend the faith. This is especially true if there is any anti-Catholic sentiment. Also, it often happens in pods and open areas, that there is a discussion about religion and the Bible. We wanted to give prisoners the tools that they needed to defend their faith compassionately and knowledgeably. We tried to help them to explain the faith to others who are just seeking to know what this, Catholicism is all about. Speaking of Catholicism, I just want to give you a little story about sometimes when, prisoners, write to our ministry for a Bible.

Ron Zeilinger: And if it comes from a non-Catholic, prisoner, they will sometimes say, I want the Catholic Bible. I want the one with all the books in it. So that is what we send them. Next are the study courses which we have developed for prisoners. And there will be four. But the first one is the Bible study, and it is called God with us. And this study comes in three parts. First, there is the book of Genesis, the historical books, Psalms, and Prophets in the old Testament. And then the third book ends with the gospels and the epistles and in the book of revelation. So, it takes them through all the books of the Bible. And each, each book has a chapter that explains the background, the history, something about the author, and the themes that run through each of the books.

Ron Zeilinger: there will be selective readings, each of the books of the Bible. And then there are also reflect a page of reflective questions, for the reader to go through simply to use for, I guess, what you'd call Lectio Divina so that they could learn how to apply scripture and integrate it to their own lives. That is also then in the back of the book, there are, perforated tear up pages that are their test pages. Those get completed by them and returned to us. And we have wonderful volunteers herein throughout Southeastern Wisconsin, various parishes who look through and review the test pages and make any comments necessary and then return those along with the certificate of completion to the participant. I should add that, for all of our courses, what we require is that each interested prisoner contacts us on their initiative to request to be enrolled. Registrants provide us with all of the proper information so that the mail goes through smoothly. We make sure that we receive any necessary authorizations or approvals needed from the chaplain or any other prison authorities.

Ron Zeilinger: And this also puts the initiative on to the prisoner themselves so that they do not, they are, following through with something that they intend to complete. Typically when we get requests from other people than the prisoner who says, I'd like you to send a Bible study to sell and sell in prison; the most we will do is we will not directly address that or immediately send the study course. We will contact that prisoner, and we will say that we are ready to offer you this course if you are interested. And then if they are, if they write back and we send them the course. We do this out of respect for the individual prisoner. As those of you already engaged in jail and prison ministry know, too many opportunities for personal choices and decisions are removed from their daily lives.

Ron Zeilinger: And we feel very strongly in our commitment to allowing them to make these decisions regarding materials they will receive. And we also encourage chaplains when we send them, bulk shipments of Bibles and pair books at their request that they only hand those out or make those available to prisoners who have requested them. So, that is, that has always been our traditional way of proceeding. The next study course is the faith study and, that is called the Reason for Hope. And obviously, that is from a scripture quote, and again, it is very apologetic. It is divided into three parts: the sacraments, the creed, and morality. And, as I mentioned before, I'm not precisely the sole author of these things. Before printing or publishing, chapters were sent out to various prisoners or groups of prisoners to make comments, offer feedback, and recommend any changes or any other contributions that they wanted to make.

Ron Zeilinger: It would enrich these courses. We also ask them to provide artwork that would illustrate these booklets. So, the covers and artwork throughout the books were contributed to the series by prisoners themselves. So, genuinely, these series are theirs as well. They need to have a sense of pride in their role in the creation of these popular courses. Besides focusing on the books of the Bible, the Catholic faith, creed, and so on., we also offer reflection pages that we hope are helpful for those in the prisons. These reflection pages provide them with an opportunity to reflect on what has happened in their lives, what brought them to prison, and issues that they might want to reflect on, and get some reliable information about.

Ron Zeilinger: So, we have pages on such topics as anger management, the experience of bullying, either bullying they have done or bullying that they have experienced, pages on addiction, and resolving conflict. Some pages help them to reflect on what forgiveness means - true forgiveness when and where it is possible. We try to help them to recognize the needs of their victims, the effects of their crime on themselves, their family, victims, and the victim's family. These are especially important for them to reflect upon while in prison.

Others help them to reflect on abuse. Many people in prison have experienced some sorts of abuse, whether it is emotional, physical, or sexual. And so, there is a lot of healing that needs to take place there. It even helps to simply recognize and admit to themselves that they have had these experiences, and somehow, they need to deal with them and be healed.

Ron Zeilinger: And then there are other broader questions, with which all of us grapple. Questions about God like who is God? What is evil? How does evil show up in God's plan for the universe? How do they reject all the evil that they've encountered in their lives? How do they deal with it when they encounter it? These are some of the themes that run throughout these courses as well.

It was my privilege to put together this course on faith while working with a prisoner for whom I became his godfather. So, in the early stages, this was his RCIA; this was his faith preparation for Baptism while in prison. And he contributed a lot to making this course directly through his responses and his input.

Ron Zeilinger: And taking that the first time around this course with me before we publish it. So, I am grateful again for all the input that I have had in these courses.

The third course, which is on prayer, is a result of several years of correspondence with a lot of prisoners. And we, it became clear that many of them, and this might be true for people in the field as well, but they had not a clue about the vast treasury of Catholic prayer traditions. And, you know, from where the mass came. What is liturgy the hours? What do we mean when we say, Benedictin spirituality or Franciscan, Dominican, Carmelite, or Ignatian spirituality? All of those great, spiritualities in the Catholic tradition, were relatively unknown to them. And so, we wanted to offer a course to explain as much as possible about the roots of the mass, origins in the Old Testament of the liturgy of the hours as the universal prayer of the church.

Ron Zeilinger: They learn how early Christians, met and gathered, and prayed and developed the liturgy. Then they learn how the various spiritualities began and developed? What is contemplation? You have the whole wonderful Carmelite tradition. What is Lectio Divina? Throughout, we've offered models of prayer in the old Testament, New Testament, and throughout the history of Christianity. They come to know that both men and women were role models for prayer.

And that proved to be enriching for us as well. In writing this course, we discovered how many beautiful people there were about whom we knew little. I was personally delighted to find a Saint

Macrina who was the sister of Saint Basil and Saint Gregory. I had not known that she even existed. And yet, she was an excellent theologian in her own right. In some cases, she outshined her two brothers.

Ron Zeilinger: And then also, you know, you have Francis and Clare, Benedict and Scholastica and John of the Cross and Theresa of Avila and on and on. So, there were always beautiful examples of prayer throughout Christian history. Thus that course invites prisoners to participate, right where they live, in the Liturgy of the Hours, the universal prayer of the church. And that has been an enriching experience for many. We even have formed a unique collaboration with a Benedictine Abby in Kansas that has an Oblate program for prisoners. And I think at this point they have, upwards of 185 to 190 lay Oblates, throughout the country. We collaborate with them by providing materials to these oblates as they develop their life of prayer.

Ron Zeilinger: The fourth course is a single volume. It is not divided into three volumes like the other courses are, but it is, divided into parts. The first part is an introduction to the scriptural roots of the church's social teachings. And again, it's, it's somewhat apologetic because there might be some non-Catholics to say, well, you know, where did the Catholic church get all this social teaching stuff? If you read the prophets in the Old Testament, you'll see justice mentioned over and over and over again. And the church simply capitalized on that and drew its wisdom from the old Testament. And then also, it reviews the seven principles of Catholic Social Teaching starting with the dignity of the human person, especially those taking the course.

Ron Zeilinger: And that third part is about restorative justice. Restorative justice is about the role of everyone in the pie if you will. It is not just concerned about the criminal and the state, but it looks at all the other people who are impacted by crime. First, it looks at the person who committed the crime and their families. Then it also looks at the victim and their families. It also considers everybody in the community that has either witnessed the crime or heard about it and thus are impacted by it through social media. And so, there is a ripple effect that prisoners need to understand. And, here, sometimes prisoners will say there were no victims to my crime. And yet, once they read through this material, they learn that they too are a victim of their crime. They are in prison, and so it has impacted their life.

Ron Zeilinger: And, secondly, it impacted their families. Cause as, as you know, the expression is families endure a sentence of their own when a loved one is in prison, and then it's the impact on the victim and whether they're living or deceased as a result of the crime. There is a continuous ripple effect in their lives as they try to cope with the trauma of the crime as well as the families. And then there is also the community itself who feels the effects of crime. Is my neighborhood safe? Do I have to keep looking over my shoulder where I go? Am I okay? Are my loved ones okay? So all of those dimensions need to be considered. And then it introduces for the perpetrator of the

crime, the need to somehow repair the harm done. That is an exceedingly difficult task for people who are in prison.

Ron Zeilinger: and that, with the guidance of others, maybe they can work that out and offer their apologies or any other way in which they can, they can repair the harm done, but, but at least that the concepts are there under reflect on. We have got some beautiful testimonials, which I will touch on later regarding all of these materials. And in particular the web of life course. The final piece that I want to talk about, and then before I hand it over to Tyler, is a unique project that we call. I am beautiful. And again, in correspondence with prisoners, we came to realize, especially particularly with women in prison, that many of them were talking about experiences of abuse. And so, throughout a rather brief spot survey of chaplains at women's prisons when we asked them, what percentage of women in your prison would you say, had histories of abuse, would it be 50%, 60, or 80%.

Ron Zeilinger: And all of the chaplains said almost a hundred percent of women in prison have histories of abuse. So, we thought that we need to do something special. And the title I am beautiful comes from a conversation I had with someone here at a shelter for abused women and children and who said, the director told me I came out of my own abuse feeling so ugly until at some point I realized that I am beautiful. And with her permission, we use that as the title. We have seven volumes of this anthology so far, and we are preparing our eighth annual issue this coming year. It is a compilation of writings and art, poetry, and prose that comes from women in prison. And we, edit that and, and publish it in this book. And then this goes back again to the women who contributed their writings and their art.

Ron Zeilinger: And it also goes back to the chaplains of each of the prisons, women's prisons throughout the United States. This experience gives these women a way to heal themselves through their writing. Even more so, they know that their art and stories touch the lives of many other women across the country. Hopefully, others will be healed as well. Yes, they have been victims of abuse, but now they are survivors and, and how that could help others and with God that they have come to survive their abuse. So, that's the end of the materials for now. I hand this over to Tyler for the next conversation. Thank you.

Tyler Curtis: Ron spoke about the materials that we have that are available to people behind bars. I am going to talk briefly about the materials that we have for friends and family of the incarcerated as well as for chaplains and volunteers in ministries. The first book I am going to talk about is Keeping Hope, a resource for families and friends of the incarcerated. This book is co-authored by Karen Henning, Boyd Brooker, and Ron Zeilinger, and it is a helpful guide for someone who may have a spouse, a parent, a sibling, or a friend who has been recently incarcerated in this book. Families, who have been through this experience already share their stories, their wisdom, their struggles, and even

their joys. The final chapter of Keeping Hope provides a list of resources that are available to people, whether that's national resources or those by state.

Tyler Curtis: And they are listed alphabetically by state. Some of the resources might include different books that are recommended for families or friends to be websites to visit, support groups, and then transportation programs. I also want to make note that Karen Berger is also a member of our Dismas ministry team, and she serves as the director of fund development for Dismas Ministry and has for several years. Now, the next item I want to talk about is Messengers of Hope, which is a training source for Catholics and prison ministry. Messenger of Hope is a unique training resource for those who are engaged in this work already or for those who are considering participating in this work in the future.

It should be noted that several dioceses use this resource across the United States in their volunteer training programs. Messengers of Hope includes practical information and advice for those training others for this work or for those who are preparing themselves for this ministry. Some of the topics covered include: how to enter a prison facility,

what to be aware of while visiting prisoners, how to conduct a visit, and what to do and what not to do and following the rules and regulations of the facility. It also includes preparation for prayer services and how to distribute communion in a prison setting.

Tyler Curtis: Another item I wanted to talk about today is Understanding Trauma, a training resource for Catholics in prison ministry. This resource is currently in development. It is not yet available, but it is mostly written. We will be in the editing stage and hope to print it this fall. It does provide an examination of trauma, like the overview Ron mentioned earlier. Many people are behind bars, while they are perpetrators of trauma in some form or fashion, they are also victims of trauma themselves. So, this tool, if you will, for a chaplain or a volunteer, is going to help them recognize some of those signs of the trauma that has been experienced, whether it's a short term situation or something longer term, lifelong. This resource might also be helpful to the volunteer, chaplain, and even the volunteer police going in to serve the prisoner. But it also might include resources that can help the prisoner themselves.

Tyler Curtis: So, Ron and I have shared at this time a variety of materials that are available through Dismas Ministry. But we encourage feedback from anyone who is listening today, to share what your valuable resources are, what resources have you found helpful in your ministries. If you send those in, we will be happy to share with everyone who has participated in this webinar.

Now I would like to shift and talk a little bit about our prison ministry network. Since the ministry was founded in 2000, of course, we have increased our offering of spiritual resources provided to

prisoners. And in addition to that, since the founding of the ministry, the team at Dismas ministry has built an in house list of chaplains and volunteers who are engaged in this work. Currently, that list has over 1600 individuals from around the country. And everything has become a very valued resource for connecting people to pastoral visits in different locations throughout the country.

Tyler Curtis: Currently, most of the people on that list include sisters, priests, and brothers from various orders around the country, diocesan priests and deacons, as well as laywomen and men. Some are paid staff, but many are volunteers. So, I am confident that a good number of you participating today in the webinar are on that prison ministry network list. But indeed, if you are not, we invite you to join, and you can do so by sending an email to us at Dismas@DismasMinistry.org. That website provides you another place where you can order materials. Any of the stuff we spoke about today, they are available, to any of you are. Our primary goal is to provide these materials free of charge. But we do, of course, welcome contributions and donations when you can offer them.

Tyler Curtis: We do receive a lot of donations from individuals, businesses, and foundations who provide support so that we can give these materials out for free to everyone who needs them. But we have had an increase in requests this year. And so, when you can provide any payment for these items, it's appreciated. Just know that it is not necessary. So again, to order the materials, you can do one of two ways. You can go to our website at DismasMinistry.org and complete a "contact us" form there. Or, as I mentioned earlier, you can send an email to our general email box, which is Dismas@Dismasministry.org. In either case, we are happy to respond and provide you what you need. I should make note that we do also have an online store. And so, some of these are all of the items that we discussed today can be purchased there.

Tyler Curtis: For a small donation, you can order them directly from that site. So those are a couple of options for you. And again, I want to take a moment and just say thank you and recognize our donors. Many, many people over the last almost 20 years have been so generous. You know, their prayers and their financial support have meant so much to us. And again, I want to make sure that, you know, we, we received donations from individuals, religious orders, parishes, dioceses, we have several business partners who help us from time to time, our board of directors and many foundations. So, again, we are so grateful and blessed to have the support of all of these people because, indeed, through their help, we're able to do this work. Genuinely, they are partners with all of us in this work of mercy.

Tyler Curtis: So, thank you to all of them. Now I would like to just talk about a few of the highlights, to share again, some milestones that we have achieved over the years. For those who do not know, Dismas Ministry does provide support to all 50 States, which is terrific. And that milestone was achieved in 2013. and so, we are immensely proud of that. Since 2000, more than 216,000 prisoners have received the Catholic Bible. And since 2000, more than 260,000 prisoners have received a Catholic prayer book, as mentioned before. When Ron was sharing about materials,

all of these are provided in English and Spanish. So, our ministry has reached a lot of people, which is lovely. For the first time in December 2017, Dismas Ministry provided materials to 109 95 ice detention facilities. That means Bibles, prayer, books, and rosaries were issued to the detainees, and we are talking thousands, thousands, and thousands of these were distributed.

Tyler Curtis: So that is something that we wanted to share with all of you today. One thing I did not mention, I am sorry. We do have, as I said, more than 1,600 people who are part of our prison ministry network. We also have more than 2,200 donors who contribute to Dismas Ministry and support our work. Also, we have over 6,600 members of our union of prayer. And these are where warriors who, when they sign up to become a part of our union, they commit to regularly praying for the Dismas ministry and for those we serve behind bars. So those individuals are especially important to us as well. And I wanted to make sure that if anyone wanted to join the union of prayer or if you know someone who would like to become a member, same thing, you can have them, you or someone else, contact us through a Dismas at Dismas Ministry.

Tyler Curtis: That, so, next what I would like to do is talk about our conference, which is coming up in October of this year. Business ministry is hosting the national Catholic prison ministry conference on October 12th and 13th. It will take place in Milwaukee for the second time. Two years ago, Dismas ministry hosted a meeting for the first time here. We are again going to be at the Archbishop Catholic center in Milwaukee. I want to recognize the Archdiocese of Milwaukee for donating their space for us to use for this second event. So, the theme of this year's conference is bridges of hope, and the topics that will be our speakers will be presenting on include pastoral care for prisoners, re-entry, parish prison ministry, servant leadership, restorative justice, and death row ministry. Right now, we have about 140 attendees registered, and they are from about 28 States.

Tyler Curtis: In 2016, when the conference was held for the first time, we had over 200 attendees from 31 States. So that is our pool. We would like to have at least 200 people come again this year to join us for the conference. And so, if you have not registered yet, we invite you to go ahead and visit our website at Dismas Ministry. There is a registration option for the conference on our site, and we hope you will join us. The conference is a time for enrichment, networking, and fellowship for all Catholics engaged in this work of mercy. So, we have a highly informative program, and we are happy to see all of you there and to come to the conference and to visit our beautiful city of Milwaukee. I do want to make note that in addition to Dismas Ministry hosting us, we have many co-hosts including The Catholic Mobilizing Network, the Ministry and Peace studies center at Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois, the national Saint Vincent DePaul society headquartered in Saint Louis; the prison ministry of the Apostolic of the order of Malta, I was in Prison outreach ministry in Tallahassee, Florida, and the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

Tyler Curtis: We also have others who are sponsoring us, with some financial gifts, some of whom are anonymous individuals and foundations. One organization that has committed to sponsorship is

Catholic Financial Life. I just wanted to recognize that support as well. So, at this point, I would like to turn it back over to Ron.

Ron Zeilinger: Okay. I would like to make a few quick responses to some of the messages that have come into us. One was about if some of our RCIA materials are approved by some dioceses to use. Yes, they are. But, you would have to check with your Bishop or your prison ministry coordinator to see if that is the case in your particular diocese. And then, Messengers of Hope is also used by several dioceses throughout the United States as the preparation for their volunteers going into the prison ministry. And then, another comment was, as particularly people in ice facilities or in jails or detention centers where the turnover is very rapid, the study courses are not usable in that way. However, what often happens is if a volunteer or a local chaplain wants to use our materials as a resource to create study plans, they can pull out a chapter or focus on one book or one particular reading. You are more than welcome to take our study courses and use them as your lesson plans. And you have full permission to copy as many pages as you need from those. So please go ahead and do that.

Ron Zeilinger: See if there were any other comments here. I think that is, about yet there. There are lots of other resources that are available that are being developed for families of incarcerated and for people going into prison ministry. So that is continued to share those as we can. I guess, at this point, I would like just to have a little reflection on Pope Francis and how wonderful a leader he has been. You have that on your screen there, but I will read it as well. Let the church always be a place of mercy and hope where everyone is welcomed, loved, and forgiven. We have a beautiful example in the papacy of Pope Francis that, particularly model of care for and concern for the prison because, as you know, every country he visits somehow, he always manages to include a visit to the imprisoned.

Ron Zeilinger: And, his face to face meetings with them, his embraces, his message to them, is beautiful. He helps them to know and to feel the love of God. His modeling is also his message to us as our spiritual leader. We know that people who work with prisoners have watched him and gotten this message of mercy and love and are carrying that forward into prisons. But I also want to remind myself and all of you that we also need God's mercy. I think one of the main ingredients for any type of ministry is humility. And as Pope Francis always reminds those in prison when he visits them, I am a sinner too. And we all stand in the mercy of God. And as, as Paul wrote, we all fall short of the, of the glory of God.

Ron Zeilinger: And so, as we go into the prisons, that should not be a deterrent. It should be an encouragement and a valuable ingredient in our ministry to know that we, too, are subject to the

mercy of God. And, and that is why, you know, we are reaching out to our fellow members of the body of Christ who are in prison. That only enriches our ministry. So, I just want to thank all of you, today and, and all of those, who are your associates as well but may not have tuned in today. I want to encourage you in your ministry. We are there for you. We hope that we can continue to be a support for you as this miss ministry continues to develop and grow in the years ahead under the wonderful leadership of our new director, Tyler, who has been a great gift to this ministry. So, thank you again for being with us today. We appreciate it so much. I have had the opportunity to share it with you. Yes. Thank you again.

Tyler Curtis: I would also like to remind you again that, if you would like to order materials, you may do so by sending an email to dismas@dismasministry.org or visit our website at www.dismasministry.org and complete the "contact us" form.

Ron Zeilinger: We have a little bit of time left. What I'd like to do is mention some of the input from prisoners. We get a lot of letters that are feedback as well. I just wanted to share two quotes from them. This one is from Cody, Tip, and Bill in Tennessee. "I want to thank you sincerely for the wonderful resources you provided me with. As a result, I have been able to grow a great deal spiritually. You have inspired me to help others the way you have helped me. This ministry is much appreciated. Thanks again for your kindness and your caring hearts."

And then I'd like to share one last, testimonial, from Patrick in Fort Stockton, Texas. He is talking about the Web of Life course that he had completed. He said, "What an incredible, powerful, and profoundly moving study on social justice! Thank you so much!"

Ron Zeilinger: Sometimes, it's all too easy to feel abandoned and pushed aside like the whole world would prefer if we just weren't there. I'm blessed with supportive my family and friends. But imagine how difficult it is for those who have no one. I see them every day and do what I can when I can. It is a real struggle to trust in God's Providence. Each moment I struggle much with the pain and harm I have caused because of my regretful choices and crying. I have a lot to keep working on and still much to be grateful for. Thank you for your prayers. You are in mine; God bless you and your ministry. And I would just like to conclude that it is that kind of feedback and the fact that we know that prisoners are praying for us too. And that's a beautiful sense of nourishment. And for our part, it is the feedback that we receive for this ministry that keeps us going as well. I am sure that you also have experienced what we call the ministry in reverse. You come out of it feeling peaceful and joyful every time you go into prison in jail. So again, God's blessings on you all. Thank you so much.

Tyler Curtis: Thank you so much. And please save the date for our next webinar, which will take place on September 18th at 1:00 PM Eastern daylight time. The topic is maintaining resilience in

prison ministry, using self-care to prevent burnout. The presenters are Father George Williams, S J, and Dr. Eileen Dumbo. Thank you again.