

## Why Go To Prison....?

I've been asked that question many times through my 33 years of service to Stateville Prison through the Lutheran Church. I can hardly believe I've been in prison as long as some of those serving sentences. God works in mysterious ways and, has a wonderful sense of humor. I still contend as I did when I first started this ministry, God always chooses the least likely yet most appropriate candidate for his ministry and work **wherever that may be**. God has called each of us to a particular work and you will know it as you keep your heart open and your trust in Him to guide you along the way. Be comforted in your call and know this, His grace will hold you and keep you in the best and worst of times. God is a constant in our daily lives and He gets the job of loving His people accomplished *through each one of us*.

As I was saying, why go to prison? Well, there's Henry, Bill and Fred, some of the lifers I worked with many years ago. Fred has passed on, Bill is out and living in a nursing home these days after 42 years of doing time. Henry is still behind the wall after 47 years. These days, it's Dennis, Juan, Christopher, Sherod, and many others. Since those early days at Stateville, and for a time, Sheridan, Kankakee Min. Sec. Unit (no longer operating) and IYC in Joliet (no longer operating), I continue with new challenges and ministry at Stateville. Lutherans (LCMS) have been ministering at this particular prison since the 1930's. Stateville was built in 1923 and opened in 1926. When I started there in 1986 with Chaplain Bob Kramer, I was young at heart and open to whatever God was doing in my life. I'd like to think I still am, that is, open to the work among individuals that most of us don't want to think about. Matthew 25 speaks eloquently regarding helping the homeless, naked, thirsty, hungry, and those in prison. We need to be in prison. The church goes to those who cannot come to us. We bring light, grace and mercy – all gifts to each one of us from a loving God – because none of us deserve it. None. We may think we're different, but a sinner is a sinner, and a sin a sin. And thank God His grace is grace – for all! That's the message I bring each week to those who live in cell houses, an infirmary, and those I teach in classes at Stateville. I enjoy the staff and inmates I work with each week; they are a treasure.

I need your help to stay in prison. Your funds do make a difference and keep this ministry moving forward. Please consider a gift towards this work so I can continue my life's work. Thank you. God's peace and grace be with each of you.

Deaconess Lori Wilbert  
Voice of Hope Prison Ministry