



October 2026 Mission Support Memo

Belonging: Even in Prison

A story from our [Southwestern Washington Synod](#)

As you read this story, what inspires you?

In what ways can you learn about prison ministry?

Every Thursday at the [Washington Corrections Center](#), there is a different kind of sound emanating from the walls, the sound of a worship praise band, playing joyfully and calling men to gather in a place where they are accepted and known. This is Living Stones Prison Congregation in our Southwestern Washington Synod, providing a place of belonging in prison.



Living Stones Prison Congregation started in 2005 and has been a place to grow in faith, fellowship and forgiveness for over 20 years. In 2025, the Rev. Chris Smith was offered the opportunity to lead this prison ministry on a part-time basis. Smith had been active in the church his whole life, with a passion for music, and started his ministry as a mission developer in Tennessee, eventually being called to Atlanta, Colorado, Nashville and finally Washington state. Throughout this time, he was able to start new ministries, experiment with ecumenical partners, work in campus ministry, manage building projects, be a fundraiser, create incredible music, and even be a bridge prison chaplain. All of which made Living Stones a perfect place for him to serve in this time.

Washington Corrections Center has a number of different chaplains; Living Stones is a true place of acceptance. It includes a number of ecumenical partners, all with a theology of grace. Every Thursday, when they gather for planning, band practice and worship, all are reminded to "have grace with one another," to know we are the kingdom of God, no matter where we are. As in all prison ministries, folks transition in and out often, but word of mouth keeps a steady wave of participants. Every week, worship is a bit chaotic, but no matter what, the gospel is read by a member, the worship band plays, prayers are voiced, communion elements are shared, and the service ends with a sending blessing. There was even a first baptism last spring that fully gathered the community together, reminding them that they are claimed by God and unconditionally loved by Jesus Christ.



Over the last two decades, this ministry has been accompanied by a number of local congregations. Faith Lutheran Church in Shelton provides Pastor Chris with an office and has the volunteer extraordinaire, Astrid, who has been a thread of continuity over the last five years of COVID challenges and pastor transitions. She arrives every Thursday at 5:45 p.m., ready to rock 'n' roll with whoever joins each week. Silverdale Lutheran Church also has a dedicated group of six folks who participate in worship, bring prayers in the community and equally participate in leadership as needed.

This ministry of course needs support from outside. Smith spends much of his time reaching out to congregations across the synod to create partnership. Living Stones is lucky to have ELCA synod-authorized worshiping community grant funding that comes out of our collective ELCA Mission Support. The ministry is in the process of rebuilding its board to plan for the ministry's future and raise funds to ensure that Living Stones can continue to offer men a place of belonging, even in prison.

ENGAGE WITH US

Stewardship Webinar: "Making a Helpful Ask for Sustainability"

Monday, Nov. 16, 6 p.m. Central time

How can church leaders make faithful and effective invitations to give while building a sustainable culture of generosity? Join the Rev. Tim Brown, ELCA director of congregational stewardship, and the Rev. Lindsay Fertig, director for generosity in the Northern Illinois Synod, to explore practical approaches to gift invitations, sustainable ministry funding and cultivating generosity that inspires further generosity.

Webinar passcode: 752044

[Join the webinar](#)

GRATEFUL

This month we give thanks for the immense generosity of our congregations, members, friends and supporters who make it possible for us to steward about \$1.6 billion in regular offerings, and the Mission Support shared from those offerings, to build up Christian communities, support global ministry and strengthen the whole church. The free resource "[Mission Support: What Does My Offering Do?](#)" shares how Mission Support is used for us to be church together. You can also view and share the Mission Support video "[What Does My Offering Do?](#)" We are grateful for all the generosity!

In gratitude,

Nick Kiger, Interim Senior Director for Congregation and Synod Support

Karen Kretschmann, Coordinator for Storytelling Engagement