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JAIL MINISTRY

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**A Salute to Retiring Mental Health Specialist
Steve Josephson**

And A View of Mental Health Challenges in the Jail

It takes a special kind of health professional to want to work with a jail population. Jails house many of the most hardened people who often come from adverse situations almost beyond imagination. It's not cushy; it's not glamorous.

Steve Josephson, the jail's recently retired supervising clinical jail therapist, is one of those willing few. Over 25 years ago he jumped at the opportunity to leave day-to-day office life with the La Crosse County Human Services guidance clinic at the "old Grandview Building," recognizing the pressing and growing need for mental health support within the jail itself.

Josephson recalls that, ironically, the availability of mental health services in the early 1990's actually came easier than now. The County also had more alcohol and drug specialists and community residential beds ready for treatment.

Now, in 2017, other community problems, in addition to limited financial resources, create pressures, Josephson notes. Chief among these are the ease of drug availability and their increased addicting potential.

Josephson also points out that the number of fatherless children raised in poverty, sometimes with several generations of jail background, makes breaking patterns of recidivism harder.

Caring for an inmate population has special challenges. Almost all inmates are on drugs or alcohol when they are admitted. This makes it harder to know if a true psychiatric disorder exists, and these substances complicate treatment. Josephson regrets that solutions to dealing with drugs and other substances remain elusive and stresses that they are key to better outcomes in the future. There are many pieces to this complex issue that need to come together for better outcomes. The best solution is to figure out how to prevent youth from experimenting with drugs and this can be correlated to the quality of family life and positive life experiences.

About 30–35% of inmates are on mental health-related medicines. Josephson and the team of mental health staff and medical nursing must try to create a plan within the jail for treatment stabilization and for continuity of care upon release. And

a constant goal is to keep inmates and jail staff safe.

Fortunately, there have been no suicide related deaths since 2006. Suicide assessments and prevention are a major focus. It can be common to have several suicide watch precautions in place on any given day.

Josephson praises Chaplain Tom Skemp, the Jail Ministry and La Crosse County for its proactive and positive support of staff and attention to mental health issues. He says Jail Ministry helps to create a more positive environment and open lines of communication. The Chaplain is an active part of the team that consults together to work out best plans for the safe keeping of inmates. Often inmates leave jail with better control of their physical, mental and spiritual health.

La Crosse County and staff members have received state recognition for commitment to mental health challenges in the jail, a matter of pride to Josephson. He shares this recognition with social worker Cindy Eirschele, clinical therapist Carrie Bailey, and many excellent nurses and

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The Chaplain's Corner

Fishing Trip

About ten years ago a young man came to jail who is a heroin and meth addict, as well as having more than one significant mental health issue. He came back on and off over the next few years and I got to know him pretty well. Last year he managed to get a couple of months clean, and finally seemed serious about getting control of his life. He was taking his proper meds instead of relying on street drugs and his life was starting to look pretty good to him. I told him then that if he managed to get a full year clean that I'd take him to Colorado on a fishing trip. As much as I hoped that he would succeed, I didn't start planning the trip right away. He got to the point when he was nine months clean, and I thought it was beginning to look like we might be going. When he had ten months clean I thought I'd better get planning. The only hitch was that his one year would be up in early September, and he was now going to college, so we had to go in August so that he would be back in time for classes to start. A good problem to have.

So we went in August and had a great time. We spent three days stream and reservoir fishing for trout, stayed in a Forest Service cabin up in the mountains at 10,000 feet, caught a few fish and enjoyed the cool mountain air when it was so hot here in Wisconsin. And if and when he gets another 12 months clean and sober, we may just go back again.



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medical staff. He also mentioned appreciation to County Administration, the jail administration, and jail staff for the support given to him in his work.

Our groundbreaking jail mental health specialist, Steve Josephson, leaves a special legacy for vision and dedication to La Crosse County for over 33 years, 25 of those years at the jail. Yet La Crosse County will not step back upon his departure.

The County Board has committed to increasing jail staff hours towards mental health issues for inmates and for the safety of the community, with a new approach that will have a primary Health and Human Services jail clinician, Sam Seefeld, but also staff from Human Services with focused AODA training. An important goal is continuity of care so that staff is available and resources are shared.

And Steve? He says that he and his wife of 43 years are "going full circle" back to where they spent their childhood in Menomonie, Wisconsin, which is also nearer to their two adult kids living in the Minneapolis area. Thank you, Steve Josephson! You took on a hard job and we salute you.

Dessert Recipe

Ingredients: duplex cookies like oreos, chocolate cupcakes, vanilla cappuccino, peanut butter, sugar.

1. Take all the cream out of the cookies.
2. Crush up the cookies into a powder.
3. Add little bits of water at a time to the cookies to form it into the crust
4. Optional. If you want to add the cupcakes, remove the cream center from the cupcakes first and mix it with the cream from the cookies. If you add the cupcakes to the crust, it will be more like a cake than a pie.
5. Once the crust is formed take the bowl of creams from the cookies (and cupcakes, if used) and add a couple of spoonfuls of peanut butter, a little bit of cappuccino, and a little bit of sugar in there, and small amounts of hot water at a time to get it to the texture you want.
6. Pour it over your crust. (In prison we put it on ice to chill but we don't have that at the jail)
7. If you want to make it real good you can crush up a candy bar of your choice and sprinkle it over the top or use M&M's or something else.

Submitted by an inmate

History of the Jail Ministry

After serving in administrative positions at Viterbo College for 26 years, S. Mynette Gross began a new career in parish ministry at St. James Parish in La Crosse. She gradually learned that some families had members in the County Jail who had no connection with their churches nor any opportunities for spiritual growth.

After talking about this with Fr. Bernard McGarty in 1983, they decided to begin a ministry for people in jail. "Our first purpose was to have a balanced jail ministry," McGarty said, "one that didn't favor one denomination over another." (From an undated *La Crosse Tribune* article by Gayda Hollnagel)

Fortunately, they had the support of Sheriff Sylvia Boma for this ministry. Their first task was forming an ecumenical board for Jail Ministry. S. Mynette served as chair and was later succeeded by Rev. Charles Evavold from Holmen. Other representatives from the local religious community were the Revs. Richard Burlingame, Armin Heidmann and Daniel Vinge. Community representatives on the board were Tiny Anania, Jim Bannen, Georgia Carr, Bob Daley, Dick Record and Bill Transberg.

Their next task was hiring a Chaplain, Jim Johnson, an ordained Presbyterian minister. Jim was hired part-time in 1984 and then became a full-time employee in 1985. The ministry was supported by donations from churches, civic groups and various grants. It also received money from the greater La Crosse Area United Way and La Crosse County. Initially, the ministry included regular ecumenical worship services with volunteer prayer leaders from various denominations in the area.

For a few years, the bakery at St. Francis Hospital also supplied baking to serve after each Sunday evening worship service.

A goal was "to really help these people to become better adjusted and make a new life for themselves," according to S. Mynette in a *La Crosse Tribune* article. As the ministry continued, Bible study groups were formed for both men and women, a recreation program was initiated and continued for a few years and basic supplies such as writing paper, pencils and stamps were provided through funds in the budget. Volunteers continued to lead Sunday evening worship services, write "thank you" notes to donors and to serve on the board.

In more recent years, new programs have been added. For example, the PROVEN program is coordinated by Western Technical College to help inmates develop skills related to a job search and subsequent job, and CCFA, Compassionate Community Faith Alliance's Circles of Support partners with the Jail Chaplain to help support inmates upon release with stable relationships to break the cycle of recidivism. GED courses are also popular with many of the people in the jail. Jail Ministry assists the Jail Visitation Volunteer Program founded in 2011 by Dee Paque that brings volunteers to interact with families in the lobby while a parent or other loved one is in jail.

Today, a board continues to serve and to support Chaplain Tom Skemp in his daily ministry with the inmates. Funds still come from donations and from the La Crosse County budget. And the goal remains the same as expressed in the current mission statement: "To provide an opportunity and create an environment for inmates that awaken, renew and stimulate their spiritual life, thereby promoting behavioral change, social reintegration and personal well-being."

La Crosse Jail Ministry Prayer

This prayer was created by a board member and shared at a recent meeting

Creator of all, grant us the Spirit of wisdom and discernment in this meeting so that we may know the path for the good of the majority.

Use our hands and feet so we may be a channel through which You pour out Your grace for us to help our board to help others.

Open our eyes for wisdom. Help us not to fall into a spiritual slumber but rather to remain alert and watchful, knowing that each day is a gift.

We pray for the knowledge and depth of insight in discerning Your will, so that we may be able to understand all that is best, and that which is pleasing in Your sight.

Help us as we pray to discern what our future needs are and not to confuse them with our own desires.

Give us an understanding heart so that we may be open to hear Your voice so we may walk in the shoes of the oppressed, homeless, the imprisoned and those who are in any need. Lord our heart is open to Your leading and guidance.

Thank You Lord for bringing us together in the true spirit of giving. Thank you for the grace to help us "provide an opportunity and create an environment for inmates that awaken, renew and stimulate their spiritual life," as our mission statement and vision state.

Amen.