



YOUR MISSION SUPPORT GIFTS AT WORK

MAY 2023 Mission Support Memo

STORYTELLING ENGAGEMENT

The eHarmony of Prison Reentry

A story from our Grand Canyon Synod

As you read this story, what questions arise?

How is your synod or region involved in prison ministry?

Over 600,000 people are released from prison every year, and as they struggle to rejoin society, they face barriers to connecting with reentry service providers. We are honored that so many of our synods and congregations are active in prison ministry; yet they know the challenge of finding reliable and effective resources to support folks once they've been released.

Our synods are supporting reentry ministry: the Metropolitan Chicago Synod helped start the work and the Grand Canyon Synod has launched the innovative online resource the [Inside Out Network \(ION\)](#), a one-of-a-kind platform that helps returning citizens connect with the support they need for a successful reentry. The Grand Canyon Synod has made a strong commitment, awarding ION an "Adapting, Connecting, Transforming and Sustaining" grant so it can help people access ministries and service providers.

ION is a bit like eHarmony: returning citizens and service providers can find each other and exchange messages, even before release, to make sure returning citizens get the support they need as soon after release as possible. What started as a prison ministry from an ELCA church in the Chicago area is now operating in Illinois and Arizona and launching soon in Oregon, with 6,400 returning citizens and 443 service providers and ministries enrolled. ION is always free to returning citizens, and service providers participate free of charge for a year before paying a modest annual fee.

With the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, ION has gone into Arizona prisons to train staff on using the platform. This has led to inmates enrolling before their release; reports indicate that as release approaches, they are less anxious, seeing ahead of time what help will be available.

ION values its partnerships with ministry and is currently developing a Reentry Congregational Initiative, gathering insights from faith communities that intentionally minister to returning citizens. Many ELCA congregations work in this area, and we welcome any insights they might provide by [completing this survey](#). ION intends to develop a guidebook called “Effective Reentry Ministry for Ordinary Congregations”; its valuable “Spiritual Survival Guide for Prison and Beyond” can be read or downloaded free of charge from the ION website at insideoutnetwork.net/resources.

ENGAGE WITH US

Among the many joys of our work across the ELCA is partnering with ELCA Congregational Stewardship. Its work is intertwined with ours: as it equips congregations to be generous, we work with synods to be creative with the Mission Support they receive.

This month we hope you will engage with the summer stewardship newsletter. Tim Brown, director for Congregational Stewardship, urges us to share stories of stewardship, reminding us that facts and figures fail to tell “the deep truth about our work and ministry.” Check out his take and learn about upcoming events, resources and Bible readings [here](#).

GRATEFUL

Synod assemblies bring us together to accomplish important things, but it’s not all about business! Every year, members of the Mission Support team serve as churchwide representatives and workshop presenters at synod assemblies, so we know that, beyond business, assemblies enable us to gather, celebrate, dream and even have hard conversations.

The term “Mission Support” might come up only when the budget is presented, but people at synod assemblies talk about Mission Support a lot. The stories you tell about your vibrant ministry, the ways you walk alongside your congregations, the accompaniment of your global companions, the creative ways you work with ecumenical partners, the new things you are trying — those are all, very likely, stories of Mission Support. We are grateful to everyone who prepares, presents and engages with these stories, lifting up the important role Mission Support plays in our lives together as congregations, synods and the churchwide organization.

Blessings from your churchwide organization Mission Support team,

Victoria Flood, Senior Director for Mission Support
Nick Kiger, Director for Mission Support
Karen Kretschmann, Coordinator for Storytelling Engagement

