



Bridges of Hope: Reflections on the Power of Partnership

2024 LENTEN DEVOTIONS

Week 2
(February 19 – 23)



Monday, February 19
INCARNATION LUTHERAN, MILWAUKEE

Augustine Harper: My name is Augustine Harper. The person who influenced me the most was my mother. My mother influenced every step of my life, how I live and interact with other peoples, and my relationship with God. She is my inspiration for my achievements, and guidance in my life. She was a very wise person. Always found solutions to problems. She taught me the value of character, compassion, helpful, honesty, hard work, dedicated, guidance, strength and independence. She didn't only teach me. She showed me in her life, and the things that she did in her life, it influenced me to do.

PRAYER: Great and Gracious God: May we be aware and sensitive to the presence, guidance, and power of your Holy Spirit. Remind us that we are not alone...and that we also can't do it alone. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Using the daily devotional practice of St Ignatius in his Examen, take a moment to reflect on today's devotion...

- 1. What thoughts, questions, and feelings come up for you?*
- 2. Invite God's Spirit to speak to you about your reflections and also what is happening in your life today.*
- 3. Notice any feelings of thankfulness, retrospect, repentance, and renewal.*
- 4. What is God encouraging you to do with these thoughts and feelings?*
- 5. Ask God to lead you today and into tomorrow - guiding you towards something particularly important.*

Tuesday, February 20
BREAKING THE CHAINS CHURCH
& ST. LUKE'S, GREENDALE

Greg Wajerski: My name is Greg. I'm a volunteer with Breaking the Chains Church, a worshipping congregation of the ELCA Milwaukee Synod. This is Rob, a church council officer at St. Luke's Church in Greendale. Breaking the Chains Church and St. Luke's Church in Greendale are partners in ministry. The theme of these devotions is "Bridges of Hope: The Power of Partnership." So, Rob, how has St. Luke's impacted Breaking the Chains Church?

Rob Kegel: Well, Greg: through regular contributions. St. Luke's contributes Christmas bakes each holiday season. We also try to offer a strong welcome to released men from both Felmers Chaney and the Kenosha Correctional Centers. We also donate cash for flowers to beautify each of these Centers every year. And how is St. Luke's impacted by Breaking the Chains? Well, we have an increased awareness of their existence now, and the need to support and encourage incarcerated people as fellow children of God. Many Bible passages used often in Lenten study refer to hope. Here are three examples: In the first book of Peter, "Praise be to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. In His great mercy, He has given us new birth into a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." The second chapter of Romans, "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." And from the 62nd Psalm, "Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from Him."

Greg: The men served by Breaking the Chains Church do say often that they appreciate the support and the prayers that come from congregations such as St. Luke's. These men have increased hope because of this spiritual partnership. In a similar way, Breaking the Chains Church has increased hope, because of partnerships like the one with St. Luke's.

Rob: Moses spent 40 days on the mountain before receiving the Ten Commandments. Those 40 days showed us that he had hope.

Greg: Elijah spent 40 days on his way to Mount Horeb, where the word of the Lord came to him. Those 40 days must have strengthened his hope in the Lord.

Rob: And of course, Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness at the start of his ministry, where Satan tried to wear him down. Jesus overcame Satan because he had hope in his Father, our Lord. Lent invites us all, as partners in ministry, to spend 40 days in prayer and preparing for what we all know is true. Jesus will win the day. This gives us all hope!

PRAYER: God, you are the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Where the messages from the culture divide us, we pray that you unite us. Where the difficulties of this moment weigh us down, we pray that you lighten our load. Give us partners for the road, and bless us all

so that we may together be your blessing in a world that desperately needs it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Wednesday, February 21
ELCA OUTREACH CENTER, KENOSHA

Karl Erickson: Welcome to the ELCA Outreach Center. I'm Karl Erickson, Executive Director. This is Mary Zorn, the Assistant Director. Raul Hernandez is the Legal Advice Coordinator. And Raul's going to talk to you about a couple of the partners we have on our ministries.

Raul Hernandez: So I partnered with [Racine Vocational Ministry] in Racine. We use their office space and they come and use our office space, when they have clients here and we have clients in Racine. And we're also partnering with [Racine Interfaith Coalition] and [Congregations United to Serve Humanity] in Racine, doing some immigration cases.

Mary Zorn: One of the places-- we have a clothing closet where anyone's welcome to come and get clothing. And one of the things we've found is that people who are just getting out of jail or prison come here for clothing. And we've had a really nice relationship with Rev. Dave Rebey who does Breaking the Chains. And we're very happy that he actually has brought people in to us, to try and get clothing and some personal care needs that they might have, as soon as they get out of jail. One of the things Raul does also is that when people get a place, he will get them a 'welcome home' packet, which is really cool. It has like dishes and things like that.

Karl: Yep! And then also, we do, right now, three Bible studies each week. On Tuesdays and Thursdays at nine, we have guest pastors coming in: Pastor Sandy from St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Kenosha, and then Pastor Chip from Lord of Life in Kenosha comes in. And then we have a couple of other people that lead those Bible studies. Very casual. I've learned way more about the Bible in this last 14 years that I've been participating in 'em. And then also last summer, Pastor Chip from Lord of Life started doing 'PB and J' - peanut butter and Jesus - and they would bring in a group from Lord of Life, and bring in food, and we would sit around the table on Friday afternoons at 11:30 and do a Bible study. They're continuing that! We just started last week. So we're going to continue that this year. And we're excited, because there was probably 25 people around the table last week, talking about Jesus and the Gospels, and just spreadin' the word. And it's a wonderful opportunity to get deeper with Jesus. And I think, you know, if you're in town, come by, because it's a lot of fun! 11:30 on Fridays. So we appreciate Outreach for Hope, and all the donors and supporters of Outreach for Hope. We wouldn't be here today, on our 27th year, if it wasn't for Outreach for Hope, because they helped us get started 27 years ago. So thank you so much, and God bless!

PRAYER: Great and Gracious God: We see your boundless grace in every part of creation, and most especially, we see it in Jesus. Pour your grace into our hearts, so that it overflows in our lives and makes us generous people. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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Thursday, February 22
RACINE VOCATIONAL MINISTRY - "AMAZING GRACE"

Content Advisory: This devotion includes mentions of child abuse and death, and substance misuse.

Jim Schatzman: Good Morning! I am Jim Schatzman, Executive Director of Racine / Kenosha Vocational Ministry. We work with people returning from prison who are in programming to become restored members of the community.

In one of the Ash Wednesday readings, the psalmist says, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions."

This is a story about James. He came to us just days after he was released from prison following years of multiple incarcerations. James was an angry young man. He had a right to be! He grew up in abject poverty in the Deep South of the 1950's. He was in a home where addiction and neglect were the order of the day. He was removed from his home as a seven-year-old boy and placed with [foster] parents. He was loved, taken care of, and enrolled in a wonderful Sunday School where he was making friends and recovering from his abuse. His mom made no effort to contact him while he was gone. One day, his mother saw him on the street in his Sunday suit and shiny shoes. Inspired by jealousy, his mom went back to court to bring him home. Shortly after returning home, his brother died. James said, "I lost my brother and my mother that day... she sank into the darkness of addiction, theft, and prostitution."

This led James to a life of despair and violence. James received multiple charges for battery, and once seriously beat another man within a breath of his life. He spent the better part of his life in and out of prison, with his last sentence being 26 years. James had always hoped that he could reconcile with his mother, but she died while he was incarcerated. He came back to the community old, tired, and emotionally worn out.

James came to RVM and was surprised by the warmth he was shown. He hadn't experienced this kind of acceptance since he was a young child. James was beginning to see that there were people who could love him, and his faith began to grow. While attending church, he began to volunteer. He saw that the staff at RVM was willing to be a part of his life - not just a place for transactional services, but a haven for transformational relationships. In 2023, James received the RVM Rising Star Award. He was making friends, serving others, reading his Bible, and learning to be loved. He said, "Everyone in the agency has been so kind to me."

God never gave up on him, and neither did we! God's saving grace is restoring him to a wholeness he could not have imagined. We were walking alongside

him in his newfound journey in faith! As the hymns says, "I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see."

I want to thank OFH and all of their dedicated sponsors. You are saving lives and sharing God's love!

PRAYER: O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son. Amen.

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Friday, February 23
FAITH/SANTA FE LUTHERAN, MILWAUKEE
MUSIC PARTNERSHIPS

Victor M. Puentes Ramirez: Well... about the relationship that I have with the kids? When I teach [music]... you know, every year, it's a new single experience. All kids are different. And all kids have a different story. I have a couple of stories to tell.

One is like -- one kid, in 2014, right here at Santa Fe. And he came to pay some hours of community service for spray painting or something like that. He came here. And he started taking lessons. Because the church was giving free lessons at the time. And he became really obsessed with the guitar. Like really obsessed. And, you know, after two years, he became one of the best students I ever had. And right now, he's in Texas. His name is Arturo Rodriguez.... And yeah, he's amazing. He's making music. He studied music for, I think two years in pre-college or something like that. And now he's making music for commercials.

And, you know, it's like, all the kids have something interesting... So that impacts me because I don't need to do this. I think it's something that I really like to do. And I like to share because something like that happened to me. So, the experience that I have, is like, is something good to give back. So that's amazing. And I have a good time all the time. Now I have two students right here. And that's a different story every time. So, I really enjoy teaching them.

It's teaching me more than them. Because it's like, it's the process that I learn how to connect with them... It's something that I don't know how to explain. It's like, it's a different teaching for me, because every kid is different. But I will say the most, you know, the most payback that I can get is the evolution from nothing to really playing the first song. And the connection they have for me, and the trust they start having. Like, "Hey, is this okay? How can I be better?" Things like that. It's like, you never know what they're gonna come out with.

PRAYER: God of Harmony: In the music of life, you remind us of how beautiful we can sound as we combine our voices together. Continue to remind us that our melodies are a compilation of the notes that you first gave to us. May the music of our lives bring glory to you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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