

**“BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL,
FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY.”**

(MATTHEW 5:7)



OUR FAITH IN ACTION

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*Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)
Bridge Ministries (Community Chaplaincy)*

This is a grateful ex-prisoner's story of hope and renewal. He has asked to remain anonymous.

I was once at a point in my life where I felt hopeless, my future was bleak and suicide was a very real and viable option. I blamed God for my problems and for making me so flawed that I had sinned by victimizing others.

After my arrest in 2010 and for the two years and six months while I was out on bail, I wrestled with shame, guilt and the inability to forgive myself, along with feelings of severe depression and hopelessness. In being arrested and going to jail I lost everything – my job and career, my life savings, my house, my marriage, my reputation and my self-respect.

It wasn't until my first week in prison that I asked God for help and forgiveness, and that's when the healing slowly started. While in prison I realized the errors in my thinking and saw that God had never really left me. He was just waiting for the right time; waiting for me to seek Him. In chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel, Jesus talks about a lost sheep, and that lost sheep was me. The only way I could let myself be found was through imprisonment.

Sometimes drastic measures are needed in order to find the right path, to re-evaluate priorities, to find your lost faith and to change your life. I was too stubborn to turn to God before; I trusted too much in myself for the answers to fix everything and relied only on my own strength. I realized that what I needed was to believe in something bigger than myself if I was to have any hope in changing the path I was on, and to find forgiveness for myself. There is a quote I learned that I try to follow which sums this up nicely, "Instead of living in the shadow of yesterday, walk in the light of today, and the hope of tomorrow."

That was the first step. The second step was to learn more about the Bible, myself, God, and to attend chapel while I was in prison. The third step was to find some way to continue this progress when I got out – this new way of thinking, this new lifestyle. That's where the reintegration chaplain from MCC came in. While I was in prison I met with him on a regular basis, and we talked about finding a church community I could be a part of when I got out.

He was someone from the outside that I could be honest with and talk to in confidence. When I did get out, he visited me the very next day at the halfway house, took me for lunch and to the John Howard Society to see if any of the services they offered would be of benefit to me during my reintegration. We also went to a couple of churches to see which one would be a good fit for me to attend. He picked me up and accompanied me to church on Sundays until I got my own car and was able to meet him there.

I've been going to church with the reintegration chaplain almost every Sunday since my release. After the service we have coffee, talk for a while and meet others from the congregation. I decided to take the course at our church in order to eventually become a member. He offered to be my sponsor and attend the weekly sessions with me.

The reintegration chaplain from MCC has been there when I needed him. He has supported my spiritual growth, has been someone I could talk to and has been a friend. MCC was a great support for me while I was inside. When I got out, all I could say was thank God for them. I am sure I would be neglecting my spiritual needs if I didn't have this support and friendship.

I had been travelling alone doing things my way for decades, but now I can take the verse from the song 'Amazing Grace' for myself: "I once was lost but now am found; was blind, but now I see!"

Submitted by Peter Worsley, Reintegration Chaplain, MCC

