

# Remembering



**T**he Savior spent His life ministering to the poor in spirit and downtrodden. He taught: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40, see also verse 35). Today He still calls to us to follow Him in serving those who suffer. We are to feed the poor, clothe the naked, and visit those who are in prison.

It is in this spirit that the Church has made efforts to reach out to those incarcerated in jails and prisons. The purpose of such

efforts is to care for the spiritual well-being of inmates and help bring them to the Savior. *All* can repent and come unto Christ. President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, “Save for the exception of the very few who defect to perdition, there is no habit, no addiction, no rebellion, no transgression, no apostasy, no crime exempted from the promise of complete forgiveness. That is the promise of the atonement of Christ.”<sup>1</sup> (See Matthew 12:31; Mark 3:28–29.) This belief in each

# Those in Prison

By Becky Young  
Church Magazines

person's capacity to change drives members to reach out to those who are incarcerated.

## The Efforts at Church Headquarters

Elder Ron and Sister Luann Stephens have been working as Church service missionaries in the Correctional Services segment of Welfare Services for nearly 10 years. They help people find the hope of repentance in their lives. Elder and Sister Stephens, along with seven other couples, spend time each week in an office lined with shelves of scriptures, Church manuals, and other gospel literature. When Correctional Services receives a letter from an inmate or a phone call from an inmate's relative, Elder and Sister Stephens determine which resources might help the individual the most. Then, praying for the Spirit to guide them, they write personalized letters of encouragement to the inmate, bearing testimony of the power of the Atonement to change lives, and send the letters with the appropriate Church materials.

The Stephenses have not grown tired of their service, even after sending thousands of letters each year. "We believe in this work," says Elder Stephens. "We are part of the missionary effort, and we are doing what needs to be done to support people."

Like other missionaries, they don't always see the direct results of their work, but they know that their efforts are helping inmates develop a love for God and the Savior. They receive letters and phone calls thanking them. "We have been converted to the idea that people can change—even in prison," says Elder Stephens.

President James E. Faust (1920–2007) taught this principle when he wrote: "Transgression brings pain and sorrow. But there is a way out of 'the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity' (Mosiah 27:29). If we will turn to the Lord and believe on His name, we can change. He will give us the power to

change our lives, the power to put away bad thoughts and feelings from our hearts. We can be taken from 'the darkest abyss' to 'behold the marvelous light of God' (Mosiah 27:29). We can be forgiven. We can find peace."<sup>2</sup>

## The Efforts of Local Church Units

The help and resources offered through Correctional Services are available to members and leaders throughout the world. In addition, prisons and jails in some areas of the United States facilitate Church-organized programs for inmates. These may include worship services (including prayers, hymns, and talks), Sunday School classes, and priesthood and Relief Society lessons.

Darwin Packard of Boise, Idaho, USA, has served as the bishop of the Pleasant Valley [Correctional Facility] Branch since 2005. (Prison branches are usually led by branch presidents, but in some cases, they are led by bishops.) Inmates, both Latter-

day Saints and those of other faiths, attend the services. While not everyone chooses to embrace the gospel, in the time Bishop Packard has served in his calling, he has worked with many who have. "We see the way the gospel works with those who have lost their way," he says. "They come to church and feel the Spirit and want to repent."

Bishop Packard spends his Sundays presiding over meetings in correctional institutions. He meets with inmates one-on-one, presides over disciplinary councils, gives priesthood blessings, and fulfills other responsibilities that accompany his calling. Through his service, Bishop Packard has seen the influence of the gospel in the lives of the inmates. "They are grateful that they can become clean. They are coming to understand their mistakes and know that they have to change," he says. "And they are glad they are changing."

This element of change is a common thread in the gospel. Speaking about repentance, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf has





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taught, “We acknowledge that ‘all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God’ (Romans 3:23), but we also declare with firmness that repentance and forgiveness can be as real as sin.”<sup>3</sup>

In Utah, USA, sisters living in wards near the Salt Lake County Jail have been called to serve in a Relief Society presidency in the Metropolitan Second Branch, which ministers to women incarcerated at this facility. Under the direction of the branch presidency, this Relief Society presidency tailors lessons for the sisters they serve, focusing on principles such as welfare, self-reliance, and self-worth. Their goal is to help the women understand that they are daughters of God and that the worth of their souls is great. “You can see a change in their countenance. You can see emerging in them a belief that they can have a good life regardless of their past,” says Sister Barbara Lockhart, first counselor in the branch Relief Society presidency. “Once they start to realize that their worth is great, they just blossom.”

Likewise, Brother Richard Lines, called to serve at the Federal Correctional Institution in Safford, Arizona, USA, says he has seen lives change after years of sin and inactivity. The program at the Safford institution is set up so that the inmates have an opportunity to participate in gospel discussions every Sunday. On two Sundays per month, inmates can volunteer to lead the lessons, giving them the chance to develop teaching skills and spend extra time studying gospel principles. (For many, leading a gospel discussion is a first-time experience, Brother Lines explains.) The group also meets formally in the chapel on Monday evenings for additional gospel instruction.



**Inmates at the Utah State Prison participate in Sunday School.**

## **In God’s Service**

**Name Withheld**

I was born into an LDS family and was raised knowing right from wrong. I did not stay active in the Church, and I made some poor choices. Herein lies the reason for my present situation. I am in prison.

But that’s not the story I want to share. Rather, I want to share the story of the many Latter-day Saint volunteers who come to the prisons to minister to, teach, listen to, and pray with those of us who are members of the Church or former members of the Church who have followed paths of alcohol, drugs, pornography, gambling, or crime.

They come to us for the first time with trepidation. They are not sure what to expect. They are even a little frightened. What they find when they arrive, for the most part, are people who are also frightened. Most inmates, if not all, want to learn how not to hurt others anymore. We wish we could have another chance.

That’s why we attend services with the volunteers. From them we learn the true meaning of service and brotherly love. They teach us about repentance and the Savior’s Atonement for our sins. We learn that all is not lost.





They teach us other things too. Some play the piano, some teach choir, some come out twice a month to share family home evening. The volunteers help us learn how to teach Sunday School and priesthood preparation classes. They give us blessings when we are ill or when we are having difficulty dealing with our environment. They are dedicated to their task, and we love them for it.

With the support of these volunteers, I read the Book of Mormon for the first time. (I've read it several times since.) I have learned how I can return to the Church after I have finished my sentence. My wife, who

was not a member of the Church, saw the sincerity of the volunteers and the testimony they helped instill in me. She decided to learn more about the Church, and with the help of the brothers and sisters in my home ward, she has been baptized and received a temple recommend.

Because of the volunteers' teachings, support, and love, I have come to know our Savior, Jesus Christ. I know that the Church is true. I also know that these volunteers are special people, blessed by the Lord and called to minister to us. May God continue to bless them for their generosity and unselfishness. ■



Elder Ron and Sister Luann Stephens are among the many couples who serve as Church service missionaries in Welfare Services at Church headquarters. Their assignment involves writing letters to inmates to accompany the gospel literature they send.

“It is sweet to see these men grow in this capacity,” says Brother Lines. “It is the only chance for many of them to really get back into the gospel. The Church services in the facilities really help them find the iron rod that they lost sometime in the past” (see 1 Nephi 8:19).

### The Efforts of Home Wards and Leaders

Members of the Church need not have access to formal programs or be given official callings to bless the lives of their brothers and sisters. Inmates' home ward bishops and ward members can also be instrumental in helping those who have been incarcerated find the courage they need to change. Members can follow the Savior by helping inmates transition back to life outside of prison walls.

One brother feared how he would be received when he was released from prison because ward members knew what he had done and where he had been. But when he was released from prison, he found himself encompassed by Christlike love from the bishop and ward members. This acceptance gave him the hope he needed to stay on track and eventually make temple covenants.

Many inmates find that when they return home they may be surrounded by old friends and old temptations. Sometimes it is difficult for them to hold on to the positive changes they made in prison. Michael (name has been changed) feared this may happen to him. He decided that upon his release, he couldn't return to his home and family because of the negative influence they would have on him. He was afraid he would lose what he had worked so hard to develop if he did. He

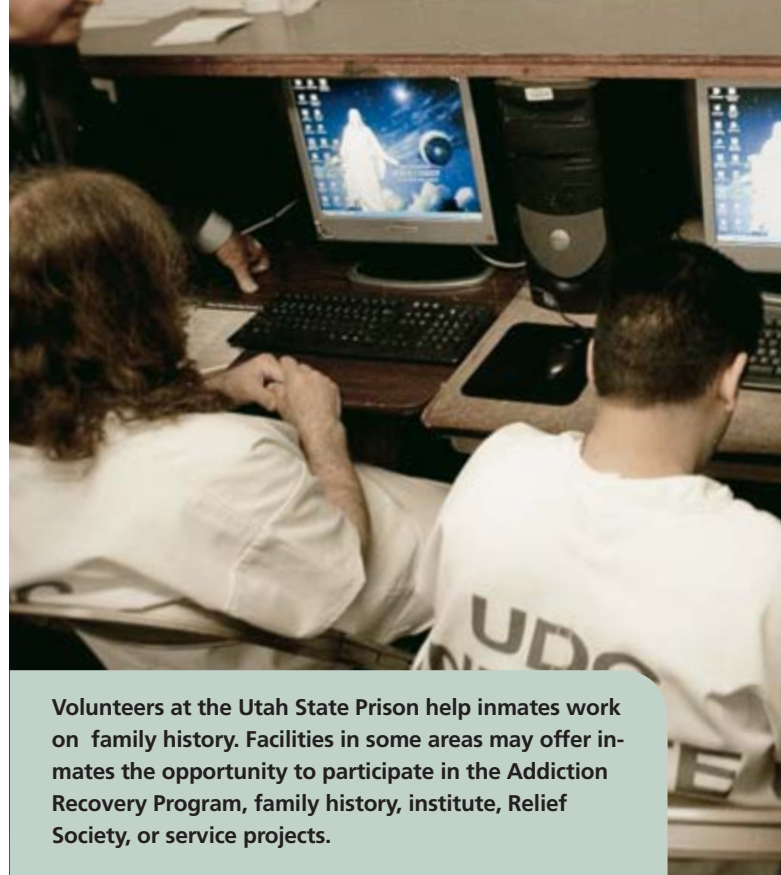


**Bishop Darwin Packard, who presides over a correctional-services branch, has seen the influence of the gospel in the lives of many he has worked with. He says, "They are coming to understand their mistakes and know that they have to change."**

moved to a new place and turned to his ward there for help. The ward took Michael in and helped him know that he belonged. The ward family became his family.

"They want to know that they are still loved," says one bishop who has worked with several former inmates. He points to what President Uchtdorf has taught: "There is *always* a point of safe return [in the gospel]; there is always hope."<sup>4</sup>

This bishop adds: "People who have been incarcerated are children of Heavenly Father too. They have the ability and the right and opportunity to change."



**Volunteers at the Utah State Prison help inmates work on family history. Facilities in some areas may offer inmates the opportunity to participate in the Addiction Recovery Program, family history institute, Relief Society, or service projects.**

## Reaching out to Families Affected by Incarceration

**By Mark Duke**

LDS Family Services

**W**e are given a scriptural mandate to minister to people who are in prison. (See Matthew 25:34–45.)

Following are some ideas of what you can do for those who are imprisoned and for their families.

### For the Person in Prison

- Be aware of—and sensitive to—what the person might be feeling. It's common for incarcerated people to feel fear about their new surroundings, how they'll relate to fellow inmates, potential violence,
- their legal future, and how they'll be able to relate to friends or family members upon their release. Many also experience anger, loneliness, and depression. They worry about being forgotten or the well-being of their families while they are in prison. Acknowledging the inmate's feelings can be helpful to him or her.
- When appropriate, visit or write letters to the inmate. (Be cautious about sharing your contact information, especially in cases where you do not already know the person.) When a member of one ward

went to prison, his bishop and home teacher made regular visits. On a regular basis, the home teacher would report on how the man was doing. The home teacher encouraged others to write to this brother, and occasionally, he would read letters from him. The man wrote touching messages about how he appreciated letters from priesthood quorum members and what their fellowship meant to him. He said he no longer took for granted the brotherhood the quorum offered.

- Give encouragement. In writing a letter, for instance, don't avoid the reality that the person is in prison, but don't dwell

on it either. Instead, share news of your family or the ward as appropriate. Acknowledge that the person's situation is difficult and then give sincere encouragement. Let the person know that you are staying aware of his or her family and their needs. Most people who are in prison will welcome anything you might write.

### Ministering to the Family

- Be accepting. Don't make assumptions about or judge the family based on the actions of one member.
- Recognize that the family member's incarceration may be causing



Volunteers at the Utah State Prison meet to partake of the sacrament and for a brief devotional prior to attending worship services with inmates.

hardship. In some cases, an incarceration might affect a family's income. In other instances, one parent's being in jail will create additional responsibilities for the remaining parent or for another guardian. Being aware of a family's needs can help you know when and how to offer encouragement and resources.

- Graciously ask the family how you can help. They may have unmet needs that aren't obvious to even sensitive observers. Maybe they'll ask for your prayers. Perhaps they could benefit from inclusion in some of your family's activities.
- Don't ignore them. Some members may feel

uncomfortable approaching the family of a prisoner because they're not sure what to say or how to help, so they don't say anything at all. Don't pretend that the family members aren't there. Talk with them. Find out how they're doing. It may be appropriate to ask about the well-being of the person in prison, but focus your efforts on family members and how you might support them. The situation of the person in prison will generally remain the same, but the family will be the ones "plugging away" on a daily basis, facing various challenges that need your sensitive support. ■

### "Follow Thou Me"

Church service missionaries, leaders, and other members throughout the Church are following the example of Jesus Christ by reaching out to those who are incarcerated and seeking spiritual help. Through following the teachings of the Savior, both inmates and the Church members who serve them see how the Atonement of Jesus Christ brings hope and light to the lives of God's children. As healing and change take place in the lives of inmates, the lives of those who serve them also change. "I feel like I have done something significant for my Heavenly Father," says Brother Lines. ■

#### NOTES

1. Boyd K. Packer, "The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 20.
2. James E. Faust, "The Power to Change," *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 123.
3. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Point of Safe Return," *Ensign*, May 2007, p. 100, 101.
4. Uchtdorf, "Point of Safe Return," 101.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

In collaboration with Welfare Services at Church headquarters, LDS Family Services is responsible for materials and professional resources to assist those in correctional institutions and their families. For assistance, contact LDS Correctional Services at 1-800-453-3860, ext. 2-2644, or [correctionalservices@ldschurch.org](mailto:correctionalservices@ldschurch.org).

Priesthood leaders can also find information at [LDS.org](http://LDS.org), clicking on Serving in the Church, and choosing Melchizedek Priesthood. Select "Support for Those in Correctional Facilities" on the right side of the page. Additionally, information on the Correctional Services helpline is available in the *Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 1*.

See companion article written by a former prison bishop at [ensign.lds.org](http://ensign.lds.org).