



MINISTRY OF HOPE

HEARTBEAT

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ISSUE

A Publication for the Swannanoa Correctional Center for Women Chaplaincy Committee

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CONVERSATIONS ON THE FRONT PORCH OF THE CHAPEL

by **Carol Sasser Dalton, Chaplain**



Carol Dalton, Chaplain

Being in prison can be extra painful for minorities. Prison is a microcosm of the rest of society, so boil down what you may be hearing on the news, and you have a picture of how women sometimes feel inside the gate.

When you are the minority of the minorities—Asian American, Latinx, transgender—the comments made by the people around you hurt deeply. The chaplains offer safe space and try to get the word out that we have sanctuary where residents may come to release some of that pain.

As opportunities arise, we teach residents how to be an ally when they spot injustice. The last thing any of us want to do is make the problem worse.

Asking permission before intervening when we see someone being targeted is a good practice. We also don't want to make assumptions, so having conversations with marginalized individuals is a good starting place.

Remember that discomfort is a growth opportunity. As we heard today after one of these discussions in which a woman shared her personal story of family immigration, another resident said, "I just learned something."

Visitation is great for some women in prison, but it causes a lot of heartache for others, even in non-COVID times.

With COVID restrictions, visits have recently opened up for children younger than 12. Imagine if you left a 2-year-old with family while going to prison for two or three years. Visits were suspended for several months. Then no-contact visits were offered for people 12 and older. "No hugging" became a real thing! Then visits were offered for children younger than 12, but still no contact. Most residents do not even want to imagine what that would be like.

Video visitation has arrived, and it's wonderful to hear about women "seeing" family members for the first time in many years, simply because of the distance. While we applaud the system for making headway, the act of listening to some impromptu conversations in front of the chapel opens the mind to the many layers of pain and joy families are experiencing.

Being released from prison after many years is frightening.

Even for the person who has so much family support, a home, and a reentry plan - sleepless nights in the final two weeks are the norm. We try to normalize the angst with words like, "Most of the women I've talked to, pre-release, feel that exact same way, but here are some practices that might help you shut off the chatter in your brain so you can sleep."

Sometimes just knowing this is so common that the chaplain has a go-to method is enough to reduce the anxiety, but mindfulness practices are good for all of us!

We never know exactly what the day will bring, but we can almost always count on interesting conversations and opportunities to listen. Thank you for helping us make a safe space for women of all faiths to express their hurts, joys, questions, concerns and hopes for the future.

MY EXPERIENCE WITH MINISTRY OF HOPE

by Cara, a former SCCW Resident

In September 2017, I arrived at Swannanoa Correctional Center for Women after having spent 16 months at North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women in Raleigh. I was also 16 months into my journey of faith and recovery, and elated to finally be getting out of Raleigh. The moment I stepped off the bus, I knew I was in a very different place with a very different culture.

The scenery was beyond inspiring, but so were the people. The inmates who worked in the warehouse greeted us with a smile and "Welcome to Swannanoa." I almost cried because of this simple humane gesture after having experienced so much trauma at NCCIW. The correctional officers were treating us with dignity and kindness. This was an unbelievable contrast to what I had grown accustomed to.

I thought, "wow!" I felt in my spirit this was a place for the hope and healing I so desperately needed. So why is this place so different from other prisons? It did not take me long to figure out the answer. The chaplaincy and programs made possible by the Ministry of Hope influence the culture of the institution, from the staff to the inmates. SCCW is a place where women are supported and encouraged, and where they are taught to support and encourage each other.

The many dedicated volunteers showing up each week are essential. They form healing bonds teaching us what it means to be loved, how to love ourselves, and how to love others. My most valuable experience at SCCW was being part of the chaplain's transitional mentoring program. Nothing else that I've ever done has enabled me to heal and grow more than this.

I learned so much from the mentors, but also the other women in the program who faithfully showed up each week willing to be vulnerable and share their hearts. We formed friendships that not only supported us throughout those difficult days, but continue to endure to this day.

I found my hope and healing at SCCW, but I also found so much more in the friendships that have continued throughout my transition. Most people say my transition thus far has been highly successful. I would agree because I have met and exceeded every goal I've set for myself. However, none of this would have been possible without the grace of God and the relationships I formed through the programs made possible by the Ministry of Hope.

Editor's note:

Cara has been a resident of our Black Mountain Community now since November of 2020, residing at The Jane Pfaff House. It is owned and operated by Swannanoa Valley Transitional Housing Committee, a sister organization, and is located in Black Mountain. They receive women directly from SCCW - providing housing, emotional support, assistance in securing employment, and some transportation. Cara continues to offer hope to the women in the SCCW program who still anticipate their own release, as well as support and encouragement to her fellow Pfaff House residents.

A Reminder about recurring giving as a way to support Ministry of Hope...

When a donor signs up for this recurring donation program online, there are no checks to mail and no reminders needed - it's all automated!

A monthly gift allows our supporters the option to spread the financial impact of their giving across the entire year, making the commitment more manageable.

These ongoing funds will provide regular and predictable support for our ministry, allowing our organization to fund our ongoing operations overall, but also predict future cash flow - **giving us a better lead in future planning and outreach.**

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A RAY OF HOPE AT SWANNANOA

by Vickie H., SCCW Resident

November 5, 2020, began as any other day for me at Anson Correctional. I got up at 4:30 a.m.—devotions, shower, breakfast, off to the dayroom to listen for my work crew to be called, report to work. It was the usual busy day until the plant manager yells, “Hill, they want you in Operations.” My first thought was an annoyed, “What now?” Then it went to, “Oh, no, not my dad.” As the officer escorted me to Operations, I talked to calm my nerves.

No amount of talking could prepare me for what I was about to hear. At Operations, the lieutenant told me my daughter needed to talk to me. When Morgan answered, she was crying. The words that followed were words no mother wants to hear: “Mom, Tanner is dead!” Tanner is my middle child and was only 21 years old. To say I lost it would be an understatement. A captain walked in and told me I was being too loud, and they couldn’t find the chaplain. Through those dark days, my support system was my co-workers and a few staff members.

I knew for my spiritual, emotional and mental well-being, I had to transfer, but how? I was medium custody, and I didn’t want to go to Raleigh. Guess who was working while I was barely functioning? God!

I received minimum-custody status in December and did not even know I was being reviewed. Due to COVID-19, the first transfer bus did not leave until Feb. 23. A co-worker and I packed our things, along with 25 other ladies, and headed for the mountains. Heading to the mountains means getting on a transfer bus. That’s fine until we get to receiving and find out we have to be handcuffed and shackled! What? We are minimum custody. “New rule,” they say. My good friend and co-worker looks at me and says, “I can’t do this. This is the reason I haven’t been on an outside appointment in seven years.”

So, here we go - as we get on the bus, I can see my friend’s anxiety level rising. I’m trying to figure out how to help her, and the only thing I can think to do is what I do VERY well - I talk. As we head up the mountain, talking about everything from the beautiful scenery to family to the weather, I can feel the shackles starting to loosen on my heart. I knew I was going to the right facility.

After going through the intake process at Swannanoa Correctional Center for Women, we were placed in quarantine for fourteen days. The officers we had during that time were awesome.

One day, my friend and I were having one of our “heart to hearts,” and I was crying about Tanner and not being with Austin and Morgan. The officer stopped and talked with us. Little did we know, she went and contacted Warden Boysworth, and he contacted the psychologist, Ms. Larkin, to come check on me. Are you serious?! I’ve been here a week and have received such support. Wow—how awesome is this!

That afternoon, we were looking at the view from the dayroom and noticed “I ❤️ U” in the trees! Another sign of confirmation for me, and they just keep coming!

This facility has the Ministry of Hope Mentoring Program, and the Warden approved church services to resume on Easter Sunday, April 4. (Tanner’s 22nd birthday was April 12.) What an Easter service we had. The chaplains at Swannanoa are amazing, and they see ladies (moms, daughters, etc.) and not just an OPUS#. The chaplains go out of their way to have an open-door policy that is COVID safe.

The staff at SCCW, administrative and custody, are diligently working to “open” SCCW. They care about us and want to meet our spiritual, emotional and mental needs. Programs such as the mentoring program allow us to heal. With healing comes growth, and we all need that.

Is SCCW perfect? Absolutely not, but I do believe it is God’s facility, and God is working miracles, big and small, through the staff, volunteers and offenders here!

Editor’s note:

At time of printing, women are now going out to work release jobs. Upon approval from Raleigh, we will send out an email and post on Facebook regarding any upcoming dates for volunteer training.

We are relying on the generosity of continuing donors like you more than ever.

Please use the enclosed envelope, or you may donate online by going to our website: www.MinistryOfHopeWNC.org

Would you like to join our email list for SCCW updates, event reminders and news?

Visit the “Contact” page of our website, then enter email address to “JOIN OUR NEWSLETTER”





MINISTRY OF HOPE

Swannanoa Correctional Center for Women
Chaplaincy Committee

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The Ministry of Hope is a community-funded chaplaincy program, which raises funds to employ on-site chaplains at the Swannanoa Correctional Center for Women (SCCW).

Our chaplains conduct religious services in the center's chapel and provide pastoral care and spiritual guidance to the inmates. Their guidance and leadership are crucial to helping these women, many of whom struggle with addiction, abuse, and grief issues. The women of SCCW are within five years of release or parole. Our chaplains offer them a sense of hope and real-world self-care tools to manage parenting, relationships, and employment with discernment and spiritual maturity.



BECOME A PARTNER IN THE MINISTRY OF HOPE!

Here are some ways **YOU** can join us in
our mission to provide chaplains at **SCCW**:

- ♥ Sponsor a fund-raising event for the benefit of Ministry of Hope
- ♥ Put the Ministry of Hope in your mission budget, either as a church or as a Sunday School Class/Mission Group
- ♥ Make a one-time or regular contribution
- ♥ Request that you be put on the mailing list for our quarterly newsletter
- ♥ Our chaplains are available to provide virtual educational events for your group

Contact us today to learn more:

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