

2009 Assembly Offering

This year's offering at the Synod Assembly will go toward building the Coyote Ridge Religious Activities Center in Connell, Washington. A great start is already underway on this chapel but more funds and building help is needed.

(Bishop Wells' October 2008 *Cross Connection* article)

God's Beloved People,

Those of you who regularly drive the WA 395 route through Connell, WA, have seen the construction on the west side of the freeway. Coyote Ridge Corrections center is adding 2000 beds in a major expansion of the prison. It really is impressive to see the miles of razor wire, the new light towers, the grey, grey buildings with square corners and slotted windows. Much could be said about our penchant for warehousing people but I have another purpose to this article. I'd like to ask for your assistance as a Great Commandment/Great Commission church.

I spent the school year 1978-79 as a Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) student and then seminary intern at the Washington Corrections Center in Shelton, WA. Only marrying Susan in the early fall of 1979 saved this from being the hardest year of my life, hardest and most depressing. I lived right on the beach at Hood Canal and even the fresh oysters couldn't counter-balance the hopelessness and physical and emotional violence of working in the prison. We conducted four services every Sunday, one for those in transit from court to their final facility (maximum custody, one hour out of the cell per day), one in the Protective Custody unit (full of mental patients and "snitches,") one in the Training Center (Medium security) and one in the visiting room with families attending. Shelton was the place I learned from inmates about the power of the resurrection and the supremacy of grace over justice.

To the point: The only "free space" in the entire facility was the small chapel. It was furnished with left over pews and font and altar from a closed congregation. There was little grace to the space but it was a place where a door could be closed for confession and absolution. It was the only place where inmates could let down the machismo that protected them in the yard. In short it was holy space and the air was free to breathe. In this space it was possible to talk of confession and reconciliation with victims and the hope of a new life after prison.

Coyote Ridge needs a chapel. The State can build the shell of the building but everything else, from the HVAC to the bathroom fixtures, must be donated as part of our State's separation of church and state. A great start is underway with congregations, largely from the West Side, donating the basics. But the rest is up to the church. I'd like this to be the most welcoming and beautiful space in the prison. I'd like this to be a place where love for prisoner neighbors (Matthew 25:36) is shown in the space itself. This chapel building has the potential to be a portal to new life.

Chaplain Eric Askren is a solid partner in ministry and he is eager for our help. Will you consider a \$64 dollar gift to buy a yard of concrete? Could your evangelism budget donate \$100 for chapel furnishings? Donations can be sent to Community First Bank, P.O. Box E, Connell, WA 99326, payable to the Coyote Ridge Religious Activity Center Fund. Maybe you're someone who could volunteer construction assistance: Contact Vas Sinyuk, volunteer coordinator, 509-528-1610 or sinyukconstruction@yahoo.com.

We're grateful that Gideon Lutheran Church of Connell is leading us in ministry through their Room at the Inn initiative. See <http://www.doc.wa.gov/facilities/docs/ROOMATINNFORM.pdf>. I hope we can join them in a new project, helping to build a chapel that will minister as "space for grace" for years to come.

Peace,

Pr. Martin Wells

Bishop,

mshmmwells@aol.com

<http://www.doc.wa.gov/facilities/coyoteridge.asp>