

# Love in Action



Mission Creek opened in 2005 as a minimum custody level facility with a capacity of 321 female inmates. The WCCW facility opened in 1971 with a capacity of 738 female inmates, serving minimum, medium and closed custody levels.

## Empowering Life

*"Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them." Hebrews 13:3 NRSV*



*Empowering Life* is a ministry of the Southwestern Washington Synod serving women who are incarcerated at the Washington Corrections Center for Women in Gig Harbor and at Mission Creek in Mason County. For the past decade, *Empowering Life* has provided pastoral care & life coaching, a worship service on the 2nd & 4th Sunday evenings, "Grief, Loss & Life Change" classes, spiritual retreats in the prison chapel, a "Gathering in Faith" bible study, therapeutic art, "Confident Parenting" classes, spiritual & emotional mentoring, and backpacks with school supplies & Christmas gifts for the incarcerated women to share with their children. Joan Nelson, a member of St. Mark's by the Narrows Lutheran Church in Tacoma & president of *Empowering Life*, has a heart for these women who yearn to experience the difference the gospel can make in their life journey. *Thank you, Joan and our SLC women, for your ministry!*



*Empowering Life Core Team* (left to right)

Pastor Annie Jones-Barnes, Sharon Peterson, Twylla Moore, President Joan Nelson and Pastor Melanie Wallschlaeger (not pictured)

In February, a group of women at Silverdale Lutheran formed a small group, *Christianity and Criminal Justice*. For 8 weeks, they met in the church library to study the American criminal justice system through the lens of Christianity. Their material, *Outrageous Justice*, was provided through Prison Fellowship, a national organization that works for reform in the criminal justice system. The book study and accompanying DVD prompted a lot of excellent conversation and reflection on the definition of biblical justice and how we can change the American system to better reflect God's justice, a sense of restoration and a renewal among victims and those incarcerated.

Members of the group traveled twice to the WCCW in Gig Harbor to attend worship services with *Empowering Life*. The services are held on the second and fourth Sundays at 5:30 p.m. The opportunity to worship with the women & see their joy and love of Christ was inspiring!

What's next? The small group is now discussing ways to support *Empowering Life*... including possibly becoming regular volunteers, raising money through a summer brunch and also supporting an annual rummage sale in Gig Harbor at Peninsula Lutheran on July 19 & 20.



SLC member, Kara Willis, volunteered as a mentor for the June prison retreat.

SLC women joined Joan Nelson at her annual home garden party to raise money for *Empowering Life* ministry. The ministry must raise \$20,000 a year to sustain its presence at the correctional centers. SLC is now one of 20 SWWS congregations who offer support in a variety of ways.



## *Christianity & Criminal Justice* Small Group

Judi Blockhus, Sue Gitch, Kara Willis, Aimee Gordon, Dawn Hamrick and Lisa Ottenbacher...Lisa Gregg & Intern Marietta Nelson-Bittle were the facilitators

If you are interested in the study material, it is available from our SLC Small Groups Connector.



"I first started thinking about women in prison some years ago after hearing a story about how empty visiting day is in a correctional facility for women. Women are often the social glue in a family and community... what happens to those structures when the glue is gone? I feel called to let the women know that they are not forgotten, cast aside, written off. After prison they face near insurmountable obstacles. I believe that supporting these women on their journey in prison and after their release, could help re-create that social glue in our community."

*Lisa Gregg, Facilitator*

God's work. Our hands.