

November, 2018

Dear Companions on the Journey with Us:

In this world where there is so much hate and division, where daily we hear about violence and bullying, it is so comforting to think of you and all you do for us. Thank you for the important volunteer service you do in our projects and all of the resources you share with us. What may be more important is the motivation and energy, your gifts give us. Because of your help, we are touching thousands of lives each year. This is how some of that is happening:

- Our Aunt Mary's Storybook Project not only means a lot to the parents and grandparents who participate. It reminds them there are some ways to parent even while imprisoned. It also gives hope to the caregivers. Most importantly, it reminds the children who receive the books and recordings that they are still loved and remembered by those very important people in their lives. In addition, our volunteers who go into the 10 state prisons and 7 county jails have an opportunity to listen to those who participate and remind them there are people who care.
- 80+ volunteers are corresponding on a regular basis with about 100 prisoners. Mail is so important to our brothers and sisters who are incarcerated and can help motivate them to take positive steps so that they can return to society as positive members of our community. It allows us to have a presence to people who are living in very negative environments.
- About 4,000 packets of cards and stationery were distributed to youth, women and a few men in jails and prisons before Mother's Day. Each contained 5 pretty pieces of writing material. We know from empirical research that prisoners who keep in touch with their loved ones are less likely to recidivate.
- Through other mail we remind prisoners they are remembered. This too can be a powerful motivator for people who know they have done horrible deeds, but who want to do better. We mail about 80 birthday cards a month. Groups often send Easter, Mother's Day or thinking of you cards to select people from our mailing list. Then there are the thousands of Christmas cards we mail or supply for prisons and jails to distribute.

To be grow this work, we are working hard at Board Development. Several of our long-time board members who worked so hard for us have retired. We have added a few new younger members, and are actively looking for more. And we are working to update our board policies and procedures. In 2019, we hope to be starting a strategic planning process, so we can set our objectives for the years to come.

To keep growing we need your help, too. Would you be willing to remember us in your year-end giving? Would you be willing to increase the gift you normally send? All of those we serve, our staff, and board would be very grateful.

Sincerely,

Jana Minor
Founding Director

Preparing for Christmas 2018:

Hundreds of people have already gathered Christmas cards, signed some of them, and helped prepare them for mail or to be distributed to our brothers and sisters who are imprisoned both in adult and juvenile prisons. Others have donated thousands of stamps. Each year we mail about 3,000 cards directly to prisoners. Many other thousands are distributed to those confined in other jails and prisons. And thousands are provided for prisoners to send to their families and loved ones. So many of you have helped us with this project. By the time you receive this newsletter many of these cards will be mailed or shipped. Thanks to all who helped with our Christmas Card Project, 2018.

Is it important? Those who receive our mail can tell you better than I can what it means to receive mail.

"I have no family or friends still living that could write to me or send a card. You don't know how much it means to receive cards on my birthday and holidays. That someone will take the time to acknowledge my existence. Thanks so very much for keeping me in your memory and prayers. May the God of love and peace be with all of you."

"Hello all the compassionate Companions volunteers: thank all of you for speaking out for, even standing up for us throw aways, and reaching behind all the razor wire & bars with genuine Christ Jesus' Love, in your actions and words. Thank you for leading by example. May God bless all of your families for being good examples of His Love in the community & prisons."

"Thank you for the wonderful cards your Companions have been helping us with over the many years. You have been a true Blessing and certainly touch my heart in a special way."

"Thank you so very much. You have been there for me all these years more than my own family. Sending me a birthday card and Christmas cards every year for my whole time being locked up – 10+ years. Keep up the very humble and God will work. God bless you."

Insidenotes

Preparing for Christmas	pg. 1
Board Profile & We Honored	pg. 2
Years of Services & Pen Pal Club	pg. 3

NEEDS

- ◆ Groups to fundraise
- ◆ Opportunities to speak
- ◆ Postage stamps
- ◆ Envelopes



BOARD PROFILE & WE HONORED

Get to Know Board Member Tom Kucharski:

As a new Board member at CJT, can you tell us a little bit about yourself? *I have been a public school teacher and/or administrator for more than thirty years. During that time I have had the privilege to work with students on social issues and service opportunities throughout the Chicago area.*

Tell us about your work with Aunt Mary's Storybook in the Cook County Jail. How did you get involved, and what do you like most about your volunteering? *I became involved with Aunt Mary's Storybook in response to a call for volunteers from the organization. I was so impressed by our clientele: they take time to choose books; they read them with great care; and they always leave the child with a heart-warming personal message. I find it truly inspiring to work with these men who, despite being in very difficult circumstances, express their love for their families in such direct and authentic ways. I look forward to my experiences there every month!*

What inspired you to join the Board? *I very much appreciate the work that the organization does, and I am motivated to help it expand. I have studied incarceration in the United States for years now, and it is clear to me that our system is ailing on many levels. We disproportionately incarcerate people of color and the poor, and we stress punishment rather than rehabilitation. Companions' work is a part of the cure to these ailments.*

What do you hope to accomplish during your term as a Board member? *I hope to support the Board as we maintain and expand our services throughout the state of Illinois. I hope also to help spread the word regarding prison reform in the United States. We need to stop leading the world in the percentage of people imprisoned, and to recognize the dignity of every individual incarcerated by stressing rehabilitation and personal development rather than punishment and societal revenge.*

We Honored:

Our fourth annual Kindred Spirits Fundraiser was moved from July to November at a new location with a new planning team. Two generous supporters of our previous Kindred Spirits events, Libby Robertson Kincanon and Angelina Russo, offered to coordinate and plan our fundraiser. We are so thankful for their time and dedication.

We gathered at Brewpoint Coffee in Elmhurst. As in the past, supporters, volunteers, and friends enjoyed a wonderful evening together. A great friend, Neal, once again provided us with his guitar and vocal music. We bid on auction items, ate and drank, and just enjoyed being together.

A regular feature has been to honor a volunteer. This year we chose to spotlight the dedicated work of our longest running Aunt Mary's Storybook Project volunteer. Mary Walsh started coming with us into old Kane County Jail about 18 years ago. Since then she has been sharing her expertise and loving presence monthly with women both at Kane County Jail and DuPage County Jail. Mary spent her career as an elementary school teacher. Thus she knows how to help the women we serve choose books and how to help them make the most of their recording sessions.

Mary, we are so grateful to you.

YEARS OF SERVICE & PEN PAL CLUBS

Years and years of service by St. Alexander's in Villa Park:

Preparing this newsletter for mailing can be a time consuming and expensive process. We are so very grateful to the wonderful people of St. Alexander's parish in Villa Park who have for 18 years been helping us with that process.

Their involvement with us started with a wonderful woman, Joyce Dempsky. She started collecting Christmas cards and materials for our Mother's Day Project. She recruited volunteers to help conduct Aunt Mary's Storybook Project at Dwight Correctional Center. Later they joined us in serving the women confined at Kane County Jail. And in about 1999, she invited us to come to her parish to prepare *JourneyNotes* for mailing. 2-3 times a year, parishioners would gather after daily mass to stuff inserts into the newsletter, fold, and label. They made a hard job simple. Truly they made it possible for us to produce so many issues of this newsletter to our supporters in the free world and to those we serve in prisons and jails.

Joyce left the area to be nearer to her sons, but the participation of St. A's people has continued. We thank them and pray that their service of us has brought them many blessings.



Pen Pal Clubs:

Presently we have 90+ volunteers corresponding with men and a few women who are imprisoned. Each volunteer belongs to a pen pal group organized by someone in their church or organization. Recently one group added 6 new volunteers and three existing volunteers asked for new pen pals.

To prepare for these new volunteers we wrote to several prisoners who had requested a pen pal a few years ago. Most wrote back thanking us for remembering and assuring us they would still like to write to someone – more than the nine we were able to assign to a volunteer.

Our Pen Pal Club project is a ministry of presence. We are told over and over how helpful it is to receive mail and to have contact with people from the outside. Many receive no other mail than that which we send. Please let us know if you know of a group that would like to start such a group.

journeynotes



Companions, Journeying Together, Inc.

P.O. Box 457

Western Springs, Illinois 60558-0457

OUR GOALS ● OUR VISION ● OUR COMMITMENT

- ◆ To bridge the gaps between the free and the unfree worlds in our society.
- ◆ To implement programs that foster the personal growth of incarcerated people and their families.
- ◆ To promote family literacy, lifelong learning and positive parenting techniques
- ◆ To recruit and educate volunteers about the criminal justice system and restorative justice.

*Journeynotes is a publication of
Companions, Journeying Together, Inc.
Visit us at www.cjtinc.org*

Nonprofit org
US POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT #6060
CAROL STREAM, IL



30 YEARS OF COMPANIONS!

The Companions staff would like to hear from you.

Scott@cjtinc.org (Executive Director)

Jana@cjtinc.org (Founding Director)

Call at (630) 481-6231

[facebook.com/cjtinc](https://www.facebook.com/cjtinc)



An electronic version of our *JourneyNotes* publication is now available! Please visit our website at www.cjtinc.org to sign up!

Needs:

- ◆ Always postage stamps. We send so much mail.
- ◆ Opportunities to speak at your church or group.
- ◆ Groups who would hold a book drive for our Aunt Mary's
- ◆ Storybook Project. Contact us or see our web page for guidelines for the books we need: cjtinc.org/book-drive or call 630-481-6231.
- ◆ White Tyvek® envelopes (sizes: 9x12, 10x13, 12x15.5)
- ◆ White A9 Envelopes (for CDs for Aunt Mary's Storybook)