

2017 Woman of Faith was called to find Christ — behind bars

Hearing Linda Pischke's story might change your heart, just as hearing the stories of women behind bars changed Linda's.

This Milwaukee suburban wife, mother and social worker thought she knew her place in the world, until God's plan led her to a place most unfamiliar. For more than 16 years, Linda has served with St. Dismas Jail Ministry. That's when she began hearing the stories that inspired her 2011 book, "The Women of Block 12."

Kay Styza nominated Linda for the Woman of Faith Award, and shared the history behind Linda's book and her Joyful Souls aftercare program for women released from prison.

"For 10 years Linda led a Christian-based creative writing class at the Waukesha County Jail. She shared the Good News with women who felt unloved and undeserving of God's forgiveness. She invited them to write about how God was helping them find new hope." With their approval and blessings, Linda wrote the book that shares their heartbreaking life journeys.

"Linda also saw that these women lacked a healthy support system upon release from jail. With the support of St. Dismas Ministry, she founded Joyful Souls." The women meet every Friday evening at the St. Vincent de Paul store in Waukesha to share a meal, prayer, Bible study, fellowship and fun. Kay says, "The group is thriving," and after more than five years, none of the longtime attendees have returned to prison.

John Waymel, president of Waukesha County's St. Dismas Conference, says Linda is one of their longest-serving members. In a letter supporting her nomination for the Woman of Faith Award, John wrote, "Linda has a deep understanding of our Christian mission to love unconditionally. She demonstrates a solid witness of faith in God and the Holy Spirit that is so crucial to inmates and their families."

"I began my ministry believing it was my job to take Jesus to the jail, but he was already there waiting for me."

— Linda Pischke



Linda encourages the women to be accountable for their actions, but not define themselves by past mistakes. Kay says the women often refer to Linda as "our tough, but loving mom who doesn't let us get away with anything." Sadly, many of the women didn't grow up with a tough, but loving mom, and have struggled with addictions and mental illness.

The beauty of Joyful Souls is that women serving as mentors often receive inspiration, hugs and prayers from the women they come to serve. Linda recruits mentors from local churches, including Christ the Servant Lutheran, where she worships. Kay says, "Linda motivates us all to use our God-given gifts to help each other and give back to our brothers and

sisters in Christ. Our Joyful Souls group, by the grace of God, has helped work miracles."

One of those miracles met Linda more than 10 years ago while in custody. She supported Linda's Woman of Faith nomination with this testimonial:

Linda was a light that shined in that gloomy place. She saw something in me that I didn't. She stayed in touch with me while I went to prison, and gave me strength to get through. When I was released, she helped me get back on my feet. She continued to pray, mentor and love me no matter what. She never gave up on me. As I look back, Linda has shown me a love I never got from my family. She's an amazing woman of faith.

Read about our Woman of Faith Award at <http://sistersofthedivinesavior.org/about-us/wof/>



WOMAN OF Faith AWARD

Please join us to honor

Linda Pischke

Founder of Joyful Souls ministry

Bridging the gap for women rebuilding their lives after prison

Thursday, September 21, 2017 • 7:00 p.m.

SDS Community House • 4311 N. 100th Street, Milwaukee

Please register for this free event by September 16

Go to sistersofthedivinesavior.org/2017wof or call 414-466-7414

Special thanks to Catholic Financial Life for their Premier Partnership in this event.

