



A Tool Kit for Dismas Fellowships

About This Tool Kit for Dismas Fellowships

This Tool Kit has been developed to assist communities create places of safety and welcome for men and women returning home from prison.

We call our effort ***Dismas Fellowship***, taking the name of the unnamed convict who was crucified alongside Jesus. The good thief mentioned in the Gospel of Luke (chapter 23) asked Jesus to remember him in his kingdom. In tradition he is referred to as St. Dismas.

The first Dismas Fellowship began in 2003 in Toronto and since then a number of fellowships, sponsored by various ministries, have formed across Ontario and have organized into a Dismas Fellowship Network.

This guide draws on our shared experiences and learnings as the Network has grown. It tries to offer “best practices” to ensure the safety and stability for emerging and existing Fellowships.

The Dismas Fellowship Tool Kit has been developed by Friends of Dismas Inc. and reviewed by members of the Network which function on a shared set of values (see Section 3). The Tool Kit is a companion piece to a **two-part orientation** that we offer to any existing or emerging Fellowship, and broadly addresses the following topics:

1. *The correctional system and the lasting effects of prison culture.*
2. *The challenge of “coming home” and the vision of Dismas Fellowship.*
3. *Elements, guidelines and shared values of a Dismas Fellowship.*
4. *How to have safe and open friendships in the context of Dismas Fellowship.*

A very special thanks to Dismas volunteers **Ron and Cathy Fielding, Sue Pfeffer, Jim Black** and **Michael Walsh** as well as many Dismas Fellowship members across the province who gave their time to reviewing and editing this material

Harry Nigh,
for Dismas Fellowship Network

<http://dismasfellowshipnetwork.com/>
1-877-554-1076

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Section 1

Dismas Fellowship ...

... begins in an encounter between two convicted men. One of the men was Jesus, the other a man we call St. Dismas, the name given to him in legend.

Both of them had received a death penalty; they came together at their execution.

There was also a third convict who mocked Jesus, but Dismas replied, *"Don't you fear God? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."*

He then turned and asked, *"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."*

Jesus answered, *"...today you will be with me in paradise."* (Luke 23: 40-43)

In 2003 we came together in an encounter that we called **Dismas Fellowship** taking the name of this brother and adopting his story to create a community where each of us – and we're all offenders- could find acceptance without judgment, and a safe place to tell our story.

Many people leaving prison carry an invisible stigma that hinders them from participating in places of worship, finding employment and making their way again in society. We wanted to create a place where their story could be heard and where they could be celebrated for the courage it takes to live without returning to crime.

Dismas Fellowship is not a correctional program. Dismas is a place of hospitality.

We strive to be a circle of trust where we share our stories – *"no fixing, no saving, no advising, no setting each other straight"*. (from Parker Palmer's *"A Hidden Wholeness"* p. 114).

We like the AA approach, seeking to encourage rather than direct, and allowing people to express their experience, strength and hope in order that we can all grow in freedom. And like AA, we do not accept government funding. We look to our community for the resources to continue.

God bless you as you join us in this journey. May you have many holy encounters!

Why Dismas Fellowship



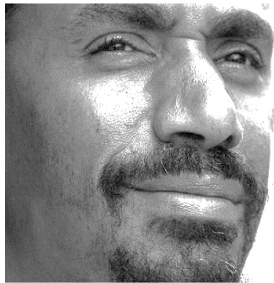
Section 2

Coming Home from Prison

"It's a stain. It's like having a birthmark on your face or a tattoo on your face that says, 'I'm a criminal.' I probably marked myself in my own way. I've got sleeves of tattoos. that's what we do in (prison).

"It's like we brand ourselves, because we feel like we don't fit into society anymore, so this is our own club, and this is how we brand ourselves. That's the way I felt, that people didn't understand. I didn't understand, either. I wasn't really willing to look at in-depth issues that were driving me...

"I was a criminal. Addiction- that was my lot in life. Anger, hatred towards the world, anger and hatred towards myself. It wasn't just one thing. I don't think it's ever just one thing. I think that's just simplistic. . . .



"Being in so long, after being out four or five years, I realized I was institutionalized. Waking up at seven in the morning, still, every day. I get hungry at the same times as I was eating inside. Not having a probation, parole or bail – somebody to basically watch over me – it screwed me up. When that was gone, it was like I was totally responsible for all my decisions, even though I was before, but I kind of had them to fall back on. . . .

"It can destroy you. It can make you stronger. Or you can accept your lot and life in prison and that just becomes your life, really. Living out in society just becomes too hard, and you just like the breaks of going out there, but, really, you won't say it, but living in jail is more easy."

Greg Simmons... Toronto Star, July 25, 2008

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-daYflbwc8>

"There is a palpable sense of disgrace strapped like an oxygen tank onto the back of every homie I know.

"I asked a homie once, after Mass at a probation camp, if he had any brothers and sisters.

'Yeah', he says, 'I have one brother and one sister,' and then he's quick to add, with emphasis, 'but THEY'RE GOOD.'

'Oh,' I tell him, 'and what would that make you?'

'Here,' he says, 'locked up.'

'And THAT would make you...?' I try again.

'Bad', he says."

.... Fr. Greg Boyle, "Tattoos on the Heart" p. 52

Toxic Shame / How Do You Trust?

We find that the experience of prison only deepens the sense of shame and unworthiness that most men and women in prison carry. Many have already lost much of their family by death or abandonment. Many have lost their self-esteem in addiction or trauma or both.

Often the wounds of shame are covered by a shield of toughness and resentment, and living in prison teaches you that to survive you must be very careful about who you trust.

It creates a difficult barrier, then, as we draw alongside men and women returning from prison, calling for humble patience.

A Community of Hope

As tough as life can be for a man or woman inside prison, it can often be more challenging for them when they return to the community. If anyone hopes to recover and start over after being inside, there needs to be someone, or better still a team of people, who can support that transition.

We believe that everyone needs 3 essential things to start a new life out of the “stump” of lost years:

- A safe place to live
- Work or something useful to do
- A community of friends.



"For there is hope for a tree, when it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and its shoots will not fail.

Though its roots grow old in the ground and its stump dies in the dry soil,

At the scent of water it will flourish and put forth sprigs like a plant."

Job 14: 7-9

What Happens at a Fellowship?

Elements of a

It will be up to your group to organize your Dismas Fellowship in a way that best suits your setting, but this is a format that several groups follow:

3:00 PM those preparing the meal arrive and begin cooking and setting tables. (4-6 vols). You may prepare your own meal or invite a church or community group to prepare and bring a meal. The room needs to be set-up by 5:15 pm and the meal on the serving table by 6:00 PM.



5:00 members start arriving – an important time for fellowship over coffee. Some fellowships have a sign in sheet for members and another for guests.

6:00 sharing our meal - starting with an opening prayer followed by a simple dinner and dessert.

6:45 clean-up crew (4-6 vols) and the whole community begin to clear the tables by approximately 6:45 pm. The goal is to begin the circle by approximately 7:00 pm.

7:00 In a Circle, begin with welcome and singing (Dismas Song Book). The opening usually includes introductions, announcements and appreciations and,

- someone recounts the Dismas story;
- someone reads the Dismas Values (next page) and speaks about one that is meaningful to him/her;
- the group prays the Dismas Prayer (next page).

7:30 a short (10-15 min) theme presentation (a testimonial, a lesson from the Bible or a topic).

8:00 sharing in small groups – usually a question (*eg., what challenge are you facing right now?*) – but the emphasis is on freeing everyone to tell their story, sharing their experience, strength and hope, while gently discouraging preaching, “cross talk” and “head” talk. People can find a common ground with sharing personal stories. Be clear that everyone has the right to pass.

8:30 end in a Circle sharing prayer requests and singing “*Jesus, Remember Me*”

Important Guidelines for a safe Fellowship

- We ask that all participants be 18 years of age or older. Some of our members may have court-ordered restrictions that prevent them being with younger people.
- We voluntarily wear name tags (first names only) to promote fellowship.
- We remain on a first name basis with one another and do not share address and phone numbers, nor do we ask people for details of offences or time spent in jail.
- We do not lend money if asked.
- Out of respect to the church where our meetings occur, Dismas Fellowship is an alcohol and cannabis free zone.
- For everyone's protection, valuables should not be left unattended – there is a locked cabinet available for this purpose.

Please note further guidelines in Section 5, "Friendship Support in Dismas Fellowship"

Our Shared Values

- 1) *We welcome and celebrate one another, regardless of religious or criminal convictions, knowing that we are all 'offenders'.*
- 2) *We encourage everyone to give of themselves in some way – cooking meals, setting and cleaning up, sharing our truth or reaching out to others*
- 3) *We are committed to paying our way by sharing the costs of food and accommodation.*
- 4) *In the Circle everyone is given the opportunity to speak or to pass.*
- 5) *We will treat each other's story with confidentiality and love. Each story is sacred.*
- 6) *We are committed to being a safe and responsible fellowship with accountability to the church where our meetings are held.*
- 7) *We are committed to ministering to each other as if they were Christ.*

Dismas Prayer

*Dear God,
In your mercy remember me
and forgive me for the wrongs I've done.
Set me free of my deep fears
and resentments.
Melt the hard places of my heart, and
Allow me the grace to
Surrender this day to your
loving care.*

Amen

How Can I Serve At Dismas ?

....before the meal

- Assist with purchasing food and supplies
- Open the doors to the church
- Set up tables and chairs
- Make coffee and juice
- Bring out storage bins
- Set up registration table
- Assist with name tags /sign in
- Set up serving tables
- Bring a dessert
- Have a coffee with someone!

.... after the meal

- Clear the table of all dinnerware
- Wash off the tablecloths and put them back into the storage containers.
- Put away tables, and set up chairs in a circle
- Wash pots, pans, utensils, etc. and put away in proper cupboards
- Clean off all kitchen countertops
- Place leftovers in takeout containers so members can take these home.

... the Circle

- Arrange the chairs in a big Circle
- Offer to share your experience in the large circle
- Lead a small circle sharing
- Be part of the Dismas Fellowship planning group or Board



So How Do We Begin?

Now that you have decided to take the plunge and start a Dismas Fellowship, we offer some steps that many of us have found helpful in getting organized.

You're also welcome to contact the Dismas Fellowship Network for advice and support:

<http://dismasfellowshipnetwork.com/>
1-877-554-1076

Getting Started & Member Training



1) Ascertain Need

Consult with local chaplains, parole officers and ex-offender agencies regarding the needs of persons coming home from prison in your community.

- ***It is vital that your leadership group includes one or more personnel who have a close working relationship with correctional officials (parole officers, halfway house staff, and chaplains) in order to have referrals and to develop credibility within the correctional community, and to be aware of situations that may contain high risk,***

2) Create Community

Recruit 6 – 8 interested persons ready to meet, to pray and to commit to launching a Dismas Fellowship. Ensure participants are over 18 and have a variety of skills and training.

Dismas Fellowship does not want to be the project of one church alone, so we encourage you to seek members from different churches. There is great strength in a shared approach.

3) Volunteer Orientation

Dismas Fellowship Network has developed an orientation that explores:

1. *The correctional system and the lasting effects of prison culture.*
2. *The challenge of “coming home” and the vision of Dismas Fellowship.*
3. *Elements and shared values of a Dismas Fellowship.*
4. *How to have safe and open friendships in the context of Dismas Fellowship.*

Along with this Tool Kit we have prepared a PowerPoint presentation to lead us through the orientation sessions, one that aims to give time for interaction and team-building. It's available on request for new or existing groups.

4) Finding a Place to Meet

This can take time because you need to be clear with the meeting place about the composition of the group and potential risks. Often churches will want a letter of agreement or even a contract that details who the principals are on the Dismas leadership team and the procedures to be followed in the event of an incident. They will want to be assured of liability insurance. Dismas Fellowship Network may be able to assist in this regard.

5) Visit Another Fellowship

If at all possible attend and observe another Fellowship to get a sense of how a fellowship operates and how meaningful it can be.

6) Building a Leadership / Planning Team

Most Dismas Fellowships have a leadership board and / or planning team that meets usually monthly to review progress, address challenges and plan for the weeks ahead. This group should be a cross section of both former prisoners and other members.

We recommend that at least three positions of leadership should be developed:

- A Co-ordinator who heads up the leadership /planning team;
- A Treasurer and/ or Secretary
- Music / sound leadership
- Perhaps a volunteer co-ordinator

Co-ordinator/s	Planning Committee	Teams
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize monthly planning committee meetings & send planning notes to all members • Ensures “Key Person” arrives by 3:00 pm to open doors • Serve as main contacts between meetings to answer questions and mediate problems • Liaison with Church where meetings are held • Maintenance of mailing list & members list • Attend meeting of Dismas Fellowship Network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure schedule for meals and programs are planned two months in advance • Serve as clearing house for resolving problems and reviewing what is happening in the Fellowship • Generating new ideas for themes and programs • Plan themes and arrange presenters for each meeting • Organize music 	<p>Team Leader ensures each role is covered with team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Set-up Team” of 3-5 persons • 1-2 “Hosts to welcome, assign name tags, check members list, and monitor halls, and outside building • Set-up the sound equipment • “Meal Prep” of 3-5 persons or assist group that is bringing meal • “Clean Up” crew of 3-5 persons to put away tables, and wash dishes.

If your Fellowship grows and meets more than once a month, you may want to develop distinct teams to serve at each Fellowship. A possible organizations is suggested here:

7) Meals

Plan for the meals... either from within the fellowship or by inviting churches and community groups to prepare and serve a meal. If groups come to bring a meal, invite them to stay for the circle while members of the fellowship clean up.

8) Funding

Our Fellowships are committed to paying our way by sharing the costs of food and accommodation. This allows us to be independent of government funding and reporting but it also means that individual fellowships will need to care for their own costs.

Donations can be channelled through Friends of Dismas Inc. to receive tax deductible receipts which can in turn be designated to an individual Fellowship.

Address:

Dismas Fellowship Network

c/o Friends of Dismas

1730 Bur Oak Ave Bldg. G

PO Box 3005 Markham, Ont. L6E 0J1;

Phone: 1-877-554-1076

(Registered Charitable No # 837345560RR0001)

9) Become Part of the Network

The next Section (Section 6) of the Toolkit invites new fellowships to become part of the Dismas Fellowship Network for mutual support and sharing best practices.

10) Handling Conflicts and Emergencies

It would be an unusual Dismas if you did not have flare-ups and conflicts between members from time to time. You may have other emergency situations, such as a medical crisis.

We encourage a restorative approach that emphasizes dialogue, mediation and respect in ironing out conflicts. Such an approach usually takes more time than a rigid, authoritative approach but you will discover surprising resilience when it is followed.

There may be times when a member needs to be asked to leave temporarily or even permanently for the sake of the whole group but this should be seen as a last resort and should be the decision of the whole leadership group. Calling the police should be avoided unless the risk of injury or the commission of a crime is clear.

Similarly, you may give consideration about handling emergencies such as a health crisis. Who will attend to the stricken person (not the whole group as exciting as that might seem!)? Who will go with him or her to the hospital? How do you communicate subsequently to the other members of the fellowship?

You may want to also consider sponsoring key persons for First Aid and CPR training, and consider having an overdose kit on hand.

Some Online Resources

<http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/volunteers/092/003008-2000-eng.pdf>

Correctional Services Canada 2009 Reference Handbook for volunteers within the federal system.

<https://ccjc.ca/>

Based in Ottawa the Church Council on Justice and Corrections is a national faith-based collation sponsoring creative projects aimed at restorative justice.

<https://www.cfcn-rcafd.org/>

Canadian Families and Corrections Network (CFCN) focuses on families, children, and friends who have someone they care about in jail.

<http://smartjustice.ca/>

The Smart Justice Network of Canada provides a number of resources reflecting current justice issues in Canada. If you wish to receive a regular email update of subscribe info@smartjustice.ca

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2dELS0l4B8>

Volunteers of America Correctional Re-entry Programs

<http://prisonfellowship.ca/connecting-links/>

Prison Fellowship Canada's national website. You may also find the following useful:

<https://www.prisonfellowship.org/resources/training-resources/reentry-ministry/>

<https://mcccana.ca/learn/what/restorative-justice>

Mennonite Central Committee has good stories and restorative justice resources at this site.

<http://www.friendsofdismas.com/>

There are a number of reflections here on the home site of Friends of Dismas, the body that currently sponsors the Dismas Fellowship Network - <http://dismasfellowshipnetwork.com/>

<https://www.earhustlesq.com/>

A podcast from San Quentin prison

<https://tvo.org/video/documentaries/a-hard-name>

filmed in 2009 by Alan Zweig tells the story of 5 men and 2 women, all but one members of Dismas Fellowship Toronto. The documentary won a Genie for best feature length documentary.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mle3NXXjGKs&t=28s>

2008 "Extreme Clergy" video that shows the beginnings of both Circles of Support and Accountability and Dismas Fellowship.

Friendship Support in Dismas Fellowship

When we come together in Dismas Fellowship, it's natural that friendships take root and we may want to support each other outside of the meetings.

In an AA group, members are encouraged to choose a "sponsor" to guide them on the road to recovery.

But Dismas does not offer a formal sponsorship or "mentoring" program, nor does it offer formal counselling. Dismas is a Fellowship where members gather to experience community.



Guidelines for Friendship Support

1) No Lone Rangers please!

The greatest danger in these kind of relationships is working alone.

If you want to meet with a member outside the fellowship time, please consult with a trusted leader or leadership team before doing so.

We advise you to consult *especially before exchanging telephone numbers or email addresses!*

If you want to mentor someone outside the fellowship time, we suggest that you do so as a team and after receiving appropriate volunteer training and with oversight from a recognized agency.

You may be asked to meet with your friend's Parole Officer to learn any special conditions with which the ex-prisoner must comply as part of his parole obligations. You may be asked to fill out a police check form by the correctional officials and receive volunteer training by Correctional Services Canada.

2) Where can we meet? Can I invite my friend to my home?

In the beginning we suggest meeting in a coffee shop or any public place.

You should not feel pressured to open your home unless and until you feel comfortable with doing so and have consulted with trusted leaders.

You will need to know any particular conditions that your ex-prisoner friend carries, especially if it involves children or other vulnerable persons. If your friend resides in a halfway house, make sure to check with the halfway house manager before making plans to take your friend out and certainly to your home.

3) What if I'm asked for financial help?

Loaning money will always complicate your relationship – usually for the worse! If you want to assist, it is better to make a gift than to provide a loan. You or others in the fellowship may know of community resources to assist with specific needs.

4) What if my friend need a place to stay or a job or a meal?

This can a huge need. Sometimes you can play an important advocacy role with social service agencies on your friend's behalf. Others in the fellowship may have suggestions.

But Please Note: You are strongly discouraged from becoming a landlord or employer. It will almost always ruin your friendship!

5) What if my friend wants to give me a gift?

We advise you to be sensitive to potential obligations created by gift-giving, but a token gift can be received with gratitude.

6) What if my friend asks to join my social media network?

We have seen some issues arise when volunteers include ex-prisoner friends as part of their network. It potentially introduces them to your whole relationship network.

7) What if I'm asked to write a letter of support for parole?

This is usually okay, as long as you don't feel used. Simply explain the nature and length of your relationship and the kind of community support that you are able to offer. If there is a hearing you may request to attend as a support person.

8) What if I see my friend headed for trouble again?

Tough issue! You are a friend and do not have a custodial role. Discuss your concerns with other experienced volunteers. You may want to confront your friend honestly about what you see happening. If it becomes too difficult to watch your friend's destructive path, you may need to pull from the friendship.

9) What about confidentiality?

Please be very careful to guard the confidentiality of your conversations with your friend. Do not reveal his or her name or details of the offences to others.

“Many ex-prisoners will be lacking any kind of documents for identification or access to government services. In securing ID, the ex-prisoner will probably need and want the active help of a volunteer.

Without a SIN or a health card, a volunteer may have to serve as a guarantor in initiating the application process. With government agencies spread out around the city, the offer to drive the ex-prisoner to offices and to help them when roadblocks are faced will ease some of the frustration that are part of the early days.”

.... Jim Black

However, if you receive information that could result harm to others (especially abuse of children) **you will need to discuss this information with trusted leadership immediately.**

Or, if you receive information that points to the possibility, you will need to discuss this information with trusted leadership immediately for advice in notifying appropriate authorities.

Do not allow another's crisis to become your crisis. If an individual says, "Don't tell anyone about this." then it is likely that you are being manipulated.

10) What if my friend gets arrested again?

You may choose to continue your relationship even if through correspondence. But the decision is yours and it would not be automatically assumed that you would do so. The faithfulness of friends who stick with someone who fails sends a very powerful message of hope and love.

11) What if my friend asks me to post bail to get out of jail?

We ask you not to do this. If your friend does not show up for trial, you could be liable for the amount of the bail that you posted. Agencies such as the John Howard Society may be able to point out community bail programs.

12) What's love got to do with it?

Dismas Fellowship is not a dating site. Do not get involved with someone from Dismas if you are looking for romance or a life partner. If you find your relationship with a member of Dismas is becoming more than platonic, please seek counsel from trusted leadership.

13) How can I share my faith with my friend?

Be patient and sensitive about sharing your faith. You may become a friend with someone who shares your faith and welcomes your conversations, but others will resent being "preached to". Some general suggestions:

- Bring your friend and your relationship into your life of prayer;
- Be willing to wait for the relationship to develop until you have a sense that it may be safe to explore questions of spirituality;
- Be personal. Speak about what you have experienced rather than theological doctrines. This must be a dialogue of the heart not the head.



14) How do I measure success in this kind of relationship?

Each of us want our friends to "make it" and we will be understandably disappointed when things don't work out. However, the meaning of our relationship does not depend on whether the other changes in certain ways. Relationships that are built on loving acceptance will see the potential in others and leave the results to God.

Each of us performed the task which the Lord allotted. I planted the seed, and Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. Thus it is not the gardener with their planting and watering who count, but God makes it grow." (1 Corinthians 3: 5-7)

What Have We Learned?

.... Ron & Cathy Fielding

Walking as a team with an ex-offender allows individuals to share concerns, support each other, celebrate successes, laugh together and acknowledge difficulties

We might assume that, upon release, our friend would be grateful to be out of prison, and be comfortable with our involvement and support.

What we experienced is that he may be frightened, angry and even possibly resentful of our presence.

We learned that much of the information that we received is through the lens of the ex-prisoner, a perspective that may have been damaged over time.

We also learned, that despite our best efforts, relationships may become strained, leading to inappropriate outbursts, or signs of lack of respect for the team.

Therefore, the team has to demonstrate a strong sense of what respect looks like and to establish boundaries for behaviour. In some cases, this may mean establishing rules such as no name calling, no blaming or abusive behaviour of any kind.

Ultimately, we have learned to let go of the outcome. We are not in charge of our friend's destiny.

Having this awareness ultimately frees the team members from becoming too emotionally fatigued and potentially unable to become effective.



Expectations for groups calling themselves “Dismas Fellowship”

- 1) To ascribe to our Shared Values, in particular welcoming all ex-prisoners regardless of criminal convictions, knowing that we are all offenders.
- 2) To be rooted in the faith community on an interdenominational or inter-church basis. Dismas Fellowship does not wish to be a project of one church or one organization alone.
- 3) To take the Dismas Fellowship training and be willing, if necessary, to receive the volunteer training required by the appropriate correctional authority.
- 4) To attend and observe another Dismas Fellowship as part of the orientation of the new Fellowship.
- 5) To connect to the Dismas Fellowship Network and attend the semi-annual gatherings.
- 6) To ensure appropriate liability insurance coverage for the Fellowship’s activities.

Note:

The name “Dismas Fellowship” has been registered by Friends of Dismas Inc.

Become Part of Dismas Fellowship Network

Since 2003, more than a dozen Dismas Fellowships have begun across Ontario sponsored by a number of Christian ministries: Mennonite Central Committee CoSA, New Life Prison Ministry, Prison Fellowship Canada, Friends of Dismas – plus a number of churches and individuals. We welcome participation from people from all faith traditions.

In 2017 the various Fellowships asked Friends of Dismas Inc. to serve as the hub for the Network of Dismas Fellowships and to establish a Network website: <http://dismasfellowshipnetwork.com/>

While respecting the freedom of each Fellowship, we are prepared to provide support in the development of individual fellowships. Note the list of expectations of those who wish to join the Dismas Fellowship Network and be listed on the website.

See Appendix 2 recommended governance guidelines for members of the Network – guidelines that are particularly necessary for obtaining liability insurance.

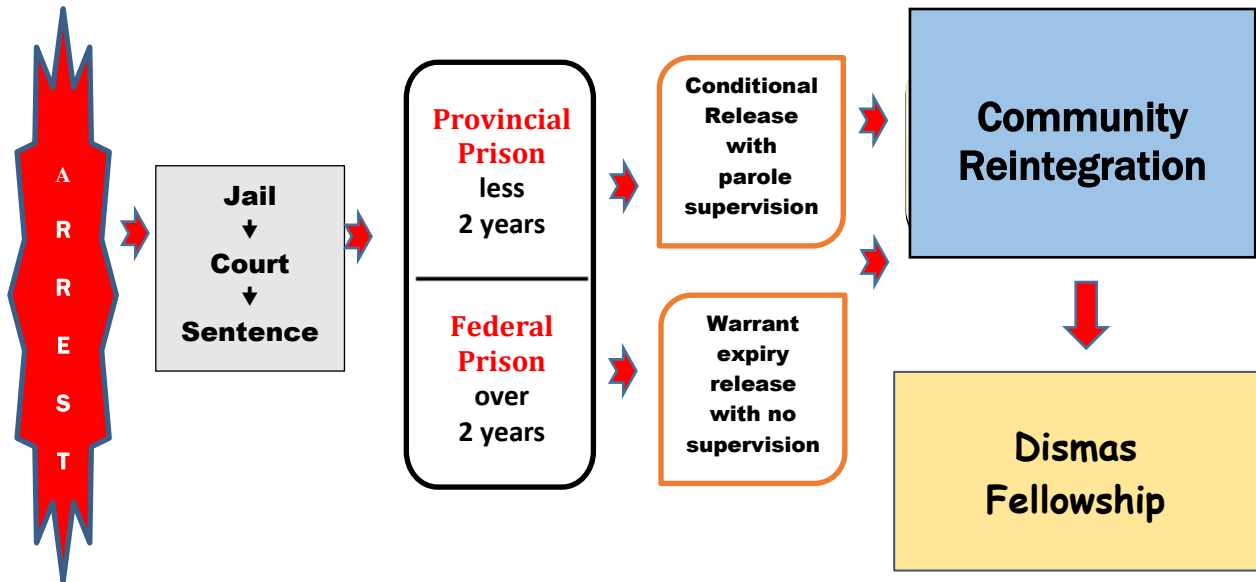
Dismas Fellowships in Ontario (2020)

**Brantford
Brampton
Brockville
Cambridge
Grand Valley
Hamilton
London
Niagara
Sarnia
Toronto
Woodstock**

The Correctional System At a Glance

Introduction to Correctional System

The criminal justice process begins when a crime is committed. The person accused of the crime enters the court system where, if convicted, he or she will be sentenced by a judge or a jury. After they are sentenced, and if the sentence is **longer than two years**, the responsibility for the accused is transferred to Correctional Services Canada. If the sentence is less than two years he or she remains in a provincial jail or Detention Centre.



- 28% of the federal penitentiary population is of aboriginal descent;
- Black Canadians comprise 10% of our federal penitentiary population although only 3% of our general population.
- In the past 5 years, the number of women in our penitentiaries has increased by almost 40%; the number of aboriginal women increased 80% in the past 10 years;
- One inmate in 5 is over 50 years of age;
- It costs over \$100,000 a year to house a person in a federal penitentiary.
- Double-bunking has increased dramatically in the past two years. As of April 1, 2012, more than 17% of the incarcerated population was double-bunked.

“The prison system is so set up that prisoners must learn to be deceptive ‘to play games’ in order to survive and get an early release.

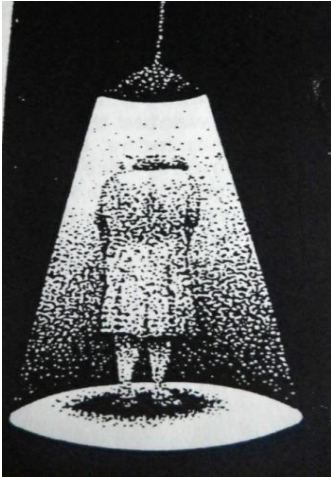
It is a system that actually works against bringing positive change into the lives of those who offend against the law”.

- Edgar Epp,
former warden

For women the level of personal trauma is especially high.

As many of the statistics indicate, women who have been incarcerated often deal with many traumatic issues. These include but not limited to rape, domestic violence, child abuse and other forms of abuse. Additionally, many women who are in conflict with the law experience drug abuse, depression, anxiety, poor education, few social supports and homelessness.

One American study indicates that 98% of the 100 incarcerated women who were interviewed had experienced significant trauma.



I bet I wouldn't fit in my own coffin
and it would be no surprise to me,
all my life I never fit anywhere.
I see no reason to be fitting in now.

My parents don't fit either into my life
or my loneliness though they tried.

I'm still the child that won't fit into the arms of anyone,
but I am always reaching.
(from Tightwire)

Mothers

- Two-thirds of incarcerated women are mothers, most of whom have primary childcare responsibilities.
- The living arrangements of children whose mothers are imprisoned varies; about 60% of children live with grandparents, 17% live with other relatives, and 25% live in non-familial settings such as foster care.
- The vast majority of long-term prisoners in Canada are male: Women are fewer than 5% of all individuals serving sentences of 2 years or more.

From women at Prison for Women

"Prison is being naked emotionally for the first time in your memory, with nowhere to hide

"Prison is frustration and anger so intense that cutting into the arteries of my own arm only alleviates some of the pain."

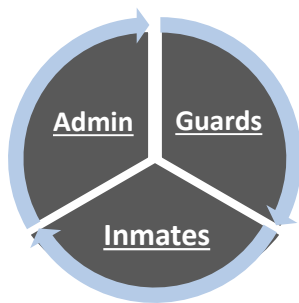
"There is nothing harder than facing kids that don't know you. Doing time is easy compared to that."

“I realized I was institutionalized” ...

Prison is about control and above all maintaining security. Prison has its own culture with its own language, customs, relationships patterns and an unwritten “Code” - a value system that prizes “being solid”.

Being solid can produce terrible tensions. It means that a prisoner must hide his or her feelings and “do his own time”. He or she must never “rat out” another inmate. When a prisoner is not accepted as “solid”, he can be placed in protective custody” and segregated from the other prisoners, and carry the stigma of being a “PC” inmate.

The Competing Worlds in Prison



- 1) Each group tries to control the prison;
- 2) Each group isolates the other;
- 3) For the inmate there is a built-in conflict between his loyalty to the population (adhering to the “code”) and his need to show that he deserves another chance for release.

The lingering effects of institutionalization

- 1) **Dependence on Institutional Control** – leaving the ex-prisoner anxious when making decisions and feeling unable to empower his life;
- 2) **Hypervigilant and Suspicious** – to be safe – prisoner may adopt a mask of toughness to keep people distant... who can you trust?
- 3) **Emotional Distance** – if you don’t care you can’t be hurt, so you withdraw and isolate;
- 4) **Carry the “Solid” Persona into the Community** – easily offended and over-reaction if there is a perceived lack of respect – must never be seen as weak;
- 5) **Diminished Self-Worth** – sometimes they feel that they have “prisoner” tattooed on their foreheads, and sometimes feel destined to spend their lives in prison. “I feel like a cockroach in my own country”, one former prisoner said.
- 6) **Post-Traumatic Stress** – many have witnessed horrific abuse first in their childhood and then in prison. Life as a combat zone.

Supervision in the Community after Release

Parole is a carefully constructed bridge between incarceration and return to the community. It is a conditional release, which allows some offenders to continue to serve the balance of their sentence outside of the institution.

Parole does not mean that offenders are completely free, without supervision. If the conditions of parole are not met, the Board has the power to revoke the parole and return the offender to prison.

In one district in Ontario, Central District (Toronto-Hamilton-Niagara corridor) there are approximately 1,000 ex-prisoners (including 100 women) on some form of conditional release, including:

- Full parole
- Day parole
- Statutory release
- Long Term Offender Supervision

Often ex-prisoners within Dismas Fellowship will be under the supervision of a parole officer, at least in the beginning until he/she reaches the expiry of his sentence or W.E.D (Warrant Expiry Date).



Standard Parole Conditions

Every offender on conditional release must:

- Live only in a community approved by the parole supervisor;
- Report to the parole supervisor as instructed;
- Obey the law and keep the peace;
- Always carry the release certificate and the identity card and produce them on request to any peace or parole officer;
- Not own, possess or control a weapon, as defined in the Criminal Code, except as authorized by the parole supervisor;
- Inform the parole supervisor of any change that may affect the offender's ability to respect the conditions of release.

DRAFT 1: Dismas Fellowship Network Member (DFNM) Governance Document

Governance Guidelines for Dismas Fellowship Network

1.0 DEFINITIONS

In this Governance Document of the Dismas Fellowship Network Member (*Insert Location or Fellowship Name*), unless the context otherwise requires:

"DFNM" means Dismas Fellowship Network Member;

"board" means the board of directors of the DFNM and "director" means a member of the board;

"meeting of members" includes an annual meeting of members or a special meeting of members.

2.0 PURPOSES OF THE DISMAS FELLOWSHIP NETWORK MEMBER (*Insert Location or DFNM Name*);

The Dismas Fellowship Network Member brings together people from a variety of experiences who gather regularly: former prisoners and friends. The purpose of the DFNM is to create a safe and welcoming space where former prisoners and their friends can find community.

3.0 BANKING ARRANGEMENTS

The banking business of the DFNM shall be transacted at such bank, trust company or other firm or corporation carrying on a banking business in Canada or elsewhere as the board of directors may designate, appoint or authorize from time to time by resolution. The banking business or any part of it shall be transacted by an officer or officers of the DFNM and/or other persons as the board of directors may by resolution from time to time designate, direct or authorize.

The DFNM will maintain two bank accounts:

- 1) A Chequing Account for Petty Cash. The amount in this account shall not exceed \$500. These funds can be used by members authorized by the Board to pay for items required for the Dismas Fellowship evenings.
- 2) A Savings Account where all funds raised by the DFNM, except those held in Chequing Account for Petty Cash, shall be held. This account will have two signing officers as approved by the Board of Directors. This account can be used for the payment of rent, reimbursing the Petty Cash Chequing Account up to the maximum of \$500 and other items approved by the Board.

4.0 MEMBERSHIP

4.1 Membership Conditions

There shall be one class of members in the DFNM. Membership in the DFNM shall be available only to individuals interested in furthering the DFNM's purposes and who have applied for and been accepted into membership in the DFNM by resolution of the board or in such other manner as may be determined by the board. Each member shall be entitled to receive notice of, attend and vote at all meetings of the members of the DFNM.

4.2 Notice of Meeting of Members

Notice of the time and place of a meeting of members shall be given to each member entitled to vote at the meeting by the following means: by mail, courier or personal delivery to each member entitled to vote at the meeting, during a period of 15 to 60 days before the day on which the meeting is to be held; or by telephonic, electronic or other communication facility to each member entitled to vote at the meeting, during a period of 15 to 35 days before the day on which the meeting is to be held.

4.3 Termination of Membership

A membership in the DFNM is terminated when:

- the member dies;
- a member fails to maintain any qualifications for membership as described in Section 4.0 of this Governance Document;
- the member resigns by delivering a written resignation to the chair of the board of the DFNM in which case such resignation shall be effective on the date specified in the resignation;
- the member's term of membership expires; or
- the DFNM is liquidated or dissolved by the Board of Directors.

5.0 - MEETINGS OF MEMBERS

5.1 Annual Meeting of the Members

The Board shall call an Annual Meeting of the members. The agenda shall include at a minimum the appointment of the Board for the year. The members may appoint the Board and Officers for the DFNM for a period of up to three (3) years.

5.2 Persons Entitled to be Present

The only persons entitled to be present at a meeting of members shall be those entitled to vote at the meeting and the directors. Any other person may be admitted only on the invitation of the chair of the meeting or by resolution of the members.

5.3 Chair of the Annual Meeting

In the event that the Chair, the Secretary, or the Treasurer of the board are absent, the members who are present and entitled to vote at the meeting shall choose one of their number to chair the meeting.

5.4 Quorum for the Annual Meeting

A quorum at the Annual meeting of the members shall be 30% of the members entitled to vote at the meeting. If a quorum is present at the opening of a meeting of members, the members present may proceed with the business of the meeting even if a quorum is not present throughout the meeting.

5.5 Votes to Govern

At any meeting of members every question shall, unless otherwise provided by this Governance Document, be determined by a majority of the votes cast on the question. In case of an equality of votes either on a show of hands or on a ballot or on the results of electronic voting, the chair of the meeting in addition to an original vote shall have a second or casting vote.

SECTION 6 – DIRECTORS:

6.1 Election and Term

Subject to the Governance Document, the members will elect the directors at the first meeting of members and at each succeeding annual meeting at which an election of directors is required, and the directors shall be elected to hold office for a term expiring not later than the close of the third annual meeting of members following the election.

6.2 Calling of Meetings

Meetings of the board may be called by the chair of the board, the secretary of the board or any two (2) directors at any time; provided that, for the first organization meeting following the establishment of the DFNM, such meeting may be called by any director.

6.3 Notice of Meeting

Notice of the time and place for the holding of a meeting of the board shall be given to every director of the Corporation not less than 7 days before the time when the meeting is to be held by one of the following methods: delivered personally, mailed, by telephonic, electronic or other communication facility at the director's recorded address for that purpose; or Notice of a meeting shall not be necessary if all of the directors are present, and none objects to the holding of the meeting, or if those absent have waived notice of or have otherwise signified their consent to the holding of such meeting.

6.4 Votes to Govern

At all meetings of the board, every question shall be decided by a majority of the votes cast on the question. In case of an equality of votes, the chair of the meeting in addition to an original vote shall have a second or casting vote.

SECTION 7 – OFFICERS

7.1 Description of Offices

Unless otherwise specified by the board which may restrict or supplement such duties and powers, the offices of the DFNM, if designated and if officers are appointed, shall have the following duties and powers associated with their positions:

Chair of the Board - The chair of the board, if one is to be appointed, shall be a director. The chair of the board, if any, shall, when present, preside at all meetings of the board of directors and of the members. The chair shall have such other duties and powers as the board may specify.

Secretary – If appointed, the secretary shall attend and be the secretary of all meetings of the board, members and committees of the board. The secretary shall complete minutes of all proceedings at such meetings; the secretary shall give, or cause to be given, as and when instructed, notices to members, directors.

Treasurer - If appointed, the treasurer shall have such powers and duties as the board may specify. The powers and duties of all other officers of the DFNM shall be such as the terms of their engagement call for or the board or chair requires of them. The board may, from time to time and subject to the Governance Document, vary, add to or limit the powers and duties of any officer.

7.2 Vacancy in Office

In the absence of a written agreement to the contrary, the board may remove, whether for cause or without cause, any officer of the Corporation. Unless so removed, an officer shall hold office until the earlier of:

- the officer's successor being appointed,
- the officer's resignation,
- such officer ceasing to be a director (if a necessary qualification of appointment) or
- such officer's death.

If the office of any officer of the DFNM shall be or become vacant, the directors may, by resolution, appoint a person to fill such vacancy.

10.0 FOUNDING BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The following have been designated as the Founding Board of Directors of the DFNM for a period of up to 1 year from the date of this Governance Document. The Founding Board may call a members meeting at anytime but no later than one year from the establishment of the DFNM.

Name 1: Chair

Contact info

Name 2: Secretary

Contact info

Name 3: Treasurer

Contact info

This Governance Document for the Dismas Fellowship Network Member (Location or DFNM Name) was established this ____ day of _____, _____.

Approved by:

Name: _____ Date

Name: _____ Date

Name: _____ Date