



# Introduction to Dismas Fellowship - Part 1

***What  
brings you  
to Dismas?***



# Our objective

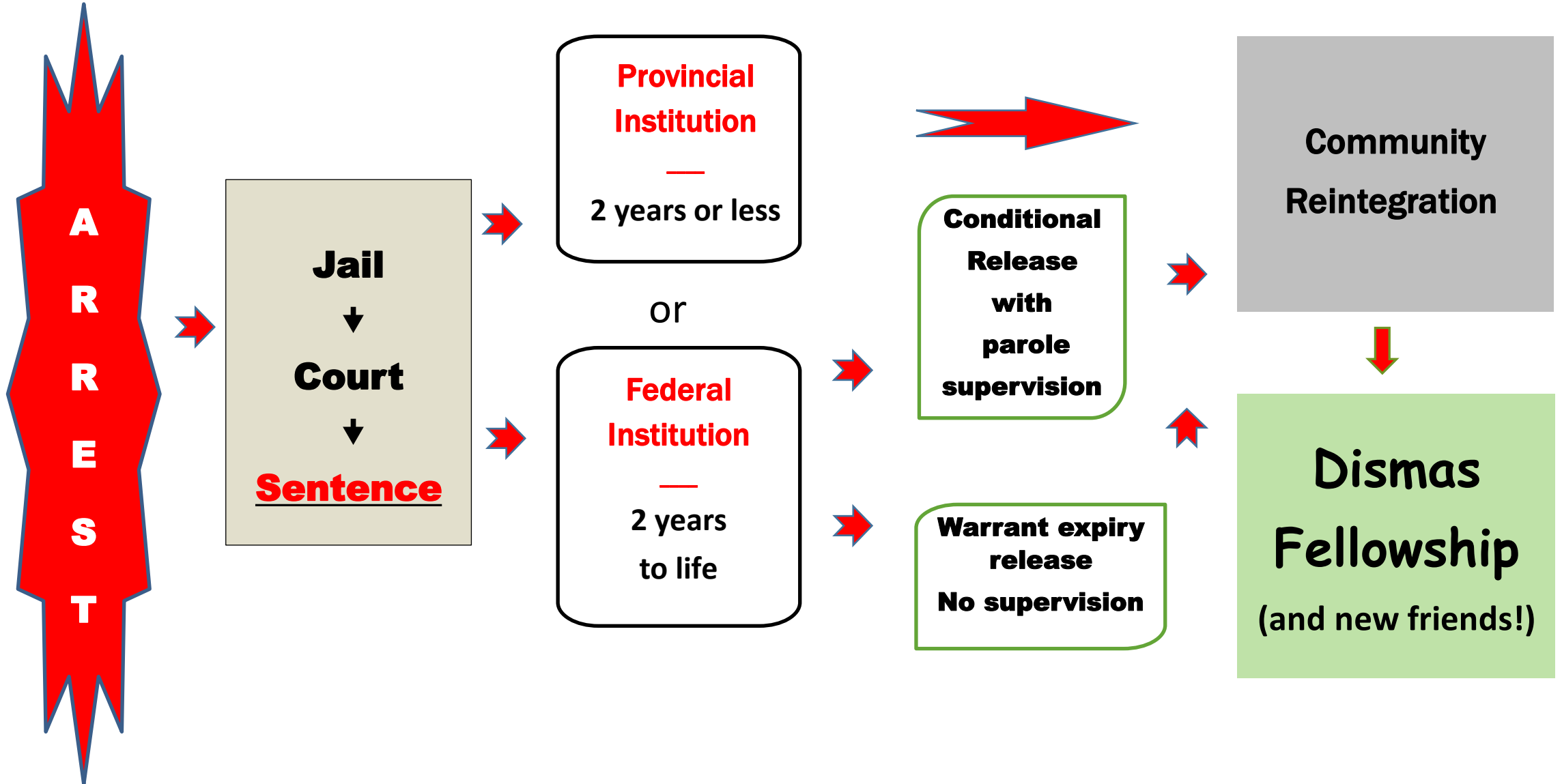
By the end of Session 1... we will

 Explore the correctional system and effects of prison culture;

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 Introduce the vision of Dismas Fellowship

# Correctional system at a glance.....



# the culture of prison







# the culture of prison

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- prizes “being solid”.
- “do your own time” - hide feelings
- never “rat out” another inmate.

... and if you're not solid?





**First Breakout (5 minutes):**

**How does this presentation of prison life and culture leave you feeling?**

- **overwhelmed?**
- **angry?**
- **inspired?**
- **hopeful?**

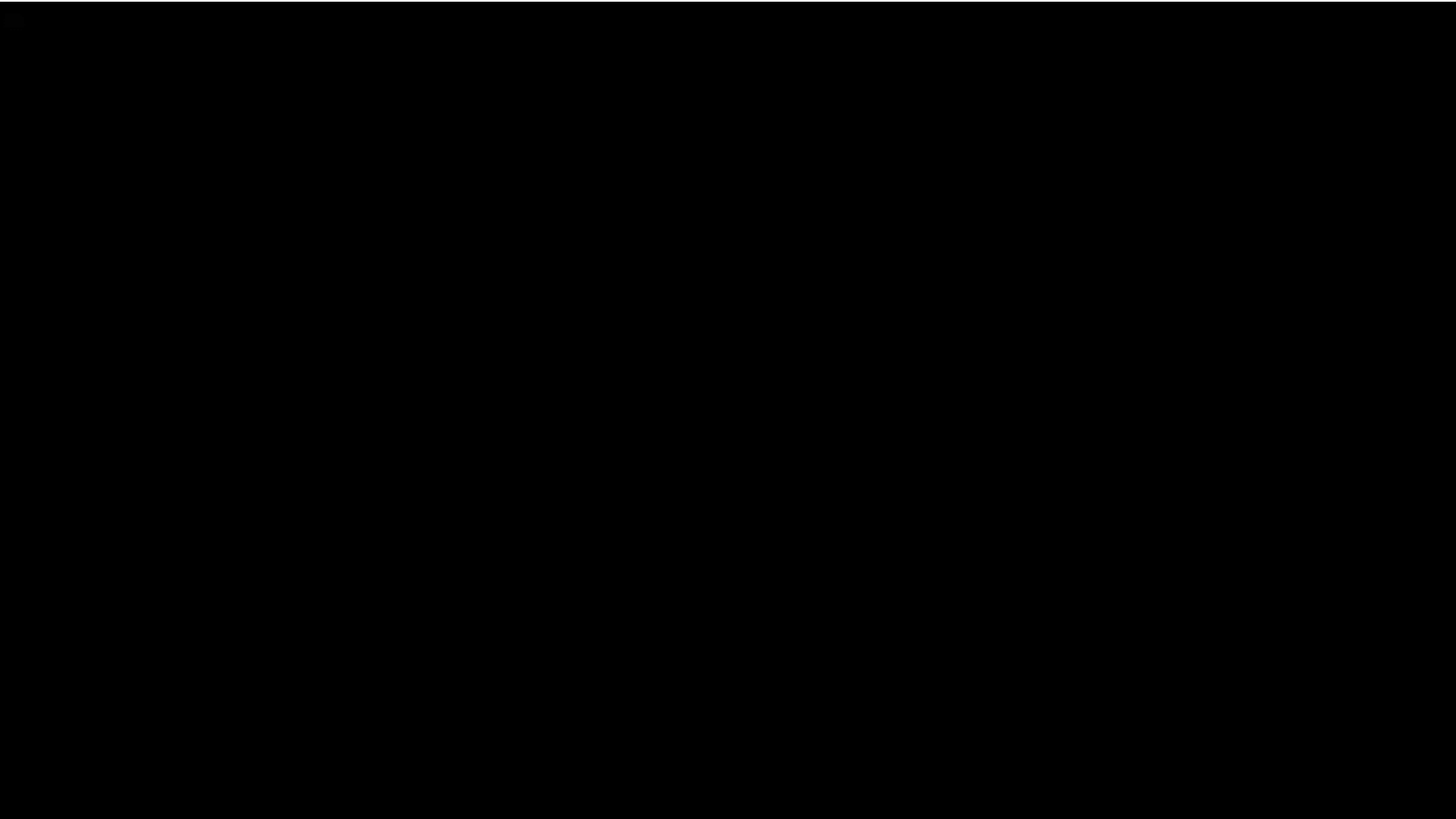
**How do you think it affects those involved?**

the person in  
prison:

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a wounded self





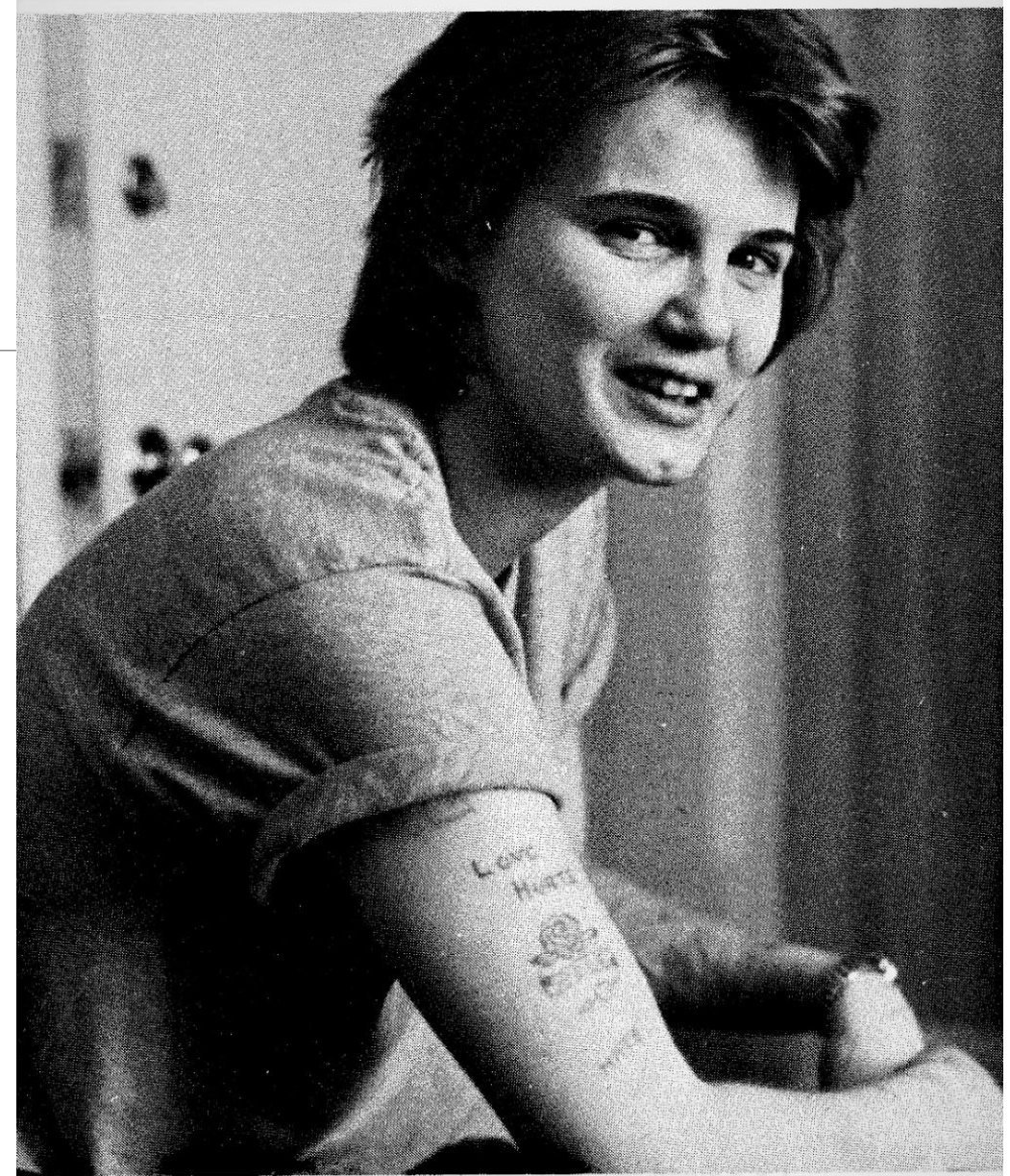
# wounded by shame:

*to feel fundamentally damaged and unworthy  
(as opposed to feelings of guilt.)*

- psychiatric label.
- addiction and alcoholism
- brain damage
- illiteracy
- history of abuse and trauma
- abandonment / foster care

***“I feel like a cockroach in my own country”***

*(First Nation man said to Harry Nigh)*



Marlene

# The lingering effects of prison

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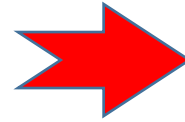
1. Difficulty making decisions (institutionalization)
2. Suspicious / Lack of Trust
3. Carry the “Solid” persona into the community
4. Stigma and Deepened Shame as an ex-convict





**Second Breakout (5 minutes):**

**What do you think a person needs to leave the culture of prison behind  
..... and return to the culture of everyday society?**



# What do we need to start over?

A safe  
place to  
live

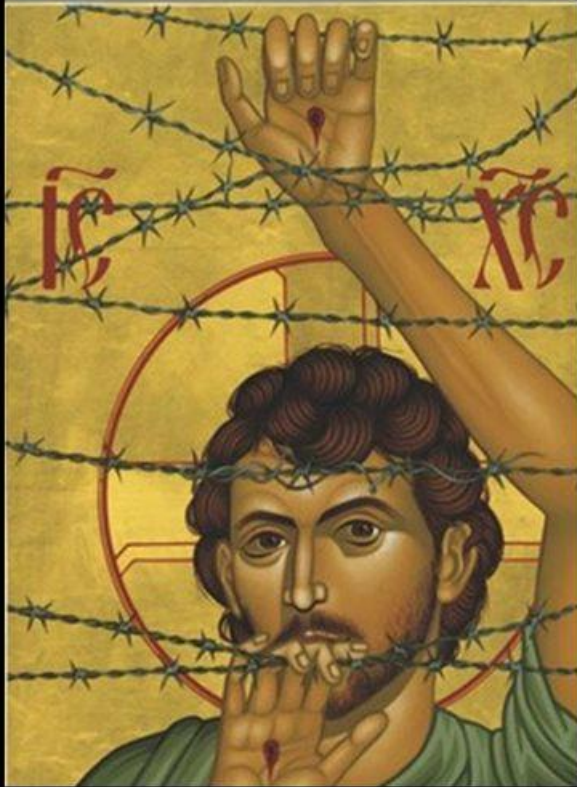
Something  
useful to do

Friends!





## WHO WAS DISMAS?



St. Luke 23: 39-43

According to the Scriptures, Jesus was crucified between two thieves. One of these thieves is traditionally known as Dismas. He is commonly called the “Good Thief”, “the Wise Thief” or “the Penitent Thief”.

He is the one, who in a single thrust of clarity cried out to Jesus and requested, *“Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”* Jesus graciously responded to him, *“Today you shall be with me in paradise.”*

# Dismas Fellowship:

a community  
of hope and  
acceptance



# First Dismas – Thanksgiving 2003

- a place of safety, welcome ..... without judgment
- hospitality not a program
- our model - Jesus' acceptance of his fellow convict.



# Basic Guidelines for a Dismas Fellowship

- 18 years or older.
- Name tags (first names only)
- Check with leaders before sharing address / phone numbers.



- We do not ask details of crimes or time spent in prison.
- Avoid lending money.
- Store valuables safely.
- **more guidelines in Section 5 of Toolkit**



## Dismas is about relationships

*“no fixing, no saving, no advising, no setting each other straight”.*

*(Parker Palmer’s “A Hidden Wholeness” p. 114).*



# Brampton Dismas



# Woodstock Dismas





Toronto Dismas



# Toronto Dismas



## Next Session – Part 2 / Thursday, March 4

- 1) Exploring the Dismas Fellowship model in detail;
- 2) How to have safe and open relationships in community

### Assignment:

Read the story of St. Dismas in Luke 23: 39-43

If you were to shape a ministry for former prisoners based on the story of Dismas, what would be the guiding values or principles of your ministry?

