



GO FISHING!

Reaching New Prospects for Our Dismas Fellowships

by Paul Tuck

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When Jesus first summoned His disciples to follow Him, He made the statement, ***“Follow me and I will make you Fishers of Men”*** What an interesting thing to say to a bunch of fishermen! Now, obviously Jesus did not literally intend for His disciples to use nets to go out and capture *people* but was speaking metaphorically about reaching others. He was telling them that He could teach them to find and make new followers.

When you think about it, reaching people for any cause is indeed quite like fishing! Finding prospects for Dismas is similar to fishing. How? Well, a wise fisherman once said ***“There are 2 secrets to catching fish. First of all, you have to go where the fish are and secondly, you have to offer them something they want!”***

Let’s consider **2 strategies** that fishermen employ to catch fish.

First of all, they go where the fish are.



Good fishermen usually know where the best places are to catch fish at any time of the day. They know which fish like the shallows and which ones prefer the deeper waters. If one spot doesn’t work, they move on to another. They go to the fish!

So think about this principle. If you are looking for prospects to visit and join your Dismas Fellowship group, where should you go? *Where should you look?*

Shelters , Halfway Houses & Soup Kitchens

Often, people who are released from jail have little or no funds, and have no recourse but to use shelters and rely on other charitable resources. From my own experience, working with a men's shelter, many (most) of those staying in shelters have been incarcerated at some point in their lives. Some inmates are given partial release and are required to maintain a residence at a Halfway House. Over time, they are given more freedoms, which would include permission to participate in community programs. If you visit areas around soup kitchens or other facilities that offer help to the marginalized, you will also find many who have been incarcerated.

Court houses, Parole & Probation Offices

It probably isn't a good idea to hang out in government spaces to solicit potential Dismas attendees! However, you can inquire about supplying these offices with attractive brochures. You can also check with officials who could refer people to your Dismas group. A parole officer once told me she would gladly refer her clients to Dismas, after reading our attractive trifold brochure. Many parole and probation officers welcome the idea of added supports for their clients; it makes their job a lot easier!

Bus Depots, Downtown Parks etc.

Sometimes just mulling about public places you will find former inmates who are searching for community. Remember, a good fisherman moves around and finds out where the fish are! When you are out shopping or doing other errands, look for people who appear to be in need. They are not difficult to find!

Important Note: Outreach like this should be done by those who have training and experience. One should follow safety guidelines and boundaries when dealing with strangers. It is best not to do it alone, and it's not for everyone.

If you need more [volunteers](#), churches are your best bet!

You would be surprised how many people are "sitting in the pews" that would love an opportunity to be involved in a group like Dismas. Some of the most compassionate and contributing volunteers in our Dismas Fellowship Network

are seasoned Christians. It would be a good idea to contact local churches and ask if you can post opportunities with them or better yet, give a short presentation at a church meeting such as senior's groups, women's, or men's breakfasts etc.

If your Dismas Fellowship is not reaching out, it will not grow.

"If you're not reaching out – you're dying out." A good fisherman is not satisfied with catching a few fish for one day alone. He goes out as often as he can to catch as many fish as he can! And he not only fishes but teaches others to fish!

Secondly, you have to offer them something that they want!



Now I realize that it may sound rather crass to compare people to fish! Certainly, the idea is not that we are "luring" people into a situation for our benefit (such as one would do if fishing for dinner!) Yet this part of the analogy remains true... *"People gladly attend events that offer them something."*

With most volunteers that "something" is the feeling that they are making a difference. With core members, it is important to them to connect and find a safe place of belonging.

The Power of Community

I have been involved in Dismas fellowships for over 14 years. I have discovered that a sense of genuine community is the magic glue that keeps people together. In our values, we state that *"We welcome and celebrate one another regardless of religious or criminal convictions, knowing that we are all offenders."* For those who have experienced incarceration, it is important to feel safe and free from judgment. For all Dismas participants it is the power of community that makes a difference.

***There is no power
for change greater
than a community
discovering what it
cares about.***

Margaret J. Wheatley

Making a Difference

For those who volunteer, it is important to not only connect with others, but sense that they are bringing about positive changes in society. Margaret J. Wheatley said, *"There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about."*

The interesting thing about Dismas Fellowship is that many of the ex-offenders who originally attend to get their own needs met, eventually end up serving as volunteers! I know many men and women who have completed all their legal obligations yet continue to attend and actively serve in a Dismas Fellowship. To me, this is a sure sign that something is working!

The “Cheers” Factor

The lyrics to the theme song to the popular 80’s sitcom “**Cheers**” said this:

*“Making your way in the world today, takes everything you’ve got.
Taking a break from all your worries, sure would mean a lot.
Wouldn’t you like to get away?
Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name,
And they’re always glad you came!
You want to go where people know, that troubles are all the same.
You want to go where everybody knows you name.”*

If your local Dismas Fellowship has the kind of atmosphere expressed in that song, then it will not be difficult to grow and reach new members. Once you reach new prospects and they attend your meeting, they will soon feel like they have found a new “home.”

ARE YOU READY TO GO FISHING?

At Dismas Fellowship Network we have resources to help you “go fishing” for new members for your local gathering. We have an informative website you can refer people to (www.dismasfellowshipnetwork.com), beautiful brochures and cards, training resources and personal training opportunities and much, much more! We can equip you to reach out safely and successfully!

We are just an email or phone call away! Please contact us if we can be of help as you nurture and grow your Dismas Fellowship!

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