

A Church of Hope

And Jesus said, "Who is the one who touched Me?" ... And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. " Luke 9:45f NASB

"No touching" is a hard and fast regulation at the women's correctional facility in Pierre, South Dakota. Nevertheless, Jesus Christ who touches the hearts and spirits of followers is evident at the *Church of Hope* located at this South Dakota women's prison.

Every Saturday evening this church gathers for worship. At 8:00 p.m. we saw an ordinary multi-purpose room transformed into sacred space where about 60 inmates gathered to pray, sing and witness the baptisms of 17 new sisters in Christ. One by one, as each of the 17 professed her faith and received the waters of baptism, she joined the worldwide family of Christian believers.

The individuals in the congregation did not have the faces of hardened criminals. In fact, most of the inmates looked strikingly young. As each baptism occurred, another inmate prayed aloud for her new sister in Christ. One woman softly spoke her prayer in Lakota and then in English. We shared the joy of another baptism of a sister who was in the last stages of pregnancy. There was jubilation in the room at the baptisms of a small few who had rejected the lure of Wicca (witchcraft) to follow instead the teachings of Jesus Christ. Shouts and claps in praise to God concluded the service.

According to the Rev. Bradley, the ministry at the prison is fraught with challenges and blessings.

Inmates at the state prison are serving sentences for a variety of offenses: some short terms, others serving life sentences. Nevertheless, Pastor Bradley continues to see God at work in the midst of difficult situations.

Ministries such as the *Church of Hope*, a mission church related to the American Baptist Churches of the Dakotas and National Ministries, will likely never be completely self-sustaining. Your gifts will help to assure the continuation of significant ministry to *the least, the lost and the locked out*.

Gifts to the ministry of Church of Hope can be directed through your local church or sent directly to Church of Hope, P.O. Box 785, Pierre, SD 57501.