**Building God’s House in the Big House: Hagar’s Community Church**

The Washington Correctional Center for Women is both the largest and the only maximum and medium security prison for women in the state. It’s surrounded by barbed wire, and you have to go through five locked gates to get to the main population. But while the women within the prison may be separated from the world, they are not separated from God’s love.

Thanks to the work of dynamic Presbyterian leaders, a new and unique worshiping community has been established inside this fortress of concrete and steel. It is called Hagar’s Community Church. For those among us today who may not remember, Hagar’s story is in found in Genesis. She suffers but perseveres. Hagar’s story teaches us that survival is possible even under the harshest conditions.

“The women I have the opportunity and the privilege to pastor to are learning that they are still indeed loved by God and are not defined by their worst mistake,” says Rev. Lane Brubaker, who leads Bible study and worship on Saturday evenings. “But rather, they are defined by one’s beloved.” Perhaps what is most impactful is providing a place of acceptance.

“We are helping women process and handle their incarceration through God’s love and guidance, and we want this to be a healthy, sustained ministry,” Rev. Brubaker explains. “There are some women who are incarcerated for many years, some for their whole lives. The dream of the presbytery when this started was that it would be a ministry that continues long into the future.”

The promise of this long-term ministry is possible thanks to the support of congregations like Skyline Presbyterian Church in nearby Tacoma. The church used its portion of the Peace & Global Witness Offering to fund Hagar’s Community Church. Rev. Brubaker says the prison ministry would not be able to maintain itself without those financial gifts and that every congregation should be looking to expand outreach to places not yet considered.

“I think there’s a lot of room for more worshiping communities like this to be established,” she said. “All of us should be listening to God to find where these worshiping communities are needed in all sorts of different unique places.”

Because let’s never forget—we are the church, together.

*Let us Pray ~*

*Reconciling God, continue to build us as your Church. May we engage in ministries that share your joy and promise with all people and deepen our call to be reconciled to one another. Amen.*