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All Hands on Deck

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An Intergroup in Minnesota comes up with a plan to write to prisoners together



The St. Cloud Intergroup has been engaging in group sponsorship of incarcerated alcoholics for more than two years now. The first participant in this modification of the usual Corrections Correspondence Program was a guy by the name of Loren, who was in a Minnesota prison. Loren was thrilled by the group sponsorship idea.

“Instead of getting a letter from one alcoholic, I’m getting them from multiple members,” Loren told us at that time, adding, “I’m the envy of everyone on my cell block because I get more mail than anyone.”

Loren was released about a year ago. He visited St. Cloud a few times to express his gratitude for the group’s sponsorship. We introduced him to local meetings and helped facilitate his transition into the AA community.

Our next correspondence participant was a man by the name of Travis. He’s incarcerated in a federal prison in West Virginia. He told us he wasn’t sure about having a group write to him instead of an individual member, but when he started receiving our letters he quickly changed his mind. He says he’s grateful for the multiple letters of support.

Incidentally, our idea for group sponsorship came to us when one of our members who had been writing to an incarcerated AA member said the responsibility was too much for him. He thought he’d have to write a few times a year. But he started receiving letters almost every other week, and he felt the need to respond every time he received a letter. It was too much for him. He asked us what could be done and a member of our Intergroup said, “Why doesn’t the Intergroup sponsor the individual? We can all write to him and thus share the responsibility among us all.” As the saying goes, “Many hands make light work.”

There is another distinct advantage here. What about the AA member who is writing to an incarcerated individual and then suddenly passes away? This has happened a few times now. If an AA member was writing to someone in prison and that AA member suddenly fell ill with

COVID or something else and was unable to write, then the inside member would suddenly stop receiving letters with no explanation. How unfortunate would that be? However, with group sponsorship someone could write them back and explain and continue to send letters of encouragement and support. In football vernacular this is called having “depth in coverage.” In the logistics field, it’s called redundancy and helps in the avoidance of single points of failure.

Lastly, we’ve heard there is a Corrections Correspondence Program backlog of requests from incarcerated individuals looking for AA members to write to them. By incorporating groups into this service work, we could vastly increase the writing pool and make a huge dent in this backlog. Moreover, it could help energize members by giving them a tangible piece of important service work.

Imagine if once a month a group would meet a few minutes before their regular meeting to devote time to writing to the group’s sponsored incarcerated member. What a great way to conduct service work and to help newcomers learn to carry the message.

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