

Introducing---

Our featured author for 2020



Jim Wallis, globally respected writer, teacher, preacher and justice advocate, will be the next in a stellar list of prominent authors brought to western Michigan by Humanity for Prisoners! More details will be released in months to come.

Our calling is not only to pull people out of the river, but to go upstream to find out what or who is pushing them in.

Jim Wallis

Our new board member

Heather Moore, M.A., A.C.C., is a certified life coach with a master's degree in sociology. She is nearing completion of her doctorate degree in Education and currently works in higher education. Her academic efforts and research come with a focus on social justice, including topics of incarceration related stigma and children with incarcerated parents. Heather speaks and presents regularly on topics related to incarceration and those affected by incarceration as well as in the area of educational support for minority students.

Appointed to a 3-year term on our board in 2019, Heather has been affiliated with Humanity for Prisoners for many years prior. She came to experience and understand the unique supportive knowledge and guidance of HFP when she and her husband were refused a marriage certificate by a county clerk who explained that "[people in prison] shouldn't be able to get married." As the wife of a prisoner, she is familiar with the intricacies of being married to a man in prison as an in-and-out-of-state resident. Says Heather: "I am very proud to work with Humanity for Prisoners in their tireless effort to directly support people in prison and to advocate for fairness and kindness, absent of judgment. This is the premise by which all support work should be done, and with the respectful regard that all people deserve, apart from the societal driven stigmas which perpetuate judgment. The system is broken, innocent people go to prison, all the time, but no matter guilt or innocence, every person in prison, and their families, deserve the kindness and respect of being a human, mistakes or otherwise for which no one is above. This expectation of respect for people does not indicate a lack of responsibility, lack of respect for victims of crimes, or lack of appreciation for those corrections staff doing a great job in the system, but rather insists that all of these things do not have to be mutually exclusive. Prison is the sentence, the punishment needs to stay behind the fence."

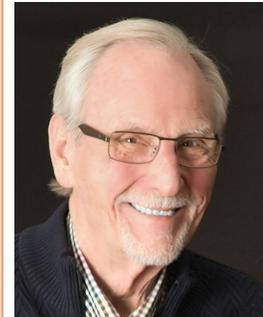


From the desk of Doug:

We need Amos again!

A Bible-reading plan that I try to follow takes me through the entire book in a year. This

means that, near year's end, we reach the Old Testament prophets. I knew that crusty old Amos was



upset about the disparity between the rich and the poor, and I remembered that he clamored for social justice. But I must confess that I didn't remember these two verses:

Away with your noisy hymns of praise!

I will not listen to the music of your harps.

²⁴ Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of justice, an endless river of righteous living.

Amos 5: 23-24

As a church musician who is known, on occasion, to pull out all the organ stops to accompany some "noisy hymns of praise," I don't believe for a second that the Lord doesn't want to hear them. But it's pretty obvious, here, that he doesn't want pious hypocrites singing those great hymns of faith on Sunday, and then ignoring and abusing the poor on Monday.

Former HFP board member the Rev. Dr. Jared Cramer used to lament the fact that churches wanted to go into prison to teach the stories of Jesus. But, years later, when those same prisoners were released into society, churches didn't want them in the same building.

As we approach 2020, let's pray that we see "a mighty flood of justice..."

HFP: Still breaking records!

For the first time in our 18-year history, we added the names of more than 1,000 Michigan prisoners to our list of new clients in one year. CEO Matt Tjapkes reports the 1,000 landmark number was reached on November 21. For each new name, the HFP team sets up a complete electronic file and an email account to establish simple communications.

Our thanks to these area churches that held Thanksgiving or year-end offerings for HFP

Ferrysburg Community Church
Hope Reformed, Holland
Park Christian Reformed Church, Holland
Parkwood Presbyterian, Jenison
Maranatha Christian Reformed Church, Holland

Sweet Freedom Legacy Circle

Russ Bloem, chairman of the HFP Board of Directors, is reporting high interest in the Sweet Freedom Legacy Circle. The program was established late last year to carry forward the work of HFP through planned gifts. Two accounts have been established in cooperation with the Grand Haven Area Community Foundation. Contact our office for an information sheet.

Ombudsman meets HFP

Created in 1975, the Ombudsman's office has a big job: It is responsible for investigating complaints regarding the state prison system. In a recent visit to western Michigan, Ombudsman Keith Barber toured our new offices, and talked business with our team in a luncheon meeting. Among our topics of discussion: grievances, prisoner healthcare, and commutation applications. Keith and his team



do a great job, and we appreciate working with them. Pictured from left to right is HFP President Matt Tjapkes, Founder Doug Tjapkes, Client Services Specialist Susie Greenbauer, and Keith Barber.

Buried Alive In This Concrete Grave

A piece by client Ricardo Ferrell:

I'm caught up in this injustice system serving a bad mu-tha called life, staying up all day not wanting to close my eyes 'cause I might not wakeup. I wonder if this concrete which surrounds me will start to crumble, I've been in here so long my smooth voice turned into an inaudible mumble. When will this horrible nightmare come to an end, or better yet how much longer must I serve for this terrible sin? I've worked hard at getting my stuff all the way together; changed my ways, renewed my thinking, picked up a better attitude, and improved my behavior - essentially transformed my life. Now, I'm ready for a good wife and live life like a normal person, hell I've even slacked up on my cursing. Each day that I wake up in here it feels like I'm buried alive, then I come to my senses and realize I must rise to survive. We know these places ain't no joke and damn sure isn't nothing to be playing with, because the reality is, you're serving a life sentence and can die in here, after all Quentin said it best, "This is Death by Incarceration." So, we have to be strong, fight and work extra hard to finally get a date, otherwise if we allow complacency to seep in they will carry us in a cardboard box out the back gate. The moral of this short story is, you gotta be about your business and take this stuff serious, because they will hold you in here so long you will become delirious. You might think this piece is an exaggeration of incarcerated life in prison, but one thing for certain looking around at all this concrete it can block your vision. So, in order to be completely free physically, you MUST first figure out how to free your mind. The courts keep denying all my legal endeavors and the parole board continuously slide me five-year flops, but I keep holding on telling myself this all will end soon, and this concrete grave will finally open up and free me from captivity in this tomb.

Dear Matt and the HFP Staff:

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! I just wanted to say hello and wish you all the best during these holidays. Thank you all for all the hard work you do. I will keep all of you in my prayers.

Mr. J, HFP Client

"Let our New Year's resolution be this: we will be there for one another as fellow members of humanity, in the finest sense of the word."

– Goran Persson

Happy New Year from Humanity for Prisoners!