

JULY 2023

# Living Stone Prison Church

Mike Durfee State Prison - Springfield, SD

# Freedom's Gate Church

4800 S Tomar St, Sioux Falls, SD

## "WHEN YOU'RE HERE, YOU'RE FAMILY"

The above slogan is one most attributed to the Olive Garden restaurant. They sell the idea that when you dine with them, you are part of the Olive Garden family. Personally, I don't care much for their food, so I guess I'm kind of like that uncle that never shows up to the reunion, leaving everyone else to speculate on what's going on in his life. I'm doing fine Olive Garden, thanks for asking.

When I (Pastor Jason) pastored at Living Stone Prison Church many of the inmates felt the same way as they walked into the doors of the chapel for our worship services and Bible studies. Multiple men told me that the church was their family. (Many times, their biological family had abandoned them.) The family ties ran deep in the prison. We who were part of the family of God had each other's backs. Many within the congregation made it their business to check on their brothers in the faith with authentic concern over their well-being. Prayers were lifted for many situations on behalf of those who shared the same spiritual DNA. When a member of the family was absent for a few meetings, they would likely hear the words "missed you at church" from someone in short order.

Like Olive Garden, when a person was with our prison congregation, they were family. The same is very true of Living Stone Prison Church today. Under the leadership of Pastor Dan Ebbens, the

MARK YOUR  
CALENDAR TO COME  
WORSHIP WITH US  
EVERY SUNDAY  
NIGHT AT 5:00

Please call Lauri at  
712.470.4165 to set up a  
date to come worship  
with the men at Mike  
Durfee State Prison!  
**Visitors are always  
appreciated!**

Would you be willing to  
make a meal and worship  
with us at Freedom's  
Gate? Please call or text  
Ruth at 605.366.3624 to  
find a date that works for  
you or check our  
MealTrain link on our  
website.

Check out our updated  
website for the calendar  
of open dates.

brothers are experiencing a time of growth in the family. The number of inmates attending the services and Bible studies as well as those seeking Biblical counseling is strong and gaining. God's family is continuing to advance in the Mike Durfee State Prison.

Jesus made it clear who was part of His family when He said this; "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:50 ESV) The first vital step in doing the Father's will is to come to the Son and connect with Jesus for Salvation and New Life. The cross is the adoption paper to join the family of God. From that point on the call is to take continued steps into God's will.

Unlike the claim of the Olive Garden, I would add that when you aren't physically in a church building, you remain family. Recently, as I visited an aftercare unit in Sioux Falls to encourage some of their residents, a former inmate I was standing near spotted someone in the distance and said, "I have to go talk to that guy over there." After finishing up my conversation with another man, I walked over to where they were talking. I found out they had attended the same church services at the Jameson Maximum Security Prison where they had originally been incarcerated many years before. The 2 men hadn't seen each other for a long time. They talked about the church they used to attend, caught up on their current situation, talked of their biological families, and shared many laughs. It reminded me of the type of conversations I've heard at the family reunions I've attended. Spiritually speaking, it was a family reunion. The years had separated the 2 men, but through Christ, their brotherhood had remained.

Good families celebrate together, grieve together, and help one another out. On a recent Thursday night, a woman brought 5 others with her to Freedom's Gate Bible Study. When we asked how she convinced them to come, she said, "I told them that this church is like family to me and that they should check it out." At times, a struggling Christian needs to be reminded that people from their past life who are apart from Christ can be very dangerous. As I write this, I am fresh off ministering to a woman who has been out of prison about a month. She started out well and got involved in Freedom's Gate with gusto, but recently she met up with an old friend who is outside of God's family at this time. Long story short, although she is doing ok, that reunion led to a relapse on drugs and an assault. She ended up getting kicked out of her home and is now separated from her children for a time. She learned the hard way. There are people who no longer belong in your life when your goal is to live for Christ. Her church family remains to help her pick up the pieces.

Both Living Stone and Freedom's Gate Church love to welcome people into our families. We strive to offer a place of worship that loves people as brothers and sisters. We invite those outside the faith to join God's family through a relationship with Jesus Christ. We want to be a family that does God's will, and gently encourages the same from others. We don't offer free breadsticks and salad, but we do offer a plate of God's goodness and grace, and spiritual food for hungry souls looking for a place to belong.

Thank you for your support!

IN CHRIST'S LOVE,

Pastor Dan and Natalie Ebbens (Living Stone)

Pastor Jason and Ruth Wiersma (Freedom's Gate)

All contributions can be made payable  
to Living Stone Prison Church and sent to our treasurer:  
Brad Whitsell, PO Box 415, Yankton, SD 57078

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[www.LivingStonePrisonChurch.org](http://www.LivingStonePrisonChurch.org)

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