



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Charlotte Episcopal Area
WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA CONFERENCE

KENNETH H. CARTER JR.
RESIDENT BISHOP

DEETTA RIVENS
EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Dear Friends in Christ,

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus consistently crossed boundaries to meet people where they were. He entered places others avoided, welcomed those society rejected, and proclaimed that no one is beyond the reach of God's redeeming love. As followers of Christ, we are called to do the same.

For that reason, I encourage every congregation in the Western North Carolina Conference to observe **Cross and Key Prison Ministries Sunday** on **August 23, 2026**, or on another Sunday that best fits your congregation's calendar. I also invite you to receive a special offering to support the life-changing work of Cross and Key Prison Ministries.

Across North Carolina, more than **58,000 men and women** are incarcerated in state prisons, federal facilities, and county jails. Behind every incarcerated person is a network of family members whose lives are also marked by separation, uncertainty, and hardship. They need to know that they have not been forgotten and that the Church of Jesus Christ continues to offer hope, healing, and the promise of new life.

Jesus reminds us in Matthew 25, *"I was in prison and you visited me."* These words are more than an invitation—they are a calling. Whenever we extend compassion to those who are incarcerated, we bear witness to the presence of Christ and participate in God's work of reconciliation.

This ministry has deep roots in our Wesleyan tradition. John and Charles Wesley believed that the Gospel belonged to everyone, including those living behind prison walls. Faithful Methodists such as Silas Told and Sarah Peters devoted themselves to visiting prisoners, offering friendship, prayer, practical assistance, and the assurance of God's grace. Their example continues to inspire us today.

One of the greatest needs in many of our congregations is simply knowing how to begin. Cross and Key Prison Ministries exist to help churches answer that question. Whether your congregation is exploring prison ministry for the first time or seeking to revive a ministry from years past, Cross and Key provides practical guidance, including a comprehensive **68-page Prison Ministry Toolkit** and on-site training designed for churches of every size.

I hope your congregation will prayerfully participate in this special Sunday and receive a generous offering to strengthen this important ministry. Together, we can equip congregations to

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share Christ's love with incarcerated persons, support their families, and walk alongside those seeking a new beginning.

Worship resources and promotional materials are available through Cross and Key Prison Ministries. For additional information, please contact Executive Director **Rev. Dr. Mark Hicks** at **336-689-1443** or **mhicksdbom@gmail.com**.

Thank you for your faithful witness to the Gospel and for your willingness to serve Christ in places where hope is often in short supply. May the Holy Spirit continue to lead us into ministries that proclaim the transforming grace of Jesus Christ to all people.

In Christ,

Kenneth H. Carter Jr.
Resident Bishop

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