Learning Behind Bars

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LEARNING BEHIND BARS

On her first day of training at the South Dakota State Penitentiary, Krista Bousema witnessed a 13-person fight. “That was my ‘welcome to prison!’ moment,” she says.

Bousema and Jared Van Wyk, Dordt senior criminal justice majors, interned at the penitentiary this past summer. They were trained to perform tasks that most correctional officers do at a prison: make rounds on each floor every thirty minutes, conduct cell searches, breathalyze inmates, stop inmates from hurting themselves or each other, and generally ensure that the inmates were where they needed to be.

Both Bousema and Van Wyk note that an important part of their job was making sure the policies and procedures of the penitentiary were followed at all times. But Van Wyk also points out that, despite the negative stereotypes surrounding prisons, his job was not as difficult as some might expect.

“One of my biggest takeaways was learning how to remain calm with an upset inmate and successfully de-escalate a situation without making anything worse.”
— Jared Van Wyk

“You never knew what was going to happen every day, which was exciting,” says Bousema. “But the SDSP has enough rules in place that the inmates are relatively orderly.”

The internship experience gave Bousema and Van Wyk a good look into where their Dordt education was taking them. Both felt that the internship confirmed their calling to go into criminal justice and gave them solid, hands-on practice in the field.

Donald Roth, associate professor of criminal justice and business administration at Dordt College, believes an internship is
especially good for students hoping to go into corrections or law enforcement. "Jared and Krista had a chance to hear stories and encounter individuals who opened their eyes up to what can be out there," he says. "They have honed their gut sense of when things are dangerous or suspicious in a way that will serve them incredibly well in their future careers."

But the internship gave Bousema and Van Wyk more than practical experience—they also learned more about themselves.

"One of my biggest takeaways was learning how to remain calm with an upset inmate and how to successfully de-escalate a situation without making anything worse," says Van Wyk. "That was not an easy thing to learn right away, but I had to let the inmates be heard to keep the peace."

Bousema had a similar experience, but she also had to know when to be assertive. "Saying 'no' and making someone upset was hard for me at first, but it got easier," she says.

Both students say their faith had an impact on how they treated the inmates.

"As correctional officers, we are working toward helping inmates live a better life and enabling them to contribute to society once they are released," says Van Wyk. "I have a strong passion for helping people, so I felt this experience really prepared me for a career in law enforcement."

Bousema gave an example of how being a Christian shaped her response to inmates. While conducting a cell search, inmates thanked her for being respectful and not tearing their cell apart. She felt that the experience gave her an opportunity to show God's love and compassion to those who needed it the most.

"While I'm not condoning their crimes, I had to remind myself that the inmates were people as well—they fell short like the rest of us and deserve to be treated as people."

ANNEKE WIND ’19

AIRBAND GOES TO THE GREASERS

In September, eight groups lip-synced and danced their way through Dordt’s Airband competition. The winning group, the Greasers, performed “You’re the One that I Want” from the musical Grease. The Greasers later performed at Northwestern College’s Airband—as entertainment, not competition.

DORDT PROFESSOR BIKES TO FIGHT POVERTY

This summer, business instructor Shirley Folkerts and her husband Rudy participated in Sea to Sea—Bicycling to End Poverty. Starting in Vancouver, British Columbia, on June 26, they cycled more than 3,000 miles, ending their journey in Ottawa, Ontario, on August 12. The rest of the tour continued on to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where the ride finished on August 29. The Folkerts spent six days per week biking an average of 77 miles per day through varied topography, weather, and road conditions.

The goal of Sea to Sea was to raise money and awareness to fight poverty. The Folkerts raised more than $25,000; the entire group collected $1.6 million. The money is being distributed to World Renew, Partners Worldwide, and local organizations that help fight poverty.