

Hands of Hope Prison Ministry

January 1, 2026

MINNESOTA SHERIFF ASSOCIATION

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP RESOLUTION 2025-1

DECEMBER 8, 2025

WHEREAS, The Minnesota Sheriff Association (MSA) met in general session on the above date for its annual winter meeting, and

WHEREAS, the MSA is the State of Minnesota's oldest law enforcement association having been founded and in continuous operation since 1885 and consisting of the 87 elected County Sheriffs of Minnesota as voting members and supported by several thousand other members of Sheriffs Offices and honorary members, and

WHEREAS, under Minnesota Statutes such as Minn. Stat. 387.11 and 641.14 the Sheriffs of Minnesota are responsible for operations of Minnesota county jails, and

WHEREAS, the Minnesota Commissioner of Corrections (DOC) is currently Paul Schnell, and

WHEREAS, Commissioner Schnell pursuant to Minn. Stat. 241.021 is responsible for and controls the licensing of Minnesota local adult correctional facilities, which includes county jails, and that task is performed by the unit of

January: A New Beginning

January is not about perfection—it's about permission.

Permission to begin again.

Permission to heal, to grow, to try once more.

God does not ask us to carry last year's failures into a new season. His mercies are new every morning, and January reminds us that fresh starts are part of His design. Take this month one step at a time. Small obedience leads to lasting transformation.

"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?" – Isaiah 43:19

January can feel quiet, cold, and uncertain—but beneath the surface, roots are growing.

This is a season of preparation, not punishment. What God is planting now will bear fruit in due time.

Shakopee Prison Choir

On Sunday, December 7, 2025, the Voices of Hope choir at the Minnesota Correctional Facility – Shakopee presented a powerful and moving concert titled Hope Rising. The event brought together invited guests and approximately 50 incarcerated individuals for an afternoon of music, reflection, and connection.

The concert featured the premiere of Time to Change, an original composition by Evgeniya Kozhevnikova with lyrics by Amanda Coulson, a formerly incarcerated woman. The song was commissioned especially for the choir and speaks to transformation and resilience.

The choir also performed heartfelt arrangements of True Colors (popularized by Cyndi Lauper) and Unwritten (by Natasha Bedingfield), celebrating themes of authenticity and possibility. To close the event and honor the holiday season, the choir and audience joined voices in singing Christmas carols together.

Here are some comments from people from Facebook

Angie Smedsrud: Too bad my daughter can't have her Trumpet there u could have a band going toooooo ... But Merry Christmas YALLS ...

Mary Cook: Love this! Thank you, VOH . Merry Christmas! Shakopee ladies – sending holiday love to you!

David Mennicke: The power of music to bring hope, joy, and light on full display! Thanks!

Justina Jones: Yay VOH!! Glad y'all could make something happen for the holidays

Norma Bourland: Wonderful! And merry Christmas to each of you, too.

Alicia Dixon: Merry Christmas ladies

Brian Dressel: Merry Christmas ladies.

Knyaw Soe: Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

the Department of Corrections established as the Inspection and Enforcement Unit (IUE) and

WHEREAS, until the last few years under Commissioner Schnell the Sheriffs of Minnesota have experienced a cooperative and positive relationship with the DOC concerning jail matters, including in the past working in partnership to create or help fund in a combination of public funds and private funds provided by the MSA an Office of Jail Resources, and

WHEREAS, under Commissioner Schnell and the Director of the Inspection and Enforcement Unit Kristi Strang serving under his authority and direction that cooperative approach to jail matters has disappeared and the DOC has elected to pursue a coercive, arbitrary and capricious and dictatorial approach to address the operations of county jails, and

WHEREAS, efforts by the MSA to collaborate cooperatively with Commissioner Schnell personally and directly on many occasions for over one year and members of the DOC have met with utter failure by the Commissioner and DOC staff, particularly the staff of the IEU as evidenced by the actions of the DOC on multiple occasions to engage in such activities as:

1. Arbitrary and capricious reduction in the authorized bed capacity of multiple jails, causing local taxpayers to needlessly spend millions of

What if life is meant to mirror the greatest symphony ever composed? By Dear Ali

Were you in a band? That class you had to go to in school, where first you had to decide what instrument you wanted to play, then you were told you had to take that instrument home to practice to play in front of a crowd of smiling but horrified onlookers at the Christmas Concert on the gym stage... I remember choosing the flute, but my stepsister had already chosen it, and my stepmother told me I had to pick a different instrument. So I decided to take the drums, but soon realized I needed more years of piano experience and thus didn't qualify. I was unaware of other instruments, and through more disappointing discussions, I ended up ... With a clarinet.

I played for 3 years and was in a marching band for one summer. I do not recall feeling joy playing an instrument. When I sang, I felt joy, so in high school I joined the choir.

As I reflect on those years, they are not happy years. I was teased and had already been abused, vulnerable to the control of others over my life. After my motorcycle accident, I remember God telling me that I was part of a symphony and all the different instruments were getting ready to play. I don't think I understood any of this until tonight.

Today is Christmas Eve 2025 as I write this, and on TV I am watching The Piano Guys play music that makes me feel closer to heaven; the sound is like rushing water with melody and rhythm, and my soul wants to dance.

As I began to weep at the remembrance of God talking to me in 2022 about life as a symphony, I thought of each of you. Every one of you is an instrument waiting to be picked up and played by a musician who knows how to play you. You may be out of tune. Your chords may be broken. Your strings may have fallen off, your keys may be damaged, your cases may be rusty, and your mouthpieces may be moldy.

But God, in His glory, is a master musician, and if you are willing to be cleaned up and played. He will!

Imagine for a moment that you don't have to do anything except be the instrument. And God picks you up, cleans and tunes you, and then plays YOU! With your unique sound and melody, which he plays alongside all the other instruments (other of God's children willing to be instruments). He wants to create a harmony and melody of love.

If you did not know that you are an instrument made for beautiful music, I wanted you to know today. Today, I want to be a violin, played by a musician who knows how to make incredible music. Say Yes with me today and ask God to let you hear His heavenly music as you close your eyes to sleep.

I pray that all of you know how important you are and how capable God is if you humble yourself to let Him lead you where He wants you to go, your life can be part of the greatest symphony ever played.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year !

dollars in funds to board inmates,

2. Arbitrary and capricious re-classification of a full-service jail to a 72-hour facility causing local taxpayers to needlessly spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in funds to board inmates,

3. Declaring in public forums and litigation that the DOC has authority to take “whatever action it wants to” against local jails and asserting in legal pleadings and arguments that counties have no pre-deprivation due process rights to legally challenge arbitrary actions of the DOC, and

4. Advancement in legislative sessions, proposals and bills legislation without consideration of the views of the MSA or the impact of the proposals on the costs and operational issues that would result, and

5. Advancement of proposed administrative Rules under the guise of compliance with statutes that far exceed the mandates of those statutes without consideration of the views of the MSA or the impact of the proposals on the costs and operational issues that would result, and

6. Taking adverse licensing action against multiple jails on the grounds of alleged rule violations when in fact no rules have been violated and the alleged violation is in fact the personal and arbitrary “interpretation” of rules imposed in violation of Minnesota Statutes, including

Minnesota’s Elected Sheriffs Submit a Vote of “No Confidence” regarding DOC Commissioner Paul Schnell

At their recent business meeting held during the MSA Sheriff’s Winter Conference, the elected sheriffs of Minnesota held a discussion that resulted in a statewide “Vote of No Confidence” regarding the Department of Corrections Commissioner Paul Schnell.

The non-partisan, elected sheriffs of Minnesota met to discuss the ongoing issues and operational challenges related to their interactions with the State of Minnesota’s Department of Corrections (DOC), Jail Inspection and Enforcement Unit, and specifically with the DOC’s leadership.

The DOC is responsible for the inspection and licensing of Minnesota Jails as has been the practice for decades. However, in recent years the DOC has begun a pattern of interpreting the law and taking enforcement actions based on whim rather than rule.

MSA President, Steele County Sheriff Lon Thiele said, “There was a roll call vote by the Minnesota Sheriffs’ Association at our recent conference. It reflects a clear message: the interpretations of 2911 rules and the DOC inspection process have become burdensome and disconnected from operational realities for safe and effective jail management. Every sheriff who voted made an independent decision based on their own facts”.

The DOC’s arbitrary and capricious decisions are consistently creating hardships for those community members who are incarcerated, the legal community, law enforcement and especially the sheriff’s offices who must anticipate which erratic action the DOC will take against their county.

The DOC rulings are inconsistent, and they are unable to back them up with any written law, rule or even protocol. Sadly, their leadership has limited experience in corrections, and still chooses to be unwilling to work with the elected sheriffs of Minnesota. The DOC’s arbitrary decisions have cost local taxpayers millions of dollars as local government must keep rapidly adapting to their unrealistic, and subjective demands.

The MSA leadership has had numerous meetings and exchanges with Commissioner Schnell and members of his leadership team in hopes of finding positive resolutions. Instead, there has been a lack of follow-through, empty promises and misinformation. The Commissioner’s failure to lead, or hold his leadership accountable, played a significant role in this action which resulted in an overwhelming statewide vote to support the resolution.

The Executive Director for the Minnesota Sheriffs’ Association, James Stuart, said, “It is alarming that the DOC doesn’t hold the jails to a consistent, legal, and fair standard across the state. They choose to impose arbitrary demands that negatively impact taxpayers without any positive operational impact, or any legal right to due process or appeal. What is really shocking is that they fail to hold themselves to the same high, and unwritten, standards that they impose on the jails.”

Richard Hodsdon, the MSA’s Legal Counsel, is a national resource for matters affecting the office of sheriff and correctional issues. Mr. Hodsdon said, “The DOC has issued arbitrary orders against several Minnesota county

but not limited to Minn. Stat. 14.381, and

7. Permitting or directing the Director of the Inspection and Enforcement Unit to impose arbitrary, capricious and unjustified mandates upon local facilities under penalty and risk of severe adverse enforcement actions, and

8. These actions taken by the DOC have imposed unnecessary costs to counties and county taxpayers and future planned efforts of the DOC as evidenced is its draft 2911 Rules would impose even more millions of dollars in unnecessary state mandates and cost to county taxpayers, and

WHEREAS, all efforts of the MSA and its representatives to facilitate a return to a cooperative approach between the DOC and County sheriffs and county jails has been met with silence or rebuffed by the Commissioner and representatives of the DOC

The MSA, acting by and through its members consisting of the elected Sheriffs of the State of Minnesota, meeting on this date in general assembly does hereby declare:

1. The MSA no longer believes that Commissioner Schnell can fairly, effectively and competently provide for and manage the licensing and regulation of local correctional facilities, including county jails, of the State of Minnesota, and

2. The continued service of Commissioner Schnell as DOC Commissioner is detrimental to public safety in Minnesota, to

jails that have cost property taxpayers millions of dollars without any evidence that its commands have done anything to make jails safer or better for those incarcerated or to better promote public safety". Hodsdon went on to say, "Under the Commissioner and Jail Enforcement managers, the DOC has clearly changed from a supportive and assisting partner that helps counties run well managed jails to the use of heavy handed and draconian sanctions to impose the personal whims and preferences of some DOC staff on how they think jails should be run."

About the Minnesota Sheriffs' Association

The Minnesota Sheriffs' Association (MSA) is a non-profit organization that was established in 1885. Its membership represents all 87 elected sheriffs, their teams, and citizens from across the state by providing numerous support services that focus on training, advocacy, legislation and professional services that enhance public safety throughout Minnesota.

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Psalm 23 — How the Shepherd Gently Leads a Soul to God and the blueprint for us on how to lead a new believer to Christ.

Author: David

Purpose: To show how God brings a person to faith and healing by meeting their needs in the right order Psalm 23 is not only a comfort psalm. It is a blueprint for how God draws a person to Himself—with care, patience, and love. Before correction, before righteousness, before change, God provides safety.

Psalm 23

1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

effective county jail operations and fiscally prudent jail managements, to the effective coordination of correctional efforts with county government and to an effective partnership between the State of Minnesota and the 87 counties and County Sheriffs of the State of Minnesota in protecting the rights of those incarcerated within county jails while simultaneously protecting public safety in an effective and cost-efficient manner, and

3. The MSA, acting through its members, call upon Commissioner Schnell to either resign from office or upon his refusal to do, for his removal by the Office of the Minnesota Governor.

RECIPES

Hotdish Bowl

1 pack ramen (chicken or beef)

Instant mashed potatoes

Summer sausage or meat stick

Cheese spread

Fried onions (optional)

Directions:

Cook ramen using half the water so it stays thick.

Stir in instant potatoes a little at a time until it becomes creamy.

Chop and add summer sausage.

Mix in cheese spread.

Top with crushed fried onions

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

1. “The Lord Is My Shepherd” — RELATIONSHIP FIRST

God introduces Himself as a Shepherd, not a judge.

A shepherd meets the sheep where they are: lost, wounded, dirty, afraid

This is how people are drawn to Jesus. Not through pressure, but through presence.

Key Truth:

People follow when they feel safe and cared for.

2. “I Shall Not Want” — OUTER NEEDS ARE MET

Before God works on the soul, He addresses basic needs. This includes: Food, water, shelter, safety, friendship and acceptance

A person cannot focus on spiritual truth while living in survival mode.

Jesus modeled this:

He fed people before teaching them

He built relationship before calling for change

Love stabilizes the heart so faith can grow.

3. “Green Pastures” — FRESH SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT

Green pastures are fresh, living fields—not dry leftovers.

This represents: grace instead of shame, forgiveness instead of guilt peace instead of chaos, hope instead of despair.

God does not feed new believers with rules.

He feeds them with life. Sheep lie down only when they feel safe.

Rest always comes before growth.

4. “Still Waters” — SAFETY AND QUIET

Still waters do not rush or threaten.

The Hebrew meaning speaks of rest, settling, and calm.

Spiritually, still waters mean: the noise quiets, pressure is removed walls begin to fall

This is where the Holy Spirit begins to work: bringing conviction, revealing truth, healing wounds

We do not do the convicting — God does.

5. “He Restoreth My Soul” — INNER HEALING

The word restore means to bring back, renew, return to wholeness.

God heals before He corrects.

Creamy Corn Chowder

Instant mashed potatoes

Corn snack (crushed) or corn from a soup pack

Chicken packet or summer sausage

Cheese spread

Black pepper (optional)

Directions:

Make mashed potatoes thick, not watery.

Stir in crushed corn snack or corn.

Add chicken or sliced sausage.

Mix in cheese spread.

Season with black pepper.

Protein Bowl

Brown rice cup or rice-based ramen

Chicken packet

Sunflower seeds or peanuts

Cranberries or raisins

Black pepper

Directions:

Prepare rice or ramen rice as directed.

Stir in chicken packet.

Add seeds or nuts for crunch.

Mix in dried cranberries or raisins.

Cheese Curd Ramen Bomb

Ramen (any flavor)

Restoration includes: healing trauma, restoring identity, renewing hope rebuilding trust

Many outward sins are symptoms of inward wounds. A soul must be restored before it can walk in righteousness.

6. “Paths of Righteousness” — DIRECTION COMES AFTER TRUST

Only after: safety, provision, rest, stillness, restoration...does God begin to redirect behavior. Righteousness is not forced. It is followed.

Obedience grows naturally where love has been established.

7. “For His Name’s Sake” — GOD DOES THE WORK

Transformation is not our responsibility. Our role: love, guide, walk alongside, God’s role: convict, heal, change

This removes judgment and pressure.

8. “Through the Valley” — PRESENCE IN HARD TIMES

New believers will walk through valleys. God does not abandon them. He walks with them. The rod and staff represent: protection, correction done in love, guidance, not punishment

Failure does not disqualify a person from God’s care.

9. “A Table Before Me” — BELONGING BEFORE BEHAVIOR

God gives belonging first. A seat at the table means: acceptance, dignity Identity. People grow best where they belong.

10. “Goodness and Mercy Shall Follow Me” — A NEW LIFE DIRECTION

Before Christ, people are chased by: shame, fear, addiction, guilt

After Christ, they are followed by: goodness and mercy.

This assurance keeps them walking forward.

KEY DISCIPLESHIP TRUTH FROM PSALM 23

Meet people where they are.

Provide safety and love.

Allow God to do the inner work.

Transformation will follow.

Psalm 23 shows us: Jesus satisfies before He sanctifies.

Follow these steps when you are leading a new believer to Christ and watch as they become transformed! This Bible study God gave to me years ago and the more I look at it the more I see how truly right it is on how to lead someone to Christ.

Written By Rebeca Warmbo

Cheese spread

Summer sausage

Crackers or corn chips

Directions:

Cook ramen with less water.

Stir in cheese spread until creamy.

Add chopped sausage.

Top with crushed crackers or chips.

GORKLE #1

CLUE: Thick Midwest comfort meal baked in one pan

_ O _ _ _

GORKLE #2

CLUE: Ancient rolled writing

_ _ R _ _

GORKLE #3

CLUE: Quiet, calm, not loud

_ _ E _ _

YEAR END REVIEW FOR MN. PRISONS

- Minnesota DOC continues struggling with an increasingly older incarcerated population, which drives up healthcare costs. Health spending soared to over \$134 million in 2025 and is projected to rise further, much of it connected to chronic and geriatric care.

- The Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act (MRRRA) — designed to let people shorten sentences through rehabilitation programs — saw early releases in a pilot phase, but one of the first people released under the

A WORD FROM A PRISONER

What would you ask a person who has spent decades in prison? You might inquire about the violence, or perhaps you're curious about the food. When I encounter individuals who have spent more time in prison than myself (26 years), my question is consistent: "Why are you still here?" As for me, I've been asked a lot of questions, but the most common was, "What is your typical day like and how does it feel to be locked in a cell?" The first time I was asked this question was during a community awareness program session. I sat on a Q&A panel with three other incarcerated individuals. The purpose of the program was to bridge the gap between the community and prison population. Most of the participants were students studying criminal justice. I thought to myself: how can I give them an accurate depiction of my reality? Then it came to me—a bathroom.

Imagine your bathroom being your cell. But we have to make a few adjustments. Let's remove your medicine cabinet and mirror. Next, remove the toilet seat and disable the hot water in your sink. Replace the bathroom door with bars and the drywall with metal; metal that will make your bathroom hot in the summer and cold in the winter. No fancy showerhead—instead, one that sends small, sharp streams of water that burn your skin.

You can't control the water temperature; it's been replaced with a button you press in order to turn the shower on. Some days, the water may be too cold or too hot to stand under. Your bathtub is your bed, with a mattress as thin as a sleeping bag. Each week you are issued state clothing, one towel that you can barely wrap around your body, a hotel-size bar of soap, a single-blade razor that irritates your skin, and one roll of toilet tissue. Lastly, you are given one thin blanket that barely keeps you warm during cold nights. The simple luxuries you once enjoyed are stripped from you—but this is only the beginning.

Depression will likely begin to consume you. You're trying to cope, but you simply don't know how. These feelings are unfamiliar. With time, your depression will turn into stress and, eventually, anger—a roller coaster of debilitating emotions. You're told when to eat, sleep, exercise, and visit with your loved ones. Not being in control of your life brings about a feeling of frustration. Your thoughts begin to consume you, and you just want to sleep to escape this reality, but the yelling and banging all night keep you awake.

As you lay in your bed, you're wondering if these people are losing their minds. It scares you. You fear encountering them. You also hope you can keep it together mentally. Your thoughts are redirected as hunger settles in, but you must wait for breakfast; you have nothing to snack on. Eight hours later, your cell opens—time to take a walk for breakfast. As you enter the mess hall, you notice nothing but metal chairs and tables. You see a friend and call out to them, but an officer yells at you: "No talking in the mess hall!"

You smile at your friend, and they smile back. That's the best thing that has happened since you arrived. You sit down to eat, and when the person next to you begins to talk across the table, food from their mouth lands on your plate. You remain silent to avoid conflict and decide not to eat. Suddenly, a

law became a wanted fugitive after leaving supervision.

- Advocates and news coverage note the broader MRRA program has been slow to roll out statewide, with relatively few releases so far.
- A significant settlement in Hennepin County jail requires staff training, use of chosen pronouns, and housing based on gender identity to protect transgender inmates' rights following a discrimination claim.
- Minnesota's Clemency Review Commission (CRC) and Board of Pardons continued work in 2025; hearings and reviews for commutation decisions are ongoing through late 2025 into early 2026.
- Some folks convicted of serious crimes, including murder, remain behind bars even after conviction review units recommended possible exoneration or release — highlighting ongoing legal complexity in reviewing old cases.
- The state advanced plans to close the historic Stillwater facility — one of Minnesota's oldest prisons — with inmate relocations underway and program pilots (like earned living units), ahead of full closure by 2029.
- An investigation remains open into the death of an inmate at Rush City prison in 2025.
- A promised statewide rollout of prison-approved tablets to support education & communication was delayed, with fewer than 30 % of inmates having access as of mid-2025.
- Reviews found problems with well-being checks and care at the Red Wing youth correctional facility after a teen suicide, prompting retraining and

fight breaks out. The officers jump into action and use pepper spray to break it up. The mist travels through the air and reaches the table you are sitting at. You inhale some of it and begin to cough; your eyes burn, and you need water—but this must wait until you get back to your cell. Once you are back, you wash up and wish you never had to walk to the mess hall.

After this eventful morning, you just want to speak with your family. But today isn't your phone day; you must wait until tomorrow. That time comes, and your family answers. After 15 minutes, the officer tells you to hang up. All you can say is, "I have to go." You don't even get a chance to say, "I love you." You spend the rest of the night thinking about that 15-minute conversation, wishing it was longer. You lay in your bed wondering when you will see the ones you love.

A few days pass by, and you are called for a visit. When you walk into the visiting room, you're greeted with forced smiles. They notice that you have lost too much weight; they remain silent and immediately buy you something to eat. Your loved ones are affected and feel helpless. Your child has many questions—questions you find other answers for, except the truth. You lie and say you'll be home soon. They tell you to promise and you unwisely say, "I promise."

Now comes your biggest fear of the day: it's time for them to leave. There are no more smiles. Your child begins to cry, saying, "I don't want to leave!" There is nothing you can do or say to comfort them. It overwhelms you to know that your relationships are at risk. You want to do something, but your hands are tied. This is the worst feeling you have ever experienced; it feels like mental torture. You consider not having anyone visit because it is too painful for all.

Anything less than a miracle . . . 41 more years to go, and hope is all you have.

There's my answer. It may leave you with many more questions and, hopefully, with the conclusion that changes need to be made. Incarceration in our country is impeded by the punitive approach taken. Prisons, in many ways, should reflect the way one would live and function in society.

Some Scandinavian prison systems have adopted this approach and people are much less likely to return to prison in those countries. In some prisons, cellblocks resemble college dorms, rooms have TVs, stereos, refrigerators, and a cell phone on the dresser. Wages are \$5.30 to \$9.50 per hour. Incarcerated people are allowed to spend time with family outside of the facility, wear their own clothes, and eat with staff. Correctional officers fill both rehabilitative and security roles. People in prison feel like humans. What's the benefit? They yield recidivism rates one-half to one-third of those in the United States.

So, I ask you this question: why should you care about the way men and women are doing time? Because over 95 percent of all incarcerated individuals in state prisons return to their communities. What type of man or woman do you want living in your neighborhood, or even next door to you?

policy revisions.

- Reports (including local sheriff complaints and online discussions) indicated friction between county jails and the state DOC over staffing, inspection protocols, and inmate counts — reflecting broader tension in managing detained populations, especially with oversight demands in 2025

Answers to Gorkle

1. Hotdish
2. Scroll
3. Silent

January Hope

A new year does not erase pain but it offers hope.

Hope that God is not finished.

Hope that healing is possible.

Hope that what was broken can be restored.

As we step into January, let us walk forward with faith, courage, and expectancy believing that God will meet us right where we are.

age and putting your best foot

forward. A new year is an

opportunity to

reset, to recharge and

Happy New Year 2026!!!!

As we step into a new year, may it bring growth, healing, and meaningful improvements to each of our lives.

Although our prison system may not be as accommodating as those in Scandinavia, there are many men and women who have dedicated their lives to change and would do more good in their communities, alongside their families, rather than deteriorating in prison.

While incarcerated, I have met amazing men—men who have influenced my life in truly transformative ways. They are woven within my every accomplishment. These are mentors I will never forget. And they deserve a second chance in a system that, for those with lengthy prison sentences, has yet to provide any meaningful hope of returning home. For those men and women, I often ask myself, “When is enough enough?!” For our families, I say the same.

David Sell is a husband, grandfather, writer, hospice volunteer, and advocate for prison reform. He can be reached on JPay at David Sell, 97b2642, NYS DOCCS Inmate Services.

MS. B's BUZZ

Hello everyone & Happy New Year! I took last month off as I felt like I was in a bit of a writing slump. I tend to overthink what I should write but I don't necessarily think that is a bad thing. I want to make sure what I'm writing has meaning, is relevant & I also aim to be respectful of circumstances. Fortunately, I have a trusted ally who is incarcerated at Shakopee and she has given me some insight and suggestions over these past few months.

I know that there has been a lot of confusion, hurt, anger, frustration, you name it, surrounding a few hot button items as they relate to the department of corrections. I will not pretend I know what you all are feeling or experiencing, but I do know humans tend to want to be in control and it can be especially hard during times of uncertainty. I CONSTANTLY struggle with my need to control, whether it's my schedule, what's for dinner, what's going on in the world, etc. so I also need to CONSTANTLY remind myself that I control very little in my life. Although I am aware of this concept, it doesn't make it any easier for me. So sometimes, I go to the experts who have a better handle on how to deal with uncertainty and things outside of our control. I've pulled some information from some articles online and am hoping what I lay out for you can help in some way.

From the American Psychological Association, **“10 tips for Dealing with the Stress of Uncertainty.”**

“People react differently to uncertainty, but you can take some simple steps to build your resilience in uncertain times. Accepting that there will be uncertainty can free us to focus on what is in our control.”

Be kind to yourself (this includes being patient, easier said than done, right?!)

1. Reflect on past successes – you've overcome stressful situations in the past which means you are resilient and can do it again!
2. Develop new skills – step out of your comfort zone (join a book club, bible study, sign up for a writing class, etc.)
3. Limit exposure to the news – the news can be informative and helpful, however too much exposure or watching it when you aren't in a good

May new doors open
bringing greater freedom, renewed
motivation, and fresh opportunities
to become better, stronger, and
more compassionate people.

May we all come to know God more
deeply, to accept His love fully, and
to allow that love to guide our
thoughts, actions, and choices.

Let us walk in peace, patience, and
understanding toward our brothers
and sisters, remembering that we
are all connected.

My hope is that the world begins to
slow down, return to what truly
matters, and rediscover truth,
kindness, and unity.

May this year be one where peace
replaces confusion, love
overcomes division, and hope rises
again.

Wishing you a new year filled with
purpose, faith, and peace.

Praying for all of you Rebeca
Warmbo

head space or when you are trying to relax probably isn't the best idea.

4. Avoid dwelling on things you can't control – this is a tough one, BUT, if you are mindful & present, you can practice shifting gears and focus on something else
5. Take your own advice – what would you tell a friend if they came to you with a tough situation/question/scenario? Often times we tell ourselves one thing and our friends something else. Be a friend to yourself!
6. Engage in self-care – we've talked about this one in the past. Self-care is SO important and looks different for everyone but pick something that works for you. That could be prayer, exercise, meditation, getting enough sleep, making healthy eating choices, etc.

These last three are very important when struggling with uncertainty: seek support from those you trust (therapist, mentor, friend case manager, supervisor, chaplain), control what you can, ask for help!

Another article titled, **“7 Ways to Cope with Uncertainty and Feel More in Control**, According to a

Psychologist” that was published on Realsimple.com has some similar & different advice/technique When we don't have enough information about the future—when things are uncertain—it makes perfect sense to be anxious,& says clinical psychologist Amelia Aldao, PhD. & anxiety makes us worry, plan for scenarios. It increases our vigilance of our surroundings and engages the fight-or-flight response in case we need to defend ourselves physically,& its perfectly normal to feel anxious when things are uncertain.

Here are 7 ways to cope with uncertainty, according to the article (my favorites which I think are most helpful are in bold):

1. Identify & tune out unproductive worrying
2. Practice mindfulness
- 3. Develop habits and routines for a sense of control**
- 4. Focus on gratitude**
- 5. Seek out humor**
6. Don't rely on temporary distractions (denial, emotional eating, avoidance)
7. Accept what you can't control (once again, easier said than done)

I hope 2026 is filled with hope, courage and putting your best foot forward. A new year is an opportunity to reset, to recharge and reignite that spark for life. Stay safe & warm!

In partnership, Ms. B

