

# City-based prison ministry program wins national grant

By VAL HYMES  
For The Capital

The Annapolis-based Touchstones Discussion Project, an educational program operating nationally and internationally, has won a \$13,000 grant for its "humanizing" discussion groups inside prisons in Maryland.

Touchstones, co-founded and headed by Howard Zeiderman of Annapolis, encourages inmates to discuss ethical questions like those raised by classical texts from literature.

The United Thank Offering grant was awarded through the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland.

Mr. Zeiderman, a member of the faculty at St. John's College, explained that prisoners read and discuss a story like that from the Old Testament about God's order to Abraham to sacrifice his son, or a Chinese tale or a short selection from Malcolm X's writings.

"It humanizes them," said Mr. Zeiderman, "to realize that others will listen to their ideas; it encour-

ages mutual and self-respect."

He said the Touchstones grant will help to sustain a program for 300 men in Jessup and will provide materials, training and courses for other Maryland parishes.

One inmate said the discussions taught him to avoid automatically resorting to violence to resolve conflicts.

"In prison, almost everything else is negative," said Vaughn Barksdale, then 32. "Normally our disagreements would turn into fights, stabbings, that sort of thing."

Writer and MCIJ inmate Larry Bratt, in an article about Touchstones, wrote, "Our lives have been chaotic. The Touchstones idea of putting our thoughts and our lives in order became a new habit."

The grant also will free up time and materials to begin or continue the project in a jail in Charlottesville, Va., a penitentiary in central Florida, a rehabilitation unit in the Florida Keys, a South Florida prison, and as part of a prison ministry course in Episcopal

Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass.

"Perhaps the grant will encourage others to commit time or contacts or resources to prison work," Mr. Zeiderman said.

The Touchstones Discussions Project, founded in 1984 by Mr. Zeiderman and two other faculty members, has been successful for thousands of students in hundreds of schools across the country, in senior centers and homes, for job training and in pilot programs in Haiti, China and Gaza.

In 1995 Mr. Zeiderman began to try the discussions with 10 inmates as a volunteer at the Maryland House of Corrections in Jessup. Since then an estimated 600 to 700 inmates in MCIJ in Jessup have been involved in the discussions.

Mr. Zeiderman, a member of St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Annapolis, applied for the UTO grant through the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland and its Prison Ministry Task Force.

The Touchstones Project can be seen at [www.touchstones.org](http://www.touchstones.org).

## CALENDAR

### TOMORROW'S EVENTS

**THRIFT SHOP**, by St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 10 a.m., 1101 Bay Ridge Ave. Donations accepted. 410-268-2881.

**FLEA MARKET**, sponsored by Marjorie House, assisting homeless, recovering alcohol and drug abusers, 10 a.m.-dark, 520 Defense Highway. 410-573-1138.

**THRIFT STORE**, by Severna Park Center, 1-3:30 p.m., 714 Baltimore Annapolis Blvd. Donations accepted. 410-647-0976.

**DINNER THEATER**, "Moon Over Buffalo," Paragon Theatre Company, 6 p.m. dinner, 8 p.m. show, Trifles Restaurant, 1397 Generals Highway, Crownsville. 410-923-6600.

**FREE FRIDAY FLICKS**, family animated films shown under the stars, gates open 6 p.m., films begin at dusk, Kinder Farm Park, Severna Park 410-222-6115.

**UNEXPECTED PLEASURES CAFE**, open mike coffeehouse and teahouse, doors open at 7 p.m., Unitarian Universalist Church, 333 Dubois Road. 410-280-0488 or 410-266-8044.

**SPEAKER**, "Rediscovering the Human Spirit," in honor of Kunta Kinte Heritage Festival, hosted by Annapolis Baha'i Community, 7:30 p.m., Banneker-Douglass Museum, 84 Franklin St. 410-268-5776 or 410-626-1449.

**MUSICAL**, "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," by Talent Machine Company, 7:30 p.m., Key Auditorium, St. John's College, 60 College Ave. 410-956-0512.

**FRIDAY NIGHT SOCIAL**, presented by Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts and Annapolis Dance Academy, 7:30-9:30 p.m., Main Building Room 117, 801 Chase St. 410-268-5968.

**SOLOMON'S PORCH**, live music Christian coffeehouse. 7:30 p.m.

### TOMORROW'S MEETINGS

**CHEMICALLY DEPENDENT ANONYMOUS**, 410-2950-3009 for sites and times.

**NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS**, 800-317-3222 for sites and times.

**ALMOST 7:30 DEMOCRATIC BREAKFAST CLUB**, 7:45-9 a.m., O'Brien's Restaurant, 113 Main St. 410-757-1678.

**CHESAPEAKE MOTHERS' CENTER**, discussion groups, children welcome to attend with their mothers, 10:30 a.m.-noon, Education Building, First Baptist Church of Eastport, 208 Chesapeake Ave. 410-721-8519.

**OVEREATERS ANONYMOUS**, 6 p.m., Woods Memorial Presbyterian Church, 611 Baltimore Annapolis Blvd., Severna Park. 410-216-9444.

**INCEST SURVIVORS SUPPORT GROUP**, 7-8:30 p.m., Anne Arundel Medical Center Franklin and Ca-