

# **Criminal Justice Ministry**

## **Volunteer Resource Guide**



Diocese of Austin

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# Preface and Ministry Overview

## I. CATHOLIC CRIMINAL JUSTICE MINISTRY OVERVIEW.

**Welcome.** Whether you are a new or experienced volunteer, we hope you will find that the information within this manual will assist you and answer important questions you may have about serving in the Catholic Criminal Justice Ministry in the Diocese of Austin.

### A. Criminal Justice Ministry Mission

The Criminal Justice Ministry of the Diocese of Austin within the Secretariat for Life, Justice and Charity works collaboratively with 127 parishes, or faith communities, throughout the diocese, the other 14 dioceses in Texas, the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP), the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD), the Texas Legislature (specifically the House Committee on Corrections and the Senate Committee on Criminal Justice), local municipal and county law enforcement, and other law enforcement agencies throughout the diocese's geographical region.

The mission of the Criminal Justice Ministry is to promote Christ's love and forgiveness through assistance, education and social interaction to the incarcerated and their families and to help those returning from prison successfully reintegrate back into society by becoming productive citizens.

These efforts are formulated to reduce trauma within correctional facilities, reduce recidivism, and increase public safety by reducing violence in the community through a growth in faith and healing for offenders, ex-offenders, and their families.

A Catholic approach to the ministry begins with the recognition that the dignity of the human person applies to both victim and offender. It is in fact a fundamental principle guiding Catholic social justice ministry efforts.

In the USCCB document, *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, the bishops state "We are guided by the paradoxical Catholic teaching on crime and punishment: We will not tolerate the crime and violence that threatens the lives and dignity of our sisters and brothers, and we will not give up on those who have lost their way. We seek both justice and mercy. Working together, we believe our faith calls us to protect public safety, promote the common good, and restore community. We believe a Catholic ethic of responsibility, rehabilitation, and restoration can become the foundation for the necessary reform of our broken criminal justice system.

The Catholic community has a tremendous history and capacity to help shape the issues of crime and criminal justice in the United States. Few organizations do more to prevent crime or heal its effects than the Catholic Church. Through many committed individual Catholics, correctional ministry programs, parish outreach efforts, Catholic schools, diocesan peace and justice offices, community organizing projects, ex-inmate reintegration programs, family counseling, drug and alcohol recovery programs, and charitable services to low-income people, the Catholic community responds to criminal justice concerns in a wide variety of ways.

Catholic Criminal Justice Ministry volunteers bring peace and hope by providing pastoral services to those who are locked up in our prisons and jails. They also provide assistance and support to their families as well. The ministry does not stop there. Volunteers also reach out to the victims of crime and violence, as well as the families of law enforcement personnel; for crime and violence affect the entire Body of Christ in one way or another.”

## **B. Catholic Criminal Justice Ministry Volunteer Programs: Reaching Out to Offenders, Ex-Inmates, and their Families**

Volunteers reach out to prisoners and their families, offering help and hope to those caught up in crime and the criminal justice system. Just as victims of crime have a variety of needs, so do offenders, ex-inmates and their families, especially the children of offenders. The Catholic Church should not only have a strong presence in prisons and jails – where we Catholics work to meet the spiritual and emotional needs of inmates – but we should make special efforts to assist children left without the support of their incarcerated parent.

Catholic volunteers can serve in or assist prison ministry programs at the diocesan or parish levels in a variety of ways:

- Men and women volunteers can enter correctional units to visit offenders and provide spiritual counsel, conduct Communion services, RCIA or sacramental preparation programs, Bible studies, rosary sessions, divine mercy, Stations of the Cross, and other Catholic devotional programs.
- Volunteers can reach out to the families of inmates. Parish volunteers can mentor families caught up in the cycle of crime, children of incarcerated parents, assist with transportation for prison visitations, offer material assistance when income is lost because of the incarceration, and provide counseling (often through Catholic Charities agencies and other ministry programs).

- Volunteers are also needed to assist with re-entry programs for ex-inmates. Often the most difficult time for a former inmate is trying to reintegrate into his or her community.
- Parishes can assist in providing the spiritual, material, educational, counseling, and emotional assistance that the probation and parole system rarely provides.
- Perhaps the greatest challenge confronting the released offender is obtaining employment. Many private employers simply refuse to hire ex-offenders. Volunteers can assist these men and women in overcoming the barriers to employment in a number of ways, e.g., by providing counseling and instruction on their job-seeking efforts and by reaching out to employers in their communities.

### **C. How to Get Involved**

There are a number of different ways to serve in the criminal justice ministry, whether you intend to enter into prison or jail units to work directly with inmates or perhaps serve in a supporting role outside of correctional facilities. For the most part, religious volunteer service programs within correctional facilities will be under the jurisdiction of the unit's chaplaincy department. Accordingly, any volunteer activity of a religious nature, whether an existing or a new program, will require approval of the chaplain of the unit at which you wish to serve. An overview of guidelines for volunteer services within TDCJ units can be found in the section **Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Volunteer Training Information** on pages 10-11 in this manual and on the [\*TDCJ Volunteer Services web site\*](#).

Should you wish to serve in an existing program at the unit, you should first contact the coordinator of that program who should be able to assist you in obtaining the necessary approvals to join the program's volunteer organization. If you desire to implement a new program at a correctional facility, it is recommended that you first contact the diocesan [\*Office of the Criminal Justice Ministry\*](#) (CJM) for assistance and information concerning approval procedures at TDCJ and the unit. The diocesan CJM office can also help provide you with information concerning [\*existing programs\*](#) or the need for new programs at any unit in which you may have an interest in serving.

In addition, should your interest be in serving outside of correctional facilities, the diocesan CJM office can refer you to various social service ministry organizations at either the parish or diocesan level, depending on the nature and scope of the support services you intend to provide.

## II. CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS

### A. Types and Characteristics of Correctional Units – Federal, State & County

As in other states, correctional institutions in Texas are typically administered by federal, state, or county agencies.

**Federal Institutional Prisons:** All federal correctional facilities are operated by the U.S. Department of Justice: *Federal Bureau of Prisons* (Bureau). The Bureau was established in 1930 to provide more progressive and humane care for Federal inmates.

Today, the Bureau consists of 122 prisons (“institutions”), 6 regional offices, a Central Office (headquarters), 2 staff training centers, and 22 residential reentry management offices (previously known as community corrections offices). The Bureau is responsible for the custody and care of approximately 188,700 Federal inmates. Approximately 81 percent of these inmates are confined in Bureau-operated facilities, while the balance is confined in secure privately managed or community-based facilities and local jails.

The Bureau protects public safety by ensuring that Federal offenders serve their sentences of imprisonment in facilities that are safe, humane, cost-efficient, and appropriately secure. The Bureau helps reduce the potential for future criminal activity by encouraging inmates to participate in a range of programs that have been proven to reduce recidivism. Approximately 38,000 BOP employees ensure the security of Federal prisons, provide inmates with needed programs and services, and model mainstream values.

**State Institutional Prisons and Jails:** The Correctional Institutions Division (CID) of the *Texas Department of Criminal Justice* (TDCJ) is responsible for the confinement of adult felony and state jail felony offenders at its institutional prisons and state jails throughout the State of Texas. As of August 31, 2016, 147,053 offenders were incarcerated in TDCJ facilities, consisting of 134,547 prison offenders, 8,705 state jail offenders and 3,801 substance abuse felony punishment facility (SAFPF) offenders (*TDCJ FY 2016 Statistical Report*).

**Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD):** Pursuant to Senate Bill 653 passed by the 82<sup>nd</sup> Texas Legislature and signed by the Governor, the *Texas Juvenile Justice Department* (TJJD) was created on December 1, 2011 and the existing Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC) and Texas Youth Commission (TYC) were abolished. On December 1, 2011, operations of both

TJPC and TYC were transferred to the new TJJD and all references to TJPC and TYC were changed to the new name.

**County Jails:** *The Texas Commission on Jail Standards* (TCJS) is the regulatory agency for all county jails and privately operated municipal jails in the state. According to the TCJS' *Abbreviated Population Report for 4/01/2017*, the total population of inmates incarcerated in local jails and holding institutions was 64,258 as of the effective date of the report. Ministers and lay people interested in volunteering within a county jail or correctional complex should contact the chaplaincy program of that facility. Contact information can usually be obtained at each county's web site.

### **III. GUIDELINES FOR PRISON MINISTRY VOLUNTEERS**

#### **A. Understanding the Incarcerated – Characteristics and Backgrounds**

The backgrounds of the incarcerated, while varied, share a number of common characteristics:

- Many have not had a healthy family environment, may have been abused by one or more parent or older sibling, and thus are not open or receptive to trustful relationships.
- It is not uncommon for formal education to have been interrupted, scattered, minimal, or non-existent.
- For many who are incarcerated, their life experience has given them a very different sense of what life has to offer.

Many prison inmates have high rates of substance abuse, illiteracy, and/or mental illness. According to the Department of Justice, nearly two million people are behind bars, of whom:

- 24 percent are incarcerated for drug offenses, and nearly half were under the influence of drugs or alcohol when they committed the crime.
- 70 percent did not complete high school.
- As many as 200,000 suffer from some form of mental illness.

While the vast majority of inmates in the United States are men, the number of women being incarcerated has increased 600 percent since 1980, largely as a result of tougher drug laws. This rate of increase is higher than the rate of increase for men. Seventy percent of female inmates are non-violent offenders, and an equal number have left children behind, often in foster care, as they enter prison.

Just as African and Hispanic Americans are victimized at higher rates, so too, are they incarcerated at higher rates. For example:

- African Americans make up 12 percent of the U.S. population but represent more than 49 percent of prisoners in state and federal prisons. Nationally, one in ten African American males is in prison, on probation, or on parole.
- Based on current trends, it is estimated that 1 in 3 African American males will be imprisoned in their lifetime.
- 1 in 4 African American children has at least one parent in prison by the age of 14.
- 56% of children serving life sentences are African American.
- Hispanic Americans make up 9 percent of the U.S. population but 19 percent of prisoners in state and federal prisons.
- 2 out of 3 prisoners serving life sentences in the U.S. are African American or Hispanic.

Recent events demonstrate that many African, Hispanic, and Native Americans believe they are often treated more harshly than other citizens in their encounters with the criminal justice system (including police activity, the handling of juvenile defendants, and prosecution and sentencing). As a result, there is a widespread bias among these population groups that racism and discrimination continue to be reflected in the criminal justice system.

## **B. General Guidelines for Prison Ministry Volunteers**

Often when people think of prisons and inmates, the feeling is one of fear. Although this is a common response, it usually goes away after the first contact with inmates. There can be several reasons for this feeling of fear.

First of all, the media tends to portray inmates as monsters, and only the worst criminals are covered in the news, even though they are a minority.

Secondly, people may be afraid because they don't know what to say or do in prison. They feel uncertain about how inmates will respond to them as "outsiders."

Thirdly, people might be afraid that violence will take place while they are visiting, and that they might be caught up in it and even taken hostage.

It is important to separate the myth from reality. The media likes to focus on the sensational, not the ordinary. It is not likely that a volunteer will come face to face with a famous or dangerous criminal.

In general, it is easy to talk to inmates because most of them are very eager to talk to volunteers. For some who have experienced poor relationships, you might have to earn their trust, since they may be suspicious of your motives for visiting them. Try to learn and use their names. You might speak to them honestly by saying: I do not know very much about prisons. Please tell me what your day is like."

Many inmates are appreciative to have someone from the outside visit them. You may be surprised by how courteous they are toward you, and how grateful they are that you took the time and interest to visit them. Veteran volunteers will tell you that they seldom had a reason to be afraid in prison. Generally, you are surrounded by correctional officers.

All of us have sinned. It is just that inmates have sinned differently and more publicly since their sins have violated the laws of the state. Regardless of whether our sins are known or unknown, they violate God's law. Humbly realizing this helps us to relate more positively with them, and in turn, they can relate more positively with us.

The greatest compliment you can pay an inmate is to treat him or her with respect as a person created in the image of God.

### **C. Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Volunteer Training Information.**

Oversight and coordination of religious volunteer programs within TDCJ are under the jurisdiction of the Chaplaincy Department of the Rehabilitation Programs Division. The Chaplaincy Department provides a variety of morally enriched programs that encourage offenders to pursue their faith, reconcile relationships and strengthen their families. Within specific units, volunteers minister under the direct supervision of the unit chaplain.

Information and guidelines for volunteering at TDCJ units along with a *Handbook for Volunteers* can be found at the *TDCJ Rehabilitation Programs Division, Volunteer Services Program website*. As stated on the website, "*The role of the volunteer within TDCJ is to provide guidance in specific activities and programs, promote personal growth and development, provide support and assistance to victims and offenders, and help facilitate re-entry into the community.*"

Ministry in TDCJ units usually requires some kind of security application processing, including the completion of a volunteer application form, background checks, attending a TDCJ orientation session, training, and working with someone who has experience.

If you are interested in becoming an approved volunteer within TDCJ, you should first submit an application, which can be completed and printed on-line. A copy of the completed application should be faxed (if printed on-line) or mailed to TDCJ at the telephone number/address indicated on the application form. You will also need to attend a volunteer training orientation session, a schedule of which can be obtained on the TDCJ web site. The session typically last for approximately four (4) hours and is conducted at various TDCJ prison or jail units throughout the state. Attendance at an orientation session is required in order to become an approved volunteer within TDCJ.

All approved volunteers are further required to undergo retraining every two (2) years. To help meet this requirement, TDCJ offers on-line retraining for volunteers who have previously completed the on-site training. On-line retraining must alternate with on-site training every two (2) years.

Volunteers programs or services at TDCJ units must have prior approval before implementation or presentation to offenders. If you plan to start a new program at a TDCJ correctional facility, you must first submit a program proposal form to the rehabilitation Programs Division, which can be found on-line at the TDCJ Volunteer Services Program website. It is recommended

that you first discuss any new program with the Office of the Diocesan Criminal Justice Ministry, which may be able to assist you with its implementation. You will also need to obtain approval and coordinate implementation of the program with the chaplain of the unit at which you plan to introduce it.

#### **D. Guidelines for Dealing with Offenders**

The role of the correctional volunteer is to see the face of Christ in the incarcerated in response to his challenge: "I was in prison and you visited me" (Matthew 25:36). However, they should also keep in mind the other words of Christ: "Be wise as serpents but innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16). This is interpreted here to mean that the correctional minister must maintain a balance between seeing the face of Christ in inmates and calling them to face the Truth who is Christ, and the truth of their own lives whatever that might be.

##### **1. Ministerial Response to Inmates**

The correctional minister's purpose is to bring the Gospel message of love and salvation to the inmate. A minister may be put off by the behavior or the values of the inmate and might be tempted to judge and convey that judgment consciously or unconsciously to the inmate.

The response of the correctional minister needs to be positive and accepting at all times. This may be difficult and the wisdom and experience of a chaplain or supervisor may be invaluable at times to keep the focus on the ministerial function of the work. Some inmates may reject the minister outright; others may say harsh, demeaning words, and still others may become angry at a minister's efforts. With patience and understanding, he or she can realize where these responses are coming from and somehow continue with the ministry despite the rejection by some of the prison population.

##### **2. Trust and Honesty**

Guard your trust; give it sparingly and cautiously to the inmate. Give the inmate time with you, so you can learn who the person is and what values and attitudes the inmate may have. If you are comfortable with these, start to give your trust to the inmate, more as things are played openly with you. Talk with chaplains or supervisors if you are uneasy.

The same applies with your openness and honesty. Honesty should make your ministry more effective, encouraging inmates to embrace the gospel message. But be cautious about your level of openness, as some inmates may try to misuse it or criticize you to others, lessening your effectiveness with other inmates.

Sometimes the level of trust may increase if inmates know there is an aftercare program available to them and their families after their release from incarceration. An effective aftercare program should assist the previously incarcerated person and their family to grow in their personal and communal commitments to God's kingdom of peace and love through the Church. Such a program should be designed to assist and motivate the local church in its ministry to the released and their families and at the same time to minister directly to them.

Inmates need to know they will have assistance in the transition from jail/prison life to the free world; that resources will be available to them that preserve their dignity while providing needed help and support as they assume responsibility for their own lives and decisions. Chaplains and volunteers can convey to them the message that they and their families will have this help in their time of transition and re-integration.

### 3. Encouraging inmates to participate in your ministry

On the plus side, inmates can assist in the liturgy within the unit, e.g., do the readings at Mass, help organize Bible study and prayer groups, and carry the Gospel message to other inmates and sections of the unit to which the correctional minister may not have access.

Reasons to be cautious include:

- They probably have favorites and enemies among other inmates.
- They could be taken advantage of by an inmate for one's own end.
- Over-familiarity between the inmate and the minister could develop.
- The minister could be asked to do "special favors" for the inmate helper.

## **IV. VOLUNTEER SERVICE PROGRAMS WITHIN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES**

### **A. Catholic Service Programs – Providing Pastoral and Spiritual Support.**

#### **1. Pastoral and Worship Services.**

##### **a) The Sacraments.**

As Catholic ministers in correctional facilities, our greatest impact is our presence as a witness of God's unconditional love for all, especially those considered "outcasts from society." Many of the people we meet in our ministry feel alienated from God, their families, the community, and the Church. For the first time, many of the people we meet can have a positive experience of Church. This positive experience leads to a desire to participate more fully in the sacramental life that the Church has to offer. It is not uncommon, then, that requests come to the chaplain of a correctional facility for the celebration of the sacraments.

##### **b) Mass and/or Communion Services.**

As a general rule, Communion Services should be the exception and not the norm. To the extent possible, distribution of Holy Communion should be a part of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, i.e., the Mass. Unfortunately, the availability of priests to conduct Mass in correctional facilities is severely limited much of the time. As such, it is only through Communion Services that many inmates may receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Even so, it is highly preferable that such services be conducted by a deacon if one is available, and that they be performed in accordance with the guidelines set forth in the *Rite of Distributing Holy Communion Outside of Mass*.

It should also be recognized that for many inmates, Communion Services may be the only "Church" that they experience in their units and that not all in attendance will be baptized Catholics who have made their First Communion. As such, effort should be made to assure that those who receive Holy Communion are properly formed and disposed to do so (see following section).

##### **c) General Considerations for the Reception of Communion.**

It is not uncommon for both Catholic and non-Catholic inmates to attend Mass or Communion services conducted in correctional

facilities. Because sharing at the Eucharistic Table is a sign of unity in the Body of Christ, only those in communion with the Catholic Church should receive Holy Communion. To invite others present to receive Holy Communion implies a unity which does not exist. Therefore, all in attendance should be instructed on the following guidelines for the reception of Holy Communion.

On November 14, 1996, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (now the USCCB) approved the following *Guidelines for the Reception of Communion*. These guidelines replace those approved by the Administrative Committee of the NCCB in November 1986. The guidelines, which are to be included in missalettes and other participation aids published in the United States, seek to remind all those who may attend Catholic liturgies of the present discipline of the Church with regard to the sharing of Eucharistic Communion.

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### **FOR CATHOLICS**

*As Catholics, we fully participate in the celebration of the Eucharist when we receive Holy Communion. We are encouraged to receive Communion devoutly and frequently. In order to be properly disposed to receive Communion, participants should not be conscious of grave sin and normally should have fasted for one hour. A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord without prior sacramental confession except for a grave reason where there is no opportunity for confession. In this case, the person is to be mindful of the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, including the intention of confessing as soon as possible (canon 916). A frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance is encouraged for all.*

### **FOR OUR FELLOW CHRISTIANS**

*We welcome our fellow Christians to this celebration of the Eucharist as our brothers and sisters. We pray that our common baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit in this Eucharist will draw us closer to one another and begin to dispel the sad divisions which separate us. We pray that these will lessen and finally disappear, in keeping with Christ's prayer for us "that they may all be one" (Jn 17:21).*

*Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life, and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily not admitted to Holy Communion. Eucharistic sharing in exceptional circumstances by other Christians requires permission according to the directives of the diocesan bishop and the provisions of canon law (canon 844 §4). Members*

*of the Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Polish National Catholic Church are urged to respect the discipline of their own Churches. According to Roman Catholic discipline, the Code of Canon Law does not object to the reception of Communion by Christians of these Churches (canon 844 §3).*

### **FOR THOSE NOT RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION**

*All who are not receiving Holy Communion are encouraged to express in their hearts a prayerful desire for unity with the Lord Jesus and with one another.*

### **FOR NON-CHRISTIANS**

*We also welcome to this celebration those who do not share our faith in Jesus Christ. While we cannot admit them to Holy Communion, we ask them to offer their prayers for the peace and the unity of the human family.*

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#### **d) Reconciliation Services.**

The Sacrament of Penance (Reconciliation) is one of the greatest gifts the Catholic Church has to offer. Because of the nature of and reasons for their circumstances, participation in the Sacrament of Penance can be a powerful experience for many inmates and its effects can extend well beyond themselves individually to their relationships with others. Most inmates have probably had little opportunity to make a sacramental confession while incarcerated and for many, the period of time since doing so may be measured in years, if not decades. Since the sacrament can only be administered by a priest, accessibility to it in a correctional facility can be limited due to the unavailability of priests, as in the case of the celebration of Mass. We pray that through the work of the Holy Spirit, priests will in fact avail themselves to administer the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation to the men and women inmates in our correctional facilities.

#### **e) Prayer, Rosary, and other services.**

One of the favorite devotional items of Catholic inmates is the rosary, although many are unfamiliar with the prayers of and the purpose for praying the rosary – *to help keep in memory certain principal events or mysteries in the history of our salvation, and to thank and praise God for them.* Volunteers can be helpful in this regard by providing instructional literature or pamphlets that contain guidelines on the

various mysteries of and instructions on how to pray the rosary. In addition, volunteers can assist by leading the prayers of the rosary as a part of a prayer service or preceding or following a liturgical event.

Volunteers, e.g., parish rosary ministries, may also be of assistance by providing rosaries to the correctional facility's chaplaincy department for distribution to inmates. However, because there are strict policy guidelines governing the composite materials from which rosaries are to be made and their possession by inmates, care should be exercised that the policies governing such are adhered to by coordinating the provision of rosaries through the unit's appropriate governing agency and/or its chaplaincy department. Under no conditions, should volunteers provide rosaries directly to inmates without the prior knowledge and express approval of the correctional facility's chaplain.

Other forms of prayer services can be conducted at correctional facilities that have a positive effect on the inmates' spiritual lives.

## **2. Educational and Faith Formation Programs.**

### **a) RCIA programs in Correctional Units.**

Background. Most sacramental preparation programs in a parish setting assume that the person going through them has had some regular church contact, enjoys a degree of harmony and stability in their life and home, and possesses necessary learning skills and abilities. Many of those to whom we minister in a correctional facility do not enjoy such backgrounds. Consequently, the formation programs designed for the parish setting are not necessarily appropriate or even possible for the population we serve.

Prison initiation ministry is rarely easy and can at times pose serious logistical problems and challenges. Yet even though celebrated in a correctional institution, the rites of initiation can move hearts as deeply as they do in a parish church. You won't have all the advantages that a church offers: a spacious sanctuary, the participation of a large assembly, a rich environment highlighting the seasons of the year, and the generous use of symbols. Nonetheless, the initiation rites are fundamentally about interior conversion, and even when they are celebrated in meager surroundings, if the catechumen's intent is sincere, the celebration will move hearts.

The current widespread practice of preparation for the sacraments of initiation today is found in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. This approach is geared less toward teaching information; rather, the emphasis is formation. The catechetical approach used in the RCIA is lectionary-based and is meant to facilitate initiation into a faith community.

This approach could be perceived as both supportive and problematic for sacramental preparation in a correctional setting. It is supportive in that it is not uncommon for a chaplaincy program to have a faith-sharing dimension to the program that is lectionary-based, even though this aspect of the program may not be explicitly associated with the sacramental preparation of the inmate. Lectionary based faith sharing enjoys a long tradition in prison ministry that predates widespread use of RCIA and its lectionary-based formula in the parish.

The RCIA approach appears problematic in that the premise of its structure assumes a faith community. Many of those in correctional facilities have little or no history of association with a faith community. Their first and often only experience of a faith community may happen in the correctional setting with a chaplain or volunteer. There are many obstacles in a correctional facility that breed isolation and deter the development of community. Further, it is often unrealistic to expect that participation in a faith community will be sustained once one leaves the correctional setting. This being the case, the validity of sacramental preparation in a correctional setting could be questioned.

Theological Grounding & Church Teaching Perspective. This section attempts to justify this practice by looking to Scripture and Church teaching. According to Canon Law, as Christian faithful, we have a duty to see that those who seek the sacraments are prepared to receive them (C 843). Therefore, we should not take lightly one's request to celebrate these sacraments, even if they are detained.

It is no secret that Christ had a preferential love for those who are incarcerated. He identified Himself as one of them "... I was in prison and you visited me ..." (Mt. 25:36). He defined his mission as one to the incarcerated "... He sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives..." (Lk 4:18). "The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost." (Lk 19:10). His stories of the prodigal son, and the lost sheep among others, proclaim Christ's option for the outcast which those in detention surely are. Jesus, himself, endured arrest, trial, and sentencing just as those in detention have. The sacraments are a very

concrete way that we as Church can make Christ present to those with whom he clearly loves and identifies.

In his encyclical titled *Catechesi Tradendae*, Pope John Paul writes that in the early Church, formation for the sacraments of initiation and the catechumenate were the same thing (paragraph 3). In other words, catechesis as the process by which one prepares to celebrate the sacraments is a practice dating back to the early Church. He states that the definitive aim of catechesis is intimacy with Christ (paragraph 5).

In prison ministry our goal is to create intimacy between Christ and the inmate. It is not uncommon for an inmate to proclaim through the presence of a chaplain and volunteers, "I realized Jesus never forgot me." Regarding sacramental preparation as initiation into a faith community, Christ tells us that where two or three are gathered in his name, that he is also with them (Mt 18:20).

We are a faith-filled community of hope, and the primary purpose of our ministry is to create faith community with those to whom we minister. Sometimes the community formed is not perfect, but we live in faith that Christ through his presence makes it perfect. The development of a faith community in a correctional setting is achievable despite the challenges presented by a typical correctional setting. Such challenges make the presence of community much more miraculous. Its benefits are more appreciated. Community is at the heart of our ministry and thus makes the correctional setting an appropriate place to prepare for the celebration of the sacraments.

Additional Considerations. A decision to administer the sacraments should take into consideration the following questions:

- Has the inmate been baptized before? One must be baptized in order to receive the other sacraments. If the person has been baptized in the Roman Catholic tradition or another recognized Christian tradition, then that person cannot be baptized again. *If the person has been baptized Protestant, a Profession of Faith is necessary before celebration of the sacraments of First Eucharist and Confirmation.*
- Does the inmate come from a Catholic background and tradition?

Is his/her family Catholic? (Parents, spouse, etc...) How will this person's faith be nurtured upon release?

- How soon will the inmate be released? If the person is going to be released within a few months or weeks, serious consideration should be given to referring the inmate to a parish upon release. The ideal environment for celebrating the sacraments is the faith community of the local parish. If the person is anticipating a lengthy sentence, then that person's faith community in all practicality will be in the correctional environment. Every effort should be made to prepare one for the celebration of sacraments within the institution.
- What is the inmate's motivation to celebrate the sacraments now? Getting the inmate to express his/her motivation for the celebration of the sacraments is vital to helping him/her discern their preparedness. Does the inmate express an understanding of the nature of the sacraments and the obligations that accompany them? If the inmate comes from a Catholic background, why has that person not celebrated the sacraments before?
- Does the inmate show a desire to participate more fully in the life of the Church? Does the person participate in the programs offered by the chaplaincy? Does he/she attend Mass or Communion services and participate in the liturgy?

Every effort should be made to foster the faith development of God's people inside correctional facilities regardless of whether the sacraments are administered. Whether we decide to administer a particular sacrament for an inmate or not, we should keep in mind that our primary purpose through our presence is to communicate God's unconditional love and acceptance. *The Gospel calls us to be present to Christ in prison, not necessarily to help him make his First Communion.*

Volunteer support for conducting RCIA or Sacramental Preparation programs in correctional units, including program guidelines and content, can be obtained from the Diocese of Austin Criminal Justice Ministry office.

## **b) Scripture Study Courses.**

Scripture Study courses tend to be offered widespread among prison units by a variety of Christian faith traditions and are popular with inmates.

The study of Sacred Scripture should be practical in that it provides lessons for living the Christian life within the correctional facility; the study should allow the inmates to leave the sessions with ideas and practices that they can immediately implement in lives, given their particular circumstances and environment.

When possible, the selection of biblical passages should emphasize the reconciling and healing of the Christian community, including references to not only the inmate but also the victims of crime, the society and community in which the crime took place and the value of making amends to heal all the wounds of criminal behavior.

Study guides should be selected that reflect issues and lessons for life. The outlines and guides should be at an appropriate reading level for the inmates, and volunteers should be mindful of and sensitive to those inmates who cannot read.

#### **c) Catholic Faith Study Programs.**

There are a wide variety of faith formation programs available that are designed to introduce one to, expand one's understanding of, or strengthen one's faith in Christ and the Gospel. Depending on their content and scope, these programs can be offered in conjunction with an RCIA program, as part of a spiritual retreat, or to supplement liturgical services being conducted in a prison unit.

Information and recommendations for such programs can be obtained from the Department of Religious Education and the Criminal Justice Ministry of the Diocese or from the faith formation office of your parish. In all cases, care should be taken to assure that the contents, format, and objectives of the program to be undertaken are appropriate for use in a prison environment.

#### **d) Educational Assistance to Inmates.**

A common characteristic among many of the incarcerated is a lack of formal education. A large number of prison inmates are uneducated and many others are undereducated. For example, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice estimates that the average educational level achieved by inmates in TDCJ correctional facilities is that of the 8th grade.

Prison inmates as a group lack basic educational tools needed to successfully adapt to the economic, sociological and cultural dimensions of society. They need to develop the academic skills to process knowledge and information, skills that will allow them to contribute to a productive society. They need social skills that give them self-confidence and the ability to interact successfully with peers.

To help provide quality educational opportunities to this population group, the Windham School District (WSD) was established by the Texas Board of Corrections in 1969 as a separate and distinct entity from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. The WSD establishes and operates schools at various Texas Department of Criminal Justice facilities.

If you have teaching skills and are certified by the State Board for Educator Certification or eligible for permit, employment with WSD (full or part-time) would offer the opportunity for you teach literacy, life skills, vocational or post-secondary classes to eligible offenders incarcerated in the Correctional Institutions Division of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

### **3. Retreats and other Programs.**

#### **a) Catholic Retreat Programs – ACTS and other programs.**

The ACTS retreat program began from an outgrowth from the Cursillo retreat program with an intention to make the retreat more relevant to the needs of the parish, especially after the changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council. The stated mission of the ACTS retreat program is to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ among Catholic communities by promoting, consulting in, facilitating and coordinating ACTS Retreats.

Today, ACTS-like retreats are conducted in prison units throughout Texas under the direction of Kolbe Prison Ministries. Men from all over the area come to visit those in prison on a weekly basis. Books and other literature are brought into the units to help facilitate learning and understanding of the Catholic Faith. Many of the inmates open their heart to the word of God and begin to make a positive change in their lives. More information about ACTS retreats conducted in prison units can be found at the Kolbe Prison Ministry web site, <http://www.kolbeprisonministries.com>.

## **b) Non-Catholic/Ecumenical Retreat Programs – Kairos.**

One of, if not the most popular ecumenical retreat programs is that of the Kairos Prison Ministry. Kairos is an interdenominational Christian ministry whose programs are designed to be presented in correctional institutions. The purpose is to establish strong Christian communities among the correctional institutions.

The Kairos ministry program began in Florida in the fall of 1976 as an outgrowth of the Catholic Cursillo program, a three-day “short course in Christianity”. It was called Cursillo in Prison. The program was redesigned in 1979 to serve a broader prison faith population and renamed “Kairos,” Greek for “God’s Special Time”. The program is now called “Kairos Inside”.

In addition to the in-prison program there is the “Kairos Outside” program that ministers to the female family members of the incarcerated. A third Kairos program, “Kairos Torch”, was subsequently developed to address the spiritual needs of young people (25 and under) experiencing incarceration.

Today Kairos Inside, Kairos Outside and Kairos Torch volunteers serve in over 400 institutions and 55 KO communities in 35 states and 9 countries. More information about the Kairos Prison Ministry can be found at the [\*Kairos Prison Ministry International web site\*](#).

## **B. Counseling and Mentoring.**

### **1. Counseling.**

Counseling is designed to bring about some degree of constructive change in the relationships, behavior or functioning of individuals. In the criminal justice ministry, the counselor will sometimes respond in an evaluative way, sometimes supportive, sometimes probing for more information of discussion, and sometimes with a simple understanding response

Communication cannot happen until one becomes a listener. Counseling is mostly listening, allowing the inmate to talk and express feelings, and encouraging with minimal words on our part the expression of the inmate's inner feelings and providing the support he/she needs. In most correctional institutions, listening is a skill rarely practiced. Listening

requires a giving of oneself in the very act of receiving the gift of the other. To listen to a person is to warmly welcome his word and to exercise empathy and compassion.

One of the most basic skills for a counselor is listening without reacting along the lines of one's own problems or experiences. If our own life does interfere, it will prevent us from communicating our understanding and acceptance. Letting go of our world of experiences, joys, sorrows, concerns and cares, allows us to listen with complete attentiveness; it also allows us to listen without judging or evaluating.

Listening intelligently encourages the inmate to communicate with the volunteer counselor and share the troublesome areas of his/her life, and it also helps the counselor to relate to the inmate a true picture of the nature of that person's life difficulties. This can be done by giving feedback and interpretive responses to what the inmate has said.

## **2. Mentoring.**

Mentors are positive people by definition; it takes a positive person to give of one's self to help another learn, grow, and succeed. It has been said that a mentor is someone whose hindsight can become your foresight.

Characteristics of a good mentor include:

- A willingness to share your wisdom, knowledge, skills, and expertise.
- Has a positive outlook on life. Can help through tough times and show how to find opportunity in difficulties being faced.
- Demonstrates a genuine concern about others and their success. Both knowledgeable and empathetic.
- Competent in what you do; respected for your knowledge and skills.
- Always will to grow. A good mentors should be curious and inquisitive, both with respect to one's self and those being mentored.
- Expects high standards. Able to give direct, constructive feedback on the achievement of one's expectations or not.
- Respected by one's colleagues. Highly regarded in one's field of expertise or company.

- Seeks out and values the opinions of others, including those with whom you may disagree.

### **3. TDCJ Mentoring Program.**

TDCJ permits approved volunteers to be matched with offenders to establish mentoring relationships. The goal of the TDCJ mentoring program is to establish a trusting relationship with accountability and responsibility from the mentor and mentee. The focus of the mentoring program is on the rehabilitative needs of the offender (not the spiritual needs of the mentor) using a continuum of care creating a growing, healthy relationship.

To become an approved mentor in a TDCJ unit, you must be an approved volunteer and complete the *TDCJ Chaplaincy Mentor Training course* on the TDCJ website. Approved TDCJ volunteers who successfully complete the course will meet the requirements to serve as a volunteer mentor under the direction of a unit chaplain.

## **V. VOLUNTEER SERVICES OUTSIDE OF CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES.**

### **A. Providing assistance to the families of the incarcerated.**

The consequences of incarceration affect not only the individual offender, but their families as well. When a man or woman of a family is incarcerated, the impact on the rest of the family can be devastating. Incarceration is not a planned activity, so the consequences are typically sudden and traumatic. In many cases, the primary or substantial provider of economic support for the family unit is gone from the scene and the remaining spouse (who may not be employed at the time) has to immediately step in. This can be especially challenging for women with young children or the pregnant wife.

Because of the perceived stigma associated with being a spouse of someone recently incarcerated, it is not uncommon for them to disengage from the local parish community out of a sense of shame. This is unfortunate in a number of ways since as a result, significant resources may be foregone that could provide much needed material, emotional and spiritual support. Parish social ministries can help avert these instances by making known through parish and other advertising media the availability of assistance to families of the incarcerated. This should be an on-going program effort and not simply responsive to individual circumstances. That said, upon learning of a situation involving the incarceration of a family member, the parish

through the pastor or other representative should proactively reach out to the family in an offer of support and encouragement rather than wait for the family to contact the parish.

In addition, it is important that parish (and perhaps diocesan) ministries along with local support agencies communicate with one another in providing support services so that certain needs may not be overlooked to the detriment of the family or the spouse.

## **B. Providing reintegration assistance for ex-inmates.**

### **1. Employment.**

Reentering society from incarceration is an extremely difficult task for most. The hurdles individuals face are varied and formidable. Two of the most persistent barriers resulting from arrest and incarceration are unemployment and underemployment. Without a job or the help of family, it is virtually impossible for ex-offenders to support themselves and their families. Consequently, feeling rejected by the society they wish to reenter, many return to their former criminal lifestyle as a means of survival.

#### **a) Job skills training and placement.**

One factor that leads to the difficulty ex-offenders experience in obtaining employment can be attributed to a lack of marketable job skills and/or a lack of ability of the ex-offender to effectively present him/herself to a prospective employer. Volunteers can be especially helpful in assisting the formerly incarcerated by teaching them how to prepare resumes, how to improve communication and interview skills, and how to best present one's self to a prospective employer. This could be a ministry effort at the parish or inter-parish level that not only strives to assist ex-offenders, but others in their community who have difficulty obtaining employment due to a lack of such skills.

#### **b) Engaging Employers in the Local Community.**

Reentry employment is a daunting task without the presence of employers that are openly willing to hire ex-offenders. The ability to establish long-lasting, trust-based relationships between service providers and employers is essential to removing the employment barrier for those striving to reenter the workforce. Typical reasons cited by employers that give rise to their unwillingness to hire ex-offenders tend to be based on fear and/or legal liability concerns. Strategies for

successfully overcoming the former can perhaps best be educational or knowledge-based. In other words, communicating to employers positive reasons for hiring ex-offenders, such as increased loyalty and commitment to work.

The Criminal Justice Ministry of the Diocese of Austin in conjunction with the Communication Division of Travis County developed a *video presentation* for use in educating local employers on the benefits and reasons for hiring ex-offenders. The same approach could work well in mitigating liability concerns employers may have as to hiring ex-offenders, since county or state agencies have enacted ordinances providing for the limitation of employer liability when hiring ex-offenders. The key is to inform employers in the local community of such.

## **2. The need for material (transportation, housing, clothing, identification, financial) and spiritual support.**

Other critical needs for those reentering society after a period of incarceration include housing, transportation, identification, clothing, and financial support. Many ex-offenders attempt to reenter society with no other possessions than the clothes on their back at the time of their release.

The focal point of assisting the formerly incarcerated with meeting these needs can perhaps best be found at the parish level. While few parishes can provide housing resources, social ministry volunteers can offer referral assistance to direct those in need to at least temporary housing support. They can also provide assistance through their various social service ministries, e.g., St. Vincent DePaul Society or the Knights of Columbus, to help ex-offenders with their transportation, clothing and food needs, and obtain proper forms of identification.

By assisting formerly incarcerated individuals in meeting these critical needs upon their release, the chances for their successful reentry and reintegration into society is exponentially increased. On the other hand, without such support, the likelihood of recidivism is substantially more probable.

In addition to providing material assistance, volunteers can play a key role by providing spiritual support to the formerly incarcerated, the importance of which should not be underestimated. Many, if not most, offenders lose to a certain degree their sense of self-worth or dignity as a result of their

incarceration. In a number of instances, husbands and wives divorce, and families are torn apart. Despite the "tough-guy" appearance they tend to project, those who suffer these auxiliary consequences of their incarceration internally bear the blame and guilt for their past actions.

Parishes need to be proactive in reaching out to the formerly incarcerated to re-engage these individuals in the faith community. By way of example, this can be done by inviting someone to attend a parish retreat or joining a particular ministry, or perhaps simply by extending a welcoming hand.

Volunteers can and do make a very positive difference in other peoples' lives. What can be more important than offering your time and efforts to help someone in need?

**"FOR I WAS IN PRISON AND YOU VISITED ME." (MT 25:36)**

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## **VI. VOLUNTEER RESOURCES.**

### **a. Diocese of Austin.**

Whether you are new to the ministry or a seasoned volunteer serving in the geographical boundaries of the Diocese of Austin, you are encouraged to coordinate your Catholic services ministry program through the Office of the Criminal Justice Ministry of the diocese, which can be found at <http://www.austindiocese.org/offices-ministries/offices/criminal-justice-office>.

The Office of the Criminal Justice Ministry (CJM) can assist you in identifying both **existing** and needed ministry programs at prison or jail units throughout the diocese, and provide or direct you to diocesan resources that can be used in your ministry. In addition, the Office of the CJM can offer **volunteer training** in conjunction with the Office of Evangelization and Catechesis, and help coordinate your interaction with other diocesan offices and ministry organizations should the need arise.

### **b. Other Web Sites and Links.**

#### **Texas Catholic Correctional Ministers**

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

A state-wide web site that provides information and resources that may assist you in your ministry and answer important questions about how to locate and contact various related Catholic ministries in your area that may need your help as a volunteer or that can provide assistance if you are in need.

#### **United States Conference of Catholic Bishops**

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

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is an assembly of the hierarchy of the United States and the U.S. Virgin Islands who jointly exercise certain pastoral functions on behalf of the Christian faithful of the United States.

#### **U.S. Department of Justice**

[www.bjs.gov](http://www.bjs.gov)

Department of Justice Statistics.

#### **Texas Catholic Conference**

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

The primary purpose of the Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops is to encourage and foster cooperation and communication among the dioceses and the ministries of the Catholic Church of Texas.

**Texas Department of Criminal Justice**  
[www.tdcj.state.tx.us](http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us)

Locate prison units; locate offenders and gain information about incarceration, parole, and death row. Information from the Volunteer Services Division on becoming a volunteer qualified to enter TDCJ prison and jail units.

**Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (TCJC)**  
<http://texascjc.org>

The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (TCJC) advances solutions that transform the adult and youth justice systems to strengthen families and foster safer communities.

**Death Penalty Coalition**  
<http://tcadp.org/>

Locate information about opposing the death penalty in Texas.

**Bridges to Life**  
[www.bridgestolife.org](http://www.bridgestolife.org)

A faith-based nonprofit corporation with a primary mission to reduce crime by reducing the recidivism rate of released inmates.

**Murder Victim Families for Reconciliation**  
[www.mvfr.org](http://www.mvfr.org)

Families who have had a loved one killed but oppose the death penalty. Opt for forgiveness.

**Hope for Everyone**  
[www.hopeforeveryone.com](http://www.hopeforeveryone.com)

Helping prisoners, parolees, ex-convicts, families of prisoners who suffer with them, victims of crime, the home-bound, people in nursing homes and hospitals.

**Restorative Justice Ministry Network**  
[www.rjmntexas.net](http://www.rjmntexas.net)

The mission of the Restorative Justice Ministry Network is to network with individuals and organizations to collaborate in creating and implementing Biblical solutions to the Criminal Justice field: criminal offenders, ex-offenders, victims, criminal justice professionals, and the families of each group.

**The Dismas Magdalene Project**  
[www.dismasministry.org](http://www.dismasministry.org)

A national organization providing serious structured in-prison Catholic brotherhood & sisterhood.

**Prison Fellowship**

[\*www.prisonfellowship.org\*](http://www.prisonfellowship.org)

In-prison ministry network.

**No More Victims**

[\*www.nomorevictimsincglobal.org\*](http://www.nomorevictimsincglobal.org)

Information about children of people who are incarcerated.

**Former Offender Reentry**

[\*www.reentry.org\*](http://www.reentry.org)

Find information about the issues that face former offenders when they are released from prison or jail.

**Justice for All**

[\*www.jfa.net\*](http://www.jfa.net)

Information about victims of crime and violence.

**PNCEA Catholic Prison Ministries**

[\*http://www.pemdc.org/ministries/prison-ministry.aspx\*](http://www.pemdc.org/ministries/prison-ministry.aspx)

PNCEA Catholic Prison Ministries

**Texas Inmate Family Association**

[\*http://tifa.org\*](http://tifa.org)

Strengthening families who have a loved one in prison through support, education, and advocacy.

**Prison Entrepreneurship Program**

[\*http://iwasinprison.com/\*](http://iwasinprison.com/)

A Houston-based nonprofit organization that connects the nation's top executives, MBA students and politicians with convicted felons to provide solutions for reformed inmates who thrive on challenge and accountability.

**Prison ACTS Retreat Ministry**

[\*www.kolbepisonministries.com\*](http://www.kolbepisonministries.com)

ACTS retreats have enriched the lives of hundreds of thousands of men and women, both Catholic and non-Catholic, in the USA and beyond. Today, men have begun to host ACTS retreats in prison units throughout the state and continue to visit those in prison on a weekly basis to help facilitate learning and understanding of the Catholic faith.

**Catholic New Creation**

[\*http://catholicnewcreation.org\*](http://catholicnewcreation.org)

Catholic New Creation, Inc. provides highly structured faith-based nonprofit transitional living facilities, dedicated to rebuilding the lives of Christian men coming out of TDCJ prisons state-wide and Harris County and surrounding county jails.

**Seedling Foundation**

[\*www.seedlingfoundation.net\*](http://www.seedlingfoundation.net)

The Seedling Foundation is an Austin-based non-profit that responds to the needs of public schools in Travis County by providing resources, assistance and programming. Their activities include a school-based mentoring program for children of incarcerated parents.

**International Network of Prison Ministries**

[\*http://www.prisonministry.net/\*](http://www.prisonministry.net/)

Prison ministry resources.

**Kairos Prison Ministry International**

[\*http://kpmifoundation.org\*](http://kpmifoundation.org)

Kairos Prison Ministry International, Inc. is an ecumenical Christian-faith-based ministry which addresses the spiritual needs of incarcerated men, women, youth, and their families.

**Kairos of Texas**

[\*http://kairostexas.org/\*](http://kairostexas.org/)

Kairos of Texas operates as a state chapter of Kairos Prison Ministry International, Inc. and serves in TDCJ prison and jail units throughout Texas.

**Knights of St. Dismas**

[\*www.knightsofstdismas.com\*](http://www.knightsofstdismas.com)

Knights of St. Dismas is a prison ministry for families and their jailed loved ones in the Connally Unit in Kenedy, Texas.

**National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated**

[\*http://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu/\*](http://nrccfi.camden.rutgers.edu/)

NRCCFI at FCN is the oldest and largest organization in the U.S. focused on children and families of the incarcerated and programs that serve them.