

Prison Ministry in Your Region

Due to the pandemic, volunteer services have been suspended at prison units and jails across the country. It calls for us to be creative in finding ways to engage our members to serve this community.

1. **Zoom Discussion.** Consider having your region watch one of the following **movies** that addresses race and the criminal justice system. Have a Zoom discussion with facilitators to talk about the movies. ([Discussion materials for each are attached](#)).
 - a. *13* Available on Netflix- a documentary on how the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which prohibits slavery, affects our criminal justice system today.
 - b. *Just Mercy* Available on You Tube- The story of one lawyer's work to exonerate a wrongfully convicted man and how that led to the formation of *The Equal Justice Initiative*.

2. There are outstanding **webinars, town halls, and discussion panels** that provide programs several times a month on prison ministry, criminal justice, restorative justice. Most of the programs are recorded, so any interested members can watch them if they miss the live broadcast.
 - a. Catholic Prison Ministry Coalition- catholicprisonministries.org
 - b. Catholic Mobilizing Network- catholicmobilizing.org
 - c. Georgetown Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life- catholicsocialthought.georgetown.edu

3. Two of my favorite **resources for information and stories** about prison life and data about prisons are:
 - a. The Marshall Project (themarshallproject.org)- This is a group of journalists who focus exclusively on prisons and criminal justice issues. They know what questions to ask and where to look. It is secular in nature, and yet every story is rich with the themes of justice, mercy, and redemption. Their stories come out weekly.
 - b. The Prison Policy Initiative (prisonpolicy.org)- If you want raw data, statistics, or charts on prisons and the criminal justice system, this is a good place to look.

4. If you are looking for a **good book**, I suggest:
 - a. *Getting Life*, by Michael Morton. He was an ordinary guy who was wrongfully convicted of killing his wife in a brutal murder. He spent 25 years in prison. His story captures what life on the inside is like and how hard it is to get an erroneous conviction set aside. It is a compelling story told by one who is not a criminal.
 - b. *Just Mercy*, by Byron Stevenson. This is also a compelling story, but it is told from the perspective of the lawyer fighting to free an innocent man. It exposes the systemic racism that is such a significant part of our criminal justice system.
 - c. *American Prison*, by Shane Bauer. An investigative reporter gets a job as a corrections officer in a privately operated prison in Louisiana. It is a fascinating glimpse into the culture of working in a prison. It is also fascinating to see what an incredibly stressful working environment a prison is. We need to keep correctional officers in our prayers.

5. **Prayers.** This is the one portion of prison ministry that is accessible to all. Attached are some **petitions for prayers** ([attached](#)) to include in your local masses, and some prayers that are suitable if your region hosts a prison ministry function.

6. **Pen Pal Program.** We always seem to be looking for volunteers. Consider setting a goal in your region to get a certain number of volunteers. Also consider hosting a gathering for the volunteers to share their experiences. This is an activity that is solitary in nature and if the experience would be enriched if volunteers shared their stories of success and challenge from time to time. Many volunteers have pals that are not very responsive, and others have rich stories to share. We should hear their stories. Encourage **new candidates** to become a pen pal in their time of formation.

7. **Advocacy.** The Order does not, as an entity, engage in advocacy. However, members are individually encouraged to speak up in the public forum. Two outstanding opportunities for those interested are:
 - a. Catholic Mobilizing Network- catholicsmobilizing.org. Their call is to oppose the death penalty and promote restorative justice. They make it easy to take action now.

- b. The Innocence Project- (innocenceproject.org) This is probably the most effective advocacy group in securing the release of those who are actually innocent, usually through the use of DNA.