



Pen Pal Program Guidance

Dear Prison Pen Pal Participant and those considering participation,

Thank you for your interest in our prison pen pal program. In writing, we, in a way, are “visiting” someone in prison, as our Lord asked us to do. Most of the individuals we write to are broken; they come from extremely rough backgrounds and have been involved with drugs and/or alcohol. Many are under-educated and some are in need of mental health assistance. They are truly some of the least among us who, had they had the upbringing and opportunities that we have had, in all likelihood would not be incarcerated. As Pope Francis said to prisoners he visited at the Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility in Philadelphia:

“I know it is a painful time not only for you, but also for your families and for all society. Any society, any family, which cannot share or take seriously the pain of its children, and views that pain as something normal or to be expected, is a society “condemned” to remain hostage to itself and prey to the very things which cause that pain. I am here as a pastor, and above all as a brother, to share your situation and to make it my own. I have come so that we can pray together and offer our God anything that causes us pain, but also anything that gives us hope, so that we can receive from him the power of resurrection.”

The prison pen pal program is one of hope; it serves several purposes: it provides information about current events and things the inmate is interested in (information one does not readily get inside the walls); it helps instill a positive attitude due to hopeful messages we send; and, most importantly it tells the inmate someone cares. This latter point cannot be stressed enough since for many inmates no one writes or visits them.

Study show that corresponding with the incarcerated reduces the recidivism rate, which says, we are saving some souls. Below are several excerpts from letters we have received that capture the importance of our work.

“Thank you for writing me, it means a lot to know you care about me. I haven’t wrote you because a lot of things have been going on and I’ve been moving around to various prisons. It’s been crazy period... Well, thank you again for praying and writing me it means a lot...”

“How are you doing. I received a letter back from you guys and I am very happy about that ... It would be awesome to be put on your pen pal list that would be excellent to have the opportunity to meet fellow Catholics. So I really appreciate what you guys offer and do for people behind wall thank you very much. I can’t wait to hear back from you and have a wonderful day God bless.”

“Thank you so much for responding to my letter so quickly. I’m in a state prison camp and we have a small group of about 15 Catholics here and basically we have nothing as far as Catholic leadership. I am very happy to hear that you have a pen pal program. I sure could use that! Please send me anything you have, and thanks for writing me back. You really made my day today. (Smile)”

“I write you because I am attempting for the first time in my life to “let go and let God! “. All the while, hoping and praying that he (God) will not only renew my spirit but also my mind as well.”

It is important that all participants become aware of what is entailed in writing to an inmate. To this end, we are providing information (Items 1-5) about the program and importantly the dos and don'ts. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact your pen pal Coordinator or Mike McGarry (jmichaelsmv@gmail.com) or Collins Whitfield (tyrannus@gmail.com). (See the prison ministry link in our Federal Association's web-site and go to Regional Activities which will identify the prison ministry contact in your region. If your region is not listed contact Mike or Collins).

Item one is a blank letterhead. Participants are encouraged to print this out and use it for their correspondence. It is handy for everyone to have the safe address in plain sight. Other blank paper can be used.

Item two is a brief description of the process. A member/volunteer writes directly to the inmate at the prison/jail address. The DC Malta Office is given as the return address on the upper left hand portion of the front of the envelope. The inmate's reply is sent to the DC Malta Office. The DC Malta Office maintains a spreadsheet matching inmates with member/volunteer writers (and their pen names if any). The DC Malta Office forwards the inmate's letter to the member/volunteer writer.

Item three consists of three pages of Program Guidelines that we ask all member/volunteer writers to read and return a signed copy to the DC Malta Office, Attention pen pal program.

Item four is a two-page letter and form we send to perspective inmates, the purpose of which is to inform the inmate of our program, of what is expected, and to elicit some general information about the inmate that can aid in identifying discussion topics.

Item five provides several sample letters to give member/volunteer writers an idea of how to begin the correspondence.

We thank you for your interest in our Pen Pal Program.