

Prison Ministry is a core component of Christ's Proclamation of the Kingdom of God!

In his first sermon to the people in Nazareth, Jesus proclaimed that he had come to set the prisoners free (Luke 4:18). In Matthew 25: 35-39, we learn that one of the ways in which we encounter Christ on earth is when we visit the prisoner.

At Calvary, we hear Christ's promise to Dismas, "the good thief," "Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23.43). The only person guaranteed a place in heaven is a tried, convicted and executed criminal. Jesus was truly "tough on crime": he conquered it through forgiveness and compassion, offering restoration and redemption. He brought into the world the divine balance between justice and mercy. This is a challenging reality for us to understand, let alone live out. But it is at the heart of the Gospel message for the salvation of a broken world. (Fr. Ted Hughes former CSC Prairie Regional Chaplain, June 28th 2015)

Jesus himself was a crucified prisoner, for us and for our salvation. St. Paul did ministry in prison as a "Prisoner of Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 3:1, 4:1; Philemon 1:1), while he was incarcerated in Rome.

During his pontificate, Pope Francis has written and talked about how we are to serve our imprisoned brothers and sisters and has shown us how to do so by personally going into prisons around the world to meet with the male and female inmates. Each Holy Thursday, Pope Francis also goes to a prison where he takes time to demonstrate the mercy of God by washing and kissing the feet of prisoners.



Where we can visit and serve the 'incarcerated Jesus' in the Diocese of Prince Albert?

Within the Prince Albert Diocesan boundaries, there are Young Offender Centers, Provincial Men's and Women's Correctional Centers, Community Training Residences and Camps, Federal Men's Prisons and Aboriginal Healing Lodges. There is Provincial Probation Services, Fine Option, Victim Services, Federal Parole Services, etc. Plus, many community organizations that work to build up our community by preventing and reducing the root causes of crime and recidivism, i.e. poverty, addictions, mental health, sexual abuse, unemployment, etc. And we must not forget, the hundreds of men and women who faithfully live out their Christian faith in the world as employed staff and support people for these many government/community service organizations.

Currently, the Catholic Diocese of Prince Albert has Catholic Chaplains and chapel volunteers engaged in prison ministry at Men's Provincial Correctional Centers, Saskatchewan Penitentiary, with Parkland Restorative Justice Ministries of Person-to-Person Visitation Programs and Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA), and with parish volunteers who escort inmates to Mass on Sunday mornings.

More volunteers are always needed: to take security cleared inmates to Mass on Sundays, to participate in our Sunday Catholic Chapel Services and Catechism Studies, to join the Person-to-Person Visitation program, or to become a pen pal. Above all, prayers are always needed for those who are incarcerated and their families, for the guards/staff and their families, and for all who minister to them.

If you have heard the call to visit Jesus in prison, you have looked deep within yourself and recognise your own need for God's mercy and forgiveness. Contact your parish priest, the Diocesan office, or one of the Chaplains in your area to inquire about how to become involved in prison ministry.

The Chaplain's contact information and other information on prison ministry can be found on the Diocesan website at <http://www.padiocese.ca/diocesan-programs19/prison-ministry.html>



The Holy Year of the Jubilee of Mercy is coming to end but our call to be merciful is not. Over the past year, we have perhaps broadened our understanding of mercy and now see it in a new light. This time of reflection has led us to question ourselves – can we truly love without being merciful?

At all times, loving our brothers and sisters in Christ requires that we be merciful as we are imperfect beings. This is very apparent and especially necessary when we are confronted with individuals who occupy our prisons or with individuals who have a criminal record in our communities, maybe even in our families. In the news, we hear regularly of people being charged with wrong doings, leading to trials and to judgement. On occasion, the person is acquitted. However, it seems more often than not the person is found guilty and receives sentencing. I sometimes ask myself, how did this person get to this place in life? Did they have opportunities to correct their behaviour and to make necessary changes? Did he or she have a positive family experience of a home filled with love and forgiveness? Many of the offenders serving time in our jails and prisons are quite often young. This breaks my heart. What can I do? What can you do?

Continued on next page..

PRAYER FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

God our Father, God of Mercy, God of Forgiveness,
Open our hearts to the needs of our prisoners.
Help us recognize their longing for unconditional friendship.
Give us the courage to forgive them as you do and to help them
Successfully reintegrate into our communities.
God our Father, God of Patience, God of Wisdom,
Open our hearts to the workers and professionals
Who care for our brothers and sisters in prison.
Help us recognize the patience and wisdom they demonstrate
in their attempts to respect the human dignity of all inmates.
Help us to encourage and support them in their chosen vocation.
God our Father, God of Love, God of Compassion,
Open our hearts to the victims and families of our prisoners.
Help us recognize the wounds and pain they suffer.
Help us lend a hand so they may heal, forgive and grow in love.
This we ask you through Jesus Christ your Son
in unity with the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

About one of our volunteers...



Sister Aline Couture is a warm, compassionate presence among her "boys" at the local penitentiary in Prince Albert. She prays the rosary with them, teaches them how to follow the Mass, and helps them to get involved in the liturgy. When asked about her ministry among the inmates she says: "I feel a part of them... I can't call them inmates; they're my boys! Just being with them is the greatest blessing for me. At first I was a bit afraid, but now it's my second home! They're at ease with me and they feel that I'm part of them."

In Matthew's Gospel, we read, "When I was in prison, you came to visit me" (Matt. 25). Fulfilling the service of a corporal work of mercy by visiting someone in prison may not be an easy task for us, but we need to focus on the needs of the one confined. This person is more than likely angry at society and, when we visit them, we often represent that society to which they are angry. Their anger breeds despair and as Christians, we are called to counter that state of being by bringing a message of hope that God loves them, that He is at their side always waiting to be invited into a relationship through Jesus Christ who offers eternal salvation. As Church, as disciples of Christ, it our mission to share His message with all his children, wherever they may be.

In some communities, building more prisons is becoming necessary but incarceration alone is not dealing with the issue. Poverty, addiction, and broken family homes are but a few of the reasons why some people find themselves in the penal system. What can we do, Church or society, to diminish this reality? Often, we are so busy treating the symptoms that we completely miss the actual reasons of affliction. We too sit in judgement. We need to meet with these lost children of God and listen to their stories on an individual basis. We need to discover why and how our brothers and sisters in Christ have become dysfunctional so that we may offer support and provide a new path in life, a path filled with God's mercy, love, and peace, transforming their lives and ultimately healing the broken parts of our world.

Where does this change start if not in our own families, in our own communities? Let us begin by rebuilding family life for our children and our grandchildren through a relationship with Christ. Let the change continue by building bridges and by opening doors in our neighbourhoods, churches, and cities, being forgiving and 'Merciful like the Father.' This year, **Restorative Justice Week is November 20-27**. I encourage each parish and each individual to reflect on how they can become a beacon of hope to those in need. Our parishes are to be havens of the love and mercy of God. Jesus is there, in our prisons, waiting to be visited.

On **November 20, 2016, 3:00pm** at **Sacred Heart Cathedral in Prince Albert**, we celebrate **the conclusion to the year of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy**, a year that has helped us to open eyes and our lives to the beauty of God's love as we follow Jesus as our mentor and as our Saviour. Join us in celebration and together may our Family of Families' legacy be one of Mercy.

*Most Rev. Albert Thévenot M. Afr.
Bishop of Prince Albert*

Prison Ministry



Roman Catholic Diocese of Prince Albert Our Church is a Family of Families



1415 - 4th Avenue West
Prince Albert, SK S6V 5H1
Phone: 306-922-4747
www.padiocese.ca