

Final Report

Archdiocese of Indianapolis Prison Ministry Task Force

Submitted to Archbishop Tobin
August 29, 2016

There are some who live a few blocks or miles from our churches, sometimes in jails, sometimes in prisons, and sometimes in transitional-housing facilities that offer shelter and support. “Church” for these men and women is generally now an unknown territory due to their incarceration. The prison system that shapes so many lives outside our churches is mostly invisible to our congregations, leaving a chasm between the incarcerated and our congregations.

The reasons the chasm exists are many: fear, misunderstandings, and lack of communication and coordination. However, this Year of Mercy provides a special opportunity to reflect and act on both the corporal and spiritual works of mercy as they relate to this population.

One of the last stops on Pope Francis’s visit to the United States was to the Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility in Philadelphia to speak to about 100 prisoners and family members. He told them “I am here as a pastor, but above all as a brother, to share your situation and make it my own.” The Pope used John 13:1-17, sharing the image of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, and he noted that though we take different paths, we all need to be cleansed by Jesus. “He doesn’t ask where we have been. He doesn’t question what we have done. Rather, he tells us, ‘Unless I wash your feet, you have no share with me.’” The Pope assured the audience of their divine worth and their need to keep walking with Christ, despite their incarceration. And he reminded all present that rehabilitation is the responsibility of all society, from corrections workers, to those in communities outside prisons, to the prisoners themselves.

The Process:

Appointed by Archbishop Tobin, the task force represented people from across the Archdiocese who brought significant depth and breadth of experience and passion to the discussion. Attendance at meetings was extremely high and very engaged. Archbishop Tobin and Chancellor Mickey Lentz were always available to offer support and clarification. Their engagement and prayerful support was felt and appreciated. The task force met regularly over the course of six months, beginning in February 2016. The task force initially focused on building consensus on the vision and mission. From there, goals were determined and formed working groups formed. The working groups met both in person and by conference call as appropriate. Best practices were researched and shared among the task force members. Additionally, throughout the process, members shared and actively engaged with working documents electronically.

This report represents the informed, thoughtful, and prayerful input, insights, and recommendations from the task force for proposed steps forward.

Key areas include:

- Background
- Vision/Mission
- Recommendations, timelines, action steps
 1. *Awareness and education* in Catholic social justice teaching concerning the criminal justice system
 2. Ministry to persons *in prison*
 3. Ministry to persons in *re-entry*
 4. Involvement/opportunities with supporting ministries
 5. Resource allocation
- References

BACKGROUND

Facilities and Data:

The most current Indiana Department of Corrections data (May 2016) indicate 23,897 adult male and 2,336 adult female offenders are in state prisons and county jails. Additionally, there are 379 juvenile male and 43 juvenile female offenders in the state's facilities. Of these offenders, approximately half are within the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, in large facilities such as that at New Castle (approximately 3,100), Putnamville (approximately 2,300), and Plainfield (approximately 1,700), as well as in smaller re-entry facilities and county jails. There are three separate federal facilities in one large Bureau of Prisons complex at Terre Haute, including the US Penitentiary Terre Haute and the Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) which includes Camp and Prison. Together the federal complex can house a total maximum of 2770 men, with current population slightly lower.

According to the Indiana Department of Workforce Development, every year more than 20,000 inmates are released. The challenges they face are significant. Without a job, it is nearly impossible to establish a new life and become productive citizens; however, nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of Hoosier employers are reluctant or simply refuse to hire ex-offenders. When such individuals are unemployed, their chances of returning to prison are 60%. More than 70% of released inmates are parents. Children of these parents are most likely to be in the lowest 5% of income earners and generally obtain less education than their parents.

The Current State:

Currently, many parishes within the Archdiocese provide outreach, often in exemplary manner, to those in prisons and jails, and those undergoing re-entry; however, no overall organizational structure exists. This has led to instability at the local level, a lack of

equality of services within the institutions, and an inability to leverage resources, including volunteers.

VISION/MISSION

Vision:

The Archdiocese of Indianapolis is a Christ-centered Catholic community that upholds the dignity of every human person touched by crime in order to practice mercy and foster hope and peace.

Mission:

The mission of prison ministry in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis is to create an environment of trust through a lens of Catholic social teaching by witnessing the Gospel to the incarcerated, those formerly incarcerated, and their victims and families, through healing and mentoring processes. The Archdiocese is committed to actively engaging parishes and parishioners in educating about, and advocating for, policies that help reduce violence, and provide for the pastoral needs of all affected by crime.

RECOMMENDATIONS

#1 Provide awareness and education in Catholic social justice teaching as it relates to the criminal justice system

- A. Establish ongoing educational programs concerning the criminal justice system in light of Catholic social teaching

Timeline: January, 2017

Action Steps: Develop easily accessible, Archdiocese-curated, web-based link to variety of resources that could be utilized by parish leadership and/or social justice committees. The “Resources” at the conclusion of this document could provide initial framework and be a first step. Additional development of website will be dependent on resources.

- B. Provide ongoing communication/education

Timeline: Initial “launch” in the *Criterion* in fall of 2016. Update Quarterly.

Action Steps: a) An article about the Prison Ministry in the Archdiocese and the task force report could appear in fall, 2016. b) The Archbishop’s column is

extremely powerful and personal and would be excellent follow up. c) In addition, periodic stories from parishioners and/or religious who serve in the prisons could be included. d) Stories of those who have been in prison would be very meaningful. Parishes should be provided with potential information for inclusion in bulletins, church websites, etc. e) Deaneries should be provided with potential information to distribute to parishes for inclusion in bulletins, church websites, etc.

#2 Effectively Minister to Persons in Prison

- A. Establish a Deanery mentoring program. Deanery mentors recruit and train lay ministers to go into jails and prisons and provide services for those incarcerated

Timeline: Beginning in Fall 2017; ongoing

Action Steps: In coordination with existing programs/personnel, develop educational programs for training volunteers. Explore existing training for prison ministers such as the program developed by Lewis University for the Catholic Conference of Illinois (<https://www.lewisu.edu/academics/theology/pdf/Prison-Ministry.pdf>). Depending on need, training could be offered via webcast or other technologies. Develop handbooks/brochures/resources that could be regularly updated and easily accessed by deaneries and parishes.

- B. Develop data/resources to support deaneries/parishes in coordinating outreach to jails and prisons. It is recommended that the data set build upon the excellent work of Laura Kazlas (2014), which includes information about prisons within the Archdiocese and contact information. It is further recommended that guidance be provided for parishes wishing to contact their local jail.

Timeline: ASAP

Action Steps: Update data from Kazlas's binder as appropriate. In some cases this should utilize weblinks (e.g., to the Indiana Department of Corrections) since the information changes regularly. Design Archdiocese Prison Ministry website. Ensure website contains training materials and resources as per #1A above. Communicate to deaneries.

- C. Examine policies and advocate for change when appropriate.

Timeline: ASAP and ongoing

Action Steps: One item of immediate concern: when prisoners enter a state prison they must check their religious preference. Catholics are a separate entity from "General Christian" (state policy 01-03-101, page 15). When strictly enforced, as it is in some facilities (e.g., Ptunamville), it means other Christians cannot attend Catholic services and Catholics cannot attend other Christian ones.

It may be the case that this was put in place to “protect the sacredness of Catholic rites”; however, merits discussion at this point in time.

#3 Effectively Minister to People in Re-entry

- A. Provide a list of resources for persons when they leave incarceration. This may include a list of parishes/addresses and locations for Catholic services, food pantries, etc. It could also include local civic services such as the Indianapolis Mayor’s Re-Entry Service providers (see resources for link). Re-entry education could be built into Deanery mentoring programs.

Timeline: December 2016

Action Steps: Initially include resources on website from this report. Recommend creation of a simple template on Archdiocese Prison Ministry website that can be utilized by parishes.

- B. Provide a contact person or welcoming committee whom Catholic persons leaving incarceration may be referred to or may contact for support. There is a significant need for people to take recently released persons to Church, for example, since transportation is often a major issue for those leaving incarceration. Additionally, they might not feel welcome in a new church.

Timeline: Fall 2017

Action Steps: Further explore two good models: Church Embracing Offenders (CEO) establishes contractual relationships before persons leave prison and has a recidivism rate of less than 10%. Dismas House in South Bend is another good good model.

There is the potential to develop a network of trained mentors throughout the archdiocese, with focus on keeping mentors close to the communities they serve.

It was noted that the largest numbers of persons leaving incarceration move to cities due to employment opportunities, so this initiative might initially focus on urban centers for maximum impact; however, there is awareness of needs in rural areas and training opportunities and outreach should be inclusive.

#4 Engage Greater Involvement of Parishioners in Support Ministries

- A. Organize parish members, using the Deanery mentoring program, and including youth, in various activities for inmates (e.g., sending birthday and holiday/holy day cards, providing Bibles and Catholic literature, becoming prayer partners, and the like).

Timeline: Immediate

Resources: Prison/jail needs identified on Archdiocese Prison Ministry website

B. Provide support for families of those incarcerated, as appropriate

Timeline: Fall 2017

#5 Provide Necessary Resources for Success

A. Create an Office of Prison Ministry that will lead, coordinate, and communicate.

Specifically it will:

- serve as a liaison for the Deanery mentoring program and parishes
- foster alignment and much-needed coordination between providing services for prisons
- share “best practices”
- develop and implement a strong communications plan/infrastructure that includes the elements outlined in the goals
- Appoint and empower a Prison Ministry Commission that will provide outreach and ongoing counsel for the ministry

While it was not within the purview of the task force to craft more specific details, there was strong opinion that this office, with targeted personnel/resources, would be essential to meeting the goals set forth in the recommendations.

Additionally, the task force offers three operational recommendations related to implementation:

Operational Recommendation 1:

The deaneries should serve as point of contact for prison ministry. They are an existing, functional, and efficient communication system.

Operational Recommendation 2:

The Archdiocese and deaneries should align efforts with existing/emerging work and avoid duplication when possible. As one example, St. Vincent de Paul Society is considering a program of support for re-entry, which should be explored/aligned.

Operational Recommendation 3:

Implementation may occur at deanery or at parish level, as appropriate. Furthermore, it is recommended that *Connected in the Spirit* teams consider prison ministry as part of multi-parish collaboration.

CONCLUSION

At the recent second annual prison ministry gathering for volunteers in the Diocese of Camden, guest speaker Sr. Elizabeth Gnam, a Dominican sister who has worked in prison ministry for the past 26 years, noted, “We’re involved in divine action. Sometimes we’re the conduit through which God’s mercy and nonjudgmental forgiveness is experienced by people.” She went on to frame her remarks with a traditional story from an African tribe that believes that every individual has his or her own song, composed by his or her mother and other women before the child’s birth. The song is sung during major life events throughout the child’s life: when he or she comes into adulthood, gets married, has a child, and finally at his or her funeral. The only other time the village sings the child’s song is when that person commits a crime, offending the community in a major way. They sing the song to help that person remember who they are and who they’re called to be. That’s prison ministry.

Saint Pope John Paul II’s first papal encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* notes:

“Christ, the Redeemer of the world, is the one who penetrated in a unique unrepeatable way into the mystery of [humanity] and entered [each person’s] ‘heart.’ . . . The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of [humanity] take on light. . . . [Christ] fully reveals [each person] to himself and brings to light [his or her] most high calling . . . for, by his Incarnation, he, the son of God, in a certain way united himself with *each* [person].”

All persons, irrespective of background, are called to holiness and unity in Christ. This can only be accomplished when all members of the Body of Christ, which encompasses all of humanity, acknowledge and embrace our incommunicable callings and work together as community to fulfill God’s mission.

APPENDIX

A. Resources

- “Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice.” Catholic Bishops of the United States (6th Printing, 2015)
<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/criminal-justice-restorative-justice/crime-and-criminal-justice.cfm>
- “The Price We Pay: Economic Costs of Barriers to Employment for Former Prisoners and People Convicted of Felonies.” Bucknor, C & Barber, A. (2016).
- Papal encyclicals and exhortations that accentuate the dignity of the human person, the call for social justice, and the importance of family:
 - *Redemptor Hominis* (John Paul II)
 - *Deus Caritas Est* (Benedict XVI)
 - *Caritas In Veritate* (Benedict XVI)
 - *Laudato Si* (Francis)
 - *Amoris Laetitia* (Francis)
 - *John Paul II, Redemptor Hominis: The Redeemer of Man, sec. 8, accessed July 30, 2016, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html*
- Web-based diocesan resources on prison ministry:
 - Archdiocese of Vancouver
 - Archdiocese of Baltimore
 - Archdiocese of Atlanta
- Additional web-based resources:
 - American Correctional Chaplain’s Association <http://www.correctionalchaplains.org/>
 - Churches Embracing Offenders: A successful re-entry program in Southern Indiana
<https://www.ceoevv.org/>
Report on this program’s effectiveness: <https://www.ceoevv.org/home/blog/59-evaluating-the-churches-embracing-offenders-program-who-graduates.html>
 - Dismas: A nonprofit transitional housing program for persons recently released from incarceration; includes housing, a caring community of volunteers, clinical support through local partners, case management, life skills development, and financial management support <http://www.dismas.org/>

- Hoosier Initiative for Re-Entry <http://www.in.gov/dwd/2732.htm>
- Lewis University Prison Ministry Training program developed for Catholic Conference of Illinois <https://www.lewisu.edu/academics/theology/pdf/Prison-ministry.pdf>
- Indianapolis Mayor's Re-Entry Service Providers Program http://www.indyhelpers.com/PDFs/Mayors%20ReEntry%20Service%20Providers_13Feb14.pdf

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