

Nine Ways to Inspire Participation in Jail Ministry among your Parish Community

1. **Ask** your priest to consider contacting the local jail, to introduce himself and be included on the list of volunteer chaplains so that he can offer Catholic inmates pastoral visits, and hopefully the sacraments of Reconciliation and/or Holy Communion.
2. **Include** prayers for prisoners, and victims of crime, in your parish's Prayers of the Faithful, or consider dedicating a Mass to the men and women in jail. Keep an eye on local news, and be specific in your prayer request so as to mention the lives that were affected. Encourage the community to consider what lessons recent harms have taught, and how the community is being called to respond.
3. **Visit** your county jail regularly, perhaps at first by reaching out to another Christian group that has a relationship with the jail. Go and observe. Familiarize yourself with your county correctional facilities and institutional conditions. Allow yourself to imagine how improvements could be made. Start considering what reflection materials, Bible studies, or structured courses the inmates in your county are most in need of to encounter Christ's love for them.
4. **Gather** a group of people who feel called to a social ministry. Try to attend sentence hearings and city and county council meetings to stay abreast of local criminal statutes and law. If you have lawyers in your congregation, see if they feel called to offer legal advice to families in need of guidance.
5. **Represent** the stories of inmates, or notes on the prayer requests of inmates in you Parish Bulletin.
6. **Give** people the opportunity to contribute books or white undergarments to the jail chaplaincy program.
7. **Suggest** that groups already meeting regularly for prayer and hospitality begin reaching out to families who've recently had a family member arrested, or are suffering as victims of crime. If the criminal has children, brain storm on how best to support the caretakers of those children and build relationships with the family.
8. **Consider** working with your parish's Saint Vincent de Paul Society, or other groups whose charism includes the [spiritual and corporal works of Mercy](#). Consider starting a study group on "[The Social Mission of the Parish](#)," "[The Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching](#)," or one of the other [foundational Church documents](#) of Social Teaching.
9. **Coordinate** efforts with other parishes in your county so as to establish one point of contact for your team, and report back to the Diocesan Social Justice Ministry Coordinator on your efforts. Let Audrey know where you may be in need of support/guidance.

"There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about... It only requires imagination, courage, and faith." --Margaret Wheatley *Turning to One Another*