

So, you've established a Catholic ministry team...Now What?

Some Guidelines for crafting opportunities and content for spiritual nourishment within your county jail

- Determine what is needed as a supplement to the ministry in your jail
 - What is already being offered?
 - Where are the gaps? (Consider the four areas of development: social, intellectual, spiritual, physical needs)
 - How can Catholic spirituality and tradition, and you as a Catholic ministry, fill those gaps?

- What is possible?
 - What are the days, times, facilities, equipment that you have to work with?
 - Will your ministry program be for men, women, or both?
 - Look at skills within ministry team: does anyone have special talents in singing, storytelling, teaching, meditating, gardening, art, writing, etc.

- What is the goal?
 - Long term goals are about hopes (Your team will have variations on the theme, but the long term goal will likely be to share Christ and His Church with the men and women -- Catholic and non-Catholic-- behind bars, and help support them as they share Him with others).
 - Short term goals should be about environments (How can we create an environment where the inmates are able to see what respect, spiritual well-being, and dialogue look like, so that they can begin to understand what Christ looks like, His amazing love for each of us, and what that means in determining how we live our lives).

- What will be the events that these environments will be created around?
 - Intellectual : Learning/Study (Bible Study, video series, lecture series, book study, etc.)
 - Spiritual : Prayer and Worship (Mass, para-liturgical events, devotionals, Re-centering prayer, Taize prayer (http://www.taize.fr/en_rubrique12.html), breathing exercises, sharing lives of the saints, examination of conscience, time for quiet and stillness, etc.)
 - Social : Community Life and Sharing (Reflection circles, Prayer/accountability partners, personal history and spiritual history inventory, journaling, pen palling, etc.)
 - Physical : Recreation, viewing of art, singing, things that stimulate the senses, planning for re-entry, Life Skills, Job Prep, how to establish a good rhythm of life, daily habits, home economics

Note: Incorporating components of each into each event will make for a well-rounded, appealing, comprehensive time together where people are being experiencing/reflecting over Christ in community, and considering how it should shape their actions.

- Will you have what it takes?

Ministry requires relationship, and jail ministry requires time, consistency, a desire to be there because you care for and respect the women/men there (not because of your own agenda)

- As an individual team member:
 - Do you have a pastoral heart?
 - Can you listen with empathy?
 - Are you spiritually/theologically formed
 - Are you confident in sharing the Catholic faith with integrity?

- As a team:
 - Are you organized
 - Centered around a common, understood goal
 - Prepared for consistency and follow-up
- Plan ahead:
 - How will the inmate know that the opportunities you have planned exist?
 - How will you introduce yourselves to the inmates?
 - What will you leave them with?
 - Determine if you can hand out literature of any kind (keep it simple)
 - How will they know that they can ask to speak with a priest?
 - How will they think of Catholics? How will they know there is a faith community that would welcome them when they get out of jail, and a person they can look up who cared enough to reach out to them while in jail?

Jail Ministry Does and Don'ts

1. Be yourself.
2. Be an understanding friend and a good listener.
3. Be honest.
4. Be consistent and dependable.
5. Be willing to learn.
6. Be prepared for the reality. Have a plan and follow it.
7. Always be respectful of and work with the chaplain and the correctional facility administration and staff.
8. Dress appropriately.
9. Know and follow the rules of the institution.
10. When in doubt, ask.
11. Develop the trust and confidence of the staff and administration as well as the inmates.
12. Honor your commitments.
13. Respect confidentiality.
14. Be punctual. Both the inmates and the correctional facility will expect you to be on time, arriving and leaving.
15. Be cautious. Some inmates will try to con you or manipulate you.
16. Make sure that you have permission to distribute Bibles and Christian literature before doing so.
17. Encourage the inmates to study the Bible and to enroll in correspondence courses.
18. Always invite the inmates to pray with you.
19. Talk to the inmates about general topics as well.
20. Do not become involved in an ego trip.
21. Do not make promises that you cannot or will not keep.
22. Do not do errands for inmates or act as a go-between. Do not send money or anything else to inmates.
23. Do not bring anything to an inmate or out from an inmate without checking with the authorities first.
24. Do not ask about an inmate's crime.
25. Do not get involved in the inmate's legal problems.
26. Do not give out your personal address or telephone number. Use the church address or a P.O. Box.