



Artwork by Tony Kelly

Prison Ministry

I was in prison and you visited me ... Truly, I say to you, as you did it to the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me. —Matthew 25

How do we approach and respond to the people around us and far away who are "crying in the wilderness"?

—Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori

Ministering to those behind bars is a challenge requiring us to walk in others' shoes. They have lost their way and need a helping hand back to a loving world. Ministering to their children, their families and their victims is as vitally urgent, since statistics say 70 percent of children with a parent behind bars will go to prison too.

The Diocese of Maryland celebrates Prison Ministry Sunday during Lent with Prayers of the People written by the Rev. Dr. Phebe L. McPherson. Some churches in Maryland and New York observe it on Martin Luther King Sunday.

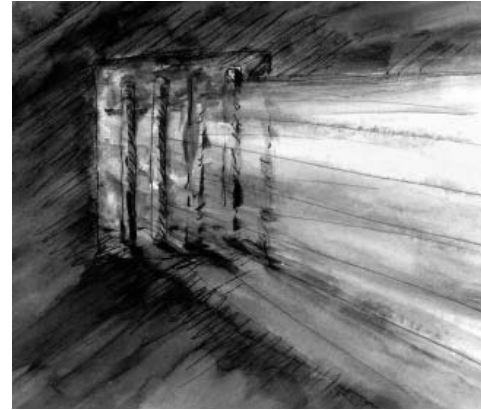
Dioceses across the country celebrate it differently in different liturgical seasons. The Diocese of New York recognizes Prison Ministry Sunday during Epiphany. "It comes just before the darkness of Lent," said the Rev. Canon Petero Sabune, chaplain at the once notorious Sing Sing. "People in prison live in darkness. We will walk the way of the cross with them into the light." A manual developed for parish use includes a cycle of prayer based on the daily head count of the prisoners.

The Diocese of Alaska raises funds year-round for its ministry to the families of prisoners. The diocese takes the families to visit their loved ones who have been sent to prisons in Arizona.

In the Diocese of Florida, inmates themselves contribute to the liturgy during the fifth week of Lent. Members of the clergy may read the prisoners' responses to the Gospel, John 11:1-45.

There are many ways to answer our Lord's call for us to minister to prisoners. Most of the dioceses began with resolutions adopted by their conventions creating a committee, commission or task force. They then began working with state and local prison officials and chaplains, and such organizations as Kairos, Angel Tree, Alternatives to Violence, Touchstones Discussion Project, Episcopal Community Services and Episcopal Housing Corporation and camps for incarcerated children.

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for better corrections conditions, including reasonable phone rates for families.

To find active prison ministries, visit www.episcopalchurch.org, Go to the A to Z Directory, select "Criminal Justice" and click on "Resources," or email Martha Gardner,

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Prayers of the People for Prison Ministry Sunday

Adapted from a prayer attributed to St. Francis and other prayers from the Book of Common Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, for our sake you were condemned as a criminal: Visit our jails and prisons with your pity and judgment. Remember all prisoners, and bring the guilty to repentance and amendment of life according to your will, and give them hope for their future. When any are held unjustly, bring them release; forgive us, and teach us to improve our justice. Remember those who work in these institutions; keep them humane and compassionate; and save them from becoming brutal or callous. And since what we do for those in prison, O Lord, we do for you, constrain us to improve their lot. All this we ask for your mercy's sake. Amen.

All: Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Leader: Where there is hatred... We pray especially for all those who live with injustice and terror in our towns and cities, and in our neighborhoods and schools. Help us in the midst of our struggles for justice and truth, to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect.

All: Lord, let us sow love!

Leader: Where there is injury... We pray especially for all those who have been injured, especially all victims and their families and the families of those who are imprisoned. Help us to heal those who are broken in body or spirit.

All: Lord, let us sow pardon!

Leader: Where there is discord ... We pray especially for those who spend their lives establishing equal protection of the law and equal opportunities for all.

All: Lord, let us sow union!

Leader: Where there is doubt... Make the hearts and minds of all your people ready to receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit, that they may be filled with the strength of his presence.

All: Lord, let us sow faith!

Leader: Where there is despair... Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of fellowship, and show us your presence in those who differ most from us, until our knowledge of your love is made perfect in our love for all your children.

All: Lord, let us sow hope!

Leader: Where there is darkness... Look with compassion on all who through addiction have lost their health and freedom or who suffer want and anxiety from lack of work. Restore to them the assurance of your unfailing mercy; remove from them the fears that beset them; strengthen them in the work of their recovery, and to those who care for them give patient understanding and persevering love.

All: Lord, let us sow light!

Leader: Where there is sadness... Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what you would have us to do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in your light we may see light, and in your straight path may not stumble.

All: Lord, let us sow joy!

Leader: Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.

All: For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen!

Written by the Rev. Dr. Phebe L. McPherson, rector, Epiphany Church, Odenton, Maryland.

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