

## Worship Service at Perryville Prison

Currently members from St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Litchfield Park lead a weekly worship service at Perryville Women's Prison in Goodyear. This service includes music, scripture readings, a brief reflection, prayers of the people, anointing with holy oil, and Eucharist from reserved sacrament. The team began holding these services on December 7, 2012 at Santa Cruz, a medium security unit, and one of 7 units at Perryville. At the beginning attendance was low, usually between 3 to 5 ladies, partially because no one in prison seemed to know what an Episcopalian was! The service has grown now to a regular attendance of between 45 to 50 individuals with more coming all the time. Numerous baptisms have been held and the team has repeatedly expressed their joy at being able to minister to these women and how enriched their own spiritual lives have been by this experience. In response to requests from inmates who have been moved to minimum security units prior to release, St. Peter's has recently requested to be allowed to hold services at other units and will be needing additional volunteers to staff these services. Each service group is limited to 5 individuals who must complete a background check as well as an annual TB test and an online questionnaire. It is hoped that individuals from other Episcopal churches in the valley will volunteer to be a part of the worship teams and that this ministry will become more popular throughout the Diocese of Arizona. There is a great need to take the message of forgiveness and freedom through our Lord Jesus Christ to those in prison. As our Presiding Bishop Elect, Michael Curry so passionately put it in his opening address, we need to go where the fish are!

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One of the higher levels of prison ministry commitment is holding services inside the prison. The service may include music, scripture readings, a brief reflection/homily, prayers of the people, anointing with holy oil, and Eucharist from reserved sacrament. AZ Dept. of Corrections allows up to 5 individuals to register as a religious volunteer team and hold services for inmates. The team must commit to holding services every week and team members (minimum of 2) must commit to participating in at least one service per month. The personal commitment required as well as the screening (background checks, TB test, and online questionnaire) that ADC requires make prison worship services a high level ministry. Currently we are aware of one church, St. Peter's in Litchfield Park, that holds services at the women's prison in Perryville each Saturday. The Diocesan Prison Ministry Program is working to raise awareness of the need for worship teams in the prisons and is

making materials as well as speakers available to assist other Episcopal churches in the Diocese become active in this ministry.

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