

Prison Ministry Program – Annual Report 2016

Statement of Purpose: “To charge the Diocese of Arizona to minister to prisoners and their families (*during and post incarceration*), advocate for changes to the current prison system, and to mutually share God’s forgiving love.”

The Diocesan Prison Ministry program hosted a booth at the 2015 Diocesan Convention. Thirteen people signed up to receive more information and discuss the possibility of implementing prison ministries at their churches. The Diocesan Prison Ministry website has been created and populated at www.prison.azdiocese.org. Materials and resources are now available on this website to help churches within the Diocese start a prison ministry, utilize training programs for prison ministry opportunities, sponsor support groups for prisoners’ families, connect with other agencies that provide assistance to the recently released, and communicate support for post incarceration (*including housing, employment, transportation, etc.*).

The Prison Ministry team currently consists of 8 members. The team has met 6 times in 2016 via teleconference call and once in person with Rev. James Bade to discuss what steps to take in order to raise awareness about the death penalty in our Diocese. Based on input from the team, the decision was made to focus our efforts in 2016 on supporting The Episcopal Church and Diocese of AZ resolutions regarding advocating for abolishment of the death penalty.

To that end, the Diocesan Prison Ministry team submitted a response to the US Sentencing Commission’s request for input for the 2016-17 legislative session. Our response requested replacing the death penalty sentence with a life sentence, including life without parole. In addition, the team is finalizing a small group study curriculum designed to raise awareness about the death penalty and our call to discipleship. The team has also submitted a resolution to the 2016 Diocesan Convention requesting the designation of the month of September as Prison Awareness Month throughout the Diocese beginning in 2017.

Team members are involved in the prison advocacy meetings sponsored by Valley Interfaith Project (VIP). The team continues to pursue avenues that will help raise awareness about the issues surrounding incarceration and the effects of incarceration on the community, families, and those who are or have been incarcerated.

In 2017, the Diocesan Prison Ministry Program will be focusing on the issues surrounding re-entry into society for released inmates.

Respectfully submitted by Rev. Kim Crecca, Convener, Diocesan Prison Ministry Program