

Prison Ministry Program – Annual Report 2017

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 an Open Space Workshop at the 2016 Diocesan Convention that was attended by 14 persons. Three of the people attending the workshop have joined the Diocesan Prison Ministry Team bringing the number of members to 11. A resolution to establish September as Prison Awareness Month for the Diocese was proposed by the team at the 2016 convention and was passed.

The team meets monthly via teleconference call. In March of this year, the team submitted a formal letter to Governor Doug Ducey expressing concerns regarding the high rate of incarceration in Arizona and lack of re-entry programs. The team offered to assist the Governor’s office in its’ pursuit of reducing recidivism in AZ.

The team developed a presentation entitled “The Cross of Incarceration” and members of the team were invited to deliver the presentation to 3 churches within the Diocese (All Saints – Phoenix; St. Matthew’s – Tucson; and St. John the Baptist – Glendale). The team has also been invited to lead a workshop at the 2017 Diocesan Convention focusing on “The Imprisoned.”

St. Peter’s Episcopal Church continues to expand worship services at Perryville Women’s Prison and several members of the Diocesan Prison Ministry team also assist with that ministry. A mentoring program is now offered and has been well received by the inmates. The Convener invited clergy from the Diocese to attend services at Perryville and 3 clergy were able to do so in 2017 (Fr. John Christopher, Fr. Martir Vasquez, and Fr. Bruce Jackson). In addition, Rev. Becca Stevens has accepted an invitation to attend a service at Perryville in September.

A survey has been prepared and sent to all clergy-in-charge to identify prison-related ministries within our Diocese. The results of the survey will help the Diocesan Prison Ministry team connect with those churches that have established prison ministries and assist those who are interested in creating a prison-related ministry and/or providing a welcoming environment for releasees who wish to join an Episcopal church. Press releases for secular and non-secular print media have been prepared regarding Prison Awareness Month and submitted to the Diocesan Communications team.

Members of the Diocesan Prison Ministry team are involved in various prison ministries including Kairos, prison reform advocacy, prison worship services, penpal programs, and prisoner visitation programs. In 2018, the team will continue to work toward reducing recidivism and facilitating successful re-entry for releasees. The team is also working with Jana Sundin, Jesse Villegas, and Kelly Wood to offer a camp for children of incarcerated parents at Chapel Rock beginning the summer of 2018.

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