

Prison Ministry Program – Annual Report 2019

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 team currently has 15 active members and 5 interested parties that participate in meetings and events. These individuals represent 12 churches located throughout the Diocese. The team hosts a monthly teleconference call.

The Diocesan Prison Ministry team uses a presentation entitled “The Cross of Incarceration” to help raise awareness about the effects of incarceration on our communities and encourage church participation in this ministry. Presentations were given at St. Luke’s - Prescott and St. Matthew’s - Tucson for the Daughters of the King spring gathering. A presentation is scheduled for St. Peter’s – Casa Grande in October. In addition, several AZ Episcopalians participated in the non-denominational Kairos program at Wilmot State Prison in Tucson.

St. Peter’s Litchfield Park continues to offer worship services at Perryville Women’s Prison and several members of the Diocesan Prison Ministry team assist with that ministry. About 150 women attend regularly and there were 67 baptisms in 2019. In August, the St. Peter’s Prison Worship team hosted Bishop Jennifer Reddall at a worship service held on one of the 5 yards currently served at Perryville. Opportunities are offered for priests throughout the Diocese to participate in these services as well. The Bridges Re-Entry Mentoring Program continues to be offered and has been well received by the inmates. The Bridges Re-entry organization formed by Rev. Gay Romack has purchased a home in Avondale for released women and is now serving 2 women. She expects a full contingent of 6 guests by the end of the year.

In June, the 2nd camp for children with incarcerated parents – Camp Genesis – was held at Chapel Rock. Scholarships were provided for all 22 children that attended through generous donations from churches throughout the Diocese. In addition, several churches contributed items and donations to fill backpacks for the children. A new ministry for sending cards to these children on a monthly basis has emerged and been enthusiastically embraced by congregations.

The Women of Perryville Art Exhibit continues to enjoy success. Exhibitions were held at Church of the Apostles – Oro Valley in January and Christ the King - Tucson in June. All Saints - Phoenix is hosting a show in October and art has been selected for a special exhibit entitled “Locked Up” at Epiphany – Flagstaff on display Oct-Dec. Shows are already booked at 3 churches for 2020. Proceeds from art sales benefit the artists, providing much needed funds for family and personal support. In addition, notecards featuring artwork by several of the Perryville artists (by permission) have been printed and will be sold at art shows, Convention, and other events to help support the efforts of the Diocesan Prison Ministry program.

Planned events during Prison Awareness Month in September include the Arizona Town Hall at the Wilmot Men’s Prison -Whetstone Unit in Tucson on 9/11; the Episcopal Night with the D-Backs on 9/13; a screening of the Oscar-nominated documentary “13th” at St. Matthew’s on 9/24; and “Walk in Their Shoes” re-entry simulation at St. Peter’s – Litchfield Park on 9/26.

The Diocesan Prison Ministry team continues to work toward reducing recidivism and facilitating successful re-entry for releasees. In 2020, we hope to begin the process for creating an association for families of the incarcerated based on the highly successful model of the Texas Inmate Families Association.

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