

Prison Ministry Program – Annual Report 2022

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 14 active members and 7 interested parties that participate in monthly Zoom meetings and events. These individuals represent 12 churches located throughout the Diocese.

Worship services at Perryville Women’s Prison in Goodyear, AZ are now being held on 4 units: Santa Cruz, Lumley, San Carlos, and Santa Rosa. Rev. Gay Romack coordinates the worship teams and continues to seek additional volunteers. The Mentoring Beyond the Gates program launched last fall is doing very well. The first group of mentees/mentors will be completing their one-year commitment soon. This program provides women who are released from Perryville prison with a caring and compassionate mentor who will help them cope with the many demands made upon them as a condition of their release. Two mentor training sessions were held in 2022 with 20 mentor/mentee pairs active at the moment. The goal is to have 30 mentors trained by year end. Having more mentors available, means more women can be helped.

Using videocasts, Rev. Romack has been able to create a mentoring program inside the Perryville facility that now reaches 65 women, including those who are restricted from taking other programming offered by ADCRR because of their sentencing. She is applying for a 2023 UTO grant for new prison ministries to support this and other programs.

The Magdalene House West reentry facility is currently housing four women with one more expected to arrive this fall. One woman graduated from the facility in March and another will graduate in November. Both of these women have met their goals, including financial security.

Camp Genesis was held in early June with 14 attendees (8 returning children). Two members of the Diocesan Prison Ministry team served at the 2022 Camp. The team is exploring how to meet even more of the needs of these at-risk children at Camp and afterwards and how to increase enrollment. Backpacks for the campers were provided with the help of donations from several churches. Donations are needed for 2023. Camp Genesis Sunday in our Diocese is September 18th. The Camp Genesis Card Program currently has 16 churches participating in sending cards to the children who have attended Camp Genesis. New this year is a Camper Prayer Heart Program started by a member of the Prison Ministry team located at St. Francis in Green Valley.

Seven “Straight from the Heart” Art Exhibitions will have been held by the end of 2022 featuring art from over 50 artists currently or previously incarcerated at Perryville Women’s Prison. These shows are now reaching non-Episcopalian venues and are booked through 2024. The art shows continue to be a successful method of raising awareness about the issues of incarceration in Arizona. Building a team to handle the demand for art shows is a primary goal for 2023.

Deacon Kim Crecca has been working with the Diocesan Communications team to update the Prison Ministry website. She has also taken a leadership role in the Episcopal Prison Ministry Community. This national group meets online monthly to share information about ministries, raise awareness about prison ministry in the ECUSA, and provide support for each other.

The Diocesan Prison Ministry team continues to work toward raising awareness about incarceration, reducing recidivism, facilitating successful re-entry for releasees, advocating for legislative reform, and serving the needs of loved ones affected by incarceration.

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