

Prison Ministry

Reflection - Matthew 25:34-40

As we reflect on the words from the Gospel of Matthew we hear the call to care for those who are in prison. Individuals in these extraordinary circumstances may experience a profound sense of isolation and a crisis in their faith. To address the needs of the incarcerated does not condone past behavior.

Instead, recognizing we all fall short, we find the stones dropping from our hands in response to the words of Jesus from the Gospel of John 8:7, “...*Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone...*”

Individually or collectively, you may find one or more of the following suggestions to lift up those who are incarcerated.

Pray

1. Add prayer for incarcerated individuals, their families, prison staff, security and non-security, to your daily devotions. Include scripture study on Bible passages that speak to prison ministry. Prison Fellowship is a helpful resource - www.prisonfellowship.org
2. Add incarcerated individuals to your congregation's prayer list.
3. Pray for incarcerated individuals during worship in Prayer for the People. Pray for staff, mindful of struggles specific to corrections including shift work and the impact on family life, substance abuse, and trauma experiences as a result of workplace duties.
4. Remember prison chaplains in your prayers, reach out to your local facility and let the chaplain(s) know you are praying for them.

Donate

Within the IL Dept of Corrections there is a Donation Protocol, as shown below.

Please note IDOC cannot and does not solicit donations.

Before a donation can be accepted, the Chaplain at the correctional facility must be provided the following information via email:

- **what is being donated,**
- **the fair market value of the item(s),**
- **the number of individuals who will benefit from the item(s),**
- **the date the donations will be delivered, and**
- **the name of the donor.**

Once this information is received, the Department will assess whether the donation meets our guidelines and will provide you with a determination on whether the donation(s) will be approved.

Please do not send donations prior to receiving this approval.

Correctional facilities have limited resources. Materials, such as the following, make a significant difference in the lives of those who are incarcerated.

Bibles - New or Used, paperback or hardcover, English and Spanish. Used in good condition (no writing or highlighting). Study Bibles, new or used in the condition described above.

*Large Print is preferred, as often as possible, for individuals who do not see well and/or are in a setting with poor lighting.

Hymnals - Used in good condition (no writing or highlighting).

Reference Books - Used in good condition (no writing or highlighting).

Printed materials for other faith traditions - Qurans for Muslims, Tanakh for Jewish individuals, etc.

New or Used in good condition (no writing or highlighting).

Potential Sources for Used Printed Materials

Personal Library - Used in good condition, no writing or highlighting. Topics such as forgiveness, guilt, shame, etc.

Church Library - Used in good condition, no writing or highlighting. Bible study materials, book club items, etc.

Public Library - Often after annual public library sales, library staff offer prison libraries, including Chapel Libraries, the opportunity to select from the remaining sale books free of charge. In coordination with the chaplain of a prison facility, you may be able to transport an approved donation of books to the gate house of that prison.

Additional Donation Items

Imagine for a moment the challenge of taking a multipurpose room and creating sacred worship space. The following items benefit the transformation from a stark area with plastic chairs or benches into a sanctuary behind barbed wire and fencing.

Communion Emblems - Prepackaged communion supplies, wafer and juice. Plastic communion cups, communion trays.

Church Furnishings - Typically donated by churches who are remodeling or closing. Sprinkle Baptismal Font, Communion Table, Brass Cross for Communion Table, Praise Banners, etc.

For Muslims - Prayer rugs, donation of dates during the Fast of Ramadan (used to break their fast each evening meal).

For Catholics - Plastic rosaries

Visit

There are three distinct layers of accessibility in the IDOC prison system for the general public. In all instances, the priority is safety and security, for the public and incarcerated.

1. **Gate House** - Each facility has a gate house which is the point of entry for visitors, volunteers, and staff. Approved donations may be delivered to the gate house and this is also the place a chaplain may interview a potential chapel volunteer. You do not need a background check to enter the gate house, though you would need to have an invitation from the chaplain.
2. **Visiting Room** - People who have been added to the Visiting List of an Individual in Custody may visit that individual in the Visiting Room at the facility or via Video Visit. If you are interested in visiting any individuals who do not have visitors, please contact the chaplain at the facility. You may also correspond with an individual via email once you are on their visiting list.
3. **Volunteer** - If you would like to bring a one-time bible study or become a regular volunteer who meets in the Chapel with individuals in custody at approved times, reach out to the chaplain of the facility. Separate from a one-time visit, the process to become an approved regular volunteer includes an interview with the chaplain followed by an application. The Volunteer Coordinator will work with the Chaplain during this process. Volunteer applicants who are approved by the Warden of the facility go through an orientation before they receive a volunteer badge which is maintained at the gate house of the facility. The facility chaplain schedules the approved regular volunteers for Chapel programming according to the needs of the facility.

Below are Illinois Department of Correction facilities within the geographical boundaries of the Illinois South Conference of the United Church of Christ.

Graham - Montgomery County
Taylorville - Christian County
Big Muddy River - Jefferson County
Centralia - Clinton County
Menard - Randolph County
Murphysboro - Jackson County
Pinckneyville - Perry County
Shawnee - Johnson County
Vienna - Johnson County
Southwestern - St. Clair County
Vandalia - Fayette County
The contact information for each facility will be located on the IDOC website:
<https://idoc.illinois.gov>