

# Criminal Justice Ministry

## Catholic Diocese of San Angelo, Texas

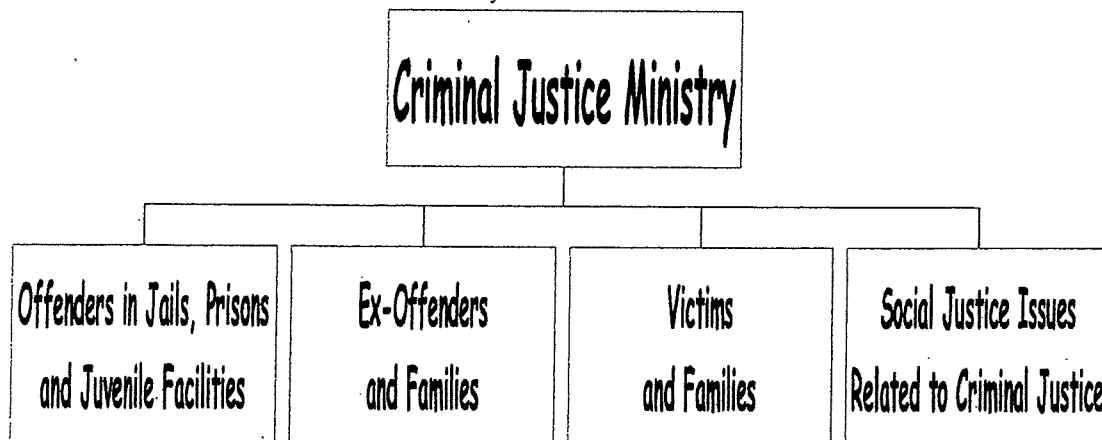
### Mission:

**I**t is our belief as Catholic people, we can bring a message of faith, hope, justice, and reconciliation to all affected by the tragedy of crime and violence whether they are the offender, victim, or public servant. The Criminal Justice Ministry Office for the Diocese of San Angelo recruits, screens, and trains volunteers from parishes throughout the diocese. As people of faith, we have to answer the call to serve those who are incarcerated, their families, the victims of crime and violence, and those who protect and serve. It is important to remember that our work is a social ministry rooted in Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching. In order to continue to serve this special population we must continue to work directly with our parishes and offer formation and on-going education to help people understand the needs of those we serve. Crime and violence touches over 90% of everyone in some way. As Catholic people we are called to social ministry. We are called to act with justice. We are called to love tenderly. We are called to serve one another and walk humbly with God.

### Ministry Efforts:

**T**here are four major areas of emphasis in Criminal Justice Ministry (CJM) efforts for the San Angelo diocese. The Ministry Goal to the offenders is to offer worship, prayer and Catholic teaching at each prison, similar to what is provided in our parishes. In the county jails and juvenile facilities the ministry offered is predominantly limited to worship services.

Parish CJM support groups have been established in the major towns and are in the early stages of developing outreach efforts associated with the second and third areas on the chart below. As volunteer interest grows, efforts will be expanded to fourth area, as it is hoped to get a TCADP chapter for our diocese, work with school boards to encourage more after-school programs and attempt to pilot a restorative justice model working with judicial and probation offices.



## **Criminal Justice Ministry Program Plans for 2023-2024**

The program actions associated with this plan can be split into three areas: recruitment, training and deployment. Action steps will be presented below associated with each of these.

### Recruitment

1. Preach at least one weekend per month to spread the message of CJM and try to solicit new volunteers.
2. Continue to establish CJ support groups in towns and parishes to build an outreach community to help those in need. Use these groups as a mechanism to entice volunteers to offer services to the incarcerated.
3. Hold second annual CJ Sunday throughout diocese on October 14-15, 2006 (date not yet approved) with expanded effort to recruit new volunteers, including a commissioning of all ministers by the Bishop
4. Use CJM council as a resource group to help recruit new volunteers.
5. Establish parish coordinators and deanery leaders to support and assist director in ministry efforts.
6. Encourage more priests to get involved in this ministry, especially for Mass, and sacrament of reconciliation (Penance service in prison).

### Training

1. Implement training in August and October in San Angelo, Big Spring, Abilene and Odessa to provide opportunity for all active volunteers to attend training.
2. Offer training in September in Brownwood and Fort Stockton for those in these locales that did not attend training in early Fall and for any new volunteers.
3. Hold any make-up training in late October and early November for those that were unable to attend a previous training session.
4. Ensure that all volunteers have attended the diocesan "Ethics and Integrity Workshop" and attend orientation training from the facility for which they will be volunteering.
5. Recruit trainers in each deanery to support this effort. Trainers have been identified in Abilene (Debra Vasquez) and Midland / Odessa (Shannon Garcia). Trainers will be identified in other towns as sessions are held.
6. Apply learnings from CPE and develop a training module focusing on pastoral counseling to the incarcerated.

## Deployment

1. Determine through volunteer monthly reports current facilities being served and where gaps exist.
2. Utilize new volunteers to fill gaps identified in the facilities and link volunteers to skill level and programs to be offered.
3. Identify volunteer capability in terms of Catholic programs attended and trainer skills in order to reassign active volunteers, if necessary, and assign new volunteers to better serve the incarcerated programs.
4. Implement Catholic teaching catechism program developed by PNCEA utilizing skilled volunteers in facilities where resources are available.
5. Expand efforts to bolster volunteers and ministry in county jails, TJPC juvenile facilities and court residential treatment centers.
6. Initiate ex-offender support group in San Angelo and access next steps.

## Matthew 25:35-36

*'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to visit Me.'*

Jesus loved the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick and incarcerated.

**Why don't we see the need to do the same?**

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*There are **five stages of "changing attitudes"** required before we will see the need to respond to those in need. In the case of the **incarcerated**, these are:*

The first is that we **react to offenders with fear and vengeance**. Offenders are equated with their crime and we reject and seek to get rid of them. They become a lightning rod for our collective hatred. Headlines refer to them as "killers," "predators," or "dirt bags". In poor social conditions, they are the recipients of vigilant justice and torture. Where the rule of law prevails, they are subjected to appalling living conditions and execution.

The second is more wide spread: **offenders are human beings** but they are **fundamentally flawed and their behavior is unchangeable**. The best we can do is give them long sentences locking them away until age or death stops their behavior. This reaction is common throughout the world, but somewhat surprisingly, it is best represented by the incarceration rates in the United States which are higher than any other country in the world!

The third stage is where one gets involved by **getting to know offenders**. They are **no longer identified by their offenses**, but **encountered as people with needs and abilities**. This attitude has inspired the transition from prisons to "correctional centers". Competent individuals use their skills to help offenders recognize the role that things such as addictions, unemployment, poverty, mental disabilities and family dysfunction play in their criminal attitudes and behaviors. The contemporary restorative justice work finds its expression in this stage. Crime is understood as a violation of relationships and not just breaking a law.

The fourth stage is **wonderment and thanksgiving**: we discover that **friendship with people in prison is possible, even desirable**. As well, we discover the people they have harmed - their families, victims and the community. The challenge to live the values of reconciliation in one's life become more visible and the gift of a life lived in this way is cherished. Meeting and being in the company of people in prison and reaching out to those who have been harmed is a joy. **One finds one receives as much or more than one gives.**

In the fifth stage, which is close to the fourth, **we see the face of God in the person of prisoner and victim.** Victims of gravely evil acts and the people who have committed these atrocities are reconciled. Those who accompany them in this journey discover the presence of God amidst the ugliness, sorrow and grief. The Christ dying on a cross between two thieves is a lived experience and one comes to know that “whatever one has done to the least of these, one has done to Jesus” (Mt. 25:40). **Thus those who were grossly repulsive lead us to discover our own dignity and inner beauty.**

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*What was the source of this information? It comes from Jean Vanier's book "Our Life Together" which talks about five stages of "changing attitudes" toward **people with intellectual disabilities**. The concepts have been revised slightly for the incarcerated, but the attitudes apply to all the disadvantaged that Jesus spoke about in the verses from Matthew's gospel. Here is some interesting information: Jean Vanier was founder of L'Arche communities, a family-like home for disabled (first community was established in Erie, PA in 1972. Also, Fr Henri Nouwen, well known writer on spiritual life, was pastor of L'Arche community in Toronto, until death.*

## **Criminal Justice Ministry (CJM) - Parish Plan**

A CJM Parish Plan has been developed to assist parishes with ministry to the men, women and juveniles incarcerated in our local facilities. The Catholic population in these facilities represents the extended community, which parishes need to reach out and serve by offering both worship and teaching.

The responsibility for the plan implementation resides with the local parish(es) where the centers of incarceration are located. The plan for pastoral ministry to these facilities is to be worked out and coordinated by the Diocesan Director and the local Pastor(s). Final approval of all those who minister in these facilities resides with the Pastor, and where and when it might be necessary with the Diocesan Bishop.

The proposed steps for implementation are as follows:

1. Initial contact by Diocesan Director (DD) made with Pastor by letter, email or personal call to arrange a parish visit to talk about the CJM plan.
2. During initial visit, explain how DD, Pastor and ministry volunteers will work together. Topics to discuss will include:
  - a) Incarceration facilities in their area.
  - b) Current volunteers and programs being offered at each facility.
  - c) Additional volunteer needs to provide both worship and teaching programs at each facility.
  - d) A plan to work with pastor and parish council to identify individuals who might be willing to serve.
  - e) A date to come and preach to stimulate volunteer interest.
3. Contact and visit with potential candidate volunteers to:
  - a) Determine "why" they would like to serve.
  - b) Provide introduction to diocesan ministry program.
  - c) Discuss potential ministry role and type of facility to serve based on interest, capability and current skills.

4. Once approved by Pastors, work with new volunteers to obtain:
  - a) Diocesan background screening and attend Ethic workshop.
  - b) Complete facility application and attend appropriate orientation.
  - c) Arrange a CJM training workshop for their attendance.
5. Work with Pastor and parish council to identify CJM parish coordinator (PC) based on list of current volunteers. Also, if possible, determine if facility coordinators (FC) can be selected based on experience at prison of interest.
6. If PC has been assigned, let them work with new volunteers in their parish to complete steps in 4.
7. Once new volunteers are ready to begin ministry, hold initial assignment meeting with PC, appropriate FC and volunteers to discuss:
  - a) Facility assignment and duties.
  - b) Provide each new volunteer with an experienced mentor (ministry volunteer) to team with to help in initial ministry efforts.
  - c) Plan to follow-up in several months to assess progress.
8. Periodic meetings of Pastor, DD, PC, FC and other volunteers to discuss:
  - a) Status of programs and volunteers involved at each facility.
  - b) CJM Training needs for volunteers.
  - c) Assignment issues and new volunteers.
  - d) Catholic material needs at each facility.
  - e) Inmate general feedback, and also individual progress of inmates toward sacramental preparation.
  - f) Scheduling issues with new worship / teaching programs, or changes.

- g) FC will report on issues or direction from his/her interaction with facility chaplain, and any impact on Catholic activities.
  - h) Formation training needs for volunteers.
  - i) Potential volunteer interest to help teach CJM training program.
9. Work with Pastor, PC and volunteers to establish a parish support group to reach out to those in community impacted by crime.
10. Work with parish support group to implement social justice actions, such as Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, after school programs, alternative sentencing, etc., based on local interest and available volunteers.

These steps apply to a single parish in a city. Depending on the number of volunteers identified, the scheduling of workshops will be set either before or after preaching in the local parish. Also, new workshop trainers will be identified based on their skills and interest in helping to support this effort. In those cities with multiple parishes, the volunteer recruitment and placement efforts and the establishment of support groups will be jointly coordinated, as is the case in Abilene, Midland, San Angelo, Big Spring and Odessa.

It is critical that parishes identify a CJM parish coordinator (PC), and also that, if possible, a facility coordinator (FC) at each facility should be found. The FC will be very important, as he/she would be the focal point and contact point with the facility chaplain. The facility chaplain is responsible for the services to be offered and volunteer entry into the facility. The FC will play a key influence role in working with the chaplain.