

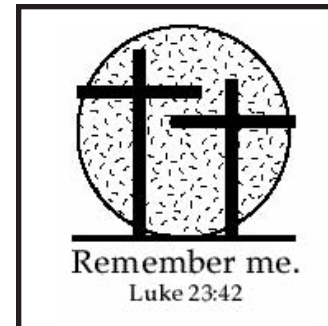
# THIS DAY

DISMAS MINISTRY  
P.O. BOX 070363  
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A Newsletter  
Published by  
DISMAS MINISTRY  
*A National Catholic  
Outreach for Inmates,  
Victims, their Families,  
the Released from Prison,  
and for the Community*

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### The Story of St. Dismas

One of the criminals hanging  
in crucifixion said, "We are only  
paying the price for what we have  
done, but this man has done  
nothing wrong."

He then said, "Jesus, remember me  
when you enter upon your reign."

And Jesus replied, "I assure you,  
**this day** you will be with me  
in paradise."

Luke 23: 39-43

# THIS DAY

Advent-Christmas 2016

A NEWS LETTER PUBLISHED BY DISMAS MINISTRY  
*A National Catholic Outreach for Inmates, Victims, their Families and the Community.*

## National Conference A Success!

*"Concluding the Year of Mercy Behind Bars"*  
A National Catholic Prison Ministry Conference

November 10-11, 2016

*Thank you to all the members of our Union of Prayer!*

Over 200 people from 31 states gathered in Milwaukee at the archdiocesan pastoral center from November 10-11. They met old and new friends, shared stories and experiences, and heard presentations on all the aspects of the special work of mercy that is *Catholic criminal justice ministry*. Presentations covered a range of important topics: *death row ministry, immigration and detention ministry, juvenile outreach, families of victims, families of the incarcerated, re-entry, restorative justice, pastoral care for prisoners, chaplaincy preparation, and creating a national Catholic prison ministry organization*. The two days were filled with the chance for Catholics working sometimes in isolation to find much needed support in what can be a lonely ministry in far-flung parts of the U.S.

## Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration:

*A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice  
A Statement of the Catholic Bishops of the United States, November 15, 2000*

All those whom we consulted seemed to agree on one thing: the status quo is not really working—victims are often ignored, offenders are often not rehabilitated, and many communities have lost their sense of security. All of these committed people spoke with a sense of passion and urgency that the system is broken in many ways. We share their concern and believe that it does not live up to the best of our nation's values and falls short of our religious principles. In light of this, we seek to do the following in these reflections:

- *Explore aspects of crime and punishment in our society*
- *Examine the implications of the Church's teaching for crime and punishment*
- *Apply principles of Catholic social teaching to the criminal justice system and suggest some directions for policy on crime and punishment*
- *Encourage action by Catholics to shape new alternatives*

Although overall crime rates in the United States rose significantly between 1960 and 1991, crime and victimization rates have fallen steadily since that time. Why criminal activity has dropped in the last decade has been the subject of considerable debate. Some argue that high incarceration rates and tougher sentences have made the difference. Others point to community policing, economic prosperity, and fewer young people. Experts do not agree on the determining factors, suggesting that many forces, taken together, have contributed to this decline. Regardless of their impact, not all methods of reducing crime are consistent with the teachings of the Church and the ideals of our nation. For example, even if the death penalty were proven to be a deterrent to crime, the Catholic bishops would still oppose its use because there are alternative means to protect society available to us today. ❖



*Rev. Ron Cloutier* of Houston, Texas, instrumental in creating re-entry houses, spoke about the needs of prisoners returning to society. *Rev. George Williams, SJ*, (Dismas Ministry's board president) is the Catholic chaplain at San Quentin, and talked about death row ministry. *Amalia Molina* from Restorative Justice Works in Los Angeles shared her own story of detention and the needs of families of prisoners. *Jeanne Bishop*, who is author of "Change of Heart" told the story of her pregnant sister's murder and her reconciliation with offender. *Elena Segura* from the Archdiocese of Chicago spoke on Immigrant Affairs and Immigration Education. *Rev. Mike Kennedy, SJ*, founded the Restorative Justice Initiative and spoke about how to help the incarcerated, especially youth. *Dale Recinella*, a death row chaplain in Florida, spoke eloquently of his own call to ministry and the need to end the death penalty. Other speakers were *Rev. Chris Reuter, OFM, (IL)* on national organizing, *Deacon Clyde Davis (CA)* on chaplaincy training, and *Deacon Bill Hickson (IA)* on training and support volunteers.



Jesus the Prisoner, Tissot



# From Christ's Body Behind Bars...

## *From Chaplains and Ministries*

*"On behalf of the women here at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women, I would like to thank you for the donation of religious CDs and books that was made to the Religious Services Department. These items will be used in religious services and help to uplift the women and provide a sense of wholeness in their lives. Again, thank you for your donation and your continued support to MCIW."* Catholic Chaplain, Maryland

*"Thank you for these materials; the men appreciate it. Our Roman Catholic ministry now has a priest and deacon ministering almost weekly in our institution. Their presence has more than doubled our previous attendees. They are a growing and welcoming group. Two have been in confirmation class and in December they will be confirmed during the Christmas celebration, Mass, and meal. God bless you for the ministry support you provide."* Catholic Chaplain, Iowa

*"Once again I bring you the heartfelt thanks of many, many women at the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women. We received your most recent box of "Pray in the Spirit" prayer books, and they're going like hot-cakes! I'm even getting requests from women who aren't Catholic--- in an environment which is still very skeptical of Catholicism. The value of your ministry is immeasurable. We are blessed and deeply grateful to be on the receiving end of your good works. We pray for you each Saturday, when our Catholic community gathers for Eucharist. May you be blessed in abundance and the good that you do be multiplied beyond measure."* Catholic Chaplain, Louisiana

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## *From Inmates*

Each week Dismas Ministry receives a list of prayer intentions from a group of prisoners in a North Carolina jail. These intentions are sent to us by a faith-filled ministry volunteer, named Dave. We wanted to share the following called "Jay's testimony" that Dave sent to us not long ago:

*"Because of the bad thing that happened to me when I was a boy, I turned to drinking and drugs at a young age. I did not care about life because I was hurt and alone. What was I to do about the pain and the hurt I held so deep inside of me? I didn't know until just lately what I could do. I've carried this pain with me for about 15 years now. Then one day, God spoke to me in jail. He told me to read his word. I read where he says for us to come to him just as we are and he will love us and forgive us. Now as a grown man and a man of God, I have finally let my past life go. And thanks to his love and his holy word, I am a new man that can love his family and be the man that God wants me to be. I am finally free of that dark spot in my life that happened a long time ago. Proverbs 3:5-6 says "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your path." So if you are that someone like me out there not knowing what to do about your dark past, just let go and let God and he will see you through your storm. I asked God to show me the way and he did just that and he will also do it for you. I hope this helps you to be strong in the name of Jesus in the same way it helped me. So I don't ask "why me" anymore-I just thank God because he already knows. Amen"*

# Thank you for Your Prayers



Dear Prayer Partners,

First of all, I want to thank you for your prayers for the success of the Catholic prison ministry conference that our ministry hosted in November 2016. This was a first in the history of Catholic prison ministry, and it was truly a wonderful, grace-filled moment for all those who attended.

One might think that meeting about prison ministry might be a more somber event, but there was a joy and feeling of celebration as over 200 Catholic priests, sisters, deacons and lay people gathered to share their love for outreach to our imprisoned members of Christ's body. When the group gathered for Vespers in the center chapel it resounded with song and praise. I imagined that Jesus was smiling to see so many of his followers gathered in His name for the sake of those who are in prison.

Each of the speakers was outstanding and spoke to the hearts of the audience about the special needs of their areas of expertise. The theme was mercy and the people attending were in the business of sharing that mercy with the incarcerated. '

What a wonderful way to conclude the Year of Mercy declared by Pope Francis the year before. Again, thank you for your prayers and support. Although your participation in this ministry is unseen, it is the "wind beneath our wings" to borrow a phrase from a popular song.

In the end, it is all about God's grace working behind bars in the lives of prisoners who struggle to see their own worth, and who begin to grasp God's mercy, as one who himself became a pris-

oner and was executed for their sakes - and ours.

That gospel story brings us to the heart of the season of Advent and Christmas. It is the remembrance and celebration of *God with us*.

What a deep and incomprehensible mystery that the God who created the universe and all that moves and lives within it, so vast as to be beyond our reach, becomes flesh of our flesh. And not only that, God becomes the least of human beings in the eyes of the world - an outcast, a criminal, publicly executed.

We are blessed indeed to know of such a God who goes to such lengths of love and mercy to envelop us in unending love and hold us in infinite mercy despite our wrongdoing and failings.

This is the good news that is the end-point of Advent and the Christmas story. The tiny, volkmerable baby in the arms of his poor parents huddled in a cave, is the living symbol and sign of God's love that cannot be contained in heaven but overflows in our world.

Thank you all for your prayers,, your compassionate support of the work we do and those we serve through our ministry. You too are good news, that you are willing to stick by us and pray for us.

We cannot do this work without the grace that God gives us, and your prayers are an essential part of that.

In God's infinite mercy,  
**Ron**  
Ron Zeilinger  
Director

