



Year of Mercy

During this Jubilee Year of Mercy, all parishes have been asked to participate in Archdiocesan-wide witnesses of mercy by serving those in need. Seven weeks throughout 2016 have been designated as “Work Weeks” in which parishes are asked to highlight a specific corporal work of mercy and encourage parishioners to take part in specific actions.

“Visit the Imprisoned” is the Corporal Work of Mercy being highlighted the week beginning Sunday, February 28th.

Who are the imprisoned? The first thought that probably comes to mind for most of us are those who are incarcerated in jails and prisons throughout our country and the world.

Why would we want to visit them? Catholic Social Teaching is based on and inseparable from our understanding of human life and human dignity. Every human being is created in the image of God and redeemed by Jesus Christ, and therefore is invaluable and worthy of respect as a member of the human family. Every person, from the moment of conception to natural death, has inherent dignity and a right to life consistent with that dignity. Human dignity comes from God, not from any human quality or accomplishment. (*Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*)

When Pope Francis was in the United States last fall, he visited the inmates at the Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility in Philadelphia. Pope Francis said that prisons must focus on rehabilitation. He also noted that no one is perfect and without need of forgiveness. That’s right. No one.

Pope Francis leads by example. He continues to stay in contact with inmates he used to visit in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He has made headlines for washing the feet of prisoners, men and women, on Holy Thursday.

During his visit to Philadelphia, Pope Francis insisted Jesus “teaches us to see the world through his eyes -- eyes which are not scandalized by the dust picked up along the way, but want to cleanse, heal and restore. He asks us to create new opportunities: for inmates, for their families, for correctional authorities, and for society as a whole.” (Catholic News Service, September 27, 2015)



There are other forms of imprisonment...

- We can be imprisoned by our **addictions**...in Luke’s gospel we hear Jesus read from a scroll of the prophet of Isaiah, proclaiming: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.* In a homily last month, Msgr. Zinkula commented that we are an addictive society - our addictions can be to alcohol, drugs, eating-too much or too little, exercise, pornography, gambling...the list goes on. Addictions can enslave and hold us captive. Jesus can heal and free us.
- Some are imprisoned by **mental health issues**. The illness itself may make it difficult for the person to seek assistance...and even when they recognize they need help, the services they need may not be available or affordable.
- Others have limited freedom because of **physical disabilities** that prevent them from doing and taking part in activities that so many of us take for granted.
- Many older members of our society who live in **care centers** or who are **homebound** may feel imprisoned by their circumstances. Their freedom has been curtailed. They can no longer go where they want, when they want to...and many are lonely.



Suggestions of actions we can take as we focus on the Corporal Work of Mercy, “Visit the imprisoned.”

- ◇ Pray for the imprisoned and for their family members.
- ◇ Pray for the victims of violence and crime.
- ◇ Support and/or participate in ministries to those who are incarcerated.
- ◇ Support job-training and educational programs designed to rehabilitate prisoners.
- ◇ Support programs that provide holiday gifts for prisoners and their families, particularly, the children of inmates.
- ◇ Learn what the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) teaches and advocates in the area of criminal and restorative justice at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/criminal-justice-restorative-justice/index.cfm>
- ◇ Celebrate the Year of Mercy by supporting the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015. Earlier this Congress, Catholic Charities joined with the USCCB in support of efforts to improve our nation’s sentencing laws, provide improved programs for incarcerated individuals and improve programs to help ex-offenders return back to our communities. Learn more and take action at <https://catholiccharitiesusa.org/search?q=sentencing+reform>

Did you know... that the Archdiocese of Dubuque, through Catholic Charities, has an active Jail and Prison Ministry program? The ministry includes the following components:

- Mentoring—a one-to-one relationship based on trust and respect, in which one person shares knowledge and experience with another to help the other define and reach his/her goals.
- Circles of Support and Accountability—small groups of volunteers (both male and female) working with a single ex-offender. Circles provide a healthy and supportive relationship between the ex-offender and the community, opening an avenue for restoration and healing of all people impacted by crime.
- Visitation in jails and prisons in the Archdiocese of Dubuque— Men and women in jail and prison can become lonely, and may enjoy the opportunity for support, companionship and faith sharing offered by visitation volunteers. Each jail and prison in the 30 counties of the Archdiocese of Dubuque has its own policies and procedures for visitation, Bible study, faith sharing, and worship. If interested, see contacts below.

For more information or to get involved, visit <https://www.catholiccharitiesdubuque.org/catholic-charities-services/outreach-programs/> or e-mail Deacon Bill Hickson (DBQCCCJPM@dbqarch.org) or Deacon Phil Paladino (DBQCCCJPM1@dbqarch.org)

Also, **Fresh Start Ministries** has been offering spiritual support to people of all faiths within Linn County’s Correctional System since 1972. Learn more about their work at www.imfreeindeed.com.

- ◇ Visit the “imprisoned” in their homes and care centers who are unable to move about freely.
- ◇ Take Holy Communion to those who are homebound.
- ◇ Offer to bring your elderly neighbor to Mass or to pick up some groceries for them the next time you’re at the store.
- ◇ Encourage those who are enslaved by an addiction to seek the treatment they need. Go with them.
- ◇ Reach out to someone who does not have any family or friends in the area. Invite them to your home or take them out to eat.

