

**ORTHODOX
CHRISTIAN PRISON
MINISTRY
CORRESPONDENCE
TRAINING
FOR CLERGY**

Our Heartfelt Thanks

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Your Ministry Through Letters



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Welcome to Correspondence Training for clergy from Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry. Thank you for your desire to obey the Lord's words: **“I was in prison and you came to visit me”** (Matthew 25:36). You will be visiting men and women in prison through your letters.

When you write them, you are writing Christ in prison. This training is designed to help you be faithful and successful in this wonderful ministry that you are undertaking.

- As a member of the Clergy of the Orthodox Church, you have answered the call of the Lord to visit Him in prison through your letter writing. As you well know, the first and most important aspect of taking part in the Correspondence Ministry with those in prison is PRAYER.
- We believe that your letter writing is so much more than simply jotting off a note. It is a spiritual ministry to people in prison and as such, has the attention of our Lord, His Saints, and the Holy Angels. We pray for you, that God would direct your thoughts as you respond to questions and concerns from the men and women you may be writing.
- Consider for a moment the following story of what took place when St. John Chrysostom sat down to write about the letters of St. Paul. He had some incredible help. We may not be a St. John Chrysostom, but our Lord and His Saints are still the same today and will be there to assist us in this wonderful ministry.

When St. Proclus was a novice under Chrysostom, during the time that he was patriarch, it was his duty to announce visitors. A certain nobleman was slandered before Emperor Arcadius and the emperor had expelled him from the court. This nobleman came to implore Chrysostom to intercede with the emperor on his behalf.

Proclus went to announce him to the patriarch but, looking through the partly opened door, saw a man bent over the patriarch, whispering something in his ear while the patriarch wrote. This continued until dawn. Meanwhile, Proclus told the nobleman to come back the next evening, while he himself remained in amazement, wondering who the man with the patriarch was, and how he managed to enter the patriarch's chamber unannounced. The second night the same thing happened again, and Proclus was in still greater amazement. The third night the same thing happened again, and Proclus was in the greatest amazement.

When Chrysostom asked him if the nobleman had come by, he replied that he had already been waiting for three nights, but that he couldn't announce him because of the elderly, balding stranger who had been whispering in the patriarch's ear for three nights. The astonished Chrysostom said that he did not remember anyone entering to see him during the previous three nights. He asked his novice what the stranger looked like, and Proclus pointed to the icon of the Holy Apostle Paul, saying that the man was like him.

Therefore, it was the Apostle Paul himself who was directing the mind and pen of his greatest interpreter.

Here is the Holy Icon of that event . We hope that it will remind you that you are never alone as you write the precious souls in prison. The Lord loves them more than we ever can and He desires to transmit that love through your letters. Notice the people reading his words are receiving “Living Water” for their thirsty souls. May the Lord bless the work of your hands.



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INTRODUCTION

- It is our firm belief that your success in this ministry is directly linked to your ability to abide by all of the rules, regulations, and policies that are expected of you as clergy. It will seem like there are so many, many “do’s” and “don’ts” involved in this ministry. Some of these rules may make absolutely no sense to you. You may even find yourself questioning the sense of some of the rules. It is easy to begin a justification process in your mind as to why a certain rule does not really apply to you and the person you are writing. Please understand that every rule does and always will apply to you unless you have written permission from that facility to do something different.
- The rules, regulations, and policies of each institution are not haphazardly arrived at and written down. They are the result of specific laws and many years of correctional management. They are in place to protect you; to protect the staff; and to protect the people living in that facility. The rules, regulations, and policies are not “suggestions” that you can choose to follow or not to follow for yourself. You may be asked at some point to break a rule by the person with whom you are corresponding. It may be a very subtle request that seems to make complete sense to you at that moment. You must know the rules and be totally committed to obeying those rules at all times.

Introduction Continued

- Over time you will likely experience some very real needs that tug at your heart strings. You may find yourself with a deep desire to do something that seems so very right and yet will be a violation of one of these rules. You are not above the rules no matter how righteous your action may seem at the moment! Remember that Jesus told His followers to be “as wise as serpents” not just “gentle as doves” (Matthew 10:16). This is an important theme to always keep in mind.
- The price for not obeying the rules is simple: You may be asked to cease writing that person or you may even have your mail blocked. When that happens, it will be an embarrassment for the Orthodox clergy correspondence program and for you. You will have lost the opportunity to touch people’s lives in prison.
- Please do not take offense at any of the guidelines. Each of the guidelines has real, negative examples of clergy getting in trouble or into problems.
- Sometimes there can be infractions of the rules that are very, very serious. In a worst case scenario, there have actually been people who end up going to prison themselves because they not only broke the rules, but they committed a felony in the process. God forbid that ever happen to any clergy!

GENERAL QUALIFICATIONS

- The men or women that are in prison may be on a spiritual and/or emotional roller-coaster. If that is the case, they need someone who can provide some spiritual encouragement to them and not simply add to their turmoil.
- One enters into this ministry with the understanding that their only reward will be in Heaven. We don't do this work with the hope of having our names in lights or becoming famous because of our amazing letters. It is a calling to serve someone that has lost their freedom and finds their life broken in the darkness of a prison. It is an opportunity to love the “unlovely” and rejected people of our world. It may be helpful to recall who it was that Jesus came to minister to: *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick”* (Luke 5:31).
- You need to be committed to this ministry. That will involve being a self-starter and being self-motivated. People in prison have had their share of disappointments and lies. If you tell someone you will answer their letters, you must be committed to follow through. The person in prison is taking a risk of sorts in writing you and you have that responsibility to be faithful.
- Some people that you will write will be a very short-term relationship. For whatever reason, they may not want to correspond with you any further. Others to whom you write may end up becoming a long-term relationship. Either way, your faithfulness is necessary. Do not become discouraged if someone doesn't write you for a few months, rather pray for them. You do not know what a person may be going through on their end. If someone tells you they are no longer going to write you, pray for them. And for those who do write you regularly, be faithful.

GENERAL RULES

- 1. Do not use your home address or any other identifying information. It is a rule of OCPM's correspondence ministry that clergy not offer any personal details (especially family details) to their correspondents.
- 2. Your letters must come from your Church address. DO NOT WRITE TO YOUR CORRESPONDENT EXCEPT THROUGH YOUR CHURCH ADDRESS.
- 3. Clergy are not allowed to do any "favors" for their correspondents. Some may ask for money to buy toiletries, stamps to facilitate further correspondence, or other financial assistance. Some may ask you to contact someone on their behalf. The answer to all such requests should be, "***OCPM has very strict rules for correspondence which do not allow me to do anything but correspond with you.***" Some may ask you to do something very insignificant for them just to see if they can get you to do something: the next request will likely not be so insignificant. We heard of a situation where a prisoner asked a clergyman to call his mom and tell her he was O.K. It turns out that this was code for "The escape is set for Tuesday. Have the getaway car ready."
- These precautions provide a necessary shield between you and your correspondent. Manipulation is a way of life in prison. May we all "*be wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove.*" (Matthew 10:16) If you follow these precautions and the directions, you can have a very fruitful correspondence with men and women who are interested in the Orthodox Faith. You will find yourself edified and uplifted by the transforming grace of God at work in their lives. Keep in mind that, for a variety of reasons, correspondence with people who are in prison tends to be sporadic; if you don't hear from a correspondent for a while, or if a correspondence stops entirely, don't get discouraged!

SECURITY LEVEL OF THE INSTITUTION

- The mailroom rules and procedures vary from institution to institution. Our training will cover the basics that every clergyman should follow. Be aware that the facility you are writing will have very specific policies and procedures that you must follow.
- The security level of your institution will play a major role in determining the policies and procedures set in place. Security levels in any given correctional system may range from minimum, low, medium, high-medium, high and maximum institutions. These institutions may come with a wide variety of names and the name may not always indicate the security level.
- Men and women are sent to specific security levels based on many factors, including the nature of their crime, the length of their sentence, previous criminal behavior, gang affiliation, and their behavior while incarcerated. A person's security level can change over time and this also is based on different factors, such as their conduct and the remaining length of their sentence. When their security level changes, they are often transferred to a more appropriate institution.
- The person you are writing will be able to tell you the official mailroom policies and procedures for having items sent in such as including an Icon card with your letter or having an OCPM book sent in to them.

OCPM CLERGY CONDUCT – GENERAL GUIDELINES

James 3

¹ My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

² For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. ³ Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. ⁴ Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires.

⁵ Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. ⁷ For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind.

⁸ But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.

¹⁰ Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. ¹¹ Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? ¹² Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. ¹⁵ This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. ¹⁷ But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. ¹⁸ Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Clergy Conduct Continued

- As a correspondent with those in prison, you are entrusted with a great responsibility. Every time you send a letter into an institution, you represent all of the following: God, His Church, and the Holy Orthodox Faith.
- Your words may be read by many more people than the person you are writing. Letters are often passed around to others also incarcerated there and your letter may be read by the staff that screens incoming mail. (Take another look at the Icon on the cover and the people receiving the writing of St. John.) The only thing they may ever know about Orthodoxy is what they read from you. That indeed is a great responsibility. *“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. ² For we all stumble in many things.”*
- The above paragraph is not meant to discourage you, but to encourage you to take seriously the ministry to which you have come. Always keep your word. Do not promise things that you cannot actually do. If you tell someone you will do something, then you need to follow through on it. If you find that you cannot follow through on something, then you need to explain to the person why you cannot do it. Keeping your word is of tremendous importance in this environment.
- Do not write about your own personal life. Leave your personal problems at home. You are writing to help those who are incarcerated. You are not writing to receive ministry from them. If your personal problems are so great that you cannot leave them at home, then you should not be involved with the correspondence program.
- Do not enter into an “us” versus “them” relationship between the staff and the people incarcerated. You may hear some negative things about certain staff, but you need to remain neutral. If you begin to take sides against the staff, you will likely lose your privilege to write that person.
- Watch your language in your letters. The men or women coming to your program live in an environment filled with cursing and anger. They are writing to you to get away from that. Let your letters be filled words of blessings and not curses. Never talk down to the person you are writing. Do not bring your political views into your letters as this can lead to problems.

THE MEN OR WOMEN WITH WHOM YOU WILL BE WRITING

- Always keep in mind that the person or persons you are writing are human beings made in the image and likeness of God. Never ask anyone what crime they committed. If you do happen to learn the crime that a person has committed, do not judge them. You may hate that particular crime, but you are in this program to share the love of Christ with them. They have already been judged by a court of law and found guilty. They need your help in committing their whole lives to the Lord and learning to live a life of repentance. If you are judging them in your heart, they will sense it and you will not have an effective ministry.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT WITH THE PEOPLE YOU WRITE

- Your contact with the men or women with whom you are writing should always be limited to your letters. You should never be placed on their calling list to be able to call you at home. You should never be placed on their emailing address to be able to email you at home. You should never be placed on the mailing list to be able to send letters to you at home.
- Never become involved in any legal matters of the men or women you write. You are not there for any legal counsel or to take up their cause. This would include the legal work concerning their original conviction of a crime. It would also include any legal action they might be taking against the facility they live in. Do not get involved; that is not why you are writing them.

FAMILY MEMBERS OF THOSE YOU WRITE

- If family members contact you, do not share any information with them concerning their loved one. Instead, give them the contact information for the institution. You can simply say: *“I am so sorry, but I am not allowed to share anything with you. You should contact the institution directly. These are rules that I have to abide by in order to write them.”* There are many reasons for this rule and it is in place to protect you. Do not waiver on this rule no matter what heart rending story you may hear from them.
- If family members begin attending your Church, you can certainly treat them kindly. You should never accept a gift from any family member of the men or women to whom you correspond. No matter how innocent or trivial it might seem to you, do not accept the gift.
- Never pass on a message from or to them regardless if it is verbal or written. Again, do not waiver on this rule no matter what heart rending story you may hear from them.

PRIVACY CONCERNS

- The Freedom of Information Act of 1966 and the Privacy Act of 1974 go together in determining what information can be given to the public regarding men and women in prison. Generally speaking the following information is made public: name, registration number, place of incarceration, age, race, conviction and sentencing data. However, many men and women are in some kind of protective custody. In those cases, no information can be made public for them at any kind of local level. Anything released to the public regarding someone in protective custody usually will come from the highest levels of that particular correctional system. For the safety and well-being of the men and women in prison nothing else is allowed to be made public. This is not simply a rule of the institution but it is the law.
- You also need to be very careful in what you share in a public forum, even Church. There is no need to use a person's full name in sharing a wonderful spiritual event or story. You can usually tell the story without a name at all. If a more personal communication is desired, such as a prayer request, you can simply refer to them by their baptismal name without a last name as long as this does not specifically identify that person. Keep things general without specifics. This is especially important if you are writing to a high profile person that has made the news. It is very tempting to tell others specifics about that person, but please do not do this.

Privacy Concerns Continued

- In addition to privacy issues concerning the men and women in prison that you are corresponding with, there is an additional issue that you are asked to keep confidential. Your involvement with OCPM may have given you access to personal information of our Board Members, Staff, and other Volunteers. This might include names, personal addresses, personal emails, and personal phone numbers. Please know that this information should never be given out to anyone in prison. Someone in your Church may have a loved one or dear friend in prison and may want to help them get in touch with OCPM. This is great and exactly why we are here. But please understand that any information that is sent to one person will likely fall into the hands of many different people. That loved one or friend may be completely trustworthy, but others who get that information may not be quite so trustworthy.
- When inviting someone in prison to get in touch with OCPM or become part of our correspondence program, please only use our official P.O. Box. Do not give out our names or other personal information. Please let us make the decision on what information is appropriate when we respond to them. The back cover has the OCPM contact P.O. Box address you may provide to someone in prison.

Final Thoughts from OCPM

- **Then Jesus said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” Matthew 9:37-38**
- My Dear Brothers in Christ...you have stepped forward to answer that very call from the Lord. It is our prayer that the work of your hands in this ministry will always be blessed!
- If you ever come across issues or concerns that you are not sure how to address, please do not hesitate to contact OCPM. We are here to serve you in any way we can and to help you have a safe and blessed ministry with the men or women you write.
- One day, when we find ourselves before the Dread Judgment Seat of Christ, may we hear those words that will bring eternal joy to our souls: **“Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...for I was in prison and you came to visit me!’”** (Matthew 25:34-36).
- **May God bless you and the work of your hands!!**

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN PRISON MINISTRY

For more information for people in prison including OCPM books, Icons, study materials, and correspondence program, please give them this address:

OCPM
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For more information on how you and your Church can get more involved with prison ministry, please write:

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