To all the Clergy and the Laity of the Holy Orthodox Churches in the United States:

**Christ is in our midst!**

The Hierarchs of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops have approved the Sunday before the feast of St. Silas (the patron of prison ministry) to be **Prison Ministry Awareness Sunday** in all Orthodox parishes in the US. This year, this occurs on **Sunday, July 26th**.

In order to help you prepare for this important day of awareness, we are providing the following resources in this packet:

- Homily Ideas for Prison Ministry
- Bulletin Insert
- Informational Brochure

Every day in our ministry we see incredible hope for those who have committed crimes and are now confined in the deep isolation of prison! With awareness and Christian charity, this ministry is able to do the work commanded by our Lord and reach these often forgotten brethren.

Please remember those in prison by participating in this vital day of awareness. In the words of St. John Chrysostom, “a small gift may earn a crown of glory.”

After passing a tray for the ongoing work of your parish, **we humbly ask that you please pass a second tray on Prison Ministry Awareness Sunday, July 26th**, and send these generous gifts to:

**Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry**

Post Office Box 1597
New York, NY 10025

In Christ,

Nicholas Petrogeorge
Executive Director
Epistle Reading:
Acts of the Galatians 3:26-29 - “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Men and women in prison do not cease to be Orthodox Christians because they find themselves in incarcerated. Sometimes we need to be reminded that indeed “all have sinned” and none of us are worthy to “cast the first stone.” This quote fits so very well with this topic: “Never confuse the person, formed in the image of God, with the evil that is in him: because evil is but a chance misfortune, an illness, a devilish reverie. But the very essence of the person is the image of God, and this remains in him despite every disfigurement” (St. John of Kronstadt).

How many of us have said things like: “Those people in prison have nothing coming!” “They should lock the doors and throw away the keys!” No matter how far someone has fallen, they do not lose the image of God. It is through the Holy Orthodox Faith that the mud and mire of sin can be washed off these precious souls and they can begin to live a new life in Christ, even inside a darkened prison or jail cell. May we see people not as they are, but as they could become through the Holy Orthodox Faith.

Epistle Reading (Con’t): Galatians 4:4-5 – “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”

Just like there was a perfect time for the Incarnation to take place, there are also “perfect times” in our lives for us to welcome the Incarnate Lord and commit our whole life to him. When a person goes to prison, they have lost most everything. It is a time, like no other, in which they may be open to the love and embrace of the Lord through His Church. Lives can be transformed in the midst of the darkest places on earth. We are called to bring the Light of Christ to those living in darkness. Can there be any place in our world darker than the bowels of a prison? The powers of darkness rule the lives of so many who live there. Yet total darkness cannot exist with even the smallest light. Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry has the task of bringing the Light of Christ to many men and women sitting in the darkness of a prison. Every Orthodox Study Bible; every Holy Icon; every prayer and study book, sent to a prisoner brings that precious Light of Christ to their darkened world. And that Light begins to spread in that place driving out the darkness with each person it touches.

Gospel Reading
Matthew 9:27-31 - Two Blind Men Healed

Any person who has finds themselves in prison has like been “blinded” for a time. They could not “see” when they committed the crime and now they find themselves in such darkness that it is hard to see beyond it. They may have cried a prayer in their cell that echoes the prayer of the blind men today: “Oh God, have mercy on me!” The Lord hears those cries and He still comes to that person to give him or her sight. In these days He
does it through us. They too can have their spiritual eyes restored and they can begin a new life in Christ. "I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord!" (Isaiah 42:5-8)
Many of the people in prison have been spiritually blind their whole lives. They are often school dropouts from broken and dysfunctional families, whose lives have been ones of continual abuse. God has a heart for these precious people in prison and He seems to reach out to them in amazing ways. The Theotokos and other Saints have appeared to some of the toughest prisoners in order to soften their hearts and open their blind eyes.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 9:32-35 - A Mute Man Speaks – “As they went out, behold, they brought to Him a man, mute and demon-possessed.”

The people brought a man rejected by the world (society) to Jesus. He was likely labeled as “born in sin” since he was a mute and “crazy” because he was demon-possessed. Who do we bring to Jesus for healing? Is it only our friends and family; the accepted and lovely of our society? Or could we also bring the rejected and unloved to Him? It is still day and we must work the works of the Lord on this earth. Christ came to bring the Light to those precious souls living in darkness and He calls all of us to be a part of this work. “I was in prison and you visited me!” Not all of us can go into a prison, but all of us can be involved with prison ministry. We are called to bring the Light of Christ to those living in darkness. Can there be any place in our world darker than the bowels of a prison? The powers of darkness rule the lives of so many who live there. Yet total darkness cannot exist with even the smallest light. Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry has the task of bringing the Light of Christ to many men and women sitting in the darkness of a prison. Every Orthodox Study Bible; every Holy Icon; every prayer and study book, sent to a prisoner brings that precious Light of Christ to their darkened world. And that Light begins to spread in that place driving out the darkness with each person it touches.

OTHER QUOTES TO USE IN A HOMILY FOR PRISON MINISTRY AWARENESS SUNDAY

“To judge sins is the business of one who is sinless, but who is sinless except God? Whoever thinks about the multitude of his own sins in his heart never wants to make the sins of others a topic of conversation. To judge a man who has gone astray is a sign of pride, and God resists the proud. On the other hand, one who every hour prepares himself to give answer for his own sins will not quickly lift up his head to examine the mistakes of others.” (St. Gennadius of Constantinople, The Golden Chain, 53-55)

Do not be angry at anyone and do not hate anyone, neither for their faith, nor for their shameful deeds... Do not foster hatred for the sinner, for we are all guilty... Hate his sins, and pray for him, so that you may be made like unto Christ, who had no dislike for sinners, but prayed for them. (St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily 57,90)

If you do not find pity on a sinner who will suffer in flames, then you do not carry the grace of the Holy Spirit, but rather an evil spirit; and while you yet live, you must free yourself from his clutches through repentance.” (St. Silouan the Athonite)

Find evil in yourself and not in other people or things, were with you have not learned how to relate properly. This is how a child relates with fire or a knife: he burns himself, he cuts himself. (St. Sebastian of Karaganda)

If you see your neighbor in sin, don’t look only at this, but also think about what he has done or does that is good, and infrequently trying this in general, while not partially judging, you will find that he is better than you. (St. Basil the Great, Conversations, 20)

One who strictly prosecutes the misdemeanors of others will find not condescension towards his own. (St. John Chrysostom, On the Statutes, 3.6)
Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry serves those who are incarcerated and their families, and provides resources, training and support to our ministry partners so that lives are transformed and God is glorified.

We provide visitation, Orthodox publications, Bibles, prayer books, icon prayer cards, and catechism courses to those in prison and their families.

You can be involved by praying, giving, and volunteering!

In 2019

**13,666** Personalized correspondence and pieces of mail sent to inmates

**9,515** Icons given to inmates

www.theOCPM.org  ·  info@theocpm.org
P.O. Box 1597 New York, NY 10025  ·  347-868-6957

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THE PRISON CRISIS

Every day, millions of Americans find themselves behind bars. Many live in deep isolation. As an agency of the Assembly of Bishops, Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry is there, proclaiming Christ to men and women in prison, many whom are encountering the Church for the first time.

For Orthodox Christians who were arrested for crimes, we help them to return to The Faith and offer hope for the future.

As a result, families are re-united, marriages are healed, and thousands of incarcerated men and women have a new sense of peace and restored order in their lives.

With the entire pan-Orthodox community by our side, together we will shine the Light of Christ in the midst of this crisis.
OUR MISSION

OCPM serves those who are incarcerated and their families, and provides resources, training and support to our ministry partners so that lives are transformed and God is glorified.
2019 AT A GLANCE

Total letters received
3,292

Personalized correspondance and pieces of mail sent to inmates
13,666

Total Icons given to inmates
9,515

Books and bibles distributed for Christian education
1,569

2019 FINANCIALS

Total Operating Revenue
$340,564

Total Restricted Revenue
$193,000

Total Operating Expenses
$356,862

Net Unrestricted Operating Assets
$66,110

OCPM IS AN AGENCY OF ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL ORTHODOX BISHOPS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
An Orthodox inmate, Nicholas, who was granted parole on January 23rd wrote to share:

“I was an inmate in contact with you while I was incarcerated in a Nebraska state prison. Right before I left I received the envelope with the Baptismal icon, which is beautiful. I can’t tell you how awesome it was to bless all around me. OCPM will always be in my prayers, and as I move forward in coming back to the Church, I hope I am able to support OCPM more in the future. The icons and the books I was sent had a huge positive impact on me, and many around me.”
OUR LEADERS

Hierarchical Liaison
His Eminence,
The Most Reverend Mark
Archbishop of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania, OCA

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Nicholas Petrogeorge

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