



Orthodox Christian PRISON MINISTRY



ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL
ORTHODOX BISHOPS
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry an agency of
the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of
the United States of America.*

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 blessed the Sunday nearest the feast of St. Silas (the patron of prison ministry) to be **Prison Ministry Awareness Sunday** in all US Orthodox parishes.

In 2024, this occurs on Sunday, July 28th.

This is an incredibly important day of awareness for our ministry and we want to help you make the most of it by sending you the following resources in this packet:

- **A Sample Homily for Prison Ministry**
- **Bulletin Inserts**
- **Informational Brochure**

America's tragically high incarceration rate (2.3 million) means that—chances are—more than one parishioner has been touched by a person serving time in prison. As the national prison ministry of the Orthodox Church, Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry (OCPM) supports prisoners' unique spiritual needs through longterm case management and provides resources and training to parishes and clergy, enabling them to offer local solutions and fulfill Christ's command to visit Him in prison.

But we can't do it without the support of our parishes.

Please help us fulfill the commandment of our Lord to visit Him in prison (Matthew 25:36) by participating in this vital day of awareness.

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 28th**, and send these generous gifts to:

**Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry
276 5th Avenue
Suite 704-3183
New York, NY 10001**

If you have any questions or comments, please reach me at: npetrogeorge@theocpm.org

In Christ,

Nicholas Petrogeorge
Executive Director

PRISON MINISTRY AWARENESS SUNDAY

Sample Homily

July 28, 2024

Written by H. Paul Finley

OCPM Prison Relationship Manager and Spiritual Content Writer



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+In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Glory to Jesus Christ! *Glory Forever!*

The Assembly of Orthodox Bishops in North America has designated the last Sunday in July **Prison Ministry Awareness Sunday**. Our Hierarchs are reminding us to consider how we might serve those in prison. They are calling us again to remember the words of Christ Himself: *"I was in prison, and you visited Me."*

In today's Gospel reading of Jesus healing the demon-possessed men, the Fathers have given us a perfect look into the heart of prison ministry. When Christ visited these men, they had come *"out of the tombs"* and the men themselves were *"so fierce that no one would pass [their] way."* This is a terrifying story. But the Lord is never afraid of them. In fact, His healing love toward them is so powerful, that the people of the town are ultimately afraid of Jesus! The crowd witnessed His divinity in the way He visited and cared for these men, who we can know were not only exorcized of their demons, but as St. Paul says in today's Epistle reading, were truly saved by their confession. *"...If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."*

Today's reading reminds me of a recent story from Fr. John Kowalczyk, who has served as the prison chaplain at SCI Waymart in Pennsylvania for over thirty years. On his rounds through the Mental Health Unit, one day he met a man named Ezra who had lost all sense of reality and was writing expletives on the walls in his own feces. Instead of avoiding him, Fr. John wanted to teach Ezra the Jesus Prayer. They spent months praying together, even holding hands outside of his cell. The Prayer slowly transformed Ezra, as it transforms all of us. Fr. John would tell Ezra over and over, "Christ loves you, and obviously I love you." Now, the prison staff calls Ezra a miracle, who is often seen reading his Orthodox prayer

book and attending the Vespers services Fr. John offers in the facility. This is just one story from the 1,400 people in prison that Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry serves across the country.

Brothers and sisters, there are many reasons to visit the prisoner. First of all, Jesus commands us to do so. Christ always blesses obedience, and there is a price to be paid for disobedience. You may think you do not know anyone in prison, but as of this year, there are 113 million adults in the United States alone that have an immediate family member that has been to prison or jail. If no one comes to mind for you, chances are you know someone who has secretly been hurt by the struggles of incarceration.

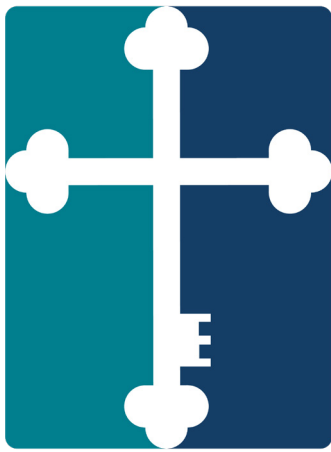
Secondly, we visit the prisoner so that they may enter into salvation. OCPM always seeks to introduce someone in prison to the Faith and facilitate his or her journey to the Kingdom of Heaven. For the Orthodox prisoner, we are calling them to turn fully back to Christ and follow Him. For Orthodox inquirers, we are giving them the Church for the first time in their lives.

A third reason to keep Christ's command is because, as He clearly states in Matthew's gospel, you will meet Him there. "I was in prison, and you came to Me." You will see Him in the prisoner you meet, because they are created in His image. When you serve the prisoner, you must be prepared for Christ to speak to you *through them*.

Finally, one last reason to visit those in prison: Christ visited you when you were in prison. You were in bondage to sin, death, and the devil and have been delivered by Holy Baptism. Think of your last confession. You were in bondage to some besetting sin, you repented and confessed, and Christ visited you, loosing the chains, breaking bolt and bar, and freeing you. Serving those inside a literal, earthly prison, will teach you this reality more than anything else can.

It is true that our country, for safety reasons, makes it very difficult to visit the prisoner in person, due to a host of reasons. Our hierarchs have appointed OCPM to help us navigate these issues. Furthermore, are you able to pray? Are you able to give? These, too, are forms of answering Christ's command. The good news of the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven is that we are no better than someone in prison. My brothers and sisters, please heed the call of the Church today and consider supporting the work of Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry with your prayers, your gifts, and your service.

To Him be all glory, honor, and worship to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.



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**WHO
WE
ARE**

Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry is the national prison ministry of the Orthodox Church in the US and an agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops.



OUR MISSION

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.

WHAT WE DO

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT - Through our Correspondence Ministry, OCPM case managers maintain relationships with Orthodox and non-Orthodox prisoners over years and decades at a time.

CATECHISM & EDUCATION - We provide personalized spiritual care, Bibles, books, icons, and catechism study courses in the Orthodox faith. OCPM publishes our own books and icons, which have been designed for use in prison and are printed to meet the stringent rules of prison mailing rooms.

COACHING & COUNSELING - OCPM trains Orthodox priests and laypersons to visit and counsel those in prison, and we counsel families with loved ones in prison. We advocate for correctional facilities around the country to recognize the Orthodox faith so that priests can enter prisons and administer the Sacraments and services.

RE-ENTRY SUPPORT - OCPM counsels those recently released from prison and trains local churches in how to fully welcome and support someone through his or her re-entry.

YOUR 2023 IMPACT

1,199 people in prison who corresponded with OCPM

200 new case files of people in prison opened

51,530 spiritual books, study courses, Bible studies, daily readings, and spiritual reflections sent

162 Orthodox churches offered coaching, training, and consultation for parish-based prison ministry

481 prison facilities served by OCPM

CONTACT US

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New York, NY 10001

(347) 868-6957

LEARN MORE

WWW.THEOCPM.ORG





Orthodox Christian
PRISON MINISTRY

PRISON MINISTRY AWARENESS SUNDAY

Did you know that there are Orthodox Christians practicing their faith in prison? Or that there are prisoners who are ready to repent of their crimes and embrace the Orthodox Church? **Who will minister to them?**

As the national prison ministry of the Orthodox Church, Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry (OCPM) supports prisoners' unique spiritual needs through longterm case management and provides resources and training to parishes and clergy, enabling them to offer local solutions and fulfill Christ's command to visit Him in prison. As a result, families are reunited, marriages are healed, and thousands of incarcerated men and women have a new sense of peace and restored order in their lives.



4,667

TOTAL PRISONERS MINISTERED TO

51,530

BIBLE STUDIES, DAILY READINGS, AND
SPIRITUAL REFLECTIONS SENT IN 2023

***"I was in prison,
and you visited Me."***

Matthew 25:36

LEARN MORE AT theocpm.org

PHONE: +1.347.868.6957



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