

## Funding and Support for TDCJ Chaplain Corps

Even time in prison does not escape God's dominion. Public authorities who deprive human beings of their personal freedom as the law requires, bracketing off as it were a longer or shorter part of their life, must realize that *they are not masters of the prisoners' time*. In the same way, those who are in detention must not live as if their time in prison had been taken from them completely: *even time in prison is God's time*. As such it needs to be lived to the full; it is a time which needs to be offered to God as a occasion of truth, humility, expiation and even faith. (*Pope John Paul II, Jubilee in Prisons*)

### Church teaching

- ★ The activity that prison chaplains are called to undertake is important, not only in the specifically religious dimension of this activity but also in defense of the dignity of those detained. Unfortunately, the conditions under which prisoners serve their time do not always foster respect for their dignity; and often, prisons become places where new crimes are committed. Nonetheless, the environment of penal institutions offers a privileged forum for bearing witness once more to Christian concern for social issues. (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 403*)
- ★ Prison officials should encourage inmates to seek spiritual formation and to participate in worship. Attempts to limit prisoners' expression of their religious beliefs are not only counterproductive to rehabilitation efforts, but also unconstitutional. As pastors, we will continue to press for expanded access to prisoners through our chaplaincy programs, including by dedicated volunteers. We oppose limitations on the authentic religious expression of prisoners and roadblocks that inhibit prison ministry. The denial of and onerous restrictions on religious presence in prisons are a violation of religious liberty. Every indication is that genuine religious participation and formation is a road to renewal and rehabilitation for those who have committed crimes. This includes contact with trained parish volunteers who will help nourish the faith life of inmates and ex-offenders. (*USCCB, Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*)
- ★ Prison should not be a corrupting experience, a place of idleness and even vice, but instead a place of redemption. To this end, it will certainly help if prisoners are offered the chance to deepen their relationship with God and to become involved in charitable projects and works of solidarity. This will help to speed up their social recovery and to make prisons more livable places. (*Pope John Paul II, Jubilee in Prisons*)

### Resources

- ★ **Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice** (USCCB) ([www.usccb.org/sdwp/criminal.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/criminal.shtml))
- ★ **Restore Justice** offers a place of compassion and assistance, resources and services and educational information for anyone who is affected by crime ([www.RestoreJustice.com](http://www.RestoreJustice.com))
- ★ **Catholic Campaign for Human Development** (USCCB) ([www.PovertyUSA.org](http://www.PovertyUSA.org))
- ★ **Texas Department of Criminal Justice** Chaplaincy Program ([www.tdcj.state.tx.us/pgm&svcs/pgms&svcs-chaplny.htm](http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/pgm&svcs/pgms&svcs-chaplny.htm))  
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The Texas Chaplaincy program furthers the mission that Jesus calls us to do in serving those who are imprisoned. The Texas Catholic Conference supports continued funding and support for the TDCJ Chaplaincy Program, specifically requesting additional funds for the purchase of religious materials for use in services.

### Texas Chaplaincy Program<sup>i</sup>

The mission of the Chaplaincy Department of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice is to positively impact public safety and the reduction of recidivism through the rehabilitation and re-integration of adult felons into society. The rendering of pastoral care, management of quality programming and a therapeutic community allow for such an opportunity. It is the purpose of Chaplaincy to provide guidance and nurture to those searching for meaning in life. A variety of programs, activities and community participation are prudently managed wherein an individual is able to pursue their faith, reconcile relationships and strengthen their families.

Chaplain's services are provided in prisons to facilitate the exercise of freedom of religion by offenders. It is the policy of the TDCJ to extend to all offenders as much freedom and opportunity as possible for pursuing individual beliefs and practices, consistent with security, safety and orderly conditions in the institution. Services are provided based on demand, need and resources. Participation in religious activities and attendance at religious services of worship is voluntary. Chaplaincy services are nondiscriminatory in the treatment of offenders' religious beliefs. No employee, contractor or volunteer shall disparage the religious beliefs of any offender, or other person, nor deliberately seek to persuade a change of religious affiliation.

Programs of the Chaplaincy Department include but are not limited to:

- Weekly Religious Services
- Visitation/Hospitality Ministry
- Offenders/Families and Victims/Families
- Hospice Care
- Post Trauma Staff Support Team
- Pastoral Care
- Youthful Offenders Programming and Pre-Release Special Programming
- Family Visitors Center & Hospitality Houses
- Life Skills Program
- Spiritual Growth Programs
- Assist the offender in his/her search for life meaning, necessitating the healing process and allowing for changes in attitude
- Develop and manage quality and comprehensive religious, clinical, and therapeutic programs and curriculum
- Develop continuum of care plans for release preparation through coordination with the TDCJ-Parole Division Work directly with all other divisions of TDCJ, incorporating the religious community into every phase of offender treatment and rehabilitation.

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<sup>i</sup> "Chaplaincy Program." Rehabilitation and Reentry Programs Division, Texas Department of Criminal Justice. 24 June 2008. <<http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/pgm&svcs/pgms&svcs-chaplncy.htm>>.