



**CATHOLIC
HOME
MISSIONS**

Restorative Justice in Santa Rosa



Families and volunteers gather for a "Get on the Bus" day to visit offenders on visiting day.

By Beth Griffin

Prison is not a permanent address for most offenders. Men and women convicted of crimes will eventually return to their communities and try to reestablish relationships with family, friends, and others they knew before they were incarcerated. But reentry into society is rarely smooth. Temptations and tensions persist and offenders who have not made meaningful changes to their lives and attitudes are at tremendous risk of committing new crimes. Offenders, victims, and the families of both have unique needs that are often overlooked in the criminal justice system.

For 25 years, the Diocese of Santa Rosa in northwestern California has operated a mostly

all-volunteer program to bring healing, understanding, and support to those engaged with or affected by the system. Deacon John Storm is director of the Catholic Restorative Justice Ministry, one of the programs supported by a Catholic Home Missions grant to the Diocese of Santa Rosa.

"Our mission is to restore and improve community by inspiring those affected by crime to achieve individual healing through self-knowledge, empathy, and spiritual growth," Deacon Storm says.

The ministry includes support, education, and pastoral interaction with inmates; support for families; community and church education and advocacy; and advocacy for healing of victims, offenders, families, and first responders.

Deacon Storm says, "We're not whitewashing crime. This is about accountability. But we talk about the dignity of all human people. It's not a matter of us OR them, but us AND them. There is more that we have in common than what keeps us separate."

The program began in 1993 as a diocesan detention ministry and expanded with the promulgation of *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, a statement issued in 2000 by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The Catholic Restorative Justice Ministry grew beyond a basic prison ministry to become an association of the faithful focused on the document's call to respond to all who have been harmed by crime. Within the diocese, detention facilities include one state prison, one state mental hospital for the

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Neighbors

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A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA

FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

When Pope Francis came to the United States in 2015, he visited a detention center in Philadelphia. He reminded the inmates that God “wants us to keep walking along the paths of life, to realize that we have a mission, and that confinement is never the same thing as exclusion.”

The restorative justice ministries in the Diocese of Santa Rosa are a powerful witness to the unfailing mercy and enveloping comfort of the love of God. Without your support to the Catholic Home Missions Appeal, this ministry, and so many others around the country, would not be possible.

Pope Francis continued his remarks to the inmates by saying, “All of us have something we need to be cleansed of, or purified from. All of us. May the knowledge of this fact inspire us all to live in solidarity, to support one another and seek the best for others.”

Thank you for your continued solidarity with struggling faith communities across the country. Your generosity is supporting our neighbors here at home and strengthening our Church throughout the United States.

May the Lord continue to bless you abundantly.

In the Heart of Christ,

Paul D. Etienne

Most Reverend Paul D. Etienne, DD, STL
Archbishop of Anchorage

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criminally insane, six state corrections and rehabilitation camps, six county jails and satellites, and six juvenile detention facilities.

Deacon Storm and his office manager are the part-time staff of the ministry. They work with 30 trained volunteers who serve in social, catechetical, organizational, and advocacy roles. The deacon, who was ordained in 2013, is a former member of the ministry’s board. He retired from a 35-year career in law enforcement that included work as a county court investigator and federal probation officer.

New volunteers make individual “friendly visits” to people in the jails. The “through the glass” visits give volunteers a nonthreatening way to experience the jail environment and help alleviate the isolation of the offenders, Deacon Storm says.

“This is pre-evangelization at its finest. We visit because we’re Catholic. Eventually we have the opportunity to explain that we see dignity in every human and believe people have value and do not have to be defined by their crimes,” Deacon Storm says. Some of the volunteers are crime victims who participated in a restorative justice program; others are professionals who want to put their skills to use in a different context.

The Catholic Restorative Justice Ministry operates a growing Victim Offender Education Group Program



Volunteers gather crafts and snacks to bring to the “Get on the Bus” visiting day.



Elizabeth Tregaskis was honored by Catholic Restorative Justice Ministries as Volunteer of the Year for her service at the Sonoma County Main Detention Facility.

(VOEG) at Pelican Bay State Prison. Deacon Storm describes this as a slow process to help incarcerated individuals understand and develop insight into the underlying circumstances of their lives and the choices that led them to prison.

“The truism ‘Hurt people hurt people’ is borne out here. These people learned how to be violent by what was done to them and they never saw an alternative,” Deacon Storm says.

“We help them self-identify patterns of negative behavior and begin to replace them with healthier ways of thinking and behaving. Almost everyone who commits a crime is seeking something good, but the way they do it looks to their own survival and gain and not at the needs, rights and safety of others,” he says.

Grief and loss, shame and guilt, are common feelings experienced by offenders and people working with them in the ministry. In some ways, sin and crime are analogous, Deacon Storm says. However, while sinners have an opportunity for sacramental reconciliation, offenders do not always have an option to reconcile with those they have hurt.

The ministry offers a gradual program of conversion that helps offenders see themselves as people who can

DID YOU KNOW?

be loved. It also sustains those who are Catholic with Eucharist and Sunday services. “We’ll bring more people to church with hope and joy than with a dour countenance and ‘reading the riot act,’” Deacon Storm said.

John C. was incarcerated at various facilities for 20 of his 65 years. He was homeless when he was released from prison last year. Deacon Storm helped him secure a home, reintegrate into the community and reinforce his commitment to lead a lawful lifestyle. “Deacon Storm is helping me get my life together. I’ve got a good thing going and I better not mess it up,” he says.

Mr. and Mrs. Z. attended a restorative justice talk at their parish, and invited Deacon Storm to make a presentation to a local fraternal organization. Subsequently, they tapped him to visit a young relative in the county jail. The inmate appreciated the encouraging visit, but the deacon’s ministry was perhaps even more important to the family, to whom he offered comfort and an orientation to the complex criminal justice system.

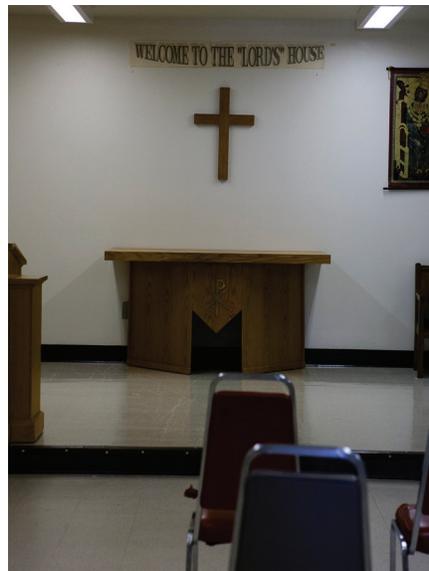
The Catholic Restorative Justice Ministry also provides volunteers, crafts, and snacks for the “Get on the Bus” program organized by other local groups. The initiative brings families to visit offenders on visiting days, especially near Mother’s and Father’s Days. “Imprisonment is a serious impediment to continuing family relationships and anything that can be done to help maintain the relationship should be done,” Deacon Storm said. “The children, the parents, and the institutions all benefit from visitation programs.”

Deacon Storm sees glimmers of hope in the prison population. Offenders in the Victim Offender Education Group are trying to figure what they need to do to succeed in life. Near the end of the 52-week program, each offender has a facilitated dialogue with a surrogate victim who was harmed by the type of crime the offender committed. Deacon Storm says the immediate measure

of success is whether the inmate can articulate accountability for his or her actions, understands the impacts of the crime, expresses empathy for the victims and the other offender participants, and commits to harming no one in the future. Long-term success is harder to measure, although anecdotal evidence is encouraging, he says.

In addition, Deacon Storm says young volunteer participants in the ministry give him hope. “When youths are exposed to the concept of restorative justice, with its holistic approach of healing harms, they get it. Restoration makes better sense to them than retribution,” he explains.

Catholic Home Missions covers approximately 40 percent of the Catholic Restorative Justice Ministry budget. Bishop Robert F. Vasa of



Chapel in a prison where offenders and volunteers can gather together in prayer.

Santa Rosa, says, “The Catholic Home Missions grant makes it possible for the diocese to fund this ministry. Deacon Storm provides invaluable service and appraises me of chaplaincy needs and local and statewide initiatives regarding Restorative Justice, prison ministry, and community concerns. In the present era of growing tension between law enforcement and communities, his expertise is especially valuable to me.” ☺

- The Diocese of Santa Rosa encompasses six counties in northwestern California. It spans more than 11,700 miles. While it is the geographically largest diocese in the state, it has the smallest population.
- Travel from one end of the diocese to the other entails an eight-hour drive over rugged terrain that is subject to seasonal flooding and mudslides.
- The diocese was established in 1962 from portions of the Archdiocese of San Francisco and the Diocese of Sacramento.
- Catholics comprise approximately 20 percent of the 936,000 people in the six counties. Hispanics make up about 20 percent of the diocesan population.
- The 41 parishes and 22 missions of the diocese are served by 60 priests, including 37 diocesan priests, 12 religious order priests, and 11 priests from other dioceses. There are 39 permanent deacons, 28 women religious, and 25 religious brothers. Nine men are studying for the priesthood at four locations.
- There are 20 state and local detention facilities within the diocese.



Strengthening the Church at Home

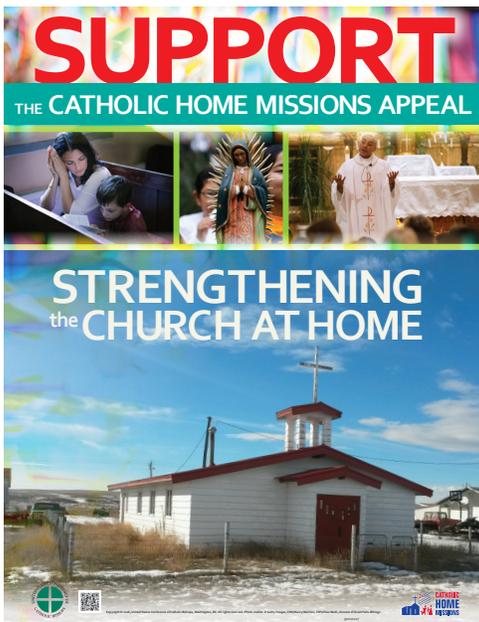
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READ ABOUT HOW the Diocese of Santa Rosa is supporting those affected by the criminal justice system.



Your generosity to the Catholic Home Missions Appeal supports essential ministries in poor dioceses across the United States and its territories.

THANK YOU for being part of our efforts to strengthen the Church at home.

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