



United States
Conference of
Catholic Bishops

Pilgrims on the Way of Hope: A Resource for the Jubilee of Prisoners

Jubilee 2025: Pilgrims of Hope

United States Conference
of Catholic Bishops

Jubilee of Prisoners: Resource Packet

December 14, 2025

INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

"In every part of the world, believers, and their Pastors in particular, should be one in demanding dignified conditions for those in prison, respect for their human rights and above all the abolition of the death penalty, a provision at odds with Christian faith and one that eliminates all hope of forgiveness and rehabilitation. In order to offer prisoners a concrete sign of closeness, I would myself like to open a Holy Door in a prison, as a sign inviting prisoners to look to the future with hope and a renewed sense of confidence." (Pope Francis, "Hope Does Not Disappoint," Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025)

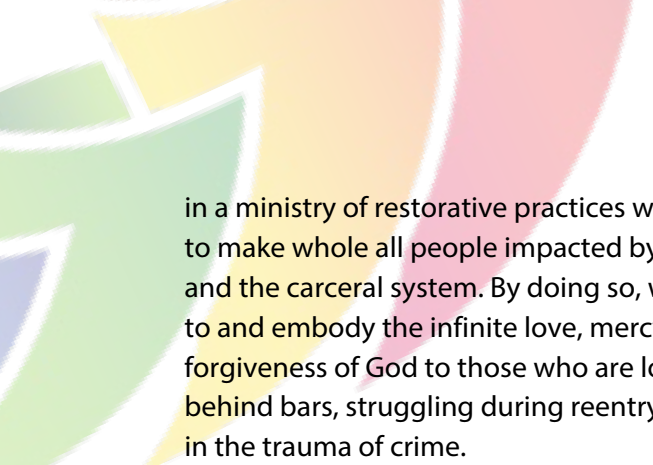
A Jubilee Year is an important and historical event in the life of the Church designed for the faithful to experience and convey God's loving

mercy in a special way. Traditionally, a Jubilee is proclaimed every twenty-five years, and the activities include pilgrimages, processions, special celebrations of Mass, and an invitation to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Jubilee 2025 began on Christmas Eve, 2024, and concludes on the Feast of the Epiphany in January, 2026. The theme is "Pilgrims of Hope." Jubilee activities are meant to encourage Catholics to both receive God's mercy and participate in acts of mercy in our daily lives and communities. Our late Holy Father Pope Francis specifically asked us to consider working for peace and an end to conflicts, promoting human life, inviting prisoners to look to the future with hope, upholding the dignity of migrants, healing the sick, and accompanying the elderly.

The Holy See has designated a number of Jubilee Days throughout 2025 to recognize and celebrate different groups of people and various ministries in the Church. The Jubilee of Prisoners will be held Dec. 14, 2025.

For this Jubilee recognizing those in prison, we call to mind the nearly two million people in the United States who are incarcerated, detained, or awaiting execution. In solidarity, born from our shared dignity as children of God and members of the Body of Christ, we are called to participate





in a ministry of restorative practices which seek to make whole all people impacted by crime and the carceral system. By doing so, we point to and embody the infinite love, mercy, and forgiveness of God to those who are locked behind bars, struggling during reentry, or lost in the trauma of crime.

Pope Francis taught that we “should be one in demanding dignified conditions for those in prison, respect for their human rights and above all the abolition of the death penalty, a provision at odds with Christian faith and one that eliminates all hope of forgiveness and rehabilitation.”

These resources can be used at any time throughout the Jubilee Year to prepare individuals, church groups, parishes and entire dioceses to engage and celebrate the dignity, resilience, and restoration of our sisters and brothers behind bars, those who have been harmed, and all who work to repair the breach.

Additional resources for the Jubilee for Prisoners and other celebrations can be found online at the USCCB Jubilee Year web pages: <https://www.usccb.org/committees/jubilee-2025> (English) and <https://www.usccb.org/es/committees/jubileo-2025> (Spanish).

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

The Jubilee Year calls us to be Pilgrims of Hope. At first glance, it may seem impossible to celebrate a Jubilee of Prisoners amid the difficult circumstances often present in the U.S. criminal justice system. Too often we see human beings confined within cells, enduring lengthy sentences in dehumanizing conditions, or even condemned to death. Meanwhile, victims and survivors of crime are often left unaided, while the families of all feel the collateral damage of their loved ones’ absence and suffering. Why should we celebrate?

In marking the Jubilee Year, we celebrate in a special way that God’s justice is merciful, redeeming, and reconciling. Despite the harm someone has suffered or caused, every person has indelible dignity and should be treated as such. We know that God’s justice is rooted in right relationship — where crime and harm are understood in terms of the affected people and relationships, rather than solely the law or rule that was broken. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis writes, “Justice is properly sought solely out of love of justice itself, out of respect for the victims, as a means of preventing new crimes and protecting the common good, not as an alleged outlet for personal anger.” (no. 252)

The USCCB Pastoral Letter: [Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice](#) says: “As Catholics, we need to ask the following: How can we restore our respect for law and life? How can we protect and rebuild communities, confront crime without vengeance, and defend life without taking life? These questions challenge us as pastors and as teachers of the Gospel.”

Catholic teaching inspires us to seek means of accountability that enable the person who caused harm to take responsibility for their actions, express remorse, make amends, and endeavor to live differently going forward. At the same time, the pursuit of merciful justice also requires us to attend to the safety and healing of people and communities impacted by crime. In this year of Jubilee we pay special attention to the ways our shared humanity and woundedness are bound up and dependent upon our shared healing and liberation.

As Christians we must also examine the underlying conditions and prejudices that gave rise to the overwhelming prevalence of incarceration in our communities. We are moved to root out the bias toward the dehumanization



of our sisters and brothers that take shape in systems, institutions, and in our own hearts.

The Jubilee Year helps us to find hope in God's love for us. We find hope in steadfast, faith-filled advocacy to end the death penalty, improve prison conditions, uphold the rights of crime survivors, and remove barriers to reintegration and reconciliation. May our witness be buoyed by the words of Pope Leo XIV who said, "Ultimately, this is hope: knowing that even if we fail, God will never fail us. Even if we betray him, he never stops loving us. And if we allow ourselves to be touched by this love – humble, wounded, but always faithful – then we can truly be reborn." ([Pope Leo, General Audience](#), August 13, 2025.)

It is the experience of God's grace-filled hope, infinite mercy and forgiveness that buoys our witness to be Pilgrims of Hope and bearers of God's merciful justice in the world.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PILGRIM PREPARATION

One major element of the Jubilee celebration for Catholics is to make a pilgrimage. For some, that may involve going to Rome, where international pilgrims traditionally visit the Holy Doors of the four great basilicas (Saint Peter, Saint Paul Outside the Walls, Saint Mary Major, and Saint John Lateran). Jubilee 2025 has a fifth Holy Door at the Rebibbia Prison in Rome — opened by Pope Francis on Dec. 26, 2024 as a way to invite prisoners to look to the future with hope and a renewed sense of confidence. This unique Holy Door conveys the special significance of the Jubilee of Prisoners.

For pilgrims unable to travel to Rome, local Jubilee pilgrimages can be made to diocesan or eparchial cathedrals, churches, and/or religious sites. A pilgrimage does not need to be a long journey in order to be transformational. It is

highly recommended and meaningful to make a pilgrimage to one's own diocesan or eparchial cathedral or other church(es) or religious site(s) designated by the bishop. Planning for a local pilgrimage can take place at any time of year, or it can be done at the same time as the Jubilee for Prisoners (December 14). The timing, as well as the exact local destination, is at the discretion of the local organizer(s).

If coordinating a pilgrimage to Rome:

- Holy Doors at the four great basilicas
 - The Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls houses the tomb and the prison chains of the Apostle Paul. While meaningful for all pilgrims, this is especially significant for a Jubilee of Prisoners pilgrimage.
- Holy Door at Rebibbia Prison
 - This Holy Door at the Rebibbia Prison chapel, the Church of Our Father, is open only to inmates and staff. Pope Francis opened this Holy Door and presided over Mass in the chapel, where he explained to those present that the door was "a sign of the door of our heart." (Note: Tour operators may be able to facilitate visits to the community outside of the prison, should pilgrims desire to draw near to the prison for a prayer walk or other locally acceptable pilgrim activities.)
- A [virtual pilgrimage](#) is also available so people from all over the world can experience the beauty of pilgrimage to the sites in Rome.

Domestic Pilgrimage Opportunities: Suggestions for Dioceses and Eparchies

- [Catholic Ministry Leaders Experience to Montgomery & Selma, Alabama](#). Throughout the year, Catholic Mobilizing Network hosts groups of Catholic leaders to learn about the racial disparities embedded in the U.S. systems



of capital punishment and mass incarceration, and to reflect on how the Church can advance truth-telling and healing. Consider joining a scheduled group or collaborate with CMN to develop your own diocesan pilgrimage.

- Hold a diocesan/eparchial-wide Jubilee walking pilgrimage from the cathedral (or another site of your choosing) to religious sites, churches, universities/schools and/or Catholic-led prison-focused organizations. Consider inviting the bishop on this journey.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CELEBRATING JUBILEE OF PRISONERS

Suggestions for Individuals

- [Become a Pen Pal with someone who is incarcerated](#). Catholic Prison Ministries Coalition partners with the Order of Malta Federal Association to provide resources and guidance on how to become a prison pen pal.
- [Attend a First Friday Prayer Vigil](#). On the First Friday of each month, CMN invites all people of goodwill to a virtual prayer vigil, a sacred space to lament upcoming executions and bear witness to the sanctity of all human life. Join others to stand in solidarity with people facing execution, their victims, and all who are impacted by the unjust system of capital punishment.
- Participate in a [Young Adult Poetry Contest](#). Each year, CMN hosts the Justice & Mercy Poetry Contest to lift-up the voices of young advocates against capital punishment and draw from them inspiration for the work ahead in death penalty abolition.

- Find additional opportunities throughout the year to partner with [Catholic Mobilizing Network](#) and the [Catholic Prison Ministries Coalition](#) on prayer vigils, restorative justice workshops and more.

Suggestions for Parishes

- Hold a Prayer Service Outside of a Prison.
- Host a [Prayer Vigil for an Execution](#).
- Pray the [Stations of the Cross](#) with People Impacted by Crime and Incarceration.
- Participate in [Conversations in Communion](#).
- Pray a [Novena to End the Death Penalty](#).
- Dedicate a [day of preaching](#) on December 14 on the [topic of incarceration](#), the death penalty, and how we can minister to our brothers and sisters behind prison walls, as well as their loved ones on the outside.
- Implement the ["Hope Does Not Disappoint"](#) education and awareness campaign.
- Host a [Film Screening](#).
- Host a [Book Discussion](#).

Suggestions for Dioceses and Eparchies

- Celebrate a liturgy or host a prayer service for chaplains, ministers and volunteers engaged in prison, jail, detention, reentry, advocacy and restorative ministry in your (Arch)diocese.
- Organize a Mass of solidarity for all people impacted by incarceration.
- Post stories about prison ministry and restorative justice practitioners on the diocesan or eparchial website, social media channels and other owned channels prior to the Jubilee of Prisoners in December.



- Host a diocesan/eparchial-wide Jubilee of Prisoners gathering with the bishop/eparch. This can be a presentation, dialogue/discussion, social gathering, meal, liturgy and/or a virtual event, allowing prison ministry and restorative justice practitioners, volunteers and advocates to engage with their episcopal shepherd.
- Encourage all diocesan/eparchial offices and departments to feature, celebrate or acknowledge the important role of prison ministry and restorative justice workers during December 2025, centered around the Jubilee of Prisoners. This may need to be preceded by a workshop or meeting with diocesan/eparchial staff to coordinate efforts.
- Inaugurate a diocesan/eparchial initiative for prison ministry and restorative justice practitioners beginning with the Jubilee celebrations. This might include an area-wide evangelization effort, an annual recognition, an annual liturgy with the bishop, or other inspired effort.

KEY SAINT

- **St. Maximilian Kolbe, OFM Conv.** (1894-1941, feast day August 14), who provided shelter for refugees during WWII, and who died by sacrificing his life for another man in Auschwitz.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **Catholic Prison Ministries Coalition:** promotes ministry to all people affected by incarceration and detention. CPMC recruits, trains, supports and empowers those called to this ministry.

- **Catholic Mobilizing Network:** is a national organization that mobilizes Catholics and all people of goodwill to value life over death, to end the use of the death penalty, to transform the U.S. criminal legal system from punitive to restorative, and to build capacity in U.S. society to engage in restorative practices.
- **United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development:** hosts resources and teachings on criminal and restorative justice for Catholics.

KEY PRAYERS

- [Jubilee Prayer Card](#)
- Example [Prayers of the Faithful](#) from the Catholic Prison Ministry Coalition
- [Praying with Victims of Violence](#)
- [Prayer to end the use of the death penalty](#)
- [The Pope's Prayer Video for the Abolition of the Death Penalty](#)
- [Collection of Short Prayers in the Face of Executions](#)
- [Prayer for God's Justice, Mercy, and Compassion](#)

