



ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

March 4, 2009

Dear Pastoral Leaders,

I write to you today to draw your attention to a challenging issue, the reentry of prisoners back into our communities. Although often disregarded, failure to be concerned about the well-being of people in prison not only ignores their dignity as children of God, but puts our communities at risk as thousands of prisoners return to their home communities as greater risks than when they first entered prison.

The Diocesan Public Policy Committee has chosen “Prodigal Sons and Daughter: Easing the Transition from Incarceration to Home and Community as one of this year’s education priorities. “This son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.”
Luke 15: 24

The numbers are staggering: one out of every 100 Americans is currently imprisoned. All but those convicted of the most heinous crimes will eventually return to their communities. But, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, over two-thirds of those released from incarceration will be in some form of legal trouble within 3 years. However, ex-offenders who receive support after their release have much lower rates of recidivism, higher rates of employment and higher earnings compared to those who received no such support.

In their 2000 document, *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, the U.S. Catholic Bishops wrote, “As bishops, we believe that the current trend of more prisons and more executions, with too little education and drug treatment, does not truly reflect Christian values and will not really leave our communities safer.”

I invite you to join in this education effort in whatever way your parish is able. Recognizing that parish communities will have many different attitudes towards the imprisoned, the enclosed materials include a variety of suggestions from book discussions or study groups to active mentoring. Even the smallest efforts to educate parishioners can help to make our communities safer while providing a second chance to those who have committed crimes.

“Come to me you who are blessed by my Father.... For I was...in prison and you visited me.”
Matthew 25: 34b, 35

Your brother in Christ,
Fr. Brian Cool
Chair, Diocesan Public Policy Committee