

# Sisters in Action



Sister Judy Greene  
Monroe County Jail Chaplain

On Tuesday afternoons I conduct a Men's Spirituality Group at the Monroe Correctional Facility. At the beginning of a recent group I was talking about making connections when a long-time member of the group said in a stage whisper to a newer member next to him, "She's big on connection." My response, "Yes she IS big on connection AND she's still got pretty good hearing," brought the relief of laughter to our group. I recount this because I believe that making connections and being in relationship is at the heart of my ministry as Catholic Chaplain in the Monroe County Jail System.

The position of Catholic Chaplain at the County Jails was established in 2004 and was the result of a collaborative effort among the Sisters of St. Joseph, the Diocese of Rochester, and the County of Monroe. The main goal in creating this position was to have a consistent presence in both facilities and to serve the needs of incarcerated Catholics, insuring access to sacramental and pastoral care. Financial support for this ministry comes from the Sisters of St. Joseph, the Diocese of Rochester and Monroe County.

The men and women I spend my days with are from the streets of our city and from the suburbs; they are rich and they are poor; some are well educated and many are school dropouts; some have families who love and support them and some have been abandoned by their families; some are jailed for minor offenses and some for murder; some are from our parishes and some have no church affiliation. It is a microcosm of our society.

The majority of my time is spent in one on one visits in the housing units. It is here that I listen to the stories – stories of regret and sadness, stories of courage and forgiveness, and stories of a hunger for God. I witness daily the strength and resiliency of the human spirit and hear of the faithfulness and long-suffering of family and friends. Despite the doubts and fears, many hope in a different future and see a light at the end of the tunnel or, as one person told me, “At least now there is a tunnel.”

The message I receive most consistently, both spoken and unspoken, is: “There’s more to me than you see.” I am aware as I write about “them” that I’m also writing about “me” and about “us.” Over the years I have developed a healthy respect for the band aid approach. Aware of the overwhelming problems in the system and my inability to significantly change it, I continue to see value in the ordinary daily connections -- the simple but powerful message conveyed by showing up consistently, keeping a promise, and calling someone by name.

Courtesy of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Rochester  
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