

## **Andrei's Story: Life in Prison, But Life In Christ**



# Orthodox Christian **PRISON MINISTRY**

Andrei was 21-years-old when he left the Ukraine to start a new life in America. Instead, he got involved in drugs, committed murder, and was sentenced to life in prison without parole.

It took Andrei some time to adjust to life in a maximum-security prison with its violence and restrictive conditions. He felt shame and guilt for his crime and had the added burden of being a foreigner in a foreign land.

Ten years ago, a friend recommended that he contact Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry. OCPM sent Andrei books, an Orthodox Study Bible, pamphlets and icons. He completed OCPM's catechism correspondence course and regularly wrote to the ministry, which responded personally to his letters. "Without exaggeration, that changed my life," says Andrei. "I developed a much better understanding of our faith, discovered the beautiful depth of patristic writings, felt the profoundly warm sense of peace when I read St. Isaac the Syrian."

Andrei is now 50-years-old. He will never leave prison but he says he is confident that he can still live a life of peace. "Through the patient and compassionate presence of OCPM in my life, I feel the presence of the Church and the light of the Lord that shines even on this sinner, into this dark depth," says Andrei. "Every day, as I get up before 4:00 a.m. to pray, I have a long list of reasons to thank the Almighty Lord. OCPM is high on that list," he says.

As we commemorate Holy Week and the Passion of Our Lord, let us remember the repentant thief who hung on the cross next to Christ. That convicted criminal was the first person to enter Paradise. The Lord was only waiting for his sincere repentance and heartfelt cry to not be forgotten.

Today, there are 2.3 million incarcerated men and women in the United States, the highest incarceration rate in the world. Scores of these prisoners are ready to repent for their crimes. And they must find a way to reconcile lengthy or even life-long prison sentences.

Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry proclaims Christ to men and women who are incarcerated, many of whom are being introduced to the Orthodox Church for the first time. For Orthodox Christians whose lives have been upended by their crimes and prison sentence, OCPM helps them to return to the Faith, offering forgiveness and reconciliation. As a result, families are reunited, marriages are healed, and thousands of incarcerated men and women have a new sense of peace and restored order in their lives.

OCPM serves the spiritual needs of the incarcerated through a variety of ways. We correspond with thousands of prisoners and provide them with books, Bibles, pamphlets and icons. We catechize them in the Orthodox faith through special correspondence courses. We train Orthodox priests and laypersons to personally visit and counsel them in prison. And we lobby correctional facilities around the country to recognize the Orthodox faith so that Orthodox prisoners can receive the sacraments.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 25, our Lord sets out clearly the conditions for inheriting the Kingdom of Heaven. We satisfy the hungry and thirsty. We take in the stranger. We clothe the naked. And we visit the sick and those who are in prison.

We may find it easy to perform most of these commandments, but when was the last time you entered a correctional facility to visit a prisoner?

Thousands of men and women are languishing in the battlefield that is prison. Many have experienced the limits of what non-Orthodox ministries offer. They suspect there is more but they don't know where to find it.

OCPM visits and meets prisoners where they are, with the fullness that is the Orthodox faith. Every year, we process thousands of letters from prisoners and personally respond to each one by speaking to their particular situation. We maintain relationships with prisoners across multiple prison transfers and we assist them in finding an Orthodox parish upon their release.

Prisoners like Andrei are no less part of the Resurrection of Christ because they are in prison. OCPM helps prisoners, no matter their sentence, to be connected with the

healing power of the Orthodox Church.

Please find out more about how you and your parish can have a vital ministry to incarcerated men and women by visiting [www.theocpm.org](http://www.theocpm.org).

[goarch.org](http://goarch.org)

