

OCPM-Houston: Bringing the Light of Christ Means Serving in Many Ways



After an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meeting, Bob Born was asked if he would like to also volunteer at the first faith-based prison unit in the United States, the Carol Vance Unit in Texas. He was reluctant at first, but he said ‘yes’ anyway. Bob’s ‘yes’ 23 years later has grown into one of the most successful local Orthodox prison ministries in the country, OCPM-Houston, which today boasts leadership from priests, laity, and monastics from Antiochian, Greek, and ROCOR archdiocese—a truly pan-Orthodox ministry.

By choosing to localize its ministry, OCPM-Houston has been able to successfully serve those in prison near them in myriad ways. The In-Prison Ministry, led by local clergy, Fr. David Companick and Dn. John Wise, visits those in prison on a one-on-one, face-to-face basis over a long period of time. Regularly scheduled Orthodox study groups in several prisons offer instruction in the Orthodox Faith and prayer services, where they have shared the Sacraments and a number of baptisms to those behind bars. The Re-Entry Ministry meets the needs of those transitioning back into society – and there are a lot of needs, most of all finding a supportive parish community. The Family Outreach Ministry strives to reunite families torn apart by the prison system. The annual Advent Party for families of the incarcerated has grown to over 60 children. Both the children and their caregivers

are showered with gifts and the love of Christ. OCPM-Houston calls the child's caregiver once a month to see if there are any new needs they can meet and sends birthday cards to the children on what can otherwise become an especially hard day. There is also a continuing Correspondence Ministry where approved lay members correspond with an incarcerated pen-pal.

Why serve in so many different ways? For Daniel Namee, OCPM-Houston Board President, serving those in prison is first and foremost a way of seeing. "I [used to have] the perception that 'bad people go to prison'...[but] we are all sinners. I would like to change the perception of the souls within a prison. I would like people to know that those in prison are just like us, but in such a dark place, sometimes they need us to bring The Light to them."

Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry (OCPM) is an agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States. For Orthodox Christians who have been arrested for crimes, OCPM helps them return to the Faith, offering forgiveness and reconciliation with Christ. For both Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike, OCPM provides spiritual care, enabling prisoners to find hope and purpose in their lives. For more information, please visit www.theocpm.org or follow us on Facebook and Instagram @theocpm.

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