

Prison Relationship Managers: A New Team for Those Behind Bars



For our brothers and sisters in prison, there is no greater need than having a consistent, loving, Christian presence in their lives. However, providing this kind of long-term relationship is not easy to achieve in prison.

Many prisons are in very rural places, with the closest Orthodox church being hours away. Most Orthodox clergy are hard pressed to be able to drive such a distance every month, let alone every week, to offer the Sacraments and spiritual care. People in prisons are often transferred to different facilities around a state or even the country, making it extra difficult to maintain visitation from a priest they may get to know. Moreover, it is rare to have concentrations of more than a handful of Orthodox prisoners in any correctional facility. As a result, accommodating the religious practice of Orthodox Christians is low on the list of priorities for chaplains. Too often, our incarcerated Orthodox brothers and sisters are left not knowing how to receive visitation from a priest or how to stay in contact with the Church.

How do we keep those in prison connected to the Church and vice versa? Enter OCPM's team of Prison Relationship Managers (PRMs). These full-time staff members are each committed to a set caseload of Orthodox or inquiring people in prison for the duration of that person's sentence and after his or her release. This means an Orthodox Christian in prison has a years-long relationship with someone from OCPM who is solely committed to maintaining their connection to the Church and helping their spiritual growth. The Prison Relationship Managers not only connect with people personally through letters, emails, phone calls, and in-person visitation, they also facilitate and coach Orthodox clergy and lay volunteers for face-to-face visitation.

Fr. Michael Pejovic, PRM, first experienced prison ministry under the care of OCPM's Fr. John Kowalczyk as his student at St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary (STOTS). "My experience in the prison truly opened my eyes to the hardships inmates are struggling with," says Fr. Michael. "From that day on, the need to minister to the inmates was formed in my heart."

"I hope that my role will help those incarcerated feel connected to the Church," says Toby John, MDiv and PRM. "We are all meant for relationships and community. And how much more do those who are incarcerated need a community? They find themselves in the lowest points in their lives. We can provide them with a community to hold onto during these challenging times."

Want an even more inside look at the work of our PRM team? Check out our four-part blog series, "The Prison Journal of Toby John," at theocpm.org/news.

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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