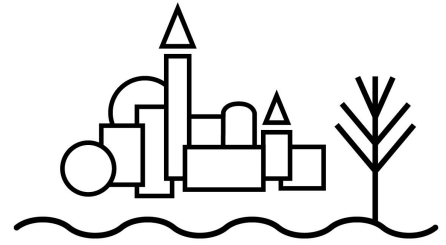


Connecting with My Neighbor in PRISON

Luke 10:29-37



I visited Juan on a Sunday afternoon in the county jail. While waiting my turn, I saw a woman with a teenager and two small children visiting another man. Through a thick window glass, the young inmate advised his teenage son to behave, to follow rules, and to take advantage of educational opportunities.

When it came my turn to visit Juan, he was surprised and almost cried. He pressed his opened hand against the thick glass and I did the same because hugs and handshakes were not allowed. After a 30-minute visit, I left, but I wondered if my feelings of being separated from Juan meant that I was incarcerated with him.

Obviously, an inmate is a person alienated from society. Most inmates come out of jail filled with negativity, resentment, and continual complaints, but every person is someone in need of being called by name, not by number. Every person needs food, dignity, respect, and love. They also need good role models.

Reflections

1. Read Matt. 25:31-46. How has this story awakened a concern in you for those in prison and for their families?
2. Read Lev. 26:11-13, Matt.5:21-25. How can our Christianity help people, residing in prison or leaving it, keep their dignity?
3. Why might a person feel “imprisoned” with an inmate? Has anyone ever taken part of your burden by ministering to you? Can you take some of another’s pain just by listening to them, by reaching out to them in love?
4. In order to leave jail when he completes his sentence, Juan will need “an address.” An address is a house, a place to eat, to rest, to keep one’s belongings, and to encounter loved ones. As Christians, what initiatives can we bring to create transitional places for individuals in the process of leaving jail when they have no roots, or when they are migrants and persons with granted asylum? (Ex. 22:21, 22, 25, Luke 6:36, Luke 19:8-10)

A Call to Action

1. A common thread for individuals in jail is suffering and causing suffering for others. They leave jail with the illusion of starting a new life, far from their old ways. How might your church or CP Women’s Ministry help one or more of them to be included in a different model of life that will make them successful?
2. Organize a prison ministry in your church or group. Contact your local county jail and inquire about what needs the inmates have and how you can help. Some prisons and jails will allow groups in for visits, for birthday/Christmas parties, for worship services.

3. If a face-to-face ministry is not something you or your group can do – maybe you can collect up items for care packages – magazines, lip balm, lotion, puzzle, craft supplies, etc. and donate to the local facility.

Resources

1. www.newdayinchrist.org
2. <http://www.cppministry.com>
3. www.bop.gov/resources/former_inmate_resources.jsp
4. <http://www.compassionlink.org>

Prayer

Dear Father of prisoners and non-prisoners, we exalt your son Jesus who was incarcerated to save us. Help us to find wisdom to serve those in jail. Give us resources to open our hearts and our doors for those in need of a place to rest. Amen.

ABOUT THE WRITER:

Rev. Dr. Gloria Villa Diaz has been serving people residing in prisons for almost eight years through New Day in Christ Ministries, which keeps in touch with about 20,000 inmates annually. Some inmates continue to request her “ear” after leaving jail. Gloria makes sure they will be heard and that they will hear the Christian message of love and support. Gloria lives in Houston, Texas with her family. She can be contacted at gloria@newdayinchrist.org, 713.527.7159, or 2119 Avalon Pl, Houston, TX 77019.