

Deacons see prison ministry as blessing behind bars Ministers say outreach does not induce fear but instead a joy of serving on the peripheries Paul Senz OSV Newsweekly

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In some of Jesus' last words to his disciples before his passion and death, he implored them to act with charity and mercy to all of their brothers and sisters. "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me. ... Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me" (Mt 25:40, 45). Among the examples of mercy given by Jesus is visiting the imprisoned (cf. Mt 25:36).

This is a call that is passed down to followers of Jesus Christ through the centuries. In our day, in a particular way, this calling is fulfilled by dedicated laypeople and religious as well as priests and deacons who serve as chaplains at jails and prisons all over the world.

As with any vocation that is sincerely lived out, God's grace infuses these chaplains, and even the challenges themselves can be seen as blessings of their ministry.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops released a statement in 2000 entitled "Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective On Crime and Criminal Justice." This document profoundly explains the position of the bishops of the United States on the importance of pastoral care of the imprisoned and their families.

"We know that faith has a transforming effect on all our lives," the document states. "Therefore, rehabilitation and restoration must include the spiritual dimension of healing and hope. The Church

How to Help

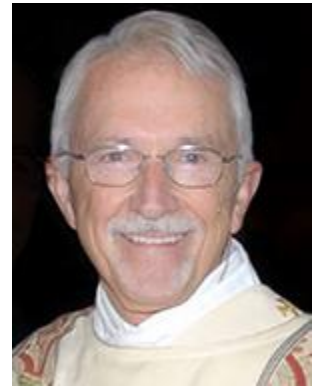
The Dismas Ministry was founded to provide support, resources, books and other materials to prison chaplains in the United States, and to bolster and encourage those engaged in this important work of mercy. For more information, visit DismasMinistry.org.

must stand ready to help offenders discover the Good News of the Gospel and how it can transform their lives.”

‘Holy Spirit is at work’

Deacon Roy Forsythe was profoundly affected by an early experience in prison ministry, one that brought home to him the importance of ministering to those in prison. Deacon Forsythe was invited to participate in a closing service of a retreat weekend at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary, commonly called “Big Mac” or “The Walls” by inmates. This is a maximum security prison, largely holding violent criminals convicted of serious offenses. It also is the prison in Oklahoma where all executions are performed. This was not your typical retreat weekend.

About 20 inmates were invited to the retreat — Deacon Forsythe described them as the “baddest of the bad,” who had been identified as leaders in the prison community. One inmate in particular stood out to him at the closing service. A 21-year old man, this inmate had never met either of his parents, and he confided that during the retreat weekend, he was hugged for the first time in his life, and for the first time had another human being say “I love you” to him.



“He was serving a life sentence for double murder,” Deacon Forsythe said. “His story brought tears to my eyes, and I knew that someday I would need to try and help other young men and women to not find themselves in a similar situation.” Forsythe

The services prison chaplains seek to provide are varied, and it is a challenge to be the minister that each inmate needs. However, chaplaincy is a call to a very specific form of service to a very marginalized population; such a vocation is tailor-made for deacons, who are by definition called to be servants in a special way.

“For those who are Catholic, we bring the Eucharist and provide copies of ‘The Word Among Us’ that are provided to us at no charge,” Deacon Forsythe said. “We also bring Bible studies, spiritual books and a program of RCIA for those who wish to join our Church.”

The call to prison ministry is not one to be taken lightly, Deacon Forsythe said, and it is one that few are able to fulfill.

“I have had many who come along for a visit to the jail to see if this ministry is for them, but few ultimately say ‘yes.’”

There can be a certain degree of hesitation, even fear, that comes from the idea of working intimately and privately with potentially dangerous people. But Deacon Forsythe insists that in this ministry, the Holy Spirit is at work, and we must move beyond whatever fear we have in order to serve these inmates as they deserve.

“Some are fearful about going into a prison, but I can tell you that in 10 years, I have never been in a situation that elicited fear,” Deacon Forsythe said. “All the inmates we see have requested to see us, so the Holy Spirit is already at work.”

The joy that is experienced by these inmates as they pray to invite Jesus Christ into their hearts is palpable, and it is something the ministers are able to share with them, he said.

“Every human being is a child of God and deserves our love, our care and our respect. But for the grace of God, many of us could be in their situation,” Deacon Forsythe observed.

There are certainly challenges that arise in this ministry, and challenges that are inherent in it.

“The challenge is always to lead another human being to the foot of the cross. To lead them from skepticism to belief, from doubt to belief, from fear to belief — to take the leap of faith in spite of their future.”

Mercy to the marginalized

A deacon’s ministry is not meant only to be at the service of the priest in the liturgy. The deacon is to serve the people of God at all times, in all places. Dispensing God’s mercy as chaplains to the imprisoned is one way deacons can live their vocation among the most marginalized.

“I feel deacons can best serve the Lord by working outside the walls of the sanctuary,” said Deacon Richard Tolcher, coordinator of prison and jail ministry for the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

In addition to his role as the coordinator of the archdiocese’s prison ministry efforts, Deacon Tolcher has served as a Catholic chaplain at the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary for 13 years.

“I had a chance to build a Catholic community behind the prison walls. It is special because I am privileged to serve men and women on the periphery of society.”

The inmates to whom he is ministering are generally open to listen and participate, Deacon Tolcher said.

“They recognize that faith-filled visitors give of their time and energy. In some ways, they are very protective and very open to God’s message and his messengers.”

Deacon Tolcher feels that this Jubilee Year of Mercy has invigorated ministry to those on the peripheries of society.

“I recognize that in the Year of Mercy, I am directly involved in dealing mercifully with the marginalized. I draw my strength from Matthew 25:43-45 wherein I see Jesus in those incarcerated,” he said. “I stay focused on the human dignity of all men and women.”

Having been involved with work in youth detention facilities and alternative schools for juvenile delinquents since early in his career, Deacon Tolcher said that the transition to ministry with adult inmates in prisons and jails came easily.

In his vocation as a deacon, Deacon Tolcher recognizes the special role he plays in dispensing the mercy of God.

Being “ordained as a deacon for approximately 29 years has helped me realize my individual calling to serve those who need God’s mercy.”

Paul Senz writes from Oregon.

Freedom behind bars Inmates can grow spiritually even while in jail, thanks to dedicated prison ministry volunteers Brian Fraga OSV Newsweekly

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For even the most experienced prison ministers, hearing the clinking sound of the security gates closing behind them is a chilling experience.

“It sends a little shiver up my spine,” Tom Navin, director of social action and prison ministry for the Diocese of Little Rock, Ark., told Our Sunday Visitor.

Navin is one of hundreds of prison ministry staff and volunteers who every week visit the more than 2 million people who are incarcerated in the federal and state prisons, and county jails, across the United States.

Prison ministry is tough work, and it can often be difficult to recruit volunteers willing to go behind the walls and interact with inmates and pretrial detainees, some of whom have committed violent crimes and are serving life sentences.

But many inmates — the hardened criminals and nonviolent drug addicts alike — yearn for God’s presence, even if they often erect defense mechanisms that prison ministers have to penetrate. Lifelong criminals have been turned around by the Gospel, and volunteers in prison ministry say they often benefit as much as the inmates.

“When we go into the jails, many of our team members and prisoners are transformed,” said Sister Judith Krantz, founder of MercyFire Catholic Prison Ministry, a nonprofit that organizes weekend prison retreats for inmates in Pennsylvania, Louisiana and California.

“We laugh with the prisoners and we cry with them,” she said.

“One time, in a Louisiana prison, we were eating with the prisoners, and one guy sat down beside me,” Sister Judith added. “He bowed his head, and when he raised his head, his whole face was just drenched in tears. God got him there.”

A call from Jesus

Visiting the imprisoned is one of the seven corporal works of mercy. Jesus, who spent a night imprisoned after his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, instructed his disciples in Matthew 25:36 that they who visit the imprisoned visit him.

“I remember the words of Jesus when he says, ‘Who among you would not leave the 99 and go find the lost sheep?’ Well, this is what we do. That is exactly what we do,” said Deacon Peter Murphy, director of prison ministry for the Diocese of Phoenix, Ariz.

“These people are not write-offs,” Deacon Murphy told OSV. “They made a mistake, and the vast majority of them want to make themselves right. A lot of them didn’t have the good parental guidance that you and I had. If we can help them, I think we’ve done a tremendous justice to help those individuals.”

About 23 years ago, Deacon Murphy said a fellow deacon asked him if he had ever considered visiting prisons in Arizona.

“I said, ‘You’re crazy.’ As far as I was concerned, they did the crime, they can do the time. Let them serve their sentence,” said Deacon Murphy, who added that he was “hooked” after the first time he visited a prison.

“I don’t know what hooked me,” he said. “It’s so different from ministry to lay folks on the outside. I really can’t put into words. It’s a feeling of being able to reach somebody. Not all of them, because not all inmates are open, but there’s definitely a feeling that you can hopefully help them change their lives a little bit.”

In the county jails, lay volunteers help provide the Liturgy of the Word with Communion. Inmates can receive one-on-one spiritual counseling, if they desire.

“We take care of providing the spiritual services for each inmate,” Deacon Murphy said, adding that volunteers have had to deal with security protocols that have been increased over the past 10 years.

Building trust

Editor's note

The morning after we went to press with this In Focus on prison ministry, Pope Francis met with about 200 Italian prison chaplains. During his brief audience Oct. 23, the pope stressed each prisoner's humanity. The task of a chaplain, he told those gathered, is to let them know that "the Lord is inside with them." "No cell is so isolated that it can keep the Lord out," he said. "He is there. He cries with them, works with them, hopes with them. His paternal and maternal love arrives everywhere." Read on for more information on this important ministry, as well as for interviews from reformed convicts who are now using their lives to promote the Gospel.

— Gretchen R. Crowe, editor, OSV Newsweekly

Still, despite the obstacles, the ministry is able to effectively engage the inmates, particularly during the Liturgy of the Word, Deacon Murphy said.

“During the prayers of the faithful, we ask the inmates to verbalize their own needs and their own prayers, and it can be so emotional, particularly with the females who are more extroverted in their spirituality,” Deacon Murphy said.

In Arkansas, Navin said he had no formal background in prison ministry when he moved to the Diocese of Little Rock from the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, where he previously had worked for seven years. He interviewed for a job in his new diocese, and was told the position entailed prison ministry.

“I said I had never done it, but I was anxious to learn,” said Navin, who became a certified religious assistant, a designation in Arkansas that allowed him to minister to inmates.

Navin’s job is to provide ministry to about 140,000 Catholics imprisoned in Arkansas’ 16 prisons and five community correctional centers, many of which are located in rural areas. Navin is constantly recruiting priests, deacons and lay volunteers to go into the prisons and lead Bible studies, rosary prayer groups, liturgies and other activities.

“It’s very difficult work,” Navin said. “People are just afraid of going into prison. It’s hard to recruit. That is why we first try to get volunteers exposed first to writing letters to inmates. Some then take the next step to visit the prison. When they see that, it opens them up a little bit, and it takes away from the threatening aspect.”

Building trust among the inmates is a critical factor, which is an early lesson Navin learned.

What's Real and What's Not?

Myth: *Prison ministry is dangerous.*

Truth: *“Although this is a common (concern), it usually goes away after the first contact with inmates,” said Ron Zeilinger, director of Dismas Ministry. Zeilinger blames sensational media coverage of crime for leading people to believe that everyone locked up in prison is a dangerous criminal.*

Myth: *Prisoners have it “made” with TVs and carpeted floors.*

Truth: *“Prisoners live in very humble quarters,” said Sister Judith Krantz of MercyFire. “If an inmate has a TV, it’s because he purchased it.”*

Myth: *Prisoners only go to church services to get out of their cells.*

Truth: *“Just like any community, prisoners come in varieties,” Sister Judith said. “We are inspired by the depths of their knowledge and holiness. One priest said that the best confessions he has heard have come from prisoners.”*

Myth: *A prison minister is at risk of being caught up in a violent situation.*

Truth: *“It is important to separate myth from reality,” Zeilinger said. “It is not likely that a volunteer will come face to face with a famous or dangerous criminal.”*

“I would go down to one cell unit every Wednesday morning for Bible discussion and general discussions about current events and things related to the spiritual life,” Navin said. “There was a group of 10 to 20 people. After six months, I was hardly getting any response, hardly any feedback. I was a little frustrated, so finally I said, ‘I just can’t get you guys to open up.’”

“One guy said, ‘Mr. Navin, we’re just learning to trust you,’” he said. “That never dawned on me. This was a group of individuals who didn’t have many people they could trust in their whole life. They just needed some time to trust me.”

“My heart goes out to prison volunteers, because it’s a tough ministry,” said Scott Woltze, 40, a Portland, Ore., resident who served three years in state prison for robbing banks. Woltze, who had a profound conversion experience after leaving prison, told OSV that inmates are good at reading people, and that their trust is earned, not given.

“Every inmate I knew came from bad backgrounds, abusive homes, and trust was something very rare for them,” Woltze said. “Prison ministers need to make the first move, show interest in the inmates, let them know that they’re someone who can be trusted. The last thing inmates want to see is running into volunteers who have barriers up.”

Ministry challenges

However, David Lukenbill, 70, a former career criminal who founded the Lampstand Foundation, an apostolate that provides written materials and resources to agencies involved in prisoner re-entry programs, told OSV that prison ministry can be difficult for laypeople without a background in law enforcement or prior criminal activity.

“You need people who understand that there is evil in the world and some criminals are really evil people,” said Lukenbill, who spent about 12 years in federal and state prisons for thefts, robberies and assaults. Lukenbill believes the Catholic Church’s intellectual tradition is the only antidote to the criminal mindset.

“As a volunteer, you need to figure out who’s hustling you and who’s real,” Lukenbill said. “That’s not easy. You have to verify things people tell you. You need to find out what they’re in for, the details of their crime. Protect yourself, keep an arm’s length. Criminals lie and criminals will use you. Criminals will tell you anything. A lot of them are very good



Many inmates yearn for God’s presence in their lives, prison ministers say. Courtesy of Dismas Ministries

at it.”

Leonard Rubio, 45, benefited from a supportive Catholic community at San Quentin State Prison in California.

“We were like family, many of us would talk to each other throughout the week, support each other and pray for each other,” said Rubio, who was convicted of second-degree murder for killing his ex-girlfriend in 1986, when he was 18. He served 23 years in state prison and recalled the spiritual support from priests who visited him in a county jail while he was awaiting trial.

“They would come in, bring me Communion, occasionally they would come in with a Mass kit and say Mass for me,” said Rubio, who recalled one visiting Vietnamese priest who had been imprisoned and tortured by communist authorities who accused him of being a spy.

“Hearing this priest’s story, getting to know him through the visits was really helpful for me,” Rubio said.

“Thinking about what Christ went through, that really helped me. It made me see that people in my community still cared for me.”

A community ‘inside’

Get Involved

From national to diocesan programs, opportunities abound to answer Jesus’ call to visit and minister to those in prison.

Dismas Ministry: Named after one of the thieves executed with Jesus on Calvary, Dismas Ministry works with prisoners who desire to strengthen their faith lives and come into a deeper relationship with God. The ministry provides an abundance of materials such as Bibles, prayer books and study guides. For more information go to dismasministry.org.

Paulist Prison Ministries: Part of

At San Quentin, Rubio interacted with Jesuits and Dominicans who often visited the prison. He went to daily Mass. He and fellow Catholics at Our Lady of the Rosary Chapel at the prison also prayed the Rosary together. They would often support one another when their parole requests were denied.

“I really haven’t seen that kind of community in the outside world,” Rubio said. “I’ve seen pockets of it. As a Church, our faith is more than attending Mass. It’s also about being in communion with one another and walking Christ’s walk with one another.”

Woltze said many of the white male prisoners like himself in the Washington state prisons were not comfortable talking about their religion with other people.

Still, even if quietly, thousands of Catholic inmates hunger for spiritual nourishment. Many inmates often write to the Milwaukee, Wis., offices of Dismas Ministry, which provides Bibles and faith study materials, including rosaries and prayer books, in English and Spanish, to inmates across the country.

“For them, in many cases, they don’t have anybody they can reach out to,” said Ron Zeilinger, who is director of Dismas Ministry. “So when they get something like a Bible and prayer book, it’s gold in their hands. It makes quite an impression. On our feedback forms, we get nice responses and spontaneously written letters on things going on in their spiritual lives.

“It’s an honor and a grace to meet them at that level,” said Zeilinger, who also visits prisons to participate in prayer services and restorative justice programs.

“It’s always a touching and profound experience when you meet the men and women, shake their hand, look them in the eye and see their face,” Zeilinger said. “It puts a human face on them. The first impression is that these people are just ordinary people. Maybe they’ve done some stupid or foolish things, but it really is a humbling and human thing to be with them.

“You don’t feel threatened, or ill at ease,” Zeilinger added. “They’re very grateful to have you there. They usually give you a warm reception. They’re grateful that someone would come and spend some time with them.”

Paulist Evangelization Ministries based out of Washington, D.C., Paulist Prison Ministries relies on chaplains and volunteers to minister to prisoners using a variety of Catholic materials. The ministry is looking for financial support through one-time or continuous donations. More information and copies of its newsletter for prisoners can be found at prison-ministry.org.

Diocesan efforts: Many dioceses have a Catholic Charities office that supports outreach to prisoners. Check with your local chancery for details.

USCCB statement: Get up-to-speed on Church teaching regarding prison ministry by reading “Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice” written by the U.S. Catholic bishops. The full text can be found at usccb.org.

Transforming lives

Sister Judith, who is a Eudist Servant of the 11th Hour, said her three-day weekend prison retreats seek to encourage inmates to open their hearts to Christ. The retreat team members present a series of meditations and reflections on God’s mercy and the Catholic faith. The retreat ends with Sunday Mass and a personal recognition of each prisoner.

“We see conversions that surprise us,” she said. “We later find out that some inmates gave up TV because it was leading them into sin. We’ve also had guys give up pornography. There are just so many beautiful, heart-warming stories. When we go in, we want the men to have a friendship with Jesus.”

Joe Martino, a prison minister in Dartmouth, Mass., said he once saw, during a prayer gathering, an inmate hug and forgive another inmate who had shot him on the street.

“It was beyond an unbelievable blessing for all of us in the room,” said Martino, who is part of a ministry team that visits inmates weekly at the Bristol County House of Corrections in Dartmouth. The ministry — called Residents Encounter Christ — also runs weekend retreats at the county jail for inmates.

Martino said he has seen inmates move from spiritual desolation and sadness to learning to trust God and other people.

“Christ is present in them,” he said. “Christ is present in their words, in their tears, in their transformation. We see the face of Christ present in them.”

The next step

Several prison ministries also seek to help the inmates reintegrate into the community after their release, as well as supporting their families on the outside. Navin said the Little Rock diocese tries to connect the inmates with the local parish where they will be relocating after release.

“We seem to lose contact with them when they get out, but every once in awhile, they’ll call us, usually with a request or questions about how to get a job and housing,” he said. “We work with the reentry community to help them out as much as possible.”



Zeilinger



Sister Judith

Related Reading

From Prison to Peace

Deacon Murphy said his ministry also is trying to help in reentry efforts.

“When an inmate is released back into society, it’s very difficult for them,” he said. “They get \$50, and the prisons are out in no-man’s land. They spend some of that money just to get into Phoenix. They need to get their Social Security cards, driver’s licenses, they need to be taken to job interviews. It’s so involved in all kinds of areas. It’s a ministry unto itself.”

Brian Fraga writes from Massachusetts.

Aiding imprisoned immigrants a joy, challenge Volunteers, catechesis materials needed to help strengthen faith of illegals detained in U.S. prisons James Graves OSV Newsweekly

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According to the California Department of Corrections, 13 percent of prisoners are illegal immigrants. Shutterstock photo

Of the 2.3 million inmates housed in detention facilities in the United States, many have entered the country illegally. Statistics vary on what the percentage may be, but one report by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, for example, puts the number in California at 13 percent, directly costing taxpayers \$1 billion annually. Most in this group are from Mexico.

Many Catholic dioceses in the United States pour significant resources into ministering to those in prison, recalling Christ's words as he foretells his praise of the just on the last day: "I was ... in prison and you visited me" (Mt 25:36).

Ministering to inmates who came to the country illegally is not significantly different than doing so for the rest of the prison population, volunteers say, but there are enough differences that result in unique needs.

Inmates' concerns

Deacon Jim Walsh, who is the Restorative Justice program director for the Diocese of San Diego, works as a detention ministry chaplain and coordinates 340 volunteers who serve at 27 detention centers in the diocese. After working as a corporate executive for 30 years, Deacon Walsh became a deacon and began working in prison ministry 11 years ago.

Resources

Inmates have many concerns, he said, including “fear and anxiety” as to when they will be released, what they will do when they are released, whether or not they will return to prison and concerns about family.

Illegal immigrants “have the added concern about facing deportation once they are released,” said Walsh, who has started a weekly program with Immaculate Heart Radio, with detention ministry a regular topic.

Kevin Starrs, director of prison ministry for the Diocese of Phoenix, agreed that one of the concerns of illegal immigrant prisoners was the fear of being deported at the conclusion of their sentences. Many have family in the United States, he said, which makes for an “ongoing stressful situation.”

Many illegals speak only Spanish, said Starrs, who has been working with illegal immigrant prisoners, particularly from Mexico and Central and South America, for 20 years. While that can be a problem in communicating with prison guards, it is not a barrier to communication with fellow inmates.

“In prisons, everything is done by race — blacks eat with blacks, whites eat with whites, Chicanos (Mexican Americans) eat with Chicanos, pisas (Mexican immigrants) eat with pisas,” he said. “A white can say ‘hi’ to a Mexican, but he can’t eat with one at the lunch table, so you’re dealing with your own people who speak your language.”

Resources needed

Deacon Peter Brause of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and his friend Rob Auten minister to men at a detention facility in Chino in Southern California. They assist at a weekly Mass (or Communion service when no priest is available) and teach catechesis. Deacon Brause said they observe an anti-Catholic and anti-Christian bias in prison.

“It shows something about our inmates when they even show up for Mass,” he said. “We want to give them the tools to know and defend their faith, in a language they can understand.”

For more information on the ministries mentioned in this story, visit these websites:

ACTS Missions:

www.actsmissions.org

Dismas Ministry:

www.dismasministry.org

Catholic Community Services of Southern Arizona: *www.ccs-soaz.org/detention-ministry.html*

Prison Ministry for the Diocese of Phoenix:

www.diocesephoenix.org/prison-ministry.php

Office of Correction Ministries for the Diocese of Galveston-Houston:
www.archgh.org/correctional-ministries

Restorative Justice Program for the Diocese of San Diego:

bit.ly/1hkLFbb

Deacon Brause and Auten said their biggest need in working with the illegal immigrant population is for bilingual catechetical materials. Mike Gutierrez, detention ministry coordinator through Catholic Community Services in the Diocese of Tucson, Ariz., said his ministry also has a special need for Spanish-language Bibles.

Forty-five miles north of Tucson is the Eloy Detention Center, a facility that houses 1,600 illegal immigrants. According to Gutierrez, many in that facility are receptive to the message of the Church, which presents a unique opportunity for evangelization.

“I always get excited when I go,” he said. “In our services, everyone participates, and everyone has a chance to share.”

In addition to Bibles, there’s also a need for prayer books and other religious materials, Gutierrez added, particularly from Dismas Ministry, which is a national Catholic outreach for inmates.

Deacon Eddie Stoughton is associate director of the Office of Correction Ministries for the Diocese of Galveston-Houston. He noted that he has ministered to illegal immigrants who finish their sentence and are deported, only to return illegally to the United States and again be imprisoned.

In addition to offering a plea for English and Spanish religious materials — Bibles are a particular expense — Deacon Stoughton added that there is a need for materials in Vietnamese as well.

Volunteers sought

Starrs, who works in the Diocese of Phoenix, said his greatest need is for additional volunteers to assist with religious services for inmates, and if they are bilingual and can work with Spanish-speaking immigrants, that is an added bonus. He noted that the enthusiasm of the prison ministry volunteers has always kept him motivated in his job.

“We have older women who are full of passion for helping the imprisoned,” he said. “Seeing their zeal has really helped me stay committed to my job.”

Ministry to illegal immigrants can be easier, Deacon Walsh added, because they often are housed in immigration detention facilities and are there because they have broken immigration laws and not committed other crimes.

“Our programs in these facilities are more personal and liturgical because the security level and security concerns are not the same. Our volunteers do not view them as criminals,” said Deacon Walsh, who echoed the need for volunteers.

Living in Southern California, Walsh said, there's no shortage of Spanish-speakers, but there is a need for volunteers able to communicate with illegal immigrants from other parts of the world, including China, Africa and the Middle East.

"It's not dangerous, it's extremely rewarding and God is calling us to serve others. Our volunteers discover that they leave with more than when they walked in," Deacon Walsh said.

Rewarding work

Deacon Brause and Auten are members of the Knights of Columbus and use a catechetical course offered through the Knights' Catholic Information Service. They regularly rely on the generosity of their fellow Knights to provide the materials and encouraged support for Knights' initiatives, which help fund their work.

The work has borne much fruit, Deacon Brause said. "The men we work with have made mistakes but regret them and are trying to find their way back to God," he said. "In fact, I have found Jesus to be more present in the Chino facility than in my own parish."

Deacon Stoughton has worked in prison ministry for 11 years; his wife is a volunteer as well. His newest initiative, he said, was introducing ACTS Missions to spread the Gospel into his detention ministry, as well as educating the public about the rewards of prison ministry. "You meet the nicest people in prison," he said. "They are not the monsters the media can portray them to be."

Jim Graves writes from California.