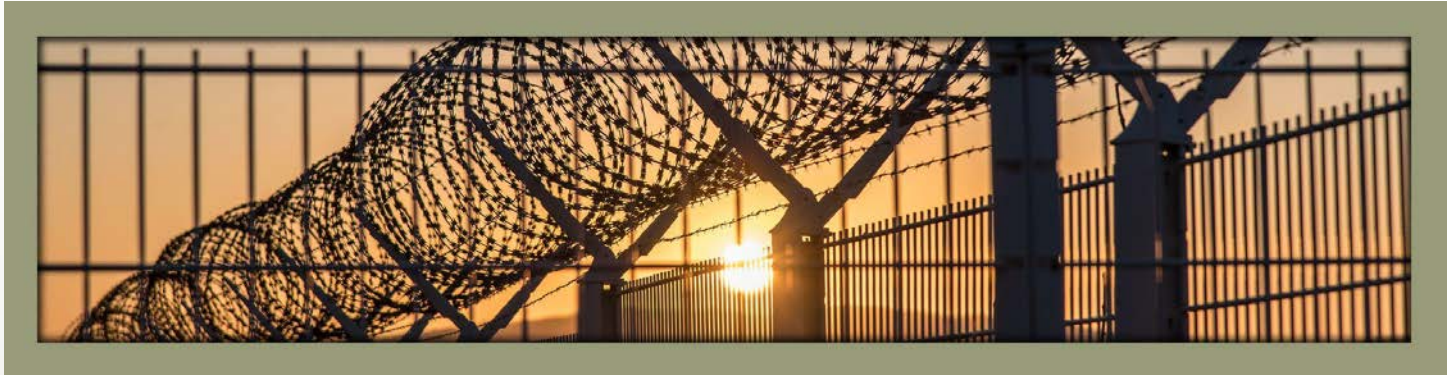


Serving Others

In the Margins

PMUNY Newsletter

Fall 2021



Hello Prison Ministry of Upstate New York Friends & Family!

We are excited to showcase the first issue of our PMUNY newsletter with you. We hope it will help PMUNY's loyal jail and prison volunteers **stay in touch and simultaneously assist in recruiting others to get involved in this meaningful and purpose-driven work**. We hope this newsletter is informative. We welcome your feedback and your suggestions for future PMUNY newsletters. We invite you to share your copy of **In The Margins** with anyone wondering if this rewarding ministry may be in their future.

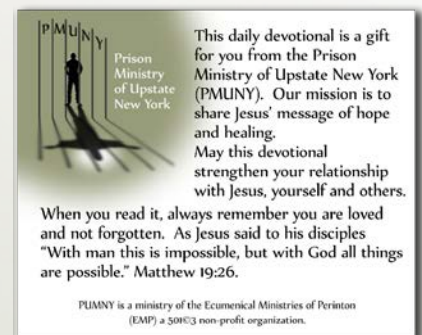
Gratefully, *Deb, Tim, Ray, Barb, Marilyn, Guy-Kevin, Jean, Tom, Don & Joyce*

*Deb Barb Marilyn Tom
Tim Ray Joyce Guy Kevin Jean Don*

REMINDING **In**MATES

"You Are Loved Not Forgotten"

Although the CoVid 19 pandemic has not allowed us to offer face-to-face programs to "Men and Women in Green," the PMUNY Leadership Team has continued to meet each month. We searched for a way to share Christ's message of **love, healing & transformation** with those in prison without our volunteers being able to go inside correctional facilities. In consultation with prison chaplains we determined PMUNY would purchase spiritual reading materials for members of "inside" faith communities. **Let Us Celebrate** missalettes



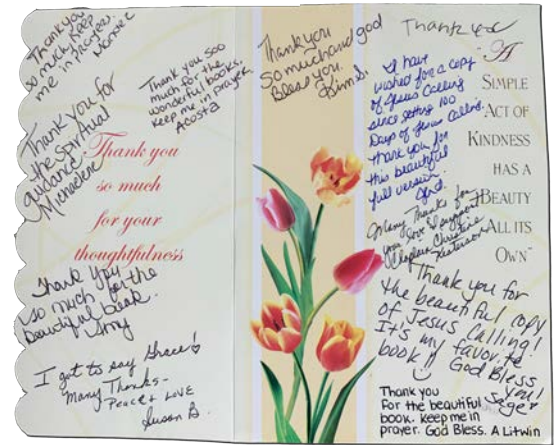
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(English & Spanish) and the daily devotional **Jesus Calling** (English & Spanish) by Sarah Young were selected for distribution. **“Let Us Celebrate”** is routinely used at prison liturgies and **“Jesus Calling”** had previously been well received by Residents Encounter Christ (REC) participants. PMUNY and prison chaplains distributed nearly 400 items to members of their faith communities.

Our sincerest THANKS to Chaplain Kesterton at Albion, Sr. Roz at Attica, Chaplain Stein at Auburn, Chaplain Clement at Groveland and Fr. Kuklich at Wende for placing a PMUNY acknowledgement sticker in each book.

Every inmate was reminded **you are loved and not forgotten**. PMUNY received a lot of positive feedback. Residents were deeply grateful as

shown in this “Thank You” note from some of the residents. It goes without saying that PMUNY’s Leadership Team was delighted as well to donate uplifting spiritual reading materials to our Brothers and Sisters In Christ.



In Memory of Eric and Tom

Sadly, two of our prison ministers have passed away. Eric passed on March 19, 2020 at the age of 62 and Tom on April 29, 2021 at the age of 81.



Eric

He was 62 years young, full of unbridled enthusiasm, humor and endless zeal for the grace of God. Eric reveled in people and their life

journeys. He intentionally walked beside them, shared their highs and lows, and provided strength through his presence. He befriended all who crossed his path and his humility belied his incredible mind. He was always the first to roll up his sleeves with enthusiasm, no matter how mundane the task.

Eric was larger than life. He walked his talk as a Faithful Christian, pouring his time, talents and treasure into every parish community he joined. Eric especially enjoyed serving as a member of the Prison Ministry and Nursing Home Eucharistic Ministry Teams.

In addition to his prison ministry family, he is survived by; 5 children, 3 grandchildren, many nieces, nephews, several life-long friends and hundreds of acquaintances who loved and admired Eric.



Tom

Tom spent his life living his faith in service to others. At the May 28, 2021 PMUNY Leadership Team meeting fond memories were shared of Tom. Deb recalled that he enthusiastically made

many copies of meaningful Palanca to share at RECs whether he was on the team or not.

He often took in homeless men who had nowhere else to go. He had a reputation of visiting friends unannounced bearing gifts he thought they might appreciate. He once performed a pantomime during a “Christianity In Action” REC talk focused on kindness. The men in green were mesmerized by both his message and delivery.

Tom loved his four-legged animal friends and his two-legged human ones as well. He had a great fondness for prison ministry and was eager to share his knowledge and his faith. Tom was a kind and generous man. In addition to his biological family he leaves behind many acquaintances who admired his authenticity, sincerity and generosity.



*A Volunteer Perspective: My Time **In**side*

By Joyce, PMUNY Leadership Team

Even though the men and women we meet in prison are often incredulous that total strangers willingly spend time inside, I am the one who has truly benefitted. ***Anyone looking for a deeply meaningful activity that profoundly impacts others as well as yourself might give prison ministry a try.***

As a prison volunteer, my “good life” has been enhanced by spending time with **In**mates. I have:

- Never once (in almost 20 years) ever felt threatened or scared and I have always felt safe.
- Witnessed many events that have altered my own life and the lives of many incarcerated individuals.
- Listened to many heart-wrenching stories.
- Heard deep pain in their voices.
- Listened to many stories of regret and remorse.
- Seen joy in their eyes when total strangers entered a room, sat at their table and listened to their stories.
- Heard countless expressions of gratitude.
- Witnessed changes in hearts and behaviors, making way for new life altering habits.

My experiences in prison ministry have been rewarding, leaving me filled with gratitude for things I once took for granted. Prison has taught me to be more accepting and less judgmental. Even some of the personal relationships in my life on the outside have been restored due to the valuable lessons I have learned on the inside.

My spiritual lessons involve: forgiveness, finding peace, becoming a peacemaker, respect and dignity for human lives, acknowledging sacredness of the human person and developing a more personal relationship with God. Because of the jail and prison programs I have participated in, my worldview is wider, more inclusive and more respectful. I have more compassion. ***Going inside gives me purpose. I know I am making a positive difference in this world and for that I am both grateful and humbled.***

Prison Ministry is one of the best things I have ever done in my life.

Share Your Perspective

- *What Benefits Have You Enjoyed As a Jail or Prison Ministry Volunteer? Send us your story.*
- *To best stay in touch, please send us your **Name, Email and Current Address.***

Contact us at pmunyorg@gmail.com or 585-633-0184



A Prison Perspective: Insights from a former Inmate

By a formerly incarcerated woman.

We thank her for her honesty, generosity and willingness to share her pain filled story. To view the full article, visit <https://pmuny.org/insights-from-a-former-inmate/>

I can say with confidence that going to prison was not on my bucket list. The how and why I ended up in prison are not relevant to this article. I believe and hope that what I have learned through this experience can be instructive to those fortunate enough not to have ever gone “upstate.” Some of the observations from being in prison that are listed below may be insights that one might experience just going through life normally (that is, without a stint in prison) but let’s just say some of those lessons I learned in prison were far more...intense, because of my incarceration.

The real pain, the never ending pain of incarceration is the pain caused to those I care most about. The greatest sorrow of my life is.... As a result of my incarceration, my precious child was left without the love and support she needed. This excruciating reality haunted me every day I was incarcerated. The sorrow of this devastating loss still takes my breath away.

It is surprising, and disappointing, to discover who your real friends are. My mother visited me almost every week when she was able; it was the one of the greatest gifts she gave me. The stigma of associating with a “criminal” proved to be a clarifying test of who really cared about me, who was a true friend, and who was a friend of convenience. Most didn’t even bother to make sure my child was surviving this excruciating period of our lives.

Everyone works when “doing time” in prison and the pain of prison work can be significant. **My work assignments involved constant and excruciating manual labor.** My work exposed me to immeasurable amounts of poison ivy, tormenting blisters (from mowing acres of grass with a push mower while wearing sub-par prison issue boots) and agonizing shoulder pain (from carrying endless bags of garbage long distances) not to mention the repulsive stench.

Luckily the mind has a way of helping us forget or block out some of our traumas in a way that helps us endure what would “normally” be horrifying circumstances. Most of these repulsive experiences involved the humiliating routines inmates are forced to endure, namely the delousing when you enter the system, the regular urine tests and strip searches, all performed under the scrutiny of corrections officers (COs), and the dehumanizing and disrespectful treatment and interactions with non-inmates. These dehumanizing negative events and treatments happen so frequently that my mind just went on autopilot in order to just get through them.

It turned out that my faith, specifically the rosary, was my salvation during the most difficult times, particularly for the endless hours every day that I mowed. I would say the rosary non-stop as I mowed - heat, cold, rain, humiliation...

Suicide in prison is a very real occurrence. Without faith in God, I would not have survived prison.

People are capable of great cruelty and...great kindness even in the most cruel and inhuman of places. As a result, **I found that I was stronger than I knew.** Thankfully, I did not lose my work ethic just because I was in prison. **I had always been a hard worker and it was my personal standards, standards instilled by parents and God, that I sought to meet. Oddly enough, working diligently at the mindless tasks assigned to me even earned me a modicum of respect from the COs.**

Interestingly, the first facility most female convicts go to be processed is arguably one of the most depressing places on earth. However, **even in this hell hole, I was able to experience moments of inspiration, beauty and awe.** God's soothing beauty was revealed to me when I witnessed the sun glinting off the razor wire on a clear cloudless February sky. At the second facility where I spent the majority of my "bid," I could experience exquisite moments of beauty while walking across prison grounds. Returning from evening activities **I searched for the moon.** It was most visible on nights when the sky was remarkably flawless. It was on these tranquil evenings **I hoped and prayed my loved ones were looking at the same beautiful moon.**

One of the highlights of my time in prison was when caring souls from neighboring communities would come into the prison to lead worship, share Bible study or guide a craft program for inmates. These remarkable human beings from the outside world had no affiliation with the prison system, yet they were willing volunteers humbly answering a call from Jesus. They made a huge impact on the quality of my prison existence.

Now that I am out of prison and rebuilding my life, I have new lessons to learn. **Employment, housing and financial barriers. These are huge hurdles firmly in place for formerly incarcerated individuals. They serve as constant impediments to anyone striving to begin from scratch at rebuilding a life where one can be a self-sufficient and contributing member of society.** The transition from prison to civil society is extremely difficult and current programs are insufficient at helping most formerly incarcerated persons re-enter society. I remind myself that many people who have never served a prison bid in their lives also struggle.

Formerly incarcerated individuals need help, support and understanding to overcome a whole new set of challenges. To those that have helped me along this journey, THANK YOU.

To those considering helping others that are still experiencing these circumstances, please know that every act, whether large or small, performed to help someone through this season of their life is worthwhile and appreciated.

People have touched my life, made it better and I thank God for their presence in my life.



PMUNY Volunteer Survey

By Jean, PMUNY Leadership Team

A survey of prison volunteers was developed as part of an ongoing effort to understand the nature of prison ministry volunteerism. During a phone conversation a representative sampling of volunteers was asked to respond to nine questions. Volunteers were selected for their commitment to prison ministry over the years and the depth of their experience. Survey questions focused primarily on the volunteer's involvement in the Residents Encounter Christ (REC) ministry. (Go to our website [Home - PMUNY](#) to learn more about REC and other prison ministries). Volunteers were asked to respond to a variety of questions designed to identify **motivational factors** influencing a person's decision to **serve Inside** and the **attributes of a good prison ministry volunteer**. This interviewer was amazed by how **overwhelmingly positive and complimentary** the survey respondents were about their experience as a prison ministry volunteer. **Key Findings:**

- Overwhelmingly respondents stated they are motivated by a **desire to SHARE their faith...and LIVE their faith**.
- Survey respondents identified the following attributes and characteristics of effective prison ministry volunteers.

Humble
Willing to go **Inside** a prison
& be with **In**carcerated people
Faith-filled
Empathetic
Not monopolizers of conversation
Great Listeners
Able to set aside bias
Open-Minded
Do not interrupt
Non-Judgmental
Comfortable sharing faith with others
Willing to share a personal story
Transparent
Maintains confidentiality and anonymity
Willing to provide helpful perspectives
Honest

Prison ministry benefits everyone!

- **In**mates AND Volunteers are mutually inspired by what they hear, see and learn.
- Volunteer's stories show **In**mates how the love of God is at work in their life.
- The volunteer's own spirituality is enriched while simultaneously encouraging inmates to build a personal relationship with God.
- **In**mates appreciate that someone from outside the prison wants to spend time with them.

Everyone comes away feeling valued, **In**spired and appreciated.

*Interested in helping? – We **In**voke you to...*

Pray for our prisoners and that volunteers can re-enter prisons and programs can start up again.

Write letters of encouragement that we can share with the chaplains who can share with the incarcerated. For more info visit pmuny.org/palanca

Share our website and mission with friends and family! For a full list of ways to get involved, visit pmuny.org/get-involved

*We **In**voke You...*

*We **In**voke You To Come As You Are...*

We want you to enter into jail and prison ministry with an authentic and open heart.

*We **In**voke You To Feel Welcome...*

Whether you are a first time visitor or a seasoned volunteer you are a PRECIOUS resource to the men and women who reside inside. You are a SIGN OF HOPE.

*We **In**voke You To Share Your Gifts...*

Whatever they may be. Perhaps you have COMPASSION or EMPATHY? You may be a GOOD LISTENER or possess a SENSE OF HUMOR? You may be someone with FLEXIBILITY in your schedule? YOU ARE NEEDED.

*We **In**voke You To Be Part of A Community...*

Of LIKE MINDED individuals eager to live with purpose and meaning. By HELPING YOUR NEIGHBOR you will witness firsthand the POWER OF God's LOVE and the DIGNITY of all.

May God Bless

You And Your Loved Ones

All Victims of Violence & their Families

All Wrongdoers and Perpetrators of Violence & their Families

All Who Work and Serve in our correctional facilities & their Families

Thank you for taking the time to read **In The Margins** and for supporting PMUNY's ministries

Prison Ministry of Upstate New York

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“I flip the excruciatingly dark memories of my incarceration and use them as a powerful motivator for me as I live my new life. Every day I choose to be the Light of Christ...to serve, to help and to love others.”

– Jake, a formerly incarcerated man and REC participant