



PRISON MINISTRY IN THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF LOUISIANA

Prison Ministry continued during the year 2021 despite the challenges posed to that ministry during the COVID pandemic.

The Church of the Transfiguration at Angola weathered the pandemic. Following the 1st Tuesday worship service inside Angola in March of 2020, the Department of Corrections shut down all state prisons to outside ministry groups and inmate visitors. Communications with the Church of the Transfiguration inmates also came to a full stop; but internally, inmates continued to gather and to minister to each other. Angola opened twice for short periods of time during 2021, followed by new shutdowns. Consistent reopening to outside ministry groups did not occur until March of 2022. Yet for every month during this COVID time that the prisons were open, the prison ministry teams were on-site, visiting and conducting services for Angola inmates at Main Prison, Camp C and Camp D. Our reunions were joyful, as we had much to learn from our brothers whom we had not seen for many months.

During one shut-down period, volunteers gathered at St. Margaret's Church in Baton Rouge to prepare to resume ministry and to mark the death of Kenny Prestridge, a long-time member of the Church of the Transfiguration and an inmate member of the Advisory Council.

New ministry opportunities opened during the COVID restrictions. Angola administration gave permission to send videos of church services to Angola for showing on the internal Angola TV channel, a footprint which promises exciting and creative ministry for the future. Volunteers became more involved in the advocacy efforts taking place outside the prisons through such organizations as The Parole Project, V.O.T.E., The Innocence Project of New Orleans, and Lead Out Louisiana. Individuals continued to facilitate assistance for inmates being released from prison. Two former participants of the Church of the Transfiguration at Angola were elected to serve on the Vestry of their respective Diocesan churches.

Challenges remained. New wardens, new rules, reconfigured physical spaces and significant numbers of inmate relocations disrupted inmate participation – with 'old-timers' relocating and new participants 'checking out The Episcopalians', as the parlance goes. The pre-pandemic volunteer pool of 40 participants (including 5 priests) shrunk to 11 participants (including 1 priest). By necessity, Evening Prayer and the distribution of reserved sacrament replaced some services of Holy Eucharist. The bi-annual banquets – normally highlights for the inmates – were not held due to restrictions in place.

Quarterly visitation to Louisiana Corrections Institute for Women did not survive the COVID pandemic. Intermittent openings and closings also affected LCIW, but none of the former volunteers for this ministry were available to continue it during COVID.

Despite the challenges, enthusiasm remains high throughout the Diocese for prison ministry. With new ventures and new leadership anticipated for 2022, we believe that this prison ministry which

began 35 years ago will continue to serve as a solid foundation for diocesan outreach efforts, even as it evolves under new circumstances and opportunities.

To visit prisoners or to advocate on their behalf is to encounter the presence and the power of The Holy Spirit in a life-changing way. We offer prayers of thanksgiving for all that God is doing through the prayers, desires and actions of the people of the Diocese of Louisiana.

Respectfully submitted,

The Reverend Peggy King Scott

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