

Patriarch Joseph the All Comely Texas ORTHODOX Prison Ministry.

Since 1995, Priest Seraphim Holland (Pastor of [St Nicholas Orthodox Church, McKinney TX](#)) has been visiting prisoners in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice prisons. We did not seek out this ministry; rather, it came to us as God allowed. (See Fr Seraphim's story, "HOW DID WE GET STARTED IN PRISON MINISTRY?" below).

Our patron and protector is a certain notable former prisoner, Patriarch Joseph the All-Comely (see his story in Genesis 37-50).

Currently (Jan 2015), our focus is on two different men's prisons, one visited at least twice each month, and one is visited four times! This could always increase or be supplemented, and other prisons have been visited on an as-needed basis.

There have been 9 baptisms, and there are several men that are catechumens or preparing to become catechumens. All together, about 25 men are seen regularly, and the "prison dyptichs" are full of people who come often or occasionally and have been released.

Most Wednesdays are set aside for prison ministry. Because Texas is a big state, there is a lot of driving involved (between 6 and 8 hours round trip). This is made possible because the parish is able to pay Priest Seraphim a small stipend (so he only needs to work in his job as an RN once a week) and there is a prison ministry account that pays for travel and other ministry expenses. There are, glory be to God, several people locally, and from parts of the country, that have sent contributions to our prison ministry, but at this moment, there is not a regular dependable income. The parish currently does not fund the prison ministry because we do not yet have the means.

With God's help, this ministry is expanding. There are four Orthodox volunteers that Priest Seraphim works with regularly, and Orthodox Christians in Houston have collaborated with us and developed their ministry.

We serve Divine Liturgy monthly in two different prisons. Most of the time one or all of our local volunteers (4 so far) accompany Priest Seraphim. We also go to each prison another time in the month, with teaching, prayer, confession, and just discussion, which is something the prisoners all need.

Sometimes, there are [audio or written reports about these visits](#): here:

http://www.orthodox.net/full-voice/index.html?Prison_Visit_Reports

Some of the volunteers as well as Priest Seraphim also write regularly to all prisoners. The [general letters](#) Priest Seraphim writes are online at:

<http://www.orthodox.net/full-voice/index.html?Letters>.

These general letters are written to a mailing list of over 30 people. There are also many personal letters written by the volunteers and Priest Seraphim. For some of the men, our letters are the only thing from the outside world they receive.

We have provided all prisoners with complete prayers books, and compact Psalters, and occasionally, Orthodox Study Bibles. We will continue to do this as funds allow.

On festive occasions, such as baptisms, and after Nativity (Christmas) and Pascha, we bring in food for the prisoners. They have loved the real coffee (prison coffee is not very good) and cream, baklava, Greek Pascha bread, and their favorite (even more than the roast lamb we once brought) is Greek salad, because they almost never get fresh vegetables.

We always need volunteer chaplains to work with Father Seraphim. Whether you wish to visit or write letters, your help is needed, and we can help you get the training that you need. For some of these men, we are the ONLY human beings in the "free world" (as they call it) who sees them or writes to them. Imagine how that feels! Imagine if we could provide a service to each of these prisons EVERY week!

Finally, and most importantly, we need your prayers! We cannot give out names of people, to protect their privacy, but you certainly can pray that God would prosper our small ministry as He sees fit.

Anything you give that is earmarked for prison ministry will be used only for this ministry. Contact us if you want to help in any way.

Current Schedule (may change)

1st & 2nd Wednesdays of the month - Michael Unit, Tennessee Colony TX 8-10 AM

2nd & 4th Wed of the month - Hughes Unit, Gatesville, TX 8-10AM

2nd & 4th Thu of the month - Michael Unit, visited by Terry Cowen, 8-10am

The first Wednesday visit each month in each prison we serve Divine Liturgy (and Presanctified Liturgy in Great Lent)

HOW DID WE GET STARTED IN PRISON MINISTRY?

One Sunday, in about 1996, a young man came to our church with two parishioners. They had been friends for many years. I could tell that this young man was troubled about something; I did not know what it was. After service, I sat with him under a Hackberry tree for 5 hours and discussed many spiritual things. I did not think much of it; these things happen sometimes. Some people come around again, and others I never see again in this life. It is hard to know whether one's efforts will bear fruit or not.

Three days later, on Wednesday, I was told the young man had turned himself in regarding a legal matter. He was kept in the Fort Worth Jail for over 2 years before his trial (so much for the constitutionally guaranteed right to a speedy trial!). I visited him many times in that cold and creepy

jail, and developed a relationship with him. I did not evangelize him; I just tried to be a friend. I was working full time, and the visits were fewer than I would have liked. Eventually, he was convicted, and I followed him in to the prison system. In time, he expressed to me a hunger for baptism, and his actions made me believe that his was not a "jail house conversion".

I made arrangements to baptize him. The Baptists in Texas have done us a great service. There is an adult baptistry in every Texas prison! On the day of the baptism, two other men showed up. The prison grapevine is very efficient, and faster and more reliable than the internet. One of the men had been baptized by Fr Duane Pedersen years ago, and his friend and he had been praying for TWO YEARS that a priest would come so that he could be baptized. It turned out that I was the answer to that prayer.

In due time, this man was also catechized and baptized.

It turns out my first prison convert is quite the Apostle, and two of his close friends were catechized and baptized in due course. One of the men knew another Orthodox Christian in another unit, and I started going there too.

And all I did was talk to a guy under a Hackberry tree!

So much happens in God's plan without us knowing, understanding or even needing to know. All we need to do is be like Samuel:

"... the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I. " (1Sa 3:4)

Ministry does not take talent; God gives that. It does not require intelligence: God gives that. It does require us to SHOW UP; God won't do that for us, but He will help.

I do not have any snazzy pictures (I cannot bring a camera in), or any incredible stories that I feel free to tell. Most of what I have heard and seen I do not feel I can share publicly. I am not any good at marketing stuff and making it look really exciting. To tell the truth, there is nothing exciting about driving 8 hours in a day to be in a prison for only 2 hours. I can only assure you that this ministry has been God's doing, and I am privileged to be a part of it. I am also overwhelmed by the need that is present, and my meager strength. There is so much more that we should be doing!

If you want to SHOW UP in this ministry, you know who to call.

Priest Seraphim Holland seraphim@orthodox.net 972 658-5433

Prison Ministry Costs.

Our costs are mainly because of travel (mileage and occasional meals). We also have substantial postage costs and occasional large sum book costs.

Below is a monthly estimate for Priest Seraphim's expenses. The other volunteers have graciously done their ministry out of pocket, except for the occasional meal.

Average Monthly Costs

2 trips to Michael unit. About 280 miles round trip (reimbursed at federal rate to account for gas and vehicle maintenance.

Mileage expense: $\$156.80 \times 2 = \mathbf{\$313.60}$

2 trips to Hughes unit About 351 miles round trip

mileage expense $\$196.56 \times 2 = \mathbf{\$393.12}$

Meals. Average cost about \$10.00/trip

Meals cost: $\mathbf{\$40.00}$

Average of 2 general letters sent to about 30 people twice a month

Postage cost: $\mathbf{\$29.40}$

"Jpay" (using the site jpay.com) email letters sent when needed (these arrive that night or the next day and are useful to keep the prisoners informed about schedule changes, and other time critical things) This is a more expensive medium, as each "page" costs a "stamp". Of course, postal letters can have up to 8 pages double sided per stamp, but sometimes, time is of the essence). These letters vary, but an average of 50 pages is sent monthly

"Jpay" postage cost: $\mathbf{\$24.50}$

Book cost. We bought about \$500.00 of prayer books and Psalters last year, and try to get others books as needed.

Average current monthly book cost: $\mathbf{\$41.67}$

TOTAL AVERAGE MONTHLY COSTS: \$762.29

Updated: 28 January 2015

Priest Seraphim Holland 2015 [St Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, McKinney, Texas](http://www.orthodox.net/ministries/orthodox-prison-ministry.doc)

This article is at:

<http://www.orthodox.net/ministries/orthodox-prison-ministry.doc>

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