

Prison Ministry Letter

Valuing the Precious. Being serious.

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Priest Seraphim Holland, PO 37, McKinney, TX, 75070. Date: 2/24/2020 ns, Monday, the week before Great Lent begins.

I am sending this letter to people that I believe are on the lay-in list for the Orthodox Christian service, which is Wednesday, the ... and the ... weeks of the month, at There's a lot of names on this list of people that I don't think I've ever met. I'll be honest with you. I'm getting really tired of coming and seeing one or two people. I understand that stuff happens, but if it happens all the time, then there must be something else going on rather than just normal prison stuff.

I'm told by the chaplain that there were 13 people laid in for this Wednesday. If all 13 came that would set a world record for our group. I expect that if you really care about coming, you will, or you will contact me and tell me that you wanted to come but could not. If I don't see you at this coming meeting, then I'll give you a chance to write to me. If you don't write to me and tell me that you do want to come, and that you do value that I come to see you, the next time I come, I will have your name removed from the list.

By the way, I am including this letter to everybody that is laid in. I know that some of you are serious, so don't be angry that you're getting this letter also.

If this letter sounds a little bit angry, I apologize, but I cannot waste my time and lots of money going to prisons all over Texas, when other people consider their sleep or their job or whatever else they're doing to be more important than the meeting they are laid in for. The last three times that I have come to the ... unit I have seen literally two people total. It was the same person each time. It is possible you didn't know I was coming the last time I came and thought that I was in Africa. So, you get a Mulligan for that one. But if you're getting this mail, whether you get it Tuesday or whether you get it too late to actually know that I'm coming, you write me if you have not come to the meeting on Wednesday, or else I'll just remove you from the list. If you get this letter, and you don't get a lay in, I expect that you will tell me that.

You know, ministry, just like any personal relationship, is a two-way street. I'm trying to give you something that I think that you want. If you don't want it, then there's no reason for me to try to give it. My trips to the ... unit cost about \$300. That's a lot of money to ask my supporters to pay if I see one person in two different trips, and one trip I saw nobody.

I also have very few people write to me, so sometimes I wonder if I'm just talking into an echo chamber. I don't need to hear my own voice. I have written to many of you, and some of you, today, I've only written the first

time. But even people that I write too often don't send me anything. So, if I don't see you come to the meeting, and I don't get an email from you, how can I know if you care or not?

I think it's important to value things that are precious. Sometimes in the penitentiary, I think people forget to value things that are precious, because of the mentality that "you gotta do whatever you gotta do to get by". That is not a Christian mentality. We do we have to do to live as actual human beings, as Christians made in the image of God and obtaining His likeness. Everything we do should have a purpose, including signing up to an Orthodox Christian service. If we don't live according to our ultimate purpose, then we are wasting our time with things that are going to fade away.

God told me to do this prison ministry because I met a man and talked to them for an afternoon on a Sunday. Three days later he turned himself in for crime he was accused of. He went to a jail in Fort Worth, and I started visiting him. He wasn't even an Orthodox Christian, but he had a need, so I was willing to provide for that need. Later on, he was convicted and eventually sent to the ... unit. I started visiting him, and I hated that I had to talk on the phone to him, so I became a volunteer. Eventually, this man was the first person I baptized, and other people found out about the baptism and from that small start, I have a ministry where I go to five prisons regularly. I've been to many other prisons also.

I know TDCJ does not value the chaplaincy very much. I know that they make it hard on you, but they also make it hard on me. I'm willing to deal with the ups and downs, if I know that you care. If I don't know that you care, then I'm a human being too, and I start to run out of steam. I am not a mushroom. They like the dark, but I like the light and I only want to talk you about the light. You can shed a little bit of light on me by telling me what you want. If you just came once or put your name on the list because you had a notion, and decided that it didn't scratch your itch, then I would appreciate it if you'd actually have the courtesy to tell me that.

I am in a transition period right now. I cannot keep coming to prisons, spending hundreds of dollars, and not see the people I am intending to see. There are always reasons – good and bad, and even ridiculous (like I overslept", or I have a night job now and I am really tired in the morning – well boo hoo! I drove through a blinding rain storm recently, stayed overnight, and completed a 480 mile round trip on Thursday after going to 2 prisons and seeing 2 people total, and I was tired too!), from inmates and the prison administration (well all of the latter are basically bad, and often ridiculous!). I am getting worn out. I try to do what people ask me to do, as a rule. I think this is the Christian way of life. But when the people asking me are not showing up, I get tired.

I am not sure what I will do, but likely, I will travel to each prison no more than once a month. I intend to write via jpay more. The new rules about letters, in large part because people like to literally smoke letters, because they get dosed with K2, are making it pretty hard to send you letters. I'm told that there's a lag time of sometimes almost a month for postal letters.

If I go less often the prisons, let's say once a month instead of twice a month, I'll have extra money and time to be able to write you letters. But I am a human being, and writing letters and putting them in a bottle is not what I'm interested in doing. I'm interested in having a dialogue with you, even if you only tell me that you received a letter. Some of you don't have funds. Maybe you know somebody who has funds, who does write to me, and you

can just ask him to put a sentence in, from you. You're no good at saying things in letters, then you can at least get a word to me. If you're motivated, you can get it done.

Ok, something to fill out the letter. I hope to see many of you Wednesday!

A story about prayer for the dead illustrates both the benefit of our prayers for both the dead and for us:

There was once a priest in Russia who was unfortunately a drunk. He would miss services, or worse, come to them inebriated. He became a scandal to the parishioners and indeed to the diocese. Finally, his bishop could tolerate the priest's scandalous behavior no more and had to defrock him and send him away from the parish. For several weeks after this the bishop was afflicted by dreams of a vast array of the departed. On their ghostly lips was the constant question, "Where is our batushka? Where is he? Only he was there to pray for our souls. He brought us comfort and consolation!"

Unknown to any, this drunkard priest in his sorrows for his sins would go to a long-abandoned cemetery and prayed for each and every soul interred in that burial ground. Forgotten by family and friends, these dead had only this one lowly and pathetic priest to pray for them.

The bishop could take no more of these nightly visits and so had to restore the man to his priesthood so that he could come back to this village and pray for the forgotten dead. The restored priest was so moved by the mercy of the bishop and the Church that he was able to repent and reform his life. He became an exemplary priest for his flock in his parish... both those visible and invisible.

....

“When Patriarch Tikhon asked [the future Met. Peter of Krutitsa] to accept monasticism, the priesthood and the episcopacy, and become his assistant in administering the Russian Church, Peter came home and said: "I cannot refuse. If I refuse, then I will be a traitor of the Church. But when I agree, I know that I will thereby be signing my death warrant.””