



St Joseph the All-Comely Texas Prison Ministry

Jan 2 2017 / Dec 20 2016 St Ignatius the God-bearer

I appreciate all the donations to the Prison Ministry. We had humble beginnings over 18 years ago, and still have a humble little ministry, but things are happening at a faster pace, especially because I have the funds to do what I need to do, and I am no longer working in my secular (if there is such a thing – I do not think so!) job – I am a registered nurse.

I have intended to write a “Christmas Letter” about the Prison Ministry for several years, now, but my incompetent secretary has hindered me. He is rather disorganized, and sometimes lazy, and will not do the things I tell him to do, even though he is always with me! I cannot fire him, because he is family, and he would not go away in any case.

In the dark days, not so long ago, when gas was three bucks a gallon, I was paying for everything, and was very limited. Your kindness has made those days ancient history. I now drive all over Texas, send lots of letters, bought many books (this year, 24 Orthodox Study Bibles, 24 “Boston” Psalters, 24 “Jordanville” prayer books) and to the delight of the men, sometimes bring festive food, such as my wife’s incredible baklava (a much requested, and expensive favorite) and Greek Salad (they want this more than meat!).

I know some of our donors, but things happen very fast, and I am hard pressed to keep track of the PayPal reports. If I, or *my secretary*, was really organized, I would keep track of all the donors as they donate, but this task has proven to be too difficult for me. I am resorting to an end of the year letter to convey to you my deep gratitude and desire to return your love by praying for you, and to keep you updated about the fruit of your labors, since, as almsgivers to this ministry, you have entered into its labors (John 4:38). Those of you whom I know, I pray for, and I pray for all of our donors. I want to extend the sincere offer to you to send in your name, and those of your family, and who is Orthodox or not, some I can pray for all of you in each liturgy. I pray for everyone, but we also have a custom of commemorating in a particular way those who are Orthodox, when we serve the preparation service before the Divine Liturgy. I am easy to get a hold of.

Send me email: seraphim@orthodox.net, or text your names to 972 658-5433.

Those “Christmas letters” We all receive at the end of the year, often have pictures of smiling children and lots of bragging about what they accomplished the past year. In that tradition, I want to give you a few statistics. I will not talk about my children and grandchildren, since they are not part of this ministry, but if I told you stuff, I assure, you it would not be bragging, just fact!)

I have been doing prison ministry for 18 years. It all started when I met a young man who came to a service with friends, and then talked to him for 5 hours under a hackberry tree. Three days later, he turned himself in for a crime he was wanted for. I visited him as much as I could in the Fort Worth City jail, and eventually followed him into prison, Eventually, he desired to be baptized. At the baptism, there were two other men, one of whom was already Orthodox, and the other had



been praying for a priest to come for 3 years so he could be baptized. He was, after a suitable period, and the small group in the Hughes unit (Gatesville TX) grew a bit, and eventually I was told about men in the Michael Unit (Tennessee Colony, TX) and the Powledge unit (Palestine TX). I now regularly got to these prisons, each twice a month. Usually I celebrate liturgy in one visit, and have discussion, teaching and prayer in the other visit. Those that I minister to get “shipped” not infrequently, so I have started going to other prisons to see them, as I am able.

I have baptized 18 men, 4 this past year. This year, I visited 7 prisons. I have driven 12,476 miles, and made 54 prison visits. Most visits are a 300-350 mile round trip, but I have made two long trips, of 850 miles and 950 miles. It has been my great joy and privilege to serve everyone. Everyone is in my heart. I have complete “dyptichs” (the word means “list”), and pray every day for each prisoner who has come to our services. At this point in time, I am only aware of myself and Fr Cassian Sibley¹, as Orthodox priests who regularly visit Texas prisons. I sometimes go with some volunteers, and have visited with the following people this year: Deacon Christopher, George, Anna, Terry, Michael, Michael, and my wife, Marina.



I will sum up to you my philosophy about prison ministry. Basically, it is that 90% of life is just showing up. If somebody crosses my path, there had to be a reason, and as a Christian, should find out why. There is a lot of stuff that I should do better, but nothing matters unless I show up. So, because of your alms-giving, I will keep on driving down the highway almost every week, writing letters, and doing whatever else comes up.

I have written a lot about prison ministry, shared many letters (with specific things that identify people taken out) given audio reports of prison visits, and even given a talk about prison ministry. All these things are available on our prison ministry page. I want to get it organized better, but at least it is there. Maybe my secretary will figure it out sometime.

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

We also have a Facebook page, which I try to keep current, and all the new things are posted there.

<https://www.facebook.com/orthodox.texas.prison.ministry>

May God bless you for your generosity! It is making a big difference, and I am very grateful for your participation in this important work.

Sincerely yours

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

St Joseph the All Comely Texas Prison Ministry <http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/>

Pastor of St Nicholas Orthodox Church, McKinney TX <http://www.orthodox.net>

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¹ Fr Cassian Sibley, Bryan Texas, and Priest Seraphim Holland, McKinney TX, L.R. This photo was taken on an eventful trip to Bryan.