

## How can an inmate do ministry in prison?

### Your past and personal struggles should guide your intercessory prayer.

Letter to a prisoner.

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From: Priest Seraphim Holland, PO 37, McKinney TX 75070 TO: ... DATE: August 28/September 10, 2018, St. Moses the Ethiopian

Dear ..., I am replying a month after I received your letter that I read on .... I am still way behind. I just finished a long prison trip which didn't help matters for letter writing. I left on Tuesday evening and came back Saturday morning. I went to six prisons altogether, and also got to kayak the Neches River. I didn't see any alligators unfortunately. I'm trying to get back on the stick here and get all the letters replied to.

Sometimes you guys think I'm ignoring you. I understand that because you're in an environment where people are always ignoring you. I never ignore you. I might not write back because, to be honest, I'm in a difficult period right now, but I pray for you every day. I have not forgotten you. I think the most important thing we can do for people is pray for them. That way we remember them every day. Even if were out of contact with them, we are remembering them every day. Since I pray for you every day, I bring you to my mind every day, and therefore I never forget you. Of course, that's invisible to you, and I wish I was better at getting everything done.

You ask if I would like you to help me in prison ministry. Of course! For you to help me you need to know the services, and be Orthodox. So, we have a ways to go. You tell me how fast you want to go and if you are fully committed to it. I am 60, so theoretically in 14 years I will still be going strong. We'll see if God agrees with me.

I think the best way to help in prison ministry is to do the following things. The first is ***have an inner life***. That means that you must ***learn to really pray***. You must learn to struggle in the Christian life, so you can communicate the need to struggle to other people.

You know that in prison there's a lot of lack of discipline. The more disciplined you become, the more you will be able to teach discipline to others. There is no reason why you could not begin teaching people even while you are in prison. I wouldn't do it yet. I would wait until you are baptized and have a little bit under your belt and have a regular prayer life in a regular life in reading the Scriptures etc. The more you talk to me about your problems in your sins, the more likely your life will become more orderly. We all have problems and sins.

Thank you for being so honest about your past .... I will be perfectly honest with you, and tell you that it will take work to overcome this. This is all possible, in indeed it is absolutely guaranteed if you struggle. You must struggle to be pure in the way you think, the way you talk, the things you do. You must repent in an active way when you find impurity in your life – whether just be in your thoughts, or in your language or even in your actions. We can talk about this more personally. You must give no quarter to yourself regarding your sexual weaknesses. I don't mean that you should be full of shame – far from it. I think you should be a warrior, and when you are wounded you should fight harder. When God sees a person fighting, he gives him strength and makes him victorious.

You know that most people in prison are not fighting very much at all. They make excuses for their weaknesses. A Christian does not make excuses for their weaknesses. They recognize their weaknesses sin is and they call them what they are – sins. They beg the Lord to help them. They not only beg the Lord to help, but they do other things that will assure that this help indeed will be fruitful. That means that they will struggle to love their neighbor and even their enemy, and pray for their neighbor and their enemy. That means that they will read the holy Scriptures and fast as best they can and the prison environment. Watch how you speak. If you curse at all, and for every time you

curse, you should do a prostration and say: “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy and me a sinner”, or “I’ve sinned immeasurably O Lord help me”.

The world does not take the way we talk and the jokes we say seriously. These things are very serious. We are defiled by the things that come out of us. I just read that gospel in liturgy today. A man is defiled not by the things that go into him, but the things that come out of him. The things that come out of him are his thoughts and his words and his actions. If you become Orthodox, and you are serious about it, you will consider it to be a battle of life and death. If you think these things, you will live. And if you are living, that is that you are living a triumphant Christian life, then certainly you will be very useful to God in ministry.

Your description of your past, and your military service gives me ideas for how you should pray. I think *our experiences in life should direct our prayers*. I think you should pray for people with PTSD, and soldiers that are suicidal, and those that are feeling guilty because they killed someone, etc. I think also you should pray for those who have had impure sexual lives. The way I do this is I have some various petitions and I just say: “Lord God have mercy upon ...” And then I finish it with a little formula that I like because I think the most important thing to pray for with people is that they would have union with God: “and grant that they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom thou hast sent”. Below are some of the petitions that I use. You should craft your own. *Let your experiences be a guide for how you should pray for others*. You know how hard it is to deal with PTSD, and the horrors of military service, and sexual problems. You are therefore a person whom God will listen to.

### Grief and loss

1. All who lost someone suddenly.
2. All who had a great loss.
3. All who are troubled by grief.
4. All who have been victims of violence.
5. All who have witnessed or survived violence.

### Personal trials – Personal History

1. All who have been abused.
2. All in prison.
3. All slaves.
4. All sexual slaves & sex workers.

### Personal trials - thoughts

1. All who are contemplating suicide.
2. All who are without true purpose.
3. All with PTSD
4. All who are anxious.
5. All who are depressed.
6. All who are in despair.
7. All who are in great stress.
8. All who are lonely.
9. All who do not fit in.
10. All who have trouble coping.
11. All who have been or feel abandoned.
- 12.

I basically have come to the end of your letter. I’m sorry that it was so late getting a reply to you. God willing, I will see you in two weeks. God bless you and help you in all things.