

**May 30- June 2 *Walk with Christ: Encounter—Accompany—Proclaim***  
**Annual Conference for *National Conference for Catechetical Leadership***  
**(NCCL) & *National Association for Lay Ministry* (NALM)**

## Friday June 1, 2018 - Proclaiming the Joy Experienced

**2:30 – 4:00pm:**     *When We Visit Jesus in Prison: A Ministry of Hope, Courage and Joy*

## Dale S. Recinella – Heathrow B

**Participants will encounter the face of Jesus through the lens of local parishes addressing the needs of men and women in our prisons and jails and of children with incarcerated parents.**

**Participants will be introduced to the needs of the incarcerated in general and also to the specific needs of inmates with special conditions.**

- **What are the needs of women in jails and prisons?**
- **What are the needs of elderly inmates in prison?**
- **What are the needs of inmates suffering with physical or mental illness?**
- **What are the needs of children with incarcerated parents?**
- **How can we as parish and as Church respond to those needs effectively and bring the message of hope, courage and joy?**

**Based on my most recent book: “When We Visit Jesus in Prison: A Guide for Catholic Ministry” (ACTA Publications: Chicago, 2016)**

**Following materials are quoted from *When We Visit Jesus in Prison: A Guide for Catholic Ministry* (ACTA Publications: Chicago, 2016)  
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The Kent Family: *When I Lay My Isaac Down: Unshakable Faith in Unthinkable Circumstances*. Available with that edition is a DVD set, study guide, and discussion questions, dealing from the standpoint of Christian biblical faith with the trauma to an inmate's family.

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Can we look to secular society at large to fill this role? Probably not. Secular society seems at times to exhibit the characteristics of a dysfunctional family, unable to cope with trauma of this sort. For example, in connection with the trauma and stress caused to family members by the incarceration of a loved one, even a parent, the public square seems infested with the language of:

- **Denial:** The family of the perpetrator is not allowed to be stressed or traumatized; only the victim of the crime is entitled to that.
- **Blame:** The family must have done something wrong or the perpetrator would not have committed a crime; somehow the family members deserve to pay the consequences.
- **Intolerance:** Family members of criminals are anathema and are to be treated as lepers.
- **Lack of commitment or affection:** Any attempt to ameliorate the effects of incarceration on the family of the perpetrator are met with condemnation, as if those trying to help the family of the inmate are taking the side of the bad guy against the victims of the crime.
- **Lack of communication:** Any attempt to give voice to the plight of the family members of the incarcerated is characterized as coddling criminals and their "ilk."
- **Rigidity in social roles:** Attempts to restore services or support for family members of the incarcerated are characterized as trying to take away the punishment for the crime—as if the punishment of the whole family is part of the sentence.

In short ... secular society at large does not have the will to stand-in as a functional coping family for healing the traumatized loved ones of the incarcerated. That plants the hope of children with incarcerated parents firmly in the lap of the family of last resort, the Family of God.

The Catholic principle that applies is ***solidarity***. From the standpoint of its social teaching, the Church holds families among the highest of social priorities. The Church does this not just for healthy families but to encourage healthy families to reach out in love to those who do not have the blessings they do.

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... almost all congregations and Catholic parishes have established programs for outreach to various groups of people who are suffering themselves, who are affected by the suffering of loved ones, or who are caring for suffering loved ones.

[What about] outreach programs to prisoners and others affected by incarceration, especially the spouses and children.

- outreach programs for pastoral ministry in hospitals and nursing homes can provide a basis for structuring ministries of visitation in jails and prisons.
- ministries of comfort and support to families who have a loved one suffering from cancer or other disease can provide a basis for ministries of comfort and support to families with a loved one in prison.
- ministries of bereavement and grief support for families who have lost a loved one can provide a basis for ministries of bereavement and grief support for families whose loved one has received a long or life sentence or a death sentence.

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For us Catholics who are seeking to engage in Pope John Paul's *generous, intelligent and prudent pastoral commitment, modeled on the Good Shepherd*<sup>1</sup> with respect to children of incarcerated parents, some of the following programs can be effective:

- Work in cooperation with the prison administration to create structured parent-child visiting programs.
- Organize community-based mental health and bereavement services outside the prison walls to provide counseling for children of inmates.
- Work with the prison administration and mental health professionals to design and teach classes for inmates on how to parent effectively, even when one is inside prison.
- Work with the prison administration to create child friendly visiting areas that will enhance children's experience of visiting their parents.
- Organize mentoring programs to assist children whose parents are in prison in making positive life choices.
- Organize caring families to serve as sponsors to assist children monetarily whose parents are in prison primarily because of financial difficulties.
- Organize church homework and tutoring centers to assist children of parents in prison in core math and language skills.

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<sup>1</sup> Apostolic Exhortation, *On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World (Familiaris Consortio)*

## CHAPTER 13

### Special Pastoral Needs of Women in Prison and of Inmates with Children

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The questions no one dares to ask --

- What kind of women end up in prison and jail in America today?
- Are they all serial killers?
- Are they all dangerous?
- Or are some of them women who, out of love for a man, stumbled or were duped into their partner's felonious activities?
- Are they women who fell into addiction first and, after that, into the criminal activity necessary to support the addiction?
- Do they have children? Do they have minor children?
- Are they pregnant when they arrive in prison?
- What happens to the children when mom goes to prison?
- Are some of the women in prison primary caretakers for elderly parents?
- What happens to these elderly parents when their daughter goes to prison?

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- In 1999, one of every 14 black children had a parent in prison, compared with one in every 125 white children.
- Black children are almost nine times more likely than white children to have a parent in prison, and
- Hispanic children are three times more likely.

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In its 2007 report *The Sentencing Project* summarized the more recent statistics:

- More than one million women are currently under the supervision of the criminal justice system in the U.S.
- More than 200,000 of these women are confined in state and federal prisons or local jails.
- Expanding at 4.6% annually between 1995 and 2005, women now account for 7% of the population in state and federal prisons.
- The number of women in prison has increased at nearly double the rate of men since 1985, 404% vs. 209%.
- Women in state prisons in 2003 were more likely than men to be incarcerated for a drug offense (29% vs. 19%), or property offense (30% vs. 20%), and less likely than men to be incarcerated for a violent offense (35% vs. 53%).

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With respect to mental health care:

- Nearly 1 in 4 women in prison are diagnosed with a mental illness.
- 12% of women in jails have severe psychiatric disorders.
- Fewer than 25% of them receive mental health services.

With respect to substance abuse treatment:

- 60% of women in state prison have a history of drug dependence.
- During incarceration only 1 in 5 women in state prisons with a history of substance abuse receives treatment for substance abuse.
- During incarceration only 1 in 8 women in federal prisons with a history of substance abuse receives treatment for substance abuse.

With respect to education:

- 44% of women in state prison have neither graduated from high school nor received a GED.
- 14% of women in state prisons have had some college-level education.
- Half of women in prison participate in educational or vocational programming—only one of every five women takes high school or GED classes.
- Only half of women's correctional facilities offer post-secondary education.

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Most prisons and jails will not allow the religious volunteers who actually come into the prison to be involved with the family or children on the outside. That means the work of the volunteers in Catholic prison ministry is one of educating the members of their parish about the needs outside the prison and about the teaching of our Church on responding to those needs.

[As noted above], the Church is telling us that our intact families have a Gospel duty to intervene in service and attention to the suffering of those who are impoverished, orphaned, in mourning, in doubt, in loneliness, and abandoned. The Church calls our attention to the activities of guardianship and adoption. ...

- This can mean working with the incarcerated parents and the legal community to protect parental rights from premature and unnecessary termination under the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997.
- It can also mean intervening on a temporary basis to assure the safety and health of young children and newborns while their mother is in jail or prison.

Any Catholic parish in the U.S. with retired mothers and retirees with social work or medical backgrounds could work to provide such services.

- The goal would be to make sure that children with incarcerated parents have their basic needs being met and are surrounded by a community of love and respect.

- This activity would also frequently involve re-entry services for the mother upon her release.
- Such an outreach would involve licensing and training of volunteers and extensive networking with social service agencies for wrap-around care.

Surely, any parish group that has the talent to organize and handle the logistics for a pilgrimage to Eastern Europe would have the talent to pull together a parish team to create an outreach in their local community for young children and newborns while their mother is in jail or prison.

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- Another way of assisting with incarcerated mothers and newborn children is through establishing and operating prison nurseries and community-based residential programs.
- Catholic parishioners who are not able to minister inside prisons might well consider becoming involved in the creation and operation of such centers of care to help ensure that women being released from their community's prisons and jails will be empowered and equipped to stay free and never return to prison.

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