

## Setting Prisoners Free

**By: Jennifer Carr-Allmon, Associate Director, Texas Catholic Conference**

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” (Luke 4:18)* Jesus proclaims these words when he begins his ministry in Galilee; it is the inaugural address for the Kingdom of God. In this intense political season I hope that others will share in these goals.

Who are the captives and oppressed in the world? In the United States? In Texas? In our communities and in our families? One such group are those who struggle daily with addiction to drugs and alcohol. These children of God are held captive to the disease of addiction and are often physically imprisoned as a result of their addictions. A study by Dr. Nancy Lavigne, presented to the Travis County Reentry Round Table in July 2007, found that 80 percent of prisoners returning to Houston admitted to pre-prison drug use. Dr. Nora D. Volkow, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse reports that “providing drug abusing offenders with comprehensive treatment saves lives and protects communities.”

In the last legislative session, the Texas Legislature, led by the House Corrections Committee and Senate Criminal Justice Committee, turned in earnest toward solving crime and reducing incarcerations by increasing treatment funds for offenders. This effort, one of our best successes in the 80<sup>th</sup> session, was a significant move away from a sole focus on punitive measures to deter crime and incarceration, previously endorsed by the state—a focus that studies consistently find to be ineffective. In the next legislative session we will continue to seek community-based treatment alternatives to prison.

Alcoholism and drug addiction touch all of our lives in one way or another. There are the social impacts that we cannot deny when faced with the statistics of those in prison. But we must also have the eyes to see it in our own families and in our lives. We can bring the glad tidings of recovery: Treatment doesn't have to wait until prison! We can follow Jesus' command to set the prisoners free from addiction in our very own families by seeking treatment and recovery.

In 1950, Father Ralph Pfau (1904-1967) founded the National Catholic Council on Alcoholism and Related Drug Problems (NCCA). Through his dedication and commitment, many Catholic priests, religious and laypersons found recovery and were restored to the faith family and are leading productive and hopeful lives. To receive the prayer booklet, "Prayers for Addicted Persons and Their Loved Ones," e-mail [NCCA@guesthouse.org](mailto:NCCA@guesthouse.org). In addition to this national program, many of the dioceses in Texas have counseling programs for alcohol and drug abuse through Catholic Charities and other social service programs.

In our call to join Jesus in setting prisoners free, we must remember that in addition to our legislative actions and taking steps to heal our families, we must do all things in prayer and with prayer.

We pray with St. Francis of Assisi that our legislative actions and our desire to heal our families will bear fruit: Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace:

where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,

grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

to be understood, as to understand;

to be loved, as to love;

for it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.

Amen.

Jennifer Carr-Allmon is the Associate director for the Texas Catholic Conference. You can email her at [jennifer at txcatholic.org](mailto:jennifer@txcatholic.org).