

Chaplain Corps

The Texas Catholic Conference **supports increased funding and support for the chaplain corps** within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, including ensuring access to inmates by all chaplains.

Prisoners easily can be overwhelmed by feelings of isolation, shame and rejection that threaten to shatter their hopes and aspirations for the future. Within this context, chaplains and their collaborators are called to be heralds of God's infinite compassion and forgiveness. In cooperation with civil authorities, they are entrusted with the weighty task of helping the incarcerated rediscover a sense of purpose so that, with God's grace, they can reform their lives, be reconciled with their families and friends, and, insofar as possible, assume the responsibilities and duties which will enable them to conduct upright and honest lives within society. (*Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Participants in the Twelfth World Congress of the International Commission of Catholic Prison Pastoral Care*)

A Texas Bishop Speaks:

"The true safety of the community is put into jeopardy when the system seems to give up on those who have broken the law. Chaplains in our correctional institutions play critical roles in the rehabilitation of inmates, leading many on a path of healing and recovery."



-Bishop Kevin Farrell, Diocese of Dallas

Church Teaching

- ★ The activity that prison chaplains are called to undertake is important, not only in the specifically religious dimension of this activity but also in defense of the dignity of those detained. Unfortunately, the conditions under which prisoners serve their time do not always foster respect for their dignity; and often, prisons become places where new crimes are committed. Nonetheless, the environment of penal institutions offers a privileged forum for bearing witness once more to Christian concern for social issues. (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 403*)
- ★ Even time in prison does not escape God's dominion. Public authorities who deprive human beings of their personal freedom as the law requires, bracketing off as it were a longer or shorter part of their life, must realize that *they are not masters of the prisoners' time*. In the same way, those who are in detention must not live as if their time in prison had been taken from them completely: *even time in prison is God's time*. As such it needs to be lived to the full; it is a time which needs to be offered to God as an occasion of truth, humility, expiation and even faith. (*Pope John Paul II, Jubilee in Prisons*)
- ★ Prison officials should encourage inmates to seek spiritual formation and to participate in worship. Attempts to limit prisoners' expression of their religious beliefs are not only counterproductive to rehabilitation efforts, but also unconstitutional. As pastors, we will continue to press for expanded access to prisoners through our chaplaincy programs, including by dedicated volunteers. (*USCCB, Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*)

Resources

- ★ **Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice** (USCCB) (www.usccb.org/sdwp/criminal.shtml)
- ★ **Restore Justice** (www.RestoreJustice.com)
- ★ **Texas Youth Commission Chaplaincy Services Program** (<http://www.tyc.state.tx.us/programs/chaplains.html>)
- ★ **Texas Department of Criminal Justice Chaplaincy Program** (www.tdcj.state.tx.us/pgm&svcs/pgms&svcs-chaplny.htm)

The Texas Catholic Conference (TCC) is the association of the 15 Roman Catholic dioceses of the State of Texas, and is the Official Public Policy Voice of the Catholic Bishops of Texas.

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Funding and Support for TDCJ Chaplain Corps

The Texas Chaplaincy program furthers the mission that Jesus calls us to do in serving those who are imprisoned. The Texas Catholic Conferences supports continued funding and support for the TDCJ Chaplaincy Program, specifically requesting additional funds for the purchase of religious materials for use in services.

Texas Chaplaincy Programⁱ

The mission of the Chaplaincy Department of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice is to positively impact public safety and the reduction of recidivism through the rehabilitation and re-integration of adult felons into society. The rendering of pastoral care, management of quality programming and a therapeutic community allow for such an opportunity. It is the purpose of Chaplaincy to provide guidance and nurture to those searching for meaning in life. A variety of programs, activities and community participation are prudently managed wherein an individual is able to pursue their faith, reconcile relationships and strengthen their families.

Chaplain's services are provided in prisons to facilitate the exercise of freedom of religion by offenders. It is the policy of the TDCJ to extend to all offenders as much freedom and opportunity as possible for pursuing individual beliefs and practices, consistent with security, safety and orderly conditions in the institution. Services are provided based on demand, need and resources. Participation in religious activities and attendance at religious services of worship is voluntary. Chaplaincy services are nondiscriminatory in the treatment of offenders' religious beliefs. No employee, contractor or volunteer shall disparage the religious beliefs of any offender, or other person, nor deliberately seek to persuade a change of religious affiliation.

Programs of the Chaplaincy Department include but are not limited to:

- Weekly Religious Services
- Visitation/Hospitality Ministry
- Offenders/Families and Victims/Families
- Hospice Care
- Post Trauma Staff Support Team
- Pastoral Care
- Youthful Offenders Programming and Pre-Release Special Programming
- Family Visitors Center & Hospitality Houses
- Life Skills Program
- Spiritual Growth Programs

In addition, chaplains assist the offender in his/her search for life meaning, necessitating the healing process and allowing for changes in attitude. They develop and manage quality and comprehensive religious, clinical, and therapeutic programs and curriculum and develop continuum of care plans for release preparation through coordination with the TDCJ-Parole Division Work directly with all other divisions of TDCJ, incorporating the religious community into every phase of offender treatment and rehabilitation.

(Last updated August 24, 2010, 82nd Legislative Session)

ⁱ "Chaplaincy Program." Rehabilitation and Reentry Programs Division, Texas Department of Criminal Justice. 24 June 2008. <www.tdcj.state.tx.us/pgm&svcs/pgms&svcs-chaplny.htm>.