

Conference to Build Hope Among Those Involved in Prison Ministry

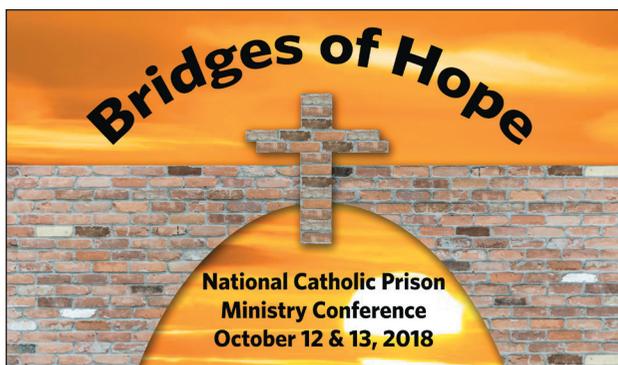
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Catholics have different, God-given gifts. Some are given the gifts that are best used in prison ministry, and those people often dip their toes into the ministry at first.

“Then they catch the fever and catch the fire,” said Ron Zeilinger, the founder of Dismas Ministry, a national ministry headquartered in Milwaukee that provides prisoners with Catholic resources. “There’s an initiation process that a lot of (ministers) talk about. It’s not so easy to see yourself going into prison at first. There’s a stereotype and a fear, but most people will say that it becomes a joyful ministry. It lifts them up and they are encouraged by the prisoners’ faith.”

Almost 200 Catholics involved in jail or prison ministry, including lay ministers, chaplains, clergy and religious from around the country will gather at the Cousins Center on Friday, Oct. 12, and Saturday, Oct. 13, for the National Catholic Prison Ministry Conference hosted by Dismas Ministry.

Topics that will be discussed include pastoral care for prisoners, prisoner re-entry, parish prison ministry, restorative justice, death row ministry, servant leadership and criminal justice reform. There will also be a number of roundtable discussions among ministers. The conference’s keynote speaker is Sr. Helen Prejean, author of New York Times’ bestseller



“Dead Man Walking,” who is nationally known for her work against the death penalty.

The theme of this year’s conference is “Bridges of Hope.” This not only applies to building bridges between the ministers and the incarcerated they minister to, but also among the ministers themselves, said Tyler Curtis, the executive director of Dismas Ministry.

“The goal of the conference is to provide a time of enrichment and networking and fellowship for Catholics who are engaged in prison ministry and those who are considering doing so,” she said. “Sometimes the ministers are isolated because they work in remote areas, or they’re the only person in the area or parish that does this type of work. This gives them a chance to come together, experience a day or two of sharing,

support each other and learn from each other. It’s a renewal for them and an opportunity for rejuvenation of their ministry.”

Zeilinger hopes that the conference will also encourage prison ministers to share what they heard at the conference with their parishes and their communities.

Zeilinger describes ministering to those imprisoned “the forgotten work of mercy.”

“There’s feeding the hungry, visiting the sick and burying the dead, but people don’t know how to or aren’t conscious that we need to minister to those imprisoned,” he said. “It gets the least amount of attention in terms of outreach in Catholic communities, yet it is clearly stated by Jesus in Matthew 25 in the final judgement scene.”

Because the imprisoned remain members of the Church and body of Christ, Dismas Ministry’s mission is to provide spiritual care for the incarcerated and help them reconnect and renew their relationship with Christ and his Church. The ministry, named after St. Dismas, the criminal crucified next to Jesus who spoke the words, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom,” is a publications and mailing ministry which provides materials to chaplains, ministers or prisoners themselves mostly free of charge, thanks to generous donors of the ministry.

Materials include Catholic Bibles, prayer books, and four courses, including a Bible study course, a prayer study course, a faith study course and social justice study course.

If those involved in prison ministry or those who are considering the ministry are interested in attending the conference, visit www.dismasministry.org/national-prison-ministry-conference to register immediately.

Zeilinger said that although not everyone is called to prison ministry, anyone can pray for the incarcerated and those who minister to them. Dismas Ministry has a “union of prayer,” where anyone can sign up at no cost with the intent to keep the ministry in your prayers. Dismas will then send those who sign up a prayer card and occasional newsletters. To learn more, visit www.dismasministry.org/union-of-prayer.

“Jesus said what you do unto others, you do to him,” Zeilinger said. “The incarcerated are Jesus behind bars. His face may be unrecognizable, but he’s there.”

Archdiocese to Celebrate Couples who Exemplify Sacredness of Marriage

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The Archdiocese of Milwaukee will honor couples who are celebrating significant wedding anniversaries during its annual jubilee celebration at 10 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 6. Bishop Schuerman will preside over the Mass at St. John XXIII Parish on the St. Peter Campus, 1800 Wisconsin St., Port Washington.

Couples celebrating their silver anniversaries (25th), golden anniversaries (50th) or those who have been married for more than 50 years are “treated as guests,” said Rich Harter, the director of the Office of Marriage and Family Life, through which this event is hosted. Each registered couple will receive flowers, a special blessing for their marriage during Mass and a nice meal following the Mass. Each couple will also

get the opportunity to take a picture with Bishop Schuerman and will receive a copy of the photo to commemorate the day.

Sixty-nine couples will celebrate their commitment to each other this weekend. Twelve will be celebrating 25 years of marriage, 19 will be celebrating 50 years of marriage and 38 couples will be celebrating more than 50 years of marriage. The longest married couple in the group will be celebrating 70 years of marriage.

“It’s our way of honoring the sacrament of marriage, which by definition is until death do we part,” said Harter. “We publicly honor those people who are living examples of the sacrament, who are faithful to each other, fruitful in marriage and love each other in sacrificial ways.”