

PRISON MINISTRY “DO’S AND DON’TS” FOR MEMBERS

Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church’s Prison Correspondence Ministry was created to provide encouragement, prayers and scripture testimony to people who are incarcerated. The members of this ministry are expected to correspond by sharing their faith and offer hope as a reason for writing to an incarcerated person. They may also express personal things God has done in their lives and how their beliefs have helped them.

Our Church has numerous ministries that also receive correspondence. Please use the official P.O. Box address and format as follows:

Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church
Prison Ministry – c/o _____
P.O. Box 639
Helotes, TX 78023-0639

Because prison inmates living in a highly secured environment, there are strict rules that must be observed and followed. Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in Helotes, Texas is sponsoring this Ministry by providing a P.O. Box as the official address for incoming correspondence from prison inmates. We are also available to provide support and guidance to members of the ministry.

The rules for corresponding are as follows:

- 1) Do not provide your personal home address. Provide your name but use the address shown above for the return address. The church has a mail box designated for this ministry. The office staff will be glad to hand you any responses you might receive or leave them in the parish drop box outside the office door for after-hours pick up if you call and ask. Any responses remaining in the mail box for over one month, will be forwarded to you.
- 2) Do not get involved with or contact the prisoner’s family members, personal friends or acquaintances that are in or out of prison. Do not get involved in their CASE. This Catholic ministry’s main function is for correspondence. The privacy laws have changed within the last few years that can cause difficulties for all concerned.
- 3) Do not disclose information from their letters as to what activity they were involved in. This could create challenges for the person you are writing to.
- 4) Prisoners are vulnerable to abuse by other prisoners, cellmates or guards. If the inmate reports extreme injustices done to him in his letters, please report all details and provide a copy of the letter(s) to Michelle Freyre or Sandra Archey.
- 5) If your inmate mentions in his letters that he is getting paroled, please find out when and notify Michelle Freyre or Sandra Archey so that our records can be updated.
- 6) Do not offer financial help. Do not send money or gifts. You are providing your time, friendship, compassion and they should not expect more than that. If you feel you want to help them financially, you can send money via a voucher through the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Inmate Trust Fund. It is against the law for an inmate to ask pen pals for money or gifts. If it is your own free will to send money, please contact Michelle Freyre or Sandra Archey for deposit slips.

- 7) Do not expect an immediate reply to your letters or make him feel guilty when you do not hear from him as often as you would like. We know many prisoners have limited funds and depend on stamps issued to them by the State. However, if you suspect that your inmate is not interested in writing, please ask him in a direct manner if he would like to continue in this ministry. If he has decided that he no longer wants a pen pal, please notify Michelle Freyre or Sandra Archey. If you have no response after three attempts and a waiting period of eight weeks, please notify Michelle Freyre or Sandra Archey for a new assignment.
- 8) Letters must be simple and cannot have stickers, glitter or handmade décor. If you send handmade cards they must be colored with colored pencils only. Anything else such as watercolors, paints, glue, tape, etc. cannot be fully inspected by TDCJ officials. Thus, they are unacceptable. Lamination is not permitted.
- 9) Do not send any packages directly, only written correspondence. Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church is authorized to send religious and inspirational materials to inmates. These packages must be approved by Sandra Archey before mailing.
- 10) Do not send jokes or stories that might offend the prisoners. By all means be lively and humorous, but use good moral judgement.

You may, and hopefully will:

- 1) Provide encouragement, prayers and scripture testimony. Also, personal things God has done in your life and how your beliefs have helped you. Sharing your faith and offering hope is very important for an inmate's successful rehabilitation.
- 2) If the inmate writes you back after you've sent your card or letter, ask him when you answer to tell you a little about his background. You in turn can share some of your life experience. Just basics – what kind of job you have or what you do with your time – do not mention company name or specific travels; your faith experiences – how many children you have without mentioning names or specifics regarding any one child – beautiful things that you have witnessed or you see happening in the world.
- 3) You should receive an information form for your inmate when assigned. It is recommended that you remember their birthday as many did not celebrate birthdays and their creation in a positive way as a child.
- 4) Invite your inmate to send art and participate in our Creative Arts fundraiser.
- 5) Keep a folder or binder with your correspondence and ministry updates and have a place to write down thoughts or inspirations that you want to send in future correspondence.
- 6) Put forth your best effort to remain in contact with your inmate at least once every 4-6 weeks.
- 7) Attend our ministry meetings and other events. A calendar of events is provided each year.

Please don't hesitate to call Michelle Freyre (210-677-5514) or Sandra Archey (210-602-7233) with any questions or concerns.

Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters that you do unto me. Matthew 25:40