

2.8.2024

COL Educational Opportunity

Prison Ministry Talk - Larry Fulton

Larry volunteers at the Donovan Prison. Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility is a California state prison located in unincorporated southern San Diego County, California, near San Diego. It is a part of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. It is a 780-acre facility. It is the only state prison in San Diego County.

Address: 480 Alta Rd, San Diego, CA 92179

Capacity: 2,992. Population: 2,920 (97.6% capacity) (as of January 31, 2023)

Opened: July 1987. Security class: Medium – Maximum

Larry has volunteered for the past 20 years at Donovan Prison, working with the Restorative Justice Office of the SD Diocese: <https://sdcatholic.org/life-peace-and-justice/restorative-justice/> “Our Catholic understanding of justice is balanced between compassion and understanding for the people harmed by others (victims) with accountability and mercy for people that have caused harm (offenders). Restorative justice is not a “soft on crime” approach to justice. Rather, restorative justice focuses on meeting the needs of victims first and foremost, and holding those who have caused harm accountable while still recognizing the dignity of the person that caused the harm. Restorative justice focuses on “what needs to happen to make things right” after the harm has occurred, in contrast to our current system of retributive justice that focuses solely on the punishment of an offender. The following link from the California Catholic Conference provides additional information and resources on restorative justice: <https://cacatholic.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/RJM-FINAL-3.pdf>

Training required to volunteer in the Prison Ministry:

- SD Diocese: Be trained as a lector and Eucharistic Ministry and seminars.
- CA State: 8 hours on-line training plus background check, TB and driver’s license.

A typical visit to the Prison for Larry: After going through many gates, locks and searches plus carrying an alarm (he is not allowed to take his cell phone into the prison):

- Runs a Communion service in the chapel. Clerics (prisoners) for the Chapel set up. Service consists of Gospel readings, reflections, and communion. An average of 20-25 prisoners attend the service.
- Runs a recovery program session (12 steps) for most of the attendees.

Questions for Larry?

What is the recidivism rate? [a measure of the likelihood that an individual who has been released from prison will reoffend and return to the criminal justice system]

- 20 years ago, it was 80%. Today it's around 50% at Donovan Prison
- Success happens when the heart is changed over the mind.
- Need good support when released from prison: programs and families.
- <https://riseupindustries.org/> is a good example of a Reentry Program based in Santee.

How have the changes in CA Prison Laws changed things in the Prison System?

- Larry opinion is that it has been a good for the Prison system. It is not for the more hardened, dangerous, and violent criminals, but for those with less offenses. They still must go through the Parole Board which is looking for that change of heart over mind.
- The key to the change in the CA Prison Law and its success is the support they get when released from prison and families.

How often do they have a full Mass and/or Adoration?

- They do not offer a weekly Mass in Donovan and do not have a Tabernacle and Monstrance. Only two deacons are currently assigned to the SD Diocese Ministry due to a lack of priests. They do offer an Easter Mass and Christmas. Bishop Brom used to come and do the masses at Easter and hear confessions etc.
- He will be distributing ashes on Ash Weds.
- Sometimes the correction officers come to the Masses.

Do you interact with any of the prisoners that do not sign up for the Chapel service or Recovery program sessions?

- Occasionally they are allowed to work the jail in the jail for more hardened prisoners. They hand out pamphlets and some want to talk, receive ashes etc.

Can you be a sponsor for a prisoner?

- We cannot be a sponsor and cannot become familiar with the prisoners. If they find out about your home life, they could threaten your family if you do not deliver drugs etc.

How can SMM COL support the Prison Ministry?

- Pray for Larry and the SD Diocese Prison Ministry.
- Display pamphlets, collect donations, collect sign ups etc. on our COL table every month.
- Support and promote a Reentry Program like RiseUp Industries.
- Educate using resources from the SD Diocese Prison Ministry.