

Texas Catholic Correctional Ministers 2017 Retreat Highlights

There were representatives from 10 dioceses at the 2017 Texas Catholic Correctional Ministers (TCCM) conference, a pretty good turnout. The program began with a review of ongoing ministry highlights in each diocese on Monday evening. The Kolbe Prison Ministry Retreat program seemed to be at the top of the list, as retreats are now being held in approximately 40 prison units in 14 dioceses. New retreats in the Amarillo and Lubbock diocese are now being conducted. RCIA programs are flourishing in the state prisons with Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, Archbishop Gustavo-García-Siller, along with other bishops and priests administering the Sacraments in correctional facilities.

On Tuesday morning, we met with Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller of San Antonio. The Archbishop reminded us that this ministry is not ours, but that God has entrusted and called us to serve in His ministry. We are called to bring and sustain hope. The gift of hope is a special gift, and we must rely on the Holy Spirit in sharing this message. Following his talk, the Archbishop presented on behalf of the TCCM, a certificate of appreciation to Deacon Doots Dufour.

Deacon Doots distributed a summary document of his interaction at House Corrections Committee Hearings held from March 23 to April 25. We then had a teleconference with Michael Barba of the Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops (TCCB) to get an update on the status of Criminal Justice bills in the House and Senate. In reviewing input from Deacon Doots and Michael Barba, there were no new bills introduced in the 85th Legislature that will have a great impact on our efforts in the area of Criminal Justice. Deacon Doots was encouraged by the information contained in the House Corrections Committee on Criminal Justice - Interim Report to 85th Legislature - Dec 2016. Doots had praise for some of their conclusions and recommendations, as they are consistent with what we have been saying for the last few years.

ENDOW (educating on the dignity of women) - <http://www.endowgroups.org/>. Three representatives (Sharon Menezes, Christi Rohmer and Dr. Joan Meaney) told us about this program that they have been teaching at Bexar County jail for a number of years. It is a 6-week program based on Pope John Paul II's 1995 teaching on women's dignity. ENDOW is a well-known program used in 130 dioceses in the US, Canada and New Zealand. I believe the 6-week outreach program based on Pope John Paul II's letter could be offered to women in any TDCJ state prison, including those on probation, parole and under pre-trial supervision.

Ed Smith and Jeremy Itz gave an update on **Kolbe Prison Ministry** (KPM). KPM is now a registered 501(c)(3) entity, and dioceses, if desired, can set up accounts under this tax free non-profit agency. The KPM core team in Fredericksburg is now able to focus on "missioning" retreats in other dioceses and even outside of Texas, as the San Antonio Archdiocese has established a separate core to handle 10+ retreats per year at the TDCJ units in their archdiocese. The 3rd annual Kolbe conference will be held on Saturday July 15th from 8am to 5pm on the 4th floor of the Cathedral Centre on 1701 San Jacinto Street in Houston. Following the conference, Mass will be celebrated by Bishop Sheltz at the Cathedral across the street from the Centre. Conference speakers will include Bishop George Sheltz; Fr. Mitch Pacwa from EWTN; Warden Monroe who was warden at Connally when the first retreat was held; and former offender Damon West. If you are interested in attending, please go to <http://www.kolbeprisonministries.com/statewide-conference/> to register.

An update of the Oblate IFP program at the Briscoe Unit was given by Rita Velasquez from **Oblate School of Theology**. Ms. Velasquez oversees the two-year certification program entitled *Institute on Pastoral Formation*. The first class began in September, 2014 with 13 inmates completing the program in June, 2016. A second class began in September, 2016 and the first year is now complete with 18 students that will continue into year two. The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston is contemplating bringing this program to the Ramsey Unit in September, 2018. If other dioceses are interested, please contact Rita Velasquez at rvelasquez@ost.edu.

Professor James Greenaway from St Mary's University has been teaching a philosophy course with a focus on Human Dignity at the Torres Unit in Hondo. This 12-week course was well received by 26 students and they are asking for more. He was very impressed by the academic ability of the students. Because of this pilot program, he feels compelled to offer much more and is proposing that St. Mary's University offers a more in-depth liberal arts curriculum which could be taught over a number of year at the prison. This would not be a degree program, but a certificate of completion could be offered from the University.

Following discussion of criminal justice related topics, we turned our focus toward the spiritual realm with Fr. Bill Shaughnessy giving two meditations on the Crucifixion and Resurrection. This took place in the retreat center chapel during which the Blessed Sacrament was exposed. There was a break between the meditations and time for confession. This was followed by Mass.

After dinner, we talked briefly about the TCCM and handed out copies of our charter, which was first drafted at our 2016 retreat in Beaumont. We will be sending this document to the Texas Catholic Bishops in early July to inform them, especially those new in their diocese, and to ask for their support of the TCCM. Following this discussion, we roasted Deacon Doots, but to be honest, no one had any good stories about Doots other than his attending meetings in shorts and a bow tie. I think we all believe that Doots is a "Pearl of Great Price" from Matthew 13:45-46. He is great treasure to Criminal Justice Ministry in Texas and can never be replaced. Doots, you are truly a role model with a servant's heart and an undying passion for the ministry.

On Wednesday morning, we talked briefly about conducting a statewide Criminal Justice Conference in the spring of 2018. Stay tuned for more details. Doots handed out a document entitled "Reducing Crime and its Cost\$". Following this, we went off to the Bexar County Reentry Service Center for a tour and presentation of the services offered. Nino Tarantino, CEO of Chrysalis spoke to us about this agency (<http://www.chrysmmin.org/>) and then [Debra Jordan](#), Reentry Program Manager, talked about what is offered at this center. Everyone was impressed by the reentry efforts in Bexar County, and the center is a model that could be adapted by other large counties or municipalities in the state.

All in all, the retreat was very productive and the MACC was a good venue for our event.