

# Pastoral Ministry In West Virginia's Regional Jails

*What you have done for the least among you...  
.... you have done for me...*

Matthew 25:40



## **Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston**

### **Office of Prison Ministry**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

There has been a concern among several of clergy and religious of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston describing their reception at correctional facilities while attempting to make a pastoral visit to an inmate. This would be especially true for the Regional Jail system.

The information contained in this booklet is an attempt to explain the West Virginia Regional Jail Authority's policy, or lack there of, pertaining to clergy or religious pastoral visits to a facility.

Experience has proven the consistency is not the same from one facility to another. Nor, is there a consistency in a facility to another. Nor, is there a consistency in a facility from week to week.

This booklet is not an attempt to endorse WVRJA's policies. However, the purpose is only for informational reasons with the hope of assisting those, who in the future, may wish to pastorally visit a Regional Jail.

### **INTRODUCTION TO PASTORAL VISITS IN WEST VIRGINIA REGIONAL JAILS**

Anyone that has tried to arrange a pastoral visit for an inmate in one of West Virginia's Regional Jails has discovered the difficulty of accomplishing the task. Usually the Minister finds many obstacles in their path, which results in not only a great deal of frustration but concern over the lack of assistance and the indifference encountered by many of the staff of facilities.

Numerous requests over recent years, both written and verbal, by the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston's Office of Prison Ministry, for a written copy of the West Virginia Regional Jail Authority's policy concerning clergy visits has yielded no document. To date the requests and pleas have gone unanswered. Therefore, many remain cloudy or murky. This can only lead one to believe a degree, the difficulty experienced by the Church at various facilities.

Oddly enough, the Region Jails located in the region of our state and Diocese representing the larger Catholic population seems to be the facilities offering the most obstacles to our Ministry for those incarcerated.

Perhaps the following outline of information will give some assistance and a better understanding of gaining access to a Regional Jail facility for contact visits, until the time we receive some form of written uniform policy produced by the West Virginia Regional Jail Authority.

**I. Visiting Inmates Incarcerated in WVRJ**

There are two forms of visiting inmates of Regional Jails, contact visits and non-contact visits. Each has its own character outlined separately.

**1. Non-contact visits** (background checks are not required)

A. Call the facility between 8am and 4pm one day in advance. Usually, visits are offered four days a week - afternoons and evenings. Calls will be taken, first come first served, until all visitation time slots are filled. You will not be able to pick your time, you will get the next available time slot.

B. Non-contact visits are limited to two per inmate per week; this includes family-friends and or clergy visits.

C. On the day of visitation the visitor must be present and registered at least 45 minutes prior to assigned visiting time with no exceptions.

D. Non-contact visitation is for 30 minutes in visiting stalls with glass panel-dividing inmates from visitors.

E. Each person who is to visit must be registered and must provide:

1. Names
2. Address
3. Phone Number
4. Relationship to the inmate
5. Birthday

F. You will need at least two proofs of ID; one of which needs to be a state picture ID when registering (valid drivers license, valid state identification, certified birth certificate, voters registration, social security card, passport, military ID or so-forth).

G. All visitors are subject to a pat search prior to entering the visitation area. Visitor's who refuse to consent to the pat search will be denied entry to visitation at that time.

- H. Visitor's are required to pass through the metal detector.
- I. Lockers are provided in the public lobby, which requires a quarter to operate. The quarter will be returned when the locker door is re-opened. (Wallets, coats, hats, keys, cell phone and so-forth)
- J. Only items pre-approved by the Lieutenant or the Director of Inmates Services may be left at the window for an inmate.
- K. The passing of any items from visitor to inmate or from and inmate to visitor is prohibited and can be punishable by law.
- L. A visit may be terminated by the shift supervisor for violations of facility policies or for security reasons.

**2. Contact Visits** (background checks are required)

In reality there are several elements or steps involved with gaining a contact visit with an inmate of WVRJ. Many of these steps depend upon the inmates themselves.

**A.** How did the inmate register their faith preference while being processed into the Regional Jail?

- 1. Practicing Catholic
- 2. Non-practicing Catholic
- 3. Have not been attending Church
- 4. Other response or lack of a response.

The inmates answer or response becomes very important at the time they wish to receive a pastoral visit. The inmate that responds as practicing Catholic will most likely receive pastoral visits on request.

**B.** The inmate must make an official request to their councilor for a Pastoral visit from their faith representative: a Priest-Deacon or Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist. The inmate will not be asked by Correctional Officers or staff if they want to see clergy etc.

**C.** Official requests by non-practicing Catholic's or those with a different response at the time of processing into the WVRJ will most likely be denied. Those individuals will be encouraged to attend an Ecumenical Service or see the Ecumenical volunteer chaplain, which visits a couple times a week. Obviously, this inmate will not receive the Catholic Spiritual direction nor receive the Sacraments of the Church while in this condition.

**D.** There is a procedure for the inmate to change the answer given at the time of processing into the facility. Again the individual must make an official request to receive a form to be filled out requesting to make the proper changes about religious answers. Receiving the form and returning it, then receiving the necessary permission usually will take several weeks to accomplish.

**E.** Clearly a great deal of the responsibility for receiving Pastoral visits from the Church rest upon the individual inmate and their desire to follow the WVRJ policy. However, the amount of this official request policy, the written forms and so forth the inmate is actually aware of remains a mystery. Although this information is suppose to be given to them during their processing into the facility, both written and verbal, many inmates have indicated they were not aware of policies in regard to Religious Services and their needs for making official request. If another inmate did not inform them, they would not have known of their right and ability to receive Catholic Pastoral contact visits. Family members calling DWC Office Prison Ministry are also informed of the policies for WVRJ's and the procedures necessary for the inmates to perform.

**F.** It is worth noting an inmate may be refused contact visits if for some reason it is deemed they are a security risk, meaning they pose a danger of violence, or if the facility is in a state of lock down, no one in or no one out, for security reasons not directly related to the inmate to be visited. Severe mental health issues may also interfere with contact visits to certain inmates.

**G.** Although the rules, regulations and policies of the WVRJA appear to be overwhelming at times, creating hardship for Ministers and inmates alike, this situation can be overcome. As Ministers, we can take a pro-active role to assure a Catholic inmate of WVRJ has access to a full sacramental life and spiritual direction during this period of time they are behind bars. When a minister becomes aware of an individual becoming incarcerated, the Minister may write a note and mail the note to the inmate explaining the need for making a request. A Minister may also contact the Director of Inmate Services inquiring about the inmate. A Minister may choose to do both methods in an effort to express their concerns for both the

inmate and their family. Although a small percentage of inmates may choose not to respond, most will look forward to regular Pastoral visits as the highlight of their week.

**II. Volunteer Clergy (background application required)**

**A.** Application forms are available from DWC Office of Prison Ministry or directly from WVRJ facilities.

**B.** Applications will be processed in a more timely manner if returned to DWC Office of Prison Ministry. The WVRJA is being held accountable for processing applications in a reasonable amount of time. Applications will no longer be overlooked or discarded.

**C.** Applicants returning applications to DWC Office of Prison Ministry will be included on official call list of the WVRJA and only those will be recognized for pastoral visits.

**D.** Time frame of processing applications can be one month or more.

**III. Making the arrangements for a Catholic Pastoral Visit**

Once a Minister's background application has been approved, granting proper clearance for ministry in a Regional Jail, and it is determined a Catholic inmate has made a request for Pastoral visit, there is at least two ways the visit can be arranged.

**A.** On a rare occasion, the Regional Jail staff may call a Catholic Minister and make all arrangements at that time. That is, of course, if the Minister is on the list of those approved for pastoral visits.

**B.** The most common method of arrangement for Pastoral visits will be initiated by the Minister becoming aware of an individual requesting a Pastoral visit, either by the inmate themselves or their family; then the Minister make contact with the facility staff to pre-arrange the visit. Staff members the Minister would need to speak with are: Director of Inmate Services or the Councilor for the individual inmate. Experience has proven the Councilor is usually more accessible than the Director of Inmate Services, and will also assist in making arrangements of setting times and dates.

**C.** In the matter of setting times and dates, it is always desirable to strive for accommodations that can and will be

consistent from week to week. In doing so, both the inmate and the staff of the facility come to expect and depend on the visits. This is most desirable, for a good working relationship is being established between the Minister and the Regional Jail, which services to strengthen the Ministry.

**4.** Emergencies, funeral and other situations often occur in life and may do so causing a conflict with a scheduled visit to a Regional Jail. If this occurs, the facility should be notified A.S.A.P. Perhaps that visit can be changed to a different time or day for that week.

**V. What to expect upon arrival to a Regional Jail  
for Pastoral Visits.**

In contrast to the non-contact form of visits, which require being registered 45 minutes before a scheduled visit, Ministers may register 10-15 minutes before hand for contact visits. It is not unusual for an officer to escort a Minister to a conference room immediately after registration is completed at the front desk.

**1.** To register, or sign in, the Minister will be required to have two forms of identifications and also the name of the inmate to be visited. The forms of ID accepted are the same as for non-contact visits: valid drivers license, valid state identification, certified birth certificate, voter's registration, social security card, passport, military ID or so-forth.

**A.** Ministers sign in to a log book recording the time in to the facility and the time out and the nature of the visit, which is Catholic Services.

**B.** Only items pre-approved by the Lieutenant or Director of Inmate Services may be left at the window for inmates. Usually daily devotionals can be given directly to the individual *after receiving approval*.

**C.** The passing of any item from visitor to inmate or from inmate to visitor is prohibited and can be punishable as delivery of contraband.

**D.** All visitors are required to pass through the metal detector, however a pat search is always an option of the Correctional Officer.

**E.** Lockers are provided in the public lobby which requires a quarter to operate. The quarter will be returned when

the locker door is re-opened. Wallet, coat, hat, keys, cell phone, coins and so-forth, including pens and pencils, should be stored in the locker.

**2.** Preparing to enter metal detector the Minister may want to hand the Correctional Officer the Pyx containing the Eucharist and wristwatch especially if the band is metal. The officer may ask for the Minister to open the Pyx just for a visual inspection. The Lectionary, Bible or other form of text must be a soft back version, which will also be inspected.

**A.** Once the Minister has past the metal detector and carry in items inspected, the Correctional Officer will escort the inmate from their pod to the same conference room.

**B.** An hour is the common time given by the WVRJ for the service. However, when the service is completed, the Minister may need to motion to a Correctional Officer in the hallway for an escort back to the lobby. Depending upon the volume of activity that particular day in the facility, the escort

**C.** With the visit complete and returning to the lobby, to the public lobby could take a few minutes. The Minister would sign out with the time leaving, then retrieve items from the locker before leaving the facility.

## **CONCLUSION**

There are many opportunities for ministry to individuals who have made a serious mistake in their lives. Often, Prison Ministry Volunteers can become involved without ever being inside or near a prison setting. Ministries exist for family members, such as a spouse, and especially for children with at least one parent incarcerated. Mentoring programs for ex-offenders have been developed in several areas in an effort to assist those individuals re-entering society. For more information about these programs and other, please contact:

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