

## **SVdP Returning Citizen Re-Entry Group Successes**

Ladies and Gentlemen; I write this note to you to describe some successes we have had with aiding offenders to reenter society after release from mainly, the Idaho Dept. of Corrections facilities.

Idaho has a fairly low crime rate, but a high rate of recidivism. Once they are in, they don't get out. The arguable rate we believe is 67%. This is unacceptable.

In 2012, Dick Gallegos, who was the Operational Director of the Prison Ministry for the Catholic Diocese of Boise and I began a dialogue about how to ease the process of rejoining society for those men and women who were coming out.

We believe that anyone who is incarcerated five years, or more, is returning to a society that is far different than the one they left. We also believe that many of these persons have lost their family connections; or that their family connections are not good for them. They are facing a strange world that they need help dealing with.

Research has shown that the State of Idaho incarcerates the average, nonviolent prisoner two years more than our neighboring states. We also know that the daily cost of housing an inmate is \$57.43. This does not include the capital costs of building prisons, only the operational costs. Those two years cost us \$41,923, per prisoner, and extends the time that he or she is absent from the society they must re-meld with.

The outcome of our early meetings was to gather a group of persons of like minds. We formed a St. Vincent de Paul Conference devoted to reentry.

Now I must explain that the term Conference to members of SVdP defines a local working group. The name comes from the French origins of the Society and its original name – Confraternity of Charity.

We invited people from other church groups that were doing some ministering to the prison system to join with us. The first such volunteers came from The Vineyard and Ten Mile Christian Church. We are religious internally, but seek to serve the needs of anyone who calls out. There is no proselytizing, no recruiting of church membership unless the client requests it.

We elected a President - Tony Arrubbarena, Vice President Jorge deVarona, and Secretary Debra Servatius.

In August of 2013 we started doing home visits to offenders that had been briefed about our service. We were just taking "baby steps" and learning what we needed to do. We could offer some clothing, furniture, help with rent, bus passes, bikes, and referrals to other services. Our funds were somewhat limited.

From August through December 2013, we saw 108 clients. The number we see weekly keeps increasing. At the end of December 2014, Debra went to the prison records with the 108 names to see how many had been re-incarcerated. That number was 18. That is one in six, not anywhere near

the two out of three. We were elated. We understand that this is preliminary and a short time sampling, but it is a significant trend in a good direction.

In 2014, we saw over 300 clients.

What is next?

I think anyone reading this note can see the possibilities. We need to expand out of the Treasure Valley Area. We need more volunteers who feel that our prison system can be helped by caring people. We need additional funds to expand our work.

We learned early on that the most important thing we offered these people was hope and caring. We went to their living quarters, where ever they might have been to show our interest in their wellbeing. We did not require them to stand in a line and demean their pride to get aid. We treated them as equals who had paid their debt and wanted to resume their lives.

Other than that, the two most important assets for these folks are housing security and a job. We want to begin an employment service that would put them in contact with employers that would give them a chance. If you want a loyal employee, give some desperate person a chance and see how he responds.

I will respond to anyone who wants to learn more, or help, or publicize our mission. I can be reached at 208-794-1223 or [mikeg@svdpid.org](mailto:mikeg@svdpid.org)

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