

THE VOLUNTEER VOICE

CRIMINAL JUSTICE MINISTRY NEWS FOR VOLUNTEERS



STAFF UPDATES

Since the publication of our last edition of the *Volunteer Voice*, CJM has onboarded a new Volunteer Coordinator, Andrew Briseno. Coming to CJM as a Vincentian Mission Corps (VMC) member, Andrew joins a tradition of long-term volunteer service with CJM; consisting both of regular volunteers in our programs and volunteers from partners like VMC and IVC (Ignatian Volunteer Corps). Andrew will be serving as the current point of contact for all volunteer-related matters. He has been working with our IVC volunteer, Ginny McDonald, and other office volunteers to connect with all our committed volunteers for opportunities to reengage. For any volunteer-related questions during Andrew's service term and beyond, please feel free to contact us at volunteer@cjmstlouis.org.

STAY CONNECTED

As we're continuing to evolve our volunteer programming, stay connected and check out the latest opportunities with CJM. The blurb to the right further details program statuses, but a full listing and sign-up form for current positions can be found [here](#).

CURRENT OPPORTUNITIES

Over these past few months, our organization has been learning to navigate how to continue our ministry in all facets. Our volunteer opportunities have undergone very large changes due to necessary COVID regulations. We have been working to establish new and previous volunteer opportunities for anyone who may be interested. Currently, we can provide volunteer opportunities that mainly involve supporting our out of prison ministry, such as helping our housing clients and around our offices. The most direct work with inmates pertains to our **Zoom Sunday Evening Fellowship** and our **Penpal Program**. There is also a spot in helping run an **in-person anger management class** inside a Department of Corrections facility. While many of those programs tend to be reoccurring volunteer opportunities, we also have need for one-time support for those who cannot participate in a long-term engagement, such as, **making homecooked meals for recently released inmates** or helping us in **our food pantry**. There are many ways to volunteer with CJM. We are in contact with prisons and jails, but it will take time to communicate exactly how we will work together to provide volunteer work that would be safe and beneficial for all parties involved. We know that our volunteers will still help out in whatever forms they can.

PROGRAM, EVENT, AND VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHTS

PEN PALS AND MORE



MEET GINNY MCDONALD, IGNATIAN VOLUNTEER CORPS

For much of the past year and a half, I have thought a lot about people at the margins. People who lost jobs and housing, essential workers, children navigating online school, people without access to healthcare, and people in prisons and jails whose crowded living conditions made avoiding infection difficult.

I have been volunteering at CJM since August - a short time, but long enough to become acquainted with the many services that they provide and with a dedicated staff that is remarkably welcoming to clients and volunteers.

Our clients are individuals recently released from prison, and I have been struck by the courage and determination they display as they begin to rebuild their lives. The clients that I have gotten to meet with have been unfailingly gracious and grateful. After a long conversation with one FIRST Services client, I was told that I had done more for him than anyone had since he had been released. I think maybe he mostly wanted to have someone who was willing to listen to his story. I'm glad to be a part of work that helps to bring these people back from the margins.

CHRISTMAS BAKING



Christmas Cookie Season is upon us once again. Our needs are different this year than in years past as COVID continues to impact our access to facilities, but we plan to host multiple opportunities for all our Holiday Bakers. If you're interested in offering your baking skills to the CJM community, sign up [here](#) to receive more information on our needs and timeline for delivery. Sign up soon before slots fill up!

JOIN OUR PEN PAL PROGRAM

CJM's Pen Pal program is one of the largest and underutilized ways to volunteer and impact the lives of the incarcerated through service with CJM. Our next page demonstrates the power of this program through testimony from short- and long-term pen pals of CJM.

You too can make that important difference in a life who needs support. To learn more about the CJM pen pal program, contact Myra Vandersall at myrav@cjmstlouis.org. All letters are held in confidence and are routed through CJM for your privacy.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE MINISTRY

"TO SERVE, NOT TO JUDGE"



One stamp, one envelope and one piece of paper makes a world of difference for incarcerated people

In this time of preferred communication—Twitter, text messages, email, Facebook—the art of actual letter writing is still alive through the Criminal Justice Ministry (CJM) pen pal program. Our pen pals have communicated with incarcerated individuals for 28 years, faithfully writing letters sent in the mail for an inmate to read and keep. This is especially important as the holidays are a very difficult time for incarcerated individuals.

Our volunteer letter writers offer their pen pals a sense of wellbeing, help relieve isolation, offer support for inmates to make changes to their self-esteem. Letters provide a way for inmates disconnected from society to establish strong relationships and develop communication skills. And for the CJM pen pals, they learn about life in prison, the inmate's hopes for a positive future.

In the state of Missouri, 96% of individuals incarcerated will eventually be released. By showing our prison pen pals the outside world, how things work now and offering the hope of self-confidence we can facilitate their return to society and reduce the incidence of recidivism. CJM pen pal Bob realized this sense of progression with his pen pal of three years. "We were matched well, found ourselves compatible and managed to form a friendship over this period. I encourage anyone interested in being a pen pal to sign up and hope your involvement will be as rewarding as mine." Bob is now writing to a second inmate. His first pen pal has been released and has a job.

Lauren is a new CJM pen pal. She lives in Ireland and has two pen pals. "The experience has been enlightening, humbling and insightful," she says. "I'm a more open person now and helped me understand that people make mistakes. I hope my letters help breach the sense of loneliness in prisons. I understand the importance of not being judgmental and realize incarcerated people need support and to be heard."

Loneliness and isolation are very real in prison. Many inmates never receive any mail or communication. When an inmate receives a letter, this shows there is someone out there who cares. CJM pen pal Mary began corresponding with her pen pal and "I understood pretty quickly my pen pal just wanted someone to talk to. He said no one in prison talked to you unless they thought they could get something from you."

As the correspondence continued Mary saw a decline in her pen pal's writing and grammar. He also indicated he was not feeling well. She made a call to the prison and asked for a welfare check. In a subsequent letter he told Mary he was receiving much better medical care since her call. She's not sure if he received better care because of her calls, but it "showed my friend that someone cared about him and may have made a difference in his recovery."