

The Story of the Catholic Prison Ministries Coalition (CPMC)

Numerous people who minister to those affected by incarceration have requested that the Catholic Mobilizing Network gather them, create resources and assist in formation. This groundswell of need is the result of the absence of national leadership and national organizations within the Catholic Church in support of prison ministry. With the publication of Catholic Mobilizing Network's (CMN) newest book, Redemption and Restoration: A Catholic Prospective on Restorative Justice, CMN worked with several offices of the USCCB staff (Certification, Domestic Social Justice and Peace and Government Relations) to develop a plan of action.

Simultaneously, Pope Francis asked the Nuncio what the status of prison ministry in the United States was. The Nuncio sent a letter over to the USCCB and Dr. Harry Dudley, then Associate Director for Certification for Ecclesial Ministry, responded by sending out a survey to all the dioceses. The report from this survey, gave concrete evidence of the lack of national Catholic leadership effort to support and form those who felt called to this ministry.

As a result of 6 months of conversations with partners that each dealt with aspects of the many related ministries within the Church, on April 24, 2018, 20 + national organizations gathered to discuss what was needed and what next steps needed to be taken.

The group quickly concluded a national networking resource was needed. To do this, the partners gathered formed the following committee to continue our collaborative efforts:

- **Executive Committee**, formed to create a strategy, determine next steps, continue the national conversation and move this new entity forward.
- **Steering Committee** composed of representatives of the national organizations who agreed to partner and lend their unique expertise to the mission.
- **Formation Committee**, formed to begin addressing the need for national standards for those who minister, formation of courses and materials based on those standards and the plans for several levels of certification to meet the growing need.

Since national leaders had been heard, it was decided those doing the ministry and work needed to be heard. Monthly webinars were set up with a chat feature to provide education, but also to get input from the attendees. The USCCB agreed to host the webinars and post them on their website. After the logistics of setting it up, publicity went out with only 3 business days notice for the last week of June which overlapped the first week of July. Despite the short notice and bad timing, it was decided to proceed as a trial run. CPMC had over 650 people sign up for the webinar. The response was overwhelming- so many needs and no one to provide them.

The USCCB hosted the first webinars monthly until December 2018 ([Click here to see USCCB hosted webinars.](#)) In March, the University of San Francisco, began hosting the webinars with the assistance of a Jesuit Intern, working with Fr. George Williams, SJ, the chaplain at San Quentin. ([Click here to see the USF hosted webinars.](#)) The hope is to host and house the webinars on CPMC's own website which could direct those seeking help and seeking to help to connect to the many fine support services that have up to now been doing fine work but working in silos. The webinars have continued to have a high level of attendance. Over 10,000 people have participated in the short time since this effort began, less than a year ago. Topics for these webinars were surfaced from the participants themselves and the steering committee helped to surface the facilitators. The topics and/or presenters surfaced for this year include:

- March 5, 2019 -Dr. Ted Smith, Dr. Kathryn Getek Soltis
"The Basics of Empathic Listening for Pastoral Care Ministry"
- April 3, 2019 -Dr. Harry Dudley, Sr. Rita Mary Harwood at the diocese of Cleveland
Recruiting Volunteers to Ministry to the Incarcerated and their Loved Ones-
- May 7, 2019 -Ashley Feasley, Ofelia de los Santos
Immigrant Detention Ministry
- June 4, 2019 - Dr. Melisa Kelly, Fr. George Williams, SJ
Addressing Grief and Bereavement in Jail and Prison Ministry
- July 9, 2019 - Sr. Maureen Clark , CSJ & Fr. Dustin Feddon-
Creating a Successful Reentry Program
- August 2019 (Spanish) -Deacon Edgar Farias, Director for Detention Ministry at
Archdiocese of Miami
- September 2019 -Krisanne Murphy Vaillancourt or Caitlin Morneau
Restorative Justice

During these months of webinar production, a mission statement was created and approved by our steering committee for Catholic Prison Ministries Coalition (CPMC).

Mission statement

The Catholic Prison Ministries Coalition (CPMC) promotes Catholic ministry to all those affected by incarceration. Our goal is to recruit, train, support and empower those called to minister with the poor and marginalized. We hope to create a more just and merciful criminal justice system closely aligned with the ministry of the Church and the teachings and example of Pope Francis.

CPMC will create opportunities to share resources and best practices to strengthen the Church's mission to advance restorative justice that upholds the dignity of every human person.

To do this we agree that we don't need a new 501c3 but better cooperation. The partners in the CPMC do not want the coalition to become another 501©3. The need is too urgent and the members did not want to become distracted by the logistics and time needed to do that. Instead a decision was made to explore to live up to the standards of a true, working coalition that brings together national organizations who are doing specific ministries so that their work could be promoted and supported. The goal was to help eliminate silos, avoid duplication of services, and to allow us to meet more needs in areas previously uncovered. In addition, it was felt that each partner could then focus on its strengths. For example, the National Association of Catholic Chaplains (NACC) currently have standards and procedures approved by the USCCB for forming and certifying hospital chaplains. They already have the mechanics in place to provide on-line courses and certification. They have made a commitment to expand this service to include formation and certification of prison ministers (as well as to partner with others who do pastoral care.) Our formation committee is chaired by NACC's executive director.

To change things Catholics do need coordinated formation about the issues. The CMN and our partners surfaced the major need within the Church is to educate the average Catholic about how Catholic Social Teaching and Restorative Justice provide the principals needed to advocate for the necessary changes in the broken correctional system in our country. There are many fine materials created individually by dioceses and organizations but, as we have noticed about formation, these materials are not well disseminated and need to be housed and accessible on a reliable website.

If the Church could be educated about needed legislative change and how to assist in making it happen in states and nationally, a unified Church could make great change. An active campaign for advocacy needs to be combined and initiated on-line to catapult Catholics into action. This will require a state-of-the-art website.

To see that those in prisons around the country are better served – the silos of good work being done within the United States need to be broken down. People do not know who is doing what where and how to access these services. We are in great need of a national registry that is easily accessible for individuals seeking ministry or seeking to help. This information needs to be gathered and housed in a website which is easy to navigate.

To address the decreasing number of and aging of chaplains in prisons and jails, we must ask: "who will be next generation of ministers?" Our Executive and Steering Committees are deeply concerned about this. Due to the decreasing numbers of our youth attending Mass, the Executive Committee was instructed to survey the Catholic Colleges, Universities and post-

graduate Volunteer organizations for possible hubs of activities to engage students. ***“Young Catholic Professionals”***

To address this, we have also surfaced the need to create hubs of the many Catholic Universities and Colleges who are currently running education programs within prisons and jails. Some have tutorial programs and support organizations for those affected by incarceration. Would it be possible to create a movement to engage *both* those interested in social justice, criminal justice, social work *and* theology, pastoral ministry and religious vocations? By creating hubs across the United States, Interns could be engaged and support this national work.

Two hubs have already been surfaced:

1. CPMC has initiated one hub at the University of San Francisco (USF) where a Jesuit Intern has succeeded in setting up the hosting of the webinars within the USF Communications Department. Two more Interns will begin working in May. Raymond Parcon, SJ will begin a two-year commitment in August 2019 under the guidance of Fr. George Williams, SJ.
2. Loyola Pastoral Institute in Chicago, Illinois, is willing to provide office space, computer, and support for an employee to maintain the website and serve as a full-time coordinator.
3. Multiple Universities (Georgetown, Boston College, Villa Nova and Notre Dame) have been engaged in conversations regarding creating materials to attract students to prison ministry and provide opportunities for encounters within the prison system, in re-entry programs and support organizations.

To help address the need for further formation of the Catholic in the Pews, America Media has agreed to work with CPMC to support education about all the issues associated with incarceration. They are planning on hosting an event in New York City to nationally launch this CPMC in May of 2020 when the website is expected to be fully functional and populated with the data being gathered. They are also planning a large expose in their magazine to promote this unified, national effort.

Such work requires funding partners. Several partners have been part of our gatherings of the steering committee from the beginning. They agreed to provide initial seed money because they see the value of this national effort. Porticus Foundation (publicly to be Anonymous) (20 K) and RASCOB (5K) have provided seed money without formal requests to enable us to meet face to face in conjunction with national conferences quarterly. Porticus has also given us seed money to begin the process of initiating this needed website. Catholic Charities, USA is providing an intern to help gather data on the many efforts taking place.

CPMC hopes that the _____ would be willing to become a partner with us in this effort. We need your help to _____ so that we can build our effort to educate, train, support, and encourage those who minister and are affected by incarceration. This is a very large project and

goal which can only be accomplished within the Catholic Church by a combined effort of national organizations with the structure and resources to accomplish the many goals.

Long term sustainability for CPMC is an issue we are addressing. Porticus has offered training and support for our team members in soliciting funds directly from interested donors with resources. CPMC plans to take advantage of this training and set up meetings with our team members with the appropriate expertise to meet the needs of the interested national donors. The ongoing costs of maintaining a central office, maintaining a website and coordinating hubs should be a sustainable cost of interest to individual funders. Individual hubs could be funded by local/regional funders. National Catholic Foundations would be a targeted source of funding for regional gatherings of those in ministry to have the face to face encounters needed to improve, sustain and support those in ministry across our country.

We appreciate your input and insights as we move forward with this effort.