

# PRISON OUTREACH MINISTRY, INC.



## *The Welcome Home Reentry Program*

Forty-nine-year-old Greg has a hard time reading, is facing the challenge of overcoming addiction, and has been labeled a felon. He knew it would be difficult to find a job and success did not look likely. But thanks to the Welcome Home Reentry Program of Prison Outreach Ministry, Greg has been partnered with a Mentor who helps Greg to develop his reading skills while also strengthening his coping skills by talking with him and acting as a positive role model.

Prison Outreach Ministry (POM) has been providing services to the incarcerated since 1984. Initially, the organization provided toiletries and other necessities to inmates in the D.C. Jail. After witnessing firsthand the high rate of recidivism, Prison Outreach Ministry broadened its focus and launched its Welcome Home Reentry Program in February 2006, which partners trained mentors to work with persons as they re-enter society. After starting in the District of Columbia, the program has rapidly grown to include Montgomery County, Maryland in December of 2006, and Prince George's County in early 2008. Eventually the program will expand to the Maryland counties of Charles, Calvert, and St. Mary's.

The program which is strictly voluntary for men and women returning to the community after incarceration, works with law enforcement and social service agencies in each jurisdiction, and is tailored to the needs of each locality in which it operates. While the program is open to persons of all faiths, it receives support from the Archdiocese of Washington, drawing volunteers from local parishes.

Welcome Home Reentry Program volunteer mentors live the Gospel mandate of serving those most in need and stigmatized by society. Through one-on-one support, individuals returning home from incarceration are reducing the obstacles they face. With a mentor they navigate barriers and receive the spiritual and social support necessary in encouraging them to lead meaningful lives that include productive employment, pro-social activities, and healthy relationships.

### THE CHALLENGE

- In a twelve-month period, approximately 10,000 persons return home to Washington D.C., Montgomery County and Prince George's County after being released from incarceration.
- Most of these individuals will face a variety of barriers and have great difficulty managing the most basic necessities for successful reintegration-reconnecting with jobs, housing, and their families, as well as gaining access to needed substance abuse and health care treatment.
- Many newly released individuals are estranged from family and friends because of problems related to extended substance abuse and end up living in homeless shelters or boarding house rooms devoid of established familial support.
- Because the navigation of services can be complex and the wide-array of needs can be mutually related and dependent (*i.e.* can't obtain a job without proper credentials – can't obtain proper credentials without a place to live), individuals returning to the community need successful community members to help guide them and navigate the social service system.

## MEETING THE CHALLENGE: SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY MEMBERS

*Prison Outreach Ministry, Welcome Home Reentry Program has dedicated volunteers and staff working to ensure ongoing support.*

### **Volunteer Mentors**

- Are spiritually strong men and women who are role models demonstrating God's love, forgiveness, and compassion.
- Develop supportive relationships with persons returning to the community from incarceration and offer guidance, moral support, assistance, and practical information about employment, housing, and social services.
- Help returnees reintegrate successfully into their communities by providing spiritual and moral support.
- Help returnees acquire the basic human services so they can pay fees to obtain birth certificates, drivers' licenses or non-driver licenses for identification purposes; tokens for public transportation to go on job interviews, security deposits to secure appropriate housing, and so forth.
- Provide men and women returning to the community after incarceration with a sense of belonging while fostering positive ties to the community.

### **Coordinators**

- Select and train Mentors.
- Provide information to Mentors regarding available community services including family counseling, vocational counseling, life-skill classes, job training, employment information, and emergency services (i.e. food, clothing, transportation, and short-term housing.)
- Offer on-going support to Mentors by providing spiritual retreats and in-service training.
- Develop relationships with human service providers such as Catholic Charities, other non-profit community agencies, and government services to aid Mentors in their ministry with community reentrants.

## ADMINISTRATION

- Led by an Executive Director.
- Guided by Board of Directors.

## FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- Provided by foundation grants, gifts and support from local churches, and contributions from interested individuals and organizations.
- Catholic Charities provides fully furnished office space in the District of Columbia as an in-kind contribution. The Montgomery County Pre-Release Center provides office space for the Program Coordinator in Montgomery County. Space in Prince George's County is provided by the Prince George's County Department of Health.

Greg now lives in a halfway house and has a job. Yet, success is not inevitable. Greg, like others, may relapse into drugs or alcohol and the crimes that feed these addictions. The road back is not always smooth and straight, but with the help of The Welcome Home Reentry Program, each newly released individual has someone to help them, give them guidance and bring real hope for success.