

An Evening of Hope

Peter Harb is an Ohio State University student, member of the St. Thomas More Newman Center, and CCHD Intern for the diocesan Office for Social Concerns.

When the term hope is used, it usually means an aspiration or desire for something more, such as hoping that your hard work will earn you a promotion at work, or hoping to go on a month-long trip to Europe, or even hoping that the Cleveland Browns might make it to the Super Bowl one day in the near future. However, for millions of people locked up in prisons in the United States and alone, hope becomes much more about the little things. They want to encounter something more, the love that our Father so freely gives.

At An Evening of Hope held at the St. Thomas More Newman Center in Columbus, on October 18, 2018, people from all across the diocese came together to pray in solidarity for our incarcerated brothers and sisters and learn more about how to share the gifts with which the Lord has so abundantly blessed us. A few hymns and a beautiful prayer of solidarity kicked off this intimate evening, followed by two very inspiring speakers. Brittany, a returning citizen, spoke about her past and what led her to become incarcerated, which unsurprisingly had many people in the room wiping tears away. Rose, a chaplain at a prison for decades, highlighted the human dignity that our incarcerated brothers and sisters

have no matter what their past entails. We are all sinners, and we are all loved by our Creator. Both shared how prison and reentry ministry have shed such a light on an otherwise dark place for our brothers and sisters, and have given them and many other inmates and returning citizens the hope that we take for granted.

Several ministries were featured during the evening. ARCH (Accompanying Returning Citizens with Hope), a reentry ministry of the diocesan Office for Social Concerns and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, welcomes the formerly incarcerated back into the community and helps ease them back by connecting them to the faith community, jobs, housing, and transportation. Kindway EMBARK also ministers to returning citizens. Kairos Prison Ministry bakes cookies for inmates and organizes spiritual retreats for them. These ministries, along with many others, were present at An Evening of Hope to connect those who feel called to prison ministry to learn more about the work they do.

As a follow-up, on November 17th, the St. Thomas More Newman Center held a "Taste and See" Service Fair which featured several prison and reentry ministries to aid participants in their discernment in prison ministry. A multitude of friends participated by watching our Facebook live broadcast as well. If you are interested in providing hope to those in prison or the formerly incarcerated just returning back to the community, visit the ARCH website and learn about how to get involved.

This article was originally printed in the Catholic Times, December 2018

Contact Information

Program Director:

Wendy Tarr
wtarr@svdpcolumbus.org

Program Coordinator:

Vanita Nevis
vnevis@svdpcolumbus.org

ARCH Ministry Phone:

(614) 643-2140

Arch Ministry Email:

arch@svdpcolumbus.org

Website: svdpcolumbus.org/arch

*Be Part of Restoring Hope to
the Formerly Incarcerated*



Brittani Hill, graduate of Kindway Embark, shares her testimony during the Evening of Hope event at St. Thomas More Newman Center.

A Conversation on Reentry and Accompaniment

George Figuray is a Catholic volunteer at Southeastern Correctional in Lancaster and Noble Correctional Institution. Doug Thompson was recently released in March 2018 after six years of incarceration.

George: I started visiting the prison about three years ago because I was going to become a deacon and needed an outside ministry. I started doing the Masses at Southeast Correctional in Lancaster. That's where I met Doug, going every Tuesday for the Mass and getting to become friends with the guys, getting to know how they were doing and what they were going to do when they got out. I pretty much stuck with Doug since 2016.

Doug: I grew up attending Catholic Mass weekly, so when I went to prison I started going to the Catholic Mass. That's where I met George. George was a breath of fresh air to us. It means a lot to have someone come in that's not an inmate because, in the prison, every day is the same. Nothing changes. You wake up, you go to breakfast, you go to work, you come back to your rack at night and you go to sleep. That's it. So it's kind of nice to have someone else come in that brings the outside world to us. What was nice about George is that he didn't judge us. He came in and he was a friend to everyone. I ended up transferring to a different prison, and that was hard because I am not good with change but he accompanied me over to the other prison. It helped me adapt more quickly.

George: In prison ministry, like everywhere, everybody deserves a second chance. A lot of times, when you say the word, "prison," people go, "Oh, I don't want to go there. They're killers and rapists." There might be "those" people, but when I go into prison, I don't judge people. I'm not the guy on the cross. So I am there to be their friend, boost their spirits and let them

know that I am not one of the people that go in there to build a wall. I am there to tear that wall down, to have a relationship so that when they get out, they can say, "I know someone who is going to at least try to help me out when I get out."

Doug: I have faith in my Church, but I think there was something still missing -- and that was just having someone that has been with me to understand. He knew I was going through another change when I was moved to the halfway house, and he (George) was there. I have family support but it gets to a point where you feel like, "I've asked my family for enough," and you stop asking them for things. And I needed things. I needed bedding. I was talking to George about it, and the next thing you know, he shows up with new bedding, a comforter and everything else. To me, that was an unbelievable experience. I didn't ask him for it, but he went and did it on his own and I appreciate it. It made me more comfortable. It made me feel like there are people out there that are going to be by my side and accompany me through this journey that I'm going through.

George: One thing I would add is that my wife is very supportive of me in this endeavor. With the bedding, she wanted to go with me and help me pick it out, to give a woman's touch. She said she saw a change in me in the three years since I started in prison ministry.

Doug: Reintegrating back into society is hard. There are a lot of challenges, especially if you had a longer-term prison sentence. I think it's all about having a support group, like George. I want the church to understand that there are a lot of different people and a lot of different kinds of personalities, and we all need help.



LEAF Ministry

Listening Encouraging
and Assisting Families
of the Incarcerated

Do you or members of your community have a loved one or family member who is incarcerated? LEAF Ministry is a peer support group designed to provide emotional support, resources, information referrals, and fellowship for families and friends of the incarcerated.

Interested parishes can launch their own LEAF meetings. Training materials and support is provided by ARCH staff and trained LEAF facilitators.

Meetings are currently held the **2nd Sunday of the month at St. John Neumann Catholic Church**, 9633 State Route 37, Sunbury, OH 43074 from 4:00 pm - 5:00 pm in Classroom 9 and the **2nd Sunday of each month at Corpus Christi Church**, 1111 Stewart Avenue, Columbus, OH 43206 from 2:00 pm - 3:00 pm.

Additional resources for families of the incarcerated and meeting times in the Cleveland area can be found at www.leafministry.org.

Doug: We are all broken in some way. As we go through the phases of being in prison, leaving the prison to go to the halfway house, reintegrating back into society, there are a lot of changes if you have a long-term prison sentence. You don't know about a lot of things happening in society. When you have someone like George who accompanies several people, we can create a mini-network. I don't talk to the other people he does, but George calls me with questions and I call him with questions. We help each other.

George: Yes, I think the church can do more with volunteers. If a person is getting out and they live close to a parish, maybe work with them to have someone there for them to help. I probably have six people that have gotten out that I still try to call on a regular basis.

Doug: We can also help in the church. George helped advocate for me to be able to become a volunteer at Holy Family Church. My first day I washed dishes. After the first day, they said, "We're moving you into the pantry." After about three weeks, they said, "You're moving to the front window." Then after about two more weeks, they said, "We want you to manage this area," and I began managing the food pantry. I'm happy I can meet all these people coming to the window. I learn about them and they come back and see a familiar face. I learn what they like. One lady comes and I know she's a baker so I put aside baking utensils for her. I feel like I'm accomplishing something. I'm not getting paid, but to me right now it's more important that I'm accomplishing something. I'm making 25 families a day happy. I still have bad days, especially in my job searching. But even when I get turned down for a job, the first thing I think is, "Okay, God closed a door, but somewhere he opened a window." And right there it made it easier for me to deal with.

“Give something, however small, to the one in need. For it is not small to one who has nothing. Neither is it small to God, if we have given what we could.”

-St. Gregory Nazianzen

Advocate for Justice Reform

Since 2011, a series of laws have been passed that have helped to stabilize Ohio's prison population avoiding the need to build more beds. However, these reforms have not met the goals intended to reduce incarceration and the Ohio prison population continues to grow. According to a recent report by Alliance for Safety and Justice, Americans for Prosperity and the Buckeye Institute, about 12 percent of the bills filed in the previous two-year session of the legislature would have put more people in behind bars. Current populations of jails and prison is at 130% capacity. Reforms are still being proposed in this new General Assembly with a renewed effort to address addiction and overdose in Ohio.



Photo from Ohioans to Stop Executions (OTSE) - Advocates gather to advocate against the death penalty in Ohio. www.otse.org

The Ohio legislature is considering Senate Bill 3, a priority bill that would reduce punishments on drug users while going after drug traffickers. It's hoped that if it becomes law, it will reduce prison populations enough to save taxpayers \$50 million a year, but numbers will still be above capacity.

Bail reform is also likely to be proposed this General Assembly with recommendations coming from a newly formed task force with the Ohio Supreme Court. Bail reform would address jail overcrowding and address issues of incarceration linked to one's financial capacity instead of one's flight risk or the danger they pose to society.

Governor DeWine has halted executions in Ohio until a lethal-injection protocol is in place that courts find in compliance with constitutional standards. Legislation has been proposed in the past two General Assemblies that would end the execution of individuals with severe mental illness, but it has not yet gained the needed support to change the current law.

Support ARCH

Your donation will make a difference in the lives of returning citizens and their families.



ARCH was launched in 2017 with seed money from the Catholic Foundation. In order to continue to build a network to help returning citizens and impacted families, we need your support! Consider making a donation or a monthly pledge to help ARCH continue this ministry and grow our impact. Donations can be made online at www.svdpcolumbus.org/donate and indicate "ARCH ministry."

Make checks payable to the "Diocese of Columbus - Office for Social Concerns" and note "ARCH ministry" in the memo line. Please mail to:

ARCH Ministry

Office for Social Concerns
197 E. Gay St.
Columbus, OH 43215

ARCH Business Network

Helping the formerly incarcerated find employment is crucial to reentry. ARCH volunteers recently visited Beacon of Hope (BOH) in Cincinnati. BOH is focused on matching returning citizens with jobs available through a base of second chance employers. BOH helps with a matching process based on the

employee's skill and the job's requirements. ARCH is planning to model its employment program after BOH. Meetings have been held with Goodwill, Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO), and Ohio Means Jobs in Columbus to establish a process for identifying returning citizens needing employment and ensuring workforce readiness training so ARCH can partner to increase the workforce options that potential employees with a past conviction may access once they have demonstrated they are ready for employment and reliable in the workplace.

ARCH will be working to increase the number of employers willing to hire returning citizens into their companies through parish outreach, networking, and employer education. Ongoing support and follow-up with the company and employees will occur through services provided by our social service organization partners. We believe businesses will gain motivated employees eager to work. Statistics show that the retention rate for returning citizens is higher than the average worker. If you are an employer or if you want to learn more about our ARCH Business Network, call Vanita Nevis at 614-643-2140.



Matt Palmer, a volunteer with Kindway EMBARK and a parishioner at St. Catharine Church, organized a bus trip with various business leaders to Marion Correctional Institute in October 2018 for a spiritual retreat led by the inmates associated with Kindway EMBARK.

Get Involved with ARCH

Sign up for Accompaniment, volunteer at First Step Friday (resource fair for returning citizens every 1st Friday of the month in Columbus), or **join our Business Network**, by contacting Vanita at vnevis@svdpcolumbus.org. To **Start a Leaf Ministry** or help with families, contact Angelita at 614-241-2540 or email us at leaf@svdpcolumbus.org. To **Schedule a presentation** at your parish or **join our legislative efforts**, contact Wendy Tarr at wtarr@svdpcolumbus.org. If you have other ideas, needs, or ways to help, please reach out. **We'd love to hear from you!**

www.svdpcolumbus.org/arch



THE
CATHOLIC
FOUNDATION