



Even though most of the correspondence I get these days is by email or text message, I still like to receive a hand-written letter or note now and then. There is something special about slicing open an envelope and removing a hand-written note. Whether it's a thank-you note or simply someone saying hello and catching you up on their news, hand-written correspondence creates a warm, intimate, human connection. It brings something a typed, formal letter or email message simply cannot.

For people who are incarcerated, receiving mail is a cherished gift. Letters become connecting points to the outside world. A reminder that they haven't been forgotten. An entry way into the activities in which they are no longer able to participate.

Cathedral of Hope is a United Church of Christ congregation located in Dallas, Texas. For several years, about 50 volunteers have been writing between 60 and 70 inmates in prisons across Texas. It's a simple ministry that delivers a strong message. Those incarcerated are reminded that they haven't been forgotten, that they are not alone. They experience God's grace and generosity in the written words of Cathedral of Hope's volunteers. Words of hope and encouragement and support.

The ministry is called the Cathedral of Hope Prison Ministry. Here's what they say about it:

"One of the worst things about being incarcerated is the feeling of loneliness and isolation. Many inmates have no emotional or spiritual support from family, friends, or a church family, and they feel little or no hope. The primary purpose of the Cathedral of Hope Prison Ministry is to share the message of God's unconditional and inclusive love and grace. Our Prison Ministry Team provides much needed emotional and spiritual support to inmates, through correspondence, during their time of incarceration. The church provides the postage. That's it! Low budget. High impact. A penpal ministry.

Letters have a long history in the church. The Apostle Paul stayed in contact with the many faith communities he visited through letters of correspondence. Letters he wrote from prison. His letters continue to touch our lives today. There is power in the written word sent and received. Nothing breaks the spell of isolation better than human contact in the form of a letter.

When I was in college and far away from home, my father wrote me handwritten letters on a regular basis—filling me in on what was happening in my hometown, in our family, and in his life. I kept those letters. They were life-giving and life-affirming. How powerful and meaningful such correspondence can be to those who are incarcerated!

If you would like to learn more about the Cathedral of Hope Prison Ministry and perhaps start a penpal prison ministry in your church, go check out the website above or contact DeSorrow Golden, Prison Ministry Team Leader, at prisonministry@cathedralofhope.com or (817) 726-5130.

There are so many ways to share the love of God with those who are often forgotten, locked away, and pushed to the margins of our society. We give thanks for folks like DeSorrow Golden who bring the light of hope into places of incarceration. Thanks be to God!

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