



*The New*  
**VISION**  
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## **When I Was in Prison, You Came to Me CCS' Detention Ministry Brings Faith and Hope to Prison Inmates**

*by Ruth Liljenquist The New Vision, June 07 issue*

Roughly 38,000 inmates live in prisons located in the Diocese of Tucson. It's a startling number, considering that most towns in the diocese have only a few thousand residents, if that.

But it's not just a number—it's thousands of men, women, and youth who have lost their way in life. Many of them want and need spiritual guidance. They also want to seek forgiveness to relieve the guilt they feel and begin or re-establish their relationships with God.

Started in 1988, CCS' Detention Ministry responds to such people by providing Catholic worship services and one-on-one spiritual counseling to inmates in prisons throughout the diocese. Priests, deacons, sisters, and volunteers carry out the work of the ministry.

Inmates benefit from this spiritual presence in their lives. They see that people care about them, and that they are not forgotten. They are lifted by the presence of people who treat them with dignity and respect, which helps them find worth in themselves and others.

It was nearly eight years ago that Ben Gastellum first encountered CCS' detention ministry. He was an inmate at the Santa Rita prison, where Sr. Esther Calderon, a volunteer for the program, visited weekly to conduct Catholic worship services and one-on-one counseling with inmates.

Ben found the prayers, songs, and discussions very meaningful. He felt welcome and appreciated, and it meant a lot to him that someone from the outside had come to help him, that someone was completely on his side.

"She brought spirituality and friendship into that bleak place," said Ben. "She helped us feel normal. She helped us feel appreciated for who we were, not for what we had done."

On and off for two years, Ben attended Sr. Esther's services. "She gave me hope that when I got out I would be able to get on with my life."

Sr. Esther Calderon, a sister of the Eucharistic Missionaries of St. Dominic, became a volunteer more than 11 years ago.

"I really didn't know much about the prison ministry when I started, but when I saw how it made a difference for the inmates, I wanted to stay involved," said Sr. Esther. She has seen men who have started out angry and hostile but over time have become more calm and more at peace.

"They just don't have the same kind of personal contact that those of us outside prison have. We bring companionship and faith sharing. We talk to them about what they are feeling. And they get something very positive out of it," said Sr. Esther. "Seeing the change in the men we work with is very rewarding for me. I see how much they appreciate it."

Ben Gastellum, certainly appreciated it. Out of prison for more than six years now, Ben still remembers the impact Sr. Esther and the prison ministry had in his life.

"She lifted our spirits and made us feel wanted and loved," said Ben. "She gave us hope."

"Want to Volunteer?"

With an ever expanding prison population, the Detention Ministry needs more volunteers, especially those that can offer religious education or Bible study. Catholic inmates are eager for more knowledge about their religion and more outside contact with their fellow Catholics. If you would like to volunteer for the ministry, contact Barb Mattus at (520) 298-0021 or at [BMattus497@aol.com](mailto:BMattus497@aol.com). You may also call Anita Lopez at (520) 623-5515.