

IHMs in Action: Oakland County Jail Chaplaincy

For the last 25 years, Sister Peggy (Michael Francis) Devaney, IHM, has served as chaplain for the Oakland County Jail, which includes seven sites in Oakland County and more than 1,900 inmates. She trains and mentors volunteers, developing their skills to work with survivors, offenders and families through direct service, education and advocacy.



Volunteers staff the Chaplaincy Program, which is funded entirely through donations. Sister Peggy works as a co-coordinator of the more than 400 volunteers from various faith traditions ministering at the jail.

"Because our program is all-volunteer, we need each other to accomplish the tasks of every day," she says. "This ministry is about the volunteers who make it work."

"Within the jail, the ministry involves coordinating religious services and ministerial visits from an inmate's faith community. Annually, those in the Chaplaincy Program also respond to 12,000 inmate requests for religious materials, prayer, communication with families and pastoral counseling.

Sister Peggy's ministry requires two offices - one in the main jail complex in Pontiac, Mich., and the other at an outreach office located at St. Vincent De Paul Church nearby.

"I didn't want to become entrenched in one world or the other," she explains. "By having a foot in both worlds, I have a better sense of what goes on in people's lives.

"Being a presence in the community, the ministry reminds the community of our call to respond to the needs of others," Sister Peggy continues. "The people we serve are frequently poor and marginalized and often feared and hated because they're part of the criminal justice system.

"But simply put, by working together, we bring hope and healing to those in the system and to the community as a whole. Together, we convert each other to see life in radical new ways."

The Oakland County Sheriff's Office recently awarded Sister Peggy and the Oakland County Chaplaincy Program volunteers a special commendation for their work with those in the criminal justice system.