February 2019

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings! Pope Francis has been a great Restorative Justice role model in the church with his pastoral visits to the incarcerated men, women and young people in his travels around the world. In keeping with this tradition, he recently met with incarcerated youth during the World Youth Day celebrations in Panama. He stated, "A society is fruitful when it is able to generate inclusion and integration..." Further, "...You are part of the family...help us to discern how best to live and to accompany one another along the path of change that we, as a family, all need." This month we celebrate Valentine’s Day, a day dedicated to the celebration of love and hope. In discernment of this love, we ask you, as Pope Francis asks, "Open your window, the window of your heart, of love, and you will find it." Let us work to extend this love all year long by supporting Get on the Bus.

Each year, Get on the Bus rallies Catholic faith communities throughout the state to provide the children of incarcerated parents with a visit with their mother or father – a parent they likely see one day a year thanks to Get on the Bus.

Each year, over 1,000 children board buses and travel to prisons hundreds of miles from their homes for Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. Several of those buses will carry over 350 children from our own communities and it is my hope that our Christian community will embrace them. Get on the Bus recognizes, as should we, that these children are innocent victims, who are essentially serving the same sentence as their parents. Get on the Bus was founded in Los Angeles and the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, but dozens of parishes all over the state have a long legacy of active participation and support – a tradition that should be celebrated and expanded to help meet their growing needs.

As a Church, we advocate for a more restorative model of justice that strives to bring about healing and to restore the brokenness caused by violence and criminal activity. Attending to the needs of children who have a parent in prison is a critical component of this restorative process. It also helps to maintain family bonds and decrease recidivism. As a prison guard in San Quentin once stated, “I believe in the program because I have seen the change that takes place in the men as they prepare to see their families and even after.”

I am inviting you, as individuals, and as a faith community to heed this call and be partners in this special ministry by informing others, encouraging their participation and support of Get on the Bus through your donations, volunteer efforts and your prayers for the program and the children it serves. Get on the Bus affords us all the opportunity to live out our Gospel values, "I was in prison and you visited me." (Matthew 25:37)

If you have any questions, or would like to learn more, please contact Lidia Alcantar-Uribe, Regional Coordinator at (909) 891-9114.

I am grateful for your consideration and with prayerful wishes may God bless you in your discernment to support Get on the Bus.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Gerald R. Barnes
Bishop of the Diocese of San Bernardino

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