

## 2013 James F. Hornback Ethical Humanist of the Year

It is our pleasure today to honor Criminal Justice Ministry as the recipient of the 2013 Ethical Humanist of the Year Award. This prestigious award was established in 1975 by James S. McDonnell in honor of James F. Hornback, who led the Ethical Society of St. Louis from 1951-1980. The award recognizes an individual or group in the St. Louis community that has provided courageous and dedicated service to maintaining the rights and dignity of their



Sister Carleen Reck, Executive Director

fellow human beings in some aspect of life - religious, social, political, economic, medical, educational, ecological, recreational or artistic. Criminal Justice Ministry is well deserving of this award; it is an organization that brings support and aid to some of those who need it most.

Criminal Justice Ministry was organized in 1979 under the auspices of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, St. Louis Council. The inspiration for prison ministry comes from St. Vincent de Paul himself who aided men and women in prison and led the cause of prison reform in France. CJM began by coordinating jail ministry in the St. Louis Area, then extended its ministry to jails and prisons throughout the geographic Archdiocese of St. Louis and provided various forms of assistance to persons released into St. Louis.

The program's stated mission is this: "Criminal Justice Ministry improves the safety and well-being of individuals affected by crime and the criminal justice system, their families and their communities in the Greater St. Louis Area through person-to person assistance rooted in Jesus Christ's message of love, reconciliation and hope." CJM's intent is "to serve and not to judge."

The services of Criminal Justice Ministry bring comfort to those who are incarcerated and show the prisoners that they are valued as persons. CJM provides religious services, one-on-one visits, classes in jails and prisons and coordinates a pen pal program.

Father James A. Veltrie, S.J., has volunteered with the program for over 15 years, going to the prisons to give spiritual support. He wrote, "What I feel about this ministry is that these men need hope, something there is little of in prison. They are literally on the bottom rung of society. Offering them an opportunity to express their belief in a God who forgives – as I tell them 'gives all of us a second chance' and provides an outlet for them to share what's going on inside of them. On occasion some prisoners sing a hymn or play the piano which at times can cause a lump in my throat."

Kathy Adrian was a volunteer in the pen pal program which is coordinated by CJM. In her letter to support CJM's nomination, she wrote that she exchanged letters with a death row inmate with whom she developed a friendship. This man, with no family, told her once, "Thank you for treating me as a human being." Kathy was able to be with him on the day of his execution.

CJM works with other agencies to help reduce the number of released persons who return to prison. According to Nancy J. McCarthy, Regional Administrator of the Missouri Department of Corrections, over 19,000 offenders are under state supervision in the St. Louis Metropolitan area. For many of them, CJM can provide short-term assistance including "Welcome Backpacks" containing personal items, bus passes for job-related travel, and dress-out clothes. Also CJM helps recently released prisoners obtain essential identification documents such as birth certificates and driver's licenses. CJM offers help in taking GED exams and other needed certification. CJM also provides referrals to needed services such as employment agencies, food pantries and limited legal assistance.

A key program of CJM is called Release to Rent, which provides a year of supportive housing for men who have served long terms, can work full time, have major challenges, and have no one to help. For Veterans with criminal records, CJM offers an R2RVeterans program with two years of supportive housing.

CJM staff members coordinate support groups in which ex-prisoners can support and advise recently released inmates to help them cope with the various challenges of life after prison.

Officials in the criminal justice system respect and learn from the work of CJM. Nancy J. McCarthy stated, "Criminal Justice Ministry has long served as a partner with the Missouri Department of Corrections in the work that we do. Under the direction of Sister Carleen Reck, the Ministry works to identify and understand the gaps in the system which block and interfere with an offender's desire and goal to be successful. As an example, offenders are generally not released with a state identification card. While this seems like a simple item to obtain, this can be quite complicated. Without an identification card, one cannot rent an apartment, obtain a job, open a savings/checking account etc. Sister Carleen not only worked to secure the funding for this, she worked diligently to help public officials understand the value of this which has allowed for systematic changes within our process."

CJM is also praised by George A. Lombardi, Director of the Missouri Department of Corrections, who stated, "CJM has played a valuable role in the lives of offenders in their quest to return to society in productive, healthy and safe ways. The case management, reentry programming and prison ministry provided by CJM helps to build safer communities in Missouri." Jennifer Joyce, Circuit Attorney of the City of St. Louis, wrote of CJM's work: "These efforts help break the cycle of crime, reduce recidivism and help empower and restore dignity to those convicted of a crime while instilling respect for their redefined role within society."

The Criminal Justice Ministry thanks the Ethical Society for recognizing CJM as it builds on 34 years with the Society of St. Vincent DePaul and becomes a freestanding nonprofit corporation, affiliated with the Archdiocese of St. Louis.