

For the Least of These, Thousand Oaks, USA

Sister Mary Lynn Liederbach, who passed away in May of 2014, was renowned among the Sisters of Notre Dame for her devotion to detention ministry. Among her possessions were boxes full of letters from the inmates to whom she wrote and visited over the years. In the spirit of Sister Mary Lynn's example, Sister Shirley Marie McGovern (pictured at left) recently began visiting inmates at Todd Road Jail in Santa Paula, Calif.

"I want to have as much compassion as Sister Mary Lynn had," said Sister Shirley Marie.

On Thursday afternoons, Sister drives 30 miles to the jail. There she meets with Margaret Oberon, Catholic chaplain for Ventura County detention facilities, whom she met through Sister Mary Lynn. They enter the building, pass through a metal detector and into a small room with a table and a few chairs. A small group of female inmates joins them, and the group is locked into the room for the duration of the Bible study and faith sharing meeting.

"Each inmate has her own Bible and we discuss the Sunday reading from the Gospel. We talk about the issues and concerns on their minds and where to find consolation in the Psalms or other passages. We pray together," Sister Shirley Marie said.

Sister was trained for detention ministry through the Archdiocese of Los Angeles' Office of Restorative Justice in 2014. She then waited a year to be approved to serve. Eventually, she'll be able to lead a group of inmates without the help of another chaplain.



After each visit, Sister meets with Margaret Oberon to debrief and discuss any emotional concerns or burdens brought up during the session.

"Visiting the incarcerated is as important as any other ministry," Margaret said, "Christ is asking us to share what we are, not what we have. We cannot give the inmates anything but our presence. It's an encounter with the living Christ."



Sister Shirley Marie also works at Notre Dame Learning Center Preschool as the school secretary. She wants to continue visiting the jail once school starts again, and she hopes to begin writing letters to the inmates as well.

Sister Shirley Marie Guides Inmates to the Gospel