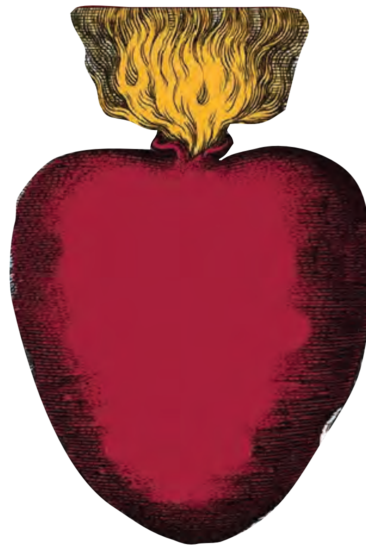
Making the Case
for Jesuit Prison Education



AMDG
JESUIT PRISON
EDUCATION NETWORK

The cover for our publication is in black. Why?

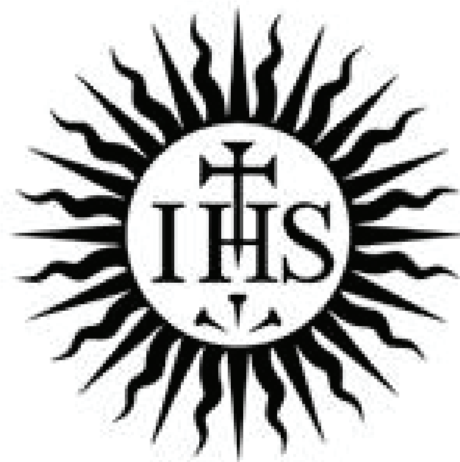
Johnny Cash gives the answer from his song, Man in Black:

“I wear black for the poor and the beaten down, livin’ in the hopeless, hungry side of town, I wear it for the prisoner who has long paid for his crime, but is there because he’s a victim of the times.”

Image of Sacred Heart extracted from Jesuit publication in the 17th century. Reprinted with permission of St. Joseph’s University Press. It reflects the importance of the Sacred Heart in the life and works of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). Prison education aligns with the Heart of Christ burning especially for our hidden humanity.

This project is the collaborative work of Julia (Jules) Nock, ‘24 Regis University, Daniel Karpowitz, JD, former Special Advisor on Criminal Justice to Governor Tim Walz, State of Minnesota, and previous director of the Bard Prison Initiative, and Thomas Curran, SJ. In the Jesuit tradition, they co-labored as companions committed to bringing forth a renewed commitment to our shared humanity.

Making the Case
for Jesuit Prison Education



Essays compiled for the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU) Faith, Justice and Reconciliation Assembly 2024

The Case for Jesuit Prison Education

Table of Contents

Introduction
Introduction and Foreword
Julie A. O'Heir, Former Director of the St. Louis University's
Prison Education Program (through 2023)....................1

Civic Leaders
Reflections on Education in the Maw of the System
Vincent Schiraldi, Secretary of Juvenile Services for State of Maryland &
Author, *Mass Supervision: The Illusion of Safety and Freedom*
(The New Press: 2023)....................3

Higher Education Inside Prison Walls?
Dean Williams, Commissioner for Department of Corrections,
Alaska (2016-2019); Executive Director of the Colorado
Department of Corrections (2019-2022)....................5

The Case for Jesuit Prison Education: Giving Faculty and Students a
Chance at Redemption Hon. Thomas More Donnelly, Circuit
Judge, Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois....................7

College and Employment During Incarceration
Ved Price, Executive Director, The Alliance for Higher Education in Prison....................9

Justice Reimagined: Community and the Power of Connection
Wyatt Lim-Tepper, President and Founder, A Curiae and adjunct faculty,
The University of San Francisco, California
& Stephen Asmus, Director, San Francisco Adult and Teen Challenge....................12

The Public Policy of Higher Education In Prison
Bill Ritter, Jr., Governor, Colorado (2007-2011);
District Attorney, Denver, Colorado (1993-2005)....................14

The Jesuit Trifecta: Forming Leaders, Accompaniment, and Mutual Transformation
Chris Lowney, Chair, CommonSpirit Health;
Former Managing Director at J.P. Morgan
& Author, *Heroic Leadership* (Loyola: 2021)....................15

Three University Presidents
Reflections on College Prison Education
John J. DeGioia, PhD, President, Georgetown University, Washington,D.C.

Fred P. Pestello, PhD, President, St. Louis University, Missouri
Joseph G. Marina, S.J., President, University of Scranton, Pennsylvania.......................17

Higher Education Leaders
Moments of Clarity: Along a River and in a Prison
Thomas B. Curran, S,J., Coordinator, Jesuit Prison Education Network (JPEN); President Emeritus, Rockhurst University (2006-2022)......................19

Jesuit Education and the Moreau College Initiative at the University of Notre Dame
John McGreevy, PhD, Provost, & Stephen M. Fallon, PhD Professor Emeritus and John J. Cavanaugh Professor of Humanities, The University of Notre Dame...........21

Entrepreneurial Jesuits
Kevin F. O'Brien, S.J., Vice Provost and Executive Director of the Bellarmine campus of Fairfield University, Connecticut...23

Faculty
The Mission of Jesuit Colleges and Universities and Higher Education in Prisons
Kenneth L. Parker, PhD, Chair, Catholic Studies Department and The Ryan Endowed Chair for Newman Studies Duquesne University, Pennsylvania...........25

Dignity Restored
Patrick J. Govan, Research Coordinator, Jesuit Social Research Institute at Loyola University New Orleans, Louisiana...28

Cura Personalis, Cura Apostolica, and Prison Education
Paul Lynch, PhD, Associate Professor of English
St. Louis University, Missouri..30

Assessing Assessment and Evaluation of Higher Education Prison Programs
Darren Wheelock, PhD, Associate Professor, Director of Criminal Justice Data Analytics and the Educational Preparedness Program
Marquette University, Wisconsin...32

Prison Education and the History of Jesuits in Prison
Daniel J. Finucane, S.J., graduate student
Jesuit School Theology, Berkeley, California;
Former Chaplain, Belize Central Prison, Hattieville, Belize...35

History, Historians, and Jesuit Prison Education
Joanna Carraway Vitiello, PhD, Professor of History,
Rockhurst University, Missouri...*37*

From the Projects to a Ph.D.: Paying it Forward and Honoring Those Who Protected Me
Don C. Sawyer III, Ph.D., Vice President for Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging
and Associate Professor of Sociology, Fairfield University, Connecticut.......................39

Solidarity and Prison Education
Christopher A. Haw, PhD, Assistant Professor of Theology and Religious Studies
University of Scranton, Pennsylvania...41

Students

Understanding Through Reflection
KM, Student in St. Louis University's Prison Education Program, Missouri..................43

The Sky's the Limit
G, Student in Companions in Chillicothe, Rockhurst University, Missouri....................45

The Experience of the Jesuit Values
MS, student in the Inside/Out Prison Education Program
at Regis University, Colorado..47

The Experience of Care for the Whole Person at LOYNO
A student in Loyola's University's Prison Education Program,
Rayburn Correctional Facility, Louisiana..48

Plato in the Prison:An Experience of Freedom and Shared Humanity
Arlando Tray Jones, Prisons and Justice Initiative
Georgetown University, Washington, D.C...49

Companions in Chillicothe
Stephanie Eckert, Staff Chillicothe Correctional Center
Rockhurst University, Missouri...51

Academic Program Directors

Villanova University's 50-year Response to "A City of Forgotten Men"
Kate Meloney, Director of the Villanova University at SCI-Phoenix
Villanova, Pennsylvania...53

Why Higher Education in Prison Matters
Courtney Everett, Program Director, St. Louis University's
Prison Education Program St Louis, Missouri...55

Men and Women With and For Others Researching Jesuit Higher Ed in Prison
Annie Phoenix, PhD Executive Director of Jesuit Social Research Institute at
Loyola University New Orleans...57

Biblical Imagery and Prison Education
Andrew Skotnicki, PhD, Professor, Religious Studies, Manhattan College
and Director, E3MC at Rikers Island. New York..60

An Academic Journey Towards Our Shared Humanity
Malia McAndrew, PhD, Professor, History, John Carroll University
& Richard Clark, PhD, Chair, Sociology and Criminology, and
Co- director of John Carroll University Prison Education Program
University Heights, Cleveland, Ohio...62

Introduction and Foreword

Julie A. O'Heir, Director for the St. Louis University
Prison Education Program through 2023

A Christian university must take into account the gospel preference for the poor. This does not mean that only the poor will study at the university; it does not mean that the university should abdicate its mission of academic excellence--excellence which is needed in order to solve complex social issues of our time. What it does mean is that the university should be present intellectually where it is needed: to provide science for those without science; to provide skills for those without skills; to be a voice for those without voices; to give intellectual support for those who do not possess the academic qualifications to make their rights legitimate.

Ignacio Ellacuria, S.J. Commencement Address at Santa Clara University, June 1982

On my refrigerator, next to last year's Christmas cards and postcards, is a kite, written in pencil on a 6"x4" piece of paper, that reads "YOUR HEAD COUNT IS APPROX. 109 SOULS." An incarcerated man who works in a prison visitor's center passed it to me while we were cutting and plating a sheet cake for a reception. We were trying to remain quiet, not to take away from the main event. The occasion was the 15th anniversary of the Saint Louis University (SLU) Prison Education Program (PEP), a panel discussion, audience comments and questions, followed by the reception.

The event itself would seem, if not impossible, incredibly unlikely fifteen years ago. In a Visitor's Center at a maximum-security prison, a president emeritus of a Jesuit university, a division director of the Missouri DOC, and a man incarcerated in Missouri for more than 30 years shared the stage discussing collaborative efforts in making college-in-prison happen. And yet, after a decade and a half of SLU going inside prison, this conversation felt ordinary.

This is the enormity of what has happened with SLU PEP since its inception – the contradictory and once inconceivable feels ordinary. Growing from a series of theology courses to full academic program for incarcerated people and prison employees, PEP is now a priority in SLU's academic strategic plan. Incarcerated students connect with their children over shared academic experiences, receive awards from SLU's literary journal and publish in the Law Review. Alumni recruit others at the prison to apply and advocate for change within the facility. SLU faculty consistently report that teaching in prison changes how they teach on campus.

Yet, this work feels inadequate. It is inadequate in the human face of the need and the desire for higher education in prison. Every visit to the prison, I meet people asking for applications, for a new drawing workshop, for a specific lecture in our speaker series. It is heartbreakingly inadequate in response to our historical present, wherein the U.S. incarcerates 1.9 million people and controls another 3.67 million on probation or parole.

The Jesuit Prison Education Network (JPEN) is a necessary response to this inadequacy. In this volume, administrators, academics, and most importantly, students and alumni of Jesuit higher education in prison, will share how Jesuit institutions are uniquely situated to welcome incarcerated students. The 109 souls in that room in October – people incarcerated, prison staff, guests of other Jesuit institutions – witnessed what a Jesuit education is and does when it is available to all members of our community. We invite you to join us.

Reflections on Education in the Maw of the System

Vincent Schiraldi, Secretary of Juvenile Services for State of Maryland

I began my journey in human services as a junior at Regis High School when my inspirational English teacher – John Mullin – encouraged me to volunteer in a soup kitchen in Manhattan's pre-gentrification Lower East Side. That experience helped me as an adolescent grow a spine about interacting with people I would normally pass on the streets without a thought and put the notion of becoming a social worker into my psyche for good.

A few years later when I went to SUNY Binghamton, I interned for, and eventually became employed by, New York State's juvenile justice system living in a group home with seven boys. I loved that job, seeing hope for a brighter future become a reality if kids just got a little bit of help.

These were the early years of our nation's disastrous experiment with mass incarceration launched in 1972 with Richard Nixon's War on Drugs. Our prison population grew 8-fold from then until its 2008 peak, landing most heavily on young men of color who had not completed high school. At its peak, two-thirds of young men of color who did not finish high school would go to prison by the time they reached their mid-30s.

I started getting a social work degree while I was a houseparent and had the good fortune to meet Jerome Miller who visited one my classes as a guest lecturer. Jerry was a former Maryknoll Seminarian educated at Chicago's Loyola University who had closed all juvenile prisons during his time heading Massachusetts' juvenile system, a dramatic move that improved the system's decency and reduced recidivism.

Jerry made me uncomfortable. Listening to his bold words, I felt that I, myself, was already becoming institutionalized. I had read the Milgram and Stanford Prison experiments revealing how "normal" people could visit abuse on others under the cloak of authority. I realized that during my time with the state I was becoming inured to creeping dehumanization. I argued with Jerry and, thankfully, he saw something in me and hired me in his non-profit to become an early warrior against mass incarceration.

After founding two non-profits myself, I re-entered government as Director of Washington, D.C.'s juvenile justice agency in 2005. There, I got a close-up look at inhumanity to children in government "care," something I would witness repeatedly throughout my career in public service. Some staff were beating the children, selling them drugs, and sexually abusing them while others turned a blind eye.

Elie Wiesel wrote "the opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference." I have seen systems that reeked of this indifference. To be sure, there were heroes among both keepers and kept,

those managing to hang on to their own and one another's humanity in some very brutal places. But for far too many, the institutions ground them down and stripped them of much of their compassion.

Returning humanity to a system determined to strip people of it must, in my view, be our priority.

An essential element of St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises is the consideration of our shared humanity. One of *the* most powerful and effective ways to combat dehumanization is education. Good educators – whether they were the Bard Prison Initiative studying Kant with lifers; or my wife and University of the District of Columbia professors opening young people's minds to Shakespeare; or the Maya Angelou School transforming my facilities' awful school in D.C.; have an unmatched power to touch people in ways that few other techniques can match.

When a young person incarcerated for violent crimes, who had been causing problems throughout his confinement, stepped up to perform Banquo at the Folger Shakespeare Library, and then our scholars were awarded the "best ensemble" at their secondary school festival, staff, elected officials, judges, and families viewed him differently. They could see talent and inspiration previously cloaked by their own stereotypes and the young people's tough veneer. When people sentenced to life emerge unexpectedly with a degree and, more importantly, a voice previously hidden, it challenges views about the potential for *all* incarcerated people.

It has long struck me that before we abuse others, we first rob them of their personhood. Many rightly highlight the salutary impact education has on recidivism. But as someone who has administered and endeavored to reform some terrible places, the ability of education to transform perceptions of our fellow human beings caught in the maw of mass incarceration, and to bring light into dark places, is unmatched.

Higher Education Inside Prison Walls?

Dean Williams, Commissioner for Department of Corrections, Alaska (2016-2019);
Executive Director Colorado Department of Corrections (2019-2022)

"Dear God, help the Governor find somebody who'll do something so this won't happen again." Such was the prayer of an Inupiaq woman in the small village of St. Michael, Alaska in December, 2015. I was sent there by then Governor Bill Walker to apologize for the death of their son who died in an Anchorage jail. It was a tragic and avoidable death with him telling the officers "I can't breathe, I can't breathe." It was a George Floyd type death before George Floyd.

The context of how I got to that place is a story for another day, but until the moment of that native woman's prayer, I never contemplated leading any correctional system. I was advised against it. Too many issues. God must have laughed, I've often thought.

In my subsequent experience leading two state (Alaska & Colorado) correctional systems I quickly became aware of the importance of education behind the prison walls. Research was convincingly clear that almost any type of college-level education would reduce the risk of recidivism. In other words, any type of college education would drive down the chance of someone returning to prison once released. This mattered a great deal to me since Alaska had the dubious distinction of having one of the highest rates (60-65%) of recidivism in the country. Colorado wasn't far behind with about a 50% recidivism rate. From a purely practical perspective, education behind the walls wasn't a luxury, but a clear strategy to advance public safety for men and women returning home from prison. And remember, about 90% of the people in prison get out.

On another level, education behind the walls transforms the environment. It provides hope and meaning that is so desperately needed. Prisons become safer. There is a purpose. I guess my father was right to say that "idle hands are the devil's workshop."

Perhaps the largest obstacle you might face in initiating or expanding educational opportunities is the historical belief that prison is a place of punishment. As you can imagine, I know this tired and ill-informed belief better than most. To quote a man scolding me at a meeting – "If you made prison a hell hole people won't want to go there." The problem, as I tried to explain, is that it never works out that way. In fact, where such a vision is pursued you have violent prisons for staff as well as inmates, tremendous litigation, and higher recidivism. Yet history and entrenched belief can discourage, I get it.

My gentle encouragement is to seek and find pockets of opportunity. There are a growing number of leaders who see the jail and prison system differently. They have seen what I have seen. They speak as I do. They know that a partnership with a university is a tremendous

opportunity. Get to know those leaders, take them to coffee. Have some of us semi-retired leaders come along with you, either in person or virtually.

Here's a little inside baseball. Education behind the walls also becomes a toe hold for other opportunities. Remember, the weight of history is often the largest obstacle for transforming prisons. The misperception that the scope of education is narrow (it's not) stifles other dynamics within people's lives and within our institutions. The broader, deeper relationship between education and the prison system can help till the soil for other work.

Lastly, we need you even when the signs from some suggest we don't. This work is challenging and yet I know of nothing more compelling. You are engaging someone in prison, you are providing hope, transformation, purpose. Godspeed.

The Case for Jesuit Education in Prison: Giving Faculty and Students a Chance at Redemption

Hon. Thomas More Donnelly
Circuit Judge, Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois

Sitting in a classroom of Division 6, listening to high school seniors tell the story of their lives, was riveting. Every story relayed how a young man under 21 had ended up behind bars for murder. This was a Chicago Public High School located inside Cook County Jail, a classroom for 18-21-year-olds who had never graduated and were now students once again, awaiting trial for murder. There were 32 students in that room and it was 1988. For the next five years, as a supervisor training new public defenders, I brought young lawyers here to meet yet another group of such young people. Each of the new twenty public defenders would sit next to a student, not a fellow lawyer. The class session would last two hours and every new defender had a chance to talk with a student. And each one came away changed. These were no longer just inmates awaiting trial, but young people locked up away from family and friends. They were anxious, scared, and human.

While telling their stories, students would usually recount how their public defender failed to communicate with or fight for them. The new public defenders would take this for 5-10 minutes before one of them would lose his or her patience: "You don't understand how busy your lawyer is and how hard they are trying to fight for you." This was met by a resounding chorus from the inmates: "No, you don't understand what it's like to be waiting for trial for two years and to not know what's going on." At that moment, for every training class, it would dawn on the young new defenders just how different the students' perspectives were from theirs. The training graduates always remarked that when they were tempted to decline a phone call from a new client while preparing for trial, they would remember our session at the jail and take the call if only to tell the inmate that they were working on a trial and would get back to them soon.

Bringing these new public defenders into the jail classroom educated these lawyers. It also broke down the inmate/lawyer divide. Listening to a student talk about his family on the outside connected the lawyer to the student. It also clarified the difference between them. The students were in jail; the lawyers were free. We encountered our common humanity, but also our vastly different circumstances.

Prison education that brings in outside students to sit in the classroom with inside students has a chance at doing the same thing: educating our university students about the similarities and differences between those of us on the outside and those of us on the inside. We

incarcerate huge numbers in the United States. Nearly 2 million people are behind bars. Nearly 30 percent of African American males will spend some time behind bars. (In a state like Alaska or the Dakotas, where many Native Americans live, the disparities are even worse, especially for females.) It is worth educating ourselves about this.

Because penitentiaries are often far away from universities, not all programs could put outside students physically into the same classroom. However, we should at least have virtual classrooms that connect inside and outside students. Moreover, every university town has a jail. If we could bring even a few faculty and students into the jail for class, those faculty and students would profit immensely, as would the students inside. The inside students from jails are treated worse than animals. To have class with outside students sends a message to the inside students: you are human; we do not fear you; we want to be with you. That is the message of Jesus Christ for these inside students.

I have incorporated the formerly incarcerated as guest faculty in my law school teaching. They teach far better than I do about the realities of our criminal legal system. My students participate much more deeply with these formerly incarcerated faculty leading the class. The students share their views more honestly, divulge more personal life experiences, and later report greater learning from these guest faculty members.

I, myself, always learn from these sessions. What do I learn? Every time I bring in a formerly incarcerated person, I expect a stereotype, no matter how many times I have done this. The stubbornness of these images in our minds is remarkable. Then each time I encounter a person, a unique individual with a story that is, in fact, unlike any I have ever heard before. The murderer who baldly admits the crime, states he deserved the life sentence he got, but is grateful for the mercy of his commutation and release. The exonerated man who is so sad that none of the lawyers and judges who handled his case ever asked him what happened, before he was jailed for life at 17. The white-collar criminal who, now that she has been released, has dedicated herself to jail ministry.

Hearing these stories, I feel like the women caught in adultery, as I am caught in my stereotyping, my bias, and blind preconceptions. But through the eyes of the formerly incarcerated Jesus Christ asks me, "Has no one condemned you? Neither do I condemn you. Go, and sin no more." I feel enveloped in mercy. I would hope that we would offer that mercy to our students and faculty. The mercy of seeing how much we miss by incarcerating our future. The mercy of a chance to stop this sin of denying our brothers and sisters. The mercy of a chance to mend the mystical body by bringing ourselves back into communion with those who are excluded.

We exclude them, but Jesus Christ does not. If we deny them, however, He will deny us. *The cry of the poor finds a hearing with God, but does it with us? Do we have eyes to see, ears to hear, hands outstretched to offer help? "Christ himself appeals to the charity of his disciples in the person of the poor" (Gaudium et Spes, loc. cit.). He asks us to recognize him in all those who are hungry and thirsty, in the stranger and those stripped of dignity, in the sick and those in prison (cf. Mt 25:35-36).* - Pope Francis, World Day of the Poor, 18 November 2018.

College and Employment During Incarceration

Ved Price, Executive Director
The Alliance for Higher Education in Prison

The critical importance of higher education in prison systems cannot be overstated, particularly in its capacity to aid workforce development and prepare individuals for successful careers post-incarceration. The integration of higher education into prison settings is not merely a rehabilitative or transformative tool, but a necessary one, with far-reaching implications for individuals, communities, and the economy.

Educational Opportunities and Workforce Development: A fundamental tenet of this argument is the undeniable link between education and employability. Individuals who participate in any kind of educational program while incarcerated are 43% less likely to recidivate than those who do not (Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders, and Miles, 2013). This striking statistic underscores the role of education in reducing recidivism, however, its significance extends beyond mere reduction in reoffending. Education, especially higher education, equips individuals with critical thinking skills, knowledge, and qualifications that are highly valued in the workforce and the broader ecosystem of our communities.

Impact on Employment Post-Release: The stigma of a criminal record is a formidable barrier to employment. A study by Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll (2006) found that a criminal record significantly reduces the likelihood of a job offer or callback. Higher education, however, can counteract this stigma. Possessing a degree signals to potential employers that an individual has the skills, discipline, and commitment necessary for professional roles. This is particularly important in an era where the labor market increasingly favors skilled over unskilled labor.

Economic Benefits: From an economic perspective, the benefits of educating incarcerated individuals are twofold. Firstly, it leads to a reduction in recidivism, which translates to decreased costs in the criminal justice system, which frees up money for other areas of need. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, annually it cost in the United States approximately $31,286 per individual (Kyckelhahn, 2014). Reducing recidivism rates through education, therefore, has the potential to save millions in taxpayer dollars.

Secondly, by preparing incarcerated individuals for the workforce, higher education in prisons contributes to a more skilled labor pool, driving economic growth and productivity. A report by the Center for Economic and Policy Research (Schmitt, Warner, & Gupta, 2010) estimates that the reduction in employment caused by convictions and imprisonment cost the U.S. economy between $57 and $65 billion in lost output each year. Furthermore, According to

the U.S. Census Bureau, the manufacturing industry alone is projected to face 2.1 million unfulfilled jobs by 2030 due to a lack of skilled labor.

The Alliance for Higher Education in Prison: Education in Action: Here at the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison (AHEP), we are aware of the lack opportunities for incarcerated individuals to apply their education in professional work environments, but due to COVID, the landscape of employment has changed drastically. With the emergence and normalization of remote work opportunities, employment during incarceration can now be reexamined, especially since Pell Grants have been reinstated for incarcerated learners and since many prisons are expanding access to internet and technology for those who are incarcerated. We know that approximately 95% of those who are incarcerated will be released at some point in their lives (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002), at which point they will be faced with finding employment amongst other things critical to their successful reintegration, yet we know since they have been removed from the workforce they may experience hurdles while seeking meaningful employment that provides a livable wage.

To bridge the divide between the acquisition of knowledge and its practical application, AHEP is has launched Education in Action (EiA), an initiative that focuses on the development of a sustainable infrastructure capable of supporting the implementation of high-impact learning practices during incarceration. High impact learning practices are a common part of quality postsecondary education. With EiA, we seek to lay the national foundation for what employment can look like for the incarcerated population, beyond prison industry jobs where wages are typically .30 cents - 2.00 per hour, and in many cases, uncompensated under (which is legal under the 13th Amendment). We believe that giving people the opportunity to work during incarceration will make for a smoother transition upon release. Currently, AHEP has 2 incarcerated individuals on staff, who are completing 18 month long remote fellowships, where they are each paid $25.00 per hour. We are also working with a handful on employers such as Jobs For the Future, Unlocked Labs, Vera Institute of Justice, and more, to create paid positions for incarcerated individuals.

A few perks of employment during incarceration include but are not limited to:

1. It allows a person to obtain transferable job skills
2. It allows an individual to make money during incarceration thus they can feel less dependent on social services and reentry programs (who's budgets are already stretched thing) upon their release
    a. They are immediately able to contribute to paying for their own housing, transportation, food, and other basic needs
3. They are able to send money home to their families, kids and loved ones for things like rent, school, food, bills, and other expenses that might burden a household due to a portion of income missing as a result of incarceration

Psychological and Societal Benefits: Beyond economic implications, higher education in prisons has profound psychological benefits. Education enhances self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-concept – crucial factors for successful reintegration into society. It fosters a sense of

purpose and achievement, which has proven to be a positive force for individuals who have been marginalized. From a societal standpoint, individuals who are educated and gainfully employed contribute positively to their communities.

Conclusion: In conclusion, the integration of higher education into prison systems is a critical investment in human capital. It is a strategic approach to workforce development that benefits individuals, society, and the economy. By providing educational opportunities to incarcerated individuals, we not only prepare them for meaningful careers post-release but also contribute to a more equitable and prosperous society. So why release someone back into society after doing 5, 10, 15+ years with little to no real world work experience and less than $20 to their name, when that time could be used to build an individual into one that is much more prepared to make smoother transition into their community? The benefits span way beyond what is outlined here in this short essay.

Justice Reimagined:
Community and the Power of Connection

Wyatt Lim-Tepper, President and Founder *A Curia*e
Stephen Asmus, Director San Francisco Adult Teen Challenge

Relationships, communities, and systems, all require connection. We work to make ends meet, and the lucky ones find happiness in work. This has an impact and influence on every aspect of our lives. The criminal justice system has long been viewed as inhumane, but with collaboration, community, and education, change can happen. There has been attention to reentry, incarceration, and social justice that has brought perspective and problem-solving to address people stuck in a cycle of recidivism. Similar to healthcare, criminal justice is a large system requiring different skills, expertise, and collaboration to change outcomes.

Collaborative courts are programs within the criminal justice system that address needs such as substance use, criminal thinking errors, habilitation, and peer associations through intensive supervision. These programs provide therapeutic intervention, social connection, and community. Defendants of criminal cases are referred to as participants of programs in an attempt to remove stigma. They work diligently through trauma, addiction, and difficulties to learn the skill that it is ok to ask for help. Participants do the true hard work of addressing their needs and finding help in another.

There is a vicarious benefit to court staff understanding the depth of human struggle and persistence in these programs. Alternatives to incarceration programs and collaborative courts are developed to help participants. No longer are people case numbers, but they are humans building relationships. This is a rare opportunity court staff has an opportunity to know someone and have an impactful connection. Judges look forward to these programs as a break from the misery of their regular calendar. Officers and attorneys learn different skills to improve their relationships with participants to motivate change. Court staff need the participants for social and professional fulfillment, for purpose. *A Curiae,* the nonprofit I founded, was developed to find a purpose for both participants and staff to improve outcomes in the justice system.

There is change happening, and with a commitment to collaboration, community, and education, the justice system can improve with one another.

My time in the collaborative court was nothing short of transformative. It wasn't just about acknowledging past mistakes; it was a deep dive into making meaningful life changes, significantly reducing my chances of falling back into old patterns. The program’s strength lies

in its approach: a holistic blend of team collaboration, structured phases, and a focus on individual needs that foster accountability and a steadfast commitment to recovery.
In this journey, spirituality played a unique role. It wasn't about religiosity or dogma; it was about finding a deeper connection with others and understanding our shared human experience. The program's teachings, focusing on humility, vulnerability, and empathy, weren't just lofty ideals. They were practical, everyday guides that helped us see the value in each other and the strength in our shared experiences. The program gave me a renewed sense of purpose and the resilience to reintegrate into society not just as an individual, but as a member of a larger community.

I learned that recovery isn't just a solo endeavor. It's about making connections, being open, and embracing the kind of vulnerability that truly heals. Vulnerability showed me that true healing comes from reaching out, not just digging in. Recovery, whether from addiction, trauma, or loneliness, demands that we fix what's broken in our relationships. It's about healing together, not alone.

My journey has redefined the essence of recovery. It has highlighted that healing and growth emerge from our willingness to be vulnerable with others and the necessity of relational healing. The program's emphasis on communal support, accountability, and spirituality has not only facilitated my recovery but also illuminated the path for others in similar circumstances. This journey reaffirms the critical role of community and vulnerability in overcoming life's challenges, embodying the need for one another.

The Public Policy of Higher Education In Prison

Bill Ritter, Jr
Governor, The State of Colorado (2007-2011)
District Attorney, Denver, Colorado (1993-2005)

As a former Governor of Colorado and former District Attorney of Denver, Colorado, I have studied criminal justice policy and funding from a front row seat. There is much about our system that has evolved in a positive way over my decades of involvement. Yet we should never stop building upon those things that work, and reforming those things which don't.

Leaving aside the discussion of what is not working, I turn my attention to one of the parts of the system which does work – Higher Education inside prison walls. It may seem readily apparent, but studies have verified the manifold benefits of college courses offered to the incarcerated.

First, there is the matter of the recidivism rate, the measure of those who return to prison after a previous incarceration. A 2018 meta-analysis published in the Journal of Experimental Criminology found that individuals who enroll in post-secondary education programs are 48% less likely to be reincarcerated than their peers who do not. Then, there is the problem of employment. A felon's record follows them through life and is often a barrier to even applying for a job. But the same meta-analysis found that rates of employment post-release increase by 12% for individuals who participate in ANY type of correctional education. Studies have also noted a shift in the culture inside a prison when college courses are offered. Experts say that college in-prison programs can reduce violence, making facilities safer for both the incarcerated individuals and the prison staff.

And, finally, studies have shown that upward social mobility improves when a parent obtains a post-secondary education. It would follow that prisoner families benefit as well. Studies have also shown that people who are taking courses in prison develop stronger ties to their families, especially to their kids. One researcher put it this way. "You can imagine what it might provide for children who have a parent in prison to be able to talk about school, sort of a meeting of the minds, and having that shared experience."

We know it is expensive to incarcerate a person in America. When I was Governor, the annual cost of putting someone in our state penitentiary was roughly equal to the annual tuition at a good private university. We also know if we offer a college education to prisoners we reduce recidivism, we increase employment opportunities, we make prisons safer and we increase social mobility among the formerly incarcerated and their families. Everyone wins. In public policy terms, it is a no-brainer.

The Jesuit Trifecta: Forming Leaders; Accompaniment and Mutual Transformation

Chris Lowney
Chair, CommonSpirit Health and author of Heroic Leadership

Some years ago, I hatched an idea that would only have occurred to a one-time Jesuit seminarian who later served as a JP Morgan Managing Director: Hey, how about if I write one of those "leadership lessons" books, one that draws its learnings from the early Jesuits!
Before pursuing that unconventional project, I had thought of Ignatius of Loyola only as, well, a "*saint*," a deeply admirable but (truth be told) rather stereotypical, one-dimensional figure.
But now I had to scrutinize him through the same lens as I might turn on one of my JP Morgan bosses, that is, assess Ignatius as a leader who had to assemble, motivate, and direct a team to achieve ambitious, worthy goals.

There ensued many afternoons in Fordham University's library, and a sometimes fascinating but often tedious slog through the leadership literature. But a light bulb went off when I stumbled upon Abraham Zaleznik's claim that "leaders are 'twice born' individuals who endure major events that lead to a sense of separateness, or perhaps estrangement, from their environments. As a result, they turn inward in order to emerge with a created rather than inherited sense of identity."

Zaleznik was a revered Harvard Business School professor and pioneer of leadership theory. In describing a defining difference in successful corporate leaders, he had helped crystallize my understanding of Ignatius's transformation as a person and leader.
These observations seemed to map so well, almost isomorphically, onto Ignatius's life story. "Major events": You mean like a battle injury, personal defeat, disfigurement, and dashed career plans? "A sense of separateness": like an isolating convalescence, a solitary pilgrimage, and months in a Manresa cave? "A twice born…created…sense of identity": Like a profound conversion experience, leading to a galvanizing sense of mission?

Zaleznik's frame struck me so powerfully that, when I eventually wrote *Heroic Leadership: Best Practices from a 450-Year-Old Company that Changed the World*, I mused whether Ignatius, "…without the setbacks, crises and challenges that punctuated his real life…might never have grappled with who he was, what he wanted, what personal resources he had, and why had failed along the way. [Because] Only by asking and answering those questions does one develop personal leadership capacity."

If the above ideas shed any light on Ignatius, all the more so might they be relevant for understanding the leadership journeys of those scholars being accompanied through JPEN programs. After all, most of those in JPEN learning communities have lived through their own "major events," often traumatic in depth. Many of these students may be in the midst of what Zaleznik called "a sense of separateness, or perhaps estrangement."

None of this is to "fetishize" what these students are enduring: No one wishes adversity or suffering on another. Yet it is the mysterious nature of human life that difficult, painful personal experiences often prove the crucible in which one's leadership identity and commitment is forged, as it was for Ignatius.

The task -- no, the *privilege* -- of those teaching in the JPEN program, then, is to rise to the challenge of accompanying and coaching students as they, like Ignatius, mine their life experiences in order to see more clearly their deeper mission and purpose, and consequently become the sorts of leaders who can pursue their mission more effectively, not in some distant and abstract future, but in whatever opportunities life is presenting them right now.

And so, for educators in Jesuit institutions, JPEN would seem to offer a "trifecta" of sorts. First, just as the Jesuit founder's own leadership journey was birthed through personal challenge, what better way to honor Ignatius's legacy than by accompanying scholars who, five centuries later and each in unique ways, are working through their own transformative journeys to discover their leadership capacity.

Second, all educators, and perhaps above all those in the Jesuit network, prize the rare privilege of nurturing a transformative moment in a student's life. The potential for such transformation surely abounds among this community of learners, precisely because the challenges they are enduring present such fertile "grist" for transformation. Thus, JPEN educators have an unusually rich opportunity to accompany learners through a potentially transformative moment.

Third, every Jesuit college that I know of, in its identity or mission language, alludes to or speaks explicitly about being in the ministry of "forming leaders." JPEN presents such a unique chance for Jesuit colleges and universities to live this defining aspect of their mission. And, so, JPEN: *Ite, Inflammate Omnia*!

University Presidents' Reflections

John J. DeGioia, PhD.
President, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.

As Catholic and Jesuit institutions, we seek to advance the common good in ways that are resonant with our tradition. As St. Ignatius and his early companions developed the mission of the Society, they found prison outreach so vital to their ministry that it was included in their founding document, written by St. Ignatius himself. This document instructed that each should be "*ready to reconcile the estranged, compassionately assist and serve those who are in prisons or hospitals and, indeed, to perform any other works…according to what will seem expedient for the glory of God and the common good.*" Today, we bring this tradition to life through prison education courses and a degree program, programs for returning citizens, and scholarship and engagement around issues of injustice in the judicial system. Our community at Georgetown has expanded to include those determined, passionate, and talented students within and beyond the walls of prison, animated by the words of Pope Francis: "*You cannot talk about paying a debt to society from a jail cell without windows…No one can change their life if they don't see a horizon*."

Fred P. Pestello, PhD
President. St. Louis University, St Louis, Missouri

A Universal Apostolic Preference of the Society of Jesus calls us to "walk with the poor, the outcasts of the world, those whose dignity has been violated, in a mission of reconciliation and justice."

Saint Louis University's Prison Education Program shows what it means to walk *with* incarcerated individuals and correctional staff. Faculty and students grow in wisdom together, through the direct encounter with ideas, stories, perspectives, and life experiences.

The Prison Education Program has expanded the SLU community, drawing the University closer to the heart of our mission. The program's students, alumni, staff, and faculty demonstrate what becomes possible when people gather with open minds and hearts, nurtured by

a deep respect for human dignity, a shared love of learning, and a steadfast faith in our collective potential for growth and transformation.

Joseph G. Marina, S.J.
President, University of Scranton, Pennsylvania

The program we offer at the State Correctional Institution (SCI) in Dallas, PA affords the University of Scranton a unique and compelling opportunity to extend our mission to the marginalized in a way that clearly resonates with the 25th chapter of Matthew's gospel and the second Universal Apostolic Preference of the Society of Jesus, to "walk with the excluded." This forms the foundation of the case we make for prison education.

On Dec. 20, 2023, Scranton held its first commencement exercises at SCI, graduating nine students with their associate degrees in the presence of their families and friends. It was a morning I will never forget, watching these inherently good people recognized and affirmed for their accomplishments rather than ignored and discarded by those in society who judge them much too quickly.

During a previous visit to the prison, one of our students said to me, “Father, please tell everyone back on the main campus that there’s a lot more to us than our crimes.” While I certainly agree with that sentiment, I was particularly struck by the words “main campus,” implying that SCI is, in fact, a kind of auxiliary campus of the University. That student was exactly right. It is!

I am very proud of our newest alumni and the other students pursuing a Scranton degree at Dallas SCI. And I am extremely grateful to our faculty who continue to cut through all the red tape to gain entrance to the prison every week in order to teach our talented students. “When, Lord, did I see you in prison and visit you?” On the Dallas campus of The University of Scranton, the visitation happens every week and now we have the graduates to prove it.

Moments of Clarity: Along a River and in a Prison

Thomas B. Curran, S.J.
President Emeritus, Rockhurst University, Missouri
Coordinator, Jesuit Prison Education Network

Biographies about the life of Ignatius Loyola always include details about him being struck by a cannonball during the Battle of Pamplona, in 1521, and his moment of clarity while sitting alongside the Cardoner River. The first experience ended his life as a soldier; the second helped him move from the life of a seeker to that of a pilgrim.

What is given less attention in the biographies is the time he spent in a jail cell. Yet, these carceral experiences were also moments of clarity for him. Ignatius was imprisoned, in 1527, on charges of committing heresy. For the first period, he spent forty-two days in custody, in Alcala, Spain, for his public presentations on theological matters. His second period of confinement, in Salamanca, Spain, lasted twenty-two days. Ignatius' periods of confinement convinced him that he needed to complete training in theology and other areas of study if he wanted to preach publicly. Imprisonment provided him clarity: acquire academic credentials to preach the gospel or continue to spend time behind prison bars for charges of committing heresy.

I witness similar moments of clarity, regularly, through my teaching in prisons. Our Jesuit Prison Education Network (JPEN) students remind me of Ignatius Loyola. I see incredible transformation occur; it's a transition from seeing myself as an offender to realizing I am a student. Prison students acutely understand that education can provide a path to early release and significantly reduce their likelihood of recidivism. These 'moments of clarity' include other experiences: feeling human again; experiencing deep self-worth; becoming convinced that one has something significant to contribute to society; and believing in one's sacredness before their Creator/higher power.

These 'moments of clarity' and commitment to serious study and reflection convince me that Ignatius Loyola and his early companions would approve of what we are doing. Jérôme Nadal, SJ, whose influence on the development and growth of the early Society of Jesus is second only to that of Ignatius, wrote about prison work, "that we accept from God…the care for those whom nobody is caring for even if there is somebody who ought to be caring for them." (1557)

John W. O'Malley, SJ, noted Jesuit historian and scholar, posits that the Jesuits were initially formed "to help souls" not to form schools or colleges. Nonetheless, they established their first proto college, in 1548, in Messina, Italy. Just five years later, 'reading the signs of the times,' this Least Society would fully endorse the establishment of schools. Today, there are 189 Jesuit institutions of higher learning found throughout the world.

Jesuit education consists of transformation. Jesuit prison education is about mutual transformation. Teaching in the prison is a *bona fide* way "to help souls." The souls being helped are those receiving the instruction as well as those providing it. The mutual transformation that occurs in these college credit classes is the experience of a shared humanity. It's an intense and genuine moment of clarity. It's what Ignatius experienced while sitting along the Cardoner River. He saw his reflection and understood what God wanted of him.

In our Jesuit enterprise in higher education, we use the term companion. It comes from the official title of the Society of Jesus, *La compañía de Jesús.* Our companions in the prisons provide us with opportunities "to help souls," most especially, our own. It's abundantly clear: they are "leading us towards the end for which God has created us." (Principle and Foundation) (#23) The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola.

Ignatius in chains with companions in Salamanca
Created by Thomas Rockford. S.J.

Jesuit Education and the Moreau College Initiative of The University of Notre Dame

John McGreevy, Provost, The University of Notre Dame
& Stephen M. Fallon, Professor Emeritus and
The John J. Cavanaugh Professor of Humanities, The University of Notre Dame

In 2013 a group of University of Notre Dame professors, in partnership with colleagues at Holy Cross College and with the advice and encouragement of the Bard Prison Initiative, started a program offering Holy Cross College A.A. and B.A. degrees to incarcerated men in Indiana. Now, a decade later, students in the Moreau College Initiative (MCI) at the Westville Correctional Facility have earned 35 B.A. degrees and over 100 A.A. degrees.

While Notre Dame and Holy Cross are not Jesuit institutions, our educational missions on our campuses and at the prison are consistent with Jesuit pedagogical principles. Holy Cross institutions aim to educate the heart as well as the mind, and in small classes featuring ample discussion and reflection MCI students grapple with complex questions in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, relating them to their past experience and future commitments and aspirations. A crucial element in the B.A. degree program is a capstone project through which, with the help of program staff, students turn their education to finding solutions to challenges facing the world outside as well as inside prisons. Recent projects have examined the roots of poverty in Malawi and the causes and effects of the decline of labor unions in the United States; others have proposed an innovative drug rehabilitation program for prisons and the creation of curated libraries at youth correctional facilities nationwide. The students in MCI have responded to the call to move from experience to reflection and on to action.

Jesuit educational tradition asks teachers to be mindful of the context of their students' lives. This is especially important in the prison setting, and as it has turned out attention to a new context has had a profoundly positive impact on my colleagues teaching in prison. The poverty, inadequate schooling, and trauma that so many incarcerated students have experienced are far from typical among our traditional students. In adapting their teaching to a student body strikingly different in age, socioeconomic background, and life experiences from their traditional students, Notre Dame professors have improved as teachers; the flexibility demanded by teaching non-traditional students in settings lacking the usual technological support has paid dividends in our classrooms on the main campus. And we hear from many that teaching in prison has strengthened their passion for teaching and given them a greater sense of connection and commitment to Notre Dame as a place where knowledge is put in service for the public good. Professors who have taught in the MCI program do so despite the work being in addition to their on-campus teaching schedules. The result is not exhaustion but a group of energized faculty who

bring that energy back to their traditional classrooms. The program has also offered some of our on-campus students a window into a world that would otherwise have remained invisible to them. In the process they have seen vividly that unlimited human potential exists where they might least expect it, and that all human beings are worthy of being regarded with dignity.

Entrepreneurial Jesuits

Kevin F. O'Brien, S.J., Vice Provost
Executive Director of the Bellarmine Campus of Fairfield University, Connecticut

From the beginning, Jesuits have innovated to serve the pressing needs of their time and place. Prison education is the most recent innovation in the Society of Jesus's ministry of education.

For the Society of Jesus, innovation is not a marketing technique nor an attempt to follow the latest trend in education. In the Jesuit tradition, innovation has deep spiritual roots and is grounded in the Jesuits' mission today. In the introductory annotations of his *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius reminds us that God works directly with each person. Thus, the Exercises must be adapted to meet the unique needs of each person. This directive stems in part from Ignatius' own experience of God during his months-long conversion, when, as he later described, God worked with him personally as a teacher works with a student. Embedded in the founding documents of the Society of Jesus is a preference for adaptation as an expression of God's creative work with each person and within myriad cultures. In the Jesuit way of proceeding, context is key.

In the last fifty years, we have seen various innovations in Jesuit education: Nativity and Cristo Rey schools in the United States, *Fe y Alegria* schools in South America, secondary and tertiary degree programs in refugee camps, and more recently, community college programs in Chicago, Boston, and Bridgeport, Connecticut. While Jesuits began serving prisoners soon after their founding in 1540, only recently have Jesuit universities innovated their programs to offer associate and bachelor's degrees in prisons.

Such innovative educational initiatives give concrete expression to the Society's mission of faith, justice, and reconciliation. This mission is a contemporary expression of Jesus' commitment to caring for those on the margins of society and to realizing the kingdom of God, which is God's dream for the world. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, we hear Jesus's personal invitation to labor with him in realizing God's reign of justice, peace, and love. Prison education advances that reign in the particular context of prisons and serves as a counter witness to those who seek to discard incarcerated persons and define them by their worst acts.

For those engaged in prison ministry, the "third week" of the Spiritual Exercises is particularly compelling. In this movement of the Exercises, we accompany Jesus in his Passion. Here, Ignatius offers a curious direction: see how Jesus' divinity is hidden. In other words, as the forces of opposition mount, Jesus does not run away from human struggle and pain. Love propelled him to get so close to humanity that he got caught up in the violence and hatred that

sadly constitutes part of our condition. Jesus remained faithful to his mission of realizing God's dream from the world. Far from a sign of defeat, the cross is a sign of freedom, of loving us to the end. Resurrection, which is the subject of the Exercises' "fourth week," reveals the triumph of love over hatred, life over death, peace over violence.

Prison education is faithful accompaniment of those suffering the pains of prison life. The dignity of incarcerated persons is often hidden by our personal biases and assumptions, by systems that dehumanize, and by cultural presumptions that crassly categorize people for political ends. Prison education helps educators see the human being behind the colored prison uniform and challenges conclusions about who counts in our society. Education affirms that they matter.

As with any student, education helps the incarcerated person appreciate their self-worth as a human being, a dignity that can never be taken away. Education empowers them to seek restorative justice with those they have hurt. Amid the many invisible crosses that people carry in prison, hints of resurrection emerge in the unlikely community that forms in prison classes and in the hope that emerges for their future.

The Mission of Jesuit Colleges and Universities and Higher Education in Prisons

Kenneth L. Parker, PhD, Chair, Catholic Studies Department,
& Ryan Endowed, Chair for Newman Studies Duquesne University, Pennsylvania

At Christianity's core is the narrative of Jesus' arrest, incarceration, trial, and execution. The faith's most recognizable symbol is the cross—Rome's favored method of public execution—which iconically reinforces the Christian calling to identify with those who are social outcasts, objectified, and marked for destruction. In Matthew 25:31-46, the gospel writer makes this direct connection as he presents Jesus' account of Judgment Day and the separation of the people into those who will enter his kingdom and those who will be turned away. He told those granted eternal life that they merited that reward because, "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." The "righteous" asked when they had done this. The king replied, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."[1] The gospel writer leaves no doubt about his point, because the next chapter begins the narrative of Jesus' suffering and death through the Roman judicial system. When followers of Jesus are present to those at the margins of society, it is an opportunity to encounter Jesus in the world.

Fifteen hundred years later Ignatius of Loyola instilled this profound identification with "the prisoner" through his *Spiritual Exercises*. Members of the Society of Jesus became steeped in this mystery because they annually followed Loyola's practice in the *Spiritual Exercises* of vividly re-imagining Jesus' human experience of arrest, incarceration, trial, and execution. Internalizing the experience of "the prisoner" and identifying with those incarcerated and destined for execution marked the Jesuit mission in the world. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Jesuits not only became noted for their educational enterprises, but also their particular focus on service to those in prisons and at executions.[2] These should never be viewed as disconnected missions for the Society of Jesus.

In the mid-twentieth century a Saint Louis Jesuit, Fr. "Dismas" Clark—named after one of the thieves crucified with Jesus—sought to live out this special Jesuit calling by working with

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1 Matthew 25:35-40 (New Revised Standard Version).

2 For more on this history see: Paul Shore, *'In carcere; ad dupplicium': Jesuit encounters in prison and in places of execution: Reflections on the early-modern period*, 19.2 European Review of History—Revue européenne d'histoire. 183 (2012).

men coming out of prison. He founded a halfway house for formerly incarcerated men in 1959. Dismas House of Saint Louis was a radical concept at the time and had little support in the community or in correctional systems across the nation. Yet Fr. Clark's success was notable, for fewer than five percent of the 1,500 men who entered Dismas House before the Jesuit's ultimate death in 1963 returned to prison. His work made headlines because of the film, "Hoodlum Priest," which premiered in 1961 and brought Fr. Clark's Catholic Jesuit mission-driven project to public notice. The movement has grown in size and impact over the last sixty years and more. It has multiplied from a few dozen programs in 1965 into a network of more than 250 private agencies that operate over 1,500 residential and community alternative programs throughout the world. Fr. Dismas Clark's deeply rooted Jesuit spiritual calling grew in impact and influence long after his death and has expanded to attract people from many different backgrounds and diverse religious and philosophical commitments.[3]

This Catholic Jesuit heritage is essential background for understanding what happened fifteen years ago, when Saint Louis University took up the project of developing a college-in-prison program at a maximum-security prison: the Eastern Reception, Diagnostic, and Corrections Center (ERDCC), in Bonne Terre, Missouri. The Catholic Jesuit mission of the university is at the heart of why this major research university started by offering a pilot certificate in theological studies, then designed an associate of arts degree program for incarcerated men and prison staff and continues to develop programming to meet the needs of those who live and work at the ERDCC.

As the founding director of this project, it is a joy to note that since this project was conceived fifteen years again, none of those touched by this program have returned to prison. But this statistic does not capture the deeper meaning of this mission driven project. For inside students and prison staff members influenced by this work it has meant changed lives, new ways of living, and a transforming vision for their future. For the faculty, staff, and volunteers who have brought their faith to this work, it has been an opportunity to encounter Christ in our world and experience his presence, sacramentally, in the persons served in the prison context. Every Jesuit college and university should have the opportunity to experience the joy that comes from melding of these two mission driven priorities of the Society of Jesus—education and being present to the prisoner—and come to know how it can transform the culture of each of these institutions. Saint Louis University is now just one of a growing number that has embraced this vision. My prayer is that this becomes the defining mission of each Jesuit college and university in the United States.

Endnotes

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[3] The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, *Requirements and Minimum Licensing Standards for Halfway Houses* 2 (Revised November 2012); Dennis Brown, *Repudiated upon its 1961 release by the tough-talking clergyman who inspired it,* The Hoodlum Priest *remains as obscure and intriguing as ever*, The Riverfront Times, March 10, 2011, available at https://www.riverfronttimes.com/news/repudiated-upon-its-1961-release-by-the-tough-talking-clergyman-who-inspired-it-the-hoodlum-priest-remains-as-obscure-and-intriguing-as-ever-2493304.

1. Matthew 25:35-40 (New Revised Standard Version).
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Dignity Restored

Patrick J. Govan, Research Coordinator, Jesuit Social Research Institute at Loyola University New Orleans, Louisiana

How does one restore the dignity he has lost over a period of time while incarcerated? Is it possible to feel human again? We live in a society where mass incarceration has become an accepted eyesore, like homelessness in every major city in America. When people are sentenced to prison, a negative stigma automatically attaches itself. That attachment does not care about your culture, class distinction, job skills, personality, prejudices, age, physical attributes, or nationality. It does not matter if you are well-educated, uneducated, rich, poor, or colorblind. No matter how long the sentence is, the stigma remains, visible like an old scar or unwanted tattoo.

Incarceration often castrates people in various ways. It breaks the family bond. It separates loved ones, family, and friends. Many lose their sense of belonging to the community. The isolation alone can cause a mental health crisis. Life and treatment in prison are far from ideal. It imposes hardship, discrimination, ridicule, rejection, even emasculation. The more years spent in prison, the greater the distance between family, friends, community, and even hope becomes. In some instances, the risk of becoming feral increases due to a lack of proper socialization. Humans are naturally sociable and creatures of habit. In a different vein, prisons steer humans to become socially inept and form uncommon habits.

One of the things that Loyola University in New Orleans, a Jesuit institution, has sought to live up to, is their Jesuit way of proceeding or living. Their preference is to walk with the poor, the outcasts of the world, those whose dignity has been violated, in a mission of reconciliation and justice. Certainly, anyone incarcerated fits into those categories. In 2022, they began a prison education program. Loyola began offering credit-bearing courses to incarcerated students and staff at Rayburn Correctional Center in Angie, La.

Their program strives to bring the full Loyola experience to the prison and integrate the students into their community. In prison, one can choose to do either one of two things. Either serve time, or let time serve them. What it means by serving time is to live and work in drudgery each and every day of their sentence. To let time serve you means to take advantage of programs that will help one to make their life more meaningful.

There is no substitute for lived experiences. Several of the students from Rayburn have shared their lived experiences. The following are their testimonials: “One of the things that incarceration has done to me is compounded feelings of worthlessness and meaninglessness, which I’ve already struggled with most of my life, but for the first time in a long time I feel once

again in control of my own future and that good things could be just beyond the horizon. Loyola is the number one contributor to this positive shift in my life."

Another student shared, "Many of us ended up in prison because of the culture of where we come from and because we have a tendency to look at the world through a narrow pinhole, while thinking this IS the world in its entirety. I think sociology and philosophy are very necessary for us. That would help us understand other views of society, and hopefully better function in society. Philosophy would help us expand our way of thinking and analyzing different situations. We could certainly benefit from a new way of thinking, analyzing, and planning solutions to problems."

Finally, one student said: "I think any classes we take should be geared at teaching us how to function with "normal" people, and how to make money with the skills that we have acquired. . . I would rather take classes that you determine will be most effective for "us" to function better in society."

The Jesuit Social Research Institute is a collaboration of Loyola University New Orleans and the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). They seek to create more equitable societies and engaged communities. They have spearheaded the educational program at Rayburn. In helping someone, it is believed that you must accompany them at whatever junction they are in life and walk with them. One way to restore one's dignity is by providing them with a higher education. It restores their sense of pride, and self-respect. It helps them to feel and be valued and respected as a person, a human. Higher education in prison helps restore one's dignity. It makes them human again.

Cura Personalis, Cura Apostolica, and Prison Education

Paul Lynch, PhD, Associate Professor of English, St. Louis University, Missouri

Cura personalis, or "care of the person," reminds all Jesuit educators that our students are not brains on sticks. They are people, which means they have histories, bodies, desires, longings, hopes, wounds, traumas, and fears. They come from particular families, neighborhoods, cultures, and creeds (or sometimes no creeds at all). They are complex human beings, and *cura personalis* requires attention to their full humanity. The phrase is thus both descriptive and prescriptive. It describes the actual, real-world situation of all teaching and learning, and it prescribes care of the persons in those real-world situations.

The same is true in prison education, though prison education requires a more intense form of care. Our incarcerated students also have histories, hopes, and wounds. Like traditional students, our incarcerated students desire to cultivate their humanity, but they pursue that desire in an utterly inhumane situation. Already separated from their families and friends, incarcerated students suffer the additional punishments of constant surveillance, capricious policy, and an ever-present threat of violence. The pandemic exposed the malign neglect of our overcrowded and underfunded prison system, where the incarcerated—denied PPE and unable to distance—suffered half a million infections and over 3,000 COVID-related deaths. Fyodor Dostoyevsky (who himself spent four years in prison) said that a civilization can be judged by entering its prisons. Our civilization must then be under a very harsh judgment indeed. Prison education therefore requires a particularly attentive *cura personalis*. At the very least, it requires the same level of care that our main campus students receive: academic counseling, personal counseling, campus ministry, extra-curricular opportunities, everything that makes for a rich college experience. *Cura personalis* demands more than just delivering courses.

That care should also extend to those who staff prisons. Overworked and underpaid, the workers inside our prisons cannot always access the kind of high-quality education that can enrich their lives and afford them new opportunities. It is therefore vital that the mission of Jesuit prison education include prison staff. In addition, the university faculty and staff who administer these programs also need *cura personalis.* Working with students under such challenging conditions can be draining, and it is not uncommon for prison educators to suffer burnout. Here, the need for *cura personalis* is a bit closer to the original meaning of the phrase, which referred to the responsibility of Jesuit superiors to take diligent care of those in their charge. *Cura personalis* reminds us that no one is to be instrumentalized in the pursuit of a project, no matter how worthy the aims may be.

Cura apostolica, meanwhile, extends care to the works of the apostolate, which includes all the institutions and endeavors of a given Jesuit province. Universities, high schools, parishes, community centers—all of these require apostolic care. Jesuits are already stretched thin across these various works, and the universities in particular face daunting challenges of demographic pressure, rising costs, and a competitive educational landscape. One might reasonably ask why Jesuit universities should take on the additional task of prison education. The definitive answer comes from the Gospel: when we visit the imprisoned, we visit Christ. But a more recent answer comes from the Jesuits' statement of the 2019 "Universal Apostolic Preferences," one of which is "walking with the excluded." In the document that promulgated these preferences, Superior General Arturo Sosa writes, "Sent as companions in a mission of reconciliation and justice, we resolve to walk with individuals and communities that are vulnerable, excluded, marginalized, and humanly impoverished." It would be hard to write a better mission statement for Jesuit prison education.

On the main campuses of Jesuit schools, our students speak of social justice. In our prison campuses, our students live and learn in a world of social injustice. We cannot fully educate the first group of students unless we educate the second.

Advancing Assessment and Evaluation of Higher Education Prison Programs

Darren Wheelock, PhD, Associate Professor, Director of Criminal Justice Data Analytics and Educational Preparedness Program,
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As higher education in prison (HEP) programs expand, so undoubtedly will efforts to examine their impact and effectiveness. To date, recidivism, or reoffending, has been the most common method to assess the impact of HEP programs. To be sure, recidivism is an important data point when attempting to measure their efficacy. When assessed in these terms, research has found that HEP programs can reduce recidivism and even lower rates of disciplinary infractions for those currently incarcerated (Davis, Steele, Bozick, Williams, Turner, Miles, Saunders, & Steinberg 2014, Pompoco, Wooldredge, Lugo, Sullivan, & Latessa 2017; Denney & Tynes 2021). That said, focusing evaluation efforts of HEP programs on whether they reduce reoffending still limits the ways researchers conceptualize the diverse ways higher education can impact students who are currently and/or formerly incarcerated.

Colleges and universities contend that obtaining a college degree has long-term and durable benefits including, increasing life-time earnings, lower levels of unemployment, lower levels of life-time poverty, higher likelihood of home ownership, greater levels of civic engagement, increased levels of self-esteem, important social networks, increased life-expectancy, etc. In fact, these outcomes ostensibly justify the ever-increasing cost of college tuition that can rival or exceed the cost of a home mortgage for an undergraduate degree alone. Jesuit institutions like my own go even further with promises of a "transformative" education that can help students become "better people," and not just more effective earners. If a college education, especially a Jesuit one, triggers intra-personal transformation and growth (that also come with labor market and health advantages), then better understanding the impact of higher education in carceral spaces (both inside and outside prison walls) necessitates exploring the impact of higher education in domains other than recidivism.

Recent scholarship highlights an intellectual shift that is already occurring across many social science disciplines. A National Academy of Sciences publication, "The Limits of Recidivism: Measuring Success After Prison," (2022) makes a compelling case for rethinking how to measure and reconceptualize reentry "success." There is much to learn from this work.

For example, there are numerous reentry domains ripe for exploring the impact of HEP programs including housing, familial and social relationships, physical and mental health, participation in peer support and "help-giving roles," and civic engagement. Not coincidentally, participation in and engagement with many of these reentry domains are also correlated to desistence from crime and successful reentry. Below, I briefly introduce three methodological innovations that I posit will advance HEP research to better understand the ways in which a college education, especially a Jesuit one, can truly provide a transformative educational experience for all our students.

- First, include the perspectives of currently and formerly incarcerated students, not just as research subjects, but also as research partners. There are networks of scholars who understand the potential impact of HEP programs from the perspective of program participants and who also understand the rigors of research and evaluation efforts. While there has been a more concerted effort to include the voices of currently and formerly incarcerated students in developing and operating HEP programs, their knowledge and skills remain underutilized as authentic research collaborators and partners.
- Second, incorporate greater methodological diversity. Scholars have utilized self-report "survey" instruments when assessing quality of instruction and course impact. Different versions of student surveys can collect important data on the student experience in specific classes and programs. Other types of studies could include focus groups, interviews, and other forms of qualitative methods that gather data on meaning, understanding, and process.
- Third, develop study designs that differentiate between different kinds of HEP programming. For example, some programs explicitly aim to foster community-building, such as the Inside/Out Prison Exchange. Assessing the impact of Inside/Out based programs should then include community-building and/or interpersonal relational measures. It should also consider the ways in which this model impacts both "inside" and "outside" student populations. While this recommendation is not directly tied to an overreliance on recidivism as an assessed outcome, this methodological innovation would advance efforts to better understand the impact of different kinds of HEP programs.

In conclusion, focusing on recidivism, or reentry failure, overlooks key insights from scholars and practitioners that characterize the lives of those returning home with micro-level "successes" and "setbacks" experienced daily. Demarcation events, such as a rearrest or reconviction, are notable and should be examined, but someone's reentry journey is rarely, if ever, reducible to that event. The challenge is contextualizing the reoffending data point in a broader tapestry of data that captures both a student's setbacks across multiple domains, but also records and acknowledges their successes. Adopting innovative approaches to evaluating HEP programs would yield a richer and fuller understanding of the ways HEP programs can facilitate

growth and transformation, an explicitly stated feature of a Jesuit education. Adopting these innovations also help position Jesuit institutions as leaders in HEP programming by actualizing the Jesuit value that education is more than just a credential and the Jesuit commitment to the search for complex truths and knowledge creation.

Prison Education and the History of Jesuits in Prison

Dan J. Finucane, SJ., graduate student at Jesuit School Theology, Berkeley, California
Served as chaplain to Belize Central Prison

Though providing formal education in prisons is a new dimension of the Jesuits' mission, it is perhaps helpful to consider Jesuit prison education as a bringing together of two apostolic threads that run through the entire history of the Society of Jesus: ministry to the imprisoned and education.

The *Formula of the Institute*, the founding document of the Society of Jesus, states that whoever seeks to become a member of the Society ought to defend and spread the faith by means of various ministries of the Word (education being a particularly essential means) and goes on to add,

> "Moreover, he should show himself ready to reconcile the estranged, compassionately assist and serve those who are in prisons or hospitals…. according to what will seem expedient for the glory of God and the common good."

From the very early years of the Society's existence, Jesuits were thus engaged in ministering both through the Word in education and in works of charity and justice.

The early Jesuits founded their first school at Messina, Italy in 1548. At the same time, Jesuits were going into the prisons. Some Jesuits did both, teaching in the schools and in their "spare time" going to the prisons to minister there. John O'Malley notes that in the 16th century, people were incarcerated either because of outstanding debt (usually debtors from the poorer classes) or to await sentence or execution. In their ministry, Jesuits sought to console the incarcerated through preaching, catechesis, and the sacraments. In one instance, early Jesuits chained copies of the lives of the saints to a jail wall in Rome for prisoners to read. Though much has changed in the centuries since, Jesuit prison ministry continues to include these same ministries today.

Notably, many Jesuits have themselves been imprisoned over the centuries, for reasons such as: the refusal to renounce their faith or Jesuit vocation, political persecution, and civil disobedience. Some, like St. Isaac Jogues, Blessed Miguel Pro and Alfred Delp, have been martyred after a period of imprisonment. Others, like John Havas, Paul Beschet, and Walter Ciszek, have endured great hardship in solidarity with fellow prisoners, often ministering to them through companionship, preaching, prayer, and offering of the sacraments, creatively hearing confessions and saying Mass. Jesuit ministry in prisons and concentration camps throughout the centuries has often been undertaken at great personal risk, including horrific torture if discovered.

In a couple of documented instances, imprisoned Jesuits offered classes for fellow prisoners. William Weston, SJ, taught Hebrew and Greek and helped established a regimen of classes while imprisoned in the early 17th century in England, while Daniel Berrigan, SJ, and his brother Philip gained permission for a great books course as well as a study of the Gospels for fellow inmates during their imprisonment in the 1970s. Commenting on both Weston and Berrigan's efforts, George Anderson, SJ, observes, "Experienced teachers, Jesuits have known how to apply their pedagogic skills in prisons as well as in classrooms."

That many Jesuit universities now welcome incarcerated men and women as enrolled students demonstrates that the Society's mission of compassionate service to people in prisons encompasses not only pastoral counseling and sacramental ministry, but also formal education. Indeed, doing so demonstrates a next step in the evolution of Jesuit apostolic work in both education and prisons that seeks the common good.

Finucane, S.J. with men in the Ashcroft Rehabilitation Center

History, Historians, and Jesuit Prison Education

Joanna Carraway Vitiello, PhD, Professor of History, Rockhurst University, Missouri

From classical antiquity to the present day, liberal arts education has been a primary vehicle of civic and moral education. Its transformative power was understood to make people better citizens of their societies and better stewards of their world. Ideally, this education is the fuel of intellectual curiosity, famously idealized by Chaucer's Clerk in the *Canterbury Tales*: "Gladly would he learn, and gladly teach." A historical lens highlights the importance of the JPEN network and its commitment to offer an Ignatian approach to the liberal arts education for incarcerated populations and prison staff.

From the imprisonment of St. Ignatius to the creation of the JPEN network, the Jesuit involvement with the incarcerated has been a consistent distinction of the order's history. Ideas of incarceration and imprisonment, however, have changed dramatically over time. Long-term incarceration as a penalty for crime is a newer historical development. Prior to the early modern period, in Europe and the Mediterranean basin, confinement was generally meant to hold people awaiting trial or awaiting punishment.

These confinements were usually brief by modern standards, but the consequences could be lifelong because conditions were so poor. In medieval Italy, for example, food for incarcerated people was usually provided by family members, or by confraternities or other charitable organizations who cared for prisoners as pious acts, meaning that access, quantity, and quality varied widely. Unsanitary conditions bred disease. Men and women were not always separated. Even before the development of modern prisons, incarceration affected everyone it touched. Escape attempts were common, and prison guards faced severe consequences when those attempts were successful.

Individuals were not habitually sentenced to lengthy periods of incarceration as punishment for crime until the early modern period. Sentences were also imposed when convicted people were unable to pay fines, and thus incredibly early, the incarcerated population was disproportionally made up of the poor. By the modern age, lengthy sentences of incarceration were more common than corporeal or capital sentences. Incarcerated populations grew, and the institutions that imprisoned them transformed. In America, the federal prison system coexisted with the development of private, for-profit prisons, from early plantation prisons in the South, to later for-profit corporate prisons across the country by the twentieth century.

Even as sentences have grown in length, the stated purpose for incarceration has been inconstant, shifting on a spectrum from rehabilitation to punishment, goals which are

diametrically opposed. Given that average American prison sentences surpass even the maximum sentences imposed in other developed countries, the incarcerated are likely to see contradictions in their own experiences as philosophical shifts occur in public policy and public opinion. In this changing scenario, two things remain constant: the fact that prisons reflect the problems and inequities of their boarder cultures, and the spiritual imperative for Christians to show compassion to prisoners, no matter what their circumstances.

For the Jesuits, this Christian imperative combines with the Ignatian educational mission to form the whole person. The JPEN network broadens the scope of prison education, applying it both to inmates and to the staff in prison systems, whose difficult jobs and often rural locations can complicate access to education. The average lengths of sentences served in American prisons, some of the longest in the world, strengthen this moral imperative. Educational programs approach the potential of the human intellect and offer transformative experiences, both for the students who learn in these programs, and for those who teach in them.

In my discipline, history, I found vast opportunities to learn and to better my craft inside the JPEN network. For historians, whose sources are imperfect, whose methods are constantly changing, and whose subjects – people – are often irrational actors, every new perspective we encounter and every new interpretative method we learn broadens our toolbox. I once assigned an analysis of a famous Hellenistic art piece, *The Boxer*, to my incarcerated and staff students in the Chillicothe Correctional Center. It was a very standard assignment in primary source interpretation, so commonplace that I was taken off guard when an incarcerated student approached me for an alternative. In the boxer's beaten expression and physical exhaustion, she saw her own horrific experiences as a victim of domestic violence. *The Boxer* is such a famous piece that, like da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* or Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, it is difficult to see it with new eyes. That day, I did.

Her reaction inspired a host of new questions: how did this piece resonate with the Roman women who saw it? With the slaves who tended the baths where it may have been displayed? Did the Boxer's pain hurt them? Did they find solace in his stoicism? Did they see in the idealization of his suffering an effort of the patron class to dominate theirs? These are not scholarly questions that the historian can analyze, but they are human questions that the historian should remember. Teaching is learning in the JPEN network.

Prison education in the Ignatian tradition harnesses the intrinsic power of liberal arts education, and in this age of mass incarceration, it is indeed a moral imperative. Historically, prisons have changed, and doubtless they will continue to change. In our current moment, Ignatian pedagogy and the Jesuit prison outreach provides new horizons to all involved - prison staff, incarcerated people, and teachers – to all who would gladly teach, and gladly learn.

From the Projects to a PhD: Paying it Forward and Honoring Those Who Protected Me

Don C. Sawyer III, PhD, Vice President for Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging
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"Walking with the Excluded Walk with the poor, the outcasts of the world, those whose dignity has been violated, in a mission of reconciliation and justice."

Growing up in the housing projects of Harlem, New York City, during the crack cocaine epidemic, I was not expected to be where I am today. The narrative written for young Black boys like me was not optimistic. But here I am, a testament not to my singular strength but to the community that shielded me. Some say I was blessed, while others might label it luck. But amid the gratitude, at times, guilt lingers. If I was blessed, what about my friends who shielded me? Were they not blessed? Were they not deserving of the same opportunities I was given?

I never considered myself any different from my peers. We all had dreams. Our challenges often mirrored one another, and a similar desire for a better life fueled our aspirations. What set me apart? Was it fate, chance, or a series of fortunate events? I firmly believe that most of the people from my community would have thrived, as I did, given the same chances. Their potential was no less than mine. My internal dissonance is a constant reminder of the fine line between where I have landed and where others, equally deserving, found themselves. Despite this emotional turmoil, I am driven to move forward, not just for myself, but in homage to those who believed in me, guided me, and invested in my future- many of them in prison or living with the mark of a criminal record.

It is remarkable to reflect on how the most marginalized in society, those labeled with the stigma of a criminal record, became my protectors. I watched friends get lured into the ways of the streets. Yet, in their activities, I was often pushed away. They foresaw a different path for me, one I could not envision at the time. To them, I owe an unrepayable debt. Their belief in me propels my endeavors, motivating me to bridge the divide between potential and opportunity, ensuring others receive the same support that was once bestowed upon me.

I had my first experiences with prison and jails when visiting incarcerated family members. Later in college, I worked with a Muslim chaplain to visit men in prison and host discussion circles. More recently, I have been teaching sociology courses in a maximum-security prison in Connecticut and helping to facilitate the Young Men's Group at a youth correctional institution. Lastly, I am working on a project with my cousin titled "Going Upstate." This

sociological exploration juxtaposes my life with my cousin's, all through the shadow of the war on drugs. While he, four years my senior, was incarcerated at 17, I, four years later, pursued higher education. He was imprisoned for 25 years. In the same span, I climbed the academic ladder, cementing a place in higher education. We were children of the same family, the same housing project, products of the same environment, yet our lives diverged sharply.

As I step into prison classrooms today, at 47, I see reflections of myself in the faces of those I teach. Most of us are the same age. Many of their journeys echo the challenges I faced, the choices I made, and the fate I encountered. Our stories are connected. They often express their appreciation for having a Black male professor, especially one from a similar background. It is a reminder of how representation matters, how seeing someone who 'made it out' can inspire hope. Many of my brothers are fighting for a second chance, but if you listen to the experiences that shaped their lives, you will realize many were not given a first chance. These men have hopes, dreams, and a desire to positively impact the outside world, one that many of them, unfortunately, may never see again.

While people argue the merit of prison education lies in transforming people serving time and preparing them for a life beyond bars, the experience has equally transformed me. This work grounds me, lending purpose and clarity to my existence. It is a reminder of my roots, the challenges I overcame, and the responsibility I bear to give back. Our Jesuit ethos emphasizes social justice, urging us to stand with the marginalized and be "people for others." Thus, prison work is not a deviation but a genuine reflection of our beliefs. Through these endeavors, we put our dedication to justice and love for all into action.

Questions I would like us to consider together include: “What untapped potential lies within our communities, especially among youth who face challenges like those I experienced? How can each of us in the AJCU contribute to unlocking this potential through support and mentorship? In what ways do systemic inequalities shape the choices and futures of individuals in underserved communities? How can we, as the AJCU, work towards creating more equitable systems that provide genuine opportunities for all, regardless of theirbackground?”

Solidarity and Prison Education

Christopher A. Haw, PhD, Assistant Professor of Theology and Religious Studies
University of Scranton, PA

"While there is a criminal element, I am of it; so long as there is a soul in prison, I am not free."
Eugene V. Debbs

The moral jugular of prison education, for me, is the issue of co-identification and solidarity. By this I mean seeing oneself as tangled in, and complicit with, the minds and bodies of all humanity. In other words, I consider it not only a sin but also *inaccurate* to see oneself as easily *distinguishable* from the evils (and *goods*!) of the world. The sin of others is in oneself, and vice versa. Thus, sages from Terence to Henri Nouwen have said that, to the compassionate person, nothing human is alien. *Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto*.

But co-identification is *offensive*, even dangerous. For it breaks down the simplistic mirage that "I am good, and they are bad," the most ham-fisted self-aggrandizement that animates so much of human behavior and structures so much of society. But teaching college in prison, can break down this self-exonerating scapegoating in two ways: 1) the first breakdown is amenable to most people, which is to discover that "prisoners have worth and dignity just like the rest of us; they're not all bad, but often lovely people—or at least, a mixture." While this is a perfectly important insight, many people avoid the second. 2) I am also a murderer who just has not had a lot of opportunities. This is not only the moral exhortation of the New Testament, that hatred is murder. It is a biological fact: I am part of the same species, with plenty of capacity for violence and bad judgment. Only, I have just been placidly born on the top of a pile of privileged power.

I was once talking in prison with a guard while waiting for our students to arrive; and, upon my having mentioned that I had lived in the infamously poor and violent city Camden, NJ for ten years, doing community development work, he asked "what is the one lesson you learned there?" The first quip that sprang from my crowded mental satchel was the above point, that "I am a murderer." He seemed dumbstruck, almost appalled. For a major feature of working prison, I infer, is the categorizing of radical difference between the "offenders" and the rest of us. I sometimes sign my emails, Offender Haw.

Thich Nhat Hahn provocatively expressed this sentiment in his poem *Call Me by My True Names*. There, he co-identifies not only with the victims of the world, but with the victimizers. He says he is not only the starving Ugandan or the raped refugee; he is also the arms merchant and the pirate. I have talked about this offensive and important poem with some program professors. One found it awkward, even galling, stating that she just "presumes all the inmate-

students are in for expired parking tickets.” This bracketing is a beautiful thing as far as it helps one push through the maelstrom of prison teaching; but, such bracketing, as a mirage, will eventually break down. It will either burn out before the dark, brutal, murderous reality, or give way to the ultimate truth of humble co-identification.

To be in solidarity with victims can be cheap and easy, especially after centuries of Power having appropriated the Cross for branding—granting victimhood an aura of glory, innocence, and cachet. But solidarity with victimizers is not *at all* about affirming their evil, but the recognition that, “had I been born in their position, I could have done the same.” Simone Weil thus noted that, as a teenager, had she been in the presence of the captivating singing of Nazi youth, she would have become one. Ultimately, solidarity in imitation of Christ means being as shrewd as a snake— “knowing what is in people’s hearts” (Jn 2:25)—and yet also as mercifully innocent as a dove, imitating the heavenly Father who indiscriminately loves good and evil alike, going as a sheep into a world of wolves. Wisdom, I think, sees this snake-dove disposition not only as morally laudable, but as fitting to the facts and working with the grain of the universe.

Graduation ceremony from University of Scranton at SCI Dallas, PA (approved for publication)

Understanding Through Reflection

K.M., Student in St. Louis University's Prison Education Program

I stand in my cell, strapping magazines to my body. They are secured with string and look like a bullet proof vest, if only they are made from newspapers, magazines, and string. As I secure the vest and pull my shirt over it to see how noticeable it is, I ask my cell mate, who is currently watching at the door for an officer so we can hide our work during their 'security walks,' to explain to me why we are going to war again. "It's like this bro, those bastards that work with one of our bros says that he stole from them. Bro says that work area don't belong to them, it belongs to him. They tried to say something slick and now we got to show them who we are." I say nothing as my cell mate carries on with a diatribe about how we must look, respect, and how our bro is right. Once he begins, I tune him out.

Shortly after I reach a position of leadership in my community, through blood, sweat, and perseverance this happens. My goal was to become a leader and stop stupid situations like this from happening. As I look at my half-finished homework, I think about how I may never have a chance to do something like this again; attend SLU. A prestigious college accepted me! And now I am going to lose it all. I chuckle to myself at the irony of my situation. Just a year ago before I started this college program, I would not have cared about the sacrifice. I would have gone to war at the slightest nudge. Now, I carefully weigh the words of my friends and fellow prisoners. Instead of being blinded by the rhetoric of retribution, I see that this whole situation stems from a misunderstanding over resources. The bigger irony here is that I am currently in an economics class. Had it been a regular economics class, I would not have been able to think about it the way I did. Instead, I thought about how Adam Smith and his idea that everyone wants to be loved and lovely, which really means everyone wants to be admirable and respected, pertains to this situation.

As I grabbed a knife and hid it up my sleeve, me and the rest of my friends headed out to the yard to meet our enemies. I scan for guards and the faces of my friends. I see that many of them have the same look I did when I caught my reflection on my cell mirror before walking to what will most likely be my ruin; this is stupid, yet I have a commitment to do it. We mob out to yard in groups of twos and threes, carefully making our way to the kill zone. Our enemies do the same. As I walk with another leader and our second best, I ask "what's to be done?" "We see if they will accept conditions, if not, we burn it down." As we see their best three walk to meet us, we meet them halfway. As we approach, I see that one of them is someone that I have a decent understanding with. As we stop, outside of arms reach, we light cigarettes and talk...

I was able to talk this confrontation down, and thus avoid lots of bloodshed that day. And I did it with the words of Adam Smith in my head. SLU, and its education did not just teach me, it pushed me to apply what I learned in class to myself. That self-reflection, even

over so short a time as a year, changes you. It changed me, from a belligerent and ignorantly egotistical child to a student of critical thinking, situational awareness, and analysis. I saw this self-reflection change my fellow students as well. Over 4 and a half years, we went from indifferent strangers to a cohort of companions that helped promote education and understanding in our community. This is why SLU's education is a distinctly Jesuit one, and in my opinion, the best!

St. Louis University's program at Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center
Bonne Terre, Missouri (approved for publication)

The Sky's the Limit

G., Student in Companions in Chillicothe
Rockhurst University, Chillicothe Missouri

My education and experience through Rockhurst University has been nothing short of amazing. I am thankful to be a part of the Companions of Chillicothe Program and a Rockhurst student. If you had told me at the beginning of my incarceration that I would leave Chillicothe Correctional Center, a proud college graduate from Rockhurst University, I would not have believed you. This program has transformed my life in ways that I can only begin to explain.

Rockhurst has honored the Jesuit beliefs throughout the five plus years that I have been a part of this program in diverse ways. From the beginning, Dr. Craig Watz and Father Curran have been so enthusiastic about this program. It was such a good feeling to see people excited to offer us the opportunity of a lifetime, after all few opportunities as big as this one present themselves while incarcerated. Throughout the program, each and every staff member from Rockhurst has welcomed us with open arms. I have never felt judged or like I did not belong, I have felt a part of something bigger than just being an "offender."

The goal of Rockhurst has always been to educate us because as we all know, knowledge is power. Along the way, Rockhurst has given me so much more than an education. Rockhurst has allowed me to feel a sense of normalcy when every other aspect of my life was foreign. This program has been a huge part of my life as I have been incarcerated for over seven years and I have been a student at Rockhurst for five and a half years. This program has been a constant in my life through the good days, the bad weeks, and the times I just wanted to give up. I know that every Wednesday, someone is counting on me to show up.

If it were not for Rockhurst University and their willingness to put something great into action to transform and change lives, I am not sure what my path would look like. The kindness and the compassion this program has shown to each of us is unexplainable. The effort each person in this program contributes, no matter how big or small, is what makes this program successful. I will be released in 2026 and after spending 10 years in prison, Rockhurst has ensured that I will be equipped with one of the most powerful things one can acquire: an education.

This program has pushed me to grow, they saw something in me that at times I did not see in myself. Not only has Rockhurst University allowed me to be their companion, but they have also allowed me to show my children that the sky is the limit no matter your circumstance. I am honored to have this great life changing experience while being in a less than ideal situation. Rockhurst University has been a rock in my life and now it is my duty to pay it forward just as they have!

Rockhurst program at Chillicothe correctional facility (approved for publication)

The Experience of Jesuit Values

M.S., student with Inside / Out Prison Education, Regis University, Colorado

I was exposed to Jesuit education while attending Regis University as an incarcerated student. My expectation was that I would simply become better informed. However, I quickly learned that a Jesuit education is not merely informational, but transformational. In my opinion, it is this aspect of a Jesuit education that makes it truly exceptional. During my very first class I was introduced to the Jesuit value *cura personalis*, or care for the whole person, and the idea of living an "authentic" life also arose. This spurred a deep challenge to reflect, which continues to this day. The questions I began to ponder were: Who am I? Who do I want to be? And how do I become that person?

Rev. Thomas Curran, SJ was the professor during my last class with Regis, "Leading Lives that Matter" and more questions were added to my burgeoning list. Rev. Curran's explanation of the Jesuit concept of justice – right relationships with God, man, and creation – that helped provide a guiding light to answer my questions. I think most would agree that the world-at-large is in need of transformation. One might argue that the incarcerated are in even more need of this. I would concur. It was the Jesuit approach to education and the cultivation of Jesuit values that has led to my personal transformation and my desire to contribute. I do not know what the future holds in store for me, but I do know that whatever positive impact I have on others in the future is due to the distinctive opportunity I received through Jesuit education.

Regis University's Inside/Out Program at Colorado Territorial Correctional Facility, Cañon City, Colorado

The Experience of Care for the Whole Person at LOYNO

A student in Loyola's University's Prison Education Program
Rayburn Correctional Facility, Louisiana

For the first handful of years after my incarceration, I would lay in bed at night and imagine that the grief and sorrow I felt was so strong that it would cause me to shatter into a million tiny little pieces as I slept. Then I would hope that maybe the broken pieces of myself would come together again and get mixed up and rearranged into a different order and I would not have to be myself any longer. I could be someone who is not a convict or cripple. I do not know when I stopped thinking these things, or wanting to break apart, but I think it might have a lot to do with Loyola.

One of the things you find in a Jesuit education is the people involved seem to have an odd fascination with two Latin words: *cura personalis*. It means something like "care for the whole person." The idea here is cultivating well-rounded people. However, I was sitting in a presentation lovingly crafted by the leaders of our program about its – and by extension, our – future and it hit me like a lightning bolt, setting my mind and heart ablaze with a renewed love for this Ignatian education thing that we are doing, smoothing the rough calluses of my once battered and embittered heart.

Cura personalis just might mean care for more than the incarcerated person. Maybe it has to do with my *animas* – the animating principle inside of me, what I call my person, my "I" – taking flight and leaving behind the shackles and barbed wire, this broken and defeated person. Far above it all I can see a million billion possibilities cascading out, and a Voice belonging to me, you, and everyone whispers, "The world, and you, are so much more than you know."

LOYNO program at Rayburn Correctional Facility (approved for publication)

Plato in the Prison: An Experience of Freedom and Shared Humanity

Arlando "Tray" Jones
Program Associate, Prisons and Justice Initiative (P&JI), Georgetown University, Washington, DC

Plato declared that "An educated man is to an uneducated man what a living man is to a dead man." In a prison setting, you can easily discern the truthfulness and accuracy of Plato's declaration. For the prisoners who elect to languish away on the tier and idle about in the recreation yard never grow and mature. Their mind and soul come under the constant vicious attack of unscrutinized information that often render them bitter, resentful, and filled with a hatred that contaminates everything and everyone they touch.

There is no doubt that it's virtually impossible to elevate your socioeconomic status sans an education, and no one is more seemingly socioeconomically low than a prisoner. Thus, it stands to reason to expose prisoners to a genuine education so that they can grow and mature into the best possible persons they can become. Our nation was built on the premise that it was necessary to view and treat certain segments of our population as if they were less than human. In order to propagate that notion, disinformation had to go unto some and no information whatsoever went to others. Prisoners, for the most part, are the ones who inherited that disinformation or no information at all, which makes prisons the perfect bastions for ignorance, stupidity.

A genuine education would erode ignorance and some stupidity. For education is simply discerned and thoroughly distilled information. The only contention about education/information is how it's distributed. The Jesuit institutions, Loyola in Maryland and Georgetown University, brought in a curriculum – a cornucopia of information – that allowed us prisoners to acquaint ourselves with the accumulated wisdom of the ages and become the people God created us all to be. And the most astonishing fact about receiving a Jesuit education is that the Jesuits didn't teach me a single thing. They created an atmosphere, I would suppose, in the tradition of all the greatest teachers, that made learning easier, more enjoyable, and tolerable. For the prisoner who receives an education quickly accepts the painful truth of Ecclesiastes 1:18. "He who increases his knowledge, increases his sorrow."

It's practically impossible to have a genuine Jesuit education, bear witness to man's inhumane treatment of fellow human beings, and not feel compelled to challenge it. The focus of virtue, honor, and personal integrity is so innate to the curriculum that anyone who subjects him/herself to it will instantly become better. Prior to receiving information and an education

from this institution, I had no way of reconciling myself with the Ethiopian Proverb that states: “If the lion doesn’t tell his own story, the hunter will get the credit.”

A Jesuit education instilled in me the courage to create my own narrative and tell my story. No longer am I a slave to distorted and undiscerned information. I am a custodian of the accumulated wisdom of the ages; I am no longer qualified or fit to be a prisoner. The Jesuits don’t have any qualms with distributing liberating information to the least among us. And therein lies the dilemma: for a person who receives a genuine education is not fit to be a slave or a prisoner. It’s known by oppressors the world over that a genuine education inspires a revolt. And America’s revolting criminal justice system, which renders scores of people superfluous, beaten and woefully broken necessitates a revolution.

Rockhurst University Companions In Chillicothe

Stephanie Eckert, Staff Student, Chillicothe Correctional Center, Missouri

What does this program mean to me? My name is Stephanie Eckert and I currently work at Chillicothe Correctional Center in Chillicothe, MO. I have participated in this College program since its inception. This program means the world to me! My bucket list has included getting a college education, and needless to say this has been on my list for several years. When I graduated high school in 1987, college was never even discussed, my parents didn't encourage me to go to college, neither did my school counselor, it was just never even talked about, even though I graduated in the top of my class. Therefore, after college I got a job and got married, after being married for 3 years we began our family. I knew from the beginning of being a mother that I wanted my children to have every opportunity in the world, including getting a college education so that they had opportunities that I never had. So, we discussed these options with our children from the beginning. My children weren't made to go to college, but were encouraged and we helped them with their college expenses. Both of my children went on to college and both have college degrees.

With that being said, my hopes of obtaining a college degree were put on the back burner, because my children's education was my top priority. When this opportunity came to Chillicothe I jumped on board and submitted my application and it has changed my life ever since. I have taken and even passed every class offered to us. This walk in my education path hasn't always been easy to say the least. While I've been enrolled in these classes I was on a rotating schedule, where my work schedule changed every 6 months, I either worked days, evenings or nights. When I worked nights, I got off work at 7:00 am, drove 30 minutes home and tried to get some sleep, got up, showered and drove 30 minutes back to class, and then drove back home to finish my sleep and then would return to work at 11:00 pm. We are required to make up our school time during our work day, so that means flexing our work schedules to meet that requirement.

The Rockhurst opportunity has been a challenge academically as well, since it's been over 30 years since I went to high school, going to college has been challenging in itself. Our class is a small but mighty group of individuals that have worked very hard to obtain this degree and have been there for each other as we've worked to meet our educational goals.

Like I've said, this program means the world to me, to be able to meet my goal and check this off my bucket list is both wonderful in itself, but to have this opportunity without the overwhelming expenses is even greater. I know firsthand, the expenses of college education, with my children's expenses, and would probably never have the opportunity to check this off my bucket list, without this opportunity.

I want to thank Rockhurst University and all the donors that have made this program available. I am proud to have been chosen to participate and be a part of the program.

I soon will be a graduate of Rockhurst University and couldn't be prouder and more thankful for this opportunity.

Villanova’s 50-year response to “A city of forgotten men.”

Kate Meloney, Director of the Villanova University Program at SCI -Phoenix, PA

The Villanova Program at SCI Phoenix is Pennsylvania’s largest and oldest continuously running degree-granting prison education program. The Villanova Program is an outgrowth of Villanova’s mission and provides students with an excellent education that cultivates knowledge, understanding, and intellectual courage for a purposeful life in a challenging and changing world.

Established in 1972, this in-person program currently enrolls 70 students and is offered at SCI Phoenix, a 3,830-bed maximum security prison on the outskirts of Philadelphia, PA. Students enrolled at SCI Phoenix are not charged tuition and do not pay for books. To date, 98 alumni have received a Bachelor of Liberal Arts degree from Villanova University.

Villanova University’s steadfast support of the Villanova Program at SCI Phoenix reflects our Augustinian Catholic values and belief in the inherent worth and dignity of all individuals. Villanova University, founded in 1842, is a Catholic Augustinian higher education community committed to excellence and distinction in the discovery, dissemination, and application of knowledge. The University provides a comprehensive education rooted in the liberal arts where community members share a commitment to the Augustinian ideals of truth, unity and love, and dedication to service to others.

As such, it is our firm belief that the creation and operation of the Program at SCI Phoenix is a moral imperative in direct response to Villanova’s mission statement as an Augustan institution. The students who are enrolled in Villanova’s Program at SCI Phoenix are Villanova students without exception. Full-time faculty teach in-load and are not allowed to teach as adjuncts or as overload. The curriculum, the professors, and the academic rigor are identical to what is found on the main campus. These guardrails ensure that we maintain a program that adheres to Villanova’s values and beliefs and enhances our students’ college experience.

It is insufficient to organize a higher education program at the local prison out of a misplaced act of charity. The university itself must be rooted in the belief that education is a right that must be afforded to everyone within the community and must acknowledge its responsibility to do so. Far too often, this charge is hefted onto the shoulders of an eager professor without appropriate support from their university. This usually ends poorly.

Several of our students remember the day in 1994 when Pell grants for incarcerated students were rescinded by the signing of the Crime Bill Act. They were sure that their academic journey had come to an end. However, because Villanova University knew that it had a moral duty to provide higher education to this community, the program continued. Our students tell this story as it is an indication that their education has immense value to society at large.

Education is the key to a healthy and vibrant community. About five years ago, I escorted a new professor to her classroom and as she looked upon the sea of men in brown and said, "It's like a city of forgotten men." Those forgotten men have voices that must be amplified, and it is our duty as an institution of higher learning to provide the resources for that amplification. These students must not be forgotten.

Why Higher Education in Prison Matters

Courtney Everett, Program Director, St. Louis University's Prison Education Program

When I think about why this work matters, I cannot help but recall a recent encounter I had at my gym. I was sitting in a sauna with two local law enforcement officers who were discussing upcoming changes in their department. They took turns enthusiastically describing their pleasure with the departure from their past leadership and how much they were going to enjoy the benefits of the new administration: a windfall of new equipment. During a brief pause in their conversation, I interjected by asking the officers what I believed to be a very valid question. "Then what?" I asked.

After receiving confused looks from the two, I restated the question, asking, "Now that you have all the material resources you need, what will you do next?" I imagine that the two officers took me as another in an extensive list of unappreciative law enforcement critics. However, that was not the case. While listening to their conversation, I began to contemplate my position as program coordinator of Saint Louis University's Prison Education Program. I thought of the long days spent organizing spreadsheets, researching, and writing grants. The hours spent either staring at computer screens waiting for ideas to jump out or watching the clock waiting for an opportunity to leave the office. I thought about those 2am flashes of inspiration or the meetings that lead to meetings, then more meetings. I realized how easy it is to become so consumed with the day-to-day operational aspects of doing a job, that you can lose sight of what it is all about and stop imagining what it would be like the day your work is complete. This is especially easy for those of us who work to serve others. It seems like our world has become so depraved that "servant of the downtrodden" has become a job title rather than a calling. And for those of us who work in higher education, this has become even more evident.

On July 1, 2023, the Department of Education's amendment of the Higher Education Act of 1965 made individuals incarcerated in both federal and state correctional institutions eligible to receive Pell Grants to fund their going to college on the inside. Since this day, there has been an influx of new higher education in prison programs throughout the U.S. It seems like we are moving toward a day where there will be a college classroom in every prison in the U.S. If that day comes, I am sure that will be a great day for them. But maybe not so much for us.

By us I mean members of Catholic, Jesuit institutions such as Saint Louis University who adhere to the teachings of the Society of Jesus. Our mission is not to make depraved and inequitable places such as prison more comforting. Our mission is to create a world where more people are afforded the opportunity to realize the talents and abilities given to them by God. Our goal is to heal broken populations and to bring occasions of grace and compassion to broken institutions. And there are very few places more in need of this than prison.

Therefore, by bringing higher education programs into prisons, we are doing more than creating a deeper pool of college students, we are creating advocates who return to underserved communities as examples of how higher education empowers one to improve the quality of one's own life and the lives of those around us. This is especially true for Jesuit higher education. When we bring Jesuit higher education into prisons, we are not merely creating more alumni for our universities, we are creating disciples who go forth spreading the gospel. Every student who enters our programs leaves with an assignment to be the change that they want to see in the world. Every administrator, staff, and faculty in a Jesuit prison education program is doing more than fulfilling their job requirements, they are fulfilling the call of Matthew 28 to go forth and make disciples.

Men and Women With and For Others Researching Jesuit Higher Ed in Prison

Annie Phoenix, PhD Executive Director of Jesuit Social Research Institute
at Loyola University New Orleans, Louisiana

In a 1973 speech, Pedro Arrupe, SJ, then Superior General of the Society of Jesus, reflected, "Today our prime educational objective must be to form men-and-women-for-others; men and women who will live not for themselves but for God; men and women who cannot even conceive of love of God which does not include love for the least of their neighbors; men and women completely convinced that love of God which does not issue in justice for others is a farce."

Accordingly, at Loyola University New Orleans, our mission is "to prepare students from diverse backgrounds to lead meaningful lives with and for others". One of the ways that we give life to this mission is through the Loyola at Rayburn program, which provides for-credit courses to 40 incarcerated men and 15 correctional employees at a medium security state prison in Louisiana. I am fortunate to be the Executive Director of the Jesuit Social Research Institute at Loyola that leads the program. In my position, I've witnessed the creation and formation of this program over the past two years and been able to experience the uniqueness of Jesuit education for students in prisons.

In prison education programs there is a temptation to believe that colleges and professors are giving the gift of education to those who wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity; like pouring into an empty cup. Instead, as Fr. Curran, S.J. often reminds us, Ignatian spirituality calls for us to engage in a process of mutual transformation, whereby we accompany each other towards the end for which we were created. In Jesuit education we are called to work together with our students and within our communities to meet the challenges of society.

This summer, I co-taught a course at Rayburn Correctional Center with Jarrod Wall, a formerly incarcerated PhD student from Tulane University. Jarrod has an impressive resume in prison education starting from his own experiences as a participant and leader of a program during his 26 years of incarceration in Indiana. Over the past few years, Jarrod has worked with multiple higher education in prison programs to design participatory evaluations. Participatory program evaluation is a methodology that involves program participants as co-researchers in the design and implementation of the evaluation process. Instead of researchers conducting research *on* and *about* subjects, they work *with* communities to develop and implement research goals and

projects. The process is reminiscent of the Jesuit value of accompaniment which encourages us to work side by side on equal terms.

The course started with Eddie Ellis' open letter on humanizing language and grounded our work together first in our shared humanity. Next, we introduced the concept of participatory evaluation, while teaching a brief history of higher education in prison and Jesuits in education and prisons. Students were drawn to the Mission Priority Examen, an evaluation that occurs every 5-7 years at every Jesuit college and university and explores the distinction of what it means to be a *Jesuit* higher education program. We asked ourselves the questions: Do the characteristics of Jesuit higher ed apply in prison education? What about religious diversity? What does Catholic education mean when the vast majority of our students at Rayburn are not Catholic? Is there something distinctive about *Jesuit* higher education in prison programs? How do we measure success in our program?

One of the desires that our students have expressed repeatedly is to use this evaluation to better understand the impact of the program not only on individuals, but within the larger context of the prisons and communities that they serve. Students want to contribute to their communities both inside and outside of Rayburn. One student offered the example that he is a tutor in the high school equivalency program at the prison, where students often struggle to pass the writing section of the exam. After taking a course in Critical Reading and Writing, he has been a more effective instructor and helped many more people to achieve their educational goals. Other students shared how their education is positively impacting their relationships with their families and even encouraging their children to pursue higher education. Students are seeking service opportunities and looking outside themselves to understand the impact of our program outside of the traditional higher ed in prison metrics of recidivism and employment. Just like on campus, the real measure of Jesuit education in the prisons "lies in who our students become" and how they serve others (Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J.,).

At Loyola, we are working closely with students to develop a participatory evaluation based on the example of the Mission Priority Examen that captures the uniqueness of our work together and contributes to a larger understanding of Jesuit education and education in prisons broadly. In Spring 2024, we are evaluating our own program and then sharing this resource with JPEN members who will hopefully incorporate similar evaluation practices. We imagine our students collaborating across states to lead site visits through zoom to learn from peer-programs and support future development.

I'll conclude with the reflections of one of our students as he was entering the evaluation course this summer.

"It's been really heavy on my soul to try to figure out HOW and WHY Loyola has meant so very much to me. I expected to love it because I loved past college experiences. I expected to benefit in a multitude of ways from being a part of it. I did not expect it to change me so thoroughly, to open my eyes to heretofore unforeseen vistas of possibility. I didn't expect to find peace and true joy, or a new purpose and meaning in life. But found it I have, and in spades. I want to understand the how's and the why's because if I can have it, why can't I capture it in a

bottle in some kind of way to share it with others? Education that is truly emancipatory. This leads me to wonder if there is something specific about the Loyola program which leads to this kind of response or is it something else? Can it be measured? How? What about benefits of the program that go beyond just the students and faculty? Is there a way that you could somehow track and measure the positive effects of, say, the programs in JPEN over a period of time against other HEP programs that do not have an interest in the entire person as part of their goals? I can't help but wonder if the "Jesuit" part of the whole enterprise has more than a little to do with what sets it apart."

Jesuit education encourages educators to accompany our students not only in courses, but also in research and program development, as well as larger ambitions of social change. Pedro Arrupe, S.J. emphasized that, "education imparted in Jesuit schools will be equal to the demands of justice in the world." Prisons expose many demands for justice and also offer us an opportunity to work side-by-side with our students to become men and women with and for others in order to build a better world.

LOYNO program at Rayburn Correctional Facility (approved for publication)

Biblical Imagery and Prison Education

Andrew Skotnicki, PhD, Professor, Religious Studies, Manhattan College
Director, E3MC program at Rikers Island, New York

Let us reflect on Paul's exhortation in Romans 10. After declaring his prophetic universalism, "the same Lord is the Lord of all, enriching all who call upon him," Paul then asks "But how can they call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach?" Like all great literature, the passage is evocative. It instructs and elicits, standing as an inspiring portrait and a didactic lesson. What it reveals is eternal and its message resonates in the heart and imagination of the hearer. Yet, as Paul notes, this lesson's meaning can become gibberish if the listener has not been prepared through prior instruction or self-discovery, or if their imagination has not been sufficiently tutored to accommodate the imparted vision.

The home of our human endeavor, the foundation for the kind of person we seek to become, is found in the images that we have of ourselves. The guiding images within us inform and guide the outcome of those myriad conflicts, challenges, and sufferings that arise in the inevitable course of our lives. William James called such images "the center of personal energy." It is upon such images that our emotions and our reason seize to help guide our behavior in a way that conforms to these formative self- portraits that dwell within our souls.

What does all this have to do with prison education? Just about everything. Scholars for the past few generations have underscored that a child's image of the man or woman he or she will become is tethered to the roles and achievements of the adults, or peers, who have had the most impact on their development. Those who love, strive and struggle to survive in some of the most challenging places in our country face acute challenges in this life work of forming images that can guide us through the greatest adversity. These struggles constitute the real education that countless children receive even before they go to school. And the results of this are revealed in the fact that the chances of a black male in America to spend time behind bars (approximately one in every three) are much higher than they are to graduate from college (approximately one in every five). Nearly three of four black males who do not finish high school will become involved in the criminal justice system. The demographics of our jails and prisons bear witness to the power of labelling and its accompanying narrative of deviance and social immobility to meld with one's self-image. A formerly incarcerated gentleman, raised in the projects in Brooklyn, and now taking classes at our college was asked what it was like being incarcerated on Rikers Island. He responded: "it wasn't difficult at all; it was just like the neighborhood in which I grew up."

Prison education is meant to address that social and human tragedy played out endlessly in all our nation's places where work has disappeared, be they in large post-industrial cities or in our countless small towns of rural and post-rural America. Mark's gospel (6:34) tells us that when Jesus "went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them . . . and he began to teach them many things." Surely, Jesus was instructing his listeners—largely the poor, the sick, and the discarded—of the beautiful image of personal and social flourishing that is their birthright as children of God; that they are not what others label them to be. Our confined brothers and sisters are often unaware of the internal shackles that ensnare them. Education is as much a tutoring of the imagination as of the mind. It is also a doorway, a milestone, and the most important commodity in elevating the life prospects of the incarcerated. But how can our poorest citizens strive for a more just life and society if they do not believe? And how can they believe "if they have not heard" the "good news"? And how can they hear and ignite their imaginations without those who will teach?

An Academic Journey to our Shared Humanity

Malia McAndrew, PhD, Professor, History,
& Richard Clark, PhD, Chair, Sociology and Criminology
and Co- director of John Carroll University Prison Education Program
John Carroll University, Clevelenad, Ohio

The study of the liberal arts on our Jesuit campuses is often envisioned within serene settings: students nestled behind books in quiet corners of the library or engaged in discussion around seminar tables under vaulted ceilings. In addition to these traditional places of inquiry and exploration, in recent years our teaching practice has also begun to take place in an equally profound, though less conventional, educational environment: the confines of a local prison.

With names like "Modern Social Problems" and "Women in the Contemporary World" courses offered at the Northeast Reintegration Center, a minimum-security women's prison in Cleveland, Ohio are identical to those taken eight miles away on the campus of John Carroll University. Part of the university's integrative core curriculum, they are grounded in humanistic inquiry. They help students to read critically, communicate effectively, and engage deeply in meaningful dialogues with one another. Conducted in a setting that requires only a book, pencil, paper, and chairs, our prison-based courses still aim at the highest goals of liberal arts education – the transformation of the learner.

To do this, our classes welcome two distinct learner groups. The first is comprised of women incarcerated at the facility who have opted into this rigorous academic course of study over, or alongside, various vocational trainings and re-entry programs. The second group is composed of traditional campus-based undergraduates, who make a 25-minute journey by van to join this unique prison-based course each week. Both groups play a pivotal role in catalyzing the learning and development of the other, creating a dynamic and mutually enriching educational environment.

For the first group, the transformative power of the classroom starts with its ability to help learners redefine themselves as students, as opposed to criminals, inmates, or offenders. Many report feeling like forgotten, unnoticed, "throw away" people. By engaging in class discussions —posing questions, offering insights, and reflecting on new knowledge— students' intellectual abilities are validated and respected by their peers. This simple experience is profound, especially for women whose life story has included not only incarceration but all too often homelessness, domestic violence, sex trafficking and other situations of gross human indignity. College instills confidence, fosters agency, and restores a sense of humanity.

This learning experience is also revelatory for students who have taken all their other classes in traditional college classrooms. Here too, people are struggling. Most especially, 18-to-22-year-old students whose formative high school education was interrupted by the COVID pandemic. Some report high levels of anxiety, disconnection, and loneliness. In what the *Chronicle of Higher Education* has termed "an age of militant apathy," there's a tendency among many to enter a classroom, sit down, and immediately turn their attention to cell phones. This is not the case in prison. The mere act of transporting students beyond the familiar confines of the campus and outside their ordinary day-to-day routine reminds them of the extraordinary opportunities they have before them. Once inside the prison, they are met by peers eager to engage and ready to discuss the assigned readings, sometimes having done more work than required. This raises the bar for everyone. Together students hear new perspectives, rethink assumptions, problem solve, and grow in connection to one another.

The greatest gift of teaching our prison-based courses lies not only watching students' individual transformations but in the growth of a truly enriching learning community. Talking, listening, and working with one another is powerful. They resoundingly tell us this every semester. The high impact of prison-based educational opportunities reverberates not just at John Carroll University, but across many of our Jesuit intuitions. If Jesuit schools collectively harness their strength in teaching the liberal arts, they can build a social infrastructure as grand and inspiring as our campuses' physical footprint. This collective effort is simple in that it requires only that we do the same things we have always done, only in expanded settings. And it is significant in that it offers a meaningful response to some of the most paramount challenges of our time —providing those who have too often been given the worst of everything, the best possible education. Such efforts would connect us both to our Jesuit Catholic mission and to our shared humanity.

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