



- FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE -
May 26, 2020

**Most Reverend Richard E. Pates, Apostolic Administrator for the Diocese of Joliet
Issues Statement on Solidarity and Compassion for Incarcerated People**

As Christians, we believe that every person is made in the image and likeness of God. We believe that God has given inherent dignity to every human being that cannot be lost or diminished. Additionally, we must live out a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable. These are the foundations of our Catholic social teaching.

Today, our imprisoned population find themselves extremely vulnerable to Covid-19. Jesus who himself was a prisoner, exemplified the greatest mercy for humanity by dying on the cross. It's from Christ's mercy for us that we practice mercy and compassion for people who are imprisoned.

Below are a few steps that can be taken to ensure that our brothers and sisters in jails and prisons are protected from the risks associated with Covid-19:

- The Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) should continue to prioritize early releases, especially of the elderly and medically vulnerable. This is particularly important since Illinois's prisons continue to be over capacity and social distancing is impossible with the current numbers housed there.
- IDOC should provide testing for all imprisoned persons as well as people who work in jails and prisons. We know that several hundred inmates and staff have already tested positive for the Coronavirus. By testing all inmates and employees, IDOC will be able to isolate those who test positive and protect others from getting sick.
- IDOC should provide those who are incarcerated and all prison and jail staff with personal protective equipment as well as soap and cleaning supplies. As reported by the Center for Disease Control and the World Health Organization, these are effective steps in slowing down the spread of the virus.
- IDOC should accurately and completely report COVID-19 statistics publicly so that family members and advocates are able to support incarcerated individuals appropriately.
- Finally, IDOC should, again, shut down the old Stateville F House as it was condemned a few years ago. Since the outbreak, it has been reopened to isolate some of the inmates. In order for it to be in acceptable and safe condition, the building would need to be entirely reconstructed; in its current state, it is inhumane to house any human being there.

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Though these steps are just the beginning of a comprehensive approach to halting the spread of Covid-19 inside our jails and prisons, they are a good start. It's crucial that we protect those persons who are incarcerated because though they are imprisoned, they should never be forgotten.

Recognizing that the pandemic has impacted all of us, we are thankful for all of the personnel serving on the frontlines as well as those advocating for the just and merciful treatment of all, especially the most vulnerable. We join together in prayer to uplift all of our vulnerable sisters and brothers and stand in solidarity with all victims of Covid-19, wherever they may be in the world.

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Anyone with questions or who is seeking ways to get involved is asked to contact the diocesan Restorative Justice Committee led by the Justice and Peace Ministry of the Office for Human Dignity. Contact: Edith Avila Olea, Justice and Peace Associate Director is eavilaolea@dioceseofjoliet.org.