

The Jail Ministry of Otsego and Schoharie County

CORRESPONDENCE MINISTRY

Jail Ministry of Otsego and Schoharie County
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You can bring hope, compassion, and the Gospel into a lonely environment. Prisoners are often isolated from family and friends. Often their relationship with a Christian pen pal is their only connection with the outside world. Imagine the witness it is to a prisoner when the only person who will write and be a friend is a Christian. You will have the opportunity to engage in prison ministry without ever actually entering a prison.

Many lonely men and women are currently in prison. They have nothing to look forward to, some are on death row or locked in their cells 23 hours of everyday and most prisoners never receive mail. They have become the forgotten part of society their existence spent locked away in cold houses of concrete and steel. These prisoners have become “out of sight, out of mind” to their family, friends and loved ones; that is if they were fortunate to have any of those. Like you and I, these prisoners feel pain, they feel the ache of loneliness, they feel the guilt of their past but they also can feel the happiness of receiving a simple letter written expressly to them. Mail to the prisoners are treasured keepsakes and reminders that they are still a part of society, that they are not alone and that they are worth something

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING INMATES

Do not use your home address for writing inmates. Use a church address or a private P.O. Box address. If you do not have these available to you, you may use the jail ministry P.O. Box as your return address. Our address is: JMOC, P.O. Box 1023 Cooperstown, NY 13326 We will then send you their response. I know it takes a little more time this way, plus postage, but it's worth it for safety reasons.

Until you establish a relationship with your new pen pal, in your first letter it is always best to keep it basic and avoid sharing too much personal information. Keep it light and upbeat, you can always respond to something they have written in their ads and you can write a bit on current events since most have been cut off on what is going on in the world today. What you might think is mundane and boring will actually fascinate them since the world they live in is very small and unchanging.

You should put the DOC Number and/or the name of the prisoner on the top right of each page of your letter, this will help get your full letter to the prisoner in case your letter gets loose since all incoming mail is opened and checked over.

Make sure to only put the return address and the prisoner's address on the envelope. Make sure it is legible. You also need to put the return address in the body of your letter – most often the envelope is confiscated. Please don't use ANY mailing labels.

DO NOT use any stationary (paper, cards, envelopes) that has been embedded with any foreign matter such as decorations, leaves, metal, etc., this can cause your letter to be confiscated and rejected. Also it is advisable not to decorate your envelope with stickers or photos either.

Be PATIENT. Mail moves extremely slow behind prison walls because all mail to inmates must be opened by prison personnel and inspected before being delivered to the prisoner. Mail from inmate to you also will be inspected. Some facilities do not have any mail services on weekends so please be PATIENT. As anxious as the prisoners are to

receive your letter, the prisoners are also just as anxious for you to receive their response.

DO NOT send anything in your letters such as gifts, stamps, confetti, glitter, stickers, money, postal money orders, blank envelopes, blank greeting cards, blank stationary. If you do, you will run the risk of having your letter confiscated and rejected as well as having the prisoner get a write up. We will find out what the facilities' policy is on what the prisoner can and cannot receive. This varies from jail to jail.

It is advisable NOT to write to two prisoner pen pals that reside in the same prison facility unless they are both aware and accepting of it. Doing so can cause unnecessary problems between the prisoners.

DON'Ts

- Don't give the inmate your last name or address
- Don't give the inmate your telephone number
- Don't send pictures of yourself or family
- Don't send non-approved writing materials, packages, laminated objects, pamphlets, etc.
- Don't agree or commit to visiting in person
- Don't refer specifically to where you live, work, or attend school
- Don't correspond with more than one inmate at the same time and institution
- Don't ask about their crime unless they wish to discuss it with you
- Don't give up on your writing if you don't get an answer quickly

DOs

- Do use your first name or a nick- name
- Do share favorite Scriptures and your love of God
- Do discuss your family (use first names only)
- Do discuss your interests and ask about his
- Do discuss special events in your life
- Do discuss your work with the church
- Do express your concerns, fears, and doubts about writing
- Do inquire about their faith, hobbies, family, friends, daily routines, etc.
- Do include prayers or poems that are uplifting and informative.