

# Center Offers Mothers a Place to Share

## They Can Tell Their Stories Without Judgment

Donna Liette, C.P.P.S.

One evening as I was sitting with a small group of 12-15 year-old boys locked up in Cook County Detention Center in Chicago, I heard over and over again as eyes teared up, "I miss my grandma." Or, "Could you call my mother?" Children yearn for maternal warmth in a cold cell.

My heart hurt that night as I drove home. I asked myself, "What are we doing to our children?" One boy was no bigger than the second graders I once taught.

I began to call the mothers and the grandmothers of these children and heard their loss, loneliness and sometimes their shame in these words: "I miss my child." "Where did I go wrong?" "Pray for me!" They were looking for answers, for strength, for God.

I felt the need to gather these women together in circle as did another of our juvenile detention center volunteers, Sara Nunez, so we began and slowly the circle grew. We begin our gatherings, which take place monthly on a Saturday morning, with brunch. Sometimes you hear

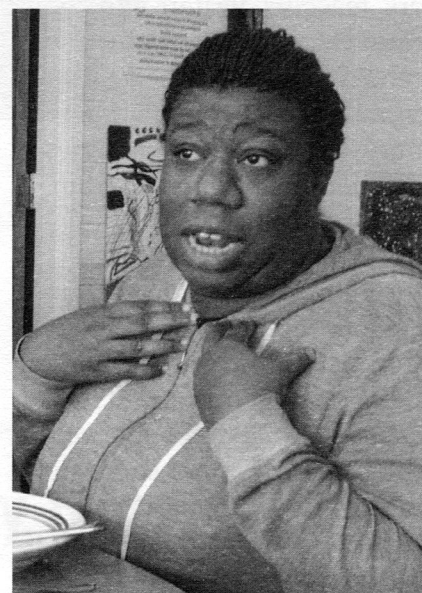
laughter as they share their stories around the brunch tables. Later they tell of how good it is to laugh in a safe place and not feel guilty. They tell how their laughter is as healing as their times of sharing stories or shedding tears.

One of the mothers, Julie Anderson, willingly shares her story:

"Some things in life never get easier. It's been 17 years since they took my son away in handcuffs on an early December morning. I can still see the slight young boy being led out of the front door to a waiting squad car.

"That was the beginning of the end of my normal life, my life where I could commiserate with friends about how great my children were doing, or how terrible things were; they had missed a homework assignment or come home 15 minutes late for curfew. When all of my friends talk about their children, I am always silent. What can I tell them? Should I share with them the heartbreak of having a child locked up? Could I do that without them judging me or him?

"Maybe I should tell them how hard it is to have your child locked away 365 miles from your home. How hard it is to get up at 5:30 a.m.; drive six hours, all for a maximum two



(Photos by Sr. Carolyn Hoying, C.P.P.S.)

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hour visit. How every time, they take him back, your heart breaks a little more. In the 17 years he has been locked up, we have never missed a visit. No matter how busy our



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*Reflections from the  
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Ministry of Reconciliation*

month, how low our bank account, or how bad the weather, we go, because, it's all our son has. Can I share this with my friends?

"When I was first invited to a circle I was doubtful. I was raised in a strict Irish Catholic home, and sharing our feelings was not encouraged. I lived in a 'just deal with it and move on' type of home. Which is what I did for 17 years. I really didn't talk about it, not even to my husband. Our pain is so real and close we couldn't share it. So I went to my first circle as a doubting Thomas.

"Circle has been an amazing experience for me. For someone who carried this burden alone for many years. I felt connected to other mothers and women; I felt I could actually brag about my son without being judged. I could tell these mothers some of my pain, my sorrow, but also my pride in my son. I could tell them he was an amazing, funny, creative adult, how he made me laugh even in a bad situation.

"I could actually accept that maybe I did not fail in my most important job, that of being a mother. I have learned in circle that there are people who care and accept. You can share without being judged, that I don't always have to be the strong one, and it's okay to be emotional. For this I say: Thank you. . . ."

And Sara Nunez, who volunteers with us, writes of her experiences: "I am a mother and a grandmother. I know the deep, abiding love that you feel toward those children that are your offspring. It is easy to learn to love children, even those who are not your own,

and to feel joy, sorrow, anguish, pain, etc., during various times and situations of their lives.

"However, it is impossible for me to know and feel what another mother feels when her child is in jail or has been the victim of violence. Only those who have been there can truly understand. I can only see the suffering in their eyes that comes from their broken hearts. It is, also, possible to see that the pain and suffering is lifted a little when one mom

realizes that there are others like her and together they can reach out and hold each other up, in spirit, thoughts and prayer.

"It's the cry of the blood heard in the voices of children and their moms and grand-moms that call all of us to find ways to bring near those far off and alone in their pain into healing circles."

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us. Our Lady of the Precious Blood, pray for us.

## Parish Mission a Success At St. Augustine Church

### Led by Deacon Ralph Poyo, Parish Energized

*Matt Schaefer, C.P.P.S.*

Recently, St. Augustine Church in Rensselaer, Indiana enjoyed a successful parish mission led by Deacon Ralph Poyo, who is based in Steubenville, Ohio. Precious Blood Companion Dubie Reichert heard about Deacon Poyo and invited him to come to St. Augustine. After preaching at the weekend Masses, Deacon Poyo presented talks on Monday and Tuesday both at the parish and at Saint Joseph's College. He also spoke to the children in our parish school and religious education program.

Deacon Poyo emphasized the need for each of us to embrace and strengthen our

Catholic identity and to recognize the vital connection between our Catholic beliefs and our everyday lives. In order for this to happen, we must experience the conversion that occurs when we encounter Jesus in a personal relationships through the life of the Church.

Along with catechesis, Deacon Poyo used personal witness and humor to make us aware of the forces, both inside and outside, that are weakening our Church. From the reactions of our parishioners, the mission was an unqualified success—we had even more people in attendance on the second night than on the first!

If anyone is looking to bring a lift to your parish, I highly recommend Deacon Poyo for a parish mission. For more information, visit [www.newevangelizationministries.org](http://www.newevangelizationministries.org)