

# The Prison Ministry Honors Families

**December 2025  
Holiday Edition**

## Restoring the Bonds of Family: A Season of Reflection and Hope

Written by:  
Prison Ministry Leadership  
Team

As we enter the holiday season, our hearts and minds naturally turn toward family. We think of gathering around tables, sharing traditions, and the comfort of being with those we love. Yet, for the justice-impacted community, this season often highlights a painful void: the separation caused by incarceration.

In the spirit of compassion and restoration, the Prison Ministry is reflecting on—and preparing for—one of our most vital missions: the Mom and Me Camp. This initiative is more than just a getaway; it is a lifeline for families torn apart by the justice system.

Our goal was to provide 40 children with a rare and precious gift: the time to simply "be" with their mothers. Away from the sterile environment of visitation rooms, these children were able to play games, engage in craft projects, and, most importantly, renew their relationships with their mothers in a supportive, joy-filled setting.

We know that when a mother is incarcerated, the impact ripples through the entire family structure. Often, grandmothers, aunts, and sisters step in to fill the gap, taking on the monumental task of raising these young children.

In this newsletter  
you can expect:

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Mom and Me Camp

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A Word From the  
Chair

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Devotional Series  
"We are a Praying  
Ministry!"

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Community Events

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Virtual Member  
Spotlight

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Ministry Leaders

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A Mother's Cry

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# From the Chair

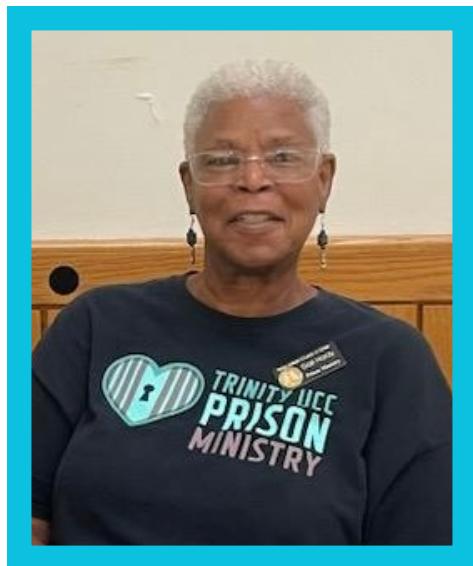
The TUCC Prison Ministry Chair, Gail Hardy shares reflections about 45 years of service to the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated

TWENTY-SIX YEARS—HOW QUICKLY TIME HAS FLOWN. AS I REFLECT ON MY JOURNEY WITH THE PRISON MINISTRY, I REMEMBER THE FRIENDLY SOFTBALL GAMES AT IYC-ST. CHARLES, WHERE WE CHALLENGED THE YOUNG PEOPLE TO SOFTBALL GAMES, AND MY FIRST EYE-OPENING TOUR OF STATEVILLE—WHAT AN INTENSE EXPERIENCE! THANK YOU, DARYLE, FOR BRINGING HUMOR TO SUCH A SOMBER PLACE. I ALSO RECALL MY FIRST VISIT TO THE CC WOMEN'S DIVISION—TEARS STREAMED DOWN MY FACE AS I WITNESSED WOMEN FROM ALL BACKGROUNDS BEING HELD AWAITING TRIAL. THE EARLY DAYS OF MOM & ME COME TO MIND: TRAVELING LONG DISTANCES ON UNCOMFORTABLE YELLOW SCHOOL BUSES TO THE PRISONS, FILLED WITH CHILDREN BUZZING WITH ANTICIPATION, AND MOTHERS WAITING ANXIOUSLY TO SEE THEM ONCE WE ARRIVED. ALL THESE EVENTS AND MORE RESULTED IN LASTING PARTNERSHIPS IN SERVICE TO THE INCARCERATED AND THEIR FAMILIES.

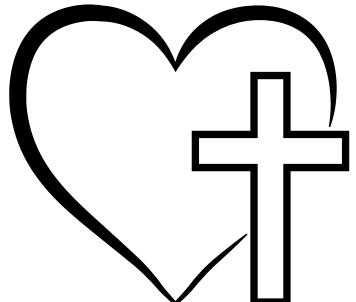
LOOKING BACK, I REALIZE HOW EACH EXPERIENCE—BOTH JOYFUL AND CHALLENGING—HAS SHAPED MY UNDERSTANDING OF SERVANTHOOD, AND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A WITNESS FOR JUSTICE WHILE SHOWING THE LOVE OF CHRIST TO THOSE AFFECTED. AS I LOOK TOWARD THE FUTURE, I AM INSPIRED TO CONTINUE THIS WORK WITH RENEWED PURPOSE, KNOWING THAT EVERY EFFORT, NO MATTER HOW SMALL, CONTRIBUTES TO THE HEALING AND RESTORATION OF LIVES.

I DIDN'T CHOOSE THE PRISON MINISTRY...THE PRISON MINISTRY CHOSE ME. PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4

ASE',  
GAIL HARDY/CHAIR, PRISON MINISTRY



Merry  
Christmas



# Devotional Series

From the Desk of Deacon Ed,  
Prison Ministry Chaplain

Trinity UCC 2025 Churchwide Theme

**Living As Disciples**  
**July- September Focus**  
**The Beauty of Sacred Acts**

**“...I was in prison and you came to me.”**  
**Matthew 25:36**

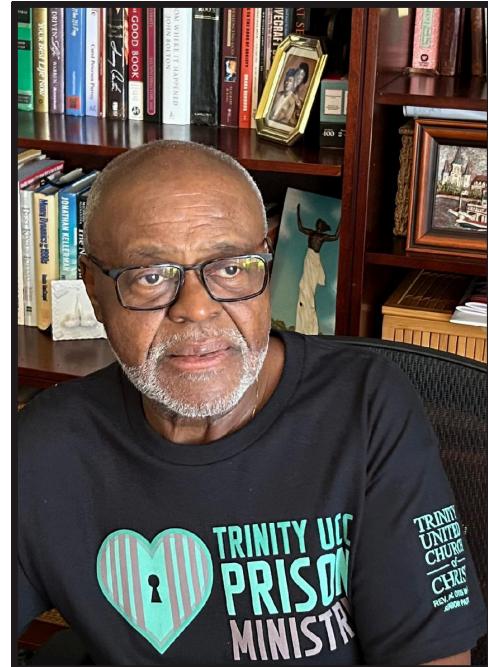
## **A Holiday Season of Hope for Mothers of the Incarcerated**

The holiday season is often portrayed as a time of joyful reunions, warm gatherings, and family traditions. But for many mothers whose son or daughter is behind bars, this time of year can be one of deep emotional conflict—love that aches, hope that wavers, and heartache that is rarely acknowledged in the glittering glow of holiday celebration.

Some mothers travel for hours, often burdened by financial stress, just to share a few precious hours behind Plexiglas or under watchful eyes. These visits can carry both joy and sorrow; joy in seeing their son or daughter's face, and sorrow in leaving them behind again.

Despite the distance, love does not falter. It endures, adapts, and persists in handwritten letters, in held-back tears, in whispered prayers. Many mothers fight tirelessly advocating for fair treatment, working to stay connected, or preparing for a future when their son or daughter will return home. The strength it takes to maintain hope in the face of uncertainty is a testament to the resilience of a mother's love.

It's okay to grieve the moments that won't be shared—the empty chair at the dinner table, the absence of a hug, or the sound of your offspring's laughter. Allow yourself to feel the sadness, but don't let it drown out your faith. God still sees you. He still loves you, your family and your incarnated son or daughter. And He is still working in ways unseen.



This season, lean into prayer as you stay connected. Every whispered prayer is a thread of love that reaches through prison walls. Write letters filled with encouragement, Scripture, and reminders of who your offspring is beyond their mistakes. These words can become a light in their darkness, a reflection of unconditional love that only a mother can give.

Find a community of mothers who understand. You are not alone in your pain. Sharing stories, tears, and prayers with others can bring comfort and renewed strength. Attend a support group such as our Prison Ministry's support group for families of the incarcerated that meets monthly or create your own circle of hope. Celebrate the love that still binds you, even when distance separates you. Even when your arms can't reach your son or daughter, your prayers can. And that, dear mother, is a powerful gift that no prison wall can contain.



# Prison Ministry 2025 Survey Results

## Highlights

### Insights from the 2025 Ministry Survey

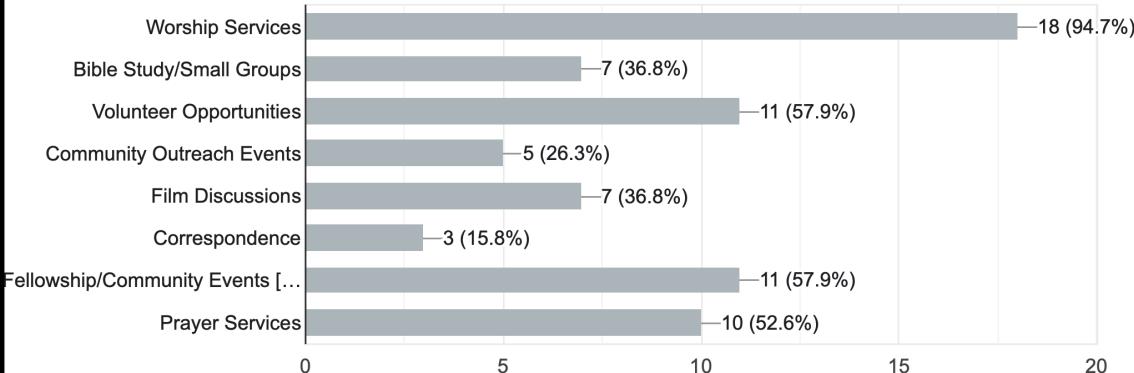
#### by Prison Ministry Leadership

As we review the feedback from our 2025 survey, a powerful theme has emerged from within our ministry family: a hunger for deeper connection. The results reflect a collective desire not just to serve side-by-side, but to grow side-by-side. Many of you expressed a strong wish for more intentional bonding opportunities to deepen relationships among ministry members, as well as more spaces dedicated to our own spiritual development and fellowship. This feedback reminds us that to serve effectively, we must also nurture the community and spirit within our own team.

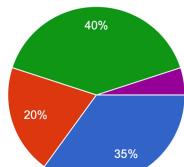
We were also incredibly moved by the specific practical commitments shared in the responses. One member, for instance, voiced a strong desire to increase in-person visits on weekends. Leveraging their past professional experience as an IDOC employee, this member generously offered to drive for these visits, bridging the gap between intention and action. This spirit of dedication—using personal gifts and history to fuel our collective mission—is precisely what continues to drive this ministry forward.

Which of the following church activities or ministries have you participated in during the last year?  
(Select all that apply)

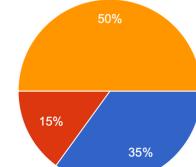
19 responses



How long have you been a member of the Prison Ministry?  
20 responses



Would you be interested in volunteering for any new church initiatives?  
20 responses



# Leadership



Gail Hardy, Chair

Gail is a dedicated servant leader of the Trinity UCC Prison Ministry, our charity organisation. She is known for compassionate leadership and sustaining our correspondence ministry and courtroom support efforts among many other leadership activities.



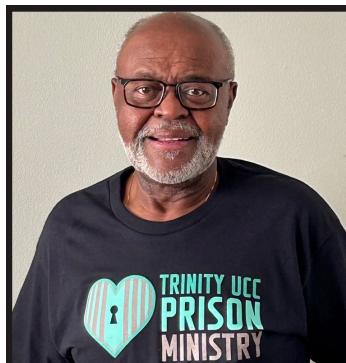
Pamela Small, Vice Chair

Pamela is a committed servant leader with the Trinity UCC Prison Ministry. She is known for her contributions to support our virtual members and is Editor and Chief of the Trinity UCC Prison Ministry Newsletter and Newsletter Committee.



Minister Phyllis Bean Johnson, Associate Pastor for Liberation & Outreach

Minister Phyllis is a servant leader for Liberation and Outreach and provides advocacy and oversight for the work of the Prison Ministry. She is known for her passion and commitment to helping others.



Deacon Ed Mason, Chaplain

Deacon Ed leads our prayer and worship efforts within the ministry. This includes his spiritual guidance in prayer and devotion during our monthly meetings. He also facilitates our prayer and worship services in-person, online, with our community partners, and our efforts at Cook County and Sheridan prisons.

## Prison Correspondence *Don't Forget To Write!*

Prison Correspondence  
*Don't Forget To Write!*

Prison Correspondence  
*Don't Forget To Write!*

### Tips for Establishing a Prison Correspondence Ministry

Our Correspondence Ministry reaches the most vulnerable in the justice-impacted community.

We have new officers for 2026.

- Pamela Felder-Small, Chair
- Jonathan Thomas, Vice-Chair
- Gail Hardy, Treasurer
- Gail Hardy, Admin. Sec
- Recording Sec., Vacant.



# In the Community



Gift Bags for Women in Cook County Jail

Written by Dyanne Elzia

During this wonderful time of the year, we are preparing to assemble three hundred (300) gift bags for women housed at Cook County Jail. Since the pandemic we are not currently visiting the women's division for a worship service, when we would hand them the gifts as they left the worship service. So, we continue with excitement to prepare gift bags for our sisters. Eight to ten faithful ministry members meet at the church and fill the bags with toiletries, socks, washcloths, blank note cards, and more. What the jail allows them to have may vary from year to year. Then another faithful ministry member delivers the gift bags to the jail. We want our sisters to know that our ministry loves them. Our church loves them. Jesus loves them. We want to brighten their day and lift their spirits. That warms our hearts.

## Virtual Member Spotlight:



Our church family extends far beyond our physical walls. Whether you worship from the sanctuary or your living room, you are an essential part of this body. If you are in the building, greet our online family in the livestream chat. If you are online, consider joining a hybrid small group.

Let's collaborate on service projects and prayer partnerships, ensuring that while miles may separate us, our mission unites us. Together, we are one ministry, serving one God.

In this newsletter edition, we celebrate our virtual member Susan Fowler, who joins our virtual fellowship and worship activities from Kansas.



## Trinity UCC Prison Ministry Collaborates with A Mother's Cry

The mission of the TUCC Prison Ministry extends far beyond the walls of correctional facilities. While ministering to the incarcerated is vital, our calling also compels us to support the forgotten victims of mass incarceration: the families. When a parent or loved one is incarcerated, the entire family unit—especially mothers and children—faces immense financial, emotional, and spiritual challenges.

This is why our collaboration with organizations like **A Mother's Cry** is so critical. A Mother's Cry is dedicated to empowering mothers of incarcerated children by providing community outreach, lifestyle resources, and a crucial network for mental health and spiritual healing (<https://www.amotherscry.org/>)

By partnering with A Mother's Cry, our Prison Ministry can become a more powerful, holistic source of care. We are not just ministering to individuals; we are actively addressing the generational impact of the justice system.

Through our unified efforts, we can connect families with the tangible support they need, embodying compassion and fostering restoration for those grieving the cross of injustice. Supporting the family is supporting the future.

**"I WAS IN PRISON AND YOU  
VISITED ME."  
MATTHEW 25:36**

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