



DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS

Prison and Jail Ministry

“Radical Forgiveness”

Catholic Prison and Jail Ministry partners with prison program students to offer third annual Restorative Justice conference

GRAND RAPIDS – “Radical Forgiveness” is the theme of the Third Annual West Michigan Restorative Justice Conference organized by inmates of Richard A. Handlon Correctional Facility in Ionia. Hosted by the Catholic Diocese of Grand Rapids’ Prison and Jail Ministry the 2019 conference will be held on Saturday, Oct. 19, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Cathedral Square Center in Grand Rapids.

The conference originated three years ago when students of the Calvin Prison Initiative (CPI) program at R. A. Handlon had the idea and the desire to reach out and create a space in which the public could learn about restorative justice practices. Each year, the students have partnered with a community organization who hosts the conference; Calvin College hosted in 2018 and the Saint Benedict Institute on the campus of Hope College hosted in 2017.

This year’s conference keynote speaker will be Kate Grosmaire, author of “Forgiving my Daughter’s Killer, A True Story of Loss, Faith and Unexpected Grace.” Through a pre-recorded presentation, Eric Boldizar, Handlon inmate and Calvin Prison Initiative student, also will address conference attendees. Additional speakers and panelists include, Nate Johnson of Fresh Coast Alliance, Officer Dan Myers of the Grand Rapids Police Department; and Angie Sprank of the Michigan Department of Corrections’, Offender Success program.

As stated in previous conferences and emphasized by the CPI students of R. A. Handlon, restorative justice is a process that “seeks to encourage peace within communities by healing the wounds of injustice through effective communication and accountability and offering hope for restoration.” Additionally, “restorative justice addresses the harm caused by crime while holding the offender responsible for their actions, by providing an opportunity for the parties directly affected by the crime – victims, offenders and communities – to identify and address their needs after the crime.”

One of the primary goals of the conference is educating the community about restorative justice and encouraging the creation and implementation of restorative justice practices within the local criminal justice system. These practices include developing legislative policy that offers victims an opportunity to participate in restorative justice circles prior to

conviction. Restorative justice circles encourage meaningful engagement and accountability and provides an opportunity for healing, reparation and reintegration.

Established over 40 years ago, the Diocese of Grand Rapids' Prison and Jail Ministry provides a Catholic presence to incarcerated men and women and those returning from incarceration within the diocese. The ministry includes more than 150 active priests, deacons and volunteers who bring messages of hope into 21 jails, prisons and juvenile detention centers around West Michigan. This mission of hope and accompaniment is accomplished through prayer, Catholic religious services including holy Communion, Bible study and the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA).

In addition to programs within the facilities, Prison and Jail Ministry helps connect formerly incarcerated individuals returning to society with a Catholic parish through, GROW (Guiding Returning Citizens to Our World). This newly-developed outreach ministry, helps break the cycle of recidivism by educating parish communities on the spiritual needs of returned citizens and their families and works to create welcoming faith communities by building awareness and relationships.

Admission to the conference is free, but registration is required. Click [here](#) to register. Cathedral Square Center is located at 360 Division Ave S., Grand Rapids, MI 49503. Free parking is available east of the building.