

# L.E.A.F

Listening, Encouraging & Assisting Families

Of the Incarcerated

Creating a  
Community of Compassion,  
Caring & Support



Diocese of Cleveland & Columbus

# Mission...

- The overarching Mission of the LEAF ministry is to proclaim the love of Jesus Christ in the form of comfort, support, assistance, and community, to all family and loved ones of the incarcerated in central Ohio, irrespective of individual faith affiliation.
- In full collaboration with the Diocese, our faith community will reach out in a boundless spirit of invitation and welcoming and gather those in need around a table of faith, love, trust, compassion, and support.
- We will develop additional outreach and assistance components as we grow in experience and understanding of the needs of our guests.



# Beginnings...



Catholic Diocese  
*of Cleveland*



## The Diocese of Cleveland

- Sister Rita Mary Harwood
- Began prison ministry in 1997
- Began LEAF at the parish level in 2014
- Now in 10 parishes located in 6 counties in NE Ohio



# Matt's Story...

- Matt began serving 18 years for two felonies in 2008
- His uncle/godfather, Bernie, offered petitions for him during daily Mass for years.
- After hearing this, his pastor, Fr. Dan, asked him if he would start a Prison Ministry at their parish.
- After a year of planning, it was decided to minister to the families of persons who are incarcerated and the parish invited Sr. Rita Mary to attend one of their meetings.
- After hearing the idea, Sister shared that the original Diocesan Prison Ministry plans included a ministry to families of the incarcerated but it was never initiated. She asked if they would consider taking it on.
- Bernie immediately replied “Yes, definitely!”
- Matt's mother, aunt and Bernie became part of the team.
- After deciding on the format, Bernie facilitated the first LEAF gathering in August 2014 at Holy Angels.
- They went out and trained the next two parishes within a few months.



# ARCH

## (Accompanying Returning Citizens with Hope)

Diocese of Columbus

- Launched in the winter of 2017
- An outreach project aimed to minister to and meet the needs of the formerly incarcerated (returning citizens) and to help local parishes become welcoming communities and essential support services on the road to reintegration and healing.
- Sponsored by the Catholic Diocese Office for Social Concerns, the Vincentian Ohio Action Network and is funded by the generous support of The Catholic Foundation.



# ARCH

## (Accompanying Returning Citizens with Hope)

### Programs

- **Education**
  - Helps parishes better understand returning citizens through presentations, workshops, providing educational small group materials, etc.
- **Accompaniment**
  - Provides training, referrals, and ongoing support for volunteers to accompany returning citizens.
- **Family Support (LEAF) Groups**
  - Offers training and support to parish leaders interested in forming a support group for families who have incarcerated loved ones.



# ARCH

## (Accompanying Returning Citizens with Hope)

### Programs

- **Business Network**
  - Helps educate, resource, and equip business leaders interested in offering employment opportunities to returning citizens.
- **Direct Needs**
  - Assists parishes interested in helping meet the tangible needs of people returning home from prison or jail. Items collected can be winter coats, personal hygiene items, house warming baskets, etc.



# Format...

- **A Time to Gather**
  - Taking time for coffee, cookies and community
- **A Time to Reflect**
  - Circling in reverent silence and/or personal prayer in a safe place where all are welcome and no one is judged
- **A Time to Share**
  - “Checking in” with personal introductions, updates, triumphs and tragedies, laughter and tears - totally voluntary



# Format...

- **A Time to Receive**
  - Presentations from invited guests, or sharing of helpful tips from our group members
- **A Time to Appreciate & Adjourn**
  - Expressions of love and support are abundantly offered and graciously received, both to God and to each other. Closing prayer is offered for those who wish to participate



# Getting a Group Started...

- **Obtain pastor's approval**
  - Set up a time to meet with your pastor and discuss LEAF. Provide information about the ministry and your passion and willingness to serve.
- **Be paired with a diocesan LEAF representative**
  - Once approved to start a LEAF group, contact the diocesan Office for Social Concerns (*614-241-2540* or *socmailbox@columbuscatholic.org*) to be linked with a diocesan LEAF representative. Your representative will assist you in getting your LEAF ministry started.



# Getting a Group Started...

- **Identify & train facilitators**
  - Identify group facilitator(s) who have a loved one who is incarcerated, has been incarcerated themselves, or has experience in prison ministry or facilitating support groups. Have all facilitators trained by your diocesan LEAF representative.
- **Determine date, time & secure a meeting space**
  - Plan when your group will start meeting and secure a comfortable and confidential space.



# Getting a Group Started...

- **Promote ministry**
  - Use provided flyers and bulletin inserts to start letting others know about LEAF.
- **Gather resources:**
  - Gather prayer cards, pamphlets, books, and other resources that may be of assistance to those in your group. Your diocesan LEAF representative can help with this.

3. Begin!



# Promoting Your Group

- Flyers
- Bulletin Inserts
- Catholic Times
- St. Gabriel Radio
- Parish Website
- Parish Social Media
- Word of Mouth



# Resources for Your Group

- Prayer Cards
- Books
  - Keeping Hope
  - An Imprisoned Heart
- Booklets
  - Ohio Department of Rehabilitation & Correction
  
- Website: <http://www.leafministry.org/>
  - First Days
  - Hope Filled Living
  - Going Home
  - Resources for Children



# Facilitating Your Group

## Housekeeping

- Sign-in sheet available
  - Completely voluntary
- Name tags
  - First name only
- Hand-outs and Literature available for taking
  - Your Diocesan Rep will assist you with this
- Confidentiality & safety is key!



# Facilitating Your Group

- Welcome newcomers and allow them to get oriented.
- Realize that the people who come to the sessions are in very different places, emotionally & culturally... Do not assume anything.
- Realize that having a loved one in prison is often felt just like a death in the family.
- No pressure to share - Allow them to open up at their own pace.
- Allow emotions to emerge, acknowledge them, and allow the Spirit to work.



# Facilitating Your Group

- Listen & be present. We are not here to solve problems.
- Respect and honor their pain, anger, fear, doubt, frustration, loneliness, grief.
- Be compassionate, empathetic, and understanding.
- No judgement permitted.
- Use silence & stillness.
- Understand that this is a PEER to PEER ministry - healing will come from the group.



# Sustaining Your Group

- Stay Focused on the Mission.
- Continue to spread the word.
- Remain Responsive to the needs of the group.
- Continue to find ways to add value for your guests.
- Encourage new ideas and Content
  - Christmas Cards
  - Speakers - Employment, Parole Officers, Prison Chaplains
  - Gatherings outside the group, picnics, retreat



## A Daily Prayer for Justice and Mercy

Jesus, united with the Father and the Holy Spirit,  
give us your compassion for those in prison.  
Mend in mercy the broken in mind and memory.  
Soften the hard of heart, the captives of anger.  
Free the innocent; parole the trustworthy.  
Awaken the repentance that restores hope.  
May prisoners' families persevere in their love.  
Jesus, heal the victims of crime. They live with the scars.  
Lift to eternal peace those who die.  
Grant victims' families the forgiveness that heals.  
Give wisdom to lawmakers and to those who judge.  
Instill prudence and patience in those who guard.  
Make those in prison ministry bearers of your light, for all  
of us are in need of your mercy!  
Amen.



# Questions?



DIOCESE *of*  
COLUMBUS

