



Face of the Church ~ Instrument of Mercy

After 13 years as pastor of Notre Dame des Victoires Parish in San Francisco, Marist René Iturbe has a new ministry with the Archdiocese of San Francisco serving as “the face of the church” to locally incarcerated men and women as the chaplain of detention ministry for San Francisco and Marin County jails. René speaks of being “an instrument of mercy” to those who feel alienated is an important part of the Society of Mary charism.

“My draw to this ministry is a bottom line belief that everyone is made in the image of God,” he said. “Even though you may not see any manifestations of it, that is what Jesus saw. Everyone has value before God and that’s the linchpin of human dignity.”

Incarcerated people “have burned through a lot of their relationships like you burn bridges,” said René, whose ministry may provide them with an opportunity to develop a relationship with God for perhaps the first time in their lives.

René described an inmate he met with years ago who had killed his estranged wife and her lover in a jealous rage. “God meant nothing to him. God wasn’t in his life, not even close.” After the crime, all relatives on both sides disowned him and he realized he was truly alone.

“One could say he was almost pushed into looking at his relationship with God hoping for God’s mercy and forgiveness,” and after a few months René felt the accused had come to “some kind of understanding that God was with him and that through God’s mercy he could begin again.”

When asked if such reconciliation is hard to believe, René responded: “Maybe, but on the other hand, the fact of the matter is that he was there praying with me to a God he didn’t know before. To me that was a palpable time, when somebody who had ‘all doors locked’ had something open up and he had some kind of hope.”

Adapted from <http://catholic-sf.org/CSF-home/article/csf/2018/01/23/marist-priest-and-former-pastor-begins-detention-ministry-job>

René (3rd from right) with detention ministry volunteers

