Celebrating Advent in Prison

By Annie Phoenix, Ph.D.

During the Advent season students at Rayburn Correctional Center are preparing for their final exams and waiting for a final grade to culminate their transition toward release. Our student Michel Kondkar, asked our students on Loyola’s main campus to send words of encouragement to his students in the prison. After receiving the notes, his students wrote of happiness and freedom. I wish I could share the whole book with you, but instead I offer this quote that I particularly value to our students at Rayburn:

“...We are excited to be connected with you thru Loyola. For some, this connection may be the closest they will get to freedom. So, do well for us!! Happy Holidays!”

Our students answered the call to sponsor a student at Rayburn by donating $2,857 to cover the full cost of a student for one year in the program. We are particularly grateful to Marcela Villareal de Panetta and Bernard Panetta for matching donations for five students. If you are interested in sponsoring a particularly grateful student, please contact our Advocacy Click To Join.

Finally, during the season of giving, I would like to thank the generous donors who have answered the call to sponsor a student at Rayburn by donating $2,857 to cover the full cost of a student for one year in the program. We are particularly grateful to Marcela Villareal de Panetta and Bernard Panetta for matching donations for five students. If you are interested in sponsoring a particularly grateful student, please contact our Advocacy Click To Join.

As you prepare to celebrate with your families this holiday season, please remember in your thoughts and prayers those who are not able to be with their loved ones, like our Loyola students at Rayburn.

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Happy Holidays,
Annie Phoenix

Wishing you a blessed Advent and Merry Christmas!

Annie Phoenix

Always a virtue to make the most of the moment and the necessary hours of our limited time. New Orleans.

HOPE:
Our student’s notes to the outside world also remind me of the Advent reflections in Prison Writings, by Alfred Delp, S.J., a Jesuit in Nazi Germany. Our students posted letters by Delp for a workshop held by the Christian values of love and community. When Fr. Delp was arrested by the Nazis, he was told that he would be released if he renounced the Jesuits. He chose instead to die for his faith. In the months leading to his execution he wrote a series of reflections on Advent and the day of his execution, offering a call to freedom: Fr. Delp wrote of happiness and freedom. I wish I could share the whole book with you, but instead I offer this quote that I particularly value to our students at Rayburn:

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PEACE:
During these long weeks of confinement I have learned by personal experience that person may be in the midst of circumstances and oppression, only when he is incapable of a great inner sense of depth and freedom. Anyone whose natural faculties are at the atmosphere of freedom, unassailable and undestroyed whenever barriers may be put on it, is already free; but such a person is not really a human being anymore. He is merely person, a prisoner. To enjoy freedom can only be attained if we have discovered the meaning of widening our horizons, the upward progress of the soul. We must mount above our own limitations. Human freedom is born in the moment of our contact with God, free love and community. Whether God takes us out of our limits by the sheer power of much suffering, causes us to have visions of truth, or pricks us into action by endless hunger and thirst for righteousness that preserves our soul. What really matters is the fact that we are called and we must be sufficiently awake to hear the call.

Our students have answered the call to sponsor students in our Loyola community. They are widening their horizons and seeking inner freedom from physical confinement. Education is a pursuit of knowledge and truth about ourselves and the world. As Fr. Delp reminds us, “The Truth shall set you free—and freedom, in every part of life is all that matters.”

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JOY:
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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY NEW ORLEANS

As our prison education program continues to grow, we need to make sure that each and every one has access to an exceptional educational experience. We can’t do it without your help. Sign up to our email list.

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