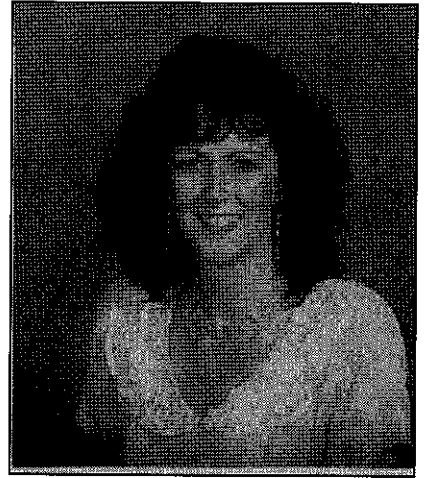


Justice and Mercy helps inmates reintegrate into society By Annie Ginder

Justice and mercy are two powerful words. One means to act fairly towards; the other is to show compassion towards an offender or enemy.

Jean Bickmire, a member of St. Mary's, works for a nonprofit volunteer organization called Justice and Mercy. It is dedicated to decreasing the effects of crime in our communities, increasing public safety and ministering and restoring both crime victims and offenders.



Parishioner Jean Bickmire

Much of our work focuses on the right people being convicted and offenders being treated and trained when sentenced and on successful reintegration. We also meet and talk with victims of crimes to ascertain how they are impacted and how we can help address their needs in our work in preventing repeat crimes with offenders. We advocate restorative justice which addresses the wrong done, talks on how the victim can be restored as much as possible and have the offender give restitution, not only monetarily as the state requires but in any other way possible to help the victim. This process may include mediation between the victim and offender, if both are willing and ready, says Bickmire.

There are obstacles though, in getting people to reach out to someone who has been incarcerated. Bickmire says, *The challenge is, of course, helping Church members to realize that most people coming out of prison are not out to hurt them but need direction that the Church can provide.* If she could convey one thing about Justice and Mercy to the people of St. Mary's, it would be the importance and blessings that you receive by helping all people in need, and those impacted by the justice system need positive spiritual guidance and support so they can believe that they have a purpose under God and are loved. *We are all God's children and are called to love and serve each other.*

Bickmire, who was born in Canada, moved to the United States when she was two. She has lived in Emporium and Warren, PA, and graduated from Penn State with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Advertising and Marketing. In 1998, she moved to Lancaster; she became involved with Justice and Mercy in 2002. *We visit prisons to be sure prisoners are given proper, humane treatment.,* she tells us.

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Children make cards for prisoners



One of the more difficult corporal works of mercy for us to carry out is *Visit the imprisoned.* Justice & Mercy, a volunteer organization that is committed to promoting safer communities through justice reform, asked St. Mary's Youth Ministry if our youth would be interested in helping to provide homemade Christmas cards for prisoners.

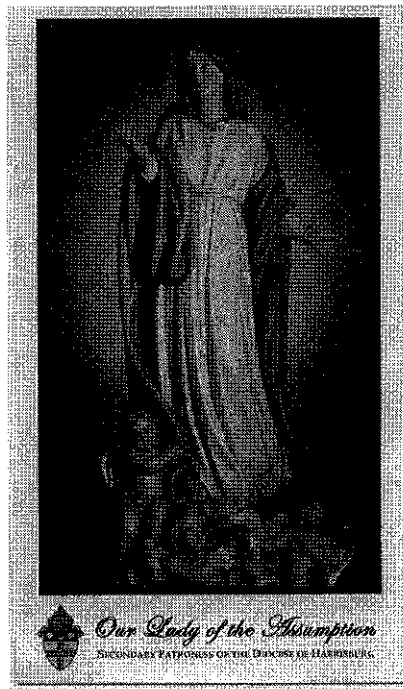
Students in grades four and seven from our Religious Ed classes, as well as those involved in the middle and high school youth ministries, had fun writing messages of hope and joy, and decorating cards with their Christmas artwork. Many of the children never even thought about those who would spend time away from their families during Christmas, and they showed care and compassion for them. Let us all offer prayers to prisoners and their families during this holy time of Christmas

Reflections of a blind pilgrim By Karen Morrisette

I like seeing things I've never seen before. The largest Roman Catholic Church in the U.S. and fourth largest in the world sounded like a must see, so I boarded the St. Mary's pilgrimage bus to the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC on Oct. 24. On the bus ride down, I anticipated the wondrous images and experiences that would most certainly unlock for me the very mysteries of our faith. Isn't that what going on a pilgrimage is all about? Boy, was I blind!

A key paradox of our faith is that *seeing is not believing*. Jesus says to Thomas, *Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed* (John 20:29). My eyes weren't graced by any miraculous visions that day. Many of the sights weren't particularly reverent or spiritual at all—long bathroom lines, crowded gift shop and cafeteria, people chit-chatting and eating during Adoration, even the towering mosaic of Jesus in the sanctuary was the angriest image of Christ I'd ever laid eyes on. I missed the intimacy of St. Mary's amid what I felt was a cold, vast space. I spent hours wandering from chapel to chapel, looking at everything yet seeing nothing. Four thousand faces from all over the diocese passed before my eyes, yet I, like a blind beggar on the side of the road, could only cry out in isolation,

Jesus, have pity on me!" What was I doing here? Why wasn't I seeing what I was supposed to see?



Often times we organize our own pity parties before we allow Jesus a chance to help us. I just wanted to get out of that place, sit outside in the rain, and wait for the bus ride home. The evil one would have liked nothing more. There I was with one foot in and one foot out of a massive door, that would have locked behind me if I exited. It must have been an angel of God who said to me, "Take courage, get up, Jesus is calling you." So I went back in, sobbing at this point, and found a priest whose comforting words and sense of humor helped turn my tears into laughter. I rejoined the congregation for a most beautiful and solemn crowning of Our Lady by Bishop Rhoades to start the Marian year in our diocese.

Jesus restored my sight that day. He heard my cry and didn't rebuke me. The pilgrimage He invites us on is not one of sight but of love, the very path of our Blessed Mother. Let Mary's pilgrimage, from her trusting, selfless, "Yes," to God's will to her unfaltering courage and devotion to Jesus at the foot of the Cross, be our map this Marian Year. That's what this journey to the shrine was all about. Now I see!

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Bickmire's role at Justice and Mercy has changed over the seven years that she has been there. It has included administrative work, working on public policy issues, helping people navigate through the criminal justice system and making sentence recommendations. She has written about these issues, done public speaking and helped facilitate state judiciary committee meetings to discuss correctional and judicial issues. She has also testified in state hearings.

With God all things are possible, she believes. We must be sure to welcome and reach out to prisoners as our brothers and sisters in Christ, assisting in their reintegration into society and helping them walk in the way of the Lord, says Jean.

When Bickmire isn't doing that, she is taking care of her 12-year-old Appaloosa horse. *I've had horses all my life in some capacity. I've raised my horse since he was a year old. His name is Rida Rainbow, but I call him Willy.*