

# Prisoner Visitation and Support

## By Jerry Knutson (almostluddite@yahoo.com)

I started visiting prisoners in 2007 in Hazelton, WV. I visit through Prisoner Visitation and Support (PVS) a national organization cofounded by Fay Honey Knopp, a Quaker. PVS is the only group authorized to visit prisoners in all federal and military prisons in the United States.

From PVS web site (<http://prisonervisitation.org/>): "Prisoner Visitation and Support (PVS) is a volunteer visitation program to Federal and Military prisoners throughout the United States. Our priority is to visit those prisoners who 1)do not ordinarily receive visits from family and friends, 2)want or need visits, 3)are in solitary confinement, 4)are on death row, and/or are serving long sentences. Our purpose is to provide prisoners with regular, face-to-face, contact from the world outside of prison to help them cope with prison life and prepare for a successful re-entry into society."

Quakers believe that if we live our lives well, we will see that of God in everyone. This makes Quakers uniquely qualified to help prisoners. Many of our 320 visitors nationwide are Quakers. PVS visitors believe in the power of a nonjudgmental presence. We attempt to visit anyone who requests a visit but some of our waiting lists are long because of a need for more visitors.

PVS is frugal but financially struggling because many people feel that prisoners got what they deserve and social change funding sources will not fund PVS because we don't do advocacy work.

**To become a visitor**, you should check the location of Federal Prisons to determine the distance to the prison and if you are willing to make the trip once/month (BOP.gov). You can also visit at Disciplinary Barracks (military) in Leavenworth, KS, Chesapeake, VA, Lejeune, NC, Charleston, SC, Fort Louis, WA, Miromar, CA, and San Diego, CA (men's barracks AND only Military Barracks for women). If you can make the trip monthly, then you need to complete an application on the PVS website. Next, you will be interviewed by an experienced PVS visitor. If approved by PVS, then the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) will send you application forms and BOP will perform a background check. When approved, PVS will give you a list of prisoner names and mail you a training manual. This process usually takes about a month. Before visiting you will need to complete four hours of training at the prison you will be visiting. On your first visit you will be accompanied by an experienced PVS visitor who will orient you to the visiting process.

**To visit**, Two weeks before the visit you send an email to BOP listing time, date of visit and names and numbers of prisoners to be visited. One week before the visit, you send post cards to the prisoners informing them when you will be visiting them. You do not use your own return address but use the PVS office address. Usually PVS visitors visit each prisoner for about an hour once a month. Three to four prisoners are usually visited during this visit. After the visit a brief report is emailed to PVS. Usually you visit the same prisoners each month.

As visitors, BOP and PVS require that we don't criticize the federal prison system or aren't involved in political action regarding federal prisons.

### **Query:**

Would you be willing to donate several hours a month to bring a little Light into one of the darkest places in the nation?