



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM | BEHIND BARS |

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Lights off at 10. Meals must be served at specific times. TV comes on at 8 in the morning. Court dates must be met. Inmates lose many privileges upon incarceration, but one thing inmates in the Coconino County Jail don't worry about losing is their religious freedom.

"Their religious rights are not revoked when they go into jail — many other rights are, a lot of things only become privileges. But to practice their faith as they see it is something that they are entitled to do," said Jim Bret, the detention programs manager for Coconino County Jail.

Bret has worked at the Coconino County Jail for more than seven years, with more than 24 years of volunteer service for various jails and prisons. From the detention programs manager position, Bret works with the jail to develop programs for the inmates, including religious services.

"For any religious or cultural program, it's voluntary — it's announced in the room that there's a bible study, worship service, or whatever it might be, and then they're welcome to come to it," Bret said.

At the Coconino County Jail, there are several religious programs offered including pastoral counseling, bible study, communion service and religious-literature distribution. For these services, various church groups in the community will volunteer to speak with the inmates.

"Volunteers who come in ... can say what they happen to practice but their service, whether it's a pastoral visitation or bible study, it's supposed to be nondenominational," Bret said.

When volunteer groups come in to talk to inmates, Bret will announce which group — Pentecostal, Catholic Church or the Church of Nazarene, for example — is bringing in the program.

Once the program and group have been announced, inmates are welcome to attend. With dorms holding anywhere from eight

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PAST INMATE

to 30 inmates, Bret said the average religious participants could be anywhere from 25 to 50 percent of the dorm, depending on the inmates at the time.

"The more programming you have, the calmer [the inmates] are, or the less chance they have of interacting in a hostile way," Bret said. "That's another reason for the programming, to not help with recidivism rates but to help their community relations in the dorm."

According to Bret, on a national average, if recidivism, or the rate to which inmates return, is reduced 5 to 10 percent, the jail is successful. With Coconino's programming, the staff is able to reduce recidivism by 30 to 35 percent.

"I don't want to proselytize on other jails, but most other jails in the state do not do anything close to what we do here," Bret said. "We are pretty progressive, contemporary, whichever term you want to use. Other jails do have some programming, just not to the extent we do."

With extensive religious programming, the jail also has an in-house chaplain, Jeffery Drayton, who comes in to give inmates one-on-one pastoral counseling.

"It used to be an on-call position, but they decided to expand it to a full-time position in order to provide opportunities for

people to make changes in their lives," said Drayton.

Drayton has an extensive background in law enforcement. Before retiring, he was commander for Coconino County Jail for eight years and had previous experience as an inmate relations, court, policing and criminal-investigations officer. Once retired, Drayton decided to leave law enforcement to pursue a higher education in seminary.

Almost three years ago, he was introduced to the opportunity of jail chaplain and could not resist.

"I think God's been preparing me all of this time to do this — I had no plans when I walked out of this door. I had a good career, I just never thought about going back, but I've always had a heart for the law enforcement," Drayton said.

As for religious programming, Drayton leads bible studies and worship services for inmates, even though there is not always consistency.

"At a prison you have guys who are doing 10, 15, 20 years, so you have a lot of consistency. In jail, you don't," Drayton said. "If it's a misdemeanor you could see them one week and the next week they're gone. And two weeks later you might see them back."

Past inmate Christian Kassoff was a heroin addict and was in and out of jail around 15 times, sometimes for a few nights, the longest was several months.

"I've never had the convict mentality — jail always scared the s*** out of me," said Kassoff.

Although Kassoff was arrested at the Los Angeles County Jail in California, Kassoff had his own experiences with religion behind bars. He was first introduced to the church through the Catholic priest who came to give inmates confessions. Priests are usually not able to give unconfirmed Catholics communion or confession, but this priest offered that opportunity to the inmates.

"That was one event in my life that led me into the church — it was this man offering me some salvation at a desperate and dire time in my life," Kassoff said. "You're just hopeless and desperate