



The Order of Malta Federal Association

Forgiveness Cookies

Cookies are a big part of our prison retreats. The stewards bring platters of cookies and fresh fruit to the participants. Cookies are distributed to all the men in the prison unit- more than 1500 dozen cookies. The entire unit looks forward to our retreats.

Even the guards get cookies. The bags of cookies are more than a tasty snack- they are badges of friendship.

Forgiveness is an important theme of the retreat. Over the course of the weekend, the participants compile a list of people they need to forgive. Their lists often include those that have abused them, betrayed them, prosecuted them, and forgotten them. The weekend leads to a forgiveness ceremony, where their lists are destroyed as a sign that those forgiven have been released.

After the forgiveness ceremony, before they are dismissed for the evening, they are informed that they are receiving a bag of cookies to take back to their cell. You see their heads nodding in affirmation. Then, they are informed that they are to give the cookies to the person in prison that they most need to forgive. They must tell the person why they are giving them the cookies.

It gets very quiet. You feel the chill in the room. You see the wheels spinning inside their heads. Prison can be a hard place.

The Men in White are reminded that being Christian is not easy. Is there anything more challenging in scripture than, "Love your enemies?" We cannot do it on our own- we need God's help.

The next morning, I asked the men at my table how it went. They were all smiles. You could see they were proud that they did something very difficult with God's grace. One man at my table had a sly grin. I asked him who got his cookies. He said, "The warden." The men at our table approved.

Who would be on your forgiveness list?

How would you tell them?

Would you have to grow in faith to complete this exercise?

Being a Christian is not easy.