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St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary and OCPM Now Offering a Certificate Program in Prison Ministry

South Canaan, Pennsylvania — Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry (OCPM) and St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary (STOTS) have partnered together to create the new Certificate Program in Prison Ministry, the first program of its kind in the United States.

The Certificate Program in Prison Ministry provides clergy and lay volunteers that are interested in prison ministry the opportunity to gain knowledge and experience to effectively lead and support people in prison from the most experienced chaplains and volunteers in Orthodox prison ministry in the country.

“In such a specialized ministry, there has been a need for this level of training for decades,” says Nicholas Petrogeorge, OCPM Executive Director. “While more and more churches and individuals reach out to us wanting to begin or further their local prison ministries, many don't have the means to effectively train for what they are called to do. Now that is all about to change.”

STOTS and OCPM have been developing their relationship over the last thirty years because the seminary is uniquely close to a state prison, SCI Waymart, where seminarians participate in an internship for a semester under the direction of the Very Rev. Fr. John Kowalczyk, Interim Chair of the Department of Pastoral Theology and OCPM's Co-Director of Training and Spiritual Care. Today, SCI Waymart and STOTS have grown to a mutually beneficial relationship: inmates are consoled by the frequent visits and services led by the seminarians, and the seminarians are spiritually moved by their encounters with those in prison.

“From its founding, St. Tikhon's has always strived to nurture the theological vocations of our students,” says the Very Rev. Fr. John Parker, Dean and Chief Operating Officer of STOTS. “This is the next natural step for this seminary. We want to support you in your calling to prison ministry through the best education and experience we can offer.”

The semester-long program covers all essential aspects of prison ministry and combines theoretical knowledge with practical skills to ensure participants develop an Orthodox approach

to the unique challenges faced in correctional settings. Through this program, students will also learn how to assist families in coping with the challenges of having a loved one in prison, as well as ways to assist clergy by offering guidance to deal with the unique needs that their parish may face because of incarceration.

The Certificate Program in Prison Ministry culminates in a residency on the campus of St. Tikhon's Seminary. Students will enter the prison daily as volunteers and shadow instructors as they make rounds, have short Bible studies, and practice "the ministry of presence," talking with inmates, praying with them, and learning from them.

Applications are now open for the Spring 2024 semester. Visit www.theocpm.org/certificate for more details.

Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry (OCPM) is an agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States. For Orthodox Christians who have been arrested for crimes, OCPM helps them return to the Faith, offering forgiveness and reconciliation with Christ. For both Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike, OCPM provides spiritual care, enabling prisoners to find hope and purpose in their lives. For more information, please visit www.theocpm.org or follow us on Facebook and Instagram @theocpm.

St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary is an institution of professional Orthodox Christian theological education, chartered by the Department of Education of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and affiliated with the Orthodox Church in America. In a rural environment conducive to spiritual growth and academic study, the Seminary nurtures the theological vocations of its students and faculty, who share the unique opportunity of learning and teaching Orthodox theology in the framework of their daily experience of a rich heritage of Orthodox spiritual and liturgical tradition.

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