

## **Prison Ministry at St. John's**

**by Mary Pat Donelan**

Around 1994, parishioner Mary Dunn began our prison ministry by speaking to our congregation requesting volunteers to visit Catholic male inmates at the Maryland Correctional Institution in Jessup either on Tuesday or Saturday evenings. To reinforce her plea for help, Ms. Dunn cited the Final Judgment described in Matthew 25. The criteria for entering the Kingdom were listed – feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger ... and visiting the prisoner. “Whenever you did this for the least of my brethren, you did it for me,” said Jesus. We can boast that one prison ministry volunteer was so convinced by Ms. Dunn’s call that she has served for St. John’s the whole 24 years since!

Our prison ministers visit these men on Tuesday evening for either a Mass or Communion Service, and on Saturday evening for a bible study. The size of the group of men attending ranges from two or three to 12 to 15. These men are so appreciative of our visits. One of the inmates said recently, “Prison life is so dark, depressing and lonely. Your visits are the only bright light of the week.” Others are like sponges, soaking up the word of the Lord. Visiting these devoted Catholics inside the walls is a very rewarding ministry. All of our prison ministers report that they get far more out of the experience than they put in.