

Mission of Light Pen Pal Program

Reaching out to those sentenced to
live away from society.

Friendship - Respect - Love - Jesus

Mailing address 6450 NW 77th Ct. Miami FL 33166



Sponsored by
Bezerra de Menezes Kardecian Spiritist Assn - Miami, FL



OUR MISSION

We are attempting to provide spiritual support as well as friendship to men and women behind prison walls. We encourage our volunteers to include some spiritual direction/counsel/inspiration with each letter, as well as the thoughts of friendship.

THE MATCHING PROCESS

Volunteers must be at least 18 years of age and will see this program as an extension of their Christian Spiritist practice. Read these guidelines and fill out an application form. Upon receipt of your signed application, your name will be matched with an inmate from a Florida State prison, and then you will receive a letter/email from us with your pen pal's information. Pen pal volunteers must give their first name only or pen pal name to the inmate friend.

SENDING/RECEIVING LETTERS

All letters from pen pals inmates will be received at the Mission of Light mailing address. In our monthly meeting, letters will be closely monitored to ensure that the content is appropriate and safe. Letters sent to the Pen Pals inmates must be handwritten and it will have our return address to ensure your privacy. All letters will be kept in a file, including copies of the letters sent to each inmate with a note of how many envelopes were used and other material sent.

MONTHLY MEETING

Every first Friday of the month, Mission of Light volunteers meet at our office to welcome new volunteers, to share experiences, pray and write together, also to review the correspondence sent and received. As a fraternal group, issues related to the pen pal program are discussed.

HOW MANY PEN PALS CAN YOU HAVE?

Having many pen pal inmates can become hard to sustain in the long run. Paper, envelopes and stamps costs plus the emotional burden needs to be considered before requesting additional pen pal inmate friends. It is suggested to start with one and grow your list according to your availability and resources. It is better one friend well taken care of than many poorly served or neglected.

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PRISON MAIL REGULATIONS (from Florida State Corrections Department)

- A. All correspondence addressed to inmates must be sent by U.S. Postal Service mail. Correspondence sent by other courier or delivery services **will be refused**.
- B. Inmates shall not be permitted to receive routine mail in **boxes, padded envelopes, plastic bags, multi-layer packaging, envelopes that include metal parts, or any package containing bubble wrap or packing peanuts**.
- C. Always use the inmate's committed name, DC number, and institutional address when addressing your letters.
- D. Address the envelope as follows:

Example:

Inmate's last name, first name, DC#
Institution name
Mailing address
City, State Zip Code

Doe, John DC# 012456
Some Correctional Institution
1212 South Street
Any Town, Florida 11111

- E. Mail should be written in English or Spanish unless the inmate has prior written approval from the warden to receive correspondence in another language.
- F. All routine mail sent to an inmate is opened, examined, and read by designated department staff.
- G. Inmates will be permitted to receive only the following types of materials through routine mail:
 - i. Written correspondence (no limit as to number of pages). Correspondence may be written on greeting cards, but cards containing electronic or other non-paper parts, cards which are constructed in such a way as to permit concealment of contraband, or which are larger than 8"x10" will not be permitted.
 - ii. Up to 15 pages of additional written materials, unless prior approval is obtained from the warden to send in an enclosure of greater than 15 pages
 - Each page can be no larger than 8 1/2 x 14 inches in size; material can be on both sides of a page.
 - This does not include bound publications which will be handled pursuant to **rule 33-501.401, F.A.C.** Individual newspaper or magazine articles or clippings or clippings from other publications are permissible, up to the 15 page limit.
 - No item can be glued, taped, stapled or otherwise affixed to a page.
 - iii. Photographs. Photographs will be counted toward the 15 page additional materials limitation.
 - Nude photographs or photographs which reveal genitalia, buttocks, or the female breast will not be permitted.
 - Polaroid photographs will not be permitted.
 - Photographs will not exceed 8"x10".

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- iv. Self-addressed stamped envelopes. These items do not count toward the 15 page limitation for additional materials, but cannot exceed the equivalent of 20 (1 ounce) first class stamps.
- v. Blank greeting cards (no larger than 8"x10"), stationery or other blank paper or envelopes. These items do not count toward the 15 page limitation for additional materials, but cannot exceed 10 in number, with a total possession limit of 15 of each item. Stationery and blank paper must be white, off-white, or yellow. Card stock, sketch paper, and other types of craft paper may not be included
- vi. U.S. postage stamps. The value of the stamps cannot exceed the equivalent of 20 (1 oz.) First class stamps. These items do not count toward the 15 page limitation for additional materials.

H. The following items are not permissible for inclusion in or attachment to routine mail addressed to an inmate:

- i. Non-paper items;
- ii. Items of a non-communicative nature such as lottery tickets or matchbooks;
- iii. Stickers or stamps (other than postage stamps, postal service attachments, and address labels affixed to the outside of the envelope);
- iv. Address labels (other than those affixed to the outside of the mailing envelope);
- v. Laminated cards or other laminated materials.

How does an inmate receive books, periodicals (magazines/newsletters), or other publications?

Books, periodicals or other publications must be sent directly to an inmate from a publisher, mail order distributor, or bookstore. DO NOT attempt to send a package of any type to inmate--it will be rejected.

Books, periodicals or other publications forwarded to inmates must be sent through the United States Postal Service. Materials delivered by package delivery services, such as United Parcel Service (UPS), Fed Ex, etc., will be refused.

LEGAL ADVICE OR COUNSEL

We advise pen pals never to become involved in the legal matters of their prisoner's case. This includes writing letters to the parole board or attorneys. State from the beginning that this is a Christian friendship and all other matters must be taken to a lawyer or case worker.

A WORD OF CAUTION

We discourage romantic involvement, visits and phone calls between pen pals. This program is meant to reach out to prisoners through letters ONLY.

ENDING A PEN PAL RELATIONSHIP

You are free to end the pen pal relationship at any time. If for any reason you wish to do so please let us know. A Six months waiting period will be necessary before assigning a new Pay Pal to the Volunteer.

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CAREFUL CONSIDERATIONS

As you can see from these guidelines, being a volunteer with Mission of Light should be undertaken only after careful, prayerful consideration requiring continuing care and mature discernment.

Nevertheless, our experience indicates that volunteers who follow these guidelines and who seek spiritual counsel as appropriate during the correspondence relationship will be richly rewarded.

DO:

- A. Write at least once a month.
- B. Use your first name only or a pen pal name on the envelope and in the letter.
- C. Include the prisoner's number after his name on the envelope to insure timely delivery of letters.
- D. Be aware that your prisoner may have emotional ups and downs. Depression is common among prisoners and they sometimes stop writing for a while.
- E. Be aware of con games. Notify us if you feel manipulated in any way.
- F. If you feel uncomfortable with any aspect of the program, please contact us.

DO NOT:

- A. Do not ask what their crime is. If he/she volunteers the information, know that he is doing so out of deep trust for you.
- B. Do not give legal advice regarding your prisoner's case.
- C. Do not agree to visit your prisoner or accept phone calls from him/her.
- D. Do not give your prisoner your address or phone number.
- E. Do not sign loans or pay an inmate's legal fees.
- F. Do not send photos.
- G. Do not give your prisoner other names and addresses to write to.
- H. Do not send money or gifts

The Mission of Light Pen Pal Program

It is a social assistance program sponsored by the Bezerra de Menezes Kardecian Spiritist Center, a nonprofit organization with status 501(C) (3) with the IRS, established in 1985.

As such, it is our hope that you will see yourself first and foremost as extending the love of Christ and the Spirits wisdom to the prisoners with whom you correspond. With each letter, we encourage you to share your faith and how God is working in your life and how He may have helped you in the past.

FINAL RECOMMENDATION

Daily prayer and reflection on the Gospel are highly recommended. Include your pen pal in your prayers and Gospel at home, mindful that he/she may have burdens and obstacles we can hardly imagine. The relationship between the volunteer and the inmate is strictly not a material one, romantic one, or any other kind, it's a spiritual relationship.

The hope is to build connections and relationships between those on the inside and those outside the prison walls. Spiritual development is not that different for people wherever they live.

Brother,

I sent you this letter to thank you for all the support that you gave me all this time. Your letters were a great encouragement for me and a blessing. It looks like I'll be leaving next week but I didn't want to go without saying good bye. Don't write to me here anymore; wait until I write to you from my homeland. Thanks for everything once again and God bless you. I don't say Good bye but so long....

PS: I'll try to send you pictures as soon as possible

*Your brother in Christ,
Carlos
May 16, 2004*

Last letter received from a member of the Mission of Light program. He was in the program for about two years.