

Pope Francis turns prisons into a popular prelate destination

Tom Gallagher | Mar. 28, 2013 NCR Today

What a difference a pope makes. With news that Pope Francis is celebrating Holy Thursday in a juvenile prison in Rome, it seems that prison ministry is now in vogue. [The New York Times](#) [1] reports [1] how New York's Cardinal Timothy Dolan visited [Shawangunk Correctional Facility](#) [2], a local maximum security prison, to say Mass.

What a coincidence. Apparently, Pope Francis' example prompted Cardinal Dolan to go visit a prison himself.

Cardinal Dolan joked to the inmates that he recently felt imprisoned. Here's what he said to the inmates:

"I was locked in," said Cardinal Dolan, the Roman Catholic archbishop of New York. "So I feel kind of close to you."

He added one disclaimer: "I was locked in the Sistine Chapel, which is a lot nicer than here."

The cardinal's joke comes across as self-reverential. He later joked about saying Mass in prison:

"I love to say Mass in a prison," Cardinal Dolan said at Shawangunk. "Nobody ever comes late and nobody ever leaves early."

To be sure, Cardinal Dolan needs a new joke writer as soon as possible.

"There but for the grace of God"

Here's a story I wrote in 2009, [There but for the grace of God](#) [3], about how one man, Bridgeport, Conn., businessman John Santa, came face-to-face with one of the imprisoned: his good friend Stan Kennedy, who went to prison for stealing money from Santa's company. Based on this experience, Santa went on to create the [Malta Prison Volunteers of Connecticut](#) [4], which has since been replicated in New Jersey and is beginning to be developed elsewhere in the country.

Johnny Cash, a real prison minister

The legendary country singer Johnny Cash frequently performed in prisons around the country, as the imprisoned had a special place in Cash's heart.

In 1968, Cash's first album, [Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison](#) [5], went to No. 1. Here's an excerpt from the title track, "Folsom Prison Blues":

I hear the train a comin'
It's rolling round the bend
And I ain't seen the sunshine since I don't know when,
I'm stuck in Folsom prison, and time keeps draggin' on

But that train keeps a rollin' on down to San Antone ...

When I was just a baby my mama told me. Son,
Always be a good boy, don't ever play with guns.
But I shot a man in Reno just to watch him die
When I hear that whistle blowing, I hang my head and cry ...

To listen to Cash sing "Folsom Prison Blues," click [here](#) [6].

But it was Cash's 1969 album recorded at [California's San Quentin Prison](#) [7], "[San Quentin Live](#)," [8] that was even more successful.

A trip to Israel inspired Cash to write "He Turned Water Into Wine." When he and June Carter visited Israel in May 1968, they took a tape recorder. The sounds they captured were a part of an album called [The Holy Land](#) [9]. It was when Cash visited the town of Cana, the place of Jesus' first miracle, that he was inspired to immediately write "He Turned Water Into Wine."

In 1969, Cash recorded "He Turned Water Into Wine" at Arkansas' [Cummins Prison](#) [10].

Listen to Johnny Cash perform "He Turned Water Into Wine" [on YouTube](#) [11].

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Links:

[1] <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/28/nyregion/cardinal-dolan-visits-maximum-security-prison.html?adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1364472556-cshCR14Hn6wmpXt9gI/eIQ>

[2] <http://www.correctionalassociation.org/resource/shawangunk-correctional-facility>

[3] <http://ncronline.org/news/there-grace-god>

[4] <http://mpvct.org/>

[5] [http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B000028U0Y/\\$%7B0%7D](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B000028U0Y/$%7B0%7D)

[6] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rX009sWzRQg>

[7] http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Facilities_Locator/SQ.html

[8] <http://www.amazon.com/Johnny-Cash-Live-San-Quentin/dp/B00004U2GH>

[9] http://www.amazon.com/Holy-Land-Johnny-Cash/dp/B00000JJT5/ref=sr_1_1?s=music&ie=UTF8&qid=1364475768&sr=1-1&keywords=the+holy+land+johnny+cash

[10] <http://adc.arkansas.gov/facilities/Pages/facilityDetails.aspx?show=10>

[11] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jj21siujwjM>