

## **Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach – Women’s Program Volunteer Manual**

This document is condensed to occupy less space on [www.smart.ny.org](http://www.smart.ny.org) but omits none of the original.

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**What is our mission?** Jennifer House is part of Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach. Spiritus Christi Church is a Christ-centered Catholic community reaching beyond the institutional church to be inclusive of all. Jesus Christ is our pastor; therefore we open our church as a spiritual refuge. We hold the Eucharist as the center of our sacramental life. We embrace the challenge of the Scriptures. We are ordinary people joyously celebrating the opportunity to follow Jesus' radical message of unconditional love. The mission of Spiritus Christi Church is to embrace the challenge of the Gospel, celebrating the opportunity to follow Jesus Christ. As part of that mission, we have founded Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach. Jennifer House is a part of Spiritus Christi Prison Outreach

**Jennifer House** is a residential program where staff and volunteers provide a loving, safe and supportive home for women and their children. The women and children recognize that they are the women and children of God and that they are beautiful just as God intended them to be. Our mission is to respond to the Gospel call, to visit women and men in prison and journey with them as they reenter the community.

**How do we accomplish our mission?** At Jennifer House, we provide women leaving prison with:

- Food, shelter, and clothing
- Structured and safe environment
- Help with getting benefits in place (e.g., Medicaid, DSS)
- Plan for next steps (longer-term housing, inpatient or outpatient care, parenting classes, etc.)
- Advocacy with other service agencies
- Help with child care and rides when able
- In-house support groups.

**Our objectives are to:**

- Help women create a solid foundation for rebuilding their lives,
- Reunite women with their children,
- Provide a safe and structured home for women leaving jail and for their children,
- Connect women with physical, mental, and social services they need to start rebuilding process.

**How can you help?** Jennifer House is a safe, structured, and supportive temporary home for women and their children. Many of the women have come from all kinds of abusive situations. Our volunteers and staff play a very important role in creating a safe home for our residents. Listen to what the women themselves have to say:

- *Understand how much we don't know. We are embarrassed; we cover up and pretend. Let us know it is okay to tell you this, and you will not judge us for it.*
- *We need someone to listen.*
- *We are worth saving.*
- *Even though we are criminals we are not animals. We need to be treated like human beings while incarcerated.*
- *How do people make it? We need people to show us how they do that.*
- *All I want is a safe place to live.*

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- *I need other people to help me.*
- *You are looking at an individual woman with individual hopes and dreams.*
- *Please look deep inside yourself before you say we are all bad.*
- *We can put ourselves back together with your help.*
- *It is very hard to ask for help; please do not judge me.*
- *No matter what the women's color, race, or crime, inside there is a child of God, a good woman.*
- *I think, "Lord have mercy. How could God forgive me?" But, He has.*

**As a volunteer you are a part of the Jennifer House community.** The responsibilities will change as our residents change. Some responsibilities may include greeting residents, making sure rules are being followed, driving women and children to and from appointments, visiting with residents, playing with children, preparing a meal, answering the phone—tasks similar to many things you do in your own home.

It is important for the smooth running of the house to have volunteer hours scheduled. The hours that you volunteer can be as few or as many as you can commit to. We ask that if you are scheduled to volunteer at Jennifer House and cannot be there, give us as much notice as possible. This will ensure that the house runs smoothly.

If you ever have any doubts or concerns about anything or anybody at Jennifer House please feel free to talk to any staff member about it. We are very thankful to have you as a part of our community, and we hope that you receive as much from being a part of Jennifer House as we do.

**What do you need to do to volunteer at Jennifer House?** To volunteer at Jennifer House, you must:

- Receive an orientation and sign the statement of orientation form
- Fill out the volunteer questionnaire
- Sign the confidentiality agreement
  - (These three documents are included in the back of the volunteer manual.)

**All volunteers will receive an orientation** to Jennifer House by the director and/or designated staff.

Orientation will take place within two weeks of the volunteer placement and will include:

- An overview of Spiritus Christi Church history
- An overview of Jennifer House history, mission, and procedures
- A detailed review of anonymity, confidentiality and ethical conduct
- A review of policies regarding money, team approach and relationships
- A review of the job description, evaluation, problem review and dismissal procedures.
  - At the completion of the orientation, the volunteer will sign a statement verifying the completion of the orientation, which will be kept in the volunteer's file.

**Are there rules or guidelines volunteers must follow?** Jennifer House is committed to work place integrity. Though our ministry often takes place in informal and formal settings, volunteers are responsible for high ethical conduct at all times. We value honesty in sharing and record keeping. We uphold the dignity of each person and honor his/her experience and story. We are committed to each person's safety—physical, emotional, and mental—by wise and just use of the power of our position. We respect the principles and teachings of Spiritus Christi Church and Jennifer House. Above all we honor the sanctity and equality of each person regardless of the differences of birth or learned experiences.

**Please make sure that you are familiar with both the staff and the volunteer policies listed below.**

Also, please review the rules that residents receive when they come to Jennifer House. This will give you an understanding of what we expect from residents and the type of structure that we impose.

**Jennifer House Staff Policies:** Our focus as a staff is to provide our residents with a safe, loving place to begin their recovery. We are committed to the following policies to help guide our work.

- We work as a team, share information and struggles. Communication is key for our residents' wellbeing.
- Volunteer staff will not give money or gifts to residents or former residents.
- Volunteer staff may not date residents.
- Volunteer staff may not lend vehicles, TV, cell phones or any equipment of any kind to residents.
- One-on-one conversations after Tuesday night group regarding anything shared in group are not permitted.

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- Discretion needs to be used when choosing to share personal information with residents.
  - Upholding Jennifer House policies and rules is essential for program unity and strength.

**Volunteer Policies:** Our experience has taught us your best interest and the best interest of the residents of Jennifer House are maintained if the following guidelines are followed:

- Do not give out your phone number or address
- Do not give any money to any resident
- Staff permission is needed to take any resident out of Jennifer House
- Do not keep anything a resident says or does from the staff
- Do not open the door for anyone you do not know or have not been informed about
- Your personal belongings should not be left unattended
- Maintain and promote mother and child bonding, however well-intentioned, interference in this process can be very upsetting to the resident
- Keep discussion of/with the residents or what goes on in the house confidential
- A child under five cannot be transported without a car seat
- Only staff can give out medications-no exceptions
- Do not bring friends or family to the house without prior approval of the staff
- Do not let residents borrow your car or belongings
- Unless asked by the staff, do not do residents' assigned chores
- Provide child care only when approved by staff
- Never hit a child
- Report any abuse/neglect to staff who will take appropriate action; do not act on your own
- Report any use of any illegal substances; staff will take appropriate action; do not act on your own
- Be sensitive at all times to the residents' backgrounds—especially when telling stories or jokes
  - Please feel free to ask for a meeting with staff at any time.

**What happens if I have a problem while I'm volunteering at Jennifer House?** If a volunteer has a problem, it is the responsibility of the volunteer to notify the director of Jennifer House and to schedule a meeting. This meeting will take place within ten days of the volunteer's request. If after this meeting the volunteer feels that the problem has not been resolved, she/he may request a meeting with the director's supervisor. This meeting will take place within ten days of the volunteer's request. The director's supervisor will make the final decision on how to resolve the problem. Documentation of the problem and its resolution will be placed in the volunteer's file.

**Volunteer Dismissal:** Several acts of misconduct are so universally recognized as being very serious violations of accepted behavior that they may subject a volunteer to immediate dismissal. The following acts are considered to be against the best interest of Jennifer House, its residents, and its ministry:

- Violence or discourtesy toward residents, visitors, or other volunteers.
- Dangerous horseplay or the use of abusive language.
- Indecency or the making of obscene remarks.
- Use of alcohol or drugs while performing duties of volunteer work.
- Unauthorized or improper use of property belonging to Jennifer House, including unauthorized use of the telephone, email, or computer.
- Creating an/or contributing to unsanitary or unsafe conditions.
- Sexual harassment toward residents, volunteer staff, employees or guests, which include sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
- Use of poor judgment while performing volunteer duties resulting in placing residents, other volunteers or staff at serious risk.
- Failure to maintain professional and ethical relationship boundaries. Volunteers are not allowed to date residents.
- Disregard for established policies and procedures.
- Breach of confidential information, material, or the breaking of anonymity.
- Theft

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## Volunteer Statement of Orientation:

I have received a volunteer / internship orientation and understand my responsibilities. I further understand that my placement supervisor is available for questions or direction as needed.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Confidential files will be maintained for Jennifer House volunteers. Jennifer House staff are responsible for ensuring safe, confidential records of volunteers.

The volunteer file will contain but is not limited to:

- Volunteer application
- Interview notes and reference checks
- Signed, dated pledge of confidentiality
- Signed, dated statement of orientation
- Miscellaneous correspondence

Note: after a period of seven years, inactive volunteer records will be shredded.

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### Pledge of Confidentiality

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand that in the course of my association with Jennifer House, I may learn certain facts about individuals being served by or associated with Jennifer House. These facts may be of a highly personal and confidential nature. Examples of such information are medical condition, finances, living arrangements, HIV status, criminal history, employment, sexual orientation, addiction history, relations with family members and the like. I understand that all such information must be treated as completely and strictly confidential.

I agree not to disclose any information of a personal and confidential nature to any person without the specific consent of the individual to whom such information pertains.

I realize and acknowledge that any violation of my pledge of confidentiality may lead to disciplinary action including suspension, dismissal.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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### Volunteer Questionnaire

*Mission: To respond to the Gospel call, to visit women and men in prison and journey with them as they reenter the community.*

Name: Address: City: State: Zip Code: Social Security Number: Birthday:  
Home phone: Work phone: Best time to reach you: Day: Evening:  
Email address: Occupation: Skills:

*These questions are meant to help you discern, with us, your gifts and comfort level in working with men and women with a history of criminal conviction. Write your answers or talk with us about them.*

What draws you to volunteering in this ministry?

#### Volunteer Experience

Have you ever volunteered in Prison Ministry? (If yes, in what way?)

Have you ever had any experience with the criminal justice system?

What is your comfort level in spending time with people from diverse backgrounds?

How do you feel about spending time with people who have committed all types of crime?

Do you have any knowledge of Twelve-Step Programs?

If you want to volunteer with the children, please respond to the following questions:

Have you ever volunteered with children before?

What type of activities would you like to do with the children?

Hours available: Please provide two references: Reference 1: Reference 2:

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