

In prison, no bars to Holy Spirit as bishop confirms inmates

CHESTER, Pa. – The Holy Spirit filled the walls of the state prison in Chester when Auxiliary Bishop Robert P. Maginnis of Philadelphia confirmed four inmates.

“These men made a real, conscious decision to pursue this reception of the sacrament. They were very serious,” Bishop Maginnis said in an interview with The Catholic Standard & Times, newspaper of the Philadelphia Archdiocese.

“The people who are in prison, by and large, are looking for ways to improve themselves. In many cases, religion is a factor for them to see that if they have a better relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ – if and when they are paroled – they will become better citizens,” he said.

Bishop Maginnis marveled at the spontaneous round of applause the men received from their fellow Catholic inmates at the conclusion of the recent confirmation ceremony. “That’s a real statement of their faith – of what they believe,” he said.

The grace of the Holy Spirit that the inmates received at their confirmation is certain to make them stronger and “better able to live better lives,” Bishop Maginnis said.

At the same time, it demonstrated to the prison staff that “these men are willing to make strides to improve themselves,” he said.

Before the Mass, each of the inmates to be confirmed met with the bishop. “That told me of their sincerity about receiving the sacrament and wanting to belong to the church,” he said. It also showed him how happy the inmates were that the church was present to them, he said.

Prison officials also communicated to Bishop Maginnis how pleased they were about the confirmations.

Another highlight of the liturgy for the bishop was that inmates provided the music,

playing drums, guitar and a synthesizer.

Deacon Michael J. Finn, who serves at St. Katharine Drexel Parish in Chester and assisted Bishop Maginnis at the Mass, prepared the men through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults program; he holds RCIA classes at the prison every year.

Through confession and general conversation, classes and weekly Masses, the church reminds the inmates “that we’re not abandoning them, that there is a Catholic presence in the prison,” said Deacon Finn, an assistant chaplain at the prison.

Three Augustinian priests from the Philadelphia Archdiocese regularly celebrate Mass for the inmates.