

## AROUND THE ARCHDIOCESE

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# Texas state prison hosts 10th Kolbe Retreat, fosters conversion

► Written by **Charles T. Ramirez**, for Today's Catholic

Incarcerated men at the Ruben M. Torres Unit State Prison prepare to celebrate their 10th Kolbe Retreat on Nov. 15–17. Deacon Bob Leibrecht serves as the Director for Criminal Justice Ministry for the Archdiocese and said that the Kolbe Retreat gives hopeless men a spiritual renewal and fosters conversions.

“The Kolbe Retreat is primarily to help men who are lost develop a relationship with God, a relationship with Jesus, targeted specifically to those who are incarcerated,” Deacon Leibrecht said. “The Kolbe Retreat is basically an ACTS Retreat that is done in prison.”

Named after the patron saint of prisoners – St. Maximilian Kolbe – the Kolbe Retreat affords previous retreatants the

opportunity to give testimonies about their faith journey, a feature that Deacon Leibrecht said makes a lasting impact on the other men.

“Most of the testimonials are given by men in white (the incarcerated) who have been on a previous retreat and have stepped up and said ‘Let me talk about my life and how God is working in it,’” said Deacon Leibrecht. “And the other guys in white – the retreatants – can relate more to them because they are walking where they are.”

The retreat team consists of previous retreatants as well as volunteers from outside the facility.

“On an average retreat, we’ll have at least 66 men,” said Deacon Leibrecht. “We have round tables that we bring into

the prison and we put six men at each table. We also have outside team members and inside team members who have been on previous retreats also be a part of the retreat, similar to ACTS.”

The Kolbe Retreat stands apart from other Catholic retreats in the fact that it welcomes men from all faith traditions on different stages of their faith journeys.

“The big difference [from the ACTS Retreat] is those people who come to the Kolbe Retreat can be anyone, whether they’re another faith denomination, whether their Muslim, whether their Jewish, whether they’re no faith at all,” said Deacon Leibrecht. “We don’t say that you have to be Christian to come to this retreat – no. We meet people where they are and we help them and direct them and lead them.”

Although the retreat welcomes men of different backgrounds, Deacon Leibrecht said the activities remain exclusively Catholic.

“We are not there to proselytize but our retreat is Catholic,” said Deacon Leibrecht. “We have Mass on Friday and Saturday, we have confessions, we pray the Rosary, we pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet, and we do the Living Stations of the Cross. We do a lot of things that are Catholic and many of the guys want to

know more about the Catholic Church.”

The men who want to learn more about Catholicism are given the opportunity to attend formation in the Rite of Christian Initiation (R.C.I.A.) process held in the facility. After a year of classes, they are baptized and confirmed at a special Mass celebrated by Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller, MSpS. The most recent confirmation Mass was celebrated on Oct. 29 with 18 men receiving the sacrament.

“One of our inmates who is our Catholic leader at the Torres Unit was confirmed in 2016 and his faith is just awesome,” said Deacon Leibrecht. “What we’re seeing is that the Holy Spirit has really been working in his life and he has brought other men who really want to know more about the Church.”

Kolbe Retreats in the Archdiocese are made possible thanks to the generous donors of the Archbishop’s Appeal. With a humble beginning in 2009 at the John B. Connally Unit in Kenedy, the Kolbe Retreat is now conducted in over 40 Texas state prisons and one Louisiana state prison, with future plans to begin in Missouri. For more information about Kolbe Retreats or the Criminal Justice Ministry, contact Deacon Bob Leibrecht at [Robert.Leibrecht@archsa.org](mailto:Robert.Leibrecht@archsa.org).