

# By the Light of Faith

## Jail is not a home at Christmas

By Rev. Randolph Fields  
Guest contributor

Christmas in Monroe County Jail. The clanging of cell keys, the shutting of cell doors, the isolation rooms, deputies, lawyers, chaplains, teachers. Few are on duty on this, the happiest, yet saddest day of the year.

What is there, then, for a prisoner to share on Christmas Day and New Year's — the two most depressing days of the year besides a mother's birthday?

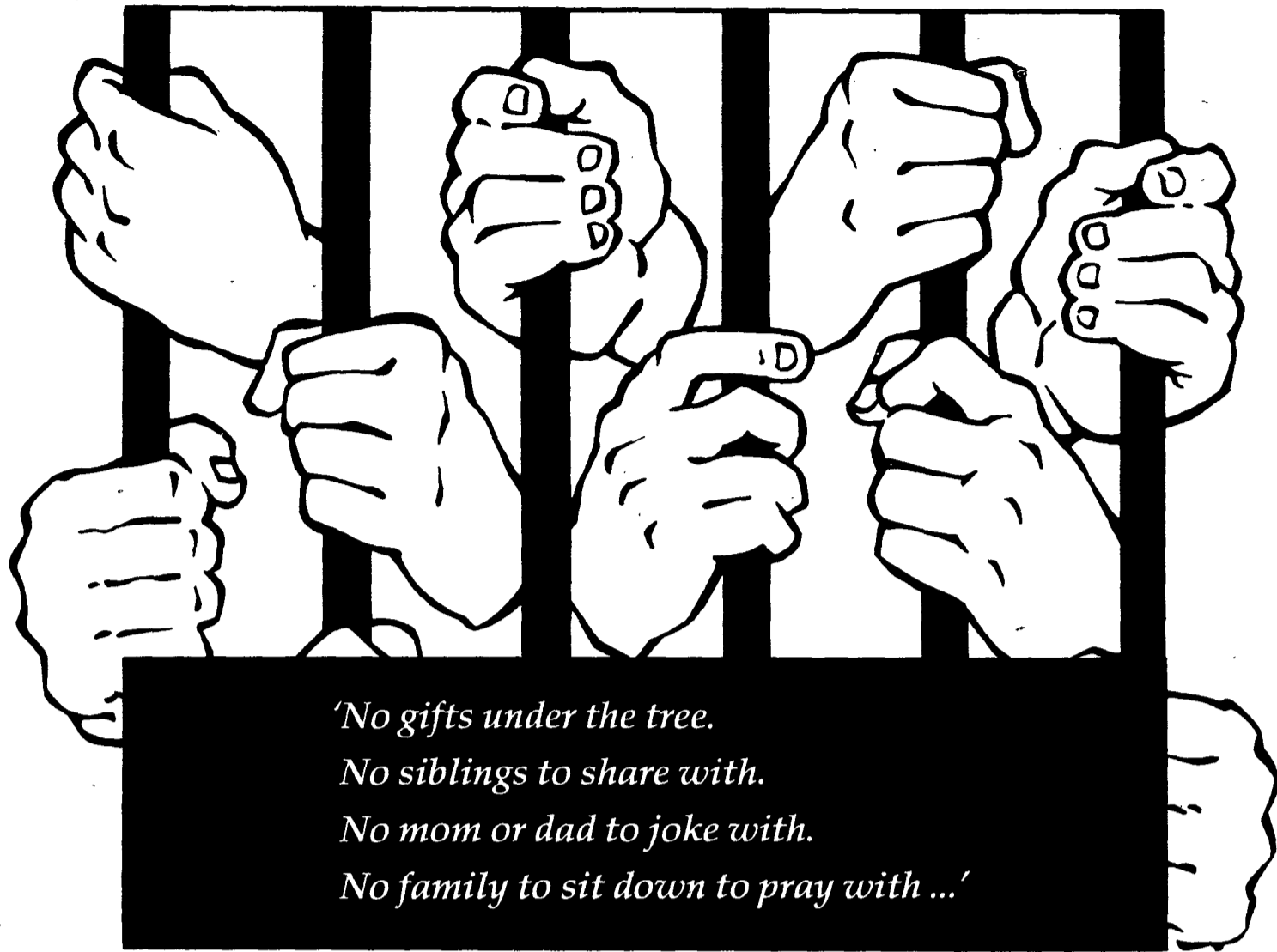
No gifts under the tree.  
No siblings to share with.  
No mom or dad to joke with.  
No family to sit down to pray with or eat with.  
Nothing to do, but hang your head down low, because there is no St. Nick or sense of snow.

"There is no place like home for the holidays."

Many of you are familiar with this song. It reflects the beauty of home during the holidays. It is a song true in every cultural, religious and psychological sense.

As we enter the holiday season, I ponder on past experiences shared with my brothers and three sisters. The laughter, the stories, games, jokes, and the expressions of thanksgiving and appreciation for life and each other are missed. Yes, I know there is no place like home for the holidays, no matter how far away you go.

On many holidays I have been far away from home. On those days I often felt sad, lonely, and empty — feelings brought on by the absence of



*'No gifts under the tree.  
No siblings to share with.  
No mom or dad to joke with.  
No family to sit down to pray with ...'*

family and friends, not to mention familiar surroundings coupled with the sounds and smells of love.

Today, I am still far away from home experiencing the holidays, like many other individuals in Monroe County. Yet, unlike me, these particular individuals may not be able to go home for years to come.

For the hundreds of males and females in jail there is no real joy or happiness during the holiday season. It is that group which concerns us most during the holidays.

Do you realize that for prisoners, there may be no Christmas dec-

orations, sights, and sounds? Absent, too, are any freely expressed notions of love — and, along with this, caring and joy.

Rochester Interfaith Jail Ministry has been committed for 23 years to working with the incarcerated person daily to bring a spark of hope and glance of joy. Serving as positive productive role models in this Yuletide season becomes increasingly difficult when there is no room for the sights, sounds and feelings of the holiday.

*The Rev. Fields is executive director of the Rochester Interfaith Jail Ministry.*



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