

Come Holy Spirit

by Mike Donovan, Volunteer Staff, PBMR

“Did you hear the great news, Mike? I just talked to Jay’s mother, and she told me he beat his case!” It was Jose calling me from the Illinois River Correctional Center in Canton, Illinois. He’s 19 and serving a 14-year sentence for aggravated battery/discharge of a firearm.

Later that evening, I received a call from Mateo, incarcerated at the Cook County Jail. He too was elated to share the news of Jay’s “Not Guilty” verdict on the charge of attempted murder. Mateo, age 20, also is charged with attempted murder, and has been fighting his case for over 3 years. He asked me if I was going to visit Pablo soon. I told him I was, and he reminded me to tell him to “keep his head up and tell him I love him.” Pablo, age 19, is at an adult prison in Mt. Sterling, Illinois serving a 31-year sentence for murder.

Jay, Jose, Mateo, and Pablo met while they were locked up at the Cook County Temporary Juvenile Detention Center and were housed in the same pod. That’s where I serve as a volunteer on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. The boys all took part in our ministry’s Confirmation class two years ago, and then in the Confirmation liturgy with Cardinal Blase Cupich presiding. Jay, Jose, and Pablo received the sacrament. Mateo served as a reader since he was already Confirmed.

The young men did not know one another prior to entering the Detention Center. All came from different neighborhoods and represented different crews and gangs. On the streets, they were rivals or “ops,” but while in jail they became best of friends. They came to appreciate that their common experiences growing up far outweighed their differences.

One by one, at age 17 the boys moved on. Today, Pablo and Jose are in adult prisons, Mateo is still awaiting adjudication of his case, and Jay, now age 20, is finally home with his loving mother and siblings.

To this day, the young men remain in close contact with one another. They call each other’s mothers to get the latest news about their friends, and I keep

them posted through my prison visits, cards, letters and phone calls. Last week I visited Pablo and also took Jay out for a celebratory lunch.

In preparing the boys for Confirmation, we studied the Fruits and Gifts of the Holy Spirit, including the virtues of charity, kindness, goodness, generosity, peace and joy. They could never seem to memorize them all, or for that matter any of them, but they’re now doing one better than that: they’re living them. ✠