



September, 2011

To: Schools of Shining Light Members

Re: Educational Trip November 11-13 to New York City

Shining Light will be making an educational cross-cultural tour to New York City from November 11-13, 2011. We will offer our drama and music presentation on Riker's Island on Friday and Saturday. The 60+ members and 15 staff of Shining Light will be leaving early Friday morning and returning late Sunday afternoon.

Entering the Riker's Island facility, the largest prison in the United States, is quite an experience in itself. Spending two day there, interacting with the staff and inmates offers a safe perspective of a dark part of urban life on the streets of New York City that many of us only read about.

In addition, our overnight accommodations Friday and Saturday night are expected to be at the Harlem Salvation Army located in the middle of Harlem. Saturday morning we usually have some time to explore Harlem. This is another opportunity to experience a situation where we will be an ethnic minority.

We are requesting that Shining Light members from your school be excused from classes on Friday November 11 and any other school activities that day or over the weekend, to participate in this educational event. We do our best to work around school music and sports schedules along with our hosts' schedules, to offer this unique experience to our members. To avoid football games, other sporting events, marching band competitions, and holidays, this was the only fall weekend that was available.

We thank you in advance for your assistance in making this possible. Please contact me if there are any questions.

Sincerely,
Jeffrey Bohn
Executive Director

About Rikers Island:

“Eleven miles from Lady Liberty's raised torch is the front door of the nation's largest penal colony: Rikers Island, where 10 jails sprawl across an area half the size of Central Park.

The island is the heart of New York City's jail system, home to 80 percent of its 14,600 or so inmates, with nine jails for men and one for women. Rikers Island daytime population—including prisoners, employees, and visitors—is enormous, nearly 20,000. All residents are temporary. Two-thirds of the inmates are detainees—legally innocent and waiting for their cases to crawl through the courts—while one-third have been sentenced and are waiting for an empty bed in an upstate prison or are serving a year or less here.

As New York City's jail system has grown over the decades, Rikers Island has become something of a small town, with schools, medical clinics, ball fields, chapels, drug rehab programs, grocery stores, barbershops, a bakery, a power plant, a track, a tailor shop, a bus depot, and even a car wash.

Despite these signifiers of civilization, it is notoriously difficult to get onto Rikers Island without a gold badge, a visitor's pass, or a pair of steel cuffs around one's wrists.”