



# PRISON VOICE

November 2023

Vol. XX

Issue 11

NATIONAL MONTHLY

₹40/-



**Inherit the Kingdom Prepared for You**



**31st Anniversary of Monvila Snehashramam, Trivandrum**



**Conclusion of Rosary Devotion at Kolbe Home, Bengaluru**



**Educational Scholarships to Boys at Government Boys Hostel Yerwada**



**Gandhi Nagar Mahila Mandal Appreciating PMI Volunteers**



**Jesus Fraternity Palakkad Zonal Gathering**



**Jubilee Celebration, PMI Bengaluru Unit**



**Kolbe Boys with Bridgedemia Members**



**PMI Volunteers Residential Training Program**



**Prisoner's Release by PMI Udupi Unit**



**Releasing of Love Bomb, Second Edition, RRDC, Bengaluru**



**Retreat for Prison Ministry Volunteers in Kuala Lumpur Archdiocese, Malaysia**



**Skill Development Program PMI Diphu Unit**



**Visit to Deaddiction Centre for Prisoners, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia**



**Visit to Premodaya, Bengaluru – Home for Prisoners' Children**



**With Most rev Julian Leow, Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur**

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## PRISON VOICE

NATIONAL MONTHLY



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### Are You Willing? “Help a Prisoner's Child Prevent a Potential Criminal”

**80% of the children of  
prisoners are potential  
criminals unless somebody  
takes care of them.  
Prison Ministry India has  
begun a scheme to  
educate 1000  
children of prisoners:  
Kindly contribute  
Rs. 5,000/- for the  
education of a child.**

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A/C No : 0416053000001419  
IFSC Code : SIBL0000518

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# Universal Call to Holiness

## All Saints Day

The Second Vatican Council in its dogmatic constitution on the Church – *Lumen Gentium* – declares that in the Church all are called to be holy. “All the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity... They must follow in His footsteps and conform themselves to His image seeking the will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor” (LG 40). This universal call to holiness is based on the teaching of Jesus “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). In the first book of the Bible, this call to holiness is expressed in the Lord’s words to Abraham: “Walk before me, and be blameless” (Genesis 17:1). Pope Benedict XVI spoke on this universal call to holiness: “The saints expressed in various ways the powerful and transforming presence of the Risen One. They let Jesus so totally overwhelm their life that they could say with St Paul “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). Following their example, seeking their intercession, entering into communion with them, “brings us closer to Christ, so our companionship with the saints joins us to Christ, from whom as from their fountain and head issue every grace and the life of the People of God itself” (LG 50). Saints are men and women from all over the world, people just like us, who remained faithful to God and trusted in his promises. Some of them led lives of extraordinary sanctity. A few of these the Church recognizes as canonized saints so that they can be special examples to the rest of us and so that we can be encouraged to pray to them for their help. But most of them lived and died with no recognition from anyone but God whom

## EDITOR'S VIEW



**Sr Amala DC**  
Chief Editor

they worshipped in the purity of their hearts. “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God” (Mt 5:8). Then at the end of our life, we can be sure of hearing from him the welcoming words, “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mt25:34). Dear brethren, as members of PMI family, we are called to be holy and lead our brethren behind bars to be holy.

## All Souls Day

The Month of November reminds us of our departed souls. As PMI family members we are specially called to pray for the sanctification of prisoners’ souls. Let us offer Holy Masses and prayers for the liberation of prisoners’ souls from purgatory. Through faith and grace, a person belongs to the mystical body of Christ and so every person has a share in the glorious resurrection of Christ. “All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death, they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The Church gives the name purgatory to this final purification of the elect (CCC 1030-1031). Dear PMI family members, greetings and prayerful wishes from PMI National Office. We would highly appreciate your valuable prayer and support for a residence for the North Regional coordinator in Delhi as well as to have a half way home for released prisoners from Tihar.

## Ladder to Heaven

On 25<sup>th</sup> September 2023 I visited St Lamberti Church in Muenster, Germany. This is a city of cultural stronghold where history breathes and lives with culture and the future. I was taken up by the art installation by Billi Thanner known as *Ladder to Heaven*, one piece 18 meters high with 21 rungs was installed in the interior of the church and the other piece with 36 meters high and with 33 rungs was installed on the tower of St. Lamberti. This proverbial *Ladder to Heaven* first installed at St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna reminds us of Jacob's ladder in the Old Testament and invites us to reflect upon the ways and means to reach heaven. After 42 years of my experiences in prison ministry I could certainly recommend that prison ministry is the surest ladder to heaven for Jesus said, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world... for I was in prison and you came to me' (Mt 25, 34-36).

### Jacob's Dream (Gen 28, 10-19)

Jacob went out from Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He lighted upon the place, and tarried there all night. He took a stone and put it under his head and slept. He had a dream. A ladder set up on the earth. Its top reached to heaven. Its bottom touched the earth. Angels were ascending and descending on it. The Lord stood beside him and said: "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac. The land whereon you live, to you will I give it, and to your seed. Your seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. In you and in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed". Jacob



**Rev Dr Francis Kodyan MCBS**  
National Coordinator & Secretary to CBCI  
for Prison Ministry India

awakened out of his sleep and said: "Surely the Lord is in this place. This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven". He took the stone that he had put under his head, set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. He called the name of that place Beth-el.

### Bridge between Heaven and Earth

There are many interpretations to Jacob's ladder. Jacob, as a holy man, was always accompanied by angels. When he reached the border of the land of Canaan, the angels who were assigned to the Holy Land returned to Heaven and the angels assigned to other lands came down to meet Jacob. Another interpretation is that the place at which Jacob slept was Mount Moriah, the future home of the Temple in Jerusalem, which was considered to be the bridge between Heaven and Earth. The ladder therefore signifies the bridge between Heaven and Earth. Jesus the mediator between God and man said in John 1,51 "Hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." This statement has been interpreted as associating Jesus with the mythical ladder, in that Christ bridges the gap between Heaven and Earth.

## Ladder

The theme of a ladder to heaven is often used by the Church Fathers. Irenaeus in the second century describes the Christian Church as the “ladder of ascent to God”. In the third century, Origen explains that there are two ladders in the life of a Christian, the ascetic ladder that the soul climbs on earth, by way of and resulting in an increase in virtue, and the soul’s travel after death, climbing up to the heavens towards the light of God. In the fourth century, Gregory of Nazianzus speaks of ascending Jacob’s Ladder by successive steps towards excellence. Saint John Chrysostom writes: mounting as it were by steps, let us get to heaven by a Jacob’s ladder. For the ladder seems to me to signify in a riddle by that vision the gradual ascent by means of virtue, by which it is possible for us to ascend from earth to heaven, not using material steps, but improvement and correction of manners. The ladder represents the connection between God and man. It demonstrates that God who created the universe desires an intimate relationship with his creation, especially mankind, and most importantly, that he is the one who initiates that connection, conversation, and relationship. St Francis de Sales, in *An Introduction to the Devout Life* illustrates that the ladder is the faithful representation of the devout life. The two sides between which we ascend, and which support the steps, are prayer, which brings the love of God, and the sacraments which confer it. The steps are but the various degrees of charity by which we advance from virtue to virtue, either descending in action to the aid of our neighbour, or ascending in contemplation to a loving union with God.

## Angels Ascending and Descending

According to St Francis de Sales those who tread this ladder are men with angels’ hearts, or angels with human forms. They are full of vigour and spiritual activity. They have wings whereon to mount up to God in prayer, but they have also feet whereon to tread the path of men in all holy and loving converse. Their countenances are open and mild, for they meet all things with gentleness and meekness. Their heads and limbs are uncovered, inasmuch as their thoughts, their affections, and deeds have no aim or motive but to please God. They are the truly devout. Devotion is the crown of sweetness, the queen of virtues, the perfection of charity. If charity is milk, devotion is the cream. If charity is a plant, devotion is the flower. If charity is a precious stone, its brilliancy is devotion. If charity is a costly balsam, devotion is its fragrance, an odour of sweetness, which consoles men and makes the Angels to rejoice.

## Prison Ministry Ladder to Heaven

Jesus is the gate, the way, the truth and the life. Jesus is also the ladder, the bridge between heaven and earth. Prisoners can also be considered as ladders to heaven. For we read in the Gospel of Matthew “Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was in prison and you came to me’. Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25, 34-41). By engaging in prison ministry we are growing in virtue, charity and in grace. By serving prisoners we are ascending the ladder of heaven to enjoy eternal bliss, to see God face to face, to sing halleluiah together with all saints and angels.

# Transform Prison Life in 2 Simple Steps

**Benedict Savarimuthu**

## The Great Commandment to “Transform Prison Life In 2 Simple Steps

If you had a chance to transform your life, both in prison and hereafter, in just 2 simple steps, would you do it? Let's read Mt. 22:34-40 and find out how easy God has made it for us and why we should take advantage of it, while in prison! “But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. One of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the Law?” He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law & the prophets.”

### Group Discussion

We are going to do a simple exercise now to analyse how intimate our relationship with God is. So, I'd like to invite all of you to please close your eyes and put up your hands to answer the following questions. The idea is for us to analyse ourselves personally, without focusing on those around us. So, please cooperate and participate fully... Once again, kindly close your eyes and put up your hands for the following questions: 1) a) How many percent do you really, really love God? 10%,... 30%,... 50%, ...70%, ...90% or 100%? b) Do you love God with all your heart? 10%,... 30%,... 50%, ...70%, ...90% or 100%? c) Do you love God with all your soul? 10%,... 30%,... 50%, ...70%, ...90% or 100%? d) Do you love God with all your mind? 10%,... 30%,... 50%, ...70%, ...90% or 100%? You can open your eyes now. 2) Would a few of you like to share what's preventing you from loving Him 100%?

After listening to the feedback from a few inmates', let us kindly move on to the next question. Before we move on, could I ask you all, once again to kindly close your eyes and put up your hands for the following questions. 3) a) Do you have one or more persons who still remain unforgiven in your life? b) Are the people who are unforgiven outside prison? Kindly raise your hands. c) Kindly keep your eyes closed! Are there people who are unforgiven inside prison? Continue to keep your eyes closed and answer these questions: 4) a) How many of you want to be 100% loved by God? Kindly raise your hands. b) How many of you want to be 100% blessed by God? c) How many of you want to be 100% forgiven by God?

### Deepen our Relationship with God & Neighbour

Let's deepen our relationship with God and neighbour. Let's reflect on these 2 important guidelines: 1) You can either love God because you have to or love to? There's a world of difference between the two!!! If you love God because you have to, *then you won't love Him Whole-heartedly!* You're forced to love Him out of fear and see God as powerful enough to punish you and use force, pain, suffering and misery to bring you to Him! If that's how you see God, *you're mistaken!* God doesn't take pleasure in your misery and pain. He wants us to use the freedom and choice He gave us and the trust He placed in us wisely and responsibly. Often, we abuse it ourselves and then suffer and then think He is to blame for it. These are *yet other excuses that blind us!* But if you love God because you love to, then you'll find it much easier to freely relate to Him, like a close friend and a loving, caring Father. You can tell Him all your ups and downs, joys and frustrations, fears and plans and keep moving forward daily, *knowing He's with you, all the way!* So, go ahead, start a new, more intimate bond with God by loving Him, Because you love to!



## 2) Time to Breakthrough from the Past & Move on to A Better, Brighter & Blessed Future from Today

How many of you want to be Blessed all your life? How many of you want Your Loved Ones to Be Blessed while you are in Prison? How many want to see miracles in prison & beyond? How many of you want a better, brighter future, starting from today & hereafter? Then, it's time to let go of the past, & focus on making life in prison more pleasing to God. *And you can do it in just 2 steps.* As stated in Verse 37 & Verse 39, step one is to first love God with all your heart, soul and mind! Step two is to love every person, as yourself! So, you need God's mercy for all your past sins. That mercy is yours, if you in turn will forgive those who remain unforgiven in your life, both in this prison and out there, if any! So, let's put all the past behind and move on to deepen that intimate relationship with God within ourselves, even while in prison! Nobody can stop you from enjoying that, even within these prison walls. So, get out of that inner prison of living in the past which you have put yourself in! Stop clinging on to the past and stop allowing doubts and fears and negativity keep you in bondage! It's time to break free and claim that freedom that Jesus has won for you! Live it! Rise because of it, from today!

Keep your mind focused on positive thoughts! Make sure they are uplifting your own spirit and of those around you. There are enough challenges in prison! Why make things worse, for yourself and others! Become and be the one who is always positive and life-giving, because of your own intimate relationship with God through prayer, the Word of God and your deep relationship with the Holy Spirit. If it's not deep enough, ask God for it and it will be yours according to the level and percentage of your surrender, obedience and trust in Him! The more you open up, the greater the benefits! That's it! That's all!

### *Shall We Pray...*

Heavenly Father, I want to love you more and more! I want to love you with more of

my heart, my soul and mind. Teach me how. Help me on this journey back to a deeper intimacy with you, each day in prison. I want to feel you so close to me that nothing or no one can come between us and that love you want to give me today and every day. Thank you for that love and make me more and more worthy of receiving even more love from you and to share that love with those who need it around me in prison. Jesus, my loving Lord and precious Saviour, how deep was your love for me, to go through all that suffering and pain to redeem me and all souls, including every soul in this prison! So, make me show my gratefulness to you by changing me from within. Help me give up all attitudes, habits, thoughts, words and lifestyle that's offensive and ungrateful. Help me in turn to become and be a better follower and witness within these prison walls. O Holy Spirit, help me appreciate your promptings and guidance. Help me differentiate, what's right and pleasing to God and what's offensive and sinful. I want to be more loving to God and others, but it's so challenging at times within prison, particularly with so much 'difference of opinions and clashing of attitudes and egos'. Give me the wisdom to handle my own weaknesses and the Challenges others bring into my life, while serving this prison sentence. I ask all these, for the sake of all those who are in this prison, especially those who are going through similar challenges, in Jesus most powerful and precious name, Amen".

### **Reflection**

1) Throughout this week, spend special time in private prayer, recalling the times you have not loved God 100% in heart, soul and mind!?! 2) Look for ways to plan to love God more and glorify Him more, while in prison. Can you become His special positive prayer warrior, faithful wounded healer and life-giving witness? 3) Remember, to receive forgiveness from God, you need to forgive, those who still remain unforgiven in your life! 4) Reflect on how to remove all barriers that are stopping you from giving mercy and receiving mercy!

# Serial Killers: Life Beyond Bars

Br Pratap OFM

## Introduction

Our current way of living might not be prevailing in the future. Even while there is a purpose to our lives, we may not always be able to manage it. In the increasingly expanding world, our lives are in the hands of others. Serial murderers are those who kill others on purpose and consciously while displaying no sorrow or empathy. There could be a number of reasons, but most of the time they are driven by euphoria or psychological pleasure. They have a normal, even appealing appearance, yet they are corrupt. They cause enormous damage to society and other people. Fortunately, laws are in place to address them and to make sure that human society is protected from them.

## What They Are and Where They Come From

In spite of the fact that there have been numerous serial killings around the globe, Robert Ressler first used the term “serial killer” in the United States in 1970; up until then, the criminal justice system and the media simply referred to it as mass murder. Mass murder and serial killing may now be easily distinguished from one another. As opposed to serial murdering, which comprises a series of episodes, mass murder is a single event that results in the deaths of many people in one place. Serial killers are typically defined as people who commit three or more murders, frequently to satiate their sexual needs or to satisfy abnormal

psychological cravings. In human history people have been committing crimes since the beginning of time. The first crime mentioned in the Bible was Abel’s murder at the hands of his brother Cain. It was the first wound that humanity ever suffered, and it is still being suffered today by Cain’s offspring.

## The Motivations

The motivations of serial killers often fit into one of the following categories: He believes that the Devil or another being is commanding him to kill. They generally go through psychosis. People with a murderous mission are those who want to eliminate a certain racial or ethnic group from society. Hedonistic behaviour includes engaging in rape, torture, or gain for one’s own amusement. The three subcategories of lust, thrill, and comfort are also applicable to it. They are the ones who dream of having power and authority.

## Laws Controlling Serial Killers

There are various types of serial killers. Some murderers are driven by emotions like lust, depression, worry and hereditary disorders that render them mentally ill. Provocation, etc., which are likely to cause mental disturbances could also drive the perpetrator to commit the crime. Others who share this willingness and soundness of mind can cause it to be done either with consent or while mad. And there are consequences even if it is done with authorization. According to Section 302 of the Indian Penal Code, “there is heavy prosecution or life imprisonment for a murderer if he or she was with the intention of committing an offense; he or she may also be liable to death penalty in

some cases.” However, a person who was crazy at the time of the incident shall not be held responsible for committing a crime that meets the description of a serial killer, according to Section 84 of the Indian Penal Code. The law demands some purpose to commit an act in order to keep the victim’s state under control, therefore even if a person was not of sound mind when they committed a crime, they may still receive a light or lenient punishment.

### **The Crossings of Serial Killers’ Trails**

Criminals can be divided into two groups: those who have been apprehended and those who haven’t. Criminals or inmates are those who have been caught and are in custody. A person is only a criminal under the exact set of circumstances for which they are accused. Nobody is a born criminal; rather, people find themselves in jail because of their circumstances. He or she turns to crime for a number of reasons, such as: **Ancestral Sin:** The Holy Bible states that a person commits sins because they are sinners, not because they are sinners by nature. We have been guilty of sin and been sinners since the minute our mother conceived. “The Lord your God, I am a jealous God, chastising the children to the third and fourth generations for the sin of the fathers,” he declared. Because sin can result in bindings and curses that are brought on by ancestral sin, sin is the primary cause of prisons.

**Family Breakdown:** “A child left to himself disgraces his mother, but the rod of correction imparts wisdom.” One of the biggest reasons for crime is broken families. Even the tendency to commit habitual sin results from a deficient early childhood experience. **Addiction:** When there is a

lack of parental affection in the home, a person may get dependent on drugs and alcohol. Alcoholism and drug addiction are both exceedingly upsetting for sufferers and frequently lead to an increase in crime. Once dependent, a person is more likely to transgress the law and commit sin. Addicts commit the majority of crimes either to enjoy themselves or as a way of self-preservation. **Urbanization** is advantageous from an economic perspective. Economic growth and industry expansion are made simpler by urbanization. As a result, there is unemployment, inflation, and income disparity. However, their rise is related to urbanization, which has historically had a detrimental effect on crimes. **Poverty** has the potential to breed feelings of hopelessness, despair, and low self-worth. All of these situations could put pressure on a person to break the law in order to give his family the resources they require to survive. But poverty isn’t the only important factor; moral worth also matters. Only those with the lowest socio-economic status and those without a strong moral foundation turn to crime as a method of survival. However, wealthy people also commit crimes to enhance their wealth and live luxurious lives.

### **Implications**

It’s almost impossible to think that prisoners might be let free to go back to their old lives. It is a fact that both the criminals and the rest of society who must deal with the consequences, are made to feel the pain.

### **Methods and Means to Exit from Serial Killing**

Praying, fasting, and giving alms are three effective methods that can change someone’s life from pain to blessing. Most people can

use the first of these three strategies, which is prayer. “Be merciful to me, O God, because of your constant love. Because of your great mercy wipe away my sins! Wash away all my evil and make me clean from my sin!”

### **PMI’s Special Task for Serial Killers**

After Cain killed his brother Abel at the outset, the Lord, God, asked Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” “I’m not sure”, he said. “Will I look after my brother?” In order to show that we are the guardians of both Cain the criminal and Abel, our brothers, Prison Ministry India is a response to this question. Jesus has shown how to restore the ripped humanity through the Calvary incident. All PMI volunteers are hereby requested to love and forgive like Jesus did. The latest project by PMI aims to better all convicts, regardless of their political or religious beliefs. The aim is to give people hope in their state of despondency. Within the jail, the PMI volunteers assist with counselling, prayer and retreats, puppet shows, music and theatre, developing a library, and other activities. The volunteers assist with job facilities outside of the institution, sick patient care, family visits, and family readjustments.

### **A Serial Killer’s Witness**

An ex-Marine and truck driver named Wayne Adam Ford is said to have killed four prostitutes by raping, torturing, and dismembering them. Ford appeared to be gearing up to turn into a prolific serial killer by 1998, possibly wreaking havoc on the lives of many more women and their families. On November 3 of the same year, Ford attended a California police station and turned himself in, which led to a peculiar

development in his life. This is quite difficult for a serial killer to pull off. Ford not only acknowledged the murders but also wept and expressed grief as he did so. He added that all he desired was to die and cease to be a danger to others. He essentially changed his mind. It does show that sometimes even the most heinous killers may pull themselves back from the edge even when it seems too late.

### **Conclusion**

Many serial killers experienced childhood trauma, which caused them to lose their capacity for empathy and commit murder. Accepting the fact that such people are not accepted by their family or society is challenging. It’s never too late to go back and start again. Every fallen man rises anew on the wings of prayer, even when it is challenging. Volunteers from PMI are mostly involved in this project to return them so they can begin a new life.

## **Joyous Moment of Releasing a Prisoner: PMI Udupi Unit**

One undertrial prisoner was in Hirriadkka jail on criminal case. With the intervention of PMI Udupi unit, continuous follow-up with the advocate, after depositing cash surety bond of Rs.5000/- in the court of ACJ and JMFC Byndoor, and by paying Rs. 2000/- to Advocate as fees, we could release him on bail on 17 October 2023. Praise the Lord Jesus Christ.

# Going Home<sup>1</sup>

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## William Jones

It's May 30, 2018, and William Jones is going home. He has been incarcerated at the Carol S. Vance Unit in Richmond, Texas, for more than three years. "I found out [I was going home] 15 days ago," he says. His prison chaplain brought him the news. "I hugged him, and we cried together. Two big, grown men standing there, crying together." William's parents, wife, and family wait for him outside the prison walls. "The fact that I'm not there to ... help them—it really lets me know how selfish I had been in my ways," William says. "The opportunity to get back out there—to get [the] second chance that God has given me ... man! I'm without words. Speechless."

## Real Change

William arrived at the Carol Vance Unit on December 2, 2015, at 5:20 a.m. The first person he met after walking through the prison gate said, "God bless you, and welcome to Carol Vance." In the next five minutes, five other men greeted William the same way, adding, "There's no other unit like this unit." Initially, William thought the guys were a bit strange. But after just two days in the facility, he changed his tune. "I saw that [the prisoners] were receiving something real," William explains. "It was [a hope] that I had been needing. ... There was nothing fake about what was happening in these guys' lives." Hungry for the hope he saw in his fellow prisoners, William enrolled in the Prison Fellowship Academy - the catalyst for life change in the men he'd met. Each year, more than 600,000 people like William are

released from American prisons. Two out of 3 of them will be rearrested within just a few years. The Academy is Prison Fellowship's response to this problem. The program takes incarcerated men and women through a yearlong, transformational journey, creating opportunities for participants to develop and practice biblically based values in a healthy community environment. Graduates become change agents prepared to take their places as good citizens inside and outside of prison.

## Release Day

In the Academy, William grew stronger in his relationship with his family, his friends, and God. "Now [God] is first. It's because of Him [that] I stand before you today as a man about to be released," he says. "I'm just blessed, man." Now William is itching to go—to take off his prison uniform and put on fresh, new clothes; to hug his wife and family; to live a full life on the outside. "I appreciate things today better than I've ever appreciated them before," he explains. "I love my wife like I've never loved her before, because I know what real love is now."

As the reality of his impending release sets in, William doesn't hold back his excitement as he says, "I'm about to get out of prison. I've had these white clothes on for 3 1/2 years! I'm about to get out of these clothes! ... I'm about to hug my wife and not to be told that it's time to stop. [It's] not a two-hour visit. ... It's time! This is my season!"

## Totally Different

Finally, after more than three years, William Jones walked out of prison a free man—

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<sup>1</sup> Prison Fellowship International.

and a changed man. After his release in May 2018, William returned home to his wife and son. Drawing from the God-centered environment he experienced in the Academy, William is creating an atmosphere of love and peace with his family. You can feel the warmth when you walk into their home.

### **New Man, New Values**

One of the main features of the Prison Fellowship Academy program is its core values - productivity, responsibility, integrity, community, affirmation, and restoration. "The values that [the Academy] instilled are self-values. And once you are able to instill self-values in you, then you can begin to expect them from others. So it really changes the atmosphere of people that you have around you," William says. A crucial lesson for returning citizens is recognizing that the people you surround yourself with and the values they hold create the atmosphere of your life. When William came home, he didn't need people from his previous life or the distraction and temptation they would bring. And that's because they don't share the same values. "Because now, guess what? I'm honest. I'm loving. I live through integrity. I do the right thing when nobody's looking, now," he says.

### **Taking the Next Step**

Like many formerly incarcerated people, William was nervous about his release. "It frightened me, not because I knew I was coming home to my wife," he recalls, "but because I knew I was coming home a different man than what I was when I left. And that frightened me some, because I knew I was going to be walking into an area of my life that I had to walk differently

than I walked in a long time - than I'd ever walked. I had to walk as a real man ... that's being guided by the Spirit of God now." Part of being that kind of man is putting others above self, something William now understands from reading the Bible and his time in the Academy. "Now I can't be selfish anymore," he says. "I had lived selfish. Selfish put me away for ... years. Selfishness took me away from the woman I love for years."

### **The Man God Has Called William to Be**

Today, steadily employed and focused on loving his family, William is proactive integrating himself back into society, becoming the man God has called him to be. "Have I been perfect in my steps? No. Nobody's going to be perfect. But do I get right back up after I realize I'm not perfect?" he says. "Oh, I seek perfection every day. And I seek it through Him now. I'm not guided by my thoughts anymore or my will. [Rather,] I'm guided by His. ... He has just immensely blessed me. ... He blessed me from the day I got out."

## **PMI Lifestyle**

Mantra – Thank You Jesus

Weapon – Prayer and Fasting

Action – Search, Serve and Save the  
Lost

Bank – BDP - Bank of Divine  
Providence

Style – Maximum Inconvenience

Mode - Begging and Blessing – No  
Foreign Fund

Goal – Saving the Lost

## 5th Nobel Peace Laureate: Incarcerated Narges Mohammadi

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I have chosen to not see my children or even to hear their voices to be the voice of the oppressed people, women and children, of my land,” says the imprisoned 5<sup>th</sup> Nobel Peace Laureate, Narges Mohammadi, who chose to be the voice of the voiceless. On October 6, Mohammadi was announced as the recipient of the 2023 Nobel Prize for Peace “for her fight against the oppression of women in Iran and for her fight to promote human rights and freedom for all.” Narges Mohammadi was still in prison when The Norwegian Nobel Committee decided to award the Nobel Peace Prize for 2023 to her for her fight against the oppression of women in Iran and for all her brave struggles and fight to promote human rights and freedom for all. Altogether, the regime has arrested her 13 times, convicted her five times, and sentenced her to a total of 31 years in prison and 154 lashes. The 51-year-old is the deputy Director of the Defenders of Human Rights Center.

### The Background of Powerful Fire

Mohammadi was born in 1972 in Zanjān, a city northwest of Tehrān with a predominantly ethnic Azeri population. In 1978, as she was 6-years-old, on the eve of the Iranian Revolution (1979), the city witnessed a major confrontation with the military. Her maternal uncle was a political activist, and he was imprisoned both before and after the revolution. Her mother visited him once a week and paid frequent attention to local newscasts about prisoners, listening



Sr Lini Sheeja MSC  
Germany

to hear any updates about relatives. In 1981 Mohammadi saw her mother wailing on the floor after hearing on television that her cousin, her mother’s nephew, had been executed. Mohammadi’s uncle was executed a few years later and this was the burning fire as a child which blazed in her and today made her the recipient of Nobel Peace Prize 2023.

### Woman for the Incarcerated

Mohammadi was arrested for the first time in 2011 and sentenced to many years of imprisonment for her efforts to assist incarcerated activists and their families. First arrested 22 years ago, Mohammadi has spent much of the past two decades in and out of jail over her unstinting campaigning for human rights in Iran. She has most recently been incarcerated since November 2021. Narges Mohammadi worked as a journalist for several reformist publications and campaigned for the abolition of the death penalty, women’s rights and the right to protest. Her book *White Torture: Interviews with Iranian Women Prisoners* also won an award for reportage at the International Film Festival and Human Rights’ Forum. Mohammadi is the 19th woman to ever win the Nobel Peace Prize. It is the fifth time in the 122-year history of the awards that the Peace Prize has been given to someone who is in prison or under house arrest.

## Nothing Crushed her Powerful Voice

Mohammadi has been a prisoner for most of the past two decades. She has been sentenced repeatedly for being the voice of the voiceless, for her unrelenting campaign against the death penalty and solitary confinement. She is currently serving a sentence of 10 years and 9 months, accused of actions against national security and propaganda against the state. But not even the darkest cells of the notorious Evin Prison in Tehran have crushed her powerful voice.

## Can any good come from Prison?

“I will never stop striving for the realization of democracy, freedom and equality,” she said in a statement released through The New York Times after the Nobel announcement. “Standing alongside the brave mothers of Iran, I will continue to fight against the relentless discrimination, tyranny, and gender-based oppression by the oppressive religious government until the liberation of women,” is the message of the 5<sup>th</sup> incarcerated Noble Prize winner. As I read this flash news in the month of October, the only question that flashed in my mind was, *Can any good come from prison?*

## Transforming Lives from Prison to Home

**Benedict Savarimuthu**

Prison Ministry Members who attended their 3-Day Annual Retreat from 20<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 2023 will long remember the impact it had on them, particularly the vision and challenges for the future, that their Retreat Master, Rev. Dr. Fr. Francis

Kodiyan triggered off! For the first time, The Kuala Lumpur Archdiocesan Prison Ministry (which is part of the Catholic Prison Fellowship Association – CPEA) invited a priest from India to lead its members to the next level in raising their outreach to prisoners and the incarcerated and their families. By sharing the secrets on how he laid the foundations for India’s Prison Ministry to become a vibrant and thriving outreach platform that keeps impacting the lives of prisoners, Fr. Francis Kodiyan set the pace for the local Prison Ministry Members to see unlimited opportunities to do lots more for those in prisons and rehabilitation centers.

Interestingly, the retreatants took up the challenge and made serious commitments to do even more, despite many a member, already juggling with various other responsibilities both in their personal and spiritual lives. Fr. Francis conducted 5 enlightening sessions on handling the needs of the prison ministry based on the theme: *From Prison To Home*. His lectures on searching, serving and saving the lost, Prisoners reformation trajectory, PMI special task forces and incessant intercessory invocation for the incarcerated enlightened and enthralled the Prison ministry volunteers in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. All were inspired and ignited to launch new initiatives and challenging practical decisions to reach out, release reform, rehabilitate, reintegrate and redeem. All the retreatants have already been grouped into 5 Task Forces committed to prayer and action, focused on improving their outreach to prisoners and their families in all matters concerning the ministry. With that, a new Chapter, with a clearer and focused mission, challenges and plans for action for the next many years, has been put in place!



## Mother Teresa Award for Jailed Iranian Nobel Laureate<sup>1</sup>

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Jailed Iranian activist and Nobel Laureate Narges Mohammadi has been named for this year's Mother Teresa Memorial Award for Social Justice by Harmony Foundation, a voluntary group based in Mumbai, western India. She is chosen considering "her intrepid fight against religious despotism in a country like Iran, where women are subjugated and oppressed," Abraham Mathai, founder-chairman of the group told. Mohammadi's husband, Taghi Rahmani, and their two children have agreed to accept the award on her behalf when it will be presented in the last week of November, Mathai said. Mathai, a former vice chairman of the state minority commission in the western Indian state of Maharashtra, said the jailed activist truly epitomized "humanity in action" through her battle against the oppression of women in Iran.

The Harmony Foundation, which instituted the award in memory of Saint Mother Teresa in 2005, in a statement hailed her "undaunted courage as a fearless defender and advocate of human rights against a murderous and fundamentalist regime." The 51-year-old Mohammadi, who won this year's Nobel Peace Prize, is the deputy director of the Defenders of Human Rights Center and is currently lodged in Tehran's Evin Prison. She has been imprisoned 13 times, and convicted five times with a cumulative prison sentence of 31 years. Her current imprisonment is for her open support to Mahsa Amini, the 22-year-old girl who was allegedly killed in the custody

of Iran's religious and moral police for not wearing the *hijab*, in September 2022. Amini's death sparked a massive wave of outrage and widespread demonstrations against Iran's regime and several people were killed in subsequent protests.

The foundation awards the Mother Teresa Memorial Awards to eminent personalities and organizations from across the world for their outstanding contributions to social justice, the betterment of society, and the well-being of suffering and marginalized humanity. "The Harmony Foundation, too, stands alongside the visionary warriors across the world who courageously advocate against women's oppression, igniting change and inspiring hope," it said. The previous winners of the award include Nobel Laureates Tawakkol Karman and Malala Yousufzai, and Laila Talo Khudher Alali, a Yazidi woman who escaped from ISIS captivity in Iraq.

### PMI Spirituality

Overwhelmed by the Love of God

Redeemed by the Precious Blood of  
Jesus

Led by the Holy Spirit

Empowered by the Word of God

Nourished by the Sacraments

Enlightened by Spiritual Exercises

Fortified by Ascetical Practices

Adorned by Virtues

Enriched by Fraternity

Enthralled by Seeking and Saving the  
Lost.

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<sup>1</sup> UCA News Oct 23, 2023.

# How Indian Prisons Struggle with Mental Health

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**Dr Debanjan Banerjee<sup>1</sup>**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) often keeps reiterating that there is no health without mental health. And to no one's surprise, mental health challenges are evidently more widespread in populations that are socially vulnerable in any way. One such vulnerable population is that of prisoners. Till a decade ago, there were more than 4,00,000 individuals lodged in Indian prisons. Keeping aside debates on human rights and the legal underpinnings, prisons with their restrictive environment can give rise to potent physical and mental health challenges. Not to mention, it depends on the duration of imprisonment, type of prison facilities, staff behavior, as well as training. Poor facilities in the prison, overcrowding, restricted privacy, limited mobility, lack of basic amenities, human rights violations, sleep disturbances, and restricted healthcare access can increase the risks of suffering from poor mental health.

## **Stigma, Discrimination, Abuse: Data Shows Epidemic of Poor Mental Health in Prisons**

A study published in the Indian Journal of Social Psychiatry in 2018 showed that schizophrenia was the most common mental illness in prison inmates followed by depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and sleeplessness. Cases of cannabis, alcohol, and tobacco addiction were high too. Suicide and self-harm behaviors are also common in prisons which get further compounded with the

fact that monitoring and sensitivity to such issues are limited. Unfortunately, with other priorities in place, mental health almost always gets a backbencher status with respect to funding and service provisions. Other factors in prisons such as lack of awareness towards mental health, stigma, exhaustion of facilities, violence, social isolation, uncertainty about future, and lack of 'usual' schedule discourage the inmates from seeking help. Mental health issues in prison can vary based on whether or not an individual has life-term imprisonment. On whether a person has been truly or wrongly convicted or had mental health conditions in the past. Trauma reactions like PTSD, adjustment disorders, panic disorder, and long-term depression are common in those convicted due to violent crimes. The Prison Statistics India 2019 data mentions that 1.5 percent of the total prison population possibly suffer from mental illnesses, 50 percent of these people are undertrials. There is also a severe dearth of correctional (including mental health professions) staff in Indian prisons. The ratio of prisoner per mental healthcare staff ratio and prisoner per correctional staff ratio are 243:1 and 628:1 respectively.

Stigma, discrimination, human rights crisis, substance abuse, and lack of staff training were identified as the main factors for the rise in mental health issues in prisons.

## **But Indian Law Provides Safeguards for Inmates**

The recent Mental Healthcare Act 2017 has several welcome provisions in this regard. It defines a prisoner with a mental illness as "a person with mental illness who is an under-trial or convicted of an offence and

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<sup>1</sup> FIT 30 Oct 2023

detained in a jail or prison”. Under this Act, the proposed Mental Health Review Board is expected to visit and inspect prisons for mental healthcare facilities. The Board can also enquire as to why a prisoner with mental illness has not been transferred to a mental health establishment. The Act mandates the training of all medical officers in prisons to deliver emergency healthcare. But perhaps the most awaited move was the proposed mandatory setting up of a ‘mental health unit’ in the medical wing of at least one prison in every state/union territory. Besides, the Indian Law has certain provisions for the mentally ill in prisons. CRPC Sections 328, 329, and 330 state that “if the accused person is determined to be of unsound mind, then the adjudicating authority must allow for postponement of this trial.” The mentally ill population in prisons have the legal right to receive treatment at a mental healthcare facility. Also, those with mental illness may be released based on the surety of safe conduct and furnishing sufficient security. If bail is not possible, then the accused will be kept in safe custody.

### **Are These Laws Enough Though?**

Prison life can be considered as the strictest form of surveillance and regularisation of human lives, hence leading to extreme stress. There’s a lot more than can be done for the inmates: The prison staff needs to be trained to detect early signs of mental illness in the inmates. Those at risk should be actively monitored. Dedicated treatment needs to be there including visit by mental health professionals. Admission in mental healthcare units or establishments is a must for severe mental health conditions including suicide risk. The MHCA 2017 can be put to effective use with policy provisions. Prisons are to be regularly visited by the local Mental

Health Review Board. External (preferably neutral) experts can monitor the mental healthcare services in prisons and suggest ways for improvement. The prison inmates are to be made aware of mental hygiene and de-stigmatisation of mental illness. Trained counsellors should be available in jails.

Finally, the prison environment, with all its restrictions and punitive angles, needs to bear a humane approach. Group activities including recreational and educational provisions can help restore quality of life of prisoners. Studies conducted in Tihar Jail in 1994 showed that the practice of Vipassana, a form of meditation, reduced depressive symptoms in the inmates. Similarly, Yoga and Pranayama improve vitality and general health. The age extremes and women prisoners are further vulnerable. Depression and anxiety disorders are more common in convicted ladies, while addiction problems and suicide risk are common in the youth. Many of the older prisoners have memory complaints and possible dementia which hamper their daily activities and safety. Dementia awareness among prison staff and inmates are minimal in our country and grossly neglected. Given the rapidly aging Indian population, dementia awareness, detection, and care assume special importance in our prisons. Fostering positive mental health in prison environments can not only reduce the mental illness burden within the inmates but possibly help in psychological stability – thereby reducing further crimes and violence.

### **PMI Motto**

Be a Love Bomb. Let it be Exploded.

Not to Kill but to Heal the Broken Hearted.

# Prison Ministry in Kerala Ex-convicts Get Their Lives Back on Track in India<sup>1</sup>

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Sean Sprague

Father Joy pays a visit to a Prison Ministry India-funded home in Paracode. Francis Joseph tries to get his life together at Shanti Bhavan. Residents of Shanti Bhavan share a meal between counselling sessions. Father Joy Cheradiyil did not blame Rajesh's wife, Anu Rajesh, for not wanting her husband back. Their arranged marriage had been a disaster. Rajesh, now 35, was a petty gangster, a thug-for-hire who specialized in extortion and intimidation. He even used to threaten his wife's family. Then Rajesh was caught and sent to jail, and who could blame Anu for saying good riddance. But jail might have been the best thing for Rajesh, said the Syro-Malabar Catholic priest who heads a branch of Prison Ministry India in Ernakulum, a city in Kerala. Through the organization, which originated in Kerala in 1986 and has since spread throughout the country, clergy try to rehabilitate prisoners like Rajesh.

"In prison, Rajesh came to regret the way he had lived," Father Joy said. "We worked with him, offering counselling and guidance." Rajesh was released after three years, but the life of an ex-convict in India is as difficult as it is in most places, and perhaps more so. Typically, ex-convicts are shunned by the small communities from which they come. Jobs are hard to come by, especially in Kerala, where the unemployment rate is around 50 percent. But most difficult of all for Rajesh was the rejection by his family, including his two children. "I went and spoke to his family, and no one wanted him back," Father Joy said. Once he got out of jail, Rajesh spent several months at the ministry's center, Shanti Bhavan, which means Home for Peace, in the small town of Edappally. Here

Rajesh received additional counselling and job training, turning farther away from his life of crime.

Finally, Rajesh and Father Joy visited Rajesh's family. Father Joy spent two hours with his wife. He assured her that Rajesh had indeed changed. This was not just some act to get back into her good graces. Okay, she said, I'll give him one more chance. Today, Rajesh and his family live in a rented house. He does laundry for Indian Railways, a job the ministry arranged. They are poor but are saving to buy their own home. The ministry may help out. It has helped purchase about 50 modest homes for ex-convicts, who do not gain control of the title for 10 years to ensure they do not return to crime. "We are poor, but I'm very happy," Rajesh said. "Now, I have a life I never dreamed possible."

Prison Ministry India, also known as Jesus Fraternity, was born from a discussion group of seminarians at St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary in Kottayam, Kerala. There was an obvious need to rehabilitate the nation's prisoners, prostitutes and beggars. In 1990, the ministry was incorporated into the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Conference, and soon afterward it established support groups to tend to the needs of prisoners in each of Kerala's 44 prisons. It also opened support centers specifically designed to help female prisoners, child prisoners and prisoners with H.I.V. Funding comes from local churches, communities and other benefactors, including CNEWA.

In the mid-1990's, the ministry expanded from Kerala, where Christians are a significant minority, to other parts of the country, where the Christian presence is relatively minimal. But the ministry was never intended to help only Christians, in Kerala or anywhere else (Rajesh is Hindu). Though Hindu and Muslim religious organizations also have prison outreach programs, Prison Ministry India organizers knew more could always be done. In 1996, the ministry established a

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<sup>1</sup> ONE-CNEWA.

national office in Bangalore. Its first national conference, inaugurated by Mother Teresa, was held in New Delhi.

Father Joy and his colleagues work with criminals who have committed much worse crimes than Rajesh. Take Francis Joseph for example. After a village political dispute turned ugly, he was convicted of murder and spent eight years in jail. Previously, he had worked six years in Libya as a driver, making a good living. But while he was in prison, Mr. Joseph's brother took control of his property. Now, after spending several months at Shanti Bhavan, the 46-year-old ex-convict is trying to get his life back on track. He has taken jobs as a cook and day laborer and is working on becoming a professional driver again.

"Father Joy is trying to bring us back to life, gradually, in a systematic way," said Anwar, a 48-year-old Muslim who spent three months in jail for stealing. "He tries to clear our minds of the past and think only of the future." Anwar taught English and economics at a high school in Nilamboor, Kerala. But after his students saw him in handcuffs, it is unlikely that he can return to his former job. Currently, he is staying at Shanti Bhavan, one of 10 such centers in Kerala. He works as a night watchman, but is itching to return to the classroom.

At each of the ministry's centers, there is a mixture of counseling, spiritual renewal and job training. The ministry helps the men find jobs, and once ex-convicts have gotten themselves reestablished, Catholic clergy continue to look in on them and offer support. It is a difficult job and one that some of his fellow clergymen sometimes resist, Father Joy said. "These criminals are seen as the worst of our society, and that can even put off some of us in the church from wanting to spend too much time with them," he said. "I have been working in this field for eight years, and I can tell you that the first two or three were hard. To understand these people and live with them is not easy.

"Sometimes we ask seminarians to stay in an ex-prisoner's home and look after him, which is not an easy thing to do," Father Joy continued. "But once they come to know these people as people, not as criminals, they see how meaningful the work is and how necessary."

Finding a job is one thing, finding a wife is something else. In Kerala, as with India as a whole, most marriages are arranged by families. This holds true for Hindus, Muslims and Christians. A single man just out of prison is not a hot prospect to most Indian women, whose families are expected to pay a dowry to the groom's family. Thus, marriages are difficult to arrange. Once the staff is satisfied that one of its unmarried clients has reformed, it sometimes approaches one of the church's many orphanages and sees if a marriage can be arranged. The sisters who run these homes generally help the orphans into their adulthood, helping them find husbands and jobs.

Saju Joseph (no relation to Francis) was involved in petty crime at an early age. His father ran a toddy shop, India's version of a dive bar, and he grew up around criminals. Mr. Joseph, now 35, used to extort money from local businesses, for which he spent two years in jail. It was time to turn his life around, Mr. Joseph said. Once he did, the ministry arranged his marriage to Roymol, 31, who grew up in a Catholic orphanage in Kerala. She is well-educated and pretty, but being orphaned meant she could not pay a dowry to a potential husband. Now, the couple live in a three-room concrete home in the small village of Paracode, not far from Ernakulum. He works as a driver and has not strayed back into crime. And soon the church will transfer its stake in the family home to the Josephs. Best of all, the couple have two young children. The Josephs were delighted when Father Joy paid a visit recently. There was tea and tapioca and laughter all around. "You see, if you touch their hearts then you can get them to change," Father Joy said.

## GPS to Heaven: Come, I'm Sick! I'm in Prison!

Is there a destination for every human being? If so, how can we reach it? Is there any GPS that will take us to our destination? All of us long for something on our journey here on earth and that is for no doubt to reach *Heaven* which is our final destination. Today, in our modern world there is a GPS to reach our destination. The GPS tells its customer always the best route and its guidelines are marvellous. Is the destination of an Indian is USA or the destination of an American is England or the destination of a German to Italy? Whether he is Indian or American or British or Italian, our destination is one and the same. To reach heaven! Now, does our Holy Bible give us the GPS to reach this destination? If so, where can we find this GPS? Matthew 7:21 gives us the way to our destination in which we read, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven"

### Directions to Heaven

Now the question is what the will of the Father is? What does the GPS from the Holy Bible tell us about the way to reach heaven? Jesus is very intelligent where He describes us clear routs to reach heaven. He not only says that by doing the Father's will we shall reach heaven, but he describes wonderfully, what the will of Father is! The GPS to heaven by our Redeemer Jesus is specific and not wavering. Let us read further, "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared



**Sr Lini Sheeja MSC**  
Germany

for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you, or thirsty, and give you something to drink? And when did we see you a stranger, and invite you in, or naked, and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and come to you?' The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of mine, even the least of them, you did it to me' Mt 25:34-40.

### Have You Downloaded the GPS?

Now, our destination is clear before us, the way is given to us and the directions are described by the One whom we will meet in heaven. Is this not interesting to know this GPS? Today, throughout the world, people use GPS as it has many advantages. It is extremely easy to navigate roads because it directs us exactly to arrive at our destination. Likewise, Mt 25:34-40 directs us exactly towards our destination. Now the question is how many of us have downloaded or set up this GPS in our lives?

## Jesus: The GPS Master

Jesus had identified Himself as the Good Shepherd, a Shepherd who knows the voice of His sheep. What happened in the Parable of the Lost Sheep? A sheep is lost and gets entangled in the midst of thorns and thistles in the desert and the shepherd knows that the sheep will perish in such conditions and so he goes in search of it. God is always of that nature, going in search of the lost. And that is the reason the Heart of God always goes in search of the sad, the broken, the vulnerable, the sick, the hungry, the thirsty and all those in prison. When Jesus demands us to do the will of the Father, He says that He has done it and it's possible for us too! Jesus makes His calling very clear, in Mk 2:17, in which He says, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners".

## The Special GPS: To Go Where the Broken are!

The GPS of Jesus is just easy for every human and possible for everyone. Look at these interesting facts. Jesus never said that if we heal a leper or cast out the demons or build institutions or go with someone for a picnic, then we shall reach heaven. His directions to reach heaven are more than we ever thought of! Just need to go! To go where the hungry and thirsty are! To go where the strangers are! To go where the sick are! To go where the naked are! To go where the captivated are! To sum up all that Jesus said is to go where the abandoned are! To go and to go where the broken are! The poor and the marginalised need us! Jesus is very wise as He never says, the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the strangers and the prisoners will come to your door and you care for them and then heaven will be open to you! Rather, He is systematic in presenting His GPS to every follower, *I was sick, and you visited Me;*

*I was in prison, and you came to Me.* The world GPS says to go and the GPS of Jesus also says "to go! Come, I'm sick! Come, I'm in prison" is the invitation of our Master and when we have received this invitation wholeheartedly, there is another invitation from Jesus waiting at our door saying, "Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world".

## The Holy Father Greets a Group of Women Who Left the Mafias<sup>1</sup>

### Innocent Adovi

At the Vatican, Monday October 30, the Pope sent his greetings to a group of women who had left the mafias. To free oneself completely, Francis advised walking with Jesus and clinging to the Word of God. "You, ladies, were born and raised in environments polluted by mafia crime, and you have decided to get out. I bless this choice and encourage you to move forward. This exhortation from Pope Francis was addressed on October 30 to a group of women who had left the mafias. The Pope took the opportunity to thank the priest Don Luigi Ciotti who accompanied them to the Vatican. He ended by providing advice for their total release.

### Walk with Jesus

"We do not become free by magic, but by walking with the Lord, by sharing his steps, his path, which necessarily passes through the cross and leads to the resurrection." Francis supported this assertion by recalling that, like men, the group of Jesus' disciples was also made up of women who were not all perfect. Some have been "tested by life, sometimes infected by evil". But "these are women whom Jesus welcomed with compassion and tenderness and whom he healed". They achieved liberation "precisely by walking with him and the other disciples."

<sup>1</sup> Vatican News.

## A Turning Point

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John<sup>1</sup>

From disaster to pastor, this is the real life story – my own personal testimony – of how I came to saving faith in Jesus Christ. I believe miracles still happen every day and the greatest miracle to me is that of human conversion.

### Fractured Childhood

I never knew my real father. My mother had many husbands and I was dumped at my aunt and uncle to live with when I was very young. My aunt and uncle already had a house full of their own children. They had seven children in all plus me and my bigger brother along with my aunt and uncle, this made 11 in one house. I ended up claiming the closet as my own bedroom. I didn't know enough to feel sorry for myself as a young child. I remember that the only books that I loved were encyclopaedias. When my mother finally did come for my brother and me, even if it was for a short time, we had a new step-father. In all those years and in all my mother's different marriages, I never heard the phrase, "I love you." I never heard any praise or encouragement but I did remember being screamed at, spit on, shouted at, and cussed out more than once. I also remember being beaten, being slammed to the floor, and one time I was "spanked" with a log from a stack of firewood. Once I suffered a fractured skull at age ten. I became so hardened over time that I never gave my mom the satisfaction of crying when I was beaten.

My aunt and uncle must have felt sorry for me, for when I was with them, they never

raised a hand against me and they never yelled or screamed at me and they never told me that I was worthless. My mother lied to the school and I started kindergarten at age 4 and wouldn't be 5 until my birthday in November. Today, most children whose birthday is in November and age is 5 would wait until next year and be 6. So I actually started school at 4 and I was always 1 to 2 years younger than all my classmates and needless to say, I struggled mightily in sports and academics. By the age of 16 I had graduated already but still being a minor I could only work on a farm.

### God Resists the Proud

What an arrogant young boy I was when I left home at 16. I had such hostility that I often got into fights with men who were much older than I was. I couldn't stand even the slightest insult. I flew off the handle at just about anything. I was a cocked gun with a trigger finger. I stole, I drank, and I used any drug that I could find. It seemed that I was taking life out on me and anyone who happened to be around. I lived with a guy that sold drugs and stole anything that was not tied down to support his drug habit. I tried cocaine, acid, marijuana, alcohol of all kinds and I even mixed drugs at times. It was amazing that I didn't kill myself. I was at home one day and a police officer arrived at the house I was living in and said that he had a warrant for my friend and then he asked me my name. After I told him, he said that he had a warrant for me as well. So off to jail I went, this being the first of many trips to lockup.

After getting busted for yet another breaking and entering and possession of a controlled substance charge, I was taken before the judge who had gotten sick of looking at me

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1 PF Malaysia.



and he sent me off to state prison. After serving there for about 2 years, I knew that I was getting ready to get out. The only person who had ever visited me...and I had only one visitor in those 3 years (1 in the county jail awaiting the transfer to the state prison and 2 while in prison), was my father-in-law. None of my actual relatives wanted to have anything to do with me and ironically, the only visitor I had was neither my family or my friends. I remember nearing my release that I had no home, no car, no job (not likely to find one either being a convicted felon), and apparently no family. I was so down that the only way I could look was up. I attempted a feeble prayer but thought, who was I? I saw the trustee bringing books and at the very bottom of the stack there was a torn and tattered Bible. I asked him for it and signed to check it out. But what a powerful testimony to the power of God, that someone so far down in the depths of a living hell on earth, could be lifted up so high.

### **God Gives Grace to the Humble**

Ironies of ironies I found that the God of the Bible was the only true source of freedom. For me, it took prison to be set free. I opened the Bible up and read Psalm 22. Now this is what is called Scriptural roulette and I do not recommend it when you want to find answers in the Bible, but apparently God had planned this as a special circumstance and I didn't know any better. If floored me what I read and I will give you some of the verses in this chapter that actually foretells of Christ's torment and abandonment on the cross (I did not realize that at the time). Imagine what I felt when I read some of these verses in Psalm 22. I thought that they were written for me!

## **Gandhi Jayanthi Celebration, Colvale Jail**

**Ms Sheila De Sousa**

On the 2nd of October 2023 the program started at 9am with a documentary on Mahatma Gandhi. Fr Maverick welcomed everyone and the Superintendent, Asst Superintendent of Colvale Jail, Curtorim Parish group and Rotary Club members were welcomed with flowers. This was followed by the lighting of the lamp and garlanding of the portrait of the Mahatma. An inter-religious prayer service compered by inmate Ryan was held with readings from the Holy Books followed by brief reflection. Mr Sameer from Rotary group accompanied the group of inmates on the tabla while they rendered a favourite song of the Mahatma "Raghu Pati Raghav Raja Ram".

Superintendent of Colvale Jail Mr Gaurish Kuttiikar administered a pledge on the occasion and later addressed the inmates. He thanked Prison Ministry for all their efforts to help the inmates, particularly in organizing the joint program along with the Colvale Jail. Next was an inspirational talk by resource person Rotarian Sameer Kapadi on Gandhian Values such as Truth, Nonviolence, Peace, Justice and Forgiveness which was very uplifting to all present. The Curtorim Parish Youth presented Gheun Nachotam a puppet show that enthralled the audience. Fr Manuel Dias Parish priest of Curtorim entertained the crowd with melodious songs on his guitar accompanied by his youth with some entertaining and catchy Hindi melodies. The program included a quiz on Gandhi, current affairs, sports etc. was held in rounds between different blocks...like convicts, undertrials, NDPS etc. The women's block was entertained by Sister Carmel and a parish group from Verna. Snacks were served. A token gift of a toothbrush was given to more than 600 Inmates. The programme came to a close with a vote of thanks by inmate Raymond followed by the singing of the National Anthem.

## Korean Groups Sharpen Call for Death Penalty Abolition<sup>1</sup>

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Catholics, Protestants and other Christian groups joined rights activists in South Korea to call for an end to capital punishment, marking the World Day Against the Death Penalty on Oct. 10. The United Conference on the Abolition of the Death Penalty, a forum that includes members of several Christian denominations and rights groups appealed to political decision-makers to abolish capital punishment as a mark of respect for human life. “Attempts to execute people must be stopped, and the campaign to abolish the death penalty in Korea must continue,” the group said in a statement. South Korea has not executed anyone since 1997 and therefore Amnesty International categorizes it as “an abolitionist country in practice.” However, the death penalty continues to be the toughest sentence in the country’s criminal justice system. At least 59 people are on death row, all of them convicted of murder.

“Although the government assures that no executions will be carried out, we are concerned because the media is spreading reports that execution facilities are operational. And the move to gather prisoners sentenced to death at Seoul Detention Center goes in the same direction,” the statement said. “Punishing a horrible crime with a horrible punishment is in itself a horrible thing”. The statement was referring to the Korean Ministry of Justice recently transferring two death row inmates to the Seoul Detention Center, a facility established to carry out executions.

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1 UCA News.

Yoo Young-cheol (a serial killer of 21 people) and Jeong Hyeong-gu (also a convicted murderer) were transferred to the center, which houses 18 death row inmates, according to the Vatican’s Fides news. “Punishing a horrible crime with a horrible punishment is in itself a horrible thing. It should be remembered that the death penalty has no deterrent effect, is not useful, and should be abolished,” the conference statement said.

The Korean Ministry of Justice is leaning toward maintaining capital punishment, despite Korean President Seok-yeol Yoon voting in favor of a global moratorium on it at the United Nations General Assembly last December, the statement said. South Korea’s human rights commission also said the country has to abolish the death penalty to live up to international standards as a majority of the nations in the world have abolished it. The National Human Rights Commission of Korea in a statement on Oct. 10 said at least 144 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. A minority of 55 countries still retained the death penalty at the end of 2022, it said quoting Amnesty. “This is the time to formally discuss repealing capital punishment. Many of those who supported the existence of the death penalty responded positively to the abolition of the death penalty when alternative punishments were introduced,” commission chair, Song Doo-hwan, said in the statement.

### JOY IN HEAVEN

‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.’ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance

- (Lk 15, 6-7).

## Finding Family After 40 Years Behind Bars<sup>1</sup>

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Helen was born during the “beginning of the end” of World War II, in the winter of 1944. The doctor attending her birth was drunk on moonshine, the gallon jug still sitting on the dining room table as her mother laboured. She often asks herself if it was any wonder her life wasn’t a straight path. For the first 10 years of Helen’s life, she was raised on her grandfather’s dirt farm in southern rural Alabama. The Great Depression and World War II had depleted the country of resources, and those in her community deeply felt the impacts. “My family lived by hard work, sweat, tears, and the Word of the Lord,” she recalls.

### Family Ties

Helen’s parents raised her and her siblings with traditional values like honesty, obedience, and respect for one’s elders. Her family regularly attended a Missionary Baptist church. Each Sunday brought lessons on the hellfire and brimstone that awaited sinners. While she knew her parents loved her, as the third of eight children, Helen remembers feeling overlooked as a child. In 1955, her family sold the farm and moved to Florida. Life looked dramatically different then. They had neighbours who lived next door instead of down the road. Helen saw a TV for the first time. Internally, Helen was changing too. She felt a resistance building toward the faith in which her parents raised her - she couldn’t bring herself to believe in a God she thought punished people for breaking rules. Helen wanted out of her childhood home, but not just because of her religious upbringing. She also disliked the strict lifestyle her father enforced in the house. At 18, Helen moved out and got married. On the outside, the marriage looked fine. But Helen was learning that

the man she had married had a secret: He was an alcoholic who was prone to violence. Helen herself began keeping his alcoholism, and the abuse, a secret. The shame and embarrassment of it was too great for her to bear. Yet despite their problems, the couple had five children over the next 20 years. It was during these years that Helen developed a faith in God that sustained her.

### A Lifelong Sentence

In 1982, two things occurred that would change Helen’s life forever: Her marriage ended, and she committed a crime that resulted in a life sentence. Her faith would become the rock throughout her years in prison, propelling her forward. “I could not have done one day in the system without the Lord in my life,” she says. Today, Helen has served 41 years of that life sentence - and the woman she is now is nearly unrecognizable compared to the “insecure, insignificant ... naïve country girl” she remembers being when she was first imprisoned. Over the course of her sentence, Helen has dedicated herself to taking part in every program she could, from Bible studies and church services to educational and mentoring programs—and more.

She applied herself fully to every program, often going above and beyond the expectations set for her. But something was missing. “The thing that plagued me,” she said, “was that I had no plan, did not know my purpose, or where I was going in life.” Helen’s relationship with her children has changed throughout her time in prison as well. Her ex-husband assumed custody of her four youngest children when she was incarcerated. Her eldest was 18 years old at the time of her crime and was charged as her co-defendant. He served 2 1/2 years in prison. In addition to the guilt she felt for her crime, Helen carried a heavy heart for the hurt she had caused her children.

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1 PFI

## **An Extended Family**

Initially, Helen's ex-husband limited her contact with her younger children. But as her children grew older and gained independence, she was able to connect with them. Today, Helen has a loving and caring relationship with all five of her children. Because they all live far away, visitations are not always an option. But they are always eager to hear updates from her on phone calls and in letters. Helen now has six grandchildren, and she hasn't been able to meet most of them. But that hasn't stopped Helen from being a "grandmother" to those around her. "I've been locked up 40 years," she says, "so over the years I was not with my daughters ... but I have had young women that have been like daughters to me, and I've had young women that have been like granddaughters to me." Helen believes the reason she can speak into so many young women's lives is because of her ability to listen well. She supports the women by providing a safe ear and friendly counsel. The women around her know she will tell them when they have made a mistake and affirm them if they are on a steady path. Many of the women Helen has grown close to have since left prison, but they keep regular contact with her through phone calls, emails, and photographs. Upon release, many have gone on to have successful careers, some working for doctors or in real estate. "I'm very proud of them," she says. "They're my success stories." Not every woman who Helen mentors is successful on the outside - but that doesn't stop Helen from loving them when they return to prison. "They always come back to me," Helen says, "and of course I still receive them back. We all make mistakes."

## **Finding Purpose in Prison**

Helen's search for purpose continued throughout her 40 years in prison, even as she participated in numerous programs and mentored women. Recently, she was transferred to a different facility where

she learned about the Prison Fellowship Academy. The Academy is a holistic yearlong program that allows participants to reflect on their lives in a community environment. In the Academy, participants engage with biblically based curriculum that imparts the Values of Good Citizenship: integrity, community, productivity, restoration, responsibility, and affirmation. Helen knew she needed to be in the next class - that there was something different about this program than all the others she had participated in. She was accepted into the program, and after five months, the class of 20 women have become a family to her. "We've built a bond that I know I'll carry with me for the rest of my life," she says. "It's beautiful." The relationships Helen is building through the Academy aren't the only benefits she has gained since joining the class.

Through the curriculum, Helen is seeing her own worth - something she was unable to do for most of her life.

## **A Purpose-Driven Voice**

When she first came to prison, Helen wasn't the type of person to speak out for the Lord. She knew and had a relationship with Him, but she kept her faith to herself. Now she has confidence and stands firm in her faith, sharing it with all those around her. Most importantly though, Helen noted that it was only through the Academy that she realized the purpose that had been missing in her life. "Did I have to come all this way, do all these years, to find that my purpose is to be obedient to God's calling and to do His will?" she asks. "I do not believe that anything happens by accident. God brought me to this place, to this time." Her advice to women who are facing prison for the first time: Get with positive people, go to chapel services, read the Bible, and take educational programs. Helen has a parole hearing coming up and hopes to return home to be with her three surviving siblings, children, and grandchildren - but unlike before, she is confident in her purpose.

## A Church with a Heart for Kansas City

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**Amanuel Mengistu<sup>1</sup>**

When Darron Edwards moved from the small town of Waxahachie, Texas, to Kansas City, Missouri, in 2000, he believed he was following God's calling. He felt like Abram in the book of Genesis, headed to an unfamiliar place. Darron had been recruited to become the new pastor of United Believers Community Church - a small fellowship barely two years old. Although he faced some situations that made him question whether he was in the right place, the Church eventually thrived. Within 10 years, the growing congregation expanded to a new facility in an area called Hickman Mills on the south side of Kansas City. As he settled into the new neighbourhood, Darron began to take an interest in the needs of the surrounding community, where 36% of children lived below the poverty line. He eventually rallied his United Believers congregation to adopt a local elementary school, Ingels Elementary.

### **The Least, The Lost, The Left Out**

"We ended up adopting the poorest school in the poorest district in our city," Darron recalls. "From that engagement ... we found out that 33% of the kids who attended that school had an incarcerated parent." Upon hearing this shocking statistic, Darron thought of Prison Fellowship Angel Tree, a program he and his family had supported for years. Angel Tree mobilizes Churches to provide Christmas gifts, summer camp

sponsorships, and other opportunities to the children of prisoners across the country. "Since 1996, I've been a supporter of Angel Tree," says Darron. "I wanted to raise my kids around the whole issue of generosity and understanding that it's more blessed to give than it is to receive. Because God has afforded us a sense of abundant living ... we wanted to pour it back into the least, the lost, and the left out." Seeing the needs at Ingels Elementary motivated Edwards to get his entire Church involved in what had previously been a family Christmas tradition. United Believers Community Church signed up for Angel Tree Christmas and began buying and delivering Christmas presents to local children who had a parent behind bars. "We started off small with 25 to 30 kids," Darron says. "Now over 300 children are part of our fellowship."

### **Going Beyond Christmas**

As the United Believers volunteers began to build relationships with Angel Tree families in their community, they discovered many more ways to offer support. "We've learned to listen to them," Darron says. "We've done many wrap-around services over the years to make sure that we don't just do Angel Tree Christmas, but we engage with these children all year long." United Believers Community Church offers many resources, including a food bank, donated clothing, and free mental health therapy sessions. The Church even stepped in to help Ingels Elementary solve practical problems, keeping some children from regularly attending school. "The principal of the school met with me and said, 'Pastor Edwards, attendance is low because of two things,'" Darron recalls. "What the principal

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<sup>1</sup> Prison Fellowship International.

said blew me away: ‘Kids didn’t come to school because they didn’t have materials, and ... because they didn’t want to wear dirty clothes.’ United Believers responded to this need by purchasing washers and dryers for the school to offer a place for students’ clothes to be cleaned. The Church also set up a year-round resource closet at the school where any child can obtain free school supplies. “What we discovered is that Angel Tree has to be bigger than Christmas,” says Darron. “There are needs all year long, and when Churches find out how to get involved, and they have a heart for those in need ... That’s our mission, and when we get back to that mission, I really believe that we’ll see a change in our world that we’ve yet to see.”

### **A Community of Generosity**

One of the things that most excites Pastor Darron is watching his congregation develop into “a community of generosity.” As members of his Church get more involved in the community, it has excited younger congregants who are eager to put their faith into action. “Some of my millennials and some of my Gen Zers say: “This is what we’ve been waiting on. We’ve been waiting to do the Gospel. We hear the Gospel, we sing the Gospel, we preach the Gospel, but now we’re doing the Gospel.” This excitement has translated into growth for the United Believers. Attendance has steadily climbed as people are attracted to the mission of serving the “least, the lost, and the left out.” “We’ve had people who’ve been incarcerated who are [now] volunteers,” Darron says. “And we’ve had people from the community say, ‘You guys are a real Church. I want to be a part of a real Church that’s meeting needs.’”

### **A Church only Has to Have the Heart**

Darron is quick to express his appreciation for Prison Fellowship® as a ministry partner. Through this partnership, the Church was able to serve as a host for an Angel Tree sports camp in Kansas City’s Hy-Vee Arena that served hundreds of local children. “We never thought we would do a sports camp. We never thought that we would rent out the Hy-Vee Arena. We never thought we would have WNBA stars come out to lead the camps. We never thought we’d give away over 200 pairs of brand-new shoes and swag bags and balls, and gifts,” says Darron. “Well, that’s the partnership of Prison Fellowship. We just supplied the volunteers. We just supplied the love; Prison Fellowship supplied the resources, and it happened to the glory of God.” By partnering with Prison Fellowship Angel Tree, United Believers Community Church has multiplied its impact and extended its reach in Kansas City - the once-unfamiliar city that Darron had moved to more than two decades ago. As this congregation shares God’s love with their community in practical ways, lives are being transformed. “A Church only has to have the heart,” Darron says. “And when you have a heart for people, and you have an agency like Angel Tree, who’ll give you the tools, it can save communities.”

### **Lost and Found**

Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe - the best one - and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate, for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

- (Lk 15, 21-24).

## Kolbe Home, Paten, Gujarat

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### Sr Karuna SMMI

Kolbe Home Paten is going forward. Having had an experience and fulfilment of working with the abandoned, neglected and marginalized in the past such as orphans, leprosy patients and HIV. I am happy to work with the children of prisoners and their family. I came to Kolbe home Paten in the month of June 2023. This centre was opened two years ago. "Whatsoever you did to the least of my brethren you did unto me" (Mt 25,40). Though we human being are created in the image and likeness of God we categorise and differentiate such as good and bad, rich and poor, educated and ignorant, intelligent and unintelligent and above all the caste system. This brings an unbearable pain and suffering in the life of the least, last and the lost. When I reached the home there were eight girl children between the age of 8 to 16. All of them are studying. Due to all promotion system in the schools their performance is poor. We are helping them to come up with their study as well as in their extracurricular activities such as tuition classes, cultural and sports programs etc. We celebrate the national and religious festivals and birthdays. Winners in various competitions felicitated with prizes and incentives. Children are very happy about it.

As the Kolbe Home stands for the memorial of St. Maximilian Kolbe on 14th August, we celebrated the feast inviting neighbouring parishes. Most Rev Thomas Macwan the Archbishop of Gandhinagar presided over the meeting with many priests. Many Religious sisters and few prison ministry

volunteers and parishioners joined with us. Children enjoy their stay at Kolbe Home. The staff try to help them experience the love and care they missed due to circumstances and help them to become better persons and build up their lives and help others. This home functions very much by the generous help of the people of good will. I am grateful to each of them and pray to the Almighty to bless them a hundredfold here and in the life to come.

### The Beatitudes

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely [b] on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

(Mt 5, 1-11).

## Incarcerated Nobel Peace Prize Laureates

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On Oct 6, 2023, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded jailed Iranian activist Narges Mohammadi the Nobel Prize for Peace 2023 for her fight against the oppression of women in Iran and promotion of human rights and freedom for all. Mohammadi became the 5<sup>th</sup> laureate to win the Nobel Peace Prize whilst behind bars or under house. The Peace Prize is granted to individuals who have made substantial contributions to fostering fraternity among nations, reducing standing armies, and advancing peace congresses. The prize worth 11 million Swedish crowns (around \$ 1 million) will be presented in Oslo on December 10, the death anniversary of Alfred Nobel, who founded the awards in his 1895 will.

### 1935: Carl Von Ossietzky, Germany

Journalist and pacifist Carl von Ossietzky was imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp when he won the 1935 Nobel Peace Prize and was unable to make the trip to Oslo to collect the award. Von Ossietzky, who had been arrested three years earlier in a raid on opponents of Adolf Hitler following the Reichstag fire, was the first regime critic anywhere in the world to receive the prestigious award. Furious over the Norwegian Nobel Committee's decision, Adolf Hitler banned all German citizens from accepting a Nobel in any category. While Ossietzky was unable to pick up his diploma and gold Nobel medal, a German lawyer tricked his family into allowing him to pocket the prize money. Ossietzky died in captivity in 1938.



**Rev Dr Francis Kodiyan MCBS**  
National Coordinator & Secretary to CBCI  
for Prison Ministry India

### 1991: Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar

Myanmar's deposed leader and democracy champion won the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, at a time when she was under house arrest as part of a crackdown by the country's military leadership on the pro-democracy opposition. Honoured "for her non-violent struggle for democracy and human rights", Suu Kyi feared she would not be allowed to return to Myanmar if she travelled to Oslo. She was instead represented at the 1991 prize ceremony by her two sons and her husband, who accepted the award on her behalf. Symbolically, an empty chair was placed on the stage to mark her absence. She gave her traditional Nobel lecture in 2012, after being freed in 2010 and going on to lead her country. Suu Kyi was again detained after the generals seized power in February 2021. In 2022 she was jailed for a total of 33 years, a term later partially reduced by junta chief Min Aung Hlaing.

### 2010: Liu Xiaobo, China

The jailed Chinese dissident won the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize. He was serving an 11-year jail sentence for subversion. Honoured "for his long and non-violent struggle for fundamental human rights in China", Liu's



chair was symbolically left empty and no award was handed out. His wife, Liu Xia, was placed under house arrest after the prize was announced and his three brothers were blocked from leaving China. He died in July 2017 of liver cancer in a Chinese hospital at the age of 61, after being transferred there from prison, becoming the second Nobel laureate to die in captivity.

### **2022: Ales Bialiatski, Belarus**

Belarusian rights campaigner Ales Bialiatski, who was jailed in July 2021, in 2022 shared the award with Russia's Memorial group and Ukraine's Center for Civil Liberties for their work to document war crimes and rights abuse. The head of Belarus's most prominent rights group, Viasna has been at the forefront of attempts to chart the abuses of the regime of Belarusian strongman Alexander Lukashenko. He was arrested -- after months of mass demonstrations over Lukashenko's rule -- on charges of tax evasion, a move seen by fellow dissidents as a thinly veiled attempt to silence him. He was represented by his wife, Natalia Pinchuk. He was sentenced in March to 10 years in jail.

### **2023: Narges Mohammadi, Iran**

Iranian rights campaigner, who has spent much of the past two decades in jail, is the fifth laureate to win the Nobel Peace Prize whilst behind bars. She was honoured for her fight against the oppression of women in Iran, the 51-year-old journalist and activist has campaigned against the mandatory hijab for women and the death penalty. She is the vice-president of the Defenders of Human Rights Centre founded by Iranian human rights lawyer Shirin Ebadi, herself a Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 2003.

## **Dussehra and Nada Habba Celebration**

### **Central Women Prison, Shivamogga**

PMI volunteers celebrated Dussehra and Nada Habba at Central Women Prison, Shivamogga. Sr Elize L. and team organised a special cultural program at the Central Women's Prison Shivamogga on 25 October 2023. Sr Elize welcomed the inmates and explained the meaning of Dussehra festival and what is meant by Nada Habba. She thanked especially the Assistant Superintendent for giving her team opportunity to entertain the inmates.

Sr. Lilly Thomas from Sacred Heart Convent spent some time explaining the meaning of all festivals and the reason why families and communities spend time celebrating them. In her vote of thanks Mrs Violet thanked the administration and particularly Mrs Shantha, the Assistant Superintendent for spending much time with all and expressing her joy and support for the program. Mrs Shantha appreciated the performance of children from Challekere who presented well prepared cultural programs. The Prison Ministry India team distributed fruits to the inmates. The children were extremely happy to have participated in this program.

### **PMI Source**

Super Dynamic Love Bomb  
Explosion of Jesus in Calvary

# Prison to Professional: 6 Life After Prison Success Stories<sup>1</sup>

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Ample research and results show that education has a massive impact on lowering crime rates and reducing recidivism - the likelihood of individuals returning to prison after release. A study by Emory University found that: Individuals who complete some high school courses have recidivism rates around 55%. Vocational training cut recidivism to approximately 30 percent. An associate degree drops the rate to 13.7 percent. A bachelor's degree reduces it to 5.6 percent. A master's brings recidivism to 0 percent. If someone in prison receives the opportunity to learn an industrial skill or acquire knowledge in a specialized field, not only do they rarely return to prison (less than 10%), but they also go on to build businesses, create jobs, and inspire their local communities.

This shouldn't sound new to any of us. We all know education can be effective. But what does it actually look like in the context of individuals who are incarcerated? How does education actually change lives? Below are six stories of individuals who turned their lives around and illustrate the impact that applied education can have on career building and community impact – even after incarceration.

## 1. Sean Pica, Hudson Link for Higher Education

Education transforms hopeless situations into inspiring opportunities to lead and give back. Sean entered prison as a 9th grade New Yorker with a 24-year sentence. He said he had little hope in himself or any sort of redemptive future. But, when he began reading children's books to fellow inmates

and teaching them how to write letters to their loved ones, he witnessed how learning created a flicker of joy amid the isolation. Soon, he enrolled in an organization called Hudson Link, a degree-granting program in prisons, and took college classes. Through that experience, he saw how the minds and hearts of individuals transformed through education and how it helped them learn about themselves and what was possible once released. After Sean was released, he went on to earn 400 credits from Nyack College and two master's degrees from New York Theological Seminary and Hunter College. In 2007, Pica returned to lead Hudson Link as its Executive Director. Today, Hudson Link's programs provide postsecondary education to thousands of men and women in prison, less than 2% of whom return to prison, compared to the rate of 68% nationwide. Pica's work saves New York State taxpayers over \$21 million per year, and that number continues to increase.

## 2. Tim Arnold, Lawn Life

The best person to teach the lessons you wish you were taught is you. By the time he was 18 years old, Ohio-based Tim had 27 convictions on his record and spent the next six years incarcerated. "By everyone else's account, I was a failure." But when he turned 25, someone gave him a chance in spite of his past and hired him full time. He went to real estate school and asked plumbers and electricians questions like, "How did you fix that?" He learned quickly. In 2008, he launched Lawn Life, a nonprofit that employs formerly incarcerated young men and teaches them work ethics and business skills. Today, Lawn Life has hired over 700 at-risk youth in five different cities.

## 3. Kenyatta Leal, The Last Mile

"Software engineers who are judged by the quality of the code they develop, not

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<sup>1</sup> <https://standtogether.org/>

by the stigma of criminality.” Growing up with an absent father, Kenyatta’s dealing with drugs and robbery with firearms led him to a life sentence in the San Quentin, California prison at the age of 22. But when he turned 25, someone gave him a chance in spite of his past and hired him full time. He went to real estate school and asked plumbers and electricians questions like, “How did you fix that?” He learned quickly. In prison, Kenyatta learned about The Last Mile, an entrepreneurship program for inmates. “I was always looking for a way to channel my entrepreneurial energy and gift.” The Last Mile inspired Kenyatta to launch Code.7370, an education program that teaches incarcerated individuals how to code. To overcome the challenge of no internet connection, Code.7370 created a proprietary programming platform that simulates a live coding experience. Once inmates graduate, they’re invited to join TLM works, the first web development agency to provide individuals coming out of prison with the opportunity to earn a living, professional wage. Kenyatta now helps train Fortune 500 companies to hire and retain employees who are exiting the criminal justice system, to create more inclusive work opportunities for those starting their second chance.

#### **4. Richard Miles, Miles of Freedom**

Empathy undergirds the drive to accomplish a huge, meaningful vision. From ages 19 to 34, Richard spent 15 years in prison for serious crimes he didn’t commit. Even after his release, employers and apartments offered him nothing. “The perfect mixture for recidivism,” he wrote, referring to the obstacles he faced over and over again upon release. When the case Miles vs. State of Texas exonerated him completely, he had one mission: to give men and women re-entering society housing, employment, and the opportunity to regain the dignity to rebuild their lives. Miles of Freedom (MOF) offers educational classes, including a three-

month Job Readiness Workshop, which results in financial literacy, resume building, and placement with employers. Watch this video to hear more about Richard’s incredible journey.

#### **5. Marilyn Barnes, Root and Rebound**

Knowledge breeds power and can have an exponential impact. In and out of prison for 20 years, Marilyn struggled with drug addiction. Her time in California prison as a young woman made things even worse. With the help and guidance of Root and Rebound’s Roadmap to Reentry guide, Barnes went on to earn her master’s degree in education, authored the book From Crack to College and Vice Versa and founded a non-profit, Because Black Is Still Beautiful. Having experienced systemic problems firsthand, Barnes’ education fuels her passion to help people break free from the cycle of recidivism.

#### **6. Hector, Getting Out and Staying Out**

Change doesn’t have to wait until after a sentence is over. Change can happen in prison, along the way. During his time at the infamous Riker’s Island prison in New York City, Hector regularly corresponded with Getting Out and Staying Out (GOSO), one of the most active re-entry programs in the New York City area for 16 to 24-year-old men. During his five-year sentence, Hector received study materials and career counselling. While incarcerated, Hector earned his High School Equivalency diploma, obtained a Masonry certification, and facilitated the prison’s Alternative to Violence curriculum. Since his release, Hector completed a successful internship at a Brooklyn-based bakery, Ovenly, one of GOSO Works’ employer partners, and was hired as their head of porters. His story of transformation is one of many, as 86% of GOSO participants never return to prison and many have earned degrees or certificates from leading colleges and universities.

## PMI Karnataka Report 2023

Karnataka State has 14 dioceses of which 10 are Latin dioceses, 3 Syro-Malabar and One Syro Malankara diocese. Of these 14 dioceses, there are no prisons situated in the Diocesan headquarters of Belthangady and Bhadravathi which are Syro Malabar dioceses and in the lone Syro Malankara diocese of Puttur. The Prison Ministry Units are active in all the other 11 dioceses and are functional depending upon the support of the local Prison authorities. The Prison administration of Karnataka has given permission for PMI units to visit the prisons subject to a few restrictions imposed in their circular which include that the local Superintendent shall have the powers to decide the entry and activities of the PMI members. The Unit members visit the prisons either bi-weekly or fortnightly as permitted by the authorities. The PMI volunteers in each diocese are around 5 minimum to 32 maximum. Monthly meetings are held to share the activities and plan programs during the month which includes adoration/prayers before the meeting commences.

### Ministries Inside Prisons

Prison visits include counselling; helping the prisoners to obtain advocates of District Legal Services Authority (free legal aid); contacting the family members of prisoners who do not meet them in prison; visiting the family members; visiting the victims' families and understanding their concerns and helping them if needed; contacting the advocates and informing the prisoners the status of their case; providing groceries to the families when the prisoner requests for help; helping out in giving cash surety for prisoners who are financially poor;



**Dr Michael Noronha**

organizing de-addiction camp on a weekly basis by arranging de-addiction counselling experts from a reputed deaddiction center and providing medicines (Nicotex 4 mg) to help them overcome smoking addiction; meeting the prison resident doctor and briefing him about the progress of de-addiction camp and cases which need psychiatric treatment which is identified during the counselling sessions; paying fees for prisoners children who seek financial help and also collaborate with National PMI in sending prisoners children for studies in Kolbe Home and to other religious institutions, Bangalore; helping prisoners families with medical help whenever sought; paying fine amount for pre-mature release of prisoners by the Government for good conduct and other prisoners who have completed their imprisonment term but are financially unable to pay the fine; conduct medical camps like general health checkup, skin camp, gynaec camp for women prisoners etc; Regular counselling for women and men prisoners in few prisons.

### Outside the Prison:

In collaboration with the National PMI help the released prisoner financially to build their home; Help released prisoners to obtain a job wherever possible and when they approach us.

## **Programmes organized inside the Prison:**

International Women's Day – competitions are conducted and prizes distributed; Volley Ball Match for male prisoners and prison staff; Skill Training- making paper & cloth bags, plastic flowers and Tailoring; celebration of Independence Day, Republic Day and Rajyotsava Day celebrations with cultural programs; Rakshabandan day by tying Rakhie to all prisoners as a symbol of brother/sisterhood; Celebration of Ugadi, Bakrid and Christmas; organized Inter-religious program as part of Bakrid celebration. Felicitate Prison Superintendents who are transferred. Celebrating Good Friday, Easter and Christmas. On most occasions, food, sweets and Cakes are distributed to all the prisoners and the prison authorities.

## **For PMI Members**

Volunteers training program; ensure most of the dioceses send their PMI members for National and State Conferences; and attend the State Executive Committee meetings held once in six months.

## **Donations to Prisons**

Donated 4 wheel chairs; a sewing machine; One amplifier and a sound system; For indoor games – Carrom, Ludo, chess board etc.

## **Service at Correction Centers**

Hardly two or three dioceses are serving the boy's and girls' Homes and correction centres in Karnataka. These homes are for those children below the age of 18 years who are convicted under the POCSO Act and those who have run away from home due to disturbed family circumstances

leading to child abuse, beggary, alcohol-addicted parents etc. Such institutes should be served as the children need a lot of love and attention from NGOs to reintegrate into society as "Children who feel Wanted and loved".

## **PMI Sunday Celebration:**

PMI is a CBCI-recognized body under the Justice, Peace & Development Commission with a special desk. Unfortunately, very few Parishes in the dioceses take it seriously and celebrate the day. The second collection on PMI Sunday is not permitted by the majority of the dioceses for PMI activities. Prison Ministry activities need huge funding for the purpose of paying fines for the release of prisoners; educating prisoners' children; organizing programs and health camps and providing medicines and snacks etc. Government funding is limited for the prison expenses and prison authorities depend on NGOs to supplement the needs of prisoners. However, the Regional Conference of Bishops seeks diocesan reports periodically without extending the much-needed support for Prison Ministry activities. At least PMI Sunday celebrations on a massive scale in every parish will create awareness among the laity and contributions could be forthcoming. A lukewarm response by the Parish Priests is a hindrance to making the PMI services fruitful.

## **Transfer of Religious**

Periodic transfer of men and women religious and lack of commitment on their part to appoint a team of the laity to ensure continuity of the PMI Unit is a serious hindrance which has resulted in many units becoming non-functional. Appointment of Diocesan Spiritual Assistants by the

Bishops who have no desire to serve the prisoners and have multiple responsibilities is another major cause for the slackness in the ministry's growth in the dioceses.

### **Lack of Interest in Starting PMI Units by Diocesan PMI Units**

There are PMI diocesan units in a few dioceses in Karnataka which have not shown interest in starting PMI Units in areas with sub-jails in their jurisdiction. Due to this, the prisoners in these prisons are deprived of the benefits that are rendered to prisoners by PMI Volunteers. The Diocesan authorities should ensure that the Diocesan PMI Units establish local PMI Units in sub-jails comprising the Priests, Religious and the laity to serve the prisoners.

### **Participation in Karnataka State PMI Executive Meetings**

Few Syro-Malabar and the Malankara Diocesan Representatives do not participate in these meetings. A lot of awareness of PMI activities is shared in these meetings and networking to help the PMI Volunteers reach out to the families of prisoners in their dioceses can be worked out if they participate and form PMI teams in their respective dioceses. Immediate attention is to be given to this need.

### **Involvement of Seminarians and Novices**

It is important to expose the Seminarians and Novices under the guidance of seniors in serving the children lodged in Correction Centers and Homes so that they are exposed to the suffering children and help give them the love and care they need.

## **The Last Judgement**

When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing?

And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me' (Mt 25, 31-40)

# Prison Ministry India: Necrology

Fr Francis Kodiyan MCBS

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## January

10 Sr Joel Pathalil, Holy Cross Sisters, Bihar (2018)

## February

18 Mr John Misquitha, Mumbai (2022)

18 Vanitha Shetty, Mumbai (2022)

## March

03 Mrs Annamma Sam, Trivandrum, Kerala (2009)

04 Mr MK Sam, Trivandrum, Kerala (2012)

07 Fr Zacharias Pathalil SVD, Odisha (2011)

## April

20 Sr Mary Jane SFN, Goa (2016)

25 Fr Sadanand CMI, MP

26 Archbishop Joseph Kundukulam, Thrissur, Kerala (1998)

29 Mr Marcus Gabriel Salve, Nashik (2021)

## May

01 Fr Cyriac Kollamparambil CMF, Kerala (1996)

01 Sr Carmelita SSA, Karnataka (2007)

01 Mrs Cynthia Arokiam, Pune (2015)

01 Mr Oswald D'Cunha, Mumbai (2023)

02 Fr Rufus Pereira, Mumbai (2011)

12 Mr Silvester Anandraj, Pune (2021)

27 Sr Rosakutty FMM, Tamil Nadu (2018)

## June

02 Fr Joseph Kavalakkat VC, Delhi (2016)

17 Mr Joaquim Vaz, Goa (2016)

20 Archbishop Alan D'Lastic, Delhi (2000)

21 Nancy Misquith, Pune (2022)

## July

- 07 Mr Finton Antao, Goa, (2018)
- 12 Mr AM Mathew, Trivandrum, Kerala (2016)
- 16 Mr Leo Fernandes, Mysore, Karnataka (2023)
- 28 Bro Theofin MMB, Kerala (2013)

## August

- 02 Sr Joy Panikulam SCSC (2023)
- 28 Fr Paul Akkara CMI, Kerala (2006)

## September

- 05 St Mother Teresa, WB (1997)
- 09 Fr Susai Raj SJ, Patna, Bihar (2023)
- 13 Fr Antonyraj, Tamil Nadu (2018)
- 28 Mr Sushil Dube, Pune (2019)

## October

- 08 Mr Peter Dantas, Sawantwadi (2023)
- 13 Sr Leena Kattukkaran FMM, AP (2018)
- 14 Fr Suresh Sathe, Nashik (2022)

## December

- 09 Sr Jemma George DHM (2022)
- 20 Fr George Kuttickal MCBS, Kerala (2017)
- 28 Mr Gabriel E John, Delhi (2018)
- 29 Mrs Angela Lobo, Mumbai (2020)

**Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord;  
And let perpetual light shine upon them.  
May the souls of all faithful departed,  
through the mercy of God, rest in peace.**

To pray for the departed souls of prisoners and PMI volunteers is our duty. Please remember them, offer them Holy Mass and pray for the repose of their souls. Would appreciate if you inform us the death dates of other PMI volunteers. Thanks. On 13<sup>th</sup> November 2023 at 4PM we shall have an online Holy Mass for the departed souls of prisoners and PMI volunteers. You are most welcome.





**PMI Bengaluru Unit Visiting Chikkaballapura District Prison**



**PMI Buxar Distributing Bicycles to Prisoners' Children**



**PMI Chengalpattu Distributing Water Purifier to Chengalpattu District Jail**



**PMI Distributes Groceries to Hiriadkka Undertrial Prison**



**PMI Distributes Steel Vessels to Pala Subjail**



**PMI Donating Water Purifier to Dharmapuri Prison**



**PMI Eye Camp, Trichy Central Prison**



**PMI House Construction for Jeeta Beuro, Odisha**



**PMI Madurai Unit Donating LCD TV to Virudhunagar District jail**



**PMI Medical Camp, Dindigal Prison**



**PMI Pune Distributes Educational Scholarship to Released Prisoners**



**PMI Visit to Shivamogga Women Prison**



**PMI Visit to Special Subjail, KGF**



**PMI Visit to Subjail Harur**



**PMI Visit to Subjail Hosur**



**PMI Chengalpattu Unit**