

FROM PRISON TO HOME

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SET OUR HEARTS ON FIRE AND FEET ON THE MOVE

The Archdiocesan Prison Ministry of Kuala Lumpur organised a stay-in spiritual retreat for its prison volunteers with the theme **“From Prison to Home”**. The retreat took place from 20 -23 October 2023 in Kuala Lumpur. It was attended by 55 dedicated volunteers from the Prison Ministry. Rev Fr. Dr. Francis Kodiyan, (MCBS), from Bangalore, conducted the retreat. He is a co-founder of the Prison Ministry of India and has been ministering it for the past 42 years with great passion.

During the event, participants were inspired by the presentations which helped raise awareness of the importance of their outreach to incarcerated individuals and their families. The sessions were highly informative and the group discussions and sharing were beneficial to all present.

The volunteers formed five groups of Intercessory Task Forces comprising 10 to 11 members in each group. The aim of the task force is to pray every day for prisoners, their families, authorities, and prison volunteers. On the final day of the retreat, which was Mission Sunday, the Prison Volunteers pledged to carry out their assigned tasks with faithfulness and truthfulness and set their hearts on fire with Christ’s love, their feet on the move, fully committed with enthusiasm and dedication.

We are grateful to Rev. Francis Kodiyan for sharing his insights and inspiring the Prison volunteers in their ministry. Archbishop Julian Leow graced the occasion and celebrated the Eucharist celebration.

We are delighted to introduce you to our very first e-newsletter, called “FROM PRISON TO HOME.” This E-Newsletter is published by the Archdiocesan Catholic Prison Ministry of Kuala Lumpur (ACPM) for its members and is strictly for internal circulation only. The idea to publish this e-newsletter was initiated during the retreat held in October 2023. We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude all whom have contributed articles and have supported us in publishing it.

During our retreat, we have committed ourselves to spend time in prayer for those who are behind bars and experiencing distress, loneliness and darkness. These individuals have been separated from their loved ones and are in dire need of our prayers and support. Let’s always bring our smiles, peace and love to them, ensuring them that they are not alone.

**The Prison Ministry Core Team,
Frs Bonaventure and George Packiasamy**

I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to all volunteers and priests who have dedicated themselves to the Prison Ministry, working with incarcerated people over the years. I thank God for the privilege given to us to minister to those who have lost their freedom and bring hope to many.

Thank you for your dedication and service as you continue to visit the prisons in the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur. Your visits and presence can and have impacted the lives of the prisoners. Let us be instruments of healing and unity for the prisoners and their families as well as to help them to integrate with society.

By Archbishop Julian Leow Beng Kim

**WISHING YOU A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR 2024!**

In 2016, I embarked on my journey as a member of the Archdiocesan Prison Ministry. My very first visit was to Bentong Prison and I was accompanied by Albert Anthony to meet the death row inmates. I was filled with excitement and anticipation as I prepared to share the Gospel passage with them, and indeed, it brought great joy.

Currently, visiting the inmates in Bentong every two weeks is something that brings me immense joy, peace and strength. During these visits, I spend an hour sharing the Word of God, praying and singing with them. The inmates are grateful and often express their desire to meet up with us volunteers for the following sessions. I always look forward to these meetings and cherish the time spent with them.

As President of CPFA, I regularly share with fellow volunteers the importance of improving our prayer life and growing in our Christian values, as this in turn, will help the inmates to transform their lives. We must strive continually to gain more insight about the Prison Ministry by participating in the formations and workshops offered by CPFA on a quarterly basis. Having a mentor can provide us with direction and enthusiasm in serving in the Prison Ministry.

I am grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the Prison Ministry, where I can offer prayers and reflections and extend the corporal works of mercy beyond the prison walls.

By Stephen K. Thiagarajah

In May 2009, my wife, Esther, signed up for an 8-week induction programme. Meanwhile I had been visiting Pusat Serenti Serendah, a Drug Rehabilitation Center.

However, since 2010, I have been regularly visiting Bentong Prison. Our group meets on Saturday at Christ the Light Church, Kepong, at 7.30 am. We start our journey with a prayer for a safe trip and for the well-being of all the inmates and wardens. Once we reach the prison, we register ourselves, and then we go to the male block where we see either the inmates, those on death row or juveniles.

Visiting prisons is an enriching and rewarding experience for me for several reasons. When I prepare my sharing, I learn more about the Gospel. Besides that, the inmates are eager to know more about the Word of God, which brings them joy, happiness and consolation. As some of the inmates have a shallow knowledge of the Bible and faith, I begin with simple catechism lessons.

I feel blessed that God has given me a good family with strong faith, and I am happy to share the Word of God and my faith with the inmates. During my visits, the inmates often ask questions about the law and faith in Christ. I try my best to answer their questions, and if I do not know the answer, I will do my own research and get back to them on my next visit. Overall, visiting prison inmates is a satisfying and fulfilling experience for me.

By Albert Anthony

During a recent retreat for prison volunteers, I learned about the crucial role of prayer in the lives of both inmates and volunteers. Without prayer, there can be no effective ministry. Our retreat master also highlighted the importance of showing love and compassion towards incarcerated individuals, who are often stigmatised and left feeling hopeless. In essence, prisoners require love and support from us at all times.

By Peter Wong

Joining the Prison Ministry had been a long-standing desire of mine, but I had to put it on hold due to my husband's concern for my safety, especially since our children were still young at that time. However, in 2016, I signed up to join the Prison Ministry during a promotional drive at my parish, the Church of the Holy Family, Kajang. This decision changed my life and I have not regretted it since. Following a series of Induction Training, I was assigned to share the Good News at the Kajang Women's Prison. Although I experienced a rollercoaster of emotions such as joy and anticipation, I fulfilled my duty religiously with a teammate.

I came to realise that one doesn't need to be a highly talented teacher, singer, or preacher to serve in the Prison Ministry. Being a part of the Prison Ministry team gave me a golden opportunity to read the Bible and understand the Word of the God, which I found complicated at times, and I had numerous questions. I began my personal faith journey and research work, and I was guided by the Holy Spirit, blessed with answers (thank God for 'Mr Google').

During my time volunteering with female inmates, I witnessed many of them at their lowest point in life, feeling as though they had lost everything. However, their dire situations allowed them to be open to the Gospel message and the possibility of change. This experience inspired me to take the Word of God more seriously. I have built a strong rapport with the women to gain their trust, empathising with them and listening to their frustrations. Through this process, I learned that confessing our faults to another person can lead to healing.

Comprehending the deepest thoughts and emotions of my fellow sisters who are incarcerated has been essential in allowing me, as a volunteer, to provide them with better support. They often struggle with denial, anger, bargaining, and depression. As a volunteer, I pray for them during each visit by raising my hands and asking the Lord Jesus to heal them and bring happiness and peace to their hearts.

By Audrey Freeman

I had a great experience getting to know our sisters and brothers deeper, especially when we had to work together to accomplish our mission. Participating in this new Task Force reminded me that all plans and things must be coupled with prayers and total trust in God. The retreat inspired me and increased my knowledge of how to deal with inmates. It has renewed my spiritual strength and my relationship with God, where faith, trust and total surrender to Him are involved. I realised that miracles can happen when you have complete faith and trust in God.

By Rupina

Fr Francis Kodiyan has outlined the direction CPFA has to take next by giving sufficient proven ideas, implementable plans and by opening new challenges for us to serve within and beyond prison more effectively. It is time to overhaul CPFA, get back on track, and become more committed and progress-minded.

By Benedict Savarimuthu

PRISON MINISTRY SPIRITUAL RETREAT 2023



The CPFA Retreat in October 2023 was memorable and enriching for me. As a new member of the Prison Ministry team, I feel truly blessed to have been exposed to the true essence of the Prison Ministry before even receiving my permit.

I benefited in numerous ways from my participation in this truly eye-opening retreat. First, I made new friends who shared the same mission as me to grow in Christ. Second, I formed a strong bond with members of the Prison Ministry team, including our beloved Rev Fr George Packiasamy, Stephen Kumar, and new members like myself. Thirdly, I had the privilege of meeting Rev Fr. Dr Francis Kодиyan, a strong figure with international influence who has dedicated his life to improving the lives of prisoners, especially in India, through his many established events and programs. Fourthly, I have joined a prayer group called the Prayer of Jabez, which has helped me deepen my faith and pray for inmates worldwide. Finally, this retreat experience has brought me closer to Jesus Christ and his message of love and mercy. Today, I have come to understand the true meaning of “the washing of the feet” which calls us to serve. I am grateful to Fr George and the Prison Ministry team for giving me this opportunity to serve the inmates in a special way.

By Carol Joseph

I have attended two Prison Ministry retreats so far. The recent one held in October 2023, highlighted the importance of daily prayer in my prison ministry. I came to realise that my responsibility extends beyond merely spending time with prisoners. It is also my duty to assist them in preparing for a successful future beyond their incarceration.

By Andrea Dias

During the retreat, I realised the importance of praying for prisoners, which can positively affect their lives. Praying to Mother Mary can also help uplift them. The retreat also provided me with valuable insights and collective wisdom on supporting and rehabilitating incarcerated individuals. It made me reflect on the various approaches that can be taken to ensure that prisoners receive proper care and rehabilitation. Rev Fr Francis Kодиyan’s facilitated the retreat in a highly inspiring and motivating manner. The retreat has left me feeling more inspired and committed to serving and growing in my faith journey.

By Jagaatheswaran M.C.J. Yehambaram



I am glad to learn that the Kuala Lumpur Archdiocesan Prison Ministry is launching a quarterly E-Newsletter with the theme *From Prison to Home*. This divine initiative reminds me of the first magazine released in 1987 as a seminary for prisoners entitled *The Dawn*. In 1988 we introduced an All-Kerala Art and Literature Competition for prisoners and published their stories, poems and drawings in a book called *Prison Melodies*. When our brethren behind bars saw their articles printed and published, they were not only happy but also became very confident and aware of their hidden talents. This led them to develop better self-image and worth. In 1991, we launched a news magazine for our volunteers known as *The Echo*, which today is known as *Prison Voice*. Seeing their articles and photos published in a magazine is a great incentive and inducement for our volunteers. In 2003, the Prison Ministry of India (PMI) inaugurated its research wing known as Reformatory Research and Documentation Center (RRDC) and launched its research journal entitled *Reformatory Explorations*. PMI’s research wing already published 65 books. Many research students from India and abroad come to RRDC to refer our books and periodicals. Prison ministry is not merely a social and charitable work. We are invited to carry out the task entrusted by God of continuing the mission of Jesus to search, serve and save the sheep, through research and with a contemplative mind. Writing and publishing our experiences will sharpen our views and will help us to review and redefine our strategies and methodologies.

The insights, intuitions, information and experiences we receive in the course of prison ministry cannot be considered as our private property. They are given to us by God for the whole of mankind. They are to be shared for the greater glory of God. Prisoners’ reformation is a great challenge because many believe it is impossible. My 42 years of prison ministry experience proves that prisoners can be reformed, rehabilitated, reintegrated and redeemed by the grace of God. This good news is to be proclaimed so that many prisoners and prison ministry volunteers can have hope and peace. Through the newsletter, our successful theories and methodologies for prisoners’ reformation can be shared. This is a channel to share with others our divine providence experiences, and reformation stories as well as the challenges and difficulties we meet with in the ministry. *Prison to Home E-Newsletter*, of course, will be an inspiration for the whole of mankind, and this would be a stepping stone to build up the history of the Kuala Lumpur Archdiocesan Prison Ministry. Your venture certainly would provide opportunities to share your experiences of faith and fraternity. A Newsletter is a vehicle to illustrate our faith and ministry experiences, to share with others the miraculous power of the Word of God, the wonders wrought by prayer and the countless blessings received. It has the capacity to build our communities better and profoundly deepen our fellowship. Let our passion in serving prisoners, our mode of carrying out the ministry, and our stories and innovations motivate and inspire many others. May Jesus who came to seek and save the lost bless *From Prison to Home E-Newsletter* and bring forth hundredfold fruits.

By Rev Fr Dr Francis Kодиyan MCBS

