



PRISON VOICE

December 2023

Vol. XX

Issue 12

NATIONAL MONTHLY

₹40/-



Incarnation for the Incarcerated



Bangalore PMI Unit Visiting Juvenile Home



Congratulations to Johnson for his Great Victory in Song Competition



Deepawali Gift for Prisoners' Families by PMI Tuticorin



Distribution of Art Materials by PMI Pune to Open Jail, Yerwada



Diwali Celebration at Beggars' Home, Yerwada by PMI Pune Unit



Holy Mass with Most Rev Niranjan Sual Singh, Sambalpur



Kolbe Boy Johnson Bags Prize for CWC Solo Competition



Kozhikode PMI Volunteers Visiting Snehashramam, Vettukad

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PRISON VOICE

NATIONAL MONTHLY



*For to you is born
this day in the
city of David a
Savior, who is
Christ the Lord
(Lk,2,11)*

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Are You Willing?
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criminals unless somebody
takes care of them.**
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He Comes, Comes, Ever Comes

Advent

“Have you not heard his silent steps? He comes, comes, ever comes. Every moment and every age, every day and every night he comes, comes, ever comes. In the fragrant days of sunny April through the forest path he comes, comes, ever comes. In the rainy gloom of July nights on the thundering chariot of clouds he comes, comes ever comes,” writes Rabindranath Tagore in his Gitanjali. The God of love, compassion and forgiveness comes once again at Christmas and the Church invites us to enter into the period of Advent in preparation for it. Advent means, the coming of the Saviour. The season of Advent reminds us of a threefold expectation of the coming of the Saviour. Firstly, it reminds us of the centuries gone by when the nations, chiefly Israel, and the chosen people, longingly waited for the Messiah. Secondly, it reminds us that this Saviour who has definitely appeared in the person of Jesus Christ in history, still keeps coming; at every moment as he comes into our lives, into the Church and into the world. Finally, Advent brings to our mind the second coming of the Lord in glory at the end of time to judge the living and the dead. Think of the great and catastrophic wars of our own time. Think of the deaths of innocent men and women in concentration camps and prisons. Think of the most refined and most brutal methods of mass killing developed by modern nations. As we enter into the spirit of Advent, let us pray for our nations, and prepare ourselves and our brethren behind bars to welcome Jesus into our midst in a fitting manner.

Christmas

Christmas is a celebration of great joy. The world to which he is coming is not different from the one to which he came in history. The message of Christmas then, is a message of

EDITOR'S VIEW



Sr Amala DC
Chief Editor

hope. On God's part it is a sign that He loves us deeply and is very much concerned that through His Son, Jesus Christ, we become His children and live His life. On our part, Christmas is an invitation to realize deeply that we are loved in spite of our failings. In the babe of the crib, each human being is Christ's flesh and blood. We are God's children, reborn in Jesus Christ and made a new creation by Him. Let us celebrate our Saviour's coming with our brethren behind bars in a creative and meaningful manner, support their families who are struggling to live their lives, and bring happiness to their children who are with us.

New Year

Let us whisper a prayer of gratitude to God and to people who have been for us the presence and love of God in our lives. There is so much to be grateful for; so much good has been done for us and we have also been able to do good to others, especially to our brothers and sisters behind bars. As we leave this year and enter into the new one, we know that God is coming along with us. As we have walked and worked with the Lord in the past, so shall we confidently take up the tasks of the coming year as well. Let us be true brothers or sisters to others, especially to people who are rejected and neglected by society, prisoners, orphans, etc. Wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Grace-filled NEW YEAR 2024. May this celebration bring true joy to our families and to our brethren behind the bars throughout the Indian prisons.

Incarnation for the Incarcerated

Proclaim Liberty to Captives

Jesus was born in Bethlehem to proclaim liberty to captives. He revealed this truth in the synagogue of Nazareth by reading from the book of Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Lk 4, 18-19). This text is very similar to the servant songs of Second Isaiah (Is 40-55) which include poetic passages of hope as well as descriptions of the Suffering Servant. The prophet speaks about himself, about his own commission. He has been sent, he says, to bring good news, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, to comfort all who mourn, and to give them a garland – using seven infinitives in the Hebrew text. God will do everything to comfort and liberate the people who have been distressed in exile. God sent His only begotten Son to this world to save those who are in exile, those who are incarcerated, the whole of mankind. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3,16).

Jesus the Good Shepherd Searching for Stray Sheep

Jesus is identifying himself with the image of a good shepherd searching for stray sheep as illustrated by Ezekiel (Ezk 34:11–16). Joel B. Green writes that “these parables are fundamentally about God, their aim is to lay bare the nature of the divine response to the



Rev Dr Francis Kodiyan MCBS
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for Prison Ministry India

recovery of the lost.” Justus Knecht gives the typical Catholic interpretation of this parable: “By the simile of the Good Shepherd our Lord teaches us how great is His compassionate love for all mankind. All men, Jews and Gentiles, are His sheep, and He gave His life for all, being sacrificed on the Cross to redeem them from sin and hell. He is therefore the only Good Shepherd, and all others who are called to the pastoral office are good shepherds only so far as they imitate Jesus in their love and care of the flock confided to them. Moreover, Jesus knows His own. He knows all about them, their needs, their weakness, their thoughts, their endeavours; He leads them into the fold of His Church, He helps them by His grace, He enlightens them by His doctrine, and nourishes and strengthens them with His Flesh and Blood in the most Blessed Sacrament. His pastoral love is, therefore, infinite and divine.”

The Lost Sheep

Both Matthew and Luke record Jesus’ parable about a shepherd who leaves 99 sheep in the fold to go in search of one that had wandered away. Jesus gave this illustration in response to the Pharisees who were incensed that Jesus “welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Lk 15:2). “If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them

wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish” (Mt 18:12–14). Father God sent Jesus on a rescue mission “to seek and to save the lost” (Lk 19:10). God does not abandon the 99. They are already safely in His kingdom, attended by His angels, and guided by His Holy Spirit (Rom 8:14; Heb 13:5). But His heart aches for those not yet in the fold. The Good Shepherd pursues the lost sheep, woos them, calls to them, and allows circumstances into their lives designed to make them look up. It is often in the bleakest of circumstances that we finally surrender our demands to have our own way. We finally submit to our Shepherd, who carries us back to the fold (Lk 15:5).

The 99 are still important to Him, but He knows the flock is not complete without the lost sheep. A good shepherd always goes after the lost sheep. The parable of the lost coin (Lk 15:8–10) and the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11–32), continue the theme of God as a pursuer of lost people. We were all lost at one time, and the Lord came after us. If He had not taken the initiative, no one could be saved (Jn 6:44). So, when our Good Shepherd wants to pursue another lost lamb, the 99 who are in the fold can joyfully support the rescue. This is a parable about salvation. Jesus was going after the one who was lost. He was extending saving grace to sinners. When the lost sheep is found and brought home, there is great celebration: “And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never

went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish” (Mt 18:13–14). Jesus often used short stories to share deeper spiritual insights about Himself, His Father, and His Kingdom. The lost sheep parables are no different and, indeed, point to some considerable truths, both here on earth and even in Heaven.

PMI Continues Jesus’ Mission

The Catholic Church in India through Prison Ministry India continues the mission of Jesus to search and save the lost. Pope Francis gives high priority to prison ministry and the Vatican Dicastery for Integral Human Development takes care of the pastoral needs of not only prisoners but also migrants, refugees, the sick, the marginalised and the like. Similarly, Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) under its Justice, Peace and Development Commission established Prison Ministry India Desk to take care of the incarcerated in India. PMI with its headquarters in Bangalore and with its 8000 volunteers reaches out to 1319 prisons in India and takes care of the pastoral, psychological, spiritual and material needs of 5.5 lakhs of prisoners. In every state and in every diocese in India PMI has its own coordinators and volunteers to reach out to prisons so as to release, rehabilitate, reintegrate and redeem them. PMI established many rehabilitation centres for released men and women prisoners and homes for prisoners’ children both for boys and girls. PMI has many projects for the integral human development of released prisoners such as employment scheme, housing scheme, scholarships to prisoners’ and their children’s education, schemes for their release, skill training and so on.

Ambulance to Varanasi Central Prison

Fr Kasper Manimaran

The Diocese of Varanasi is known for its various missionary activities. One of the missionary activities is the Prison Ministry. 17th July 2023 was a very important day for prison ministry team diocese of Varanasi. On that day Rev. Fr. Francis Kodiyan, MCBS the PMI National Coordinator and Rev. Fr. Jose Thanippara MST the PMI North Regional Coordinator came to Varanasi to meet the diocesan team and to learn about all their activities. Rev Fr. Kasper had arranged a lot of activities and program for their visit. They met different congregation of religious sisters and novices. They explained the aims and objectives of Prison Ministry India and motivated them to get involved in this ministry. He met the Indian missionary society philosophate brothers and gave them the taste to get involved in this ministry. They also had meeting with Bishops, fathers, provincials and other officials and was happy to hear from them about the activities of prison ministry diocese of Varanasi and thanked them for their wholehearted support and motivation.

Varanasi Central Prison

On 19th July 2023 Rev. Fr. Kasper arranged the visit to the District and Central Jail of Varanasi. Rev Fr. Francis and Rev. Fr. Jose met the officials and discussed about the development of ministry and also interacted with the inmates. Rev Fr Francis thanked the officials for their continuous support and cooperation to make this ministry successful. Mr. Radhe Krishna Mishra the superintendent of central jail explained about the various activities and all the products that are made by the inmates in the central jail and how the central jail

works with the inmates to make them better human beings. The superintendent thanked them for their visit and thanked Rev Fr. Kasper the coordinator of prison ministry diocese of Varanasi and his team for their selfless service.

Ambulance to Varanasi Central Prison

The superintendent proposed to Fr Francis the immediate need of an Ambulance for the central jail hospital and talked about the struggle and difficulties faced for taking the patients for investigation and checkup. After hearing from the superintendent Fr. Francis noted the immediate need and told that he will look into it and will try to support. After 2 months with the support of many sponsors and coordinators, Rev Fr. Francis and the Prison Ministry India team decided to sponsor an Ambulance for central jail Varanasi. Sr Sruthi, the Provincial Superior of Sisters of the Holy Queens (SRA) did the major contribution. Rev Fr. Francis asked Rev Fr Kasper to find out the details for the new ambulance. On 2nd November 2023 Fr Kasper brought an ambulance from Varanasi Motors Pvt. Ltd. agency and handed over the ambulance on 4th November 2023 to the superintendent of central jail. The superintendent thanked and appreciated the selfless service of Prison Ministry India. He also informed the IG of prisons of Uttar Pradesh, the jail superintendents and they all appreciated and congratulated Prison Ministry India for their good work. The prison ministry team diocese of Varanasi is also extremely happy and is motivated to undertake more good work. I would like to thank Rev Fr Francis Kodiyan, national coordinator prison ministry India who made this dream into reality. I thank all the sponsors who sacrificed for this noble act and also the prison ministry team diocese of Varanasi for their continuous prayerful support and dedicated service.



Fraternalizing with the Incarcerated

A lady from England read my 4th book, *Prison Ministry: The Dreamers' Mission* and wrote to me a few questions: "Your book reiterates emphatically that God loves the sinners and is more pleased with the conversion of a sinner than with the righteous. So does that mean that you can happily go on sinning and then repent at the end of a wicked life and thus be dearer to God than someone who strives every day to think good thoughts and do good deeds? I know that it's all in the Bible, but when I read something like that, it raised many questions about my faith." Dear readers of this article, as I woke-up on October 24th morning, this was the first message which I read on my Whatsapp. On the one hand the world placed this question to me, but on the other hand, God gave me in answer His living Word in Luke 15:31-32 in which the Father tells his elder son who came from the field and questioned him regarding the celebration for the return of his younger brother, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." This Father celebrates the return of the son who became destitute and homeless, who lived a reckless life but wanted once again to see his loving Father and plead with him to forgive his reckless living. This feedback about my book and our works in prisons made me to pen down this article.

Is this Man Called Jesus Still Alive?

Jesus told the parable of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost Son shortly after a group of Pharisees and Scribes complained



Sr Lini Sheeja MSC
Germany

and criticised Jesus for fraternizing with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus showed his fraternity with sinners who were looked down by the so-called righteous ones of Jesus' time. The Pharisees and Scribes could not accept Jesus eating with sinners. Is this man called Jesus still alive? Yes, my dear friends! Do you want to encounter Him? Go to all those who are thirsty and hungry, and you will find him there. Go to all those who are sick, you will find Him there too. Go to prisons, you will find Him alive there, waiting for the repentance of one sinner.

No Good will Go in Vain

We the Cardinals, Bishops, Priests, Religious Sisters and Laity who walk in the light of the Lord, who live in the presence of the Lord, should try throughout our life time to do every kind of good deeds. Dear friends, if we have done good all through our life time, if we have worked hard to build God's Kingdom, if we have shared with the poor, we shall receive our reward. None of our good deeds will go in vain. Through each of our good deeds we remain always close to God. But, who are we to question God's mercy towards the ones who are *Caught?* Why are we, the ones who are with God, jealous of those who want to be with God? God will reward us with what is best for Him. Let us never question God's mercy

and kindness. If we question God asking *why*, surely He will ask us, *why not?*

The Father Pleads with his Elder Son

Today once again I read the Parable of the Prodigal Son and I noticed something interesting, “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’” (Lk 15:25-30). It struck me today as something interesting that the Father pleads with the older son who was always with Him. The Father has to plead with the son who was always in his presence. *The father goes out and pleads with him.* Similarly, sometimes God pleads with us also who are always with Him.

What are our Complaints Being in His Presence?

What are our complaints today? Go to the prisons and see the face of the incarnate Son in the incarcerated. You will never complain. The Father saw the face of his younger son who had squandered his property and returned home and he had no further questions. But the elder son, on the other hand, who did not see the face of his younger brother, had many questions. Do

we also have many questions? As the elder son complained before seeing the face of his brother, we too complain because we have not yet seen the face of our brothers and sisters who are behind prison walls. We judge, because we have not yet heard their misery and agony. The whole Gospel is about God who came down to redeem the lost, the God who ate with sinners, the God who healed the lepers, the God who fed the hungry and goes on doing same. The whole Gospel is about the salvation and sanctification that Jesus came to give us. Who needs salvation and sanctification? Are we not all in need of the mercy and grace of God? Whether you live recklessly or are living in the Father’s house, you need His mercy. The Father in the parable of the Prodigal Son never pleaded with the younger son. He waited for his return? Did the Father ever know that this son who was lost would return one day? But what caught my attention was that the Father pleads with the elder son who was so adamant. Is there anyone among us who is not in need of mercy, salvation and sanctification?

Christmas: Fraternity with Incarcerated

Prisoners have been looked down upon just because they are prisoners, just because they have committed some crime and have been caught. We look down upon them, but God waits within the prison walls for their return. As we are important to God, the lost daughters and sons are also important to Him. God excludes no one. No human being is unwanted for God. God’s ways are different because God is different from us. Let us allow God to be God and never question His goodness, kindness and generosity. Let the God of the vulnerable bless all of us!

From Prison to Home E-Newsletter

Kuala Lumpur Archdiocesan Prison Ministry launches 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 seminarian 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 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 do the task entrusted by God of continuing the mission of Jesus to search, serve and save the sheep, with a research and 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 the 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



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for Prison Ministry India

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, reformation stories as well as 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 KL Prison Ministry. Your venture certainly would provide opportunities to share your experiences of faith and fraternity. For 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, 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.

God is Opening Doors

Cherise Bopape¹

Ryan's life flashed before his eyes. He had sustained three gunshot wounds while intruding into a residence and committing armed robbery. Scrambling to leave the premises, he made his way to a friend who was waiting for him outside. Ryan stumbled into the vehicle they had used earlier to drive to the residence, and the two friends sped to the hospital where Ryan was immediately taken into surgery. "Amazingly, I lived," Ryan said. "I went from the surgery room at the hospital, to county jail, and off to prison for the first time." He was 19 years old.

Trust Issues

Growing up, Ryan knew his single mother did the best she could to raise him and his older brother. When things got tough, she'd take her sons to a stable location: their grandparents' home or their aunt and uncle's place. While she gave them all she could, Ryan's mom could never be the father her boys wanted and needed. Ryan's own dad wasn't present, and different men cycled through the boys' lives. Because of some of these men's negative influences, Ryan formed a general distrust of men. His behavior worsened. When his older brother got into some trouble and spent time in a juvenile detention center, Ryan missed him. To fill the void, he began hanging out with the older neighborhood guys who he thought were "cool." Alongside this crowd, Ryan experimented with drugs and broke the law frequently. Then, at 15 years old, his crimes caught up with him. He ended up at a juvenile detention center too.

¹ PFI.

Surrendering to the Lord

During his teenage and young adult years, Ryan was incarcerated frequently. He said, "I used to live with the mentality - in my mind and in my heart - that prison was home and out here was a vacation." During one of his "vacations," he attended church with his mother. Although seeds were planted, they didn't take root. When new struggles surfaced, Ryan trekked down the familiar, dark paths that led to his addiction and incarceration. Again, Ryan landed himself a spot in the county jail. This time, he was facing a charge that carried a life sentence: assault with a firearm. For Ryan, more was at stake than ever before. Months before his arrest, he got engaged to his longtime girlfriend Jet'aime. And now, she was pregnant - with his twin girls, Kallie and Kambria. (She gave birth before Ryan could be moved from the county jail to a long-term facility.) Although Ryan's thoughts about his daughters were a source of joy, sadness was on the heels of the birth announcement. His mother suddenly died while he was still dealing with the court proceedings for his crime. Ryan said, "I understand what it feels like to have no hope, to have to see your life shattered and the ones you love the most suffer and hurt by the bad choices you make in life." Ryan realized he needed Christ. He fell to his knees in his cell one morning and, at 36 years old, surrendered his life to the Lord.

Turning Around

Slowly, Ryan's situation began to turn around. When his county's highest-paid attorney took on his case for free, he knew God's presence was with him. Then instead of a life sentence, Ryan got five years. Jet'aime stuck by his side and brought Kallie and

Kambria to visit frequently - behind a glass partition. Eventually, he was transferred to Shafter Modified Community Correctional Facility, a small private prison that was about 25 minutes away from Jet'aime and his baby girls, so they continued to visit him at least once a month. Most importantly, Ryan was growing in his faith. He began attending Celebrate Recovery, a yearlong 12-step program that helps incarcerated people in recovery from a variety of "hurts, habits, and hang-ups" experience fellowship through Christ's healing power. He said, the Lord "has become the Father I never had in my upbringing and has renewed my heart from being hardened to a gentleness that's not explainable by any words." When Ryan found out about Prison Fellowship Angel Tree, a program that would provide his girls with Christmas gifts on his behalf, the Gospel, and a personal message from him, he signed them up. They were 2 years old.

Trusting Strangers with Gifts

Ryan was sceptical and admits he didn't know what to expect after filling out the application. The process required that he trust strangers to help his family. For Ryan, demonstrating trust was challenging - something he had battled since childhood. But at a time when his fiancée and children needed him most, the Lord showed up. Volunteers came to his home bearing gifts. They prayed with his family and spent time with them—making the day a memorable one they cherish and still talk about five years later. Family bonds were getting stronger. Trust issues were getting weaker. Although Ryan doesn't remember the gifts Kallie and Kambria received, he remembers how the volunteers' kindness made him - and his family - feel. "What surprised me is

I thought, man, they're just going to go to the door, drop the gifts at the door ... and see you later," Ryan said. "But they actually stopped and had time out of their life and made time for my family." That was the only year Ryan signed up his girls for Angel Tree Christmas. He was released the following year before the holiday season. However, he was thrilled to know that formerly incarcerated people are always encouraged to serve in the ministry. He considers it a calling. Ryan fulfilled three years of his five-year sentence in prison before being paroled. Two days after his release, he married Jet'aime. Today, they serve as the inaugural Angel Tree coordinators for the church they attend, Bakersfield First Assembly of God in Bakersfield, California.

The Right People, the Right Places

In the free world, Ryan continues to pair his faith with good works. He does that, in part, through his role as a ministry leader for Celebrate Recovery (CR). Through a CR contact, Ryan was reintroduced to Dennis, then, a Prison Fellowship field director, who had also worked at the same juvenile detention center where Ryan resided 20 years prior! Dennis encouraged Ryan to volunteer with Prison Fellowship. Since then, Ryan has led a small group through the Outrageous Justice curriculum which helps Christians gain a clear understanding of criminal justice issues and take action to promote peace and restoration. And Ryan said it was an honor to share the hope of Jesus Christ with prisoners in a 2023 Prison Fellowship Hope Event[®]. Typically held on the yard, these in-prison events feature inspirational speakers, musicians, and other attractions. Ryan recruited three of his small-group members to attend a Hope Event with

him. Eventually, Ryan plans to volunteer in the Prison Fellowship Academy, an intensive in-prison program where participants learn biblical Values of Good Citizenship like community, responsibility, and others. In March 2024, Ryan will celebrate five years post-incarceration—one of the criteria he cited for teaching Academy classes. Soon, he'll be one step closer to volunteering as an instructor. Ryan said, "Everywhere I turn, it seems like God is opening another door."

A New Mission

Ryan provides for his family financially through his career as a professional truck driver. Spiritually, he's maturing and is studying to receive his pastoral credentials through Global University. He's committed to leading a Joshua 24:15 home - one that serves the Lord. Ryan's family has served the homeless together. And his daughters, now 7, attend a Christian school. Ryan is grateful "they never had to see me in my old life and who I was," he said. "Now they know Daddy goes and helps others have hope. They know that that's Daddy's mission. Mom fully supports." Ryan said he serves from a stance of humility. When he considers why he keeps coming back to serve with Prison Fellowship, he said, "I want to give back freely what's been given to me."

**"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!"
(Lk 2,14).**

Japan's Crusade against Rampant Street Prostitution

Cristian Martini Grimaldi¹

We have previously strongly denounced the distressing revelation that a developed nation like Japan would allow the ongoing rampant street prostitution in the heart of major cities such as Osaka and Tokyo. It involves young girls standing side by side, resembling a district akin to a meat market, where clients inspect their options. They choose their preference and then proceed a short distance to a so-called love hotel, where financial transactions occur. These young girls exploit a peculiar legal loophole in Japanese legislation - while the act of selling sex is not illegal, the act of soliciting sex in public places is prohibited. This to the legislator's mind is intended to maintain public order and prevent the public nuisance associated with solicitation.

But in fact, exactly the opposite is happening. The Kabukicho nightlife district in Tokyo is one place where an increasing number of women are selling their bodies. A majority of these women are in need of paying off debts accumulated at clubs offering entertainment with male companions known as "hosts." Now a mutual aid group of parents is petitioning to finally put a ban on tabs at these clubs, rightly arguing that young women are allowed to accumulate debts without consideration for their ability to pay. The group aims to collect thousands of signatures from across Japan to urge the mayor of Tokyo's Shinjuku Ward to establish an ordinance addressing the issue.

¹ UCA News Nov 24, 2023.

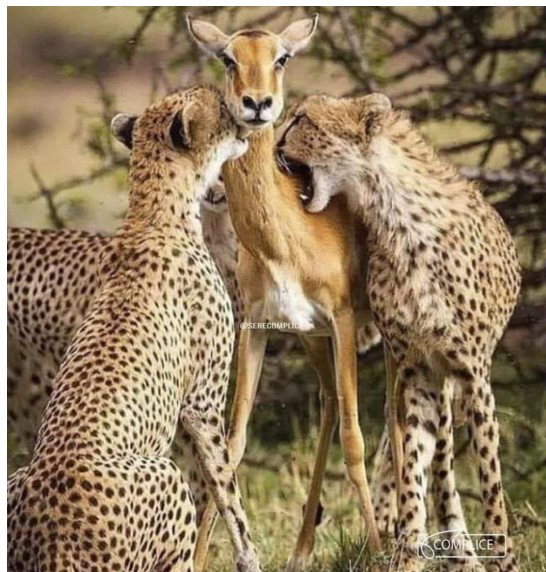
Some of these young women incur debts of as much as ten million yen (about US\$70,000) with these club hosts. The parents have to witness their daughters dropping out of university and then forcing themselves into prostitution. One mother discovered the exploitation and financial burden her daughter faced, including being forced to have an abortion. What exacerbates the situation is that this open-air prostitution is gaining popularity among youths, who, regrettably, perceive this practice as less stigmatizing due to its prevalence. This sentiment was candidly echoed by one of the girls I approached on the streets of Osaka when inquiring about her presence in such a location. In her naivety, she admitted that the widespread nature of such activities made it appear less degrading, as it had become a commonplace act for many individuals. She was one of the few willing to talk to me.

Remarkably, these young women exhibit a level of self-training to distinguish between those genuinely seeking sexual services and others, including potential undercover police officers. They are acutely aware of the legal consequences associated with solicitation, understanding that being caught in the act can lead to arrest, a risk that has materialized in the past. An intriguing not-so-well-known fact is the shift in the landscape following the cleanup initiatives on social media platforms. Previously, platforms like Twitter, now X, harbored fake accounts and bots that facilitated the solicitation of sexual services. The prior laissez-faire approach of certain social media platforms allowed many young women to engage in solicitation, while men sought their services. However, recent efforts to purge these platforms of fake accounts have led to a noticeable migration of these activities to the streets.

The correlation between the decrease in online solicitation and the rise of street-level encounters underscores the dynamic relationship between technology, social media policies, and the evolving landscape of illicit activities. But cleaning the online platforms is not enough to stop the trend. In Japan, like elsewhere, it is overly optimistic to wait for authorities to move fast to make changes in legislation so as to curb this awful phenomenon. The Catholic Church, leveraging its extensive network of charitable organizations and initiatives, is one of the few institutions to really have the capacity to extend support to these women who find themselves trapped in prostitution. Numerous Catholic organizations globally are already at the forefront, operating shelters and safe houses that serve as havens for women seeking an escape from the grip of prostitution. Within these sanctuaries, women receive not only temporary housing but also crucial counselling and comprehensive support to facilitate the rebuilding of their lives. The Church is well-positioned to offer counselling services aimed at addressing their problems, being psychological or in this case monetary debt. Moreover, rehabilitation programs, encompassing therapeutic interventions, addiction counselling, and vocational training, have the real potential to empower these women with skills for an alternative livelihood.

“Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk 2, 10-11).

The Best Photo of the Decade



For the photographer: “How did you take this picture?” When asked, he replied: The tiger chased a mother and her two cubs, she was faster than the tiger but her cubs were not so the mother surrendered herself to the leopard so that the two cubs could escape!! This photo shows how she watches her children run to safety when the leopard is about to eat her!! The mother could easily run away from the leopards, but instead, she gave her life to the tiger for the life of her cubs!! Have you ever thought how much your parents sacrificed for you.? They sacrificed everything while you enjoy life full of fun, laughter and happiness!! He who always remembers the sacrifice of his parents will gain world fame! The tiger chased a mother and her two cubs, she was faster than the tiger but her cubs were not so the mother surrendered herself to the leopard so that the two cubs could escape!!

This photo shows how she watches her children run to safety when the leopard is about to eat her!! The mother could easily run away from the leopards, but instead, she gave her life to the tiger for the life of her cubs!! Have you ever thought how much your parents sacrificed for you.? They sacrificed everything while you enjoy life full of fun, laughter and happiness!! He who always remembers the sacrifice of his parents will gain world fame!

Pope’s December Prayer Intention ‘For People with Disabilities’

Accompanying Everyone with ‘Big Hearts’

Pope Francis urged civil institutions to put in place projects that provide “access to education, employment, and places where they can express their creativity.” Along with the inclusion of people with disabilities in society, the Pope said they need to be accompanied with “big hearts”. “It means changing our mentality a little and opening ourselves to the abilities and talents of these people who are differently abled, both in society as well as in the life of the Church,” he said. The Pope also invited the local churches to work toward increased access and involvement as integral members of parish life. “Creating a completely accessible parish does not only mean eliminating physical barriers,” he said. “It also assumes that we stop talking about ‘them’ and start talking about ‘us’.”

County Jail, California

Prem Williams¹

Greetings in Jesus' name. He's such a loving Savior, caring and gentle. Here are two curious questions for which I want an honest answer: How many of you all read your Bible's sometime today? How many of you all attended a church regularly when growing up? Will you bow your heads and join me in prayer before we begin? Anyone here knows someone who's got liver disease, what about kidney dysfunction, lung problems, pancreatic issues, what about heart disease? Now, are you able to visually see these types of disease? No! They're all diseases affecting internal organs of our body, right? Let me tell you something about a disease that's visible and external - a disease that you detect on the skin. It begins there and slowly with neglect spreads into the bloodstream and thereafter affects the bones... like gangrene. How many here have heard of leprosy? Anyone seen a leper? Ok brothers and sisters, let me describe this disease as I have seen it at close quarters when I lived in India. Because of a stigma attached to such a disease, people are fearful to come out and speak of any symptoms they may have or noticed. The disease goes untreated until it has progressed to a very advanced state. It affects the nervous system numbing all sensation. Now imagine you accidentally step on a nail; wouldn't you yell out in pain? A leper won't feel that because all sensation is now numbed. Then the wound and bruise go untreated and gets infected, septic and begins to fester and gather pus. This form of the disease

that slowly eats into your body terribly is presently called Hansen's disease.

Let's read the passage from Luke 5: 12-16. Will you all please turn to it in your Bibles and keep your finger as a bookmark there. May I urge you all to go back and read it at your leisure after our time here together. This is a miracle Jesus performed before a crowd of people and is recorded by 3 of the 4 gospel writers. Here are the references of the other two accounts for you to read at leisure later: Matt 8:1-4; Mark 1:40-45. See brothers, Old Testament Jewish regulation for someone found suspect of a skin disease was: they had to be examined by a priest who would inspect them and certify them as "unclean" or "clean" to see if they could continue to live amongst others. If certified "unclean", they would have to leave and live outside the camp or city. Live in isolation, banished from all family and society. They were banished from entering the city. Should they see anyone approaching them, they would have to call out in a loud voice 'Unclean, Unclean, Unclean'; this was to warn the approaching person to steer clear and avoid getting infected too.

How do you feel doing that? How would you feel being banished from home, from society? If you had children before you caught the disease, you have to leave them too. You could never again hug and kiss them in your arms, squeeze them to your chest. You would never hear the sweetest words uttered "Daddy", "Daddy". Never see the admiration in their eyes, proud of their father. Never feel their little bodies cuddle up to you when on a dark rainy night, the thunder rolled and there were

¹ This message was delivered to incarcerated men at a local county jail in California in November 2023.

blinding flashes of lightning that lit the sky. How you'd feel their little racing hearts beat and then calm down because they were safe in "Daddy's arms". How would you feel to have to leave your spouse and family? Anyone here feel like that, my brothers? Like these lepers? You know what I'm talking about, right? Ostracized and banished by society, isolated from everyone, abandoned by family, lonely and alone! The Leper had no doubt about Jesus' ability to heal him but was not sure if Jesus was willing to! Those who felt they were healed also had to be examined and inspected by a priest, then kept quarantined for seven days to see if the disease did not recur, before re-entering the camp or city.

Across the Bible, sin is depicted as the disease of leprosy. You start with committing a small sin and leave rectifying it unattended. That then slowly spreads into your heart and I mean your spiritual heart. You keep doing more and more sin and begin to become calloused and hardened by it to the point that even if you did sin, you do not know about it. You throw caution to the wind and before long you're so drowning and entangled in sin. There is a good verse in the book of James that describes this: James 1:14–15 describes how temptation and an evil desire conceive and give birth to sin, which ultimately leads to death. Sin goes to your inner core and everything about you is then defiled. That's why David cried out for cleansing in Psalm 51:2 and purifying in verse 7. When you are defiled by sin you have to be cleansed. By the Scripture ALL of us have this tendency: It says "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" Rom 3:23. ALL. Now the only way according to the Bible, to be reconciled to

God is through His son Jesus Christ. See the God of the Bible required that anyone who sinned was to be punished for it. That punishment was to be an eternal separation from His Holy presence. But in His mercy, He said if someone else takes on that sin and bears that punishment, then He would forgive the sinner. Mercy triumphed over judgement! Now can any sinner take on the punishment and atone for another sinner? No, not possible. Only someone who is sinless, who has never sinned can say "I will bear the sins and punishment of all sinners upon myself" and get us sinners released. That someone is Jesus Christ. God's "only begotten Son". God in His mercy even provided His only Son as that sin offering. He is the "Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world".

The Old Testament required that a spotless lamb, a lamb without defect be sacrificed by the priest. In other words, it had to die as a substitute for the sinner as a symbol to take on the sins of the one who brought the lamb as an offering. Jesus the sinless spotless one, fulfilled that by standing as that sacrificial lamb for us all. He went to the cross, was crucified on it, hung there, shed His blood and died for us all taking upon himself our sins. That blood washes away our sins, brothers. It is this blood that cleanses us and makes us Holy before God again. What is our part in all this? Just as this leper begged Jesus "Lord if you are willing you can make me clean" and Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him. So too we cry out to Jesus to cleanse us of our sin and I promise you He is willing. Our cry is to accept that we are sinners by acknowledging "Yes Lord Jesus,

I am a sinner”. Then in repentance cry out “Lord Jesus forgive me my sins”. That’s all it takes brothers, a verbal confession before the Lord with the deepest conviction in your heart about your condition and Jesus will reach out to you and cleanse you of your sins as he did the leper.

God has promised that the blood that His son shed on those cruel cross washes away all sins. This you accept by faith. He has also promised that after accepting this offer of grace, He will give you the gift of His very Spirit. He is the Holy Spirit who will come into your heart and stay with you guiding and leading you the rest of your lives. If you feel led within your heart now brothers, are you willing to make this commitment? If you are, close your eyes and bow your heads and we will say a simple prayer together. You can simply say “Lord come into my heart Lord Jesus and cleanse me”. Amen. Let me suggest one last thing brothers: Just as it says in verse 16 “Jesus, often withdrew to lonely places and prayed”. He set an example for us. As He communed with His Father through prayer, will you too withdraw to some quiet or quieter spot, quieten your heart and be in prayer with Him as often as you can. Then open His word and spend some more time with Him reading it and asking for direction and help on how to obey it. Now if any of you’ll have said that prayer, be certain and assured that those sins have been cleansed. This does not absolve you the punishment of the crime you may have committed imposed by the law of the land, it only assures you that in the sight of Jesus you are cleansed of your sin and there is no more condemnation before His eyes. You can live guilt free lives before Him.

Chickabalapur Sub Jail Visit

Jayaraj

On 10th November 2023 Lucy, Sagayamary, Rose and I visited Chickabalapur sub jail between 11.00 am to 12.15 pm. The Superintendent allowed us to interact with the inmates by providing us chairs on the platform. Rose sang a welcome song in Kannada and invited the inmates to converse with us. Many inmates came forward to share with us. Some of them were involved in POCSO, Kidnapping, dacoity and so on. Many others were involved in murder cases. All were in need of good lawyers. We told them that we would talk to their family numbers and let them know the outcome during our next visit. We considered 18 cases. When our local volunteer requested the Superintendent for one more visit, he said that he had to accommodate two more NGOs and asked us to keep the visit once a month. Fr Alben kindly provided lunch for all of us and we left at 2.30 pm. Next month being December, we plan to celebrate Christmas by distributing cakes and conducting small games if possible.

Encouraging the Artist

With God’s grace and providence, PMI Pune responded to a request from the Men’s Open Jail, Yerwada on behalf of C/780 Sudhir Naik, an artist. He requested for art supplies to pursue his painting talent. His art works will be displayed in the Yerwada Jail Showroom. Cost for the art supplies was Rs 3,552. On 09 November 2023 Mr Anthony Jacob on behalf of PMI Pune handed over the art materials to C/780 Sudhir Naik. Happy faces all around.

Deepavali at Central Prison for Women 2023.

Sean Sprague

Deepavali, the festival of lights was celebrated at the Central Prison for women, Shivamogga, on Tuesday, 7th of November 2023 by the volunteers from the Prison Ministry of India, Shimoga Diocese. The PMI volunteers along with a few staff members and children from Mary Immaculate Higher Primary School took part in the celebrations.



Sr Elize Lourdh SCB welcomed the gathering. She explained the meaning of Deepavali and how important for us to celebrate the festival of lights in India. Kumari Hemavathy, the Superintendent of the Prison expressed her happiness at the presence of the volunteers who had happily come to to share the Deepavali joy with the inmates. She was happy

with the programme presented by the Children of Mary Immaculate school and appreciated their talents.



Sr Lilly Thomas and Mrs Alphonsa addressed the inmates and explained the meaning of light and how it removes darkness from within us. Mrs Erudhaya Mary sponsored the sweets, eatables and fruits to be given to the inmates. The cultural programme presented by the children was appreciated by everyone.

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. From his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace”

(Jn 1,14-15).

Celebration of Life and Light

Sr Shirley Kidangan

Diwali, the festival of lights, symbolizes the triumph of light over darkness and good over evil. When we take a glimpse into our lives, it serves as a reminder to dispel negativity and celebrate the joy of shared moments with family and friends. The rituals of cleaning and decorating the homes mirror the inner cleansing and renewal that can take place within us during this auspicious time. It was indeed a privilege for us to celebrate this festival of lights in the open jail at Bhopal. In the open jail, the inmates live with their families. All of them are engaged in different activities outside and come back in the evening. At 6 p.m., they have to sign and report to the central jail.

As a beacon of light, the members of the families and children are waiting for them to share the joy of the day. There is a light of caring, affection, eagerness, and love in their eyes. They revive the by-gone memories of the past—not those days spent in jail but at home. There is a light that is lit in the eyes of those with whom they live now. Since all of them were affianced during the day, we had the family get together in the evening along with their family members. It was altogether a different experience of celebration without many barriers. All of us were very free to interact with everyone. We could deeply experience the warmth of togetherness and freedom that was prevalent among us. Those inmates who served 15 to 20 years in jail are now enthusiastically waiting for their relief. We could see the ray of hope sparkling in their eyes. A few were planning out how to go about life and began their preparatory planning. There were those who came from faraway places,

leaving all that they had and were living with their children, parents, brothers, etc. It widened our horizons and lightened our minds. The support and acceptance they experienced, both from their families and from the workplace, amazed us much. The children were quite happy to move around as free children of God, as some of them used to go to school from there. Bro. Sunnilal Avarappattu, MMB, delivered the message, and Fr. George Thottungal welcomed the gathering. The brothers from Malabar Missionary Brothers came up with mind-blowing programs. The inmates, family members, children, and everyone else took an active role throughout the program. We also decorated the surroundings with lights, and the inmates arranged everything with whatever they had. We shared the joy of Diwali by distributing snacks to everyone. We all sat together in a spirit of joy and love, which in turn illuminated our hearts and minds.

Light plays an important role in our lives beyond its practical aspect of illuminating our surroundings. It affects our mood and rhythm and contributes to our overall well-being. In many ways, it symbolizes clarity, enlightenment, and the potential for positive transformation in our lives. Our lives can become a light for others through acts of kindness, empathy, and positive influence. By embodying values such as compassion, generosity, and understanding, we illuminate the path for those around us. Sharing knowledge, offering support, and being a source of inspiration can brighten someone else's journey. Just as a single candle can dispel darkness, our actions, no matter how small, have the power to bring light into the lives of others, creating a ripple of positivity and encouragement. This is what, as PMI volunteers, we can do for those who are less privileged and those who are behind bars.

Arthur Road Jail

Christopher Sequeira

This was my first visit to Arthur Road Jail. I must admit I was very excited as I had never before entered the doors of a jail. A few points regarding the super experience I had yesterday. The police personnel at the entrance were very courteous, they made us feel very comfortable during the security check, the guard doing my check, told me that their own personnel including their seniors are checked this way. Damascene met two top bosses of the jail in their cabins while our security checks were conducted, to wish them and share morning salaams. We were treated like VIPs, from the time of entry to the time of exit. They gave us hot coffee and asked if we would like to eat some fruits as well. Harish and Aziz helped us with the registration process, getting the inmates to the clinic, seeing that registration was orderly and regulating the entry to meet the doctor. We attended to 28 patients in one morning session from 9:30am to 1:30pm. The whole process of registration was perfect for smooth operation and it went through smoothly.

A couple of the inmates wanted to share regarding why they were in jail and all we needed to do was just provide a listening ear, nod our heads without making any comments. After all registrations were completed, we were able to get into the room where Dr Sanjay Jain was treating the patients. Damascene explained to us the importance of writing clearly the doctor's diagnosis and treatment in the registration form and in our journal. When in doubt I had to clarify with the doctor. We got to know about the different medicines

prescribed. The forms remain with the jail authorities and we use our journal to make our consolidated report at the end of the month. Seeing the happy faces and gratitude on the faces of the patients really made my day and I praised and thanked the Lord for giving me this opportunity to serve through Fr. Glasten and Damascene. Damascene is like a mother hen who takes care of the newbies like little chicks, telling us about the safeguards, the process, and making us feel comfortable. We all entered and left the premises together as one team.

I am eagerly looking forward to my next session, and in the meantime trying to read up and understand about the jargons dentists use. We have the support of Damascene who is a super teacher and mentor. All the best to all the newbies like me, I am sure you guys will have a great experience and say "Yeh Dil Mange More".

PMI Tamil Nadu Executive Meeting

PMI Tamil Nadu State Executive meeting was held at St Thomas Mount National Shrine. We thank our Chairman Most Rev Dr George Antony Samy for his blessings and guidance. We thank Most Rev Dr Neethi Nathan Bishop of the Chengalpet Diocese who presided over the meeting. We thank Rev Fr G J Antonysamy state Coordinator, Rev Fr Varghese Rozario State Asst Coordinator, Mr Jesu Raja state secretary, Rev Sr Alberal state joint secretary who organised the meeting systematically, meticulously planned and executed well. We also thank all the diocesan coordinators who had come and shared your strengths and challenges about the ministry. Special thanks to Rev Fr AD Michael Rector of Shrine who helped us in all the ways. Sincere gratitude to the PMI Chengalpet team. Thank you so much to everyone.

A Lost Sheep Wounded by his Father to Meet Jesus: The Testimony of an American¹

Caleb

I am Caleb, an American. I am 29 years old. On August 4, I offered this testimony at the ninth station of the Stations of the Cross for young people with the Pope in Lisbon. You are welcome to read this inspiring and transforming testimony of what God's grace does in my life. There are times when I think back to my younger days and I feel a deep pain, and yet, at the same time, a great joy. The reality of my life is that I am one of the lost sheep that Jesus came running after. I grew up in a very broken household with a father who didn't realize his worth or identity in Christ and was severely broken. As a result of his wounds, he wounded others. One of my escapes from home life was being at church. It always felt as if it was my home away from home. I was raised in various different Christian traditions but I always had a desire within my soul for more. I wanted that encounter with Jesus that everyone around me had but I had yet to experience myself. Little did I know that all that time, He was right by my side.

Approaching my high school graduation, my parents went through a horrendous divorce and my world spiralled out of control. I sank deep into depression, I struggled with self-harm, became a drug addict, and had a desire to end my life. I let my pain led me to embracing my selfish desires. Everything

I had known was gone, and I had no sense of direction. My head was in such a dark place from all the pain, and I searched for a reason to live. The Lord heard my cries from the pit, and sent me the most beautiful gift. One who would eventually become my bride. Once I met my wife, I found a reason to live and a desire to grow in my faith. I wanted the passion she had for Jesus but battling with the ghosts of my past, it always felt unattainable. After dating for a while, we separated for a time, and I was faced with a choice to make. I could either allow Jesus to fully take control of my life or fall back into my old habits. By His grace, I pressed on. As I apprenticed in a tattoo shop, I saw the pain of those forgotten by society, and it was there I truly saw Jesus for who He was.

After much healing, my wife and I got back together and got married. We became heavily involved in our church, and I was tasked with passing on the faith to the students but I realized I didn't understand the fullness of the faith. I started researching the early church in both biblical and historical resources. To make a long story short, it was the message of John 6, Jesus in the Eucharist, that brought me home into full communion with the Catholic Church. As I reflect, I have realized that the father wound that I've had has caused me to have an identity crisis, but after embracing the identity that my Heavenly Father has given me, the wounds I have had have finally started to heal. Being united fully to Jesus in the Eucharist is what has brought healing to my soul. After tasting all that this world has to offer, He is the only one who has truly satisfied me.

¹ Zenith 8 April 2023.

Asia Bibi's 'Continuous Martyrdom'

Joseph Tulloch¹

“When God calls an individual, it is always for the good of all.” That’s how Pope Francis started an address on Thursday morning to participants in a Vatican-run conference on ‘The Communal Dimension of Sanctity.’ In his speech, the Pope discussed three important aspects of holiness – its power to unify, its place in the family, and martyrdom.

Asia Bibi's “Continuous Martyrdom”

Martyrdom, Pope Francis said, is a “powerful model” of saintliness, of which “we have many examples throughout the history of the Church.” “There is no period which has been devoid of martyrs,” he stressed, “including our own day.” “We think that these martyrs do not exist, but let us think about a case of Christian life lived in continuous martyrdom, the case of Asia Bibi.” Bibi, a Pakistani Catholic sentenced to death for blasphemy, was imprisoned for many years, eventually being released and moving to Canada. “Nearly nine years of Christian witness!” Pope Francis underlined. “There are many, many like her, who testify to faith and charity.”

A Unifying Force

Holiness, Pope Francis stressed, is a vocation “which is fulfilled first and foremost in charity.” It thus “unites us with our brothers and sisters, and so is not merely a personal

event, but a community one.” “When God calls an individual,” the Pope noted, “it is always for the good of all, as in the case of Abraham and Moses, Peter and Paul.” The only legitimate response to Jesus’ love, he said, is to immediately desire to share it with others, “like Matthew, who, as soon as Jesus calls him, invites his friends to meet the Messiah”, or Paul, who, “having met the Risen One, becomes the apostle to the nations.”

Familial Sanctity

The final subject of Pope Francis’s address was holiness as it occurs in families. Although this sort of saintliness is “evident above all in the Holy Family of Nazareth”, the Pope said, “the Church offers us many other examples”, in particular “holy couples, in which each of the spouses was an instrument of salvation of the other.” The holiness of a married couple, Pope Francis stressed, is not simply the sum total of the sanctity of each individual; rather, each one’s holiness contributes to multiplying that of their partner. As an example of this sort of holiness, Pope Francis presented the Polish couple Josef and Wiktoria Ulma and their seven children. They attempted to save Jewish families from the Nazis by hiding them in their home, but were eventually caught and killed. This Polish family, Pope Francis said, “reminds us that sanctification is a community journey, to be made in pairs, not alone. Always in community.”

1 Vatican News.

Eucharistic Celebration for the Deceased Prisoners & PMI Volunteers

On November 13, 2023, under the PMI National Office initiation, an online Eucharistic Celebration was conducted by Rev Fr Dr Francis Kodiyan, MCBS, National Coordinator, for the repose of the souls of deceased prisoners worldwide and Prison Ministry India Volunteers. This was a tribute, the first of its kind, by the National Office for the unsung heroes and heroines of PMI who had left for their heavenly abode after rendering selfless service as volunteers. The Holy Mass commenced with Sr Amala DC, PMI National Secretary, reading out the names of the deceased Prison Ministry Volunteers from the Necrology. Fr Francis Kodiyan MCBS, the main celebrant in his brief introduction reminded the participants their duty to pray for the departed souls of prisoners and PMI volunteers.

Rev Fr Wilfred Fernandes, PMI Regional Coordinator for Central Region, gave the homily. He started with the theme of All Souls Day: "The souls of the Just are in the hands of the Lord" and reminded the gathering that Confession is a must to remain in a state of grace. He recalled the words of St Paul: The wage of sin is death and narrated how people tend to prolong their lives and seldom want to die. Our faith in the Resurrection of the dead and life everlasting gives us the hope to remain forever with our Lord in His kingdom provided we continue to remain in a state of grace. The restoration of all that was



Dr Michael Noronha

lost to Job in the Old Testament and to Lazarus back to life in the New Testament are incidents which rekindle our faith in the Risen Lord, he said. The repentant thief who was assured by the Divine Saviour to be with Him in paradise should be remembered by the faithful who have from our baptism lived the Christian faith with the hope of our resurrection on the last day. The tradition of the Catholic Church to pray for the dead should be continued by all the faithful every day, especially for the souls most in need of God's mercy.

After the Eucharistic Celebration, Fr Michael Francis led the assembly with the 'Office for the Dead' solemnly and prayerfully. Ms Lilly Vaz led the congregation with hymns in her melodious voice. Dr Michael Noronha thanked all the participants for their presence to pray for the departed which is the best way to respond to the needs of a departed soul with a call to continue to remember the departed ones every day during the Eucharistic Celebration.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (Jn 1-3).

Overcoming Drugs, The Christian Way

Benedict Savarimuthu

Group Dynamics Exercise

Things needed - 2 pieces of cloth: one normal, the other with a slight tear in the centre. Pass the first normal cloth around and ask the inmates to tear it. After everyone has tried and failed, pass the second cloth with the slight tear in it. They will be able to tear it easily. Ask the inmates, why was it easier to tear the second cloth? That tear is similar to our weaknesses. Satan and drug pushers need to find just one soft spot and they will try to get in. Let's see how Jesus was tempted and won. And what are the secrets you can learn from the temptation of Jesus in the desert.

Jesus' Desert Experience

Equate Jesus' Desert Experience and the life of the inmates (*whether you are a drug addict or a drug pusher or both*) at a Drug Rehab Experience being very similar. Here's why. Jesus fasted in the desert. You are fasting here from drugs while being at the centre. Satan knew Jesus was hungry and weak; Satan knows you'll be hungry too when you leave. So too, the drug pushers are awaiting your release. Therefore, when you leave the centre, you stand a high chance of being tempted, just like what Jesus experienced on completion of his fast. The Devil and drug pushers will come to tempt in the form of old addict friends and pushers. They offering you drugs is just like the Devil offering bread to Jesus who was hungry. If you cross that, the Devil will use pushers

who will come and offer you all the riches and wealth & benefits of resuming your role as a Pusher, just like the Devil offered Jesus all the Kingdoms and its riches if He would worship Satan. If you cross that, the Devil /your pusher bosses, will assure you of total protection from the police and related authorities and all kinds of problems, provided you promise loyalty and allegiance to Him/them, just like what Satan offered Jesus, on condition He surrendered totally to Him.

Battle Against the Devil

Jesus went into the desert filled with the Holy Spirit. You too need to call on the Holy Spirit to be with you every day, in this centre and more so to be with you, everyday and in every way, when you leave the centre. With Him by your side, you'll have the power to withstand temptations. But you need to give the Holy Spirit authority over you. Every time the Devil tried to tempt Jesus, Jesus quoted the scripture/the Word of God. You too need to be equipped with the Word of God to counter whatever temptations or tricks the Devil will use against you. You need to spend time in Prayer and strengthen your "Inner Self" during your time at the Centre, just like what Jesus did in the desert. You need to focus on the future life outside the centre upon leaving, just as Jesus prepared himself for his future calling, while He was in the desert. Take note that it was after leaving the desert that Jesus began His actual ministry. So, too, it's when you leave the centre that you begin a new chapter and a new life, free from drugs!

3-Step C.E.O. Method

Cleansing

Asking God for forgiveness for all your past sins and for a new heart, a new spirit and new future, claiming His Words, “Lord, you promised a new heart, a new spirit and new future for the repentant sinner. Cleanse me here and now, today! I ask for mercy for all my past sins and I claim your promises in the Bible, “Behold I will make all things new, and make you a new creation. Today is the day of salvation, Now is the favourable time!” Yes, Lord, I want to start afresh, put the past behind me and start a new life. Have mercy. Bless me and be with me, as I start a new chapter in my life!” Today is the first day of the remaining part of my new life.”

Empowerment

Lord, renew me, empower me, and be with me. Protect me and may your Holy Spirit speak to me during my weakest moments, and give me the wisdom and guidance on what to say and do and how to avoid temptations and stay away from falling into the temptations and traps by the evil one that lead me into sinning. Give me the boldness and courage to say, “No” to Satan and walk away from temptations and fight the Devil. Strengthen me day by day, to fight the good fight.

Overcoming

Lord, I want to start a new life. I want you to help me to face and overcome all the negative challenges within and around me! Help me bring out the goodness within me and guide me to use the talents and gifts you have given me to win back the trust of my loved ones. Bless me to develop good thoughts. Help me speak what is positive, the truth and only that which is good. Help me do only that which is good. May my

words and actions always be pleasing to you, so that I may become and be a worthy witness who glorifies You!

Cleansing

Matthew 26:41 / Mark 14:38 “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” *Matthew 15:11 - “It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.”* 1 Corinthians 10:13 - “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” *Colossians 3:8-10 - “But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”* 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 – “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

Empowering

Matthew 6:13 - And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. Psalm 50: 15...*call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.* Psalms 27:5, 6 “For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will

conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock. And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD". *2 Corinthians 1:10* "He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. James 1:2-4 - "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Overcoming

2 Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things have passed away; behold, all things are become new."
Ephesians 4:29 - "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."
Philippians 4:6,7 ... "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

1. Tips to Avoid Temptation

Pray, Understand your Personal Weaknesses, Flee Temptation, Link up with Friends who'll Guide & Strengthen You, Don't be Discouraged, Confess and Repent, Keep Praying for Strength; Always, May God Bless Your Desire To Start A New Life!

PMI Mysore Unit Gathering

Dr Michael Noronha

On 26 November 2023 during the feast of Christ the King, the PMI unit of Mysore invited all the other PMI Units in the Mysore Diocese to meet the "National Coordinator cum CBCI Secretary for PMI in the Commission for Justice, Peace and Development and the co-founder of PMI," Rev Fr Dr Francis Kodiyan, MCBS. 60 PMI Warriors gathered to grace this occasion. A formal program was held. All were served Breakfast, tea and lunch. Sr Joyce CSST welcomed the gathering. The novices of CSST Congregation performed a prayer dance and the Franciscan Capuchin Seminarians performed two skits, one on Maximilian Kolbe. Fr Kodiyan spoke on his journey from his seminary days to this date in founding, building and nurturing the PMI. He distributed PMI books to unit leaders. Fr Dr Joseph Marie and Fr Prashant Noronha shared their experiences in prison ministry and assured their support to PMI endeavours.

The following were felicitated on this day: Rev Fr Dr Francis Kodiyan; Rev Fr Dr Joseph Marie, Director Pastoral Centre & Coordinator of Mysore diocese Commissions; Rev Fr Dr Prashant Noronha, Dean Capuchin Philosophy house; Sr Joyce CSST - Mysore diocesan coordinator; Sr Lilly SJT - Counsellor Women's wing, Mysore prison; Sr Anna Mary SMMI - Administrator St Mary's De-addiction center & counsellor for de-addiction Mysore Prison. Fr Francis Kodiyan and Fr Prashant celebrated the Eucharist for us. Sr Joyce welcomed the gathering & Bro Dolphy, DDS proposed the Vote of Thanks.

Petition to Save Two Death Row Prisoners in Vietnam¹

Hundreds of lawyers and activists have called on the communist government in Vietnam to review the three fiercely disputed cases of death sentences. In a petition signed by some 900 lawyers, teachers, journalists, former officials, Catholic priests, pastors and activists, lawyer Le Van Hoa asked the one-party government to re-investigate the death sentencing of Nguyen Van Chuong, Ho Duy Hai and Le Van Manh in different murder cases. In the petition submitted to the general secretary of the Communist Party Nguyen Phu Trong and President Nguyen Van Thuong on Nov. 10, Hoa said the death sentences passed by courts “have clear signs of terrible injustice.” Hoa said that the defendants’ lawyers and families have presented many petitions, alleging the trials were “not objective and convincing.” Hoa, who started to offer legal aid to Chuong’s family in 2013, started the signature campaign on Nov. 1. The petition, also submitted to the National Assembly, urged the government to “carry out special procedures to resolve the cases” of Chuong and Hai, who have been on death row since 2008. They should be “released immediately” and those who conducted the wrongful trials should be punished, the petition demanded. The petition came after the communist-ruled country executed Manh on Sept. 22, ignoring clemency pleas by the European Union and global rights groups. Manh, accused of rape and murder of a girl in 2005, is reported to have admitted the crime under torture. The petition said it was also necessary to review the case of Manh.

Vietnam is ranked as one of the biggest executioners in Southeast Asia by the

international human rights group Amnesty. The nation recorded more than 119 death sentences in 2021. Since 2013, executions in Vietnam have been carried out by lethal injections after they replaced firing squads. Chuong from Hai Duong province was arrested on Aug. 3, 2007, for killing Police Major Nguyen Van Sinh in the neighboring town of Hai Phong on July 14. The married man was sentenced to death on June 12, 2008, by the People’s Court of Hai Phong. Advocate Hoa said the investigators failed to examine the crime scene until the afternoon of the following day. Many witnesses have confirmed that the defendant was present in his hometown of Hai Duong at the time of the murder in Hai Phong, about 30 kilometres away. Chuong, 40, has written to his family many times, confirming that he was tortured to force him to confess. His father, Nguyen Truong Chinh, said his family and lawyers have sent countless petitions to review Chuong’s case without success. The authorities have denied Chuong’s allegations of torture.

In August, the EU, Canada, Norway and the United Kingdom called on the Vietnamese authorities to halt Chuong’s execution and criticized the use of the death penalty. Hai is facing the death sentence for murdering two female postal staff before robbing them on Jan. 13, 2008, at the Cau Voi Post Office in Long An province. The petition said the investigators failed to question other suspects who were reportedly present at the post office when the murder happened. Sa La Hoa, a signatory to the petition, said they want the cases “be annulled and reinvestigated so as to restore public faith in the justice system.” Vietnam freed and offered a public apology to three prisoners in murder cases in 2013, 2015 and 2016 after many lawyers and the National Assembly worked hard to save them.

¹ UCA News, 13 Nov 2023.

Prison Ministry India: Inside and Outside: Personal Experiences

Clement Raja

“Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win” says Karl Marx. I think that the Prisoners of the world have many things to lose as they are behind bars in prisons but the Prison Ministry of India is affirming that such prisoners are having a new world and a new life to live and win. Through one of my friends I came to know about Fr Francis Kodiyan, MCBS and the National Coordinator of Prison Ministry India. In my sabbatical year, I wanted to have some different kinds of exposures to the mission of the Catholic Church and that too partially in PMI. I reached the PMI on 16th of August 2023 to receive a warm welcome from Fr Francis Kodiyan, MCBS, the national coordinator of Prison Ministry India. He took me around the campus of PMI Head office and its other wings such as Kolbe Home, the Documentation Centre, Research Centre, Jeevodaya and other rehabilitation centres and religious institutes nearby. He remembered gratefully the solid support given to PMI by the Most Rev Peter Remigius, the Emeritus bishop of Kottar Diocese, and Most Rev Mar Jose Pulickal, the present PMI chairman.

I could observe that all the normal day today functioning of PMI was very well and meticulously carried out under the dedicated and experienced hands of Sr Amala the National Secretary from the Vincentian Congregation. I had a very nice time with the children of Kolbe Home and with the Franciscan Religious Brothers Bro. Brian, Bro. Pratap and Norbertine Bro. Justin. Brothers from these Congregations were doing their regency there and looking after the children with real love and concern. I could also witness how Sr. Pushpa SCS and

Sr. Marceline SCS were really caring for the children of the prisoners and the orphans with real commitment of love and mercy. I noticed that they all do bear witness to the special call of God who wants to free the oppressed and the downtrodden, especially the imprisoned ones and their children. It was also a very enriching experience for me to live among them and enjoy the spiritual companionship of the different religious Brothers, Sisters and the Fathers after the Silver Jubilee of my Priestly Ordination as a diocesan priest of Sivagangai Diocese in Tamil Nadu.

The time that I spent with various PMI activities and its mission was only four months but I can very boldly say that I had a very rich spiritual renewal experience by involving myself with the entire community of PMI and especially with the Kolbe children. Even though it was in English that I happened to serve their spiritual needs including the Holy Masses and other kinds of worship and prayers, I used to enjoy the ministry, being directly connected with the vulnerable sections of society and that too with the children of prisoners as well as other categories.

I felt that Kolbe Home children always feel at home because of the love and concern extended to them by the religious Brothers and Sisters and the volunteers and the well-wishers of PMI. All the children, 24 in number, studying from 1st std to Xth std in the CBSE School seem to be gifted with several skills and talents, knowledge and wisdom and I am quite sure that in the future they will be different and make good and potential students in their respective states. I came to know that PMI with its various wings of service, both in Karnataka and in the other states of India, is carrying out its different missions like fulfilling the spiritual needs of the prisoners, giving counselling and moral instructions, thus becoming the bridge between prisoners and the government officials as well as their family members. Besides these PMI provides also some financial and legal support for the

release, rehabilitation and reformation of prisoners. They offer recreational facilities, some vocational training, conduct literacy programs, form mini libraries in prisons and encourage the arts, skills and talents of the prisoners; PMI organizes some medical camps and give free legal awareness to the prisoners inside the prisons and very many life-oriented projects for their family members outside. I myself have personally witnessed PMI supporting a particular person who came out of his life sentence imprisonment and was assured of a loan for a free auto as the employment scheme. I have also seen that some others were helped by PMI with educational help and medical support and financial support for free house construction, and marriage settlement and support for food stuff etc.

PMI is primarily depending on the special collections of Prison Ministry Sunday that is being observed in the month of August every year in all the states of India. It was an eye opener for me that some of the states are very regular and generous in supporting this kind of different but necessary mission in the Church by means of their very dedicated and committed volunteers, both lay and religious. At the same time it was also surprising to note that some of the units are not regular in their participation in caring and shouldering the responsibility of PMI. I learned that the state level responsible volunteers were doing many visits to the local and central prisons periodically and were fulfilling the spiritual needs of the prisoners. It was well shared in the daily special prayer services (devoted to every State one day) either by the national coordinator or the secretary. In the history of PMI, for the first time an Ambulance was donated recently to the Central Prison of Varanasi as per the constant request made and the necessity felt. Another challenging future project to buy an apartment to coordinate the prison ministry services in Delhi.

Every week some of the College students, the volunteers and the religious representatives used to come to PMI and Kolbe Home to

spend their precious time and energy with the children and the staff members. They become the day today propaganda, the real messengers and the lifelong supporters of PMI activities. Bro. Paul and Bro. Sandeep, the seminarians from United Theological College, Bangalore were also with me in PMI in those days of my stay over there and they were also very happy about their rich experiences and the formation that they received from these centres under the guidance of Fr Francis and Sr Amala and above all from the little children of Kolbe Home. In this way PMI is serving as the centre for uniting various Rites of the Catholic Church and the ecumenical centre between the Catholics and other denominations. Above all PMI is serving as the secular and humanitarian centre by bringing the chained and the imprisoned people and their children under one umbrella in order to liberate them from all the clutches they are under.

Fr. Francis, the cofounder of the Jesus Fraternity and PMI who started this mission in Kerala in 1981 with the motto “search, serve and save the lost, the least and the last” is continuing the work very effectively with the same spirit in various parts of India. I wonder how he is able to coordinate his many responsibilities as the MCBS Param Prasad Provincial Councillor for finance and development and at the same time as the PMI national coordinator. He is also the manging editor of *Prison Voice* and Chief Editor of *Reformative Explorations* - a psycho-spiritual and crimino-social quarterly as well as chief editor of *Smart Companion* magazine. How much dedication and perfection does he invest into all these services! I am also very much motivated by his very simple lifestyle and by his vast knowledge and wisdom. He has written 16 various kinds of books and did researches on prisoners’ reformation. I wish and pray that the Holy Spirit guide and protect him always to carry out the mission of Christ he has adopted in life which is nothing else but to set free the captives and the imprisoned.

PMI North East Regional Meeting: Report

Sr Irene D'Souza UFS

On 16th November 2023 Sr. Irene D'Souza the Regional Coordinator of North East, brought together all the State Coordinators, Unit Coordinators and members, along with Most Rev Bishop Joachim Walder the Auxiliary Bishop of Aizawl Diocese and the Chair Person for PMI North East along with Fr. Francis Kodyan the National Coordinator at Diocesan Social Service Forum, Joypur Karguli. We began the day with the Eucharistic Celebration thanking the Lord and invoking his divine blessings on our ministry and the day's program. The Theme for our meeting was **"Be a Love Bomb – Not to kill, but to Heal the broken Hearts"**. Meeting began at 8.50am with a prayer led by Fr. Joseph Thankachan, the Diphu PMI Unit Coordinator. Sr. Irene welcomed everyone.

Welcome Address

"Kindness is the language, which the deaf can hear and the blind can see," says Mark Twain. With these sentiments she warmly welcomed Most Rev. Bishop Joachim Walder the Auxiliary Bishop of Aizawl with the traditional Assamese Gamcha. "Step into this space and explode with love, for in the end, it's the most powerful force, in the future". With these sentiments she welcomed Rev. Fr. Francis Kodyan who explodes his knowledge, inspiration and insights in the field of PMI, by being a Love Bomb to our brethren. On behalf of all the PMI members she welcomed him with the traditional Gamcha. She also welcomed all the PMI members who came forward willingly and generously for the meeting.

Bishop Joachim requested each member to introduce herself / himself briefly with their name, place and task as PMI member. Bishop Joachim Walder requested all to enlighten everyone through their activities. (State/ Unitwise).

Goalpara Unit

Goalpara zone visited the jail in the month of December during Christmas. They gave a Christmas message which was followed by Christmas carols, a cultural program and distributed special snacks in the name of baby Jesus. According to their assessment of the needs of the inmates, they distributed blankets and musical instruments.

Guwahati Unit

On July 29th Sr. Irene called the PMI members of Guwahati Unit for a meeting to discuss and plan out for Independence Day celebration in the Central Jail of Guwahati. On August 13th the Second Sunday of the month, we offered mass with intercessory prayers for the prisoners. On 15th August we celebrated Independence Day in the prison with the Theme "Freedom is the Soul of our Country". We put up a program related to the theme with patriotic songs, dances and speeches and we distributed refreshments to the inmates. Fr. John arranged an awareness program on Vipassana which was conducted by Mrs. Lalita Narayana at Morigaon and Shillong.

Tezpur Unit

CRI Tezpur organized some programs for the prisoners. Every Saturday they visited the prison between 12.00 to 2.00pm. Along with the Coordinator, the other congregation sisters accompanied them two by two to the prison. In the prison they conducted Rosary, taught singing, held counseling and, motivated the families. During Christmas

and Easter, they organized programs and distributed gifts and snacks. For this they collected money two times from all religious houses.

Diphu Unit

They began the jail Ministry 15 years ago when they got permission for regular visits to prison. On Saturdays they were allowed to visit from 2.00 - 3. 00 pm. Sisters from different congregations visited the prisoners, talked to them, guided them, upheld them and supported them through prayers. On Christmas they put up a cultural program, gave Christmas message, sang carols and distributed snacks. On Independence Day they distributed food items. They also put-up skill training to inmates such as Mura making, surf making, weaving, bag making, wood craft and phenol making. They provided all types of raw materials required. Once they had completed making them, they sold the products through different channels and returned the money to the concerned persons as additional income for themselves.

Tripura Unit

Agarthala PMI consists of 7 members. The coordinator mentioned that along with her the CRI president contacted Sr. Irene DS the Regional Coordinator, and sought her guidance regarding the manner of going about in the PMI mission. She guided us to be vigilant and prudent and cautious in our acts and encouraged everyone to take it slowly beginning with prayer. They collected the Brochures from Sr. Irene and Fr. Praveen, and all other information related to PMI, along with application and made an appointment with DIG. But on the day of meeting, the latter refused to meet them.

Aizawl

Regular visits have been made to the central jail twice a month with 940 male and 250 female inmates. Twice a week regular visits were made to Aizawl District jail which holds 220 inmates. Volunteers are generally women but a few are men. They preach the word of God, distribute clothes, medicines and sanitary items on a regular basis. They also provide musical instruments and sports items according to their needs. Major feasts like Christmas, Easter, Prison Ministry Sunday were celebrated in the prison. Programs were conducted with the support of school children and parish youth, and tea and snack were also served to the prisoners. Once a month one Sunday collection was regularly made and used for the above said activities. Inmates after being released were temporarily sheltered in Horeb Home which was commonly used for drug addicts.

Feedback

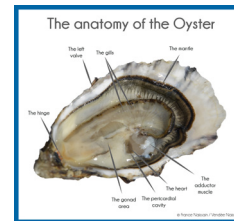
Bishop Joachim appreciated each one for the beautiful sharing and the hard work. He was particularly pleased to hear that in some places the ministry is going on wonderfully well. Hoping to receive lots of interest, cooperation, support and encouragement from the authority, he encouraged each one to have new ways of thinking and to bring changes in our attitude. He added further that we be not discouraged when we meet with difficulties to enter prisons or when they don't give the required permission. It is an additional reason to trust in the Lord and pray without ceasing. Fr Francis Kodyan also appreciated each one of us and assured his help and support any time. He emphasized that in doing anything we should begin with prayer. Prayer is the first priority not money. He reminded us that when we trust in his providence and submit to his will, He will provide everything.

Input Session

After tea break, we had input session from Rev Dr Francis Kodiyan MCBS on the basic principles of Prison Ministry India. We derived from his presentation a lot of knowledge, inspiration and insights. Fr. Francis gave us also some valuable suggestions for the smooth running of our ministry. To send the activity report to Sr. Irene, the regional coordinator, and she would forward it to the National Office. During the meeting, along with the activity report financial report as well has to be presented. Since this ministry does not welcome foreign money and FCRA accounts, we depend upon our lifestyle of begging. Our main work is to try to release as many prisoners as possible and after releasing find ways and means to rehabilitate and reintegrate them. Putting up the program on Easter and Christmas time and distributing snacks is secondary. Every year the second Sunday of August is observed as Prison Ministry Sunday. On that day a collection can be made outside the church (Bucket Collection). You can make use of raffle tickets. 25% of its income can be taken for the use of the State Coordinators, another 25% can be used by the Regional Office and 50% to be sent to the PMI National office Bangalore. State Coordinators are requested to translate the pastoral letter into the local language.

Fr Wilson Paul the assistant Regional Coordinator proposed vote of thanks. Bishop Joachim gave the final blessing. After the group photo all went back to their houses.

The Oyster



There once was an oyster
Whose story I tell
Who found that some sand
Had got into his shell.

It was only a grain
but it gave him great pain.
For oysters have feelings
Although they're so plain.

Now, did he berate
the harsh workings of fate
that had brought him
To such a deplorable state?

Did he curse at the government
Cry for election
And claim that the sea should
Have given him protection?

'No,' he said to himself
As he lay on a shell
Since I cannot remove it
I shall try to improve it.

Now the years have rolled around
As the years always do
And he came to his ultimate
Destiny stew.

And the small grain of sand
That had bothered him so
Was a beautiful pearl
All richly aglow.

Now the tale has a moral
for isn't it grand
What an oyster can do
With a morsel of sand?

What couldn't we do
If we'd only begin
With some of the things
That get under our skin. - Unknown

Paving the Road to Recovery

Lexi Aggen¹

An open bottle of beer sat on the table in front of Brian, next to a pamphlet for Celebrate Recovery. At 32 years old, he had a choice to make: continue living with his addiction or get help. He chose Celebrate Recovery, a 12-step program for those dealing with “hurts, hang-ups, and habits of any kind.” The program became a foundation in Brian’s life. But when he made the decision to attend Celebrate Recovery 10 years ago, he never anticipated that it would lead him to volunteer in prison.

A Downward Trend

Ten years before that, when Brian was 22, he needed a job. His girlfriend was pregnant, and they needed insurance to help cover medical bills. His cousin recommended joining the Army - which ended up being the perfect place for Brian. “The Army and I fit together like a glove,” says Brian, who appreciated the structure and community the Army provided. “I found a place where I could be home.” He and his girlfriend married before Brian was deployed. But the marriage didn’t last long. During his second tour in Iraq Brian received divorce papers. The divorce left him with nothing—his home, clothes, and car were all sold off. Brian already enjoyed drinking, but after the divorce his habit started to get out of control. When Brian returned from Iraq, he struggled to adjust to life stateside. He soon received orders to go to Fort Knox, where he met the woman who would become his second wife. After a year of marriage, the couple decided his time in the Army was done, but finding work after the Army

wasn’t easy. It would take a year before Brian would find work as a car salesman. His wife would often prompt him about his drinking, but Brian always denied any problems. It was through her promptings that Brian realized the need to change - to move past the addiction and find a better way of living.

The Other Side of the Door

That’s when Celebrate Recovery entered his life - and he never looked back. He actively participated in the program through his church for seven years, becoming well known in the Celebrate Recovery community. After those seven years, Brian was eager for a more active role—he wanted to give back, both to Celebrate Recovery and to God. His pastor approached him about leading a Celebrate Recovery group inside Muskegon Correctional Facility through the Prison Fellowship Academy. The Academy is a yearlong program led by compassionate coaches and offers a holistic curriculum. In 2017, Celebrate Recovery and Prison Fellowship® partnered together to include Celebrate Recovery Inside as part of the Academy curriculum. Both Celebrate Recovery and the Academy are based in biblical principles and emphasize the value of community, so the programs complement one another well. After a week of praying about the opportunity, Brian agreed to volunteer. Before entering the prison, he thought the men in his class might be angry and resentful about imprisonment and resistant to the program. Instead, he discovered compassionate participants who were willing to be vulnerable - because that is the kind of environment Celebrate Recovery fosters. “When we have our conversations, or when we have small group together, they share openly [about] their situation, how they got to where they are,” he says of the

¹ PFI.

men he leads. Most notably, Brian marvelled at the integrity of the men he encountered through the Academy. Integrity is one of the Values of Good Citizenship, six core values that the Academy is built upon.

A Greater Impact

Though the in-prison class in the Academy follows the same curriculum as outside Celebrate Recovery groups, Brian is astounded by Celebrate Recovery Inside. He feels the classes he facilitates in Muskegon Correctional have helped him. “I went in there and got more than I bargained for,” he says. “I thought I was going into a place where I was going to help people, and it turns out the men have helped me more.” One of Celebrate Recovery’s customs is to avoid giving advice; instead, participants are encouraged to share their own experiences. For Brian, the men’s stories have had a profound impact on his home life. Brian heard one prisoner expressing regret over his relationship with his late father and wishing they had spent more time together. The conversation left a mark on Brian, and when he was let go from his job selling cars, he counted it as God’s mercy. He accepted a position at a bank, which freed up more time for him to be home with his family. Since then, Brian has seen an improvement in his relationship with his son. Recently, another conversation with the Celebrate Recovery group in Muskegon Correctional inspired Brian to deactivate all social media. After deactivating his accounts, his relationships with his wife and family have greatly improved. “What they were trying to tell me is ... ‘You need to leave the things alone that are really sucking you in and destroying your life,’” he says.

A New Brotherhood

Brian has found that, along with his own experience going through Celebrate

Recovery, he can connect with the men in the Academy about his time in the military. “There’s lots of veterans, unfortunately, who are incarcerated,” he says, “who took the wrong path and need brothers like us, that they can relate with and share their story, so that they can find healing just like we did.” Brian is correct. According to the Vietnam Veterans of America nearly 181,000 veterans were incarcerated in 2021. Often, when making a point or explaining a topic, Brian will share a story from his time in the Army. When he does, he always sees the veterans in his group “light up.” “That person will always be a veteran,” Brian says, “and he needs to have that respect. He needs to be shown it regardless of his current situation.”

But Brian has gained more than just wisdom from his time leading Celebrate Recovery through the Academy - he has gained deep friendships with the men he leads. Throughout the yearlong program, Brian and the Academy participants work to break down barriers and build trust, starting from simple steps like learning the names of all the men. “Celebrate Recovery takes complete strangers and makes them brothers and sisters,” he says. “I’m friends with those men inside. I treat them like family. They’re not inmates. They’re not prisoners. I tell them all the time that they’re people and they matter.” Now, Brian is eager to invite more people to experience the healing through Celebrate Recovery and the Academy. Sometimes it takes a little more convincing, as the stigma and fear around entering a prison can hold people back. But Brian knows it takes just one experience to ignite change -including your own. “Anyone who wants to get involved in prison ministry needs to just go,” he says. “I promise you, the minute they walk in the gate, it will change their life.”

Prison Fellowship International Washington, DC

**Heather Rice-Minus
President and Chief Executive Officer-Elect**

Dear Francis,

It's an honour to email you for the first time as Prison Fellowship's president and CEO-elect. Will you continue to pray for me as I step into this role, and for the ministry as we enter this exciting new chapter? At Prison Fellowship, everything we do year-round is about the hope of a fresh start - something all of us have needed, one way or another. And I love how, this fall, we get to celebrate the growth of *Create: New Beginnings*, a Prison Fellowship program designed especially for women in prison. Rooted in biblical values, *Create: New Beginnings* offers art-based workshops for incarcerated women to explore topics like identity, shame, and forgiveness. As they discover who Jesus is, women can truly heal from the past and begin to bloom.

I think of women like Jen, who endured years of abuse at home while she watched her mother cycle through volatile relationships. As a young girl, Jen was exposed to drugs and alcohol, and she began using as a teen. She found solace in creating art, learning to draw and paint from her grandmother and dad. Later, after a serious car accident, Jen became addicted to pills. Once those ran out, she tried meth to manage her pain. Jen was finally caught selling drugs and sentenced to prison. That's where she heard about *Create: New Beginnings*.

As caring volunteers guided Jen through each activity, she re-imagined her future and experienced Jesus' love. Throughout the program, she conveyed the beauty of His healing faithfulness in her life. Jen says she developed a relationship with the Lord that "infuses her art." Today Jen is sober and

working in human resources. She looks for every opportunity to tell her story and even serves as a board member for a nonprofit organization helping others with a history of incarceration.

Each week, *Create: New Beginnings* reaches more than 400 women in 12 states through 30 active workshops. We've also partnered with the Salvation Army and are active in nine of their Adult Rehabilitation Centers. Most recently, Prison Fellowship realized that all women could benefit from this wonderful program - so we collaborated with Tyndale House Publishing to make *Create: New Beginnings* available to women outside of prison! The book is set to release on Nov. 7.

Just last week, Prison Fellowship held a special event to celebrate the book launch. We listened as artists Martha Ackerman and Stephanie Segel, the book's co-creators, shared the amazing story of how *Create: New Beginnings* came to be. *Create: New Beginnings* was designed for a prison context, but it's proving to be so much more. Each workshop walks participants through engaging, restorative content that any woman could benefit from, in prison or out - because everyone, not only those behind bars, have faced challenging personal issues and emotions. We are all broken people who need a Savior to make us whole. May this be a reminder that our ministry is not just about "going to" those we serve - it's about coming alongside them, so that through face-to-face ministry, we may experience Jesus together.

Like you, I believe that Jesus has the power to redeem any story, no matter how broken, no matter how hopeless. Would you join us in praying that God would continue to guide us in ministry for His glory? Being chosen to lead Prison Fellowship is an honor, and I'm abundantly grateful for your prayers and support in the days ahead.



PMI Housing Project in Odisha in Progress



PMI Kerala State Executive Body Meeting



PMI Mysore Zonal Gathering



PMI North East Gathering



PMI North East Gathering



PMI Odisha State Gathering at Sambalpur



PMI Pune Volunteers Celebrate Diwali at Boys Home, Yerwada



PMI Pune Volunteers Celebrate Diwali at Rescue Home, Pune



**PMI Tamil Nadu Executive Meeting,
St Thomas Mount, Chennai**



**PMI Volunteers Visiting
Chintamani Taluk Prison**



**PMI Volunteers Visiting KGF
Prison**



**Provision Distribution to Prisoners'
Families by PMI Chennai**



**Silver Jubilee Celebration of
Karunyashramam, Ernakulam**



**PMI Volunteers Visiting District
Jail Kottayam**



**Prison Ministry Sunday Celebration at
St Francis Xavier's Church, Bengaluru.**



**PMI Volunteers Visiting Bhopal
Prison**