



# PRISON VOICE

October 2022

Vol. XIX

Issue 10

NATIONAL MONTHLY

₹40/-



**ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI**  
**PROPHET OF PEACE AND FRATERNITY**





**6th PMI Karnataka State Conference, Shivamogga**



**Bellari Prison Visit**



**Bhopal Prison Visit**



**Clothes Distribution to Ranchi Prison**



**Devikulam Prison Visit**



**Distributing Grocery to Released Prisoners, Puzhal**



**Gandhi Jayanthi Celebration at Vishakapatnam Jail**

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## PRISON VOICE

NATIONAL MONTHLY



*“Jesus said to him,  
“If you wish to be  
perfect, go, sell your  
possessions, and give  
the money[a] to the  
poor, and you will have  
treasure in heaven;  
then come, follow me”  
(Mt 19,21)*

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### Are You Willing?

“Help a Prisoner's Child Prevent a Potential Criminal”

80% of the children of prisoners are potential criminals unless somebody takes care of them.

Prison Ministry India has begun a scheme to educate 1000 children of prisoners: Kindly contribute

Rs. 5,000/- for the education of a child.

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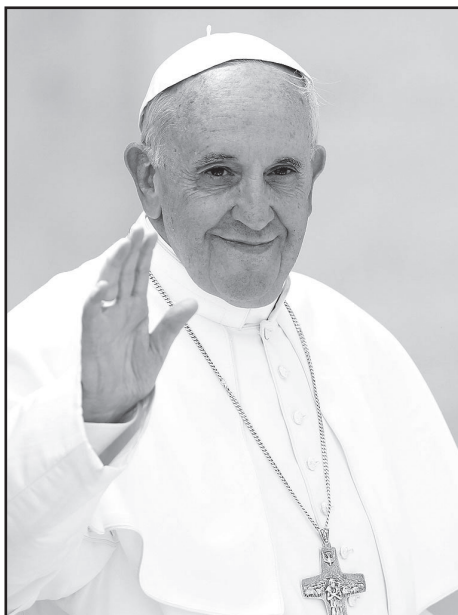
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## A Church that is Open to Everyone - Pope Francis' October Prayer Intention

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In *The Pope Video*, produced by the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network, the Holy Father begins by asking "What does it mean 'to synod'?", before answering himself, that it means walking together: syn-od. He explains that in Greek, the word synod means to walk together, and to walk on the same road. This, continued the Pope, "is what God expects of the Church of the third millennium – that it regains its awareness of being a people on the road and of having to travel together". He adds that a Church with this synodal style is one that listens, aware that listening is more than just hearing.

"It means listening to each other in our diversity and opening doors to those outside the Church. It's not about gathering opinions, nor holding a parliament. The synod isn't a survey; it's about listening to the protagonist, the Holy Spirit. It's about praying. Without prayer, there will be no Synod", says the Pope. His two-minute-long video, which shows images of people walking, praying and attending classes together, ends with the Holy Father asking that we "take advantage of this opportunity to be a Church of closeness, which is God's style –closeness", as well as asking that we "give thanks to all the people of God who, with their attentive listening, are walking the synodal way".

Finally, the Pope says, "let us pray that the Church, ever faithful to the Gospel and courageous in preaching it, may live in an increasing atmosphere of synodality and be a community of solidarity, fraternity, and welcome".



# 13th PMI National Convention, Mission Sunday, Month of the Rosary and St Francis of Assisi

## Mission Sunday

Every year the Church sets apart a Sunday in the month of October to remind us of the truth that She is essentially missionary. It gives us an opportunity to reflect on the missionary nature of the Church and of our individual Christian lives. It is also intended to make us more involved, especially through our prayers and desires, as well as by our material contributions for the worldwide missionary tasks of the Church. The Church from its very inception is missionary. As members of PMI, we need to commit ourselves further more to the work of liberating our brethren behind bars from sin and the fetters caused by sin. We Christians believe that Jesus is our hope, the source of our strength and joy. Let us become hands and feet to others, and show our living presence and service to our brothers and sisters who are languishing under the fetters of iron.

## Month of Rosary

The month of October is dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary. The Rosary is nothing else but faith-contemplation of Christ's life, death and glorification and of Mary's intimate association with Jesus. The Rosary is a simple but at the same time a sublime prayer. It is simple because anyone in almost any circumstance can pray the rosary; it is sublime because it is based on the essential Christian mysteries and therefore it sums up the final and definitive phases of the history of our salvation. Benedict XV asserted, "The rosary is a perfect prayer because of the praise it offers to God, the lessons it imparts, the grace it obtains, and the triumphs it achieves". According to St Pius X: "The rosary is the richest in grace

## EDITOR'S VIEW



**Sr Amala DC**  
Chief Editor

of all prayers. It is the prayer that most deeply touches the heart of the Mother of God". Rosary is ultimately a miniature of the Bible. As we pray and contemplate Mary in the light of her Son this month, let us renew our devotion to the rosary. Let us make it a point to recite daily with attention at least a part of the rosary for prisoners' reformation. Let the rosary become a means for PMI unity and fraternity and for the conversion of prisoners.

## St Francis Assisi

Let us also reflect upon the life of St Francis of Assisi, who himself was a prisoner and his feast was celebrated on 4th October. At the age of 19, before his conversion, he joined the military to fight against a nearby city. He was taken prisoner and held for a year, but was eventually released unharmed. After his release, he abandoned the life of luxury for a life devoted to Christ after reportedly hearing the voice of God, who commanded him to rebuild the Church and live in poverty. As we remember St Francis let us also remember all those who bear the name of Francis especially Pope Francis and Fr Francis Kodiyam MCBS, our PMI coordinator.

## 13th PMI National Convention

Let's be reminded of the upcoming 13th PMI National Convention to be held in Goa from 15 to 18 November 2022 and let us intensify our preparations for its fruitfulness by chain prayer and fasting.







## REFORMATION AND REINTEGRATION

has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift” (Mt 5, 23-24). Repentance and reconciliation are acts of grace and a spiritual warfare. Therefore, we need prayer and fasting for the fruitfulness of the PMI reformative ventures. “For nothing will be impossible with God” (Lk 1, 37).

### Rehabilitation and Reintegration

PMI has many homes to rehabilitate the released prisoners, both for men, women, children and juveniles. PMI also has many homes for prisoners’ children, both for boys and girls in different states and are always ready to welcome more children in need. PMI also assists the released prisoners with their reintegration. We facilitate this with job, marriage, family settlements, and even assisting them in constructing their houses. Like Mathew Albin thousands of released prisoners have been reintegrated into the main stream of society.

### Prisoners’ Redemption

Reformation and reintegration reach their summit with redemption. The ultimate goal of PMI is the redemption of the lost. Jesus came not merely to seek and liberate prisoners from their bondages and dungeons but also to redeem them. The story of the good thief illustrates this very well. The moment the good thief, Saint Dismas, said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom,” Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Lk 23, 42-43). The fundamental goal of our life is to return to God, return to paradise. Prison ministry shows the best and surest way to realize this goal. “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world... Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and

sisters of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25, 34-40). PMI volunteers believe strongly that no one is beyond transformation, and our Redeemer has taught us that no one is beyond redemption as he assured Paradise to the ‘Good Thief’. God also chooses the filthiest of places, stinking places, for his work of redemption. Behind the walls of maximum-security prisons, hard-core criminals are being transformed into messengers of hope. “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mk 2:17). The purpose of Jesus coming to this earth was to call sinners and to redeem the lost. Jesus who cried out from the Cross, “I thirst” (Jn 19:28) continues to thirst for the souls behind the dark cells of prisons.

### Conclusion

What can we do for the reintegration and redemption of prisoners? You can do this by volunteering in three ways: firstly, by prayer and fasting. It was the Blessed Sacrament that gave the original impetus to the Prison Ministry movement in India. Bearing this fact in mind, it is only appropriate for members to spend time in prayer before each visit to a prison. They can recite the rosary, make intercessory prayers and observe fast. Secondly, you can visit prisons and PMI rehabilitation centres and homes for prisoners’ children. Thirdly, you can financially support PMI for prisoners’ rehabilitation and reintegration. Prisoners are our brothers and sisters and PMI is ready to provide them a second chance if they are ready to repent, reconcile, reform, and reintegrate themselves. PMI stands for the integral human development of prisoners and we are ready to do whatever is possible for their reformation and reintegration.



## **REFORM TO REINTEGRATE<sup>1</sup>**

St Antony of Egypt who lived in 251-356 was a famous hermit of the early Church. He retired to the desert and lived a very austere life. Once an abbot asked him “what should I do to please God” Antony said, “Don’t trust in your own righteousness, practice moderation in food and talk, and don’t worry about things done in the past.” Antony said “Just as fish, too long out of water die, so monks who tarry outside their cells and keep company with the world, weaken in their resolve to live a quiet life. Anyone who lives in solitude and quiet is saved from three kinds of warfare – against hearing, talking and seeing. All he still has to fight against is his heart”.

### **St Paul’s Conversion**

In his letter to the Galatians St. Paul speaks of his conversion. Paul was an extremely religious person prior to his conversion to Christ. He was not an agnostic. He was not an atheist. He was not into materialism. He was “extremely zealous for the traditions” of his Jewish ancestors. He was well educated. Paul’s zeal to pursue traditions ended up in persecuting those who were following Christ and trying to destroy the very church, that Christ was building up. If God could save Paul, then He can save anyone. Even today we have such extremists and many believers zealously pursue certain traditions and attack those who have different traditions. The Church has the big task of educating such people.



**Archbishop Bernard Moras**

### **Martha and Mary**

From Jesus’ encounter with Mary and Martha we learn that we must be keen in listening to the Word of God. We may have plenty to do but we cannot neglect spiritual activities, a man who has no time for God is indeed a poor man and he leads a dangerous life. From Mary’s attitude we learn that to take care of the family is a wholesome and praise worthy work, but to get encumbered with such caring work is folly and it could be spiritually dangerous. This is why Jesus says, Mary has chosen the better part, which does not mean Martha’s part is bad but that Jesus is telling us is to have moderation in everything. If Jesus were to be on earth today, would we find Him in the prisons? Of course, we would. He would be there “to seek and to save the lost” and to restore them to sonship just as He did with Zacchaeus. When Jesus was accused for eating with tax collectors and sinners, he answered that “it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mk 2:17). Jesus identifies strongly with the weak, the helpless, and the outcasts. He considers the way we treat them to be the way we treat Him. He wants us to identify with them as well, putting ourselves in their shoes and

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1. Homily delivered on 4th October 2022 during the Inaugural Holy Mass of 6th PMI Karnataka State Conference.



caring for them. On the last judgement day the Lord will say “Come, you who are blessed by my father; take your inheritance ... I was in prison and you came to visit me.; I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:34-40).

### **Pope Francis**

Pope Francis has made it a priority during his papacy to visit prisons and talk about them. He said, “If someone is in prison it is because he has done wrong, and did not respect the law or civil harmony. Therefore, in prison, he is serving his sentence. But it’s right that those who have done wrong should be able to redeem oneself from their mistake. There can’t be sentences without windows of hope.” However, whatever a detainee may have done, he remains always be loved by God. Let’s think about the tenderness of God for them and pray for them so that they may find in that window of hope a way out towards a better life. The prison inmates, should never be deprived of hope and always have the opportunity to redeem themselves”

### **Social Reintegration**

Pope Francis has urged for a change in the outlook and approach in treating prisoners. They must be offered equal opportunities for reform, development and reintegration. Pope Francis noted that places of detention often fail to promote reintegration into society because they lack sufficient resources and also because of frequent overcrowding which turns prisons into real places of what he called, “depersonalisation”. On the contrary, real social reintegration, he

said, starts by guaranteeing opportunities for development, education, decent work, access to healthcare, as well as generating public spaces for civic participation. The Pope also urged today’s society to overcome the stigmatization of someone who has made a mistake because, he said, “instead of offering help and adequate resources to live a dignified life, we are accustomed to discarding the person rather than making efforts for him or her to return to the love of God in his or her life.” Often, a person leaving prison faces an alien world that does not recognize him or her as trustworthy, denying him or her the possibility of working for a dignified livelihood.

### **To Set Prisoners Free**

As Catholics and followers of Jesus the Divine Healer and Saviour let us keep in mind that God seeks to set prisoners free - not always from their physical prison, but certainly from their imprisonment by sin, ignorance, rebellion, and foolish choices. A person’s past does not have to dictate his future. Even a former criminal, if he has learned from his mistakes and renounced his sins, can become a great leader in God’s hands. We have plenty of examples of change of life. Despite their past, offenders who come to Christ have a new identity and a new relationship to the Church! We are to receive them as part of our family, our brothers and sisters in Christ. As brothers and sisters, we are to assist them coming out of prison as they struggle over many hurdles to rejoin their families and their communities.

## **INTERNATIONAL DAY OF NONVIOLENCE: "EYE FOR AN EYE WILL MAKE THE WORLD BLIND"**



**Sr Lini Sheeja MSC**

Mahatma Gandhi, during his first year in South Africa, travelled across the state of Natal on a business trip. He began his ride alone in the first-class compartment, unaware that in apartheid South Africa, first-class accommodation was reserved for whites only. When the train had climbed high into the mountains and reached Pietermaritzburg, the capital of Natal, a European who entered the compartment saw the Indian seated there. He left to find a railroad official to remove him. A conductor came and informed Gandhi that he would have to move to a third-class car. Showing his first-class ticket Gandhi protested, but the indifferent official demanded that he move. When Gandhi refused, a policeman was summoned to throw him and his luggage off the train. Gandhi sat up through the night shivering in the deserted train station, humiliated by the brutal treatment, imposed upon him simply because of the colour of his skin. Rather than 'knowing his place', the young Hindu lawyer determined never to allow such indignity to be visited upon himself or others again. Later, he would reflect upon that evening in a lonely train station in the mountains of Natal as the most creative experience of his life, a turning point that indelibly shaped his future. Many people are broken and embittered by harsh and unjust treatment. But, Gandhi, like iron in a furnace, became purified and took non-violence as his philosophy.

### **Peace is its Own Reward**

"An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind", is the most beloved quote of Mahatma Gandhi 'the great soul' who

taught the people and lived the philosophy of Ahimsa which encourages the use of non-violence as a tool for the peaceful resolution of differences. "Peace is its own reward" stated Mahatma Gandhi in whose memory International Day of Nonviolence is observed. Gandhi, who helped lead India to independence, has been the inspiration for non-violent movements for civil rights and social change across the world. Gandhi was born in India on October 2, 1869. He is remembered today for his contributions towards India's freedom and for sharing with the world a doctrine for dealing with injustice and disharmony. India gained its freedom on August 15, 1947, through Gandhi's efforts. He was assassinated on January 30, 1948. "Nonviolence means avoiding not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. You not only refuse to shoot a man, but you refuse to hate him" stated Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. International Day of Nonviolence is celebrated on 2nd October each year. It is the day when globally everyone celebrates the birthday of a man who helped bring forward the notion of "non-violence," and the tremendous impact this form of social response has had all over the world in the last century.

### **Pope Francis and the Principle of Nonviolence**

"Only conversion of heart can make our world, which is full of terror and violence, more humane. And that means patience,



justice, prudence, dialogue, integrity, solidarity with victims, the needy, and the poorest, limitless dedication, love even unto death for the sake of the other. When you have understood that quite deeply, then you can change the world as committed Christians”, says Pope Francis powerfully to the young people throughout the world in the book *Docat*.

### **Nonviolence: Strength of Powerful People**

“Truth is never illustrated through the use of violence”, this is one of the guiding principles that sits at the core of the illuminated thinking created by the man known to the world as Mahatma Gandhi, moral and spiritual teacher and founding father of India. Hence he would refuse to denounce his aggressors for the violation of human rights, even when provoked, which ever more convinces that non-violence is the only way to combat violence itself. On the basis of his traumatic experiences in South Africa, Gandhi developed the concept of ‘Satyagraha’ that literally means adhering unflinchingly to the truth as Gandhi saw that physical force is only used by weak people.

### **Mahatma Gandhi’s Birthday as International Day of Nonviolence**

The UN has good reason to use Gandhi’s birthday to celebrate International Day of Non-Violence. He objected to violence not only because an unarmed people had little chance of success in an armed rebellion, but because he considered violence a clumsy weapon which created more problems than it solved, and left a trail of hatred and bitterness in which genuine reconciliation was almost impossible. He made us understand that the philosophy of nonviolence is not a weapon

of the weak; it is a weapon, which can be tried by all. Gandhi is the person who came up with the name and brought together different related ideas under one concept: Satyagraha. Gandhi understands violence from its Sanskrit root, “ahimsa”, meaning non-injury. In the midst of hyper violence, Gandhi teaches that the one who possess non-violence is blessed. Blessed is the man who can perceive the law of ahimsa (non-violence) in the midst of the raging fire of ahimsa all around him. We bow in reverence to such a man by his example. Ahimsa is just translated to mean non-violence in English, but it implies more than just avoidance of physical violence. Ahimsa implies total non-violence, no physical violence, and no passive violence. Gandhi translates Ahimsa as love.

### **Embrace Nonviolence**

“Non-violence is the weapon of the strong” said Mahatma Gandhi. And its opposite, violence is the weapon of the weak. “And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword’” (Matthew 26:51-52). Jesus taught his disciple the great principle of non-violence and he lived it to the full. Each year, more than 1.6 million people worldwide lose their lives to violence. For every person who dies as a result of violence, many more are injured and suffer from a range of physical, sexual, reproductive and mental health problems. Let us embrace non-violence to live in peaceful families, society and the world.



## **Pope Francis Facilitates Exchange of Prisoners between Ukraine and Russia**

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Pope Francis revealed to 19 Jesuits that he talked to a military leader from Ukraine, who gave him a list of over 300 prisoners. “A military leader who deals with the exchange of prisoners came with the religious counsellor of President Zelensky. They asked me to do something for the trade.” Pope Francis immediately called the Russian ambassador to see if an exchange could happen as soon as possible. Since the beginning of the conflict, the Pope has left space for dialogue with the Russians and the Ukrainians. He recalled during the meeting that he went straight to the Russian embassy as soon as he heard that the war had started. “I told the ambassador that I would have liked to speak with President Putin, as long as he left me a small dialogue window”, the Pope said. At the same time, the Pope kept in touch with Ukrainian President Zelensky. He phoned him twice and sent cardinals to Kyiv to show solidarity.

Those released include prisoners of war from countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Morocco, some of whom had been sentenced to death after being captured in Ukraine and accused of being mercenaries. The group included five British nationals, two Americans, a Croatian, a Moroccan and a Swedish citizen, the ministry said in a statement, adding that a plane carrying the prisoners had landed in the kingdom and that Saudi authorities were “facilitating procedures for their safe return to their respective countries”. Russia also freed some 215 Ukrainians, including the five commanders who led a prolonged Ukrainian defence of the southern port city of Mariupol earlier this year. In exchange, Ukraine sent back 55 Russians and pro-Moscow Ukrainians and Viktor Medvedchuk, the leader of a banned pro-Russian party who was facing charges of treason.



## **Volleyball Match: Shivamogga Prison**

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**Sr Helen Moras**

On 10th September 2022 Prison Ministry India, Diocesan unit of Shivamogga, Karnataka conducted a volley ball match in the Central Prison Shivamogga in collaboration with St. Charles degree college, new town, Bhadravathi. The match was between three teams namely: Central Prison Shivamogga staff, Central Prison Shivamogga convicts and St Charles Degree College Students. During this match the Superintendent of Central Prison Dr Anitha BDS, Assistant Superintendent Mr Shivanand Shivapur, Sr Jacintha Superior of St Charles Convent, Bhadravathi, Sr Therese coordinator for Prison Ministry Karnataka State unit, Sr Shanthi, Administrator of St Charles degree college, Sr Leena, Sr Helen Moras, Co-ordinator for Prison Ministry, Diocese of Shivamogga and the staff of Central Prison Shivamogga were present. The tough competition was finally won by the students of St Charles Degree College. The Superintendent gave away the mementos to the teams and congratulated them. For the students it was an enriching experience of visiting the prison and getting to know about the prison and its condition and for the inmates, it was a time of fun, enjoyment, resilience builder, team spirit and a change in their routine work. No doubt, the students returned from the Central Prison with a pleasant and rich experience.





## 6th PMI Karnataka State Conference - Report

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**Sr Theresa Mascarenhas**

### **Inauguration**

The 6th PMI Karnataka state conference was held on 4th and 5th October 2022 at Sannidhi, Shimoga Diocesan Pastoral Renewal Centre. The conference began at 9.30am with the Eucharistic celebration by Most Rev Dr Bernard Moras, Archbishop emeritus of Bangalore Archdiocese. His thought-provoking homily supported and upheld the services rendered by Prison Ministry India (PMI). Referring to Prison Ministry he said that like Mary we need to choose the better part of sitting at the feet of the Lord and listening to Him. He cited the example of Pope Francis who visited the prisons every year and called upon us for solidarity and action for the integral development of prisoners. The inaugural session was graced Justice Michael John D’Cunha the former high court judge, Archbishop Bernard Moras, Bishop Francis Serrao, Rev Dr Francis Kodiyan MCBS, Fr Anil Joel Prasad, Justice Rajanna Sankannavar, Sr Amala DC and Sr Theresa Mascarenhas. The program began with a prayer dance. Sr Theresa introduced and welcomed guests. The representatives of 14 Dioceses carried 14 colored flags depicting the various emotions of prisoners.

### **Criminal Justice**

Justice D’Cunha delivered a talk on criminal justice. He explained that the correction and reformation of prisoners is the responsibility of the state under the frame work of law and we have no role to interfere in their work. But later it was clarified during question



session that when the government fails to meet the needs of prisoners, the NGOs have the duty to challenge the system or to help prisoners. We concluded the stage program by felicitating the dignitaries with a shawl, garland, fruit basket memento and a copy of the book on prison ministry.

### **Legal Service Cell**

Justice Rajanna Sankannavar spoke on the role of the institutions and NGOs in the reformation of Prisoners. He said that we can enter the legal service cell in every district and do a lot for prisoners. His interactive sessions clarified many questions of participants.

### **PMI Contemporary Challenges**

In the afternoon Rev Dr Francis Kodiyan MCBS lectured with the help of power point slides on the roots and wings of PMI. He further explained how we can overcome the current challenges and restrictions that are put on our way towards this service by means of prayer, fasting, visiting families, realizing different projects for prisoners such as employment scheme, prisoners’ releasing scheme, housing scheme, scholarships to prisoners’ children etc.

### **Retributive Justice**

Most Rev Bishop Francis Serrao, bishop of Shivamogga explained about the mind of the church on retributive justice and death penalty. We cannot think of eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth as per Christ’s teaching but rather we need to strictly practice forgiveness. Even when faced with a deformed child we cannot think of killing it because we accept God’s gift as it is. He explained a few encyclicals and examples from Pope Francis’ life and made

us understand how important it is for us to oppose the death penalty.

### **Karnataka Regional Pastoral Plan**

Fr Anil Joel Prasad, the Karnataka Regional pastoral plan implementation co-ordinator, advised us to check why we do what we do. According to him when we get disappointments we are pressed to move forward. We need to consider disappointments as stepping stones. In the evening we spent an hour of Eucharistic adoration led by Fr Pius of Shivamogga Diocese. This gave rest to our minds and solace to our hearts.

### **Reporting**

After dinner we had the reporting of all diocesan units which lasted till 10.30 pm. Next day began with the Eucharistic celebration. Most Rev Francis Serrao in his homily explained about the importance of mercy in connection with the good Samaritan story. He also brought in the rich man and the poor where Lazurs had a name. But the rich man did not. We need to check if we have some other's food in our plate and think of people who do not have even a plate. He appreciated the PMI volunteers who do wonderful service to the poor, the unloved and the least.

### **Testimonies**

In the morning we had testimonies of two rehabilitated prisoners which gave us the insight on how they suffer and how our PMI services have been important in their lives. This also gave a chance to explain to the participants about Jeevodaya rehabilitation

home run by Holy Cross Sisters. Fr Anil Joel explained about KRCBC and our role in KRPPi. This explanation made us grasp the importance of reports and documentation. In the evaluation we were praised for the comfortable facilities, food and lodging as well as for the pickup and drop. We were told to keep the 24 hours intercession and chain fasting. For a few the schedule was a bit tight since too many topics were dealt on the first day. During the valedictory program Mr Ravi Varma the former Karnataka advocate general who had 47 years of long experience in the field explained his struggles with the judiciary and the law frame work. He cited many examples to tell us why the role of PMI is important. His talk encouraged us and helped us to move forward in our noble service for the wellbeing of prisoners. Fr Francis Kodiyan and Fr Anil Joel Prasad thanked the executive committee for fruitfully organizing the Karnataka state conference. The program was concluded with a vote of thanks proposed by Sr Helen Moras and by singing a thanksgiving hymn.

### **Peace Prayer of Saint Francis**

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:  
 where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
 where there is injury, pardon;  
 where there is doubt, faith;  
 where there is despair, hope;  
 where there is darkness, light;  
 where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much  
 seek  
 to be consoled as to console,  
 to be understood as to understand,  
 to be loved as to love.  
 For it is in giving that we receive,  
 it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
 and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.  
 Amen



## St Francis of Assisi's Prison Experience and Conversion

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**Br Pradeep Anthony L OFM**

### **Birth and Early Life**

Francis of Assisi was born either in 1181 or 1182 A.D. His father, Peter Bernardone, was a very rich silk-merchant and his mother Monna Pica was from noble lineage. His upbringing was in the midst of name-sake Christians. Celano speaks of the nature of St. Francis as follows “for he was very rich, he was not greedy but extravagant, not a hoarder of money but a squanderer of his property, a prudent dealer but a most unreliable steward.” He always being the leader of revelers and had a strong aspiration to become a knight or a troubadour in the early years of his life. The immoral and unethical accumulation of material wealth by rich merchants must have disgusted him to run away from that world. As his father was a rich merchant, naturally he must have learnt the tricks of the trade but he changed his mind after he found the real treasure of his life. Celano acknowledges that saying: “Like an experienced merchant, he concealed the pearl he had found from the eyes of mockers and selling all he had, he tried to buy it secretly.”

### **Encounter With War**

St Francis lived in a society where moral values, care of neighbour, values of love, gentleness, honesty and sincerity were far from the reality. The Church itself had taken the path of the Crusaders and had taken many innocent lives. The Church concealed its sinful act by deeming it as a holy war.



St Francis himself in his vigour had joined this war. One of the greatest aspirations in his young age was to become a Knight. His encounter with the frail, weak nature of the human being in the war confused his conscience. He must have seen several bodies of Muslim or Christian men, young or old people being butchered, not cared for, many losing their legs, hands, eyes or any member of their body. His conscience pricked his heart like a thorn to make him rethink his path. As Dalai Lama says: “An eye for an eye... we are all blind.” St Francis saw human beings extinguishing themselves without loving each other.

### **Prisoner of War**

God had a great plan for him and he too responded in great spirit. He was captured in the civil war between Assisi and Perugia. There he was in prison for about a year. Many biographers claim that this period in the life of St. Francis of Assisi was the beginning of his conversion. He really started discovering himself by being in solitude. He used to read a gospel passage and mull over it again and again. His father Peter Bernardone paid a huge ransom for him and rescued him from the prison of Perugia. However, by this time, St. Francis, was already a changed man, his heart and mind filled with the Word of God. In the second life of St. Francis written by Celano we see St Francis happy and joyful compared to the other prisoners who were captured in the war of Perugia.

### **Conversion**

In the year 1204, St Francis goes once again to join the 4th Crusade. However, he returns home because he had a vision



## ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI'S PRISON

during his journey. He heard, "Francis, whom do you want to serve? Master or Servant." St Francis said in reply that he wanted to serve the master. When he went back to his home town and was praying in the church of San Damiano, he received the command from the Cross of San Damiano "to rebuild the church which is in ruins," Later he literally restored it and two other churches too by begging. During this time, St Francis was living a penitential life. The Gospel passage of Matthew: "Take no gold or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals or a staff; for labourers deserve their food." On hearing this passage St. Francis exclaimed: "this is what I seek, this is what I desire with all my heart." Therefore, at this instance, a shift from penitential to the Gospel way of life took place in his life.

### Prisoner of Christ

St Francis did set an example for the entire world to be a Prisoner for Christ, a Prisoner of Christ, and a Prisoner with Christ. Perhaps it all must have originated for him since he himself became a captive prisoner in the civil war between Assisi and Perugia. His experience changed from a prisoner of the world to a prisoner of Christ. St Paul in his letter to the Ephesians calls himself the "prisoner for Christ Jesus." In some other versions it is translated as prisoner of Christ and prisoner to Christ. Though, there are differences here, I would refer to it in synonymous terms as all propositions like: of, to, and with, are associated with Christ. This is what should happen to all of

us. In my understanding this is conversion Thomas of Celano, acclaims "Francis was always with Jesus, Jesus in his heart, Jesus in his mouth, Jesus in his ears, Jesus in his eyes, Jesus in his hands, he bore Jesus always in his whole body." The ultimate stage of conversion is union of our heart, mind and whole being with God. Every Christian's ultimate aim should be to become Christ. This is what makes St. Francis a prisoner of Christ.

### Impact of St Francis' Life

St. Francis really had found the Gospel life as his only ideal, thus becoming his source of life-giving stream in his heart. It not only was the foundation of his religious vocation but also a way to fulfill the mission of restoring the universal Church of Christ. With eleven brothers his rule was approved orally by Pope Innocent III in 1209 A.D. Within a few years there were more than five thousand friars in his order. In 1223 A.D., the written rule was approved by pope Honorius III. There were mainly three orders which St. Francis established. They were: firstly, The Order of Friars Minor for men, secondly, The Order of Poor Clares for women and thirdly, The Order for lay People. Presently there are more than 200 religious' Congregations, Orders, Secular Institutes, of both men and women all over the world who live the Franciscan lifestyle.

"He who works with his hands is a laborer.  
He who works with his hands and his head  
is a craftsman.  
He who works with his hands and his head  
and his heart is an artist."

— Saint Francis of Assisi

# **PRISON MINISTRY INDIA NORTHEAST REGION**

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2021 - 2022**

### **Sr Jobina UFS**

Prison Ministry is the ministry of presence where the inmates are encouraged and morally supported to experience God through forgiveness and get back their identity as children of God. On a humanitarian basis Prison Ministry India was launched in North East India in the year 2005 in Association with Ursuline Franciscan Congregation of Northeast Province. As the days and years passed the Regional office of PMI Northeast came into existence in the year 2014 in Guwahati. PMI Northeast Region was registered in the year 2018 on May 11<sup>th</sup> under the Society's Registration Act XXI of 1860, working for the release, renewal and rehabilitation of prisoners and their families. The PMI Northeast Region is functioning in different states of Northeast having its units as follows:

Assam:(5)	Guwahati Unit
	Goalpara unit
	Diphu Unit
	New Bongaigaon Unit
	Dibrugarh unit
Mizoram:(1)	Aizwal Unit
Meghalaya: (2)	Tura Unit
	Jowai Unit
Nagaland (2)	Kohima unit
	Dimapur Unit
Arunachal Pradesh (1)	Miao Unit
Tripura:(1)	Tripura Unit
Manipur :(1)	Imphal Unit

Responding to the present challenges of the pandemic and discovering the possibilities in every circumstance, we the PMI Volunteers of Northeast Region take keen Interest in reaching out to our brethren behind the bars. Due to the current challenges of Covid-19 some of the PMI units are unable to carry out their regular activities since they are requested by the jail authorities to wait for some more time to continue the Ministry. Yet the PMI volunteers put in their effort in seeking permission to visit the prisons. In spite of all the hurdles the PMI of Northeast has tried its best to extend its services to the brethren behind the bars by organising the following few activities. In the month of July 2021 Guwahati unit of PMI had organised a meeting with Jail authorities of Guwahati Central Prison and discussed about restarting of regular activities



## NORTH EAST REPORT

In the month of August 2021 prison Ministry Sunday was organised in various PMI Units of North East by conducting special prayer services and praying for the inmates of the prisons and all those who are involved in Prison Ministry. To support the inmates and to reach out to them in fulfilling some of their basic needs in the month of November 2021 we have distributed to them some material things such as vitamin tablets, hand sanitizers and clothes which brought a smile to their faces.

PMI volunteers of North east region have participated in the Ruby Jubilee celebration of Prison Ministry India National Office in Bangalore and it was an enriching experience where we were motivated and encouraged to carry out our services selflessly. National executive meeting was attended by the Executive Members of PMI Northeast Region on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> December 2021 in Bangalore. Even though we were unable to carry out our regular activities in the prisons we were privileged to celebrate Christmas with the prisoners of Guwahati and Mizoram in the month of December 2021.

In the month of March 2022, hoping to continue our regular activities in central prison Guwahati, we submitted an application to IGP seeking Permission which unfortunately we did not receive. Dimapur PMI unit has restarted their activities in the Prison and as a result they have organised skill training programmes and games competitions for the inmates of the Prisons to promote their values and skills.

Mizoram PMI Unit had their local unit meeting in the month may 2022 and also in the Month of June when they received permission to visit the prisons to distribute food items to the inmates.

PMI unit of Mizoram has reached out to the inmates of Horeb rehabilitation centre by extending to them medical help. At the same time financial help was extended to one of the released prisoners too. The Regional coordinator and the states coordinator attended the regional and state coordinators meeting organised by the PMI National office. An input session on PMI coordination in North east Region was conducted during volunteers training programme which was organised by the PMI National office Bangalore. On the occasion of Easter in the month of April 2022, food items and bed sheets were distributed to the inmates to share the Joy of the Risen Christ.

Some of our PMI Units of Northeast have applied for permission to visit the Prisons and we are just waiting eagerly for the reply of the authorities to continue our Ministry in the Prisons. We are privileged to express our thanks to the Archbishops and Bishops of the different dioceses who encourage and support us in carrying out our PMI Activities in their respective dioceses. we are also grateful to our National Team for their constant support, guidance, and encouragement towards PMI Northeast. We express our gratitude towards all the well-wishers, coordinators and the PMI Volunteers for their generosity and hard work. May God bless us all!





## ADHAR CARD FOR THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM

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**Br Alexander Chatla**

What is the Adhar Card for the heavenly kingdom? By reciting the prayer 'Hail Mary', we address our Blessed Mother with those greetings of Angel Gabriel and St Elizabeth, and then we ask for her payers as we contemplate the mysteries. I assume that the Virgin Mary had a more personal and more highly motivated love of Jesus than we sinners have. Therefore, the Virgin Mary can always lead us to a deeper love and a more uplifting perspective of faith in Jesus. The beauty of the Rosary is that it can be prayed at so many levels, in so many places, individually or in community. Moreover, we can have a direct contact with our Blessed Mother. People may wonder if I say that I am in contact with our Blessed Mother. By hearing this astonishing statement, many may wonder what the writer is speaking about. Yes, my dear faithful in Christ Jesus, I am in contact with our Blessed Mother through my daily recitation of the Rosary and my connectedness with Jesus through Mary by this beautiful prayer which starts with the beautiful words, 'Hail Mary Full of Grace'. I think by now you might have come closer to finding an answer to the Adhar Card for the heavenly kingdom?

The Rosary is a prayer of human interactions. Because the prayers of the Rosary are memorized, we can pray it while doing other tasks, like working in the garden or on a walk or on a ride and even while enjoying the company of our family. We can pray it with others, which is analogous to a family get together. A Pilot prays the

Rosary while he is piloting a flight, because he hopes that the prayers which he recites from memory are the guarantee of a safe journey for him. It's also a good way to keep a prayerful attitude while performing a task.

The Month of October is dedicated to the Queen of the Holy Rosary, during which our Mother intercedes with her Son for us. She was blessed to hear the sweet sound announcing the sacred Ave, which no other woman has been blessed with. Our sweet Mother blesses us with the blessing of heaven and answers our petitions made in grief, temptations, in joy or in pain. If you seek her by reciting the Rosary, she will intercede for the whole of mankind. God will restore peace and blessedness by the world's Majestic Queen. She gives whatever you ask through the Rosary. Mother of mine is a gentle woman, a quiet light, a morning star, a peaceful dove and bearing many other attributes as well. She was chosen by God the Father, chosen by his Son, and was chosen from among all women. Because she possessed a peaceful spirit and a gentle heart, she was selected by the Eternal High Priest and was elected by the unmoved mover of this universe. Our Sweet Virgin Mary is not an ordinary woman, but a very powerful intercessor for those who seek her. So be fervent in reciting the Rosary, which is our Blessed Mother's favorite prayer. She really likes that prayer, and moreover, she has already revealed about this loving prayer in all her apparitions. So don't be negligent in reciting it. Then we can grow and glow in this life. What is our identity and responsibility? Our identity is being the beloved children of Our Blessed Mother and our responsibility is praying the Hail Mary in the Holy Rosary.

## St Edith Stein

Fr Jose Thannippara MST

Edith Stein, a German Jewish philosopher, was born on 12th October 1891 in Breslau/Wroclaw Poland. Later she was converted to Christianity and became a Discalced Carmelite nun and was martyred in Auschwitz Concentration Camp, Oswiecim Poland on 9th August 1942. Her studies centered on Continental philosophy, phenomenology, Thomism and Carmelite Spirituality. She campaigned publicly on issues relating to women's rights and education. Edith Stein is known as a philosopher primarily for her phenomenological work on empathy and affectivity, her contribution as a research assistant to Edmund Husserl and her philosophical anthropology. The Nazis killed the 50-year-old nun, the daughter of a martyred people, in an Auschwitz extermination camp.

Pope John Paul II said in 1987, "She offered herself to God as a sacrifice for genuine Peace and above all for her threatened and humiliated people. The Pope beatified the Jewish born nun killed in Auschwitz, telling the Jews skeptical of the tribute that she had offered her life for her martyred people. The miracle that led to Edith Stein's sainthood was that in 1987 a two-year-old Benedicta Murray miraculously recovered from damaged liver and kidneys. Born into an Orthodox Jewish family in Germany Edith Stein turned toward Christianity at age 30, finding her calling as a catholic nun.

According to Stein, Empathy is similar to perception in presenting something - the

experience of the other person - as an immediate way, but dissimilar to perception and similar to other forms of experience, such as imagination, in that the meaning content of the experience is not given directly to the empathizer. Edith Stein hardly seemed to be Catholic saint material. But even as a child she was at heart, radical. When she became intellectually convinced, that her mother's stand and sister's guidance would be good for her, her youthful unruliness ended. But she rejected her mother's piety. She later rejected God because she saw little evidence that most believers, really believed. But there was something there for Stein, even as World War I unfolded and then the Nazi movement. That something led her to a remarkable life of faith, that was cut short at age 51 by her murder at the gas chambers in Auschwitz.

Pope John Paul II canonized her as St Teresa Benedicta of the cross, confessor and martyr, on October 11, 1998. She was called the Saint of Europe by Pope John Paul II in 1998. Edith Stein was a brilliant woman who in her twenties joined Europe's leading philosophers. She was attracted to the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, the Father of a philosophical school that sought to explain the connection between the visible world and the world of ideas and values.

Existentialism, an influential school of thought, had its roots in Husserl's thinking. Stein studied under Husserl as his assistant and prepared his papers for publication. Along the way she studied with Christian intellectuals. She was particularly influenced by the faith of the widow of a friend and professor, Adolf Reinach, who was killed in



## ST EDITH STEIN

World War I. She picked up the autobiography of St Teresa of Avila in a friend's library. "This is the Truth", she told herself upon completing the book. She left her university appointment soon after her Baptism in 1922. In her day a 'woman' couldn't expect a full academic career at a top University. Hence she took up the position of teaching at a Dominican College for women teachers in Speyer, Germany. Due to her mother's interference, instead of becoming a Carmelite nun she took only private vows. At Speyer she studied the philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas and translated his treatise 'The Truth' into German for the first time. Soon she began lecturing widely in Europe to women's groups on the education and role of catholic women.

When Nazis blocked her as a Jew from teaching, she was forced to make a life changing decision. To her mother's dismay she entered the Carmelites as Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. As a Carmelite she wrote among other works, *Life in a Jewish Family* and *The Science of the Cross*. She led a deliberate life of holiness and self-offering. The Nazis forced her to wear the Star of David. As the safety of anyone with Jewish heritage evaporated, she fled from the Carmelite monastery in Cologne to Carmel in Echt, Holland. But there was no escape. When the Dutch Bishop spoke out against the Nazis, the 3rd Reich retaliated by rounding up all Jewish converts to Catholicism in Holland. In a filthy, crowded boxcar they were transported to Poland. Edith Stein was murdered in the gas chambers of Auschwitz on 9th August 1942. Her sister Rosa, who had also been

converted and who stayed close to Stein, was also killed with her.

Though many felt that Edith Stein had abandoned Judaism, she in her own opinion, remained loyal to her Jewish family and heritage till her death. She predicted the Holocaust and wrote an appeal to Pope Pius XI, pleading for an encyclical to oppose the Nazi program. Her niece, Susanne M Batzdof, has written on Edith, "in following her conscience on the road to Christianity she felt that she was pursuing her Jewish path to its ultimate goal. But it is impossible, from the Jewish perspective to see it that way. Far from elevating Edith Stein as a put-down to Jews, the Church seeks to honor and imitate a woman who heard an intimate call from Jesus and followed it. However, her letters show that she continued to honor her mother's Jewish faith.

We have only begun to understand that the sainthood of Edith Stein, also known as Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Her sign of sanctity can be seen in her appeal in so many areas. Edith Stein's integrity and appreciation for truth throughout her life seems to be appreciated universally. Whenever she was asked to lecture on any topic, she used to stick to one thing that is 'How important it is to learn to live at God's Hands. Edith Stein's signature phrase is: Learn to live at God's Hands.

"I have been all things unholy. If God can work through me, He can work through anyone."

— St Francis of Assisi





# My Prison Ministry Experience

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**Sr Sophiya Thomas FCC**

“The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light so as to go by day and night” (Ex13:21). I love prison ministry. I have passion for this ministry because I could see the hands of God in all my activities and this experience of God led me to bring hope in the lives of many. In my 23 years of religious life last 7 years were the most beautiful years where I had deep God experience through my mission. It was the time I experienced my God very closely as a powerful God who walks before me to show the way, that I often heard the voice of the Lord as “this is the path you should walk and these are my people waiting for you to experience my mercy and love”. My experience of God was “As a God of Provider - How He led the Israelites from slavery and provided everything they needed. As a God of accompaniment - how the Apostles experienced Him on the way to Emmaus. As a Master and Guru – how he was leading and guiding the Apostles. Each visit to prison was an occasion to know God more deeply and to grow more in an attitude of gratitude.

## **Geetha Raju**

I remember very clearly my 1st house visit after taking up this ministry. It was a house of a lady named Mrs Geetha Raju who was in the central jail, Bhopal. The purpose of visit was to convince the family members about the legal process and the co-operation we need to release her from prison. With the information collected from Geetha we started our journey. As soon as we got into the bus, we started to recite rosary. It was of 2 hours journey. We were travelling to a strange place trusting in the divine

providence. As we reached the bus-stand an auto driver approached us to take us by his auto. We continued the journey in auto. While travelling we told him about the whereabouts of the journey. He agreed to reach me at my destination. The only information that I had was the name of colony and the name of the mother -in -law of Mrs. Geetha Raju. We entered into the colony and asked for particular lady they said she is working in the Anganawadi as attender. We started to search for her, to our surprise there were two ladies with same name and same work. We approached first lady she said that she does not know Mrs. Geetha Raju. We made 2 rounds of this colony all were staring at us.

The auto driver was of great help he did not leave us alone but remained with us and found the mother-in-law of the lady and we had fruitful dialogue with the family members. The people of neighbourhood of this family were taken up by our work and they appreciated us for the effort we had under taken to visit the family. And from then he was the mediator between us and that family to convey the message and could continue our work with that family. Even I remember after six months when I visited the parish of that particular place, I just made a call to that family then I came to know that one of the children fell down and was bed ridden. When I knew about it, I called the Auto driver he went to the family brought the child to hospital and did all the medical needs and took back the child.

## **Shardha Gulab and Omprakash**

Another experience is of reaching back a boy to his house after 10 years. Mrs Shardha Gulab and her son Omprakash were in central jail Bhopal. When Sr Rose Mathew FCC came in contact with them in central jail, Omprakash was 5 years old. We took admission for him in Pillar Fathers’ school and boarding. After completing 10th class, we decided to take him back to his village.



Since so many years passed, he was also not remembering his village and how to go. We enquired about his relatives and decided to visit his village and we arranged everything and started our journey. It was tiresome. Many were discouraging us because it was an unknown place to us. Since 10 years no one has come to visit them so we were not sure what will be the attitude of the family members or the reaction of the people. Trusting in the divine providence we began our journey we had to walk more than 5km to reach the village.

As we reached the village, we saw a girl collecting water we asked her whether she knows a person named Gulab Khushwaha. She told us that she knew. Fortunately that was the sister of Omprakash but neither we knew nor did he recognize her. Then she ran to house and told everybody that we have reached with Omprakash and the whole village gathered in their house. The happiness of people we could see in their faces and behaviour. They were saying that we have heard that we are like Goddess but now they see with our eyes. They all collected money to buy tea and snacks for us. They did not know how to express their gratitude. Hearing the news father of Omprakash and his brother reached and it was a moment of reunion of family which was scattered for last 15 years. It was an experience of finding the lost coin and the last seen of the prodigal son. We cannot explain it in words. By the time his sister made delicious food for us we all had together while we were having meal, we asked them why they didn't visit them even once they said that the final hearing date was not told to them and they did not know to which jail they were taken. What thanks can I render thee for making me an instrument to bring hope in the lives of our brethren behind the bars. There can be no greater gift than that of giving one's time and energy to help others without expecting anything in return.

## **Canticle of the Sun** **Saint Francis of Assisi**

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Most High, all powerful, good Lord,

Yours are the praises, the glory, the honour, and all blessing.

To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no man is worthy to mention Your name.

Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures, especially through my lord Brother Sun, who brings the day; and you give light through him.

And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendour! Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you light the night and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth, who sustains us and governs us and who produces varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love, and bear infirmity and tribulation.


Blessed are those who endure in peace for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no living man can escape.

Woe to those who die in mortal sin. Blessed are those who will find Your most holy will, for the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord, and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility.





## **Wounded and Traumatized behind Bars: Innocent Prisoners**

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**Sr Lini Sheeja MSC**

“Years ago, I, along with my mother and brother, were charged for the fault of one of my relatives, who murdered a girl. As a family everyone wishes to go on a tour or visit pilgrimage centres. But here, we as a family came to jail for no fault of ours! When we were brought in, people looked at all of us as murderers. Everything seemed to be hopeless and frustrating on our entry. I lost my father at a very young age. At times, I even wanted to end my life. In the prison everyone had visitors; others would get certain things from outside by their loved ones. But me? My entire family was inside. Is this life? No girl should experience such agony in their lives. Just because we had no visitors coming to visit us, we were even insulted by the inmates here. Insults by others, psychological abuse and the fact of not having any visitors pained my heart more than being within these four walls. When I was at home with my mother, every morning as soon as I woke up, with a cheerful face I used to run to my mother, hold her tightly and say, ‘Good morning mamma’. But here when I see my mother’s face in the morning, I have no words to say, rather tears roll down from my eyes. I am married, but I don’t have my husband, because he married somebody else after I came here. My mother was released a few months ago and now I’m also getting released. I have hope and a future now. I’ll live for my brother and mother, who were my support and the reason I live”, whispered Joshna to me in 2019 as I visited


her at Parappana Agrahara Central Prison, Bangalore.

**Dear Readers,**

If we are presented with a chance to enter a prison and meet our brethren, especially, the innocent prisoners, ask them about their first day’s experience in prison, when they were mocked and laughed at by their enemies. The agony does not end here. Forget rivals! It becomes even more poignant when their family members do not visit them. We come across many prisoners who have not been visited by their families for years! An inmate, who was going to be released after serving his term in jail, said to me in tears, “I was arrested for my son’s mistake. When I was arrested and put behind bars, it didn’t pain me much, but the agony was when my wife harassed me with her words; and she abandoned me, married someone else. I had no one visiting me these past 14 years except my mother.’ He did not want to look back on his past, the years in prison. Lastly, he said, “My precious time was wasted here”. “Life is miserable. Unexpected things have happened in my life! Is there a future for me, my husband and child, as all three of us are here in Indian prison?” cried bitterly Giselle (name changed) a foreign national woman, when I met her in 2020 at Parappana Agrahara Central Prison, Bangalore.

“One year and eight months ago I arrived in India to get treated for Spinal Muscular Atrophy, hoping to get better and return back to my country. My parents had two children. We were a happy family enjoying with whatever minimum that we had; we had no complaints. I lost my younger brother seven years ago in an accident and my whole family was distressed. It was when I was diagnosed with SMA, a disease that robbed me of my physical strength by affecting the motor nerve cells in the spinal cord, taking





away my muscular ability that my family was affected even more. Around this time another person entered our family circle after a gap of quite a few years. This was my uncle who was in the UK, who had been working there for 25 years. He returned to his native place to be with the family. He would visit our family every now and then, and we too did the same.

Becoming aware of the situation our family was in, he offered to bear the costs of my treatment. By that time, I was already married and my husband was a musician. My uncle gave us a lumpsum of money, asked us to fly to India saying that the treatment in India was good and I would be cured soon. There was no second thought in us about it since he was our relative. My parents were happy since he said he would bear the entire treatment costs. Through an agent he arranged everything, including our passports and visas. On the date of our departure, our parents came to see us off at the airport. They hugged and kissed us as they said their byes. They told me to eat well and asked my husband to take care of me since I was two months pregnant.

We arrived in Bombay, India and all the travel arrangements were done by my uncle - from the airport to the hotel where we were accommodated. Days passed and there was no sign of beginning my treatment, no arrangements were done by uncle. I kept asking the agents who made all the other arrangements. But they gave us no positive response. Time was passing and I found that my visa was about to expire. Due to my constant enquiries and persistence they took away our passports and visas promising that everything necessary will be done within a few days. After a few days they provided us with fake passports and visas, and we were asked to travel to Bangalore. As we were



## INNOCENT PRISONERS

ignorant, trusting my uncle and the agents, we travelled for the single purpose of my treatment.

On landing, during check-out we were caught for entry with wrong passports and visas. I fainted there itself and my husband was helpless. We were accused of something we had not done. We were arrested and in judicial custody. The police registered this case against us and took up the investigation. We had nobody to speak for us as we were not in our own country. Meanwhile my uncle was torturing my parents asking them to return the money immediately and they were helpless. It was all totally frustrating and we were completely helpless. We could not communicate with our parents and update them since international calls were not available here in jail. After the completion of the investigation, the police filed a charge sheet against us before the concerned Magistrate for the offence and we were convicted for four years. My child was born here in jail. In the beginning I couldn't eat the food which was offered at the Indian jail, for it was spicy. I could eat only bread and jam and my health was deteriorating. I had no other choice, so I started to eat the spicy food as I was carrying. For the sake of the child in my womb I started to eat whatever was offered. Days passed, months passed, my son was born and now he is eight months. Why? And what happened in our life is something I still can't understand. My son is growing up in jail. My husband is in the men's section. We have no family; we are living separately. What a pain for an outsider!" continued Giselle with desperate tone. Whose fault is this? Why do the innocents suffer? Why are the people cheated? Why do the innocents thrown



## INNOCENT PRISONERS

behind bars? There are so many like Giselle crying out from the dark cells of prisons.

### Sad Statistics

Over 300,000 people are jailed in Indian prisons without being found guilty via the court system. The numbers of actual convicts are lesser than the people who are thrown behind bars without trial. There are nearly 21 million criminal cases pending for 10 years, 300,000 cases pending for 20 years, and 54,886 cases pending for more than 30 years. In 2017, without any given conviction, 77,000 people were imprisoned in Indian prisons for more than 1 year, whilst 4,876 people were forsaken there for more than five years.

### Conclusion

A prisoner is a person who is behind bars for a crime he/she has committed. If one is supposed to be behind bars only for a crime committed, why then are innocents languishing behind iron bars? The innocent prisoners are wounded and traumatized. Is our justice system so imperfect that innocents are made to suffer? Innocents are always in danger of being slaughtered by the tyrants of this world. Innocents are always being victimized. Whether we call the tyrant Potiphar's wife, Herod, Pilate, fear, poverty, war, hunger, injustice, violence, addiction, despair, sorrow, death, indifference or imprisonment, the injustice rendered remains what it is. The tyrants of this world seek to kill the innocents. Lakhs of innocents are forever victimized by injustice meted out to them in our wounded world. God, who listened to the cry of the Israelites, calls us to heed the cries of those innocents behind bars.



## Heart Beats of a Prisoner

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**Sr Sherly Kidangan**

Who can be the master of destiny  
It's Almighty, our creator  
Life cannot be taken as causal  
Within the four walls of a prison

Amidst of suffering and pain  
Mental agony merged in loneliness  
Unwantedness and harsh treatment  
Without the oil of love and compassion

We are left alone, and all alone  
Amidst of thousands of people like us  
No water can quench the burning bush of  
our heart

Which you and me call PRISON

No one to understand, no one to listen  
The deepest cry of our heart  
No one to assert or convert  
To turn our failure into success

Our hopes swirl around in the air  
Dreams shattered in to pieces  
None with us to sprinkle seeds of  
compassion  
To lead us to possess greater heights

Who will keep our hopes alive  
Bring sparkles to our meaningless life  
Who will give a new identity for us  
To graduate from this school of suffering

We are still in the prisons  
Hungry, tattered, battered and poor  
Who will make us qualified candidates  
In the school of hope



# **Incarcerated Freedom Fighter: Neera Arya**

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**Sr Lini Sheeja MSC**

## **Introduction**

Neera Arya was a veteran of the Indian National Army (INA). She was born on 5 March, 1902 into a Hindu Jat family in Khekra Nagar, then United Provinces of India. She is also known as Neera Nagini. Her father Seth Chhajumal was a distinguished and eminent businessman. The name of Neera's early teacher was Bani Gosh, who gave her the knowledge of Sanskrit. Later her education was carried on in Calcutta. She was very patriotic towards her nation since her childhood. It was the time when the British were ruling India. Despite being in slavery, she always had a vision to get freedom for the nation from the British. Hence she participated in many freedom movements taking place at that time. Once she was also accused as an undercover agent by the British government.

## **Early Life and Marriage**

When she was participating in the freedom movement, her father's business was flourishing in Calcutta, though it was spread across the country as well. But Calcutta was the head branch and the centre of his business. As the business was spread in most parts of the country, her father had to travel a lot. Thus when she was on a business trip with her father, she travelled to many regions. These travels gave the opportunity for her to learn a few languages such as Hindi, English and Bengali.

## **Patriotic Passionate Neera Kills Husband**

The epicentre of Seth's life was only his business and daughter. He was neither part of any freedom movement nor wanted his daughter to take an interest in them. Thus, he got her married to an Investigation Officer "Shrikant Jairanjan Das" in British India. Though living as a married couple, Neera and her husband continued their different ideologies! Whereas Neera wanted freedom for her country from the British, her husband was working for the British government. He was a loyal British servant. Because of her true nationalist attitude, she ended up joining the Jhansi Regiment under Azad Hind Fauz after her marriage. Her brother Basant Kumar was also in the Azad Hind Fauz. Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose was the founder of this regiment. This regiment was working for the freedom movement of the country. It was the time when Neera's husband Jairanjan Das was ordered to spy on Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, and was also ordered to assassinate him. When her husband had fired on Netaji the bullet hit his driver fortunately and Netaji escaped death. Neera knew about this as she too was there, and subsequently she stabbed her husband to death to save the life of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. She had then to surrender to the British Government for killing her husband who was also a British servant. Her trial took place in the Red Fort and she was sentenced to life imprisonment for killing her husband.

## **Excruciating Pain as Incarcerated**

In prison, she was tortured every single day. Neera shared some of her life stories with an Urdu writer by name, Farhan Taj who wrote heart-warming stories of Neera in

his novel. One part of the heart-warming stories as related by her is as follows: “After the trial, I was sent to Andaman for lifetime imprisonment, where all prisoners were stuffed into tiny cells. There were other women like me, who were also serving their punishment. These women were also political prisoners. I was worried always, wondering how I would participate in the freedom movement while living on an unknown island in the middle of the sea. I never asked for a blanket, and kept sleeping on the ground for months despite the bitter cold. One day, it was midnight when two guards came to my cell and threw two blankets on me. I felt bad about it. But there was some satisfaction of getting blankets in the cold. But still, I was worried that I was tied with a hard iron chain around my neck, hand, and legs. But the next day, God listened to my prayer, and the blacksmith came in. He started cutting off the chains of my hand. But in the process, he had cut some flesh off my hand as well.

I ignored that, but when he started cutting off the shackles from my legs, he had hit my bones 2-3 times with a heavy hammer. It was so painful, that I sighed and grieved and complained to him saying, “Are you blind that you hit my legs 2-3 times? It is giving me a lot of pain”. The Jailer who was watching this entire incident came close to me and asked. If you tell us where Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose is, we will let you go. So I replied, “He died in a plane crash and everybody knows this”. The jailer retorted, “You are lying because he is still alive”. Then the jailer asked me again, “This is the last time I am asking you, where is he?” I angrily

replied, “He is in my heart, in my mind”. The Jailer grew furious and shouted, “If Netaji is in her heart, then remove him from there”. The jailer touched me inappropriately and tore off all the clothes and indicated to the blacksmith about my breast. The blacksmith immediately took a breast ripper and started pressing my right breast to cut it off. While they were cutting it off, the pain had crossed all limits. The jailer held my neck and said, “If you ever argue with anyone, another balloon of yours will be separated from the chest”. He continued again, hitting my nose with the pliers saying, “Thank our Queen Victoria that it is not with fire. Had it been heated with fire, then both your breasts would have been completely uprooted.”

### **Brave Woman of India**

After the Independence of India, she got out of prison. She spent the rest of her life selling flowers and lived in a hut in Falaknuma, Hyderabad. Later her cottage was demolished by the Indian Government claiming that it was built over government land. In her old age, she embraced death on 26 July 1998 in the form of a poor, helpless, destitute and sick old woman at Osmania Hospital near Charminar and she left the world with a message to every Indian: “Did I deserve this much in my last days in independent India?” Neera Arya was a great patriot, a courageous and self-respecting woman who is remembered with pride and love. The women of Hyderabad used to call her as Pedamma. A national award has also been instituted in the name of Neera Arya. Salute to such a devotee of India. She never accepted any government assistance or pension. Jai Hind, Vande Mataram!!!





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**Kolbe Home Chennai**



**Mananthawady Prison Visit**



**Manjeri Prison Visit**



**Meeting with DGP of  
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**Mop-Stick Making Demonstration,  
Sundargarh Prison**



**PMI Chairman's Visit to  
Kolbe Home**



**PMI MP State Conference**



**Neyyatinkara, Special Subjail Visit**





**PMI Training Program,  
St Peter's Seminary, Bangalore**



**Trivandrum Zonal Gathering**



**PMI Volunteers' Visit to Idukki  
Prison**



**Sundargarh Prison Visit**



**TCBC Conference,  
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**PMI Chairman's Visit to National  
Office, Bangalore**



**Tirur Prison Visit**



**Visit to Aattingal Jail**





**Visit to Arakkonam Prison**



**Visit to Gwalior Prison**



**Visit to Observation Home, Vijayavada**



**Visit to Special subjail Trivandrum**



**Visit to Thirvannamalai Prison**



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