



PRISON VOICE

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Issue 06

NATIONAL MONTHLY

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COME HOLY SPIRIT



Farewell and Prayerful Best Wishes to Fr Shaji Stephen O de M, PMI Kerala State Coordinator



Farewell and Prayerful best Wishes to Sr Jovana SCS, Kolbe Home



Farewell to Fr Joseph Chempilakam Served at Open Prison, Nettukaltheri



Farewell to Sr Jitha, PMI Kerala State Secretary



Hearty Welcome and Congratulations to Fr Varghese Karipery, the New Director of Snehashramam, Thrissur



Hearty Welcome and Prayerful Best Wishes to Fr Martin Thattil, the New PMI Kerala State Coordinator



Hearty Welcome to Sr Pushpa SCS, Kolbe Home, Bangalore



Hearty Welcome to Sr Shiny, the New PMI Kerala State Secretary

Contents



PRISON VOICE

NATIONAL MONTHLY



*“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age”
(Mt 28,19-20).*

Editor's View.....	04
National Coordinator's Desk.....	05
Indian Prison Reforms.....	07
Children Trafficked into Brothels	10
Blessed Gjon Shllaku OFM	13
Regency at PMI	14
Activities in Jharsuguda Subjail.....	16
Journey of PMI Mysore Unit.....	18
Digapahandi Sub Jail	21
Nonuplet Warrior Gang St Quitéria	22
The Burning Bush.....	24
Let Your Light Shine.....	25
Prisoner to Prime Minister.....	28
My Journey with Kolbe Home.....	30

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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EDUCATION FOR THE LOST, LAST AND THE MARGINALIZED



Sr Amala DC
Chief Editor

“People were bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Lk 18:15-17). It’s in the Gospels that we indeed discover God’s soft spot for children. He’s gentle and kind to them and passionate about protecting them from harm. If we want to possess the kingdom, we need to humble ourselves like the little ones! Let’s reminisce about our childhood and be grateful for the enormous blessings we have been lavished with; and at the same time we ought to see the face of Christ in every unfortunate child who was and is in need of parental care, love, education, etc.

We consider the month of June to be the most expensive month because it keeps us quite busy with hectic schedules. A child’s education is the greatest responsibility of a parent among others. Parents sacrifice their time, energy, and money beyond their means and imagination in order to educate their children. But the have-nots face a lot of crises; children in poverty are especially vulnerable and face an uncertain future. In many cultures around the world, children are often abused, neglected, and discarded. They may be even be sold for profit into the sex industry or sold as slaves to work in horrible conditions.

PMI family plays a vital role in children’s education especially for prisoners’ children and children who are neglected by their families and society. Education plays a pivotal role in a child’s life as it helps them

to think and analyze critically and enhance their imagination and thought processes. This platform exposes them to new ideas and helps them achieve success through their dream careers. Education is a continuous and lifelong process. From the womb to the tomb, we keep learning. It pertains to the most precious and permanent property of an individual. It ushers in positive and constructive changes in life. It makes our life really prosperous and meaningful. It is the prime key to being self-dependent and confident. Education promotes national unity. Deep rooted traditional concepts and conservative beliefs of division, discord and disparity based on ethnicity, language and religion can be reduced in society, especially in the life of the have-nots by quality education.

Children are to be looked upon as a blessing. They are a reward from God. We become parents of have-nots by sponsoring them. Your monthly or yearly gift will give your sponsored child access to life-changing benefits like quality education, proper nutrition, healthcare, support and protection. It empowers us in our efforts to save the children from vulnerable communities, from crimes like child trafficking, prisoners’ children vulnerability, child labour, etc. Essentially, you help children become better citizens for a better tomorrow. Sponsor a child today then and let’s embark on a journey together with them towards a glorious future!



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THE FINGER OF GOD

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

The phrase *the finger of God* is found on many a page of the Bible, both in the Old and the New Testament. It is synonymous with the supernatural power of God as it directly impacts events in this world. Jesus, as God in human form, touched several people by give healing and deliverance and worked miracles during His earthly ministry. Through His ‘divine finger’, He brought comfort to many in sorrow (Lk. 7:11-16; Mk. 5:22-23, 41-42). He performed many other miracles with His healing fingers (Jn.9:6-7; Mk.1:40-42). PMI volunteers are called to be the fingers of God, to manifest the power and miracles of God in redeeming prisoners. Prisoners’ release, rehabilitation, reintegration and redemption, humanly speaking, are impossible tasks. But with the grace and power of God everything becomes possible. Let’s be true, loyal and powerful instruments and fingers of God and fruitfully continue our redeeming mission for the lost.

Exodus 8, 16-20

The first reference to the finger of God is found in Exodus. Moses had unleashed the third plague on Egypt in an effort to force Pharaoh to free the Israelites who had been held captive for four hundred years. The Lord instructed Moses to tell Aaron to stretch out his staff and “strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt” (Ex 8:16). After Pharaoh’s magicians tried and failed to replicate the miracle, they said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God” (Ex 8:19).

Exodus 31,18 and Deuteronomy 9, 10

The second reference to the finger of God also occurs in Exodus, where the phrase is used about the tablets of stone given to Moses. These tablets contained the covenant law, “inscribed by the finger of God” (Ex 31:18). Moses relates an account of the same incident in Deuteronomy 9:10. It is not to be supposed that God literally touched the tablets, since God is spirit and has no “fingers”; rather, the phrase *the finger of God* is an anthropomorphism indicating that God directly caused the commandments to be engraved upon the stone. The 1956 movie *The Ten Commandments* depicts the writing as coming from a finger of fire, which is probably as good a rendering of the actual act as any. However, God accomplished it, the letters were devised and formed by Him, the writing was His, and the engraving on the stones was done by His own power.

Daniel 5, 1-31

The third biblical mention is during Belshazzar’s Feast in Daniel 5, when scripture reports ‘fingers of a man’s hand’ wrote on the wall: Daniel reads the words “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin” and



FINGER OF GOD

interprets them for the king: “Mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; Tekel, you have been weighed ... and found wanting;” and “Peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians. Then Belshazzar gave the command, and Daniel was clothed in purple, a chain of gold was put around his neck, and a proclamation was made... that he should rank third in the kingdom; and that very night Belshazzar the Chaldean (Babylonian) king was killed, and Darius the Mede received the kingdom.”

Luke 11, 20 and Matthew 12,28

The New Testament reference to the finger of God is from Jesus Himself. After freeing a blind and mute man from a demon, Jesus said to His critics, “If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Lk 11:20). In a parallel passage, the phrase is *the Spirit of God* rather than *the finger of God* (Mt 12:28). In both accounts, the meaning is that Jesus performed miracles by the overt power of God, the same power that caused the gnats to swarm and the writing to appear on the tablets of stone.

John 8, 1-11

The Gospel of John narrates the story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery. Jesus writes in the dust of the earth with his finger. This gesture can be seen as portraying Christ as the divine legislator who gives new interpretation to the Law of Moses. Jesus writes the new law of profound compassion and unconditional forgiveness. He attempts at bringing women

to a higher, if not on equal status with men. He brings to light the fact that all people are equal in the eyes of God, for all are guilty with sin, and are capable of receiving redemption. Jesus straightened up and said to them, ‘Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw the stone at her’” (John 8: 6-7). After the men left, Jesus said to the woman, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, sir.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again’” (John 8: 10-11). This is a turning point in Christianity. Jesus could have picked up the stone and struck the woman. However, he lets her go free, to live a life without sin. He gives her a fresh start, a second chance. Jesus gives each person an opportunity to feel God’s love, compassion and forgiveness. He not only protects and saves the woman from physical damage and death, but also grants her inner redemption by cleansing her soul and heart.

Conclusion

The Finger of God is still in operation today and we see that the finger of God is primarily God’s immense and unlimited power and divine providence. The working of the finger of God is unmistakable. No device of man can compete with that power, as even the heathen magicians came to recognize it in Moses’ day. You must be genuinely born again, sanctified and obedient to benefit from the manifestations of the finger of God (Dan. 6:19-22; Acts 12:6-7). As PMI volunteers our task is to become like the finger of God extending the unfathomable compassion, unconditional forgiveness and genuine liberation to those entangled in the slavery of sin and crime.



INDIAN PRISON REFORMS

Edmund Frank

Categories of Prison Inmates

Imprisonment as we understand is the end all of criminal justice system in India and for that matter in any country of the world. An imprisoned person is deprived of personal liberty as a result of the conviction of an offense committed by him. But the basic dignity of persons lodged in prisons needs to be protected. This is because we are not only talking of persons whose cases are decided in a court of law resulting in their conviction, but also a majority of the prisoners who are languishing in jails as under trials whose cases are being heard in the same courts of law. In addition to these convicts and under trials, I have also seen over the years in the Mangaluru jail are also housed innocent infants and children in the age groups of less than a year to 7 years, in case either or both of their parents are inmates and there is no person willing to look after them. These children are kept in prison with their parents. Same must be the case in most other prisons too.

Dignified Treatment of Prisoners

Protection of such basic dignities of prisoners is mentioned in the universal declaration of human rights as well as under article 21 of the Indian Constitution. Besides, dignified treatment of prisoners as co-human beings is also emphasized by the International Law. But unless the enforcing agencies abide by the rules, these directives

remain consigned to the book only. There is no better example than Fr Stan Swamy who was deprived of all personal liberty and human dignity when he contacted the deadly Parkinson's disease and had to be hospitalized and the court had to intervene on his behalf. Thousands of others await a similar fate. The provisions of the security of prisoners mentioned in jail manuals must be strictly followed and trained prison staff should be appointed to look after the safety parameters. Regular and timely inspection from judicial officers must be conducted. All the organs of the police and jail administration must work in unison to make possible the effective and social rehabilitation of inmates after securing their release.

Three Types of Jails

Sub jails at the taluk level, district jails at the district level and central jails at the national level. Then there are open prisons in some states which have come up during the recent years. The prison system in India as it is administrated today, is a legacy of the British rule. Prisons were opened not only for criminals and antisocial elements, but also to jail Indian freedom fighters who opposed British rule. Central Prisons were constructed all over India during 1835 to 1840 and still continue their 180 years legacy. Prisons were referred to as 'Houses of Captives' for deterrence and retribution. The intension was to punish prisoners and deny them even the basic fundamental rights and human dignity. The Prison Discipline committee set up in 1838 in its report recommended rigorous treatment of inmates rejecting humanitarian needs and

reforms. We should see this in the context of an imperialistic monarchy remote controlled by Briton.

Segregation of Prison Inmates

After independence, despite the liberalization of prison rule manuals and some prison reforms, regretfully, not much is done by prison administrative boards or committees either at the national or state levels. Apart from segregation of men and women inmates, segregation also has to be done of a) young child offenders and adult inmates and of b) convicts and under trials and those held c) under civil laws and criminal laws. International Law mandates that persons imprisoned in any of these forms have a right to be treated in a humane manner with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person.

Major Problems in Indian Prisons

The Constitution of India guarantees every Indian citizen the right to live. The right to live includes the right to live with human dignity. A prisoner does not cease to be a human being because he is lodged in jail. He continues to enjoy his fundamental rights including the right to live with dignity. This calls for prison reforms in true spirit which are long in the coming. Just a change in nomenclature from 'Prison' to 'Correctional Center' means nothing. The major problems in Indian prisons vary from overcrowding, staff shortage, inadequate training to the staff relating to the rights of prisoners and human dignity, discrimination and unequal treatment towards the inmates, inadequate training and orientation programmes for

the jail inmates to prepare them for their rehabilitation after their release, poor budgetary allocations for health care to inadequate legal support to the prisoners and prolonged detention of under trial prisoners.

History of Prison Reforms

This is a much-debated subject matter which is studied by several commissions and committees appointed by the government of India from time to time. All India Committee on jail reforms constituted by the government of India under the chairmanship of Justice Anand Narain Mulla in 1983 suggested: 1) Setting up of National Prison Commission as a body to bring about modernization of prisons in India. 2) To set up an all-India cadre for prison staff. 3) Bringing prisons under the concurrent list and 4) recommended alternatives to imprisonment such as community service, etc. Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer Committee on women prisoners in 1987 recommended separate institutions with women employees alone for women offenders.

The Draft national policy on Prison Reforms and Correctional Administration, 2007 in its report recommended: 1) Amending of the constitution to include principles of prison management and treatment of under trials. 2) Including prisons in the concurrent list. 3) Enactment of uniform and comprehensive law on matters related to prisoners. The Supreme Court appointed panel under Justice Amaitava Roy on prison reforms in its report on February 2020 recommended: 1) Fast track courts to be set up to deal with petty crimes. 2) Lawyers-prisoners ratio to be at least one lawyer for every 30 prisoners.



INDIAN PRISON REFORMS

- 3) To start recruiting staff against vacancies in order to make good under staffing.
- 4) Use of video conferencing for court trials.
- 5) Every new prisoner to be allowed one phone call to his family members to see him through his first week in jail.
- 6) To explore alternate punishments. Yet, despite all the reports and positive suggestions of these committees the ground level situation with respect to prison reforms remains gloomy and stagnant.

Prisons as we see them are meant to create forced detention from society, with severe discipline, provision of minimum requirements of life, strict security procedures and a monotonous daily routine. Prison life no doubt necessitates certain constraints on the freedom of inmates, but certainly not a total seizure of individual freedom because a prison houses under trials and convicts. In the modern context a prison connotes a 'correctional' facility calling for the reform of inmates. Crime is not necessarily always the result of a bad intention or criminal intent. Denying individuals their freedom of choice and economic, social, political and cultural rights could lead to more serious evils. Therefore, prison system calls for further multilevel reforms.

Indian Prison Reforms & Challenges

1) Prison is a state subject. This makes it difficult to pass common laws nationwide applicable to all states. However, the Ministry of Home Affairs provides regular guidance and advice to the States and Union Territories on various issues concerning prisons and prison inmates. 2) Prison Act 1894 is more than a century old and does

not focus on reform of prisoners and their rehabilitation. 3) It does not speak about separation between hard core criminals and under trials. Improved prison management and prison conditions are the corner stones to develop a meaningful health care system and health strategy in prisons which is also an integral part of public health and is crucial for the success of public health policies.

Undertrial Prisoners

67% of the inmates in Indian jails are under trials-those detained in prisons during trial, investigation or inquiry but not convicted of any crime in a court of law. The irony is, many of them have spent more years in prison than the actual term they would have served had they been convicted. As a matter of fundamental rights guaranteed by the Indian constitution, under trials are presumed innocent till proven guilty. But they are often subjected to psychological and physical torture during detention and exposed to sub human living conditions and prison violence. Even after their release, under trials find their employability severely jeopardized for none of their faults. It is a known fact that while the professional gangsters know how to get special privileges in the jail, the socio economically disadvantaged under trials can be deprived of their basic human dignity. In the absence of structural changes and reforms to address the issues of overcrowding and understaffing, India's prisons will continue to be heaven for politically connected and hell for socio-economically disadvantaged.



Children Trafficked into Brothels: Children Sold, Bought, Gang-raped and Forced into Prostitution



Sr Lini Sheeja MSC

“I awoke at night and found my father on top of me. My mother was mentally ill. She would try to fight him, but she was always beaten by my father. I ran away to Delhi with a boy I loved, but my father came and found me. He took me by train to Mumbai and sold me in Kamathipura, one of the largest red-light districts in Asia, for Rs 10, 000/-,” cries Shwetha, aged 16 (all names in these true stories have been changed). “I was sold into it at about eight years of age. I didn’t understand much. Nowadays kids understand more, but I wasn’t like that. There was a woman who offered me a few chocolates and I followed her here. She brought me here and then sold me. We came in through the front and she left from the back. And then they said to me, “we have bought you for 50,000/-, so you have to stay with us”. They threatened me, so I had to stay there. I stayed because I was a victim of the situation. The first two days I cried a lot uncontrollably. But where could I go? I didn’t know a way out. And so I had no choice, but to stay”, cries another girl, aged 15 from a brothel house.

Dear readers, is this the world in which we move and breath? Children are the vulnerable section of our society. They are too young to stand on their feet and very


much dependant on adults. The society which needs to protect them is abusing and torturing them. Humanity which ought to uplift them is trampling them down. Humanity which is expected to carry them is instead crushing them under their feet. Why do we look at them with eyes of lust instead of eyes of love?

The Cry Continues...

“They would beat me with belt and stub me with cigarette buds to drown my voice”, cries another girl who was forced into prostitution at the tender age of 10. “I was 14 when I was forced into prostitution. My body was used and degraded by men seeking sex with young girls in return for money”, cries another survivor of commercial sexual exploitation of children. Hiding behind the facade of being ‘clients’ or ‘customers’, they raped me, sometimes more than thrice a day, for seven long years. They would specifically demand girls like me. ‘Young and fresh’, that’s how we were marketed, she continues.”

Is it a Crime to be a Female?

Is it their mistake that they are born as girls? Is it a crime to be a female? Some victims are throwaways; others are sold by their parents or forced into prostitution



and others are street children. Prostitution of children is illegal under international law, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 34, states, “the State shall protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse, including prostitution and involvement in pornography”. The convention was first held in 1989 and has been ratified by 193 countries.

Traffickers and Pimps

Offenders of this crime who are commonly referred to as traffickers, or pimps, target vulnerable children and gain control over them using a variety of manipulative methods. Victims frequently fall prey to traffickers who lure them in with an offer of food, clothes, attention, friendship, love, and a seemingly safe place to sleep. After cultivating a relationship with the child and engendering a false sense of trust, the trafficker will begin engaging the child in prostitution, and use physical, emotional, and psychological abuse to keep the child trapped in a life of prostitution.

UNCRC

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international human rights treaty which sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children. Article 20 concerning Protection of a child without family says, “The State is obliged to provide special protection for a child deprived of the family environment and to ensure that appropriate alternative family care or institutional placement is available in such



CHILDREN TRAFFICKED

cases”. When will this law become a reality?

Sad Statistics

It is estimated that there are 40-42 million prostitutes worldwide. 80% of the world population of prostitutes are female and range in age between 13-25. A report by the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development has come out with a report ‘Commercial sexual exploitation in India’, according to which there are over three million sex workers in India, out of which 35.47% enter into prostitution before they enter their 18th year of age. The other facts in the report include an alarming rate at which minors are being forced into flesh trade. According to a survey, about 1.2 million children are involved in such trade.

World Day Against Human Trafficking

Pope Francis has made the fight against human trafficking one of the cornerstones of his papacy, calling it a crime against humanity. Under his express wishes, the Vatican has hosted several conferences on eradicating trafficking, featuring women freed from forced prostitution. Human trafficking is a “crime against humanity,” because it denies the human dignity of the victim, seeing him or her only as a piece of merchandise to be used to enrich or give pleasure to another, Pope Francis said on 11 April 2019. Pope Francis has designated 8th February, the feast of St Josephine Bakhita, a Sudanese woman religious who was familiar with the humiliations and sufferings of slavery as the




CHILDREN TRAFFICKED

World Day of Prayer, Reflection and Action Against Human Trafficking, following a request from Talitha Kum, the worldwide Network of Consecrated Life Against Human Trafficking.

Talitha Kum

We read in the gospel of Mark 5:41, “Talitha cum” “Little girl, I say to you, rise up!” In Mark 5:40, we read Jesus went in where the child was. Jesus had showed the way to each one of us to go to the lost sheep, to the vulnerable ones. Jesus took the girl by the hand and said to her to rise up. We continue to read in the Bible that immediately the girl stood up. That’s the miracle Jesus performed and that’s the power given to us. Should we not walk in to their realities and take them by hand so that they can stand up in society? The International Union of Superiors General (UISG) together with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), between the years 2004 and 2008 developed a worldwide program, forming regional networks against human trafficking in nine countries. Catholic women leaders noticed the rapid rate at which human trafficking was increasing, and came up with the idea of “Talitha Kum”. Talitha Kum came into form in the year 2009 and brought the individual groups together. By the year 2013, Talitha Kum had developed counter trafficking missions in 75 countries, and more than 600 Catholic Nuns were involved, and by 2015, there were mission groups serving in 80 countries through



about 1100 women volunteers. Let us also connect with these missions and be of service to these little children, in the manner of Christ’s “Talitha Cum”.

PMI Rehabilitation Centres

There are rehabilitation centres working for women in distress, trafficked women and children across the world. Prison Ministry India runs many centres, such as Karuniyashram in Kochin, Snehashramam in Trivandrum, Jeevodhaya in Bangalore, Premodaya in Bangalore, Noida in Delhi, Jeevan Jyothi in Iduki, Asha Kiran in Jharkhand, Marie Pushpan Home in Ranchi, Kolbe Home in Gujarat.

Daughters, Sisters and Future Mothers

Each child/woman has her own story to narrate to us. Let us walk into their realities and take them by hand with courage. In the gospel of Mathew 5:39-40 we read, “He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.’ But they laughed at him”. The crowd laughed at Jesus. When we lay our lives at the service of those in distress, we too may have to go through mockery, threat and many other troubles. For people, the little girl was dead, but for Jesus the little girl was asleep. As Jesus didn’t pay heed to those people, but focused on his goal for which he came, let us follow the footsteps of our Master to give life to these vulnerable children and women whom society considers as objects. They are not objects. They are daughters, sisters and future mothers. Their lives and dreams are precious and valid as those of our own family members.



Blessed Gjon Shllaku OFM

Rajendra Dushing

Beatification of Eight Friars Minor

Amongst the thirty-eight Blessed martyrs of the Communist persecution in Albania (1945-1974), are numbered 8 religious of the Order of the Friars Minor: a bishop and seven priests. From 1944 for nearly 50 years the Albanian Catholic Church suffered harsh persecution at the hands of one of the fiercest Communist dictatorial regimes of the present age. During this period our martyrs were condemned to death, or died under torture or due to the harsh conditions of imprisonment. They accepted for love of Christ an unjust sentence: they welcomed suffering with a patient spirit and a heroic faith. At the moment of death, they had words of forgiveness for their persecutors and trust in God, for themselves and for their tortured country.

Blessed Fr Gjon Koda (1907-1946)

Blessed Fr Gjon Koda (1907-1946), a Franciscan Friar from Albania was arrested and tortured by Communist authorities who wanted him to confess that his brother Franciscans gathered for political reasons and were planning against the state. It was a lie, and Brother refused to “confess” to save himself. He was martyred when nails were driven through his throat during his torture. A martyr to the faith. His martyrdom comes at the start of the persecution, as he was condemned to execution by firing squad together with six companions on 4 March 1946. He made his solemn profession in

1928 and was ordained a priest in 1931. He was considered one of the greatest Albanian intellectuals of his time. When, in December 1945, the seminary student, Mark Çuni, with Gjelosh Lulashi, Qerim Sadiku e Frano Mirakaj, all lay people, were arrested on the charge of wishing to start a resistance movement, it created the pretext to involve the Jesuits, Fr. Giovanni Fausti SJ, and Fr. Daniel Dajani SJ, as well as the Franciscans. To strike at these zealous religious, who were distinguished in the world of culture and who dedicated themselves to the formation of consciences, was the first step to reduce Catholicism in Albania to a religion of silence and catacombs.

Blood of Martyrs

Father Gjon Shllaku and his companions were put on trial in the “Rozafa” cinema in Scutari and condemned to death by shooting on 4th March 1946, at the cemetery in the town. The night before the execution the condemned were heard praying and singing at the top of their voices, up to the time they left to be martyred whilst singing litanies to Our Lady. The bodies of the martyrs were never found. “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15,13). “Plures efficimur, quotiens metimur a vobis: semen est sanguis Christianorum.” which has been liberally and apocryphally translated as “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church” (Apologeticus, L. 13). Blessed Gjon Koda, pray for us! 🙏



REGENCY AT PMI - A YEAR OF BLESSINGS AND LEARNINGS

Br. Pradeep Anthony L OFM

The Franciscan Province of St. Thomas the Apostle, India to which I belong had given me the opportunity to do my regency at PMI. As my regency year as come to an end, I would like to thank God, for truly, this year has been a year of blessings and full of new learnings. When I look back, I do remember my regency started from 2nd of June 2021 to 25th April 2022. It has been almost 11 months of my journey along with Prison Ministry India.

Prison Ministry India

Prison Ministry India, though deemed, recognized and called as NGO it is really a catholic prayer group. The enthralling thing in it is that this prayer group was initially started by two seminarians and their core group. Therefore, it stirs up the conscious of the seminarians to do something great for God not after becoming ordained priest but rather to start serving the Lord as a seminarian itself. The two seminarians namely, Br. Francis Kodyan MCBS and Br. Varghese Karipperry have conceptualized a living principle to be a love bomb. 'To be a love bomb not to kill but rather to heal the broken hearted' has been the guiding principle of PMI for forty years that have borne fruits all over the world.

Presently PMI is recognized under the Catholic Bishop Conference of India for

its services. PMI cares for all the prisoners particularly in India. India has about 1350 prisons and about 5 lakhs prisoners. PMI try to reach out, bring repentance, reconciliation, reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration in the lives of the prisoners thus, transforming society to be a better world. PMI takes various projects like house construction for released prisoners, education for prisoner's children. They achieve these things through a strong spirituality of theirs, through constant intercessory intercession for the incarcerated through 24 Eucharistic adoration, chain fasting as a community, begging for the brethren behind the bars from the local benefactors, reciting frequently 'Thank You Jesus' and believing in the providence of God. These principles do attract many people flock to PMI, local benefactors do contribute through spiritually, materially, financially and for all the needs of the PMI projects.

The Blessings and Learning at PMI

This entire year, indeed has been a blessing with lots of new learnings. As Aristotle said: "where your talents and the world's needs cross, there lies your vocation." It was a great blessing for me personally because whatever the formation program during philosophy taught on Human, Franciscan and Christian level in theory came to help in real life situations.

The day starts at PMI with Eucharist and ends with another Eucharist. The day is usually packed with responsibilities like going for marketing, posting, banking, and



making arrangements for the upcoming events like visit to the prison, training programs, burning bush banquet, online meetings, and some celebrations like ruby jubilee and also to help in the formation of the Kolbe children. My studies of M.A in sociology helped me to take counseling and help Kolbe Children to set their goals. The learning of keyboard and guitar during my formation came in handy while conducting both liturgical programmes and ministerial programmes.

The new learning was the counseling experience, driving bike for a long distance, became confident in driving car. The meeting the Covid victims' families, juvenile delinquents for survey at the request of CWC, (Child Welfare Committee) was both a blessing and an experience of meeting Christ in the face of broken lives of humanity.

Fraternal Life at PMI

As a Franciscan the fraternal life has been so important for my living. PMI enhances this fraternal dimension. Prison Ministry itself was earlier originated as Jesus Fraternity. The stronger the community built for Christ, the greater the impact of the mission. Taking the value of the Gospel when I was in prison you visited me, (Mt 25:36) as a rudder the PMI staff move forward. The community life with various religious and diocesan spirituality makes us to feel the richness of the Catholic Church. PMI national staff comprises of consecrated men and women, along with priests, having their own charisms, as one is from Apostolic set up,

another is from missionary, then another from diocesan setup with special and unique spirituality adds beauty to our way of life. All of us coming together for praying, working, playing, meals and ultimately working for the Lord do make the life beautiful in PMI. Thus, I would say I received more blessings than what I did to PMI. I wish may all who work with PMI may contribute in building up the Body of Christ, glorifying God in all our doings.

Heartfelt Thanks

Fr Francis Kodiyan. MCBS, being the co-founder of the PMI, and the present National Co-Ordinator of PMI, has been very good to me. Guiding and accompanying in all that I did, like playing, praying, writing, working and in recreating for the past 11 months. Great is his faith and wonderful are his works. I thank from the bottom of my heart Sr Amala DC, Sr. Basil SCS, Sr Joanna SCS for their constant encouragement and accompaniment. Gratefully I recall Fr Jaison MST, Fr. Rajendra, Fr George VC for their fraternal company. Gratefully I remember Muthama, Lakshmi, Nagamma, Lucy Checchi, Renuka, Vijaya and Mani Anna. Kolbe children always renewed, reinvigorated, reenergised me, whenever I spent time with them. They are the real attraction to me in the national office. I ask sincerely the PMI family for its prayer and blessings for my theological studies.



Inauguration of Income Generating Activities in Jharsuguda Subjail

Sr Mercyan SU

Jharsuguda Prison

“I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Mat.25:36). We the PMI executive members of Jharsuguda consisting of Sr. Mercyan SU, Sr. Lalita SCGR and Fr. Rassel SVD happily share the milestone that we have achieved in Odisha’s first prison at Jharsuguda subjail. This dream became a reality because of God’s grace, generous contribution from the Society of St. Ursula Maria Sadan convent and the moral support and team work of different congregations.

What More We Can Do for Prisoners?


Every month we have the executive meeting, where we discuss among ourselves, ‘what more we can do for prisoners.’ Keeping this in mind, we Srs. Lalita and Mercyan attended training at Ranchi, where we learned assembling the LED bulb, making phenol, harpic, detergent powder, washing soap etc. After that we decided first to demonstrate with the superintendent and staff to get their approval. Jharsuguda subjail superintendent, Mr TK Thaty, was very supportive and always wished the wellbeing of the prisoners. We explained to all prisoners how to assemble the LED bulb and to make detergent powder. Then we selected five of them and gave special training so that they would be able to teach others. These five prisoners assembled 100 bulbs. After having learned the skill, the prisoners’ face too was shining like a bulb with joy. Women prisoners were especially happy to learn the making of detergent powder.

LED Bulb Assembling Unit

11th March 2022 was a historical day for the Subjail of Jharsuguda. On this memorable day, Mrs Anausuya Jena DIG (Deputy Inspector General), Odisha inaugurated the LED Bulb assembling Unit and Detergent powder making activities at the Subjail of Jharsuguda in the presence of eminent guests and media persons. The prison department invited 15 media digital and news reports. This was made possible due to the persistent effort of the team of Prison Ministry Unit Jharsuguda. On this occasion Sr. Lalita Kullu SCGR, addressed the gathering on behalf of PMI. She explained the aim and contribution of PMI volunteers in the prison at Jharsuguda. The team had made great effort to initiate charitable activities to help prisoners earn their living and make their life meaningful. Fr. Christopher SVD, Paish Priest of St. Arnold Janssen, highlighted the benefit of this income-generating program, namely the monetary gain of the prisoners to sustain their life once they would be out of prison. The Superintendent Mr TK Thaty, thanked the PMI Unit Jharsuguda profusely, for their initiative and contributions. Sr. Mercyan SU, State Executive Member of PMI, expressed her gratitude to all the invited guests and all for their generosity in reaching out to the inmates of the prison. She also encouraged everyone to buy the 100 LED bulbs which were assembled by prisoners.

Small Scale Units

After this event the Odisha Govt. took a remarkable step to begin small scale units in jail, and branded their products. It was a happy day in the subjail because the most vulnerable brothers and sisters were reached out in love and charity. As we look back at the past four years of active ministry in three prisons, our hearts are overwhelmed with great joy and profound gratitude to God, for his inspiration, love, wisdom with which he has been re-energizing us day by day, to love



and care for the brothers and sisters behind bars. Yes, God in his abundant goodness, continued to inspire many generous people for this noble ministry, so that we could reach out 1500 prisoners in three prisons. Jharsuguda Subjail, Sundergarh Dist-Jail and Sambalpur NariBandi Niketan. Our sincere thanks to Sr. Marina Thomas SU. Provincial of St. Ursula Pune, Sr Mary C.J. Provincial of H.M. Sr. Vilma Provincial of S.S.P., Fr. Petrus Kullu, Provincial of S.V.D., Fr. Linus, Rector of S.D.B house and all the religious congregations, all the parishioners and well-wishers of Jharsuguda.

Present Activities

Soft skill-training: Spoken English and Computer training at Jharsuguda Sub-Jail. which can provide them job opportunities when they are out of prison. We have also donated one computer.

Art-Therapy: {healing tools}, with which they can draw pictures relating to their life events.


Motivational Classes: Keeping alive the spirit of hope through video clippings and workshops.

Counselling: To help the prisoners engage in the process of working through their feelings and challenges in life. Constant interaction with the prisoners helps them to share their bitter life experiences with us, through which we do give them Emotional support.

Skill Training and Production: LED Bulb assembling and detergent powder making at Jharsuguda Subjail.

Educational Help: Helping the prisoners' children for their education, college and hostel fees, uniform, Mobile etc.

Library: We have set up two library cupboards with religious, story, motivational and general knowledge books.



Celebrations of Festivals: Christmas, New Year and Women's Day etc. in three prisons. At every celebration we put up cultural programs, speeches are given by eminent persons and each prisoner receives gifts, like sarees, fruits, sweets and useful articles for daily life etc.

We can confidently say that this ministry has opened our eyes and hearts to know the prisoners' life, and what they go through in prison. Our timely visits and different activities have made a great impact on the lives of prisoners. The prisoners expressed their gratitude to PMI, for the opportunities that they get to study and learn new things for their future lives. They tell us: "Sisters when you all come and give class, or talk to us, we forget that we are in prison." And now they feel confident to meet the challenges of life outside the prison. Those who have gone out of prison keep in contact with us and feel so happy about our contribution to their well-being. We receive whole hearted support from the superintendent and police staff.

What motivates us to keep going in this ministry, in spite of all the obstacles, is God's unconditional and forgiving love that we have experienced in our lives. God wants to show the prisoners through us, the prayerful and financial support that we receive from different congregations as well as the openness and trust that we get from the Superintendent and staff. Having interaction with different age groups of prisoners have helped us to understand the feelings they experience through unwantedness, fear of facing the society, lonely hours and hopeless moments. Yes, we decided to be a little ray of hope, joy and peace in the dark areas of their lives. We thank Fr. Francis Kodiyan MCBS, PMI National coordinator, Sr Amala DC, PMI National secretary for their constant guidance and support. "Let us be a healing balm for the broken hearts".

Journey of PMI Mysore Unit: A Testimony of Providential Care

Dr Michael Noronha OFS

PMI Mysore Unit

The start of PMI Mysore Unit is a testimony to the promise: Push – Pray Until Something Happens. It was in the year 2000 that the lay members of the Order of Franciscan Secular (OFS) under the guidance of their late Spiritual Animator Very Rev Fr Vincent Lobo OFM Cap decided after prayer and discernment to take up a permanent service-oriented task in the city of Mysore. The members decided to set up the Prison Ministry India, Mysore Unit, to ensure the Reformation, Rehabilitation, and Renewal of prisoners, which was non-existent in the Mysore Diocese. Till then the prisoners were visited by OCD Priests and seminarians on special occasions like Christmas. The taunting question was how to begin. Fortunately, we had a seminarian who had served in the PMI Bangalore Unit, Bro Thomas Manakhuzzy OFM, who came forward to guide us and work with us. A meeting of all the Franciscans comprising laity of the secular order and religious sisters and brothers was called at Kripalaya, the Capuchin Theologate. The first team of office bearers was elected and July 12, 2000 was decided to be the inaugural program in the Mysore Central Prison by having the Holy Eucharist presided over by the then late Bishop Joseph Roy of Mysore Diocese. On 12th July 2000 we had the grand entry into the prison.

Palar Blast Case

Inside the prison after the Eucharistic

celebration, we were in for a shock. In a prison which has nearly 800-1000 prisoners on an average, there were prisoners who were imprisoned under TADA (Terrorist and Anti Disruptive Activities Act), allegedly Veerappan aides, the dreaded forest brigand, and were languishing in prison since 1993. Surprisingly, there were many among them who were from respectable families who were alleged to have been involved in the Palar Blast Case. These prisoners were afraid to speak to us as they were under surveillance and few mustered courage and spoke to our members who were present pleading their case and seeking help for an early release. On hearing their plight, we realised that “**Divine Intervention**” was the only solution to this problem as the entire nation was seething with anger against Veerappan and his aides for the gruesome Palar blast that killed many Policemen and their informers. Venturing to help them would result in us being branded as “Terrorist Sympathisers”. But the Psalmist reminded us: “Listen to the groans of the prisoners; by the strength of your arm, deliver those doomed to die” (Psalm 79:11). The members decided to start praying for them from day one for the following intentions:

- 1) The Courts render Justice to those who are innocent among these under-trials arrested in the Palar Blast Case 1992 under TADA and none be awarded death penalty.
- 2) To succeed in starting PMI units in the places where there are prisons in Mysore Diocese – Mandya, Nanjangud, K.R.Nagar, Kollegal, Chamarajnagar and Madikeri for the benefit of prisoners.
- 3) For abolition of death penalty from the Statute book in the country.

God Writes Straight on Crooked Lines

PMI Mysore Unit requested its members comprising majority of religious men and



women to pray for the above intentions everyday during their adoration before the Blessed Sacrament and the laity during their family prayers/ Holy Mass. A major breakthrough to the obstacles was removed on July 30, 2000 when the entire nation was shocked to learn that the much-loved actor Dr Rajkumar was kidnapped on July 29, 2000 by the forest brigand Veerappan. His kidnap shocked every citizen of Karnataka as the actor was dear to all in our country and it shook the Governments of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu under Mr S.M. Krishna and late Mr Karunanidhi as Chief Ministers of the respective States. This kidnap would have uprooted the Governments if any harm was inflicted by the forest brigand on the actor. Dr Rajkumar was released unharmed after 108 days in captivity. Little did we realise the 'Little finger of God' in the work of this kidnapping. One among the 10 demands of the forest brigand put forth to the Governments of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka as per press reports of Aug 6, 2000 were: "In a similar vein, he has demanded the release of 205 "innocent persons" languishing in Karnataka's jails, five prisoners in Tamil Nadu jails, and the payment of compensation to the families of nine murdered persons from the scheduled caste and tribe. The state governments have, however, not released the names of the five prisoners or the nine dead persons". "CMs give Veerappan a positive response. "Veerappan's foremost demand appeared to be the release of 'innocent' persons in Karnataka jails. The state government said the TADA charges would be dropped immediately, leading to their release." Till then none of the Governments cared to look into the allegations against these hundreds incarcerated for a crime which later the Courts found them all worthy to be released except 4 of them. The Word of God reminds us: "For the Lord hears the needy and does not despise those in captivity" (Psalm 69:34)

The sequence of events that followed highlighted by various news reports and Court verdicts are narrated in a nutshell to draw the attention of the reader that **"Nothing is Impossible for God"** when we decide to **PUSH**. The speed with which the trial was initiated was itself the proof of "Divine Presence" guiding the whole issue in answer to the prayers of the undertrials, the PMI members, the family members of those imprisoned and all others who cried out to God for Justice to them. Out of the over 120 detained only 4 who were given life imprisonment went on an appeal to the Supreme Court for release but their sentence was enhanced to death penalty which forced us to pray harder for them to be saved from the gallows. The rest were released by the Court. Trial by the press was more harmful to these prisoners but thanks to the Judiciary which came to their rescue in rendering Justice. Many of those imprisoned had already spent 6-7 years in prison. Out of the 121 who were imprisoned as aides of Veerappan, 4 were awarded life imprisonment by the trial court and appealed to the Supreme Court of India for their release, and their sentence was enhanced to death penalty on 29th Jan 2004.

Out of the 4 convicted prisoners in Mysore Central Prison, Mr Simon and Mr Bilavendra died in prison due to illness after over two decades in prison. Mr Jnanaprakash is now ailing and Mr Madaiah is aging. The humiliation of being hanged to death was averted. Our first petition "The Courts render Justice to those who are innocent among these under-trials arrested in the Palar Blast Case 1992 under TADA and none be awarded death penalty" was answered after a long period of anxiety. The scriptures came alive in the Judgment "From his holy height in heaven, the Lord



has looked on the earth to hear the groaning of the prisoners, and free those condemned to death” (Psalm 102:20).

Our Second Intention

“To succeed in starting PMI units in the places where there are prisons in Mysore Diocese – Mandya, Nanjangud, K.R.Nagar, Kollegal, Chamarajnagar and Madikeri for the benefit of prisoners”. The Mysore PMI Unit, was successful in starting PMI units in all the prisons in the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Mysore within 15 months of its commencement. Moreover the PMI unit members were successful in writing to the then Bishop of Chickmagalur Late Most Rev J.B.Sequeira to start a PMI unit in Chickmagalur Diocese which the Bishop gladly permitted and two PMI units namely: one at Chickmagalur and another at Hassan were started in 2000 - 2001. Some service was being rendered to the prisoners by the PMI members in all these prisons. With the formation of these PMI units an opportunity was available to the PMI Volunteers to respond to the call in Isaiah 49:9 “You will say to the captives: Come out; and to those in darkness: Show yourselves”.

The Third Intention

“For abolition of death penalty from the Statute book in the country”: The Mysore Unit wrote nearly 120 letters in 2000 to the Bishops of India including the then CBCI President to take up the matter with the Constitutional authorities in India for removing the clause on “Death Penalty” from the Statute books since the Catholic Church did not support death penalty. Pope John Paul II and his successors have strongly denounced death penalty as the stand of the Church. The Catholic Church has a formidable voice in the country and is heard by the Government of India, especially in

the Nirbhaya Case, when the opinion of the Catholic Church was sought by Justice Bagavathi, on whether death penalty should be awarded for rape. We continue to pray that this clause on death penalty be deleted from the penal provisions of the law of the land as done by over 85% of the countries of the world. We hope the CBCI will muster enough courage to take up this cause with the Government of the day. It was an inspiration from the Word of God in Lamentations 3:31-36 that compelled us to appeal to the Bishops of India: “For it is not forever that the Lord rejects man. In the abundance of his love he punishes, but has compassion. For he does not willingly abase or afflict the human race. To trample underfoot the prisoners of the land, to deny a man his rights in the presence of the Most High, to deprive people of justice – the Lord does not approve of this”.

Conclusion

It is in these circumstances we thankfully acknowledge the unique and great contribution to the Nation in general and Catholic Church in India in particular, by Rev. Fr Verghese Karipperry and Rev. Fr Francis Kодиyan (Present PMI National Coordinator) for founding the Prison Ministry India responding to the call of Jesus “ I was in prison, and you came to see me” (Mt 25:36). By founding PMI the earlier mindset that “Prisoners deserve to be in prison” has changed to “Prisoners must be given a chance to be Reformed, Rehabilitated and restored back to the Society as Renewed Persons” which is the responsibility of every member of the Society. PMI is an opportunity to serve for those who want to respond to the words of encouragement of St Paul in his letter to the Hebrews 13:3 “Remember prisoners as if you were with them in chains and the same for those who are suffering. Remember that you also have a body”.

Digapahandi Sub Jail

Sr Shanti Pulickal SCC

It is said that every flower has its time of blooming and every event has its own time of manifestation. This is my experience in prison ministry too. I had been trying in vain, for a long time, to visit the jail at Digapahandi and do prison ministry. But when the right time came, there was a smooth flow and it was almost like a miracle. Three of the Catholic prisoners were shifted from Berhampur Circle jail to the Digapahandi Jail at their request. They missed the Christmas programs and other activities at the Berhampur Jail and were eager for Mass and confession.

They were overjoyed when they saw one of the security personnel, on transfer from Berhampur jail. They knew he would support them. A new jailor had also been appointed “Let us approach the jailor with our request” they said among themselves. The new jailor was like a father to them and he heeded to their request. The jailor, in turn phoned Sr Shanti the PMI coordinator of Berhampur Diocese. “God answered our prayers”, said the PMI group and within a week, on Pentecost Sunday, Mass was said for the first time in that jail.

Fr. Proful Kr Nayak was overjoyed at our invitation. He had other commitments on that day and had to travel long distance to be present in the jail. “I will make any sac-

rifices in order to serve the prisoners” he said. “What a joy it will be to hear the Lord’s words, ‘I was in prison and you visited me!’”. The same was the response of Fr. Prasant Kr Digal who concelebrated with him and Bro. Amit Digal. All the 15 Christian prisoners were present for the Mass. They took active participation in the Mass and sang well. All the Catholics had made their confession and received Holy Communion.

The jailor was present and was very prayerful. At our request he took few photos and sent them to Sr. Shanty’s WhatsApp with the following message, “Thank you for sparing some spiritual moments with our beloved inmates”. He thanked us for our services and we too thanked him for this opportunity to serve the prisoners.

We handed over to him the snacks we had taken for prisoners. He took us to the female ward and allowed us to distribute the saris and snacks we had taken. We played with the baby there, just one and a half years old. The baby was delighted and thanked us, in his own language, the snacks and dress we gave him. It was a day of joy both for the prisoners and for us, PMI volunteers. We left the jail physically but continue to carry them in our hearts and our prayers

“It is said that no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.”

- Nelson Mandela



Nonuplet Warrior Gang: St Quiteria

Sr Lini Sheeja MSC

St Quiteria was born into royalty in the second century (AD). She was the daughter of a Galician prince, the last child of nonuplets. They were: Eumelia, Liberata, Gema, Genebra, Germana, Basilissa, Marina, Vitoria, and Quiteria. The nine girls' mother, was a lady of high rank and she was disgusted that she had given birth to nine children like a common animal and even more so that she had nine daughters and no son. Viewing the experience as a waste of her time, she ordered her maid, Sila, to take the nine girls to the river and drown them. As Sila was a follower of Christianity, she ended up entrusting the babies to a Christian monk to be raised in the Christian community, while their parents remained completely unaware of it. The monk took care of the girls, baptized them Christians, and taught them all about Christianity. All nine girls were kept together or in close community, well-aware that they were sisters, and were raised in the Faith. Quiteria was the most dedicated out of her sisters when it came to their faith. She was fascinated with the Virgin Mary and the words of Christ.

Breaking Christians out of Prisons

The Christians placing a strong premium on truth, informed the girls of their royal lineage when they were old enough to understand. Yet, none of the girls wished to return to the palace or live a luxurious

lifestyle. Instead, they became warriors for Christ, forming a group that travelled the country, breaking Christians out of jail, proclaiming the Gospel, and smashing pagan idols.

Rooms to Prayer Halls

After a few years, they were caught and brought to the King Lucio, their own father. Having discovered what his wife had done, the father resolved to take the daughters into his home and marry them to well-bred Roman military men. He requested that they give up their reckless ways and come to live in the palace with him. This they did, but only to witness to the royal court. The sisters converted their rooms into prayer halls, and spent their days praying and praising the Lord.

Imprisonment and Praising God

However, the daughters refused to consent to marriages to pagan worshippers and were locked up in jail. In jail they praised and glorified Jesus, and eventually an angel came and told Quiteria "Happy and fortunate you are, for you deserved to find grace in front of God, so that God has chosen you as his spouse. It is God's will, that you are to live in solitude on mount Oria and there you will exercise oration and contemplation".

Second Imprisonment of a Warrior

The angel released them from jail and they all escaped going in different directions. Quiteria followed the angel and lived on the top of a mountain, where she was eventually captured. Once again, as she declined marriage offer, she was imprisoned. Even while imprisoned, Quiteria converted a



ST QUITERIA

lot of people to Christianity. But again she was freed by an angel, and returned to the mountain along with a group of other women whom she converted to Christianity.

Death Sentence by Own Father

King Lucio was infuriated at the fact that his daughter converted a lot of women from his palace and one of his good friends to Christianity. He and his soldiers left the palace so that they could hunt her down. When they finally found her and her two sisters, Marina and Liberata at the Aire-sur-l'Adour church in Gascony, the sisters waged a guerrilla war against the Roman Empire. The king ordered his soldiers to behead Quiteria and her sisters. She was thrown into the sea and emerged from the water, walked to the Church of the Virgin Mary with her head in her hands.

Patron Saint

Prior to beheading, she is said to have kept the king's vicious attack dogs at bay, with simply a gentle word which led the people to invoke her against rabies. The date of the arrival of the devotion to St Quiteria is uncertain yet the locals recall that their patroness was already in their parish, first as a Visita and later when it was established as a parish in September 11, 1979 – it was dedicated to her and St. Francis of Assisi. It is said that favours were granted to those who sought her intercession and apparently, cures from rabies have also been known that the locals of Baesa are forever grateful to their unique patroness and she became embedded to the lives of the people of the area.

Warriors' Faith and Courage

The life of St Quiteria is one of struggle for the faith. Despite having a chance at a luxurious lifestyle, this lovely young woman and her sisters chose instead to fight for the truth of the Gospel, forsaking her family, her comfort, and eventually her life. St Quiteria's courage and faith remind us that in our moments of difficulty, we need only turn to the Lord for inspiration and support, and that He will send His angels to protect and assist us.

Kitheriammal

Kuthenkuly, a coastal village in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu is the home to a shrine which is dedicated to St Quiteria. The shrine attracts thousands of pilgrims from different places. The shrine is known for its Thursday devotion. Quiteria is the patron saint of this village. The hagiography of St Quiteria (Kitheriammal), a Tamil language manuscript is preserved in this village. Based on the manuscript, an eight-day play is staged in Kuthenkuly.

Festal Blessings

It brings moments of blessing to know about the Nonuplet Warrior Gang. All nine children were rejected by their own mother and so cruelly they were asked to be drowned by her. Man proposes and God disposes. God had a perfect plan for these nonuplets that He revealed His mercy through the maid. The nonuplets became warriors and God did wonders.





The Burning Bush

Fr Antnoy O de M

Birth of Moses

Moses is one of the most interesting men of the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 34:10 reads: “There has never been a prophet in Israel like Moses, the Lord spoken to him face to face. Moses had a special relationship with Yahweh. Heb: 11: 28 tells us that it was faith that made the parents of Moses hide him for three months after he was born; they saw that he was a beautiful child. They were not afraid to disobey the king’s order. Moses was born of faith”. Ex 2: 1-10 narrates the birth of Moses. The princess named him Moses because he was pulled out of water.

Youth of Moses

The Princess adopted Moses as her own son (Ex: 2:10). Moses lived in a king’s palace and was loved by the royal household. He was taught all the wisdom of the Egyptian and became a great man in words and deeds (Acts 7:22). Since he was adopted by the princess and living in the royal household, he had all the opportunities to be educated in knowledge and wisdom. According to Heb 11: 24-26 Moses had tough situation due to his faith, he chose to suffer with God’s people and slavery of his own people Israel. At the age of 40 Moses made the life changing decision by his faith. He forsook Egypt. By saving a beaten Hebrew from Egyptian, Moses looked after the sheep of his father in-law; he was stripped of self-confidence and Egyptian pride.



The Call of Moses

Exodus 3:2 narrates that an angel of the Lord appeared to Moses as a flame coming from the middle of a bush. He saw that the bush was on fire but it was not burning up; this strange thing attracted Moses to come nearer. Ex 3: 4 says that Moses was coming closer, God called him from the middle of the bush and said “Moses, Moses”. He answered “Yes here I am”. The Lord Yahweh sent Moses to redeem the people of Israel who are in Egyptian captivity and slavery. Israelites were in distress, mourning and affliction in their place. Israel needed the help of God to be redeemed from the bondage of Egyptian. In Ex 3:10 we read the following; “Now I am sending you to the king of Egypt so that you can lead my people out of this country”. Moses accepts and reveals his unworthiness in God’s call to deliver the people from the bondage. Ex 3:11 reads “I am nobody how can I can go to the king and bring the Israelites out of Egypt”. He was struggling to understand his call and mission and expressed his unworthiness to Yahweh.

Theological Significance

The Burning Bush speaks the reality and nature of God. The consuming fire represents God’s holiness that destroys and consumes the unworthy, hence Deut 4:24 speaks “Because the Lord your God is like a flaming fire, he tolerated no rivals”. The fire represents God and the bush the people of Israel. God lives among the people in a special way with lots of love and forgiveness. The logical reason is that God is using this thorny bush as a type of his dwelling with God’s people who are redeemed from the curse of the law.



Let Your Light Shine

Sr Adele Korah SCCG

Introduction

“Your Word is a lamp for my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). As volunteers of Prison Ministry India, we enter into prison cells bearing within us the Light of Christ who dwells in us. Within the prison we can sense the darkness through which our brethren struggle in their lives due to slavery to sins and bondages of guilt, feelings of hatred and inability to reach out in forgiveness, wounded memories, fear, anxieties, desire of taking revenge, loneliness and so on. We are chosen by the Lord and sent forth to be agents of light. By lighting an oil lamp and placing it on a stand St. Mother Theresa tried to bring light into the dark room of an old man’s cottage to drive away the darkness and loneliness in his life. As a person filled with the Divine Light of God’s unconditional love, Mother’s very presence cheered the hearts of every one she served.

Jesus Light of Prisoners

But the darkness in the lives of some of our brethren behind the bars can be driven away only when the Light of Christ comes into their lives by our presence, our love and compassion for them and through the light of God’s WORD that we share with them. We read in the report about prisoners in El Salvador prison, how the lives of some of the violent gang members who were in

prison were changed. A group of terrorist gang members in El Salvador prison had made the prison the deadliest place on earth. Emergency was declared when there were more than 60 killings in 48 hours. **Some gangsters could be transformed when the pastors brought in to their midst the light of Christ.** It is said that one of the prisoners in El Salvador prison had the unique experience of hearing a WORD from the Bible “Listen. I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability and this mortal body put on immortality and then the saying that is written will be fulfilled” (1Cor 15: 51-54). Many of the inmates were touched and there emerged a group of them who started reading God’s word as directed by the pastors and it brought new life in their hearts and in the prison.

As Saul was touched by the light of the Risen Lord, several gang members received the Light of Christ though the Pastors who served in the prison. They tried their best to serve the gang members by offering them the powerful Word of God. Considering them as their own brothers they led them to the Light of Christ with songs and praises of God’s love and several of them turned from their evil ways following the living God who loves them with a love that is unconditional. The result was the removal of spiritual shackles and donning of new robes and the crown of righteousness. They



LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

realized the truth that “With God everything is possible” (Mathew 19:26).

Word of God

When I entered prison ministry in answer to the call of Christ, I realized the fact that ministering to many men and women who had been hardened by life and imprisoned for crimes of all kinds is possible only with God’s grace and power. Yes, it is possible only with a very personal call from Christ the Redeemer. Through engaging Scripture readings and guided journaling, we’ll gain the confidence we need to get into the Bible and hear God’s voice through His Word and then courageously open the WORD to the brethren who have lost all hopes in their lives. Within the prison, we meet a lot of men and women who need to be awakened and are to be led to a renewed life. We are called to help people to trust in God in all circumstances and to allow God to restore their broken lives. Gradually they need to be helped to discover how by following God’s way they can bring joy and strength in their life. Committing our work to the one who called us to this ministry for the lost, we need to go forward opening to the brethren God’s Living Word.

During my service in the prison, I had several occasions when persons went through the process of inner transformation as and when the powerful Word of God was broken to them. “Indeed the word of God is living and active sharper than any two edged sword piercing until it divides

soul from spirit, joints from marrow, it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). I have noticed that whenever the brethren listen to God’s Word with an open heart, and start applying the word in their life, it bears fruit in their life. We read in Isaiah, “For the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there until they have watered the earth and making it bring forth and sprout giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth, it shall not return to me empty but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10-11).

Transforming Power of God’s Word

I have seen a double murderer who went in to a crime filled life, just because he had not experienced the love of his mother. He sought for acceptance from his peer groups, got involved in a series of criminal activities and was brought in to the prison. During his life in the prison, he took a new turn in his life after he started reading God’s word from Isaiah 49:15 which says, “Can a woman forget her nursing child or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you”. Meditating on the unconditional love of God, he began a new life even when he was in the prison. There were drug addicts and dacoits in the prison, who were touched by the power of God’s living Word and turned from their evil habits to become evangelists proclaiming God’s word after their release from the prison. Today they are

torch bearers, spreading the light of God's word in the lives of others. Christians who had turned away from God and had become murderers, serial killers, dacoits, drug addicts and alcoholics too were able to turn from their crime filled life to a value-based life. They prepared themselves to receive the sacraments of reconciliation and first Holy Communion within the prison. Ajith a prisoner (name changed) who had murdered his wife six days after his marriage, was touched by the Word of God from Isaiah 1:18 "Come now and let us argue it out says the Lord, though your sins are like scarlet they shall be like snow, though they are like crimson shall be like wool". He repented of his sinful past and started dwelling deeply on the word of God and turned a new leaf in the chapter of his life.

Prison Release through God's Powerful Word

Another prisoner Mohith, learned by heart the Words from Mathew 7:7-11 and quoted the same to the Judge before his judgment and witnessed a miraculous release from prison. He spoke to the Judge, "Your honor, you are in the place of God, I learned from the Bible the words, "Ask and it will be given to you; search and you will find, knock and the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you, who if your child asks for bread will give a stone? Or if the child asks for fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him? The Judge was surprised to see

that this prisoner had made such a progress during his prison life and learned God's word which would benefit his life. To the great joy of Mohith, he was acquitted of his case and was released from prison.

I am convinced of the fact that God blesses our services when we rely on the power of God's Spirit. It is only the healing touch of God that can bring renewal and transformation in the lives of persons who have wandered away from truth. Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and Life walked on this earth giving us the life example of a Good Shepherd who sought and saved by giving his life for the salvation of the whole humanity. If we give the word of God to those who have gone away from Him to help them to open themselves to God's touch it means that something different is going to happen in their lives. Jesus who came to seek sinners is waiting for their return. Can we be agents of God's healing love and enable the wounded and rejected brethren to be freed from their bondages? God's forgiving love frees them by his touch through his powerful Word. **"If the Son sets you free you will be free indeed" (John 8:36)** Trusting in God, we will discover how doing things God's way brings joy and strength in our ministry to the last, least and the lost.

As long as you have capital punishment there is no guarantee that innocent people won't be put to death.

- Paul Simon



Prisoner to Prime Minister - Story of Joseph the Prisoner

Sr Amala DC

Introduction


Bible speaks with compassion of those in prison, manifesting God's unconditional love for them and also sympathizing with them. In the Old Testament, we find the first prisoner in the story of Joseph. Joseph, son of Jacob was one of the twelve tribes of Israel. The Bible says Joseph learned to trust in God despite the hard times he was going through.

Joseph's Early Life

Joseph was born in the Mesopotamian town of Haran, to his parents Jacob and Rachel. At the age of six, he left Haran along with his family and journeyed to the land of Canaan, eventually settling down in Hebron. Jacob showed extra affection to Joseph, son of his old age, presenting him with a specially crafted garment. This prompted feelings of jealousy within his brothers. With that, Joseph was hated by his brothers and was sold into Egypt where he faced crushing tests. He was bought by General Potiphar and did extremely well until he is falsely accused of casting his eyes at Potiphar's wife and ended up in prison.

Life in Prison

In prison, he did well again and gained the confidence of the jailors, interpreting the



dreams for the Pharaoh's butler and baker. But when the butler is released he forgets to put in a good word to the Pharaoh for Joseph and he was in prison for two more years. Then, it was the Pharaoh, who had bad dreams, which were really bad; dreams about 14 cows, then later about 14 ears of corn; the thin cows ate up the fat cows, the thin corn ate up the fat bits of corn. Nobody could decipher them out, not even the Pharaoh's cleverest men. The butler suddenly remembered Joseph and Joseph was brought to the Pharaoh to interpret his dreams. Joseph knew what the dreams meant because God helped him.

From Prisoner to Prime Minister

Then he explained the dream - there would be seven good years followed by seven bad years and they would have to survive the bad years with what they saved from the good years; thus, they could survive through the bad years. Pharaoh was delighted and then he promoted Joseph to the position of prime minister with a new Egyptian name (Zaph-enath-paneah), which meant 'the one who is alive'. Joseph suggested to Pharaoh that it would be good that someone collected all the crops from the good years and that's what they did. He ultimately became the ruler of the land, second only to King Pharaoh.

Joseph settled down in Egypt, married and had two children, whose names were deliberately chosen to mean, Manasseh (forget the past), and Ephraim (make a new start). Forgetting the past and making a new start might have helped him but he really

didn't forget the past. He didn't make a new start when he knew deep down, he didn't belong to Egypt and had a father; and so how could he really forget who he was and his true home?

Reunion with the Family

When he was reunited with his brothers, he could say sincerely, "And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life... God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God" (Gen 45:5-8). Foreshadowing the undeserved grace that Jesus would bring centuries later, Joseph did not hold a grudge, but was ready and waiting with open arms, calling those who needed forgiveness to accept it. It is a great model for believers today who may be struggling with unforgiveness and dealing with someone with an unrepentant spirit. Patience and grace are important, as Joseph illustrated. The first declaration made by Joseph to his brothers, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen 50:20). This sentiment was also true of Potiphar's wife then and is now in the life of the modern believers. In fact, it is true of the whole of human history, what mankind intends for evil, the Lord intends for good, and for His plan. The other important theme and lesson is that "The Lord was with Joseph" (Gen 39:2); and of course, He is with all His children, even today.

Conclusion

Joseph had the wisdom to make the best out of bad circumstances. In real-life circumstances, it is rare to do the right thing. Instead of pondering over his situation of rejection, bitterness and hardship, he worked hard to become a reliable person. Like many prisoners, he suffered disappointment when his hopes for release were raised and dashed. In the end, however, his virtue and innocence were rewarded. We learn that in all things, God is there to uphold us just like Joseph when we depend on Him for our support. In real life, the qualities of Joseph are those that should also be proficient in a Christian. We can learn a lot from the patient endurance of Joseph and the hardships he experienced in Egypt and trust that God is using all situations for His and our good. So, forgiveness plays the most important part of our Christian life as God forgives us. Joseph's story is the story of the whole Bible. It's the story of glory through suffering, exaltation through humiliation. It's the story of the cross and the crown. Let us strive to grasp this truth.

"There are people who are suffering beyond description. They are innocent people, they didn't bring this upon themselves. They are the victims of the sins of other people. And while it's hard to see, it's important to understand that these people exist".

- Mia Farrow




My Journey with Kolbe Home

Marjorie Correa

Life is a journey with paths that twist and turn. We pass through hills and valleys and sometimes do not know where the next turn is. We do not possess a GPS to show us the way. We trust in a God who has the map of our lives in His hand. But there is one thing for sure and that is, He will never misguide us. When I moved from Mumbai to Bangalore 8 years ago, little did I know what the Lord had in store. I always loved to serve in His kingdom, by teaching in Sunday school, doing social work and reaching out to the underprivileged. When I noticed the board *Prison Ministry*, a few blocks away from my house, I decided to go in and enquire if they needed any volunteers. Lo and behold, they did and that's how my journey with Kolbe Home began. The words of the hymn, "Shackled by a heavy burden, came to my mind at once. It goes like this: "Shackled by a heavy burden, Neath a load of guilt and shame, Then the hand of Jesus touched me, and now I am no longer the same". I knew immediately that the Lord was calling me to untie the shackles of these children of prisoners and to set them free from carrying the burdens of pain, despair, ignorance and stigma by society. I decided to take up the challenge.

I started by tutoring a handful of boys in lower middle school. There were teething problems especially of discipline. But, soon as I won their confidence, they were willing to cooperate. I delved not only into their subjects in their school curriculum, but also taught them lessons of life - how to be honest, studious and hardworking. The classes were always fun for them and me. I



introduced the lessons sometimes through games and gave them incentives like stickers of stars and others when they performed well in class. I would also threaten to draw a black ball against their names if they misbehaved. This became an exciting challenge for them and they would literally aim for the stars.

The classroom was not only a place to do their lessons but was often a place where they could open up and share their lives with me. As I listened to their sad stories, I realised how blest I am to have a secure home and a secure family. Sometimes I would incorporate some of the words they learnt in their English lessons like "shelter" to explain to them that Kolbe Home was also a shelter for them where their needs are met. At this juncture I would like to mention that I am all praise for Father Francis the coordinator for Prison Ministry India and his team who have from the inception of this ministry, given a holistic experience of life to the boys.

There were many other activities that I also did with the boys. There were Bible classes, skits, songs, sports and games. These were all a big part of their lives. I remember a hilarious incident when I taught them the lesson on David and Goliath. I gave them an activity where I took them out into the yard and they had to use a sling and shoot a stone like David. The stone went faraway right into a neighbour's house. Such was their enthusiasm.

It was not I who was their teacher, but they were the ones teaching me valuable lessons, like how to endure pain, separation from loved ones, how to accept what life has to offer them and yet have a smile on their faces. I entered into Kolbe Home to give love to the boys, but I received more than I gave.



PMI Trichy Unit Celebrating Thanksgiving Mass



PMI Volunteers Celebrating Eid Festival in Mysore Prison



PMI Volunteers Distributing Hotpots to Amaravathi Central Prison



PMI Volunteers Visiting Bijnor District Prison



Kolbe Children Back to School



PMI Volunteers Visiting Women Central Jail, Pune



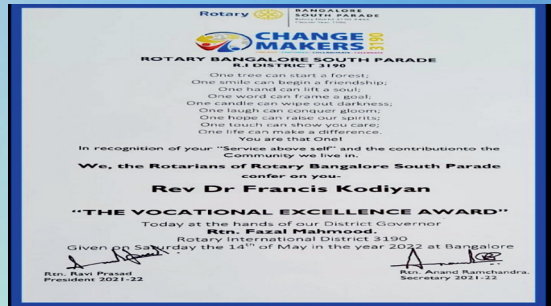
PMII Volunteers Distributing Sarees to Digapahandi Women Prisoners, Odisha



Rotary Bangalore South Honoring Fr Francis Kodiyan MCBS with Vocational Excellence Award



Welcome to Fr Antony O de M to PMI National Office



Vocational Excellence Award to Fr Francis Kodiyan MCBS



PMI Volunteers Meeting Honorable Kerala Chief Justice



PMI Volunteers Visiting Amaravathi Prison



Betrothal Blessings to Jincy and Antony



Welcoming the New Buds to Kolbe Home



Priestly Ordination Blessings to Fr Benny Pachanal



PMI Volunteers Meeting Pondicherry IG of Prisons