

**Changing Hearts, Transforming Lives and Impacting the World**

**Prison Ministry Sunday**

**10<sup>th</sup> August, 2014**

**Pastoral Letter**

**(Please read this pastoral letter in all the churches on 10<sup>th</sup> of August 2014,  
in connection with Prison Ministry Sunday)**

**Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,**

On this Prison Ministry Sunday, the Church is inviting us to think about the people in prisons with the theme of Changing hearts, transforming lives and impacting the world. The celebration of Prison Ministry Sunday is not about new dresses, arranging parties, giving expensive gifts or taking up many journeys. It is about love, the love that changes the hearts of many in the prisons, giving them a chance to transform their lives and change the world of crimes into the world of love. It is the same love that transforms enemies into friends, love that turns fear into trust. It is about love that heals broken relationships and that mends broken dreams. This day helps us to prepare our hearts to receive the miracles of that love. It removes the burden from the shoulders of many in the prisons and gives color and hope to the faded dreams of many prisoners.

**Mission of Church**

We believe that no life is beyond the reach of God's power, and we envision a future in which countless prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their families, are redeemed, restored, and reconciled through the love and truth of Jesus Christ. We believe that God's Glory is that man lives; nobody is disposable, or less worthy than any other. Like the Good Samaritan we want to spend our lives in favor of our imprisoned sisters and brothers, and all who, in one way or another, are suffering due to the crime.

In the dynamics of Emmaus, the Master teaches us the pedagogy of accompaniment: to make ourselves present, walking together and illuminating life through his Word which gives understanding, freedom, and sharing the bread that nourishes and gives eternal life.

It is to recognize the suffering face of Jesus in our brothers and sisters and to be the hand that blesses and heart that loves, heals wounds, and quenches the driving thirst, the hand that holds and turns sorrow into joy, just as the Good Samaritan.

Our place is to be in line with Ex 2.4 which says that God has visited and redeemed his people. This is not a polite passing by visit, but a visit of incarnation. Incarnate means to dwell in and to enter the lives of other, not impose, or force, not to snoop

or give lessons, but to accompany the needy, to share life and walk together, each one giving to the other the best that we have.

### **Challenges**

There are about 3,85,135 prisoners in 1394 prisons and among them 2,54,857 prisoners are waiting for trial. In a world of imprisonment, this is our challenge; to fight against everything that threatens the dignity of the human person, realizing that the kingdom of justice is full life for all.

We live in a system of exclusion, that considers many brothers and sisters as disposable and worthless and disregard, especially prisoners, as well as many people who would kidnap or kill them or lock them up forever. We are concerned with the increase of violence and insecurity. It feeds the desire for revenge and death for the perpetrators of certain crimes, with the wrong belief that this will resolve something. Prisons, refugee camps, and miserable living conditions are not the answer.

Prisoners are disabled before, during, and after imprisonment; they are disabled by parental care, by lack of education, by drugs, by gangs, by being born into below poverty level, or by being subjected to inhuman or perverted persons.

The challenge of reconciliation, of building bridges, of believing that love is stronger, and peace and justice walk together gives another chance to one who repents with his whole heart. Let us not forget the words of Pope Francis that God is never tired of forgiving though we may be tired of asking forgiveness. It is a fact that forgiveness does not change the past but it does enlarge the future as told by Mary Koren.

### **Voice of Pope**

While addressing the national congress of Chaplains of Italian Prisons Pope Francis said that he prays for them, keeps them in his heart, prays to the Lord and Our Lady that they would be able to surmount positively this difficult period of their life. They should not be discouraged or close themselves. He advised the chaplains to tell them that the Lord is close to them and say it with gesture, with words, with the heart that the Lord does not stay outside, he does not stay outside of their cell, he does not stay outside of prisons, but inside; The Lord is inside with them; he too is a prisoner again today, prisoner of our egoisms, of our system of so many injustices, because it is easy to punish the weakest, but the big fish swim freely in the waters. No cell is so isolated as to exclude the Lord, none. He is there, he weeps with them, works with them, waits with them. His paternal and maternal love reaches everywhere. The Pope himself feels after many occasions of communicating to prisoners earlier, why is he there and not me who has so many more reasons to be there? It does me good to think this; because the weaknesses we have are the same, why did he fall and I did not? This is a mystery

for me which makes me pray and makes me come close to prisoners. Let us follow the voice of our pope in our dealings with prisoners.

### **Victims and Their Family**

The victims and their families are completely forgotten by the government and judiciary. They have to be taken care of and supported by society. The Church has also decided to take a wider step to look in to the matter of victims and their families.

### **Changes Through You**

It was a heart-breaking scene to see that a rich lady came to the prison and embraced the lady who robbed her jewels. The constant prayer of some volunteers and a couple of visits made the lady forgive the one who had stayed with her for the last 14 years. It was like the father receiving the prodigal son. We may not have great things to show to people in our ministry but God always gives us a little satisfaction or a surprise fruit to re-energize us in our trials and hard works for the people behind the bars. Martin Luther King Jr. says that love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy in to a friend, we never get rid of an enemy by meeting hate with hate; by its very nature, hate destroys and tears down; by its very nature, love creates and builds up. Love transforms with redemptive power.

St Maximilian Kolbe being the patron of Prison Ministry volunteers is the best example for all of us. He was ready to take up the place of another prisoner who cried for his return to his family. Our patron gave back a father to the family, husband to the wife. The Church is engaged in the same ministry of giving back a son to the family, father to the children, mother to the children, and further a good member to the society. You can help this ministry of the Church by your prayers and financial support. During last 28 years the ministry has come across a lot of generous people who help regularly and also on the occasions of wedding anniversaries, birthdays and other occasions. Let us take a decision to rehabilitate at least one prisoner today. All cannot be volunteers but you can help all those who are volunteers to be your presence in the name of Jesus.

I express my heartfelt appreciation to all those who are involved in this ministry and pray for them. You are not alone in this mission, not alone in your struggles, not alone in your prayer and not alone in your joy. May God bless you and be with you.  
Yours devotedly in Christ,

+ Rt Rev Bishop Peter Remigius  
Chairperson, Prison Ministry India