

Prisoners' Reintegration and Redemption

**PRISON MINISTRY
SUNDAY**



1st August 2021

PASTORAL LETTER

*Pastoral Letter to be read out either on 1st August 2021
or on any convenient Sunday as decided by the Bishop*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

As we celebrate Prison Ministry Sunday, let us consider prisoners as our brethren and do whatever is possible for their integral human development.

Every diocese shall have a Prison Ministry India (PMI) unit to look after the needs of prisoners, and parish priests shall take special care to reach out to the lost sheep in prisons. Consecrated people have a special responsibility to participate in the release, reformation, and reintegration of prisoners. Pious associations and lay faithful are cordially invited to take part in the prisoners' reintegration projects of PMI. For Jesus came "to proclaim good news to the poor... to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Lk 4: 18-19).

Prisoner's Rehabilitation and Reintegration

Alphi (43) was an inmate of Snehashramam, Kerala a rehabilitation centre for released women prisoners of Prison Ministry India. She was married to Mr Johnson. They have an eight-year-old child studying in Standard III. They had neither land nor house of their own. PMI bought a small plot of land for them. With the financial assistance of the PMI Ruby Jubilee housing project, they completed the construction of the house and now live peacefully glorifying the Lord. Savitha was in high school when her father was imprisoned. She had no possibility of continuing her education. PMI came to her assistance and now she is completing her M.Com. Though Gopal completed his life sentence, he was not released from prison as he could not pay the compensation to the victim. PMI paid the compensation and now he is released and leading a pacifist family life.

“It is something beautiful, a gift of God, to take care of the people, men and women in jail. Let us thank the Lord for his great love to share the joy of loving,” said Saint Mother Teresa, a Saint of the Gutters, when she addressed PMI volunteers during the second national convention held at Navintha Retreat Centre, Delhi in 1995. When the then Chief Minister of West Bengal met Mother Teresa, he told her about 34 girls in prison who were arrested from brothel houses. These young girls with pathetic family backgrounds had been forced into prostitution and thrown behind bars. They all were picked up by the mother of love and were reformed and reintegrated. Mother Teresa witnessed the tremendous change in the life of every person who was picked up from the dark cells of prisons. Prison Ministry India has rehabilitated and reintegrated thousands of prisoners and their families from the time of its inception.

Prisoners’ Redemption

God came down in our sinfulness! God came down when we were lost! In the eyes of God, we never lose our worth. We always remain precious in his sight; for God is infinite love. God cannot but love, fire cannot but warm up. PMI volunteers believe strongly that no one is beyond transformation, and our Redeemer has taught us that no one is beyond redemption as he assured Paradise to the ‘Good Thief’. God also chooses the filthiest of places, stinking places, for his work of redemption. Behind the walls of maximum-security prisons, hard-core criminals are being transformed into messengers of hope. “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mk 2:17). The purpose of Jesus coming to this earth was to call sinners and to redeem the lost. Jesus who cried out from the Cross, “*I thirst*” (Jn 19:28) continues to thirst for the souls behind the dark cells of prisons.

What shall we do for the reintegration and redemption of prisoners? If you want to be a part of this noble work of God’s redeeming mission, you can reach out by volunteering in three ways.

Firstly, the origin of Prison Ministry India is from the Blessed Sacrament. Those hours spent before the Blessed Sacrament were powerful moments for the growth of this ministry. Before each visit, members spend time in prayer. They recite the rosary, make intercessory prayers and fast. Basically, Prison Ministry India is a prayer group for the reintegration and redemption of our brethren in prison.

Secondly, you can visit prisons and PMI rehabilitation centres and homes for prisoners’ children. “My family has abandoned me; society considers me only as a criminal. If you do not help me, who else will in this world? When I am released, nobody will dare to give me a job. Would you please find a job for me?” These heart-breaking cries of prisoners moved the hearts of PMI volunteers and the result was the

first rehabilitation centre, Snehashramam established in 1991. Today, Prison Ministry India runs 20 rehabilitation centres for released persons and their children.

Thirdly, you can financially support PMI for prisoners' rehabilitation and reintegration. One of the basic principles of PMI is 'begging'. We beg to give prisoners a better future. We beg to provide them a life of dignity. We beg to make them kings and queens. We do not have any foreign funding to meet expenses, but we actualise our plans and visions by meeting people personally. Here we become not mere distributors of easy money, but we become one with the helpless in their struggle. PMI volunteers stand at the church doors with a bucket in their hands, begging something from those who have to give to those who don't have.

PMI Ruby Jubilee

This year, Prison Ministry India celebrates its Ruby Jubilee with many new projects for the integral development of prisoners and their families. I am glad to share with you some of the major Ruby Jubilee projects such as homes for prisoners' children, houses for released prisoners, establishment of special PMI Task Forces such as Terrorists Saving Squad, Death Row Commandos, Mafia Redeemers, scholarships to prisoners' children, and releasing prisoners with legal and financial assistance. Let us praise and thank God for the unfathomable blessings showered upon our brethren behind the bars and the PMI volunteers. Let us continue to pray for our incarcerated brethren especially during these days of pandemic and closely collaborate with PMI in their endeavour to implement the jubilee projects. I take this opportunity to praise and thank God for all the blessings showered upon prisoners and their families in the past 40 years and extend my heartiest congratulations to those who pioneered this beautiful ministry.

Conclusion

As we celebrate Prison Ministry Sunday, let us remember and pray for prisoners all over the world especially the 4.7 lakh people languishing in the 1350 Indian prisons, their families, victims, the officers and the volunteers who serve them. Dear brethren behind the bars, we love you, we are with you, we pray for you and we are ready to do whatever is possible for your reformation and reintegration. Dear PMI family members, your visits to the prison are equivalent to visiting Jesus for he said, "I was in prison and you visited me" (Mt 25:36). During these COVID-19 pandemic days, we pray for you in a special way. Your continued financial support for the Prison Ministry will highly be appreciated.

Along with my brother bishops, I express my sincere gratitude to the dioceses, major superiors and well-wishers for your generous contributions towards this ministry. I am sure Jesus who came in search of the lost will bless you abundantly. I acknowledge and appreciate the PMI volunteers for their profound commitment in reforming and

reintegrating prisoners, which all of us know, is one of the most challenging tasks. May Saint Maximilian Kolbe, the patron of Prison Ministry India, intercede for the fruitfulness of this ministry and may Mary, our blessed mother, be always there to protect you.



✠ **Bishop Allwyn D'Silva**
Chairperson, Prison Ministry India