



PRISON VOICE

December 2019

Vol. XVII

Issue 4

NATIONAL MONTHLY

₹ 20/-

Year of **JUBILEE**





**Christmas Gathering
PMI Andhra Pradesh**



**Visit to Berhampur
Central Jail by National Team**



PMI Delhi State Gathering



**Visit to Chatrapur Sub Jail,
Berhampur by National Team**



**PMI Odisha
State Gathering**



**PMI Tamilnadu
State Executive Meeting**



Volleyball Match at Berhampur Central Jail

Silver Jubilee of Prison Ministry India, National Office, Bangalore
St Joseph's Auditorium, 19 November 2019





Celebration of SILVER YEARS



Contents



PRISON VOICE

NATIONAL MONTHLY



Editor's View.....	04
National Coordinator's Desk.....	05
Blessing a Sign of God's Love.....	07
Blessings to be Thanked for.....	09
Inside the Prison.....	10
Be a Blessing.....	11
Voice of the Prisoner	12
You are Gracious!.....	14
We are all on the same Boat	15
Christmas Trees and More... ..	16
Letter to the Editor.....	18
Gathered for a Worthy Cause.....	19
Silver Years of PMI National Office.....	21
Count Your Redeemed	22
Glimpses from ExCo.....	23
Great Relief and Peace Found.....	24
AP State General Body Meeting...	25
Release of Kandhamal Innocent Prisoners	26

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.*

BANK DETAILS:

A/c Name : Prison Ministry India
Bank : South Indian Bank
Branch : Koramangala
A/C No : 0416053000001419
IFSC Code : SIBL0000416

Managing Editor

Rev Dr Francis Kodiyan MCBS

Chief Editor

Sr Lini Sheeja MSC

Editorial Board

Most Rev Dr Allwyn D' Silva D.D.

Fr G J Anthonysamy

Fr Wilfred Fernandes

Sr Jobina UFS

Magazine Staff

Mr Jesu Raja

Sr Regina

Ms Teena Antony, PhD

Circulation Manager

Br Alphonse Velankanni OFM

Br John Antony CMF

Graphics and Layout

Mohini

Printing

National Printing Press
Koramangala, Bangalore

Prison Ministry India

52, Thomas Layout

Sarjapur Road

Carmelaram

Bangalore-560 035

Karnataka, India

☎ **9880022209 /
09447710488**

Email

prisonvoice123@gmail.com
nationalpmi2015@gmail.com
pmi2005@rediffmail.com

Website

www.prisonministryindia.org

Let God's Blessings Humble Us

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17).

We, the Prison Ministry India volunteers, are grateful to the God of faithfulness who has worked wonders and blessed us more than we deserve. The God who had called each one of us into this ministry continues to bestow his abundant blessings as he wakes us up every morning and takes us to the gates of prison to meet the disfigured face of the crucified Master in the brethren behind the bars. Our God is kind and generous! He blesses us with numerous benefits. How do you respond to these blessings?

Here are 7 ways to respond appropriately to God's blessings

1. Praise with Love

Fall in love with the lost who wants to praise God with you. We are created in the image and likeness of God to praise him and adore him. We, the PMI volunteers, need to join our hands together in praising him with love in our hearts. What a marvellous God He is!

2. Praise with Gratitude

God is mighty. God is caring. God is worthy of praise. God is able. God is loving and he is in control. There is nothing impossible for God, for all things are created by him. We need to kneel before him with grateful hearts for the 25 years of God's faithfulness as we celebrate the jubilee of our PMI national-level ministry.

3. Praise Him by Lifting our Hands

Our glory lies in praising him. Praise God often for his blessings in our lives. The bigger the blessing, the longer we should praise him. I believe it is a mistake if we pray for something for 10 years and then thank him only for 10 minutes. Even at the time of difficulties, we need to learn to praise him

by lifting our hands. Every phase of our lives, we need to say, 'Thank you, Jesus'.



Sr Lini Sheeja MSC
Chief Editor

4. Praise Openly

Let the world know how good God has been to you. Take every opportunity to mention God's name wherever you are. I had suffered from migraine for the past 17 years and the merciful Lord healed me of that when I was attending a retreat in Attapadi, Palakkad, Kerala. He also healed me of my multiple goitres for which I was advised to go for immediate surgery. And I am no longer under medication. Give Him glory!

5. Praise Him with Singing

Our glory lies in praising him. Jesus is the Lord of all the earth and king of the entire nation. Praising him with words alone would not be sufficient, but rather let us sing and praise him as we count our daily miracles and blessings

6. Praise Him for all the Talents

Talent is God-given. He has blessed us and he continues to bless us. Every second is a blessing and every breath we take is a miracle. When we stand before God at the end of our lives, we would hope that we do not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, 'We used everything you gave us'. Let us use all our gifts and talents only for his glory.

7. Praise Humbly by Realizing

God's blessings should humble you. "Why would God bless me this way? Who am I? I am not worthy." He has called this sinner to serve the last, the lost and the least. Out of his goodness, he has called us into this ministry. He loves us, protects us, embraces us, cares for us. How excellent his name is in all the earth! Heaven and earth belong to him alone!

Wishing you a Merry Christmas surrounded by your precious family, and many blessings for the coming year 2020

Count Your Daily Miracles



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

The story of Prison Ministry India is a saga of Divine Providence, it is an epic of innumerable miracles. PMI National Level Ministry Jubilee is the right time to count the miracles that came our way while serving prisoners. I experienced hundreds of miracles and blessings in my prison ministry and I am sure you did too. You can find some of them in my first book on PMI - *Saga of Divine Providence*. By counting the daily miracles as often as possible, we become enthusiastic about transforming our struggles into blessings instead of crying or complaining about them. Writing, sharing, reading and discussing our daily blessings stimulates and enhances the love of God, trust in God, and multiplies our faith. This article illustrates the significance of writing and sharing the unforgettable miracles in the history of PMI.

The First Great Miracle

The first great miracle in the history of PMI which I can never forget is in association with the first all-Kerala Prison Pilgrimage in 1986. We were at St Thomas Apostolic Seminary doing our theological studies. We prepared for this pilgrimage in all the ways possible except for the financial aspect. We fasted and prayed for six months for the pilgrimage, wrote songs and tuned them, scripted street plays and practised, collected books, copies of the Bible and printed booklets. Immediately after the final exam, we had to begin the pilgrimage. As exams approached, only one thing disturbed us - money for travelling and food. To our surprise, every day during the exam, the postman called and gave me money orders

from unknown people from far away countries such as Oman, Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, etc. The Kerala charismatic prayer group members sent money orders to us for the success of the prison pilgrimage. This miracle not only helped us financially but also strengthened our faith and provided us with the deeper conviction that this is a ministry close to the heart of Jesus.

Lavy Pinto

In August 2019, immediately after taking charge as the PMI national coordinator, I thought of putting together a small video clip on PMI as part of our jubilee celebration. During those days, God was inspiring a person far away and unknown to me to prepare not simply a video clip but a documentary film on Prison Ministry India. His name was Captain Lavy Pinto and he hailed from Mumbai. One day, during his leisure he was reading *Prison Voice*, given by his wife - Mrs Andrea Pinto, who was a PMI volunteer in Mumbai. He was reading the February issue of *Prison Voice*. The transformation story of Mr Sasi touched him. He thought of how many good deeds were done by the Catholic Church but the media would always convey a negative image of the Church. He was inspired to do a documentary film on prison ministry and thereby to announce to the whole world that the Church was doing great things for the incarcerated. Immediately, he emailed me informing his interest to make a documentary film. On reading the email, I thought it might cost a lot of money and replied that though we would like to have a documentary film

made since we did not have sufficient funds, we did not want this now. On 26 September 2019, when we went to see the PMI land at Karjat near Lonavala, Pune, he came to meet me. He said that he would do the documentary free of cost. We agreed to proceed with the production of the PMI documentary film.

The final outcome is an excellent documentary of 45 minutes which we released on 19 November 2019 during the PMI national-level jubilee celebration. While I highly appreciate and thank Mr Lavy Pinto and team, I cannot but see the divine providence behind this amazing love and caring. Let us count PMI miracles and praise and thank the Lord of PMI in this jubilee time. Proclaiming God's wonders in our ministry is the best gift that you could ever give to your inner-self and to PMI. "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!"

Count Your Daily Miracles

God brings innumerable miracles every day in our ministry for the lost. When we focus on our daily miracles, we become energetic, enthusiastic, filled with joy, love, hope and faith. What constitutes a "miracle" for you? Just gaining permission to enter the prison is a miracle. A prisoner shedding tears when we speak *is a miracle*. Counting our daily miracles raises in us vibrations and inspiration and reduces resistance and pessimism. If, on the contrary, we focus on the negative things that happen daily, it would raise our resistance and pessimism. Broadcasting the daily miracles brings forth more miracles. It becomes an inspiration to many. It develops faith, love and trust in the Lord and our life becomes a saga of divine providence. *Glorifying Jesus by proclaiming the daily miracles is the PMI tradition and lifestyle. Let our life be a psalm – praising and thanking the Lord for the daily miracles.*

PMI Silver Jubilee

Most cordially I thank each and every one of the PMI volunteers for your active participation in the

PMI national-level Silver Jubilee celebrations held on 19 November 2019 at St Joseph's Auditorium, Bengaluru. In a special way, I most warmly thank Most Rev Peter Machado, the archbishop of Bengaluru, Most Rev Allwyn D'Silva, the PMI chairman, Most Rev Peter Remigius, the former PMI chairman, Mar Jose Pulickal, the Kanjirappally auxiliary bishop for their esteemed presence and inspiring messages. I highly appreciate the powerful message of Rev Fr Varghese Kariperry, the PMI cofounder, the valuable presence of former national coordinators, the regional, state, diocesan, zonal and unit coordinators, the rehabilitation centre directors and directresses, the seminary directors and volunteers from all over India. My highest appreciation and most warm thanks to the Bengaluru PMI Unit, Kolbe Home, Jeevodaya, Premodaya and national office staff.

RRDC

The Jubilee brought forth countless blessings to PMI. One of the most significant blessings is RRDC – Reformative, Research and Documentation Centre, the Jubilee Memorial Institute which was blessed on 20 November 2019 by Most Rev Allwyn D'Silva and inaugurated by Most Rev Peter Remigius. Relaunching of *Reformative Explorations* – A Psycho-Spiritual and Crimino-Social Quarterly on Reformation and Rehabilitation was one of the long-cherished PMI dreams. Another Jubilee blessing is Rev Fr George Kalassery VC who will soon take charge as the director of RRDC. As soon as the construction completes, we will commence the PMI training programs in RRDC. Yet another Jubilee blessing is Rev Fr David Charles MSC, the newly appointed north regional coordinator in Delhi. Let us gratefully remember all the above-mentioned and other untold PMI miracles, blessings and benedictions from the Lord and constantly thank him by reciting the PMI mantra *Thank You, Jesus*.

"I wish all PMI family members the choicest blessings of Christmas and New Year. May the Child Jesus in the manger enlighten you to see the face of Jesus in prisoners"

BLESSING - A SIGN OF GOD'S LOVE



Sr. Marina
PMI Volunteer, Pune

To make our lives and ministry a blessing, we need to make two critical choices: count our blessings and speak out about our blessings. It is not enough, however, to recognize and count our blessings. We have to say them, too. Acknowledge them, speak them. That is why the ancient sages urged us to say 100 blessings a day. Spoken blessings can bring hope, encouragement, and direction to our families, friends, and others. Many people experience a deepening of their relationships and spiritual encouragement as they discover the power of spoken blessings. The Celebration of the Silver Jubilee of PMI at the national level was such an experience where many blessings were spoken during the adoration, Eucharistic Celebration and even during the talks. Thus, spoken blessings became a positive biblical statement that invoked the blessings of God in the lives of many. The power of spoken blessings comes from God, who Himself "hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3).

The next important step would be to minister to a victim, a downtrodden person, a person drowned in sorrows or someone with hatred and personalize the biblical blessings of God and to apply the basic truths recorded in the verses of the Holy Bible. For example, in II Corinthians 1:3, the Apostle Paul declared, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and God of all comfort." These words may be used to bless someone who is enduring deep sorrow.

The next most important point concerning blessings is to discern how to bless someone effectively through intense prayer. It often takes qualitative time and constant effort to discover appropriate blessings. We can ask the Lord to make us attentive to his spirit as we read the holy scripture, discerning the inspirations of the spirit, the words, the phrases that he wants us to share with someone. As we learn what God wants to accomplish in and through the Prison Ministry, we begin to affirm God's will by declaring the biblical goal in our spoken blessings. Imagine if all the PMI volunteers were

to count the blessings of God showered upon the Ministry; I think it would immediately extend the horizon of the Prison Ministry India. Let us all make it a reality by counting our blessings one-by-one. And by doing so, it will be like magic; it will raise the power and vitality of our mission by finding the one lost sheep and transforming the ultimate goal of our mission.

Furthermore, sacrifice is a joy and a blessing. I think our PMI volunteers sacrifice a lot in terms of time, finance, effort and otherwise, and thus become more and more eligible for God's blessings. I think that the very first blessing coming from sacrifice is the joy that we feel when we pay the price. Perhaps the very thought that the sacrifice itself could be a blessing becomes a blessing. When we have that kind of thought and feel the joy, we have received a blessing already.

Dear PMI friends, let us make some more sacrifices and enjoy the happiness and blessings from the sacrifice itself. Sacrifice brings forth the blessings of heaven. If we are caring, if we are charitable, if we are obedient to God and follow his prophets, our sacrifices will bring forth the blessings of heaven. There can be no perfect and greater sacrifice than the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross and this sacrifice of Jesus Christ has become the source of blessings to generations. Blessing is also an opportunity to acknowledge the things that can be accomplished through the blessings of God in our ministry. The words of the Holy Scripture assure us

that God will bless us and make us great through our ministry.

(Genesis 12: 2-3 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you.") If we deeply believe this verse from the book of Genesis, we will experience that from the calling of Abram to this day, God has always blessed us so that we may be a blessing to those who do not know his grace, mercy and salvation. What a privilege it is to be a PMI volunteer, to be a carrier of the blessings of mercy and salvation to the people. Let us remember that we do not earn God's blessings because he has already blessed us but we can place ourselves in a position to receive them. When we express a blessing that means we are bestowing a wish that others may also experience the favour of God. God's blessings are meant to give us hope; let us then acquire greater hope for our ministry by counting our blessings and naming them. Let us count our personal blessings and not the blessings of someone else. We often envy people when we do not count our personal blessings and ponder on the blessings of others. In order to make Prison Ministry fruitful, effective and successful, it is vital that we enter into the closure of our being and count each and every blessing that God has given us in our personal lives and then our inner being will surprise us by revealing what the Good Lord has done in our lives. Let us then keep on counting the blessings of God.

Blessing - To Be Thanked for!



Sr. Adele SCCG
National Executive Member

We are called on to reflect on the good things in our lives and to be grateful for them today. Every blessing comes from the author of life. It is authored by the Almighty God who said in Jeremiah (29:11), "I know what plans I have in mind for you, Yahweh declares, plan for peace, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." God fulfils his plan in the lives of everyone at a time when he thinks best. Two brothers desiring to come together for a period of prayer at Vadavathoor Seminary was not mere chance. The Almighty had accomplished his eternal plan in the lives of Br Verghese Karipperry and Fr Francis Kodiyan of redeeming the lost sheep through them. The charism to start a ministry for the welfare of the suffering brethren behind the bars was granted because in his eternal plan for his children, he wanted everyone to be saved. That is why the Lord invited you and me to continue in our lives, the life of Christ the Redeemer, and to bring solace to those languishing in prison, to give them the touch of Christ's love and compassion, and help them to turn from darkness to light.

The call I received from God from my childhood onwards was to carry God's light of truth to those who live in the darkness of error. By receiving permission to serve the inmates of prison, I felt greatly blessed because it opened up before me new opportunities to render corporal and spiritual work of mercy among the most needful brothers and sisters behind the bars. I consider this as grace and great blessing granted to me to stand before the Lord

and to prepare his ways. Yes, it opened the way to enlighten those who live in the valley of darkness and in the shadow of death and to gradually direct their feet in the ways of peace. The Good Lord so willed that the authorities in the prison were cooperative whenever we planned programmes for the reformation and development of inmates.

Several youths in prison were blessed through the classes in English we conducted for the benefit of those who desired to study, grow and acquire degrees. Though I started with a small group who desired to learn spoken English, they gradually longed to further their education in the fields of arts, journalism and public administration. I had the joy of watching the growth of about 14 youth in prison who graduated while a few of them also became postgraduates. In the beginning, I succeeded in getting guest lecturers from outside the prison. Later, several educated prisoners came forward to give coaching in various subjects. Several brethren received training in home-nursing, electrical training as well as in beauticians' course.

We were never left without needed assistance from people of goodwill for taking up new initiatives and developmental programmes in prison. Generous volunteers came forward to organize physical training of the youth in prison. Mr Elvis Joseph offered his services and provided all the materials including uniforms, and outfits for the players so that we could form a cricket team as well as a football team. These activities created great self-confidence

Time to Praise

in the inmates and thus their latent talents were brought out. He trained the youth in the prison so well that they defeated the opposing teams drawn from good colleges of Bangalore. I recall with joy the formation and activities of the two teams - "God loves me team" and the "Emmanuel team."

Every erring brother or sister in prison, when touched by a loving God, experiences a sense of their own unworthiness and desire to come out of their sinful past and to change their way of looking at the self and others. Thus, they sincerely desire to begin a new life and gradually open their minds to receiving help in the form of counselling and prayer. I consider it a great blessing, the cooperation that we, volunteers, receive from the prison authorities in giving value education to the inmates and assisting them in the process of transformation.

We, the volunteers, cannot transform any person unless he/she experiences the light of the Holy Spirit. Blessings come into the life of a person when they, like Saul, realize that the path they followed so far was not the right one and they need to take a U-turn in their life. I can say that persons who never experienced love and acceptance in their life undergo a gradual change from within when they experience unconditional acceptance and love from the volunteers. When they taste the love of the forgiving God, they attain peace of mind and heart. What greater blessing can we desire than the transformation and redemption of an erring prisoner who was living in the darkness of crime, becomes a torchbearer and becomes an instrument of change in the society by his/her life witness? God granted me the grace to see several persons who shed tears of repentance and questioned themselves, "Why did I go far away from my creator and also from my family? Their only cry is, "Will you give me a chance to live again, and **to begin a new life?**

The whole of my life until I breathe my last breath, I desire to be able to carry God's love and grace to persons who are hungry and thirsty to begin a new life after living

for years in the darkness of sin. "The harvest is rich, but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to do the harvesting." (Luke 10:2)

Inside the Prison



Rajendra Dushing
Aurangabad unit

Inside the prison, lonely at night,
None we can find, with love in their sight.
I am waiting anxiously, that letter no one
will write.
I was thinking about the people, who were
so close as they might.
I am sitting here alone, nothing to do,
Trying to figure out, who is who.
I am finding that, hearts are made of stone,
Realizing that, I am all alone.
I am awaiting, for the visit that never takes
place,
From so-called family and friends, who have
forgotten my face.
I am wondering why time seems to move so...
My every dream, I have no place to go...
But my attachment to this life like hell,
People who are interested in working for
person like me in cell.
Rays of hope brings Prison Ministry India,
Thousands and thousands of inmates' soul,
they have touched kinda!

Be a BLESSING



Sr. Melissa D'Souza FMA

“Whenever you did it to one of the least of my brothers and sisters you did it to me”, said Jesus. One of these ‘least members’ is our brethren behind the bars. The Church also gives us this mandate as one of the Corporal Works of mercy. Many of those behind the bars are there as a result of a judgment by a criminal-justice system that works towards justice. Yet, it is sad that there are many who are innocent too. Looking at things from a Christian perspective, we realize that even the prisoner guilty of the most awful crime is still created in God’s image and is loved by God no less than God loves you or me. PMI is thus a wonderful way of reaching out to these ‘least’ brethren of ours. We PMI volunteers feel it a privilege to visit the prison on a weekly/monthly basis. We use this opportunity to counsel, to proclaim God’s Word, help bring about repentance and conversion of heart and also encourage depressed minds. We also have some lighter moments with them through activities like the singing of action songs, games, sharing of stories etc. We consider this ministry a big blessing as we are able to reach out to the less fortunate and take part in Jesus’ own ministry which we find in Lk 4:18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.”

Along with the protection of society from truly unsafe individuals, one goal of imprisonment should always be rehabilitation so that the ‘lost’ can be ‘found’ and restored to a right relationship with God and others. And this is what we PMI volunteers have successfully managed to do with a few of the inmates. We work towards their rehabilitation, obtaining jobs, a place to stay, an opportunity to study and pursue their dreams. In a large number of cases, the PMI volunteers visit the families of the inmates and speak to them about accepting the prisoner back with an open heart and mind.

We feel delighted that in many of the states of India, we PMI volunteers, are allowed to celebrate the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist and have the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. This is a moment of grace and blessing not only for them but also for us. We are able to convey the message of God’s infinite love and mercy to them, who are in most need of it. What makes us exceptionally happy is that people of other faiths too come to spend time with Jesus and experience his peace and mercy. At times they share their testimonies of how Jesus has touched their lives; which serves to strengthen our faith.

Various feast days and national days are celebrated with the inmates. This serves as a further blessing because through these celebrations we bring in other groups inside the

jail. This spreads the message of mercy for the weak and makes them realize how fortunate they really are. Groups come in with many goodies and gifts and help spread joy among the inmates. Various health camps, coaching classes, tournaments etc. are held within the confines of the prison. This also helps them to use their talents and abilities to the best of their capacity. Jack Hyles has wonderfully said, "The greatest blessing in the whole world is being a blessing". Recognizing God's abundant blessings on each of us, we, the PMI volunteers, strive to be a blessing to the inmates of the various prisons we visit.

Working with the brethren behind bars is a special call for PMI volunteers. We work with

the broken-hearted with love, patience and compassion giving our whole self, expecting nothing in return and this gives us inner peace and joy. In this present age, no one wants to serve but expect to be served. This quality of serving our brethren behind the bars sets apart all the PMI volunteers. And 'joy' and 'fulfilment' is our reward.

Meetings held at different levels, help build our circle of friends and makes life more joyous and meaningful. Being a PMI volunteer is thus, a very precious gift given to us, a gift we indeed treasure. May the Lord Jesus help us to truly be his channels of love to the downtrodden and in particular to those behind the bars.

Voice of the **PRISONER**

Lord I will thank you with all my heart. I will tell of your great work, I rejoice, Praise you O, my powerful God. I sing to you with great love and thankful heart.

My name is Promod, resident of Hanumangadh, Rajasthan. At the age of 12, I was diagnosed with blood cancer. We went to some of the top hospitals of India for treatment, even tried Ayurveda medicines. But it was all of no use. Every month I needed up to 3-4 units of blood. Thus, we ended up spending all of my father's money. My father begged financial help from my relatives but nobody helped, saying bluntly that it was useless to spend

any more money on me. Seeing my physical condition many thought that I would not survive, except for my mother, who strongly believed that one day her son would surely be well again.

Meanwhile, I was jailed on the charge of attempting to kill someone. I was eighteen-and-a-half-years old then and was treated in one of the hospitals of Bikaner which referred me to Sawai Mansingh Hospital of Jaipur. This is one of the biggest hospitals here. The very first day I went there, the doctor referred me to AIMS Hospital, Delhi, and was saying that I could not be treated there. So, for almost 8 months I was without



Healing Testimony

any treatment there. I waited for the much-needed permission from Delhi, Rajasthan, and the Director-General (Prisons). Without their permission, I could not go to Delhi, AIMS for further treatment. Then on 27 Jan 2017, I was granted permission and came to Tihar Jail. From that time, I am being treated at AIMS. Now I am 22-years old. For the past 10 years, there was no improvement, yet I was alive. The doctors were surprised at this.

One day, 2 nuns came with my brother Charles to see me and pray with me. Till that time, I knew nothing about Jesus Christ. I was born in a Hindu family. In the Tihar Jail, my brother Charles, while visiting me, asked me to go to a church. I told him that I did not know where the church was. One Sunday, Charles gave me a Bible and took me to a church, even though I did not want to. There I was touched to see all the people present praying for me. That day I did like going to church. Then, after that day, every Sunday I would go to church and also started reading the Bible; over time, I read it in full.

Once during a Sunday Church service, I saw some people receiving the Holy Communion. Then once, without thinking, I too received it. The next day, Charles came and told me that they wanted to stop me from receiving the Holy Communion since I was not baptized, but I just could not. Later Charles asked me to read Jn (6: 51-57), Mat (26: 28-29), Mk (14: 22-24), Lk (22: 9-20), 1 Cor (11:23-25). After reading these passages I realized that I had received the body and blood of Jesus Christ. After

this, for 2 months I kept going to church. In fact, I looked forward to it. Sometimes I used to be very sad, I used to cry. One day, I saw a nun and started crying thinking that now that I was allowed to go out of jail and apply for parole, I had no money for it. I had spent all my money on my treatment, and my family and my relatives had left me. Then I heard in my heart, "Increase your faith, rejoice." I have not told anyone about this before.

One day a priest and a nun came to talk to us in jail, I went to see and hear them. That day they gave the Holy Communion. Some received it. I was sitting there, I too got up and received it. I thought it was like the prasad given in our temples since I was a Hindu.

My medical report came, the doctors did not believe it. Thrice he got it checked. Then he told me that henceforth I need not take the blood transfusion. Now it has been about three months since I have had any blood transfusion. Then, on 19 March 2017, I went to the AIIMS hospital. There the doctor said that it is about 80% sure that I would be well again. I could not believe it. Out of these ten years, for three-and-a-half-years, I was in jail and alive... I found it hard to believe but it was true. It is all because God was blessing me... Ps. (3:12) "I will sing to the Lord." It is Jesus, who has made me well again. Ps. (16: 12) "My soul glorifies the Lord. Alleluia, Alleluia..... Because for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours....."

Thanks to Jesus who is the Healer.....



You are Gracious!

We live in a country famous for its rich heritage and culture, with a population of around 1.3 billion, 29 states, 1652 different languages spoken in different parts, GDP of 2.6 Lakh crores USD (2017) and where around 33 crore god and goddesses are worshiped.

One question arises - what do we do with this rich culture, population, languages - where every 14 seconds a girl is raped? According to the NCRB (National Crime Record Bureau) Report 2016 there are 3,38,594 crimes reported against women. Out of that 38,947 (11.5 %) are rape cases and 2,167 are gang-rape cases. Conviction rate is increasing every year. The last analysis by NCRB in 2016 reports that this was around 25.5 %, which is much higher than in developed countries like the UK where it is 7%. On the streets or in the public transport, if a girl is travelling alone, whether it is boys, married men or even old-aged uncles, they will notice the girl or woman, look her up and down and will continue noticing her until she moves out of sight. And this is the mentality that men learn from their childhood; it is something we observe from our elders and this is not a good behaviour to hand down to our future generations. As it has been discussed in the Ten Commandments, "You shall not commit adultery".

If I talk about religious scriptures, in the Holy Bible, Proverbs 11:16 says, "A gracious woman gets honour". First Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Nanak Devji says, "So why call women bad? From her, kings



Abhishek Benjamin
PMI Volunteer, Punjab

are born." One of the famous men, Kabir Doha, says, "We should never rest our eyes on women". The normal human body can only bear 45 DEL units of pain, but women bear up to 57 DEL units of pain while giving birth to a child which is equal to 20 bones getting fractured at a time. Crimes happening against women were analysed and it was found to be 21 per hour in 2007 but it had increased up to 39 per hour in 2016. And now it is 2019. Who knows what the percentage is now?!

All of us must have heard and read about the gang rape of a 23-year-old on a public bus on 16 December 2012. After this incident, the government has established Fast Track Courts and Nirbhaya Fund was introduced as a special budget within the finances of state governments for victims of rape, so that the victims could avail of justice as fast as possible. However, this has not helped much. According to the latest report, state governments were not utilizing this fund for helping victims. There are so many cases that if I start discussing them, they would run beyond the scope of this article. If the government does not take action against these types of criminals, then the future of our country is indeed bleak! I would like to conclude with these beautiful lines, "If women were particular about men's characters, they would never get married at all" - George Bernard Shaw.

WE ARE ALL ON THE SAME BOAT



Fr Stanly MSC

Assistant National Coordinator

Christmas is a season of blessings, a season of grace, and a season of joy. Above all, it is a season of mercy. Because of his great love and tenderness, God the Father took the initiative to restore the lost relationship with humanity by giving human form to his only son. In the words of St. John, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn3:16). Because of this loving and merciful act of God, we are not only reunited with God in a father-child relationship but it has also taken away the darkness, fear and anxiety from us so as to make us the people of light and people of blessings. This gives us hope for a better life and the joy of grace.

As Pope Francis in his Apostolic Letter 'Admirabile Signum', would say, when we stand before the Christmas Crèche we are reminded of our childhood, eagerly waiting to set up the crèche. It also makes us conscious of the precious gift of faith that we received from our dear ones and pass on the same faith to the younger generation. We are bound by duty to share the faith and our expressions of faith to the next generation. There is an Irish custom of placing a lighted candle at the window on Christmas night. This is to indicate to Mary and Joseph that they are most welcome to their house. The youngest one in the house lights the candle and a girl child with the name Mary extinguishes the candle at the end of the day. This custom is followed even now. Passing on our traditional customs with its in-depth meaning to our children and grandchildren adds more value to our celebrations and add joy.

When we speak of Christmas, many things come to our mind. Like, Christmas tree, gifts,

crèche, manger, decorations, shepherds, angels and others. Christmas is not limited to these things alone. The true meaning of Christmas is above and beyond these. Christmas does not come from our departmental stores but beyond that. As Winston Churchill said, "Christmas is a season not only of rejoicing but of reflection." On Christmas day, Mary and Joseph continue to knock at our doors; will there be room for them in my house?

Once Steven Spielberg was asked a surprising question by an interviewer, "What do you think would God say to you when you meet him at last?" Spielberg responded, "I hope God would say to me thank you for listening." What a great answer! Mary listened, incarnation. Shepherds listened, blessed with the grace of worshipping the newborn king. Shepherds not only listened but shared the message.

Archbishop Fulton Sheen once went to visit a prison. In his usual dramatic fashion, to the room full of prisoners he said, "There is one difference between people like you and people like me." After a long pause, he said, 'You got caught.' That's it! Other than that, when it comes to the justice of God we are on the same boat. Today God is knocking at my door through the marginalized, unwanted, sidelined, hated and downtrodden. What is my personal response to that?

"God never gives someone a gift they are not capable of receiving. If he gives us the gift of Christmas, it is because we all have the ability to understand and receive it." Let us understand and receive the great gift from the Lord. By sharing that gift with others, let us have a meaningful joyous Christmas.



Christmas Trees and More...



Teena Antony PhD

Christmas means many things to us Christians. While we are supposed to think of the birth of Jesus Christ as the most important part of Christmas, I must confess, to me it is just one of the competing aspects that make Christmas special. It is the time to meet family, to break the advent fast with a good meal, to put up the Christmas tree, the Christmas star, to make the crib, to send paper Christmas cards to all the elders in the family, dig out all the sweaters and socks (which also adds to the charm of Christmas), sing carols with the neighbours, listen to old Christmas songs on the phone from the beginning of December, go for midnight mass and to fall asleep during the homily, give Christmas bonus to all the people who work in and around the home like the maid or the postman, and watch Christmas related movies to name a few.

One of the recent Christmas traditions is making fruit/plum cake. Yes, baking cakes is not really part of our family tradition. However, my grandmother lived with us. So, our family was sort of the locus of the loosely structured joint family (the modern joint family where physically people would be living in different places, even cities but would keep in touch and generally get involved in everything from what is to be cooked in a different house to the paint colour for the house!). Hence, we would receive many cakes from relatives, usually plum cakes. In fact, we started hating plum cakes. Then somewhere around the late 90s,

and early 2000s, people started bringing us chocolates and chocolate cakes. That was a welcome surprise. And now that I have started baking, I insist on gifting cakes to people whether they want it or not! Secretly, I think, I may be rebelling against having had to eat all those plum cakes and taking my revenge in a positive manner.

And surprisingly, neither is the Christmas tree. My father's family used to have a tree up during Easter, and not during Christmas. And my spousal family does not have the tradition of putting up a Christmas tree at all. So, it was after a lot of nagging and pleading that we (it was a joint family at that point) bought our first tabletop Christmas tree around 11-12 years ago. A few years down the line, those of us who had the tradition of putting up Christmas trees in our natal homes felt that the tree was a bit on the small side. We nagged and complained some more. Finally fed up with our nagging, one evening, my brother-in-law went out all alone and came home with a 7-foot Christmas tree. We were overjoyed, of course.

When we were kids, my mother used to make a list of prayers for us to recite/pray for all the 24 days leading up to Christmas. This was called building a spiritual crib for infant Jesus. There would be "Our Fathers", "Hail Marys", and other prayers, some of which had to be recited on particular days, the numbers and combinations differing on each day. Today, of course, we have

this at a more organized level with church WhatsApp groups forwarding different "Advent Calendars".

Sending Christmas cards was all the craze until the internet caught on. I still love to hand-make a card and send it to all the elders in my family and my spousal family. When I cannot make them, I buy and send them. Since very few people send Christmas cards anymore, my uncles and aunts are really appreciative of getting this written reminder that they are thought of with love and affection during the holiday season. While sending a Christmas message on the phone is immediate, it does not have the same magic and charm of an old-fashioned Christmas card.

And last of all, Christmas is best enjoyed when one attends a midnight mass. Now, many of the masses have been moved up to Christmas eve and celebrated as early as 8 pm. Earlier when midnight mass was strictly celebrated at midnight, it was a common sight to see people nodding off during the homily. Laughing and sniggering at the sleepers was another pastime for those who had the will power to stay awake. There would be processions, the lighting of candles, and the sharing of cakes after the mass. The enchantment and wonder when the crib is unveiled and the sweet voices raised in song and praise is the perfect ending to a season of giving and joy, then and now. May the Infant Jesus bless all of us this Christmas season!

Note to Prison Voice Contributors

We thank all the contributors for your inputs to *Prison Voice*. We would like to bring to your notice a few things that would make the publishing of your articles a seamless process for us, the printers and for you.

- a) Send in your articles, letters, commentaries, criticisms to: prisonvoice123@gmail.com.
- b) Take pictures with a camera or a camera on your phone, and not with the WhatsApp app. Send any pictures you want published via email at full resolution, and not through WhatsApp to maintain printable resolution of the image.
- c) Write your articles in English (India). This option is available in MS-Word in the Review tab, under Languages. Set the default language to English (India) since we follow different spellings and grammar rules here in India.
- d) The magazine needs to follow a uniform script and style, so any stylish fonts or bold font that you use may not be reproduced in the printed article.
- e) Give a subtitle to your title, which is different from the theme given for the month. Otherwise we would have 4-5 articles with the same title, with no way to distinguish among them. Any title we provide may not capture your vision.

Sr Lini Sheeja MSC
Chief Editor



Dear Sr. Lini,

The Peace of Christ!

I am a retired Auxiliary Bishop of Mumbai. For several years before my retirement, I was in charge of the Prison Ministry in the Mumbai Archdiocese.

Recently, I received the *Prison Voice* bulletin for November 2019. I had long since stopped reading the magazine. I would take it on arrival and put it along with the papers to be discarded and sold. The reason was that I found it dry, full of theoretical and heavy articles. At least that was my impression. This time I had some moments to spare and so I idly opened the first page and started reading. To my surprise, I found almost every article was a real-life story narrating some incident, practical and interesting. I could not put the magazine down and read it through and through at one sitting. It was also very inspiring.

I don't know when the magazine changed its format but please continue to fill it with real-life stories and experiences which are always very gripping.

I like your editorials.

Congrats to you and your team.

Affectionately and gratefully,

Bishop Bosco Penha

Em. Aux. Bishop

Archdiocese of Mumbai

Dear Editor,

Let me first convey my deep appreciation to the national coordinator, the national secretary and thousands of volunteers for their meritorious and wonderful service for the upliftment of the brethren behind the bars. *Prison Voice* magazine is an effective tool to communicate several realities about the incarcerated brethren. Every month I would eagerly wait for this magazine to read the wonderful work.

Every article penned down in this magazine is inspiring, informative and heart-warming; rich with biblical, theological and motivational messages. Every page starting from the editorial conveys different aspects of the reality of our suffering brethren behind the bars. It is a meritorious service that you try to heal the wounds of the broken humanity in their life's journey by giving them the compassionate love of the crucified Jesus.

I would like to express my admiration for the wonderful celebration of the PMI silver jubilee which was held on 19 November 2019. It was a great motivation and great success indeed. The wonderful coordination in the presentation was exemplary for all the participants. I pray for God's abundant blessings on all of you so that you may continue to bring solace and happiness to the suffering brethren.

Bro Dr Pius Kizhakkebhagam CMSF

Dean of Studies, Jyothi Sadan Scholasticate

Gathered for a Worthy Cause



Sr. Shanti Pulickal SCC
State Secretary, PMI Odisha

How good and pleasant it is when people gather together for a worthy cause! Well, this was the experience of the PMI volunteers of Odisha as they gathered together for the state conference at the Bishop's house, Rayagada diocese on 4 December 2019. The conference was enriched by the presence of the cofounder of PMI and the present national coordinator, Fr. Francis Kodiyan, the national secretary, Sr. Lini Sheeja MSC, and the regional co-ordinator, Fr. Wilfred Fernandes. The chairman, Bishop Aplanar Senapathy CM, Bishop of Rayagadarefresh was not present due to health reasons. But he was represented by the vicar general of Rayagada, Fr Shanti Chandan Pani.

Fr Timothy welcomed the honoured guests with words of joy and gratitude and the audience too responded by offering colourful bouquets of flowers. Prison ministry is rooted and founded in Jesus. We invoked his presence and blessings by lighting the oil-lamp and singing a bhajan.

Words of wisdom and encouragement from those in authority refresh us like a flowing stream. This is what we experienced as Fr Chandan, the VG of Rayagada diocese gave the presidential address. He appreciated the relentless services of some of the volunteers and promised his support in strengthening it at Rayagada. He found prison ministry

as the only commission with a visible and regular document which is the magazine *Prison Voice*. It expresses the voice and aspirations of the helpless ones in prisons and the way we reach out to them. He said he will support and recommend it to all institutions in his diocese.

If the spring is strong at its source there will be perennial water supply. The real source of PMI is Jesus. And we had the visible source with us in the person of Fr Francis Kodiyan MCBS, the co-founder and the present national coordinator. Before enriching us with his enlightened keynote address, he tried to create a rapport among the participants through a self-introduction by each person. Fr Francis Kodiyan was one of the invitees by Pope Francis for the conference on prison ministry, carried out in various continents all over the world. He said that a prison ministry in India was appreciated as the best. Pope Francis has given priority to "Integral Human Development" which comprises prison ministry, human trafficking, etc.

The methodology in PMI is to reach out as Jesus did to the last, the least and the lost. Odisha has 91 prisons but we have not reached out to even to one-fourth of them. Hence, there is an urgent need to strengthen this ministry in Odisha. "How shall we begin the ministry?" is a question

asked by many. From his vast experience in this field Fr. Kodyan suggested that cultural programmes like an orchestra, puppet show etc. could be the means through which we give the God experience and other experiences like fraternity, prayer, forgiveness, charity etc. which will lead to their renewal and transformation. Other areas of services are helping in bailing out innocent ones and those charged with petty crimes, providing legal and financial aid, service to prisoner's children, marriage settlement and rehabilitation of released prisoners. There is the pressing requirement of prayer groups for each of the 91 prisons and of entrusting each prison to one congregation or institution.

The Lord said to the prophet Jeremiah, "Do not say that you are too young but go to the people I send you to". This is what we felt when Sr. Lini Sheeja MSC, the national secretary PMI opened her speech with words of wisdom and knowledge. The cry of the prisoners is reaching out to the ears of God and he has chosen each of us to reach out to help them. She spoke about the 3 concepts about prisoners. The prisoner cries, "Give me one more chance". Those outside the prison respond, "Once a prisoner, you are always a prisoner". But Jesus says "I have come to seek out and save the lost." What about us? The cost of being a PMI volunteer is summarised in the 3 basic principles. They are: i) Inconvenience is our convenience ii) God's providence is our bank balance iii) Begging is our lifestyle. We may not get any appreciation or thanks but we are sure of the promise of Jesus in Mt (25:34), "Come, enter the kingdom prepared for you."

The source of our strength and energy is the Holy Eucharist. So, we gathered around

the altar for the mass with Fr Wilfred as the main celebrant. Each celebration brings the memory of what Jesus did at the last supper. Jesus took the bread gave thanks to God, broke it and gave it to others. At every Mass, Jesus takes each one of us, gives thanks to God, breaks us and sends us to the broken ones in the prisons to heal them and give them new life.

After lunch, Fr Wilfred chaired the session. He shared his experience in the ministry at Pune. He emphasised the need for keeping a good rapport with the prison authorities and other staff members. Fr Wilfred is the central regional coordinator of PMI which consists of WB, Odisha, MS, MP, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Goa, Bihar and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. At the general body meeting, the executive body members were elected.

After the tea break, the diocesan coordinators were requested to give their reports. Fr Ranjan gave the report of PMI for Rayagada diocese, Sr Shanti, that of Berhampur and Fr Timothy, of Sambalpur. Everyone congratulated them for their effort. The dioceses of Balasore, Cuttack Bhubaneswar and Rourkela were not represented.

Fr Ranjan proposed the vote of thanks to the honoured guests for enlightening us and rejuvenating us for the ministry work. He thanked Fr Timothy for organising it and everyone at the Bishop's house for making our stay a comfortable one.

With grateful hearts, we gathered together once again in the chapel for Adoration, to thank the Lord for the countless blessings we have received and praying for strength to continue this ministry.

Silver Years of **PRISON MINISTRY INDIA** *National Office*

420 volunteers of the Prison Ministry India (PMI), a voluntary organization under the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) working for the integral human development of prisoners gathered at St Joseph's Auditorium to praise and thank the God of the lost, least and the last on 19 November 2019. The Jubilee celebration began with the Eucharistic Adoration at 9.30 am and all the volunteers, with one heart and mind, gave praises and glory to God for all the blessings that were bestowed upon them in the past 25 years. Most Rev Dr Allwyn D'Silva, the PMI Chairman was the main celebrant of the Holy Eucharist. The concelebrants were Most Rev Dr Peter Remigius, the former PMI chairman, Most Rev Dr Jose Pulickal, the auxiliary bishop of Kanjirappally, Rev Dr Francis Kodiyan, the PMI national coordinator and PMI cofounder, Rev Fr Varghese Karippery, the PMI cofounder, Msgr Jayanathan and Msgr Francis, the Vicar generals of Bangalore Archdiocese. 58 priests from all the states of India concelebrated in the Holy Mass. Fr Varghese Karippery, in his homily, highlighted that unconditional and forgiving love is the golden key to the reformation and rehabilitation of prisoners.

PMI Silver Jubilee Cultural Program

Students from Homes for prisoners' children, such as Premodaya and Kolbe Home made the cultural program colourful by their dances and mimes. Most Rev Dr Peter Machado, in his benedictory address, highlighted the significance of documentation and research studies of prison visits and rehabilitation centres.

PMI Silver Jubilee Gathering

Rev Dr Francis Kodiyan, the PMI national coordinator, in his welcome address stated that PMI has 7000 volunteers, 5000 rehabilitated and reformed released prisoners, 850 units, 10 rehabilitation centres and 10 homes for prisoners' children. He added that the organization began in Kerala in

1986 and extended its ministry to all Indian states in 1994 and now with the silver jubilee will extend its ministry to Asian countries.

Most Rev Dr Allwyn D'Silva, the PMI chairman and the president of the Jubilee meeting emphasized the significance of visiting prisons and conveying the forgiving love of God to prisoners. He appreciated in the name of all the Indian bishops what PMI does for the release, reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners. Most Rev Dr Peter Remigius, former chairman of PMI, Most Rev Dr Jose Pulickal, auxiliary bishop of Kanjirappally, and Rev Fr Varghese Karippery, PMI Co-founder were felicitated. Sr Lini Sheeja MSC, the PMI national secretary proposed the vote of thanks.

Documentary Film Release

Most Rev Dr Allwyn D'Silva the PMI Chairman released the documentary film on Prison Ministry India produced and directed by Mr Lavy Pinto during the PMI Silver Jubilee Public Meeting.

Book Releasing

Two books written by Rev Dr Francis Kodiyan, *The Lost - An Eightfold Path for Prisoners' Transformation*; *Rainbow - The Theological Foundations of Prison Ministry India*; and *Reformative Explorations - A Psycho-Spiritual and Crimino-Social Quarterly on Reformation and Rehabilitation*, and the Silver Jubilee Souvenir were released.

Honorarium

The founding fathers, pioneers, national coordinators, all those who completed 25 years of service in this ministry, and all the national office staff in the past 25 years were remembered and honoured at this time with mementoes and certificates. All those who completed 14 years in the ministry were also honoured and presented with certificates.

COUNT YOUR REDEEMED

Family milestones are the perfect time for celebrations. And therefore, it was a great joy to come together in Bangalore for the Silver Jubilee celebrations of the Prison Ministry India, on 19 November 2019. The extremely creative and innovative countdown posted every day increased the anticipation of joyous fellowship and longing to be back as a family.

A beautifully decorated hall brought together a welcome reunion of smiles and testimonies of people from far and wide; about 420 volunteers from all over the city and the country. Over a delicious breakfast, we were ready for the festive events. This movement began before the Blessed Sacrament; and so, it was only fitting that the program for the day commenced with a Eucharistic Adoration. As we adored Jesus, the Saviour for the lost, least and the last, we praised and thanked our Father for his blessings lavished upon PMI over the last 25 years. We also brought before him the needs of the Prison Ministry in confident intercession. The Eucharist was celebrated by our national chairman, Bishop Dr Allwyn D'Silva, and concelebrated by Bishop Peter Remigius, our former chairman and a host of other bishops and priests who are an active part of the Prison Ministry in their regions. The Agustinian(OSA) Novices who led the entrance, danced gracefully, while the choir of nuns sang with gusto. Thank you Fr Varghese Karipery, our cofounder, for preaching about the unconditional love of the Father as the only way to prisoners. The sumptuous lunch that followed was another opportunity to meet, exchange mobile numbers, share fellowship; something I never tire of.

The next part of the celebrations was unique. Hosted by Sr. Lini, with her indomitable spirit, and Fr. Saby Mony, with his fine sense of humour and a great voice to match, kept us all attentive through a well-



Rowena

Maharashtra State Secretary

coordinated program. I truly was immensely appreciative of all the glorious past events we have to thank God for. The lamp was lit, a moment of silence for deceased volunteers, and the felicitations began. The founding fathers, pioneers, ex-national coordinators and those who had completed 25 years in this ministry were called, honoured and departed with mementoes and certificates. Likewise, those who had completed 14 years of voluntary service as well. A mime by the boys from our own Kolbe Home was not only interesting but also conveyed a beautiful message. Two books written by Fr Francis Kodiyan, and the Silver Jubilee Souvenir were released on this auspicious occasion. After a vote-of-thanks by Sr. Lini, the PMI anthem was sung by the Pune team. Everyone's delight is the unofficial closing ceremony of group pictures and selfies taken with volunteers from other states; these are the best takeaways, which make memories to last till the next celebration.

The next day also saw a most significant event, the blessing of the Research and Documentation Centre of Prison visits and Rehabilitation Homes under the PMI. Perhaps the first of its kind in the world, this newly constructed centre is an amazing witness to the power of God who makes all things possible for those who trust him. The real core of Prison Ministry is the faith-level ministry. It is a faith dance, with you, the Universe and the Heavenly Father. So, I learnt as I left Bangalore, that with faith, nothing is impossible for God. And I look to spread this message with my volunteers back home.

GLIMPSES FROM ExCo

Sr Lini Sheeja MSC
National Secretary PMI

The PMI national executive meeting was held on 20 November 2019 at the national office, Bangalore. The day began with Holy Mass at 7 am. The main celebrant was Most Rev Dr Peter Remigius, former PMI chairman. Most Rev Dr Bishop Allwyn D'Silva, the PMI chairman, Rev Dr Francis Kodiyan, the PMI national coordinator and all the PMI national executive priests concelebrated. After the Holy Mass, everyone went to the newly constructed RRDC - Reformative Research and Documentation Centre adjacent to Kolbe Home. Rev Dr Francis Kodiyan welcomed the guests. Most Rev Dr Peter Remigius inaugurated RRDC by cutting the ribbon. Most Rev Dr Allwyn D'Silva blessed the newly constructed jubilee memorial institute, RRDC.

After breakfast at 9.30 am the national executive meeting began with a prayer led by Sr Kokila from Delhi. Rev Dr Francis Kodiyan MCBS, the PMI national coordinator welcomed the members. Most Rev Dr Allwyn D'Silva, the PMI chairman delivered the presidential address. All the executive members introduced themselves. Sr Lini Sheeja MSC, PMI national secretary read out the report of the previous meeting after which Mr Jesuraja presented the financial report. Fr Francis Kodiyan divided the group into five and explained the questions to be discussed. Everyone went for the group discussions. After coffee break, the group secretaries presented the reports. Most Rev Dr Allwyn D'Silva was the moderator.

Fr Francis Kodiyan explained the future plans. It was decided that the next national convention shall be in Goa in 2022 and the theme shall be 'Reform to be Reintegrated' based on the message of the Holy Father Pope Francis during the International Conference on Prison Ministry held on 7-8 November 2019 at the Vatican. It was decided to propose to the CBCI to upgrade the PMI Desk at CBCI to the PMI CBCI Commission. It was decided that Full-timers' Training Program should be convened at the newly constructed RRDC in the month of April. It was decided to convene a retreat for PMI volunteers, and state coordinators' meet at the RRDC. Everyone was informed that the Sindhudurg diocese has offered us land and building to open a home for prisoners' children. State and regional conferences were scheduled to be convened in 2020. The appointment of north regional coordinator - Fr David Charles Muntode MSC - was conveyed to those present. The news of the national team reaching out to Maharashtra, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Kerala, Tamilnadu, and Odisha and strengthening the ministry by motivating the volunteers was conveyed to the members.

Cofounder, Fr Varghese Karipperry and former national coordinators spoke of their experiences regarding various matters for the betterment of the ministry. The concluding remarks were given by Bishop Allwyn D'Silva. Fr Stanly, PMI assistant national coordinator, proposed vote of thanks.

Great Relief and Peace Found



Walter Kamble

*Nashik Road, Lay representative,
PMI Central Region*

The Nashik Unit of Prison Ministry India conducted a programme for the children of imprisoned mothers. They were given sandals and a bathtub as requested by the jailor taking care of the women's cell. One baby did not have the proper facility for being bathed, so we donated the bathtub. You can see the picture of the cute baby sitting in the bath tub. The senior jailer has given us permission to talk to the women inmates on one-to-one basis. It was a moment when they could narrate their woes and express their anxieties to the women team members of the PMI Nashik Unit. It was told by some of the inmates that they found great relief



and peace in their hearts because they finally had someone to listen to them and also someone to silently comfort the ones who were just crying. The silence and the tears of these ill-fated sisters spoke a lot.





Not Only as a Government Employee But also as a Christian, I Did Prison Ministry

Fr Pasala Lahasthraya
AP State Coordinator

The Andhra Pradesh state general body meeting of Prison Ministry India was held on 29 November 2019 at Jeevasudha Pastoral Centre, Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh, presided over by His Excellency, Most Rev Dr Anthony Poola, Bishop of Kurnool and Chairman-Bishop of PMI under TCBC.

The AP state coordinator made a visual presentation on Prison Ministry India, and the Silver Jubilee messages of Rev Fr Francis Kodiyan and the chief guests by which all who came for the meeting learnt about the birth, foundation, growth, development and milestone (Silver Jubilee celebrations) of PMI. The inaugural address by the AP state coordinator started with Jesus' command, mentioned the uniqueness of AP state PMI, the vision and mission of PMI by quoting from the scriptures, teachings of saints and Pope Francis. He visualized the list, data, and statistics of prisons in the state.

The diocesan coordinators from Andhra Pradesh presented their reports, inclusive of their ministry, experiences, ideas, ideals and the challenges that they have been facing from the prison department. Some of the diocesan coordinators are new to the ministry and are zealous about and have plans for the ministry.



Mr Mesa Gnana Vara Prakash, Rtd DSP spoke about his ministry as a Catholic in the prison department. When he was DSP in Kadapa district, under his initiative, Catholic priests and nuns were invited for Prison Ministry, a chapel was built in the Central Prison at Kadapa, quarters for prisoners' families were built, organic farming was initiated, as were bakeries, petrol pumps, etc. In his speech, he said, "not only as a Government employee but also as a Christian, I did Prison Ministry." He said that for petty cases he used to pay bail-amount for poor prisoners to get released. He awakened and enlightened the participants with this enthusiastic message.

In the presidential address, Most Rev Dr Anthony Poola appreciated Fr Pasala Lahastraya, the AP state coordinator for the hard work of conducting and organizing the general body meeting within a short span of 6 months. He appreciated and admired the chief guest and the other distinguished guests, all the diocesan coordinators, executive members and volunteers for their report-presentation, sharing of experiences, suggestions and moreover for their active involvement and participation.



Five Innocent Christians Released in Jail in Orissa Released on Bail

New Delhi (Agenzia Fides) - The Supreme Court of India has decided to release on bail five Christians sentenced to life imprisonment, who have been in prison for 11 years, charged with the murder of the Hindu swami Laxmananda Saraswati in 2008. That murder, attributed to Christians by Hindu fundamentalists, triggered the sectarian violence in Kandhamal in 2008. The five innocent men are Bhaskar Sunamajhi, Buddhadev Nayak, Durjo Sunamajhi, Sanatan Badamajhi and Munda Badamajhi obtained bail from the Supreme Court after their bail applications had been postponed several times. In recent months the same court freed Gornath Chalanseth, and also to Bijaya Sanaseth. They had been in jail since 2008, with a life sentence handed down in 2013. Release on bail for the seven Christian was the result of a relentless effort by supporters, church authorities, human rights activists and prayers all over the country. Colin Gonsalves, lawyer and founder of the NGO "Human Rights Law Network", who leads a team of lawyers committed to defending the Christians of Kandhamal, told Fides: "We are happy that they were released on bail and can spend Christmas with their families". "This is a great victory for truth and justice for Kandhamal", commented to Agenzia Fides journalist Anto Akkara, author of the acclaimed investigative book "Who Killed

Swami Laxmamananda?" who, with a documented inquiry, exonerates Christians. "The question is not closed. For now there is only the provision of a release on bail, and after 11 years. Now the focus must be on the Supreme Court of Orissa, where an appeal process is underway. The innocent must be acquitted", emphasizes Akkara.

Akkara also launched an online petition in 2016 with the website www.release7innocents.com. Each online signature on the website generates four instant e-mails addressed to the Minister of Justice of India, the President of India, the Supreme Court of Orissa, the National Commission for Human Rights. Akkara also produced the documentary "Innocents Imprisoned" in 2018 on the tenth anniversary of the events in Kandhamal. Activist Akkara notes: "Only an independent investigation can reveal the political conspiracy behind Kandhamal's fraud that led to the murder of the 81-year-old Laxmanananda. This will open the way to identify and punish the real culprits and compensate the innocent", said Akkara. John Dayal, a human rights activist, told Fides: "Here the question of Christians and Pastors arrested or convicted on false charges of forced or fraudulent conversions begins". The murder of Laxmanananda and four other people in his Ashram in the Kandhamal district (August 23, 2008) was defined by the extremists of the Sangh Parivar as a "Christian conspiracy". The wave of violence against Christians in which 100 people were killed, created 56,000 homeless, while 300 churches and 6,000 Christian homes were ransacked and burned. (SD) (Agenzia Fides, 28/11/2019)

Source: Internet