Invest Pastoral Resources in the Spiritual Care of Prisoners (SC 59)
Christmas Celebration, Girls Care Centre, Kakkanad
Christmas Celebration, Government Care Home, Pune
Christmas Celebration, Jashpur Prison
Christmas Celebration, Kalapet Jail
Christmas Celebration, Gulbarga Prison
Christmas Celebration, Hassan Jail
Christmas Celebration, Khurai Jail
Christmas celebration, KGF
Christmas Celebration, High Security Prison, Thrissur
Christmas Celebration, Hmeichhia Lam Ve Thung
Christmas Celebration, Khurai Jail
Christmas Celebration, Kolbe Home, Bangalore
Christmas Celebration, Irinjalakuda Jail
Christmas Celebration, Jashpur
Christmas Celebration, Jharsuguda Jail
Christmas Celebration, Karunyashram, Thoppil
Christmas Celebration, Kottarakkara
Christmas Celebration, Kottayam District Jail
“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Mk 1,11)

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: Sarjapur Road
A/C No: 0416053000901419
IFSC Code: SIBL0000518

Email: prisonvoice123@gmail.com
nationalpmi2015@gmail.com
Website: www.prisonministryindia.org

CARE FOR PRISONERS

The Church’s spiritual tradition, basing itself on Christ’s own words (cf. Mt 25:36), has designated the visiting of prisoners as one of the corporal works of mercy. Prisoners have a particular need to be visited personally by the Lord in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Experiencing the closeness of the ecclesial community, sharing in the Eucharist and receiving holy communion at this difficult and painful time can surely contribute to the quality of a prisoner’s faith journey and to full social rehabilitation. Taking up the recommendation of the Synod, I ask Dioceses to do whatever is possible to ensure that sufficient pastoral resources are invested in the spiritual care of prisoners. (Sacramentum Caritatis 59).
Pope Francis writes a letter to Heads of State asking them to grant a pardon to prison inmates who “are held to be eligible to benefit from such a provision.” Pope Francis has asked for a “gesture of clemency” for prison inmates in the run-up to Christmas. In a letter addressed to all Heads of State, he invites them to make a symbolic gesture “towards our brothers and sisters who are deprived of their liberty and who are held eligible to benefit from such a provision”. “So that this time marked by tensions, injustice and conflicts may be opened to the grace that comes from the Lord.”

This is the motivation reported in a statement issued on Monday by the Director of the Vatican Press Office, Matteo Bruni.

Washing the feet of prisoners: “God always forgives”.

The request for clemency for prisoners has distant roots that go back to the Great Jubilee Year 2000 when St. Pope John Paul II asked the world’s rulers for a pardon for prisoners in the 11-page document for the Jubilee in Prisons. It was late June, a little over a week later, when on 9 July Pope John Paul II visited Rome’s Regina Coeli prison as part of the Jubilee of Prisoners, and in the name of Jesus who was “imprisoned, mocked, judged and condemned”, asked “the competent authorities” for a reduction of the sentence to allow prisoners to build a new life once out of prison.

Pope Benedict XVI – A Shepherd who Cared for the Incarcerated

December 8th is PMI Foundation Day as PMI was born on 8th December 1981 at St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Kottayam. Yes, it was Divine Providence that gave birth to PMI through the instrumentality of Fr Francis Kodiyan MCBS and Fr Varghese Karipperey which has now spread throughout India. We gratefully recall the wonderful ways in which God initiated His mission and vision to search, serve and save the brethren behind bars. The dedicated services of PMI founders, bishops, priests, religious, laity and volunteers in the past 41 years brought out unbelievable progress in PMI. Let’s continue our prayers for our founders, our brethren behind bars and for our volunteers.

Christmas Celebration

Prison is one of the last places, people think about during Christmas. Though corona virus still looms over us, Christmas behind bars is a reality. This year across the country, PMI chaplains and volunteers did their best to bring some measure of comfort and joy to the incarcerated men and women by hearing confessions, celebrating Holy Masses, cutting cakes and distributing gifts, etc. to thousands of brethren behind bars. We received Christmas celebration photos from more than two hundred prisons but could publish only a few more than hundred due to limited space. Please accept our hearty congratulations and immense thanks for visiting Jesus in the dungeon.

Pope Benedict XVI

It’s been a sad news that came to our ears that our former Pope Benedict XVI passed away on December 31, aged 95, at Vatican’s Mater Ecclesiae Monastery. He served as the 265th Pope from 2005 to 2013. In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation, Sacramentum Caritatis, he wrote, “The Church’s spiritual tradition, basing itself on Christ’s own words (cf. Mt 25:36), has designated the visiting of prisoners as one of the corporal works of mercy. Prisoners have a particular need to be visited personally by the Lord in the sacrament of the Eucharist... Taking up the recommendation of the Synod, I ask dioceses to do whatever is possible to ensure that sufficient pastoral resources are invested in the spiritual care of prisoners” (SC 59).

President Draupadi Murmu

On 26 November 2022 Ms Draupadi Murmu, the Honorable Indian President, drew attention to overcrowded prisons filled with large number of undertrials from tribals and scheduled castes. She recommended that the poor people languishing for years for petty crimes and minor offenses are to be released and thereby decongest prisons. She added that poor people who are in prisons do not even know the fundamental rights, the preamble, or the Constitution. Wish you all a happy Republic Day.
Oscar Wilde, the Irish poet and playwright who was a prisoner himself for a while said that prison walls are built with bricks of shame. His poem, The Ballad of Reading Gaol illustrates succinctly the agony, trauma, and misery undergone by prisoners. “Though I was a soul in pain, my pain I could not feel.” This innermost agony of the incarcerated unknown to the outside world leads to the most pressing problem of prisoners: self-alienation, capitulation to self-hate, and pervasive feelings of meaninglessness. We find this in its acute form among those prisoners who are condemned to death and confined to solitary dungeons. They are known as the unrepentant hardcore criminals like terrorists, serial killers, mafia dons, hired killers who are kept in high-security prisons.

PMI Special Task Forces

In 2019 Prison Ministry India launched a special ministry for their reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration known as PMI Special Task Forces. As secular special task forces of developed nations are highly professional, well trained, and multi-talented, PMI special task forces are also expected to be highly specialised, proficient, spiritually elevated and multifaceted. Fr Dominic Puthenpurackal’s new book PMI Special Task Forces illustrates well the role of PMI volunteers to empower the incarcerated and regain their lost dignity. This book which will be released during the 13 PMI National convention in Goa elucidates the history, mystery, methodology, spirituality and tactics of PMI Special task forces.

Empowering Prisoners

Among Karl Rahner’s four thousand books and articles, there is a relatively small and unnoticed piece on “The Prison Pastorate.” Rahner states that we must “read the words of Christ, his incredible, provocative, thrilling words” in Matthew 25: 34-40: “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was in prison, and you came to see me.” He argues that “in the prisoners entrusted to our pastoral care we find Christ our Lord; and in these prisoners we find ourselves, what we see in them being the concealed truth of our own situation.” PMI volunteers are prison pastors. As prison pastors we know that prisoners are powerless, weak and often desperate. This is truer with regard to the brethren condemned to death and those confined to solitary cells and high security prisons. As Psalm 82 illustrates, they are unable to do what they want and wish to do. It is the task of PMI volunteers to empower them, reinvigorate them and instil in them hope and life. “Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked” (Ps 82, 3-5). To empower the powerless brethren behind bars, first of all we need to be empowered and strengthened by Jesus Christ, the super-dynamic love-bomb. PMI Special task forces like the first disciples of Jesus who were electrified, empowered and enlightened by Jesus Christ, commit themselves to empower and transform the hardcore and staunch prisoners.

Theology of Empowerment

Meins G.S. Coetsier in his Theology, Empowerment, and Prison Ministry offers a new scholarly account of Karl Rahner’s theological anthropology and the prison pastorate seeks an antidote to the suffering and isolation of those incarcerated with the “theology of empowerment.” Drawing on prison ministry theorists and practitioners and on the experiences of Viktor Frankl, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Eddy Hilleum, he argues that Rahner’s views on prison ministry are significant and encouraging but limited regarding the needs and demands of 21st-century prison ministry. In a convincing, perceptive, and ground-breaking study, Coetsier goes beyond Rahner with ecumenical and interreligious perspectives, reminding us all of our human dignity, of meaning and transformation, of our liberation, creativity, hope and community.

Jesus the Man of Empowerment

Jesus Christ was a man of empowerment. He did this through his interactions with the marginalized, oppressed, and the physically challenged. He also gave His followers the authority and responsibility to do the same. When Christ interacted with the paralyzed, the blind, the outcast woman, one facing the death penalty, and the stigmatized minority, He left them all transformed and empowered. Those religiously unlearned followers willing to leave their working-class occupations found themselves empowered to preach, speak to evil spirits and heal the sick. Prison ministry is not only a service of compassion but also a mission of empowerment and enhancement. In this sense PMI volunteers shall be well-versed and acquainted with the significant elements of empowerment such as dignity, meaning, transformation, liberation, creativity, hope, and community which would enable us to develop a more contemporary and pastoral approach to prison ministry. Prison ministry thus becomes a mirror of Christian hope. It provides pastoral care for prisoners more than humans can do with their own abilities but with the help of God whose “power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine” (Eph 3:20). We do impossible and unbelievable things for the reformation and reintegration of prisoners with divine assistance and providence.

Conclusion

Prison Ministry India aims at empowerment of prisoners through the eightfold path of prisoners’ reformation trajectory such as reach-out, release, repentance, reconciliation, reformation, rehabilitation, reintegration and redemption. Through this process of empowerment, the incarcerated become liberated, redeemed and thus become children of God regaining their lost dignity, rights and privileges of the kingdom of God. “We had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found” (Lk 15,32).
**Why Do We Need New Jails? Draupadi Murmu, Indian President for our Brethren Behind Bars**

*These days I hear that we need to set up more jails. Why do we need them? If we are moving ahead as a society, if we are making progress, why do we need more jails? Is this development? Should we not be, in fact, closing down the existing ones?* asked President Draupadi Murmu at the National Law Day celebration organized by the Supreme Court in New Delhi on 26 November 2022. President Murmu’s questions had shaken all the judges and the leaders who heard her, as she strongly asked whether India is moving towards progress as a society with a plan to build more jails.

**President Speaks from Her Experience**

President Murmu, hails from the Santhali tribe in Uparbeda village in the Baidaposi area of Rairangpur in Odisha and she said, “It is important to know who ends up in jail”. She spoke emotively of her time as MLA from Odisha when she had a chance to visit all jails and see the condition of those inside who had absolutely no access to legal aid. She stated, “I visited all prisons across the state, at regular intervals. I was not asked to visit them. I did that of my own volition. I wanted to know who are these people, how they survive, what happens to them when in jail. They are those or the preamble or the Constitution. They are left in jail to languish for 10, 20, 30 years! In many cases the crime is as petty as having slapped another person. As custodians of prisoners, it is the judiciary that needs to keep a close check on the condition of prisoners and ensure their rights are not violated.”

**Plight of Incarcerated Tribals and Scheduled Castes**

She highlighted the plight of poor tribals of her home state Odisha besides Jharkhand, saying they remain incarcerated despite getting bail for lack of money to furnish the bail amount or arrange sureties. Departing from her written speech in English, Murmu had spoken in Hindi to urge the judiciary to do something for the poor tribals, noting those accused of serious offences walk out free but these poor inmates, who may have gone to jail for slapping someone, have to spend years on end before they are released. “I am leaving this issue to the judges here and the law minister. I am not saying anything more. I hope you understand what I have said and what I refrained from saying,” she added. President Murmu’s remark comes in the backdrop of the sharp exchange on this issue few weeks ago between Union Law Minister Kiren Rijiju and the Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud. Rijiju had made a case against the higher judiciary’s intervention in granting bail and said only trial courts ought to decide granting of bails. In response, the CJI said that higher courts are flooded with bail cases because of a “sense of fear” in the lower judiciary.

**Overcrowded Prisons**

According to the Prison Statistics India 2021, a report published by the Ministry of Home Affairs, between 2016-2021, the number of convicts in jails has decreased by 9.5 per cent whereas the number of undertrial inmates has increased by 45.8 per cent. With three out of four prisoners being undertrials, the problem of overcrowding of prisons is essentially an undertrial issue. As of December 31, 2021, around 80 per cent of prisoners were confined for periods up to a year. The report states that an overwhelming 95 per cent of undertrials released in 2021 were granted bail by courts while a mere 1.6 per cent were released on acquittal by court. It shows that the sluggish pace at which trial courts work to reach a final decision cannot keep up with the increasing number of undertrials. Over the past decade, the Supreme Court and high courts have, on multiple occasions, raised the issue of overcrowding and the need to decongest prison spaces across India. But much of the courts’ observations and directions have remained at the judicial level.
Decongestion of Prisons

Highlighting the plight of poor prisoners who languish in jails for years for petty offences with their family members unable to fight the legal battle due to penury, President Draupadi Murmu appealed to the judiciary to devise ways to help such undertrials come out of jail. She said those accused of serious offences enjoy freedom because they can afford to pursue various legal remedies but the poor undertrials, particularly from rural areas, have to spend many years in jail despite being involved in petty offences. Appealing to the judiciary to come to the rescue of such prisoners, she said after some time these people don’t want to come out of jail but steps are needed to be taken to impart them skills to learn their livelihood. “You are very knowledgeable, experienced and qualified judges. You have to think about it and you have to find a way out. People say more jails have to be built as there is overcrowding in jails. We are progressing so what is the need to build more jails? The number should be reduced. I am leaving it to you,” she said plainly to the judges. “The onus is on all of us to make the process of seeking justice affordable to all,” she continued.

Immediate Action after President’s Speech

Days after the emotional speech of President Draupadi Murmu flagging the plight of poor tribals languishing in jails in petty offences despite bail, the Supreme Court directed prison authorities across the country to provide details of such prisoners within 15 days to NALSA for formulating a national scheme for their release. Justice S K Kaul was among those seated on the dais with Chief Justice DY Chandrachud, when the president narrated her experience of meeting several undertrial prisoners as an MLA in her native Odisha and later as the governor of Jharkhand. A bench of Justices Kaul and Abhay S Oka directed the jail authorities to submit the details of such prisoners to the respective state governments which will forward the documents to the National Legal Service Authority within 15 days. The bench said the jail authorities will have to submit such details as the names of undertrial prisoners, charges against them, date of the bail order, what bail conditions were not met and how much time they have spent in jail after the bail order. Indian President Draupadi Murmu’s strong speech raised several crucial issues, the callousness of the bureaucracy, the overcrowding of prisons, the social identity of those languishing in prisons and prolonged pre-trial detention.

But what gave Jesus the strength to go forward? It was his certainty that the Father was with him. Even though in his heart there was the bitter sense of abandonment, Jesus knew that the Father loved him, and it was precisely this immense love, the Heavenly Father’s infinite mercy that consoled him. It was greater than the violence and contempt that surrounded him. Even though everyone despised him and no longer treated him like a man, Jesus, in his heart, had the firm assurance of being forever a son, the Son loved by God the Father.

This, dear friends, is the great gift that Jesus made us with his Way of the Cross: he revealed to us that God is infinite love, he is mercy, and he carries the weight of our sins to the end, so that we can rise again and be reconciled and find peace. Let us, too, then, not be afraid to make our “way of the cross”, to carry our cross together with Jesus. He is with us. And Mary, too, is with us, his and our Mother. She remains faithful also at the foot of our Cross, and prays for our resurrection because she firmly believes that, even on the darkest night, the last word is the light of the love of God.

With this hope, founded on faith, I wish that all of you live this coming Easter in the peace and joy that Christ won for us with his blood, and with deep affection I impart my Apostolic Blessing, cordially extending it to your families and loved ones.
The ‘Curse’ Becomes ‘a Blessing’!

Prison Ministry India volunteers are called to be messengers of Jesus, the Innocent Prisoner. The Crucified Jesus gives a powerful message for the volunteers to be lived and experienced, so that it can be transmitted to the inmates of the prisons. Dialysis, as we know, is the process of purifying the blood in our body. Likewise, the process of purifying our mind and our thoughts is called Thought Dialysis (Thought Purification). When our thoughts are pure and positive, we experience happiness. St. Paul tells us that we are called to be happy always (1 Thess 5.16).

It is not the reality but response to the reality that makes our Destiny. This wonderful method we get from the Crucified Lord. Before Christ, the Cross was the symbol of ‘Curse’ (Deut 21:23; Gal 3: 13). After Jesus the same Cross became the symbol of ‘Blessing’. This is called Thought Dialysis. The positive attitude of Jesus turned the cross, a symbol of Curse into a ‘Symbol of Blessing’. Our attitudinal change is very important to make our life joyful. The three attitudes of Jesus on the cross made it a ‘Symbol of Blessing’. In our daily life too, this same methodology of maintaining a positive attitude can generate happiness and peace on us here on earth.

Jesus applied three Basic Positive Attitudes when He was crucified. They are: Forgiveness, Other-orientedness and Faith. When Jesus was crucified, Crucifixion was a form of Capital punishment at that time), first of all He uttered the words of positive attitude, Forgiveness. ‘Father, forgive them because they do not know what they are doing’ (Luke 23: 34). Forgiveness is a powerful spiritual operation or Thought Dialysis to remove a great block to pave the way for the flow of creative and positive energy in our whole life. Forgiveness purifies and energizes us (Mt 5:44-45, 5:23-24, Mt 6: 14-15). How can we use this method? Our good thoughts lead to good deeds (Mt 12:35).

We make use of the Imagination Method for the purification of our mind. Imagination in our mind works in our body. That is what we see in the life of the Bleeding Woman (Mt 9:21). She imagined positively; as a result she got Healing (Mk 5: 34). I stand near Jesus and the person (whom I hate) stands on the other side of Jesus. Jesus, who made the greatest act of forgiveness to the world, helps me then to ask pardon from the concerned person. He gives pardon to me. He asks pardon from me. Then I give pardon to him. I wash all the impurities in the precious blood of Jesus. Jesus blesses both of us. We feel the heaviness of mind gone. Please experiment, experience and enjoy for yourself. The Curse becomes a Blessing!

The Second positive attitude is Other-orientedness (concern towards others) Lk 23:43. Jesus told the thief at his right-hand, “Today you will be with me in paradise” (Lk 23: 43). Even at the last moment Jesus had concern for others. One of our main problems is selfishness. Our concern is often our self only. We often think only about our wellbeing and the happiness of our family members. We have to come out of our selfish world. The whole cosmos is created in an inter-dependent way. Who can say, I can live by myself. The oxygen which we breathe in, we get from the plants and trees whilst the carbon dioxide, which we breathe out, is food for plants and trees. We all are dependent on this wonderful co-operative system. As we get our life force from outside, so we have to show concern for others. When we begin to come out of our self and our family, and start caring for the needy in the world, we experience real joy and happiness in our life. Our many problems will disappear. The Curse becomes a Blessing!

The Third Positive Attitude is Faith (Lk 23: 46). From the cross, Jesus uttered the words, ‘Father, into thy hands, I submit my life’ (Lk 23: 46). This is real faith which is filled with confidence. Faith and confidence lead to happiness and joy in one’s life. When we use only our reason, anxieties and worries follow. It is like a single dance, which means we alone work out remedies for our problems with our own reason and hence we fail, leading to anxieties and tensions. If we use Faith in the face of our problems and difficulties, automatically we shall see possibilities. When reason sees blocks and difficulties, Faith sees possibilities. Faith is a group dance. In faith I myself, cosmos and God work together like a group dance to solve the problems and difficulties that confront us. Change your CD of reason to CD of faith, and we become calm and peaceful.

The bleeding woman used reason for 12 years. She consulted many doctors and spent her whole wealth on them but the disease only became more severe. When she heard about Jesus, she believed in Him and said to herself, ‘if only I can touch the garment of Jesus, I will be healed. It became her firm belief. This powerful faith worked out in her life. She touched the garment of Jesus and got healed. Jesus told her, ‘Daughter, your faith has saved you, go in peace and get free from your sickness’ (Mk 5: 34). Faith Heals! The Curse becomes a Blessing! For Jesus, full confidence and faith in the Father, became a Blessing!

I invite Prison Ministry India volunteers to experiment this Thought Dialysis Technique for yourselves and experience real joy and happiness in your life. If it is positive, it should be communicated to the brethren who are behind the bars. Even though they are in prison, they will be mentally released from the bondages of hatred, anxiety, tension and dejection. They can experience real healing and enjoy life. The Innocent Prisoner Jesus, teaches us this great lesson: it is Not the Reality but our Response to the Reality that makes our Destiny!
Dear Friends,

I am pleased to welcome you as you gather in Rome for the Twelfth World Congress of the International Commission of Catholic Prison Pastoral Care. I thank your President, Doctor Christian Kuhn, for the kind words expressed on behalf of the Executive Board of the Commission.

The theme of your Congress this year, “Discovering the Face of Christ in Every Prisoner” (Mt 25:36), aptly portrays your ministry as a vivid encounter with the Lord. Indeed, in Christ the “love of God and love of neighbour have become one”, so that “in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in him…God” (Deus Caritas Est, 15).

Your ministry requires much patience and perseverance. Not infrequently there are disappointments and frustrations. Strengthening the bonds that unite you with your bishops will enable you to find the support and guidance you need to raise awareness of your vital mission. Indeed, this ministry within the local Christian community will encourage others to join you in performing corporal works of mercy, thus enriching the ecclesial life of the diocese. Likewise, it will help to draw those whom you serve into the heart of the universal Church, especially through their regular participation in the celebration of the sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist (cf. Sacramentum Caritatis, 59).

Prisoners easily can be overwhelmed by feelings of isolation, shame and rejection that threaten to shatter their hopes and aspirations for the future. Within this context, chaplains and their collaborators are called to be heralds of God’s infinite compassion and forgiveness. In cooperation with civil authorities, they are entrusted with the weighty task of helping the incarcerated rediscover a sense of purpose so that, with God’s grace, they can reform their lives, be reconciled with their families and friends, and, insofar as possible, assume the responsibilities and duties which will enable them to conduct upright and honest lives within society.

Judicial and penal institutions play a fundamental role in protecting citizens and safeguarding the common good (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2266). At the same time, they are to aid in rebuilding “social relationships disrupted by the criminal act committed” (cf. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 403). By their very nature, therefore, these institutions must contribute to the rehabilitation of offenders, facilitating their transition from despair to hope and from unreliability to dependability. When conditions within jails and prisons are not conducive to the process of regaining a sense of a worth and accepting its related duties, these institutions fail to achieve one of their essential ends. Public authorities must be ever vigilant in this task, eschewing any means of punishment or correction that either undermine or debase the human dignity of prisoners. In this regard, I reiterate that the prohibition against torture “cannot be contravened under any circumstances” (Ibid., 404).

I am confident that your Congress will provide an opportunity to share your experiences of the mysterious countenance of Christ shining through the faces of the imprisoned. I encourage you in your efforts to show that face to the world as you promote greater respect for the dignity of the detained. Finally, I pray that your Congress will be an occasion for you yourselves to appreciate anew how, in attending to the needs of the imprisoned, your own eyes are opened to the marvels God does for you each day (cf. Deus Caritas Est, 18).

With these sentiments I extend my heartfelt wishes to you and all the participants in the Congress for the success of your meeting and willingly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and your loved ones.
Yusuf Ali’s Compassion for the Condemned to Death

Sr Fidelis HCM

Gestures of Clemency

Pope Francis, the renowned personality who kissed the feet of prisoners, a gesture that changed the whole life of prisoners, has asked for a “gesture of clemency,” for prison inmates in the run-up to Christmas. In a letter to the Heads of State, he invites them to make a “symbolic gesture” towards our brothers and sisters, who are deprived of their liberty and who are held eligible to benefit from such a provision. Thus, a time marked by tensions, injustice and conflicts, may be opened to the grace that comes from the Lord. Pope Francis has shown his closeness to prison inmates in the course of many of his apostolic visits and in other instances. He has issued an appeal “in favour of improving the living conditions in prisons throughout the world, that the human dignity of detainees be fully respected. He also reflected on the need for criminal justice system that is not exclusively punitive, but opens to hope and the prospect of reintegrating the offender into the society.

Yusuf Ali – Man of Goodwill

Human beings are not born as criminals, but are made so by society in the course of time. Human beings are capable of changing their attitudes by their interactions with other human beings who are gifted with kindness, compassion, understanding and forgiveness. Here is an example of such a man who could get a “so called criminal” out of the gallows. It is Mr Yusuf Ali, the chairman of the Lulu group, a gentle man with a big heart, who reaches out to the one who suffers.

Bex Krishna

Mr Bex Krishna, was a man from Kerala working as a driver in Abu Dhabi. In 2012, he was driving as usual, but suddenly he lost control of the vehicle and it ran into the midst of a group of children playing on the ground and hit one Sudanese child killing him instantly. This tragic event made his life totally upside down. After a long time of relentless efforts and negotiations with the victim’s family and paying them a lump sum amount of Rupees one chore, he could grant justice to this man and bring him out of the gallows. Till Becks reached back his home town in Kerala, Mr. Yusuf Ali stood by him. God be praised!

Tears of Joy

Mr Becks and his family wanted to meet this ‘angel’ of God face to face for giving him a second birth. Mr. Yusuf Ali, came to Kerala to participate in the 15th anniversary of ‘Kerala Vision’ and to inaugurate the function for starting a Trust to give help to children from poor families born in the government hospitals and to release their logo. Mr Becks and family took this occasion as a chance for meeting him and arranged everything for this meeting. Becks fell at the feet of Mr. Yusuf Ali and said to him, “You came as God into my life and saved me,” but Mr Yusuf Ali lifted him up and responded with tear-fd eyes, “Don’t ever say that, I am only appointed by God to be his angel to bring you help at the proper time. Neither caste nor creed, but only love for humanity matters which will bring peace and happiness to our lives.” With this he embraced the whole family, his wife Veena, son Adwaith and daughter Aishwarya. Here is an example of a great life. If there were a few more people like him in our country and in the world at large, many more would have a better, peaceful and happy life. Let us glorify god for the gift of Mr. Yusuf Ali. May he be blessed to bring the good news of justice, peace and happiness into the lives of many more, especially the marginalised and the downtrodden, who stand in need of help and support.

Reaching out to the Incarcerated

Mr Yusuf Ali took the baton in his hand and started his mission of saving a so called ‘criminal’ from the gallows, knocking at all the doors possible and meeting with the concerned officials and doing whatever he could to bring him back to life. And his efforts did not go in vain. After a long time of relentless efforts and negotiations with the victim’s family and paying them a lump sum amount of Rupees one chore, he could grant justice to this man and bring him out of the gallows. Till Becks reached back his home town in Kerala, Mr. Yusuf Ali stood by him. God be praised!
Yeshwanth (name changed) had been living happily with his wife and 6 children in the house that he had built on inherited land. The property was a portion of the 7 acres that his father had cleared in the forest area, with due permission from the Tehsildar, and divided between Yeshwanth and his 2 brothers. His brothers too had constructed houses in their portion of the land. They cultivated the land and reared animals for a living. It was not a luxurious life, but they did manage to make ends meet, and were happy. Life was going on smoothly for the 3 brothers, until a few years down the line when tribals from the neighbouring village came with the claim that the land was rightfully theirs as it fell in the tribal belt. The tribals went to the extent of destroying their crops and forcefully taking the yield from the land. One evening as it was getting dark, Yeshwanth saw 3 tribals ploughing his land. When he confronted them, a scuffle broke out and they started throwing stones. Unfortunately, a stone that Yeshwanth threw back at them, accidentally killed one of the 3 tribals. The next day the police accompanied by a huge crowd arrested Yeshwanth. He was beaten up mercilessly, despite him narrating the truth. He was thrown into jail - the sub-jail first, then the district jail, and finally the circle jail. Fearing the tribals, nobody came to his rescue. He was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment. As he was poor, he could not hire a lawyer to fight his case. His family too was on the streets with no place to live, as they had been driven out of the village.

Cry Continues

Many poverty-stricken children suffer, leave home in search of good fortune and end up in prisons after committing a series of crimes. On account of poverty and hunger Ravi (name changed) ran away from home one day in search of a fortune. He wandered along the streets and landed among street boys. He learned soon to adjust with the life of children on the street and he picked up every type of bad actions of the children there. He learned to be totally on his own and earned his living from the street and became totally a child of the street. His friends took him to their masters who were professional pickpockets. He was apprenticed to them and eventually excelled in the nefarious art of pick pocketing. The money that was picked was usually squandered in liquor shops and such other places. He thrived in the business for about twenty-two years, spent years in prison and finally came back to his home as a renewed man and lived with his mother as he had lost his father by then. Whose fault is this? Did Ravi’s mother give birth to a pick-pocket? What dreams his mother must have had when she first held him in her arms? It was hunger that led him in search of a good fortune. Thinking of getting a good job, he left the home, but landed in streets. There are so many Ravi found in our so-called developed society.

They Never Intended to Do!

The brethren behind bars are deprived of their human freedom which they long for. Prisoner within the four walls reflect on many questions. Physical custody and separation from their loved ones make them lose hope. We feel suffocated when we are away from our own homes and live in a place which is not ours. We try to pack off as early as possible and get back to our shelter. If we go for a trip we buy many gifts for our dear ones, our imaginations running riot. Today, lakhs of prisoners are behind bars, many of them on life sentences who have to serve time in prison for years. I had the chance to speak to many ‘life-sentence’ prisoners. They said that when the sentence was passed their life had shattered. Some said to me that they had not wanted to commit the crime; circumstances made them act in a way that branded them as criminals. Many said it was accidental! They never intended to do. God looked upon all that he had made, and indeed, it was very Good (Gen 1:31), if so how can God create a ‘Criminal’. No mother gives birth to a child to make him/her criminal. Every mother or father invests a lot of time, money and take interest in nurturing their children to bring them up as ‘good’ persons.

Whose Fault is this?

Martin had literally stumbled into an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. “I looked up and said, Lord, if this is where you are sending me, I surrender,” he said, and stayed at the meeting. Gonzalo De Vivero, who was at that gathering, works with the archdiocesan Office of...
Restorative Justice. He became Martin’s AA sponsor and eventually pointed him to volunteering with the prison ministry. “I remember I said in Spanish, ‘Esta loco!’” (“He’s crazy!”) said Martin, who had been trying to avoid jail and once had a DUI at a time he was trying to kill himself and end his pain. Soon, he was at the North County Correctional Facility, facing a ward of some of the toughest prison inmates in the state. “I’ll tell you, I was scared at first, but when I entered, the volunteers were welcoming,” said Martin. Martin spoke with gratitude recounting the mended relationships with his wife, Rosa, and his two adult daughters. He has returned as the Spanish music coordinator at his parish. He and Rosa serve on the international board as Spanish-language coordinators for the marriage healing Retrouvaille program. Rosa is also involved in answering letters from inmates through the “Finding the Way in Jail” program. Martin continues his trips four days a week to the Castaic facility with other volunteers.

Prisoners: God’s Image and Likeness
We often hear that prison is not a safe place as it is the living space of criminals. The hearts of some of many prisoners are filled with revenge and hatred. They need someone to guide them in their desperate moments. As St Therese of Child Jesus called Pranzini, a death row prisoner, Mon Premier Enfant (my first child), the broken ones behind bars are our children and that’s why Pope Francis invites us to learn to become mothers for these broken ones. As Moses was entrusted to lead and guide the Israelites, we too are called to guide these broken ones behind bars and lift their souls to God. We need to reach out to them in their wounded-ness and tirelessly work for their integrated development.

Dear Young People,
I would first of all like to say thank you to you for your joy and for your preparation of this visit. It gives me great joy to have given you a little light with my Visit. Thus, our meeting has now come to an end; my brief but intense Visit has come to an end. As was mentioned, this was my first contact with the prison world since my election as Pope.

I listened with attention to the words of the Director, of the Commandant and of your representative, and I thank you for the cordial sentiments you have expressed to me as well as for your good wishes for my name-day. I also heard that the memory of Cardinal Casaroli, whom you called Fr Agostino in a familiar way, still lives on among you. He spoke to me on various occasions of his experiences here, where he always felt very much a friend and very close to all the boys and girls in this prison.

Dear boys and girls, you come from various nations: I would like to stay longer with you; unfortunately, time is limited. Perhaps on another occasion we will find a longer day. May you know, nonetheless, that the Pope loves you and follows you with affection. I would next like to take this opportunity to extend my greeting to all those who are in prison and to all who in various capacities work in the prison environment. Dear boys and girls, today is a feast day for you as has been said: the Pope has come to see you, the Minister of Justice, various Authorities, the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary Bishop, your Chaplain and many other figures and friends are present. Thus, it is a day of joy. The liturgy of this Sunday itself begins with an invitation to be joyful: “Rejoice!” is the first word with which Mass begins.

But how can one be happy when one is suffering, when one is deprived of freedom, when one feels abandoned? During Mass we recalled that God loves us: this is the source of true joy. Even if one has all he or she wants, one can sometimes be unhappy; on the other hand, one can be deprived of everything, even freedom or health, and be in peace and joy if God is in his or her heart.

Thus, the secret is this: God must always have first place in our life. And Jesus has revealed the true face of God to us. Dear friends, before we part, I assure you with all my heart that I will continue to remember you before the Lord. You will always be present in my prayers. I offer you in advance my best wishes for Easter and I bless you all. May the Lord accompany you always with his Grace and guide you in your future lives.
Indian President’s Voice for the Incarcerated
Br Pradeep Anthony L OFM

It was on 26th November 2022 the President of India, Draupadi Murmu, stunned the audience by her cry for Indian prisoners. It was the occasion of the celebration of Constitution Day. She spoke about her life and shook the Supreme Court and all the dignitaries present, like the Chief justice of India-Dhananjaya Y. Chandrachud, union law minister-Kiren Rijiju, supreme court judges Sanjay Kishan Kaul, and so on. She revealed that when she was an MLA, she was elected as the chairperson of a standing committee and in that capacity visited almost all the prisons in Jharkhand. She wanted to know who were there in prisons, what they ate, what they did and how they lived, in what circumstances and what crimes they committed. Some were there for 5, 10, 15, 20 and others 25, 30 years.

Undertrials for Ever

Draupadi Murmu remarked that people who are in prisons really do not know the meaning of fundamental rights, nor the preamble, nor their fundamental duties. They are put inside prisons in the name of petty cases, a minor mistake, like slapping someone, cheating someone likewise many cases were booked against them. Sadly, even after years nobody was there to release them. Whatever was left for them at home like land, property, utensils were lost to meet the cost of paying for lawyers for running their case. For several years they have been in that state with the under trial tag. It is still a sad thing, she remarked, that 76% of the people in prisons are undertrial. It means people who are held up in custody and awaiting to be declared as convicts or to be acquitted. She also commented in sharp contrast about the real criminals who did commit major crimes but are outside enjoying their life.

Overcrowded Prisons

The Indian President Draupadi Murmu agonized as the voice of the voiceless. She narrated her encounter with her brethren in prisons. She said, after a period of time, they become a burden for the government. We have a commission of human rights, when prisoners come out, they are treated by these people, for skill training. But however, prisoners don’t like to come out of prisons because as they come out, the society doesn’t accept them, as it labels them as bad. The President said, “Strangely some people say that we should build more prisons, as we face overcrowded situation in prisons. Is this kind of thinking a progressive or regressive one?”. She went on saying, “There is no need of preparing more jails, and instead we should aim at closing the jails”.

The Legislative, Executive and Judiciary

As a solution she said, the three constitutional wings are legislative, executive and judiciary who should work together with the same mindset. Especially, working towards the interest of the people, therefore, it’s important to think alike. Checks and balances should be there, however, all the three constitutional wings should work together. We are here for the people, we are here by the people therefore, thinking for the good of people is our duty. We have amidst us much experienced people and great knowledgeable judges. They should find a solution to this situation.

In the same event, the law minister-Kiren Rijiju acknowledged the present situation, saying, there are about 5 crore pending cases. Some states have taken recourse to fast-track courts but many states have yet to take initiatives on this matter. He concluded saying the ease of justice leads to ease of living. Later, the Chief justice of India-Dhananjaya Y. Chandrachud, spoke that a nation of India having diverse and large culture and community has to resolve the challenge of making the legal process accessible to the ordinary. He said in his concluding remark, that the constitution of India is not made up of a choice between rights and culture but rather with an integrated approach, building upon the values of liberty, equality and fraternity.

The impact of the President’s speech made the Supreme Court to ask the jail authorities across the country to provide details of such prisoners to NALSA (National Legal Services Authority which is an Indian agency providing free legal services) within 15 days, after which a national plan could be made for the release of the under trial prisoners.

Prison Ministry India

After rendering more than forty years of commendable service to prisoners, Prison Ministry India volunteers found out several times the same truth that the president of India, Draupadi Murmu had found. Even now many innocent and undertrial prisoners do exist in Indian prisons. The irony is that people who really commit crimes are not caught mostly, but are on the contrary, in fact flying with the wings of power and money. Most of the prisoners come from a marginalized background. The Scheduled Tribes are only 8.6% of the population. About 11 percentage of the people in the prison are tribals. Judicial delays make them to stay in the prison for years without committing any crime. Prison Ministry India has been collaborating with the government officials working for the liberation of such prisoners. PMI does this in eight stages namely, by reaching out, releasing, repenting, reconciling, reforming, rehabilitating, reintegrating and finally working for their redemption.

Conclusion

Prison Ministry India’s foundational values are fraternal prayer, fraternal fasting, fraternal begging and fraternal belief in divine providence. We should study well and absorb the original spirituality, charm, style and structure of the Jesus Fraternity before forty years when its pioneers were living it at St Thomas Apostolic seminary, Kottayam. Let us concentrate on each one’s strength and participate in the mission of Christ in the coming year.
Open Jail Invites You and Me to be Open

Sr Shanti Picardo

We have just celebrated the Platinum Jubilee of our Independence on 15th August. All were out waving the national flag including the prisoners who are in the open jails. Let me just share with you today something about Open Jails. We have 1306 prisons consisting of 145 Central Jails, 413 District Jails 565 sub Jails, 88 open Jails, 44 special Jails, 29 women Jails, 19 Borstal schools and 3 other Jails. In 2020 we had 4,88,511 prisoners and today in 2022 we have over 6.22 lakh prisoners. The actual capacity is to house 4,14,033 prisoners. Are you shocked?

What is an Open Jail?

It is a jail in which the prisoners are trusted to complete their sentences with minimal supervision and perimeter security. They are not locked up in prison cells. Instead they are permitted to take up some employment while serving their sentence. In some countries these jails are often part of a rehabilitation plan for those inmates who are considered at low risk to the public. In US, the prisoners nearing release were sent to work as labourers to evaluate their behavior. In India open jail was established in 1953 in UP where prisoners were allowed to construct a dam over the river Chandraprabha in Varanasi. Today we have 88 open Jails in 17 different states in our country. The highest number is in Rajasthan with 29 jails. Here more than 2000 prisoners work as accountants, school teachers, guards and domestic help. Similarly, 13 open jails also have inmates working in different fields. Isn’t that a good piece of news? Open Jails have many advantages such as:

Personal Change

Prisoners get employment. They feel they can earn their living. Self worth, self esteem, self confidence and self respect increases as they come in touch with people who trust them and employ them. They learn to make the best use of time by doing something useful. Some can become innovative and creative as they bring out their hidden talents when they work. This will help them to get rid of pessimism and acquire optimism towards life. Slowly reconciliation and reformation will start if they allow God to work.

Self-development will lead to positive socialization. PMI members have intervened in the case of some of the members of Open jails and have noticed the transformation in them. There is both mental and spiritual change which leads them to re-integrate with the society and family. Jesus came to redeem the world. Why not reach out to those in open jails to experience redemption?

Overcrowding in Jails

We know the Prisons in India are overcrowded. We have over 6.22 lakh prisoners today. The actual capacity is to house 4,14,033 prisoners. Very sad indeed!! I have seen overcrowding in many Prisons. To reduce this we need to have more open jails. It also reduces operational cost: less security is needed to look after less number of prisoners; less expense for the government to look after fewer inmates. In a nutshell we can say open jails are a boon for both the government and for the prisoners. Article 21 of our Constitution says about the Right to Life and Personal liberty. “No person shall be deprived of his life and personal liberty except according to procedure established by law. It is guaranteed to every person under the constitution of India”. This right is given to the prisoners also. Open Jails help them to enjoy personal liberty. They will be happy to think of themselves as useful members of the society and not get frustrated in life. The family members and friends also can meet them, encourage them to re-join the society. Psychologists and sociologists have seen improvement in the behavior of the prisoners in open Jails. Personal liberty plays a deep role in one’s life in building one’s personality.

Pope Francis’ October Intention - A Church Open to Everyone

We pray for the church ever faithful to, and courageous in preaching the Gospel. May the Church be a community of solidarity, fraternity and welcome, always living in an atmosphere of synodality. Yes, my dear friends, may the intention and prayer of the Holy father encourage and enlighten us to be open to prisoners especially those who are in open Jails. After Covid 19, we the PMI members cannot easily visit the Prisons because of too many restrictions. But let our hearts be open to pray for each member behind the bars. Open Jail invites you and me to be open. Let’s remain OPEN at all times.
Prison Ministry India launched its housing project for the released and reformed prisoners during her ruby jubilee celebrations in 2021. It was known as Donate a Brick and Construct a House. We outreached many families whose one or both parents was incarcerated, released and reformed. PMI assisted them to realize their dream to have a house. By the grace of God, we could help 32 families and the project is extended to PMI golden jubilee, that is until 2031. We praise and thank God for providing us generous benefactors and take this opportunity to thank and appreciate all those who collaborated with this program for the most neglected and rejected of our society. We have assisted 19 people in Kerala, 8 families in Karnataka, 2 in Andhra Pradesh, one each in Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. “Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them, those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured” (Heb 13,3).

Alphi Johnson
Alphi was an inmate of Snehashramam – rehabilitation Centre for released women prisoners, Trivandrum, Kerala. Sr Beena, Snehashramam director recommended her and she supervised the construction. PMI provided her Rs 2,80,000/- On 6 October 2021 Mar Jose Pulickal, PMI Chairperson, blessed the house in the presence of PMI founders and PMI Kerala state coordinator.

Viji Reni Antony
Viji Reni Kunnathu, Kannur, was at Snehashramam, Trivandrum for 6 years. She was living with her husband and two children in a rented building. Fr Shaji Stephen, PMI Kerala state coordinator recommended her. PMI provided her Rs 2,50,000/- to complete her house and it was blessed on 27 December 2021.

B Lalitha
Lalitha a bedridden patient lives at Udaya Colony, Kochi. Sr Anisha SD, former RRDC secretary recommended her to PMI housing project. We forwarded Rs 2,00,000/- for her house construction and it was completed and blessed in 2021.

Ashwathy Rajan
Ashwathy Rajan lives in Udaya Colony, Kochi. She is recommended by Sr Anisha SD. PMI paid Rs 2 lakhs and the rest amount they received from government and other sources. The construction is completed and they live happily in the new house.

Devichandra
Devichandra, Kochi was recommended by Fr Binoy CMF. Construction commenced in February 2021. PMI provided 3 lakhs and construction is still to be completed.

Jessy Jose
Jessy was in Trivandrum Snehashramam. Some years ago, PMI constructed a house for them in Ankamaly. They have two sons. They asked assistance to floor their house with tiles. Fr Shaji Stephen recommended to help her. PMI forwarded Rs 50000/- on 13 September 2021 and the work is completed.

Chinnamma
Chinnamma is from Udaya Colony, Kochi. Sr Anisha SD recommended her. PMI partially assisted the construction of this house by providing Rs one lakh. Construction completed.

Manju
Manju’s husband was at Shantibhavan the second stage of rehabilitation centre for released prisoners at Pathadippalam, Kochi, under the supervision of Fr Binoy CMF. Though PMI sanctioned Rs 3 lakhs we provided only one lakh. Because of some legal and land issues Panchayat could not provide her permission for the construction.

Haseena Nizar
Nizar in Udaya colony, Kochi. Sr Anisha SD Recommended her. PMI partially assisted her by paying Rs one Lakh/ on 7 October 2021. Construction is completed.

Pennamma George
Pennamma George lives in Udaya colony, Kochi. She is a widow with a mentally ill son. She is recommended by Sr Anisha SD. PMI partially assisted her by paying Rs one lakh. Construction is completed.

Lekha
Lekha is in Udaya colony, Kochi. Sr Anisha recommended her. PMI paid Rs 2 lakhs and the construction is completed.

Mini Roy
Mini Nizar in Udaya colony, Kochi whose husband is sick. She works as corporation waste collector. She is recommended by Sr Anisha SD. PMI provided Rs 2 lakhs and the construction is completed.
Sibin Devassy  
Siby Devassy lives in Udaya colony, Kochi. Sr Anisha recommended him. PMI provided Rs one lakh and the construction is completed.

Sheeba Jaison  
Sheeba has two girl children who pursue their studies. Fr Joy Tharackal, former PMI Kerala state coordinator constructed a house for her many years ago. Now it is to be renovated and needs to put sheet on roof to avoid leaking. PI forwarded Rs 50000/- on 5 May 2022 and completed the work.

Sheeba Jaison  
Sheeba has two girl children who pursue their studies. Fr Joy Tharackal, former PMI Kerala state coordinator constructed a house for her many years ago. Now it is to be renovated and needs to put sheet on roof to avoid leaking. PI forwarded Rs 50000/- on 5 May 2022 and completed the work.

Paulson  
Paulson Manemparambil, Thrissur has been suffering from kidney problems. He has 4 children and no proper house. Fr Babu Mathew, his vicar and Mr Shinto recommended him to assist him partially to complete the work of his house. PMI forwarded Rs 50000/- on 25 July 2021 and the work is completed.

Jose Plankuzhiyl  
Jose was at Snehashramam, Thrissur, Kerala. His marriage was arranged by Jesus Fraternity and he was living in a rented building. He was recommended by Fr Alexander Kureekkattil, Fr Binoy and Fr Shaji Stephen. He was given five cents of land by Mrs Priya Maliekal through the intervention of Fr Joseph Mackolil and Adv Sebastian Kalaparambath worth Rs 7.5 lakhs.

C. Karunan  
Karunan and his wife Sajitha live at Erimayur, Thrissur. They needed to repair their house. Fr Varghese Karippery recommended this family. Mr Shinto the right hand of Fr Varghese supervised the construction. PMI provided Rs 50000/- on 5 August 2021 and the work is completed.

Radha  
Radha in Wayanad, Kerala wanted to renovate her house and we provided Rs 2 lakhs to complete the work.

Pushpa  
Pushpa lives in Udaya Colony, Kochi. Sr Anisha SD recommended her. PMI paid her Rs 2 lakhs and the construction of her house is completed.

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE XVII COUNCIL OF EUROPE  
CONFERENCE OF DIRECTORS OF PRISON ADMINISTRATION  
CLEMENTINE HALL, 22 NOVEMBER 2012

Your Excellency, Deputy Secretary General, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am glad to be able to receive you on the occasion of your Conference and I would like, first of all, to thank the Justice Minister of the Italian Government, Professor Paola Severino, and the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Dr Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, for their words of greeting, addressed to me on behalf of all present.

Matters of criminal justice are continually being brought to the attention of the public and of governments, especially at a time when economic and social inequalities and increasing individualism are feeding the roots of criminality. There is a tendency, though, to limit the debate to the legislative aspect of the question of crime and punishment or to the judicial process – how best to arrive swiftly at a sentence that corresponds as closely as possible to the true facts. Less attention is given to the way custodial sentences are carried out. In this regard, alongside the parameter of “justice”, another essential element is respect for human dignity and human rights. Yet this too, while indispensable and unfortunately still far from being observed in many countries, is not enough to safeguard fully the rights of the individual. A concrete commitment is needed, not just a statement of principle, in order to bring about the offender’s effective re-education, which is required both for the sake of his own dignity and with a view to his reintegration into society. The prisoner’s personal need to undergo in prison a process of rehabilitation and maturation is actually a need of society itself, both because it stands to regain someone who can make a useful contribution to the common good, and also because such a process makes the prisoner less likely to reoffend.
and thus endanger society. In recent years there has been considerable progress, even if there is still a long way to go. It is not just a question of releasing sufficient financial resources to make the prison environment more dignified and to ensure more effective means of support and paths of formation for prisoners: a change in mentality is also needed, so as to link the debate regarding respect for the human rights of prisoners with the broader debate concerning the actual implementation of criminal justice.

If human justice in this area is to look to divine justice and be shaped by that higher vision, the re-educational purpose of the sentence must be regarded not as an ancillary or secondary aspect of the penal system, but rather as its culminating and defining feature. In order to “practise justice”, it is not enough that those found guilty of crimes be simply punished: it is necessary that in punishing them, everything possible be done to correct and improve them. When this does not happen, justice is not done in an integral sense. In any event, it is important to avoid giving rise to a situation where imprisonment that fails in its re-educational role becomes counter-educational and paradoxically reinforces rather than overcomes the tendency to commit crime and the threat posed to society by the individual.

As Directors of Prison Administration, you can make a significant contribution, together with all those responsible for the administration of justice in society, towards promoting this “more genuine” justice that is “open to the liberating power of love” (John Paul II, Message for the Jubilee in Prisons, 9 July 2000) and is tied to human dignity. Your role, in a certain sense, is even more crucial than that of the legislators, since even when adequate structures and resources are in place, the effectiveness of re-educational strategies always depends on the sensitivity, ability and attentiveness of those called to put into practice what is prescribed on paper. The task of prison officers, at whatever level they operate, is by no means easy. That is why today, through you, I would like to pay tribute to all those in prison administration who carry out their duties with diligence and dedication. Contact with offenders paying the price for what they have done and the commitment needed to restore dignity and hope to people who in many cases have already suffered marginalization and scorn call to mind the mission of Christ himself, who came to call not the just, but sinners (cf. Mt 9:13; Mk 2:17; Lk 5:32), the privileged recipients of divine mercy. Everyone is called to become his brother's keeper, transcending the homicidal indifference of Cain (cf. Gen 4:9). You in particular are asked to take custody of people who, in prison conditions, are at greater risk of losing their sense of life's meaning and the value of personal dignity, yielding instead to discouragement and despair. Profound respect for persons, commitment to the rehabilitation of prisoners, fostering a genuinely educational community: these things are all the more urgent, in view of the growing number of “foreign prisoners”, whose circumstances are often difficult and precarious. Clearly, it is essential that the role of prison institutions and staff be matched by a corresponding willingness on the part of the prisoner to undergo a period of formation. Yet it is not enough simply to wait and hope for a positive response: this should be solicited and encouraged by means of initiatives and programmes capable of overcoming idleness and breaking the isolation in which prisoners are often trapped. Particularly important in this regard is the promotion of forms of evangelization and spiritual care, capable of drawing out the most noble and profound side of the prisoner, awakening his enthusiasm for life and his desire for beauty, so characteristic of people who discover anew that they bear within them the indelible image of God.
MY SPIRITUAL TESTAMENT
POPE BENEDICT XVI

When, at this late hour of my life, I look back on the decades I have wandered through, I see first of all how much reason I have to give thanks. Above all, I thank God Himself, the giver of all good gifts, who has given me life and guided me through all kinds of confusion; who has always picked me up when I began to slip, who has always given me anew the light of his countenance. In retrospect, I see and understand that even the dark and arduous stretches of this path were for my salvation and that He guided me well in those very stretches.

I thank my parents, who gave me life in difficult times and prepared a wonderful home for me with their love, which shines through all my days as a bright light until today. My father's clear-sighted faith taught us brothers and sisters to believe and stood firm as a guide in the midst of all my scientific knowledge; my mother's heartfelt piety and great kindness remain a legacy for which I cannot thank her enough. My sister has served me selflessly and full of kind concern for decades; my brother has always paved the way for me with the clear-sightedness of his judgements, with his powerful determination, and with the cheerfulness of his heart; without this ever-new going ahead and going along, I would not have been able to find the right path.

I thank God from the bottom of my heart for the many friends, men and women, whom He has always placed at my side; for the co-workers at all stages of my path; for the teachers and students He has given me. I gratefully entrust them all to His goodness. And I would like to thank the Lord for my beautiful home in the Bavarian foothills of the Alps, in which I was able to see the splendour of the Creator Himself shining through time and again. I thank the people of my homeland for allowing me to experience the beauty of faith time and again. I pray that our country will remain a country of faith and I ask you, dear compatriots, not to let your faith be distracted. Finally, I thank God for all the beauty I was able to experience during the various stages of my journey, but especially in Rome and in Italy, which has become my second home.

I ask for forgiveness from the bottom of my heart from all those whom I have wronged in some way.

What I said earlier of my compatriots, I now say to all who were entrusted to my service in the Church: Stand firm in the faith! Do not be confused! Often it seems as if science - on the one hand, the natural sciences; on the other, historical research (especially the exegesis of the Holy Scriptures) - has irrefutable insights to offer that are contrary to the Catholic faith. I have witnessed from times long past the changes in natural science and have seen how apparent certainties against the faith vanished, proving themselves not to be science but philosophical interpretations only apparently belonging to science - just as, moreover, it is in dialogue with the natural sciences that faith has learned to understand the limits of the scope of its affirmations and thus its own specificity.

For 60 years now, I have accompanied the path of theology, especially biblical studies, and have seen seemingly unshakeable theses collapse with the changing generations, which turned out to be mere hypotheses: the liberal generation (Harnack, Jülicher, etc.), the existentialist generation (Bultmann, etc.), the Marxist generation. I have seen, and see, how, out of the tangle of hypotheses, the reasonableness of faith has emerged and is emerging anew. Jesus Christ is truly the Way, the Truth, and the Life - and the Church, in all her shortcomings, is truly His Body.

Finally, I humbly ask: pray for me, so that the Lord may admit me to the eternal dwellings, despite all my sins and shortcomings. For all those entrusted to me, my heartfelt prayer goes out day after day.
Christmas Celebration: Jharsuguda Sub-Jail

Sr Mercyan SU

At the sub-jail of Jharsuguda, a pre-Christmas gathering was organized by PMI on 19th December 2022 in the district sub-jail. Present for the occasions were sisters belonging to the Society of St Ursula, Sacred Heart, SSPs, Handmaids of Mary, Franciscan Clarists and SVD fathers. About 365 inmates and 15 staff participated in the celebration. The program began at 10.30 am with a prayer at the crib by Fr. Christopher, parish priest of Jharsuguda. It is to be noted that the Christmas decoration was made by the inmates of the jail. A candle was lit as a sign of welcome to Jesus the light of the world. Soon colourful angelic dances were performed by the candidates of the sisters of various congregations. Sr Bimala Nagesia HM inspired the inmates with a moving story of Christmas and the beauty of incarnation. The brothers in jail who attended the weekly classes given by the sisters also put up an item for the gathering. They spoke of the transforming love of Christ through the interventions of sisters.

Christmas gifts were distributed to all the inmates. They were also served snacks and Cakes for which supplies were provided by the generosity of both religious and lay. The guests gathered for the programme and shared the meal prepared by the brethren behind the bars. The Superintendent of the jail thanked the PMI and the Catholic Church for the constant assistance, support and service rendered for the well-being of the brothers in the prison.

On behalf of prisoners at Delhi’s Tihar Jail, the prayer of an inmate, shared during the Mass, could not be more meaningful: “We celebrate this Christmas day joyfully in this prison. May His birth bring liberation to all of us physically, spiritually and morally. May we Christians in this jail be light and hope to the inmates who are with us in more pain and loneliness.” The festive Eucharist, as a part of pre-Christmas events, was celebrated at Tihar jail on 20th December 2022 by Archbishop Anil Couto and Archbishop Kuriakose Bharanikulangara. Fathers Francis Kodiyan MCBS and Jose Thannipara MST, representing Prison Ministry India as well as Fathers Edward SDB and Stan SJ concelebrated. Sr Inigo, who regularly visits Jail No: 4 and work for the inmates here as well as Mr Shanu and Ashalayam team joined in this memorable evening. Routine life behind the walls and locks can be hard but the inmates were overjoyed to have this Eucharist, after the Covid-induced gap. Most of the inmates wore rosary beads, displaying how much they depend on the maternal protection of the Blessed Mother.

During the Mass both the archbishops spoke of joy and peace, hope and freedom, popular Christmas themes that find greater depth and meaning at the prison premises. Archbishop Anil Couto greeted them and wished that, after a fair and speedy trial, they would be able to gather outside and worship the Lord. Those who attended the Mass and cultural celebrations - most of the inmates who attended were from diverse African and Latin American nations – sang songs and Carols joyously. Cultural programs performed by the inmates of Ashalayam were appreciated by all. The inmates gratefully acknowledged and thanked Sr Inigo for her kindness and support, especially for visiting them regularly despite Delhi’s oppressive heat, biting cold or disruptive rains. May the prison inmates who prayed fervently and devotedly experience joy and peace, light and life, most precious of the Christmas gifts.
Women

Every woman who has walked with God has a story to tell you.

Sara will tell you: “Nothing is too difficult for God”.

Hagar will tell you: “Even in the desert, God is there”.

Rahab will tell you: “God can use anyone”.

Hannah will tell you: “My God answers prayers”.

Ruth will tell you, “It’s not over until God says it’s over”.

Esther will tell you: “God is able to transform an unworthy into a noble”.

Elizabeth will tell you: “Even if the age is advanced, you will give birth to a great man”.

Mary will tell you: “It will be done to you according to the word of God”.

The woman with the blood issue will tell you: “When all has failed, God never fails”.

Mary and Martha will tell you: “Dead things can come back to life”

Dorcas will tell you: “God never forgets what we do for others”. 

And Eunice will tell you: “It’s never in vain to pray for our children”

Dear Woman, it's a great pleasure walking with God. It pays a lot. Walk with God so that you too can tell us your own story.

Christmas Celebration: PMI Shimoga

Prison Ministry India, Diocese of Shimoga conducted a Christmas Program in the Central Prison for men - Shimoga, on 20 December 2022. Rev Dr Francis Serrao, Bishop of Shimoga, Sr Theresa Mascarenhas SCB, Sr Shanthi Rebello SCB, Sr Helen Moras SCB, Teachers and members of Mahila Sanghatane of New Town parish and students of St Charles Kannada high school were present. The students gave a meaningful Christmas program along with dances on various themes like patriotism and unity. We visited the prison for the noble cause of sharing the peace and joy of the birth of Jesus. The Superintendent Dr Anitha, prison staff and inmates were given a cake as we wished them a very happy Christmas and New year 2023. We experienced God’s presence and accompaniment in allowing us to celebrate Christmas with the inmates. Bishop gave a beautiful message. Soap kits were distributed as Christmas gift. We returned back with feelings of joy and satisfaction.
Christmas Celebration, Kumbakonam prison
Christmas Celebration, Kunjalamoodu Prison
Christmas Celebration, Meenmutty Jail
Christmas Celebration, Meerut Prison
Christmas Celebration, Kunjalamoodu Prison
Christmas Celebration, Mehansana Prison
Christmas Celebration, Kuzhithurai Prison
Christmas Celebration, Lateri Jail
Christmas Celebration, Moovattupuzha Prison
Christmas Celebration, Mananthawady Prison
Christmas Celebration, Muttom Jail
Christmas Celebration, Manjeri Prison
Christmas Celebration, Nadiad District Jail
Christmas Celebration, Mannargudi Jail
Christmas Celebration, Nagercoil Prison
Christmas Celebration, Mattancherry Jail
Christmas Celebration, Observation Home, KGF
Christmas Celebration, Observation Home, Mumbai
Christmas Celebration, Observation Home, Pune
Christmas Celebration, Ooty- Coonoor Prison
Christmas Celebration, Ponkunnam Jail
Christmas Celebration, Pudukottai District Jail

Christmas Celebration, Open Prison Devanahalli
Christmas Celebration, Pala Prison
Christmas Celebration, Shimoga Prison
Christmas Celebration, Sivagangai Prison

Christmas Celebration, Palakkad Prison
Christmas Celebration, Patan Prison
Christmas Celebration, Subjail, Kannur
Christmas Celebration, Tezpur Central Jail

Christmas Celebration, Peerumedu Jail
Christmas Celebration, PMI Bangalore Unit
Christmas Celebration, Thiroor Jail
Christmas Celebration, Thiruvarur Jail
Christmas Celebration, Thrissur District Jail

Christmas Celebration, Thuckalay Prison

Christmas Celebration, Vadodara Jail

Christmas Celebration, Tihar Prison

Christmas Celebration, Tihar Prison 4

Christmas Celebration, Tihar Prison 8

Christmas Celebration, TT Poondi Jail

Christmas celebration, Villupuram District jail

Christmas Celebrations, Utumapalayam

Christmas celebration, Women Open Jail, Poojappura

Christmas Celebrations, Women Prison, Kannur

Christmas celebration, Women Prison, Kannur

Christmas celebration, Women Prison, Thrissur

Christmas celebration, Women Prison, Thrissur

Christmas celebration, Vanitha Jail, Kannur

Christmas celebration, Vythiri Sub Jail

Christmas celebration, Women Prison, Poojappura