



# PRISON VOICE

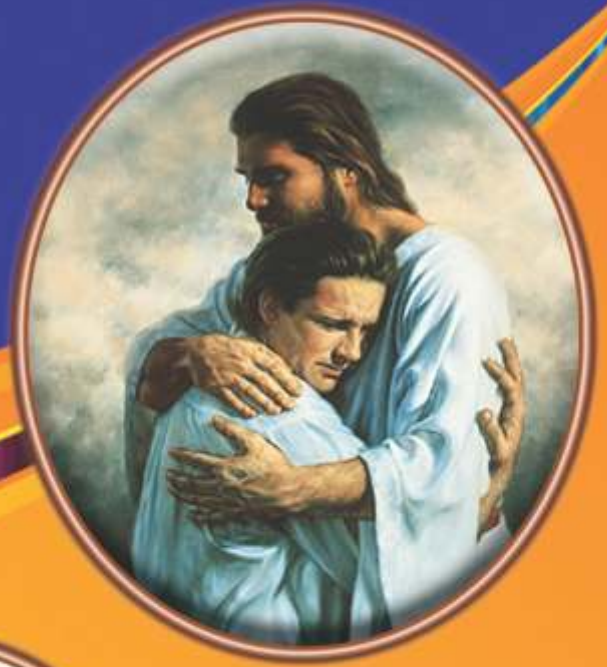
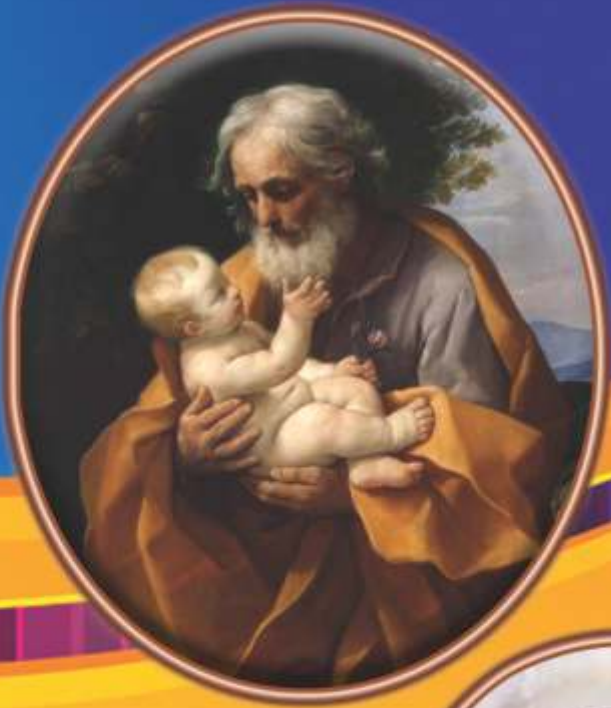
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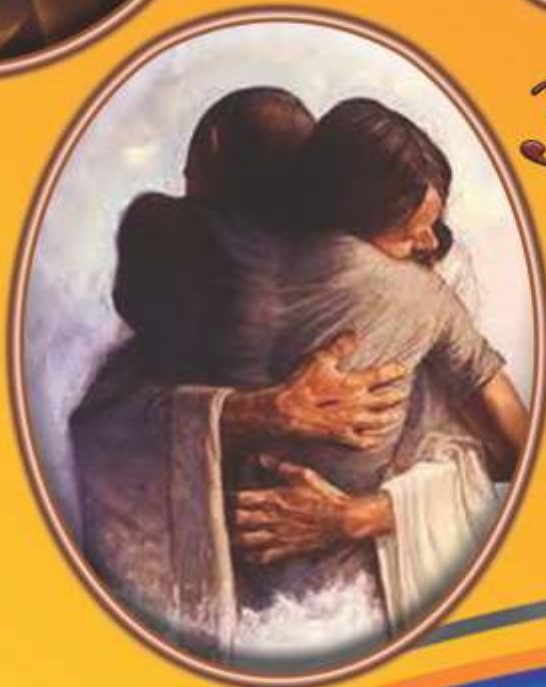
Issue 3

**NATIONAL MONTHLY**

₹ 20/-



*REACH OUT*



...  
*REDEEM*





**Rehabilitation of Released Prisoners at Erode, Tamilnadu**



**Newly Constructed House for the Victim's Family with the Help of St. Francis Convent, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu**



**Eye Camp, Chatrapur Jail, Berhampur, Odisha**



**Trivandrum Prison Visit by PMI Volunteers**



**Children's Day Celebration at Vasai Correctional Home, Maharashtra**





**Sr Lini Sheeja MSC Presenting the Annual Report of PMI at CBCI Secretaries Meet**



**Rev Dr Francis Koivan Presenting the Paper on Initiatives and Contributions of the Indian Church in Prison Ministry, The Vatican City**



**Mr Jesuraja, Tamilnadu PMI Secretary Visiting Bangladesh Police Academy**



**Maharashtra State Executive Body**



**Integral Human Development and Catholic Prison Pastoral Care, International Representatives Meeting Pope Francis, The Vatican City**



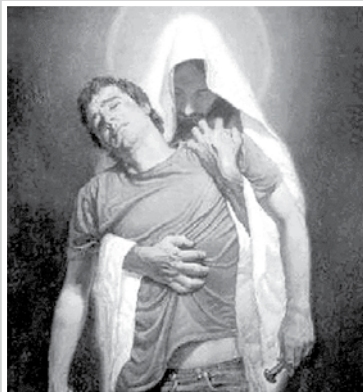


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NATIONAL MONTHLY



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not Survival,  
Rather it's  
Revival of the  
Soul*

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### *Are you willing?*

*"Help a Prisoner's Child  
Prevent a Potential  
Criminal"*

*80% of the children of  
prisoners are potential  
criminals unless somebody  
takes care of them. Prison  
Ministry India has begun  
a scheme to educate 1000  
children of prisoners:*

*Kindly contribute*

*Rs. 5,000/- for the education  
of a child.*

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## Shepherding: *A Grace*

Each one of us has the responsibility to shepherd the lost sheep of our times. Shepherding is a grace because the God of grace has given this responsibility to His chosen ones. As we are in a committed relationship with God, we need to ensure that we carry out this task with love and compassion so that no sheep of our times is lost. We are called by our name to shepherd the lost sheep. The Israelites were shattered and lost as they had no shepherd. How responsibly do we carry out our duty of shepherding?

Let us look into our families, neighbourhoods, congregations and the ministries we work with/in. Do we go in search of the lost ones? Are we able to find them? We need to look towards our master who left the 99 and went after the lost one. There are so many unloved and uncared for people behind the bars and our volunteers, imitating the master, reach out to these. The PMI volunteers should never wait for the lost ones to come to them, rather they should reach out in service as they see the disfigured face of the crucified master in the brethren behind the bars.

We, the Prison Ministry India volunteers, draw strength, energy, courage and inspiration to search for the lost ones, from our Master who never looked towards his

own comforts. In the October issue of the *Prison Voice*, we published a number of rehabilitation stories under the theme of 'Count Your Redeemed'. In this issue also we continue to bring out many more rehabilitation stories because we participate in the redeeming mission of Christ. Christ's



**Sr Lini Sheeja MSC**  
Chief Editor

act of redemption continues through the PMI volunteers in this noble ministry as we respond to the call of Christ, "When I was in prison you visited me" (Mt 25:36).

Since the beginning, God has been the Good Shepherd who rescues his

lost sheep. When Adam and Eve were hiding in shame because of their sin, he sought them out. As he continued in redeeming the lost, he promised a rescuer. Until Christ's death for their sins, he forgave them by their faith and covered them with animal skins. God still reaches out for the lost to cover and recover them through the blood of Jesus Christ. We are happy for you, volunteers of PMI, for your hard work, commitment and zeal in searching for the lost ones and bringing back those that strayed.



*Return  
To The*

## *Spiritual Sources, Experiences, Principles and Traditions*



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

We celebrate the Silver Jubilee of National Level Prison Ministry India commemorating Fr Varghese Karipperry's commencement outside Kerala in a cowshed at Huskur, Bangalore in 1994. PMI Jubilee invites all of us to return to its spiritual sources, experiences, principles and traditions. Let this jubilee be an occasion to intensify spiritual experiences, exercises, principles, traditions and reformation strategies. "Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6: 10-12).

**United We  
Stand,  
Divided We Fall !**

### **Spiritual Experiences**

1. Experience of God
2. Experience of Fraternity
3. Experiencing the Holy Spirit
4. Experience of Seeking and Saving the Lost

5. Experience of Divine Providence
6. Experience of Prayer and Fasting
7. Experiencing Inconvenience

### **Spiritual Principles**

1. Overwhelmed by the Love of God the Father
2. Redeemed by the Precious Blood of Jesus
3. Led by the Holy Spirit
4. Empowered by the Word of God
5. Nourished by the Sacraments
6. Enlightened by Spiritual Exercises
7. Fortified by Ascetic Practices
8. Adorned by Virtues
9. Enriched by Fraternity
10. Enthralled by Seeking and Saving the Lost
11. Strengthened by the Experience of Divine Providence
12. Armoured by the Power of the Name of Jesus
13. Protected by the Mediation of Mary, the Saints and the Angels
14. Disciplined by the Commandments
15. Guided by Hierarchy

### Prisoners' Reformation Strategy

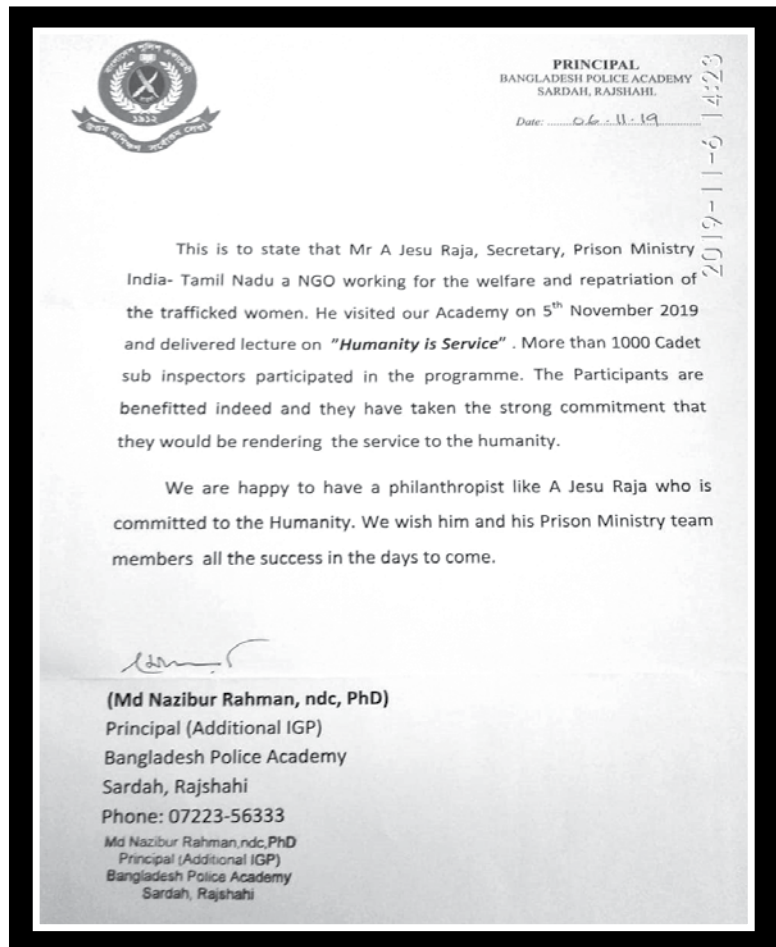
1. Reach-out
2. Release
3. Repentance
4. Reconciliation
5. Reformation
6. Rehabilitation
7. Reclamation
8. Redemption
9. Redeemer, Jesus

### The Armor of God

United we stand, divided we fall. PMI is a family of thousands of volunteers. Powerful is the light of our unity that it can illuminate the whole world. Dear PMI family members, the silver jubilee of our national-level ministry exhorts us to return to the sources of our spirituality and tradition. I appreciate your collaboration, hard-work, communion, commitment and thank you for your inexorable service, kindness and generosity in reaching out to thousands of brethren behind the bars. Thank you for being a hope for the hopeless and let us continue to be united as we are created and led by the God of unity, the Trinitarian God.

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with

the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and keep on praying for all Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given to me that I may fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel (Eph 6-10-20).





# WHY NEW SOCIAL PUNISHMENT?

Pope Francis



*Dear Brothers and Sisters:*

I greet you all warmly, who are taking part in the meeting on Integral Human Development and the Catholic Penitentiary Pastoral. When I commended the Dicastery for the Service of Integral Human Development to make patent the Church's concern for persons in particular situations of suffering, I wanted the reality to be kept in mind of so many imprisoned brothers and sisters. However, it isn't a task pointed out only for the Dicastery, but for the whole Church in fidelity to the mission received from Christ, which is called to act permanently God's mercy in favor of the most vulnerable and homeless in whom Jesus himself is present (Cf. *Matthew* 25:40). We are going to be judged on this.

As I have already pointed out at other times, the situation of prisons continues to be a reflection of our social reality and, consequently, of our egoism and indifference, synthesized in a throwaway culture (Cf. Address during the Visit to the Social Readaptation Center of Ciudad Juarez, February 17, 2016). Often society — through legalistic and inhuman decisions, justified in an alleged quest for the good and for security —, seeks with the isolation and imprisonment of those that act against the social norms, the ultimate solution to the problems of community life. Justified thus is that great quantities of public resources are allocated to repress the offenders instead of truly seeking the

promotion of an integral development of persons, which will reduce the circumstances that foster the carrying out of illicit actions.

It is easier to repress than to educate and, I would say, it's more convenient also. To deny the injustice present in society and to create these areas to lock the offenders in oblivion is easier than to offer equality of opportunities of development for all citizens. It's a way of discarding, of "polite discarding," in quotation marks.

Moreover, not infrequently, places of detention fail in the objective to promote processes of reinsertion, without a doubt because they lack sufficient resources that make it possible to respond to social, psychological and family problems experiences by detained persons, as well as frequent over-population in prisons, which turn them into true places of de-personalization. Instead, a true social re-insertion begins by guaranteeing opportunities for development, education, worthy jobs, access to health care, as well as generating public areas of citizen participation.

Today, in a special way, our societies are called to overcome the stigmatization of those that have committed an error, as instead of offering help and adequate resources to live a worthy life, we have accustomed ourselves to discard more than to consider the efforts

the person makes to correspond to God's love in his life. Many times, when leaving prison, the person finds himself in a world that is foreign to him and that in addition does not see him as worthy of trust, including going as far as to exclude him from the possibility to work to have proper sustenance. On impeding persons to recover fully the exercise of their dignity, they are exposed again to the dangers that accompany the lack of opportunity to develop, in the midst of violence and insecurity.

As Christian communities, we must ask ourselves a question. If these brothers and sisters have already paid for the evil committed, why is a new social punishment put on their shoulders by rejection and indifference? On many occasions, this social aversion is one more reason to expose them to relapse in their faults. Brethren: in this meeting, you have already shared some of the numerous initiatives with which the local Churches accompany pastorally the detained, those that end their detention and the families of many of them. With God's inspiration, each ecclesial community is assuming its own path to make the Father's mercy present to all these brothers that make a permanent call resound so that every man and every society will seek to act firmly and decisively in favor of peace and justice.

We have the certainty that the works that Divine Mercy inspires in each one of you and in the numerous members of the Church dedicated to this service are truly effective. May the love of God that sustains and encourages you in the service of the weakest, strengthen and enhance this ministry of hope that you do every day among the imprisoned. I pray for each person that in generous silence serves these brothers, recognizing the Lord in them. I congratulate you for all the initiatives with which, not without difficulties, the families of the detainees are

also assisted pastorally and are accompanied in this period of great trial, so that the Lord may bless all.

I would like to end with two images, two images that might help. One cannot speak of a debt adjustment with society in a windowless prison. There is no human punishment without a horizon and see to it that in your countries the prisons, the jails always have windows and a horizon, including a life sentence, which for me is disputable, a life sentence should also have a horizon.

The second image is an image that I saw several times when I went on the bus in Buenos Aires to a parish of the Villa Devoto area and passed by the Devoto Prison: the line of people going to visit the detained, especially the image of the mothers, the mothers of the detained that everybody saw, because they were in the queue one hour before entering and who then were subjected to security searches, often humiliating. Those women weren't ashamed if the whole world saw them. Their son was there and they showed their face for their son. May the Church learn the maternity of these women and learn the gestures of maternity that we must have with these brothers and sisters that are detained. Windows and mothers while queuing are the two images I leave with you.

With the witness and service you give, you keep alive your fidelity to Jesus Christ. At the end of our life, may we be able to hear Christ's voice that calls us, saying: "Come, blessed of my Father, receive the inheritance of the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, because what you did for one of these my littlest brothers, you did to Me" (*Matthew 25:34.40*). May Our Lady of Mercy accompany you, your families, and everyone that serves the imprisoned. And, please, don't forget to pray for me. Thank you.





**Fr Sebastian Thekkanath**  
*Former National Coordinator*

## Please GIVE ME A CHANCE FATHER

**N**ow I am going to share a heart-breaking experience that I underwent during one of my pilgrimages to prison. At one of the prisons, subsequent to my address during an interaction with the inmates, one of the young men came forward and put forward a suggestion in the form of a question: "Could you please give me a chance, Father ? I want to lead a normal life with my family". Then the said young man began unfolding page by page his life.

The youngster hails from a poor background. In an unfortunate incident, he was caught red-handed while stealing from a shop. Maybe, dire poverty prompted him to commit such a crime. The law went on its way and the young man was convicted and serving his term of sentence. While in prison, feeling sorry for the act, he made up his mind and decided to lead a normal life after the release.

After the term, the young man was released and came home. However, misfortune was

not in a mood to leave him alone. It was at that time, an incident of theft happened in his locality; the police did not bother to launch a hunt for the real culprit, instead they preferred to put the blame on this released prisoner. Consequently, he was taken into their custody.

Actually, the youngster was not at all involved in the incident, and was even unaware of it. His pleadings and entreaties fell on deaf ears. It was the seventh time that he was caught and imprisoned in this manner.

In fact, this is not a unique story as I have come across several such unfortunate incidents and helpless people in various prisons of the country.

In my opinion, it is essential for us to listen to their woes and try to understand the helpless situations they are trapped in. We should also have a space in our heart for them and be ready to extend our helping hand.

Surely, these helpless souls deserve a chance for a new life.

## NO GUN CAN CHANGE THE WORLD BUT A NUN CAN

The sixth National Convention of PMI took place in Hyderabad. And it was really a massive gathering, organized well with the whole-hearted support of Andhra Pradesh PMI unit and co-operation of the Prison Department, because the grand valedictory function was inaugurated by then Andhra Pradesh Governor, Dr. Rangarajan, and conducted inside the Central Prison.

The three-day function was inaugurated by Devendra Goud, then Home Minister

of Andhra Pradesh. He began his inaugural speech with these encouraging words: 'no gun can change the world, but a nun can'. By that time, the PMI had been very active in the state.

The regular and zealous activities of our volunteers had brought about a lot of positive changes in Warangal Central Prison. Atmosphere in the prison used to be tense due to the friction between inmates and staff. And this had turned out to be a headache for the Prison Department and the Home Ministry. The Home Minister was aware of this positive report when he came to inaugurate the function and hence his encouraging comment.

Undoubtedly, it is a truth. If our sisters come forward and take up the cause for the least, the last and the lost, they can do wonders.

Jincy (name changed), one of the inmates at our rehabilitation centre, hailed from a very poor background. She was studying in Std IX and not aware who is her father because, her mother would share life with many people. It was during such an unfortunate situation that Jincy landed up at our centre. Anyway, she was a very good girl, smart in her studies and extra-curricular activities like dancing, singing, etc.

Jincy was studying in the nearby CBSE school and except us, none of the inmates or her classmates knew about her.

Once I took a group of inmates, led by Jincy, to one of the central prisons for a dance programme. All woman-prisoners had gathered in the hall and the curtain went up for the programme. The programme was excellent and enjoyed by one and all.

After the programme, a woman-prisoner approached us and called Jincy personally. Then she was seen whispering something in Jincy's ears and showing all kinds of expressions of love. It was none other than her mother. Jincy had never expected her mother

## A DAUGHTER'S SHOCKING ENCOUNTER

there. Not to hurt Jincy, we kept the matter secret from other inmates. During the return trip, Jincy was very gloomy and silent and we never dared to ask her anything on the way.

Once we reached home, I called Jincy personally and talked to her. She was all tears for sometime. Then she spoke her heart out. While dancing on the stage itself, Jincy had seen her mother among prisoners and it was shocking. She even felt as if the whole stage was revolving and by God's grace or sheer luck she managed to complete the programme.

The incident taught us a lesson. We should think twice while planning to take such children to a prison even for a cultural programme.



## A Blessing Learned to Give



**Sr. Joyce SJC**  
*Coordinator Salem, Tamilnadu.*

**M**urthy (name changed), son of Murthy (name changed), a retired police inspector, hails from a wealthy family at Meacherry, Salem District. He is the third child of his parents and was brought up with love and affection but lacked interest in studies. After completing Std X, he stopped his education and started to hang out with his friends. The outcome of the wrong friendship was that he ended up stealing two-wheelers and selling them. He enjoyed this untoward habit thoroughly. Ultimately, he earned the hatred of his parents. As a young boy, he was put behind the bars. What a pity!

Since nobody visited him from his family, he was always waiting for our visits. He was very regular for the classes. So, we took special care to give counselling, prayer, meditation, etc. But nothing seemed to work with him. Nearly 8 times, he was released but very soon he would land back in prison. He became a habitual offender. Finally, the psychiatrist who met him informed us that it was his sickness. Only lots of love and care would change him. Twice, we gave him the chance to be released, but he repeated his old ways.

The third time, he was in prison for a year. Then, he begged us for a final chance and promised to change himself. Meanwhile, his parents were dead against him. His father was very angry with us and warned us not to bring him out as Murthy was a blot on the families' good name. Under pressure and taking a huge risk, and above all with the Almighty God's help, we paid the court fees. After his release, we got him a job as a watchman in a showroom. There he stayed put and did his best for two years while staying alone. Yes, he did prove himself!

"Set your heart right and be steadfast, and do not be impetuous in time of calamity" (Sirach-2:2). Touched by Jesus and our prayers, he decided to marry a catholic girl, though he was a Brahmin. But we advised him to proceed on his own initiative. Finally, he fell in love with a girl, Mary Stella (name changed), who was a helper in a nearby shop and married her. Now they are happy and have been blessed with a baby girl.

"I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze" (Jer 15:20). The owner of the showroom called the coordinator and appreciated Murthy for being active and pleasant. Further, he requested she recruit another boy. Murthy's behaviour fetched him a better job in one of the best CBSE schools in Salem as a security officer. Alas! Now his father is no more. His father did not want him to attend his funeral rites, so he was informed. What a cruel act!

"Stretch out your hand to the poor, so that your blessing may be complete" (Sirach 7:32). Murthy says, "In the prison I was only receiving but now I have learned to give. It is only because of PMI that I am living as a human being and being treated well by society." As his life took a better turn with help from others, he helps a little towards the welfare of prisoners whenever he meets me. At last, God worked a wonder again. Now his mother has accepted him and is ready to give him his share of the property. She expressed her deep gratitude to the noble service of PMI. "All the works of the Lord are good, and he will supply every need in its time" (Sirach 39:33).

Lastly, it is not just a day's work to bring in drastic changes in one's life. It is possible only with wholehearted faith in God and continuous guidance. It needs strong determination.

## HE JUST BLASTED AT ME IN ANGER



**Sr. Olive PSOL**  
*Bhopal Unit Member*

There are two Thailand prisoners who have been with me for the last six months. I bailed them out, hoping their case will be closed soon and that they would be back home, but it is not happening. Sometimes, I wonder whether I made a mistake in taking the decision to keep them with me in my convent. At the same time my heart goes out to them, because I know they too are feeling the pain of being here for this long. They call me mama, and one of them, Seetha says in broken English, "Mama, why? Why God doing like this? How long have I to stay here? Why can't I go home? Why India not so good?" Her father has been in a very serious condition for the past one month. He is in the hospital on ventilator, and she is just waiting to go home. Though he is in a coma, whenever the doctors permit, she calls. He makes slight movements, and opens his eyes as if to see her, waiting for her. The doctors have given up on him and conveyed to the family that he should be taken home as nothing more can be done. In moments like these, I just do not know how to handle them or console them. They are so desperate. And at times, they do not eat but just sit and cry. I am trying to do my best, but our legal system has no heart. Her father's hospital pictures and the doctor's certificate were presented in court, but the judge just said that his health issues had nothing to do with the case. It is just going on tareek-pe-tareek. One day, on the hearing, they said the papers were missing. I was so angry as the court hearing

had been scheduled after 20 days and then they said the papers were missing. I felt it was done deliberately so that there would be no hearing on that day. Then I contacted the ADJ. He reprimanded the magistrate on how papers could disappear from the court and on the case being prolonged. The magistrate in return humiliated me in the court saying, "You are trying to bring pressure on me to do wrong. I don't know where you were born. For me Indians are important. Foreigners are not VIP to be treated so." He wouldn't allow me to speak. He just blasted at me in anger. At that moment, I just turned my thoughts to Jesus saying, "Lord, on the cross you suffered more humiliation than me." And that kept me calm and at peace. Then we were waiting outside for a long time and again the magistrate called, now calm. He said, "I'm doing whatever I can to speed up the case. Don't worry! We will finish soon." But nothing much has happened. From 30<sup>th</sup> October, everyday I have been taking them to court. On the 5<sup>th</sup> was the hearing at the CBI court, then again on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October. I am just hoping for the best. I too get discouraged as to why God is not listening; at times I feel like giving up. Then the above quote, "No one put his hand to the plough and looks back", haunts me. I pray, then I am at peace. My dear Prison ministry family, I ask you to join me in prayer, so that very soon they will be free and that Seetha reaches home before anything happens to her father.



# My Suffering Never Ends

**Sr Lini Sheeja MSC**

*Editor:* Good morning, Bhagya (name changed).

*Bhagya:* Good morning, Sr Lini. It's been a long time. But I know all of us are in your prayers.

*Editor:* No doubt Bhagya. All the brethren behind the bars are always remembered by all of us in our prayers. Life behind the bars is not the life you wanted. Accident and circumstances brought you here.

*Bhagya:* (Weeps bitterly.....) You are right, sister. It's been two years and I have met several prisoners here, whose lives have made me question the meaning of life. Life is frustrating and I do not experience joy. Life never stops handing out suffering and most of the times the suffering is more than I can bear.

*Editor:* Oh Bhagya, I empathize with your bitter experience.

*Bhagya:* Thank you, sister. I hail from a middle-class family and am the 6<sup>th</sup> child of my mother. My father had 3 marriages and I am the second wife's child. I have 5 elder brothers and I lost my mother at a young age. My mother's death was a great shock that I couldn't accept. I was brought up by my brothers and I used to cook for them. When my brothers got married, I was left all alone as my sisters-in-law were not interested in looking after me. It was at this crucial and desperate moment that I met Anish (name changed), and fell in love with him. As I was longing for care and love, he became my world. We

decided to marry and he was an Indian. Later we had to face a lot of issues due to our nationalities. We married without the knowledge of any of my family members.

One day, unfortunately, my stepmother saw our marriage certificate and she created an issue. My life was under threat. Anish was not with me as he was working out of station. I contacted him immediately. He came down, took me and we landed in India. After I conceived, when I got admitted at the hospital, we were arrested as terrorists due to an issue with the address proof. I was 5 months pregnant and we were tortured at length at the police station. Since my husband was as Indian, he was released after a few months and I continued to stay here. I delivered here in prison and I was blessed with a baby girl.

My country wants me to go back and I do not want to because my husband and child are Indian. I'll stay where my husband is. We approached many places for help and we were denied the same. In my many years of stay here in prison, I have seen many inmates come with passport issues and get out on bail. But why am I still here with my innocent baby? My innocent baby has also become a prisoner with me. When she grows up what will be her emotional trauma? Now, she doesn't know where she is and what she is. I'm blessed with a loving husband who takes good care of me. All that I miss from my family I receive from him. But he stays alone and I'm separated from him. From my childhood, I have never experienced

happiness, I don't know the meaning of joy. I had experienced only agony. My suffering never ends and I know that the God whom I raise my hands to in prayer will answer me.

Editor: Dear Bhagya, thank you for being an inspiration. In spite of all these painful experiences, you are a role model to all the prisoners who are living with you. Never give up Bhagya, because God knows everything. Every beginning has an end and every end has a beginning. Always

remember, 'This too will pass', there is nothing permanent in our lives. Every problem has a solution.

Bhagya: Thank you, dear Sr Lini, for being a motivating force. I LIVE BECAUSE I HAVE A REASON TO LIVE. God is the reason I live and He has blessed me with my family as my reason to live. Hats off to you and the Prison Ministry Volunteers whose great service is admired by each and every one of us.

### Gandhi Jayanthi celebration at Chattisgarh



We had Gandhi Jayanthi celebration at Chattisgarh. on 2 October. Our school children performed a dance programme. It was appreciated by all. Then the prison staff and the prisoners also took part in the performances. We gave mementos and gifts to all the participants. The programmes concluded by 2.30 pm.





# NO ONE SHOULD BE UNATTENDED



**Prof. Dr Michael Noronha**  
Coordinator, Mysuru Unit, PMI

**P**rison Ministry India Mysore Unit, was formed in July 2000 and has varied experiences in rehabilitation and reformation of prisoners and their families.

When we entered the Mysore Central Prison, we had the shocking experience of finding over 120 catholic prisoners who were imprisoned under the dreaded TADA Act; even our conversations with these inmates were put under surveillance. It appeared to us that in India, the highest number of Catholics incarcerated were in the Mysore Prison. We embarked on a Prayer Mission and within four months the Lord heard our prayers and started acting on our supplications. The kidnap of Dr Rajkumar and the precondition set by the forest brigand for his release was that a TADA court should be constituted and the trial should be conducted with speed. The outcome of the trial was that nearly all 120 prisoners were acquitted.

It was during this period that we realised that many of those imprisoned were the breadwinners and homemakers, leaving the children/families in utter distress. Children in schools had to discontinue due to abject poverty, inability to sustain themselves and pay the school fees. The thought came to us that these children if left unattended would become school dropouts and would take to wrong habits leading to their imprisonment for criminal activities at a later date. The

Prison Ministry India, Mysore Unit had hardly any funds and sought the help of the MEP Sisters if they could provide some help towards the fees of the children. To our surprise, the then Provincial Sr Arul Mary Vimala and the Superior General Sr. Lilly Mary of the Congregation of MEP Sisters immediately accepted the responsibility. Over a few years, nearly 50 children were given financial support for school fees by this congregation. The children along with their relatives were called to their convent in Mysore for a get-together and the well-being and progress of the children were ascertained. Each child's marks card and related fee receipts were verified and payment reimbursed. Since it was a private help sponsored by MEP Sisters, they were given a free hand to carry out this mission under the PMI umbrella without routing their funds through PMI. Through the Mysore PMI unit, 30 children were educated (apart from those by the MEP sisters) and a sum of ₹ 2.70 lakhs spent over a period of 16 years. As late Nelson Mandela rightly put it, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" - our unit did find the change when a child could be protected from being a school dropout.

As the convicts got to know about us, many came forward seeking help in terms of paying the fine amount for their release and for

their children's education. Recognising the good work of the PMI Mysore Unit, the CRI Mysore Diocese contributed generously towards raising the fine amount during the Year of Mercy. To this date, ₹ 2.63 lakhs has been paid towards the release of 70 prisoners. A report is submitted regularly to the CRI President as an update on the funds utilised. Other congregations in Mysore, which support the cause of release, reformation, rehabilitation and education are the CSST, Missionary Sisters of Charity, Good Shepherd Sisters, Deena Seva Sabha, Ursuline Franciscan Sisters (UFS), Pallotine Sisters and Brothers, Franciscans (Capuchins), and of course laity who are members of the PMI.

Two instances of why we should educate the prisoners' children before condemning the convicted prisoner and his family: A prisoner convicted with life term imprisonment (now released) had very young children - three boys in the age group of 3 to 6 years. He was the sole breadwinner. His wife was treated as an outcast in the village after his imprisonment and had to move in search of shelter and a job to sustain her little children. PMI Mysore financed their education - from their primary school education to their diploma/graduation. Today the children are financially independent and the joy of seeing these children study well and empowering themselves to face the challenging world was incredibly satisfying for all the PMI members.

One of the prisoners who was convicted for having murdered his wife and was recently released approached us and sought help for his son and daughter to pursue their high school and BCA Course respectively. PMI Mysore unit was successful in financing their education and today the daughter is pursuing her Masters in Computer Application course. **Kathy Calvin, United Nations Foundation President & CEO reminds us: "Girls are one of the most powerful forces for change in**

**the world: When their rights are recognized, their needs are met, and their voices are heard, they drive positive change in their families, their communities, and the world."**

Mysore PMI unit has been paying the examination fees for 60 prisoners, who appeared for the Hindi Rashtra Basha exam, over the last 19 years.

In fact, the mission of Mysore PMI is mostly concentrating on Release, Rehabilitation and Reformation of prisoners. The families of convicted prisoners who are in need are given financial assistance to help the children pursue their education. All our activities are done without any publicity whatsoever either in public or private, in response to the call of our Lord Jesus: **"But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."** (Mt 6:3-4)

To answer all those who dispute the role of Prison Ministry India, in the work of Reformation, Rehabilitation, Release and Reconciliation of prisoners with the families of victims, I conclude with a quote from Pope Francis: "To think that the inner order of a person may be corrected only through punishment, this is not God's way, this is mistaken. Some think, 'No, we should punish more, with longer sentences, more!' This does not solve anything. Imprisoning people because - and forgive me for this - for the mere fact that if they are inside we are safe, this is not useful, it does not help us. The most important thing is what God does with us. He takes us by the hand and He helps us to go on. And this is called hope! And with this hope, with this trust, we can walk on, day by day. And with this faithful love, that accompanies us, truly hope never disappoints." - Address to inmates of Isernia Prison, near Ca Castelpetroso, Italy, July 5, 2014.





**Fr Pasala Lahastraya**  
AP State Coordinator

In the month of June 2012, when I was in a co-cathedral parish as vicar and parish priest-cum-rector, I went out to call labourers for digging out a pipe-line. While I was walking, two women requested me to give them work. I spoke to them and we agreed and fixed their wages before starting work.

While they were working, we provided them with snacks. I did not notice whether they had lunch. They worked the whole day and finished the assigned task. At the end of the day, we paid the agreed amount. They received the wages with gratitude.

At night, around 9 o'clock, when I returned from a sub-station Mass, much to my surprise, I saw that the women and their children were standing near the Co-cathedral Church. I asked them the reason why they were there. These two women told us of the criminal backgrounds of their husbands because of which the families were scattered.

Next day, I took them and approached Rev. Fr K.D. Joseph, Director of Kurnool Diocese Social Service Society (KDSSS) for help. Hearing of their pathetic condition, he was moved with compassion and rendered immediate help by giving them cooking vessels, provisions and groceries. He asked them to stay temporarily in the KDSSS quarters, admitted the children in the nearby boarding and school in Kurnool.

After a few days, Rev. Fr K.D. Joseph and I were speaking with them when they told us about other people who were also like them. Next day, the director and I, along with the women went to meet these other people. It was heart-breaking for us to hear from them that they were begging for food because no one was giving them work. Then and there, the director asked them to

## EVER WILLING TO HELP !

come with us. After bringing in the other people, the director provided them with the necessary household things and admitted all the children in the same school.

Rev. Fr. K.D. Joseph took a personal interest in visiting them and helping them. He took them to the Central Prison at Kadapa to meet their incarcerated family members, made efforts to get bails for them and for their release. He used to take them to visit the central prison regularly. I am forever grateful to Rev. Fr. K.D. Joseph, who is ever ready to help anyone who approaches him.

These people, after they started to earn for themselves, shifted to rented houses. Their husbands are still in the Central Prison at Kadapa. Now those children are studying at KVR Degree College, Kurnool.



Rajendra Dushing  
Aurangabad unit

I am Seema (name changed) from Chennai. I am married and have two sons and one daughter. I am not educated because my family was very poor and I started working as a child labourer. While staying in slum areas, as you all know, every day there is fighting, abuse and so on. Life is very dangerous if we stay in such areas. How can we become good citizens of our great nation? Anyhow, at the age of fifteen, I got married to a man from a similar situation. He was daily wages labourer.

Every day there was fighting and beating at home and life moved on with great difficulty. My husband died due to excessive drinking and sickness leaving behind three children. I was quite young at that time. After the death of my husband I was worried sick thinking about what to do now. How to survive and raise my children? So, I started to look for a better job but I was not getting the kind of job I was looking for. Therefore, I left my children at my mother's house and came to the state of Maharashtra by train. Someone told me about the city of

Aurangabad. I got someone to help me reach this city. After reaching here, I went to see the world-famous Ajanta caves by bus. But I had no money to return back to the city. So, I walked on the street for a little while. One car stopped to give me a lift till Aurangabad. I was helpless and had no other choice. There were three people including me in the car. On the way to Aurangabad, the car was stopped by police officers. They started to check our vehicle and found some drugs, Marijuana. I was not aware of what was going on. Suddenly, they took the car and all of us to the police station and started to inquire about it. I

## I WAS VERY MOVED BY THIS HUMAN ACT

was unaware of the crime. But I was put under the MPDC Act. Since 2017, I have been in prison. Many

days have passed and no one has come to see me till date

One day, the PMI unit arranged a very nice programme for us. They gifted sewing machines, clothes, dresses for inmates' children, sweets and performed a beautiful cultural programme. I was very moved by this human act. After the programme I asked one of the volunteers to help me to get out of jail by paying my bail. I assured them that after my release from prison, I will repay all the amount. And they worked on my case and I got great help from them. All my worries and sorrows have turned into joy. I am very thankful to the Prison Ministry India. They helped to bring my life on to the right track.



Dear Editor,

My hearty congratulations to you and the whole National Executive team for the incredible work that you are doing under the leadership of our Cofounder Fr Francis Kodiyan.

I'm glad to say that the Prison Voice monthly magazine is really inspiring and it helps the reader to reflect on God's unconditional love and the hope that everyone is called to live a life that is pleasing to God; a life filled with love, joy and peace. A life full of hope! May God continue his work of salvation through this ministry.

*Ms. Goretti Martins, Goa*

Dear Editor,

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to the Prison Ministry India Coordinator, Secretary, all the staff and the volunteers for their committed service for the good of the incarcerated brethren behind the bars. I am a new reader of the *Prison Voice* magazine. I really find it very interesting and inspiring. I love reading it from the beginning to the end. This magazine inspires me to be in communion with the suffering brethren who are behind the bars. It's one of the best sources to know about Prison Ministry. I especially extend my sincere appreciation to Sr Lini Sheeja, the Chief Editor for tireless service, energy, great enthusiasm and insights. I do thank you Sr Lini Sheeja for this great work that you do through this PV. I wish and pray that you continue to do the loving work of God for the betterment of humanity. I do congratulate and am thankful to the editorial board for this beautiful magazine with inspirational insights. Long live Prison voice.

*Br John Kapse  
Diocese of Aurangabad*



## *Our Love* is Their **MEDICINE**



**Sr Joy Panikulam**  
Former State Coordinator  
Chattisgarh

These words of Jesus inspired me to take my first step to the central jail Bilaspur, where there were fifteen hundred prisoners, including women and children. Lonely, depressed and deprived of freedom, they were not only the outcasts of society but even to their own families. Their only desire was to be freed from jail, but there was no one to fight their case because they were poor, illiterate and had no social standing. What mistake was it that they had done? Everything from theft to murder.

"I killed him," was the only answer Ms X gave to my question. For the jail authorities, she was a "rape-harassment case". Her demeanour was consistent with the characteristics exhibited by such patients while listening to this nameless girl, who just had a number, and who would not look up during my first visit. Finally, she revealed the truth: a man raped her repeatedly. She had no choice other than to kill him. Then she surrendered to the police, and the emotional trauma made her mentally ill.

Ms Kishori was caught on the basis of doubt by the Raigarh police. They made her remove her clothes and stand naked at the police station. She said, "I have been branded a Naxalite and I have lost my dignity. How will I face my people?" She was in tears. I consoled her and said that the truth would make her free.

I told the inmates that all those who were really guilty of murder or any other crimes that they had committed must accept their

wrongdoings. They should ask God for pardon and forgive all those who had been the cause for them being in prison. Then God will have mercy on them. It has been my own personal experience that instilling in them an awareness of a loving and merciful God has brought in a different outlook in their lives. And I have witnessed a gradual change in their life: an experience of inner freedom.

A few women prisoners narrated their story; how the police had stripped them of their clothes and made them stand naked. They would prick their fingertips with paper pins, while others were beaten up. Still another group narrated how they were made to lay down while the police would stand on their legs. The poor suffer because they have no money, but the rich manage to get out. As they enter the prison, each one has to strip their clothes, for the authorities to make sure that they do not carry weapons and other harmful things. And once inside the prison after the demeaning striping, they are customarily beaten up by the senior prisoners.

They suffer a lot, but PMI volunteers bring about radical changes in the lives of the prisoners by their love and concern. They instil in the prisoners the forgiveness of God and his merciful love.

## Prisoners should be given hope and assurance that society is ready to accept them

Walter Kamble

The Prison Ministry Maharashtra State Unit Coordinators' Meet was held at Nav Sadhana, Diocesan Pastoral Centre, Pune from 23 to 25 September 2019.

### 23 September 2019

The registration for the delegates started at 11.00 and the meet started with a Welcome prayer song in Hindi invoking the Holy Spirit followed by felicitation of Rev Fr Francis Kodiyan, the National Coordinator of PMI and Sr Lini Sheeja, the National Secretary of PMI.

Rev Fr Wilfred, the Maharashtra State Coordinator gave the welcome speech, welcoming all the delegates from the Maharashtra region. Fr Wilfred in his welcome speech stressed upon the need for the reconciliation of inmates with their families. After the crime has been committed, the victims and their families lose hope and live in despair. It is the duty of the Prison Ministry India volunteers to bring in hope where there is no hope.

After the lunch break, there was an interactive session with the rehabilitated prisoners. This session was conducted by Fr. Sebastian Mony. Mr Raju and Mr Satish Shinde, two prisoners who were released and rehabilitated, spoke about their days in prison and how they were touched

by the work of the PMI volunteers. Of them, Mr Raju found a job with the PMI in Pune itself for which he expressed his gratefulness. Working with Fr Wilfred, Raju also goes to prison and counsels the inmates in Pune. Mr Satish Shinde's sharing was truly inspiring. He said that he had been in prison for a crime he did not commit. He too was influenced by the PMI volunteers led by Fr Wilfred. It was astonishing to learn during the interaction that Mr Satish had wanted to get educated and therefore during his term in prison, he started learning. Today he has 12 degrees from different universities. He expressed his gratefulness towards the prison authorities and his family who supported him during his time in prison. He expressed that as prisoners have lost hope in humanity, "Prisoners should be given hope and assurance that society is ready to accept them". Today Mr Satish is working in different fields and is accepted by society.

Fr Francis Kodiyan spoke on "Spirituality and the Charisma of PMI" giving different bible quotations. He echoed the words of Jesus, i.e. liberty to the captives, reaching out to the lost, seek and save, liberate etc. Fr Francis guided us through the 8-fold path of a prisoner's reformation:

1. Reaching
2. Releasing
3. Repentance
4. Reconciliation
5. Reform
6. Rehabilitate
7. Reclaim
8. Redeem

After Fr Francis's inspiring talk, Sr Lini Sheeja spoke on the PMI – A Ministry to regain the lost. She quoted Ex. 3:7 expressing Christian calling, a call of love, God's heart reaching out to the suffering. She spoke of the five "Cs":

1. Christ
2. Conviction
3. Concern
4. Commitment
5. Courage

Thereafter at 12.15 pm, there was a panel discussion by priests to review and give suggestions to the PMI. This panel discussion was moderated by Fr Fernando. The priests present were Fr Malcom, the Vicar General of Pune Diocese, Fr Andrew, the provincial of Pune Jesuits, Fr Mathew and Fr Collin. All the priests spoke supporting the work by PMI.

After lunch, Mumbai, Vasai and Pune gave their presentation.

There was a session on PMI Pune HR Analysis, a study on the works of Pune Unit of Prison Ministry India by an HR Analyst Ms Kanchan. As Ms Kanchan could not be present personally, she gave

her presentation over video conference. However, though the presentation was done very systemically, her voice was not very audible.

The Holy Eucharist was celebrated followed by Rosary and then Cecilia School of Music presented a colourful cultural program including an inspiring skit. Fr Wilfred, in his valedictory address, thanked all the delegates and the speakers followed by a Fellowship dinner. The day ended with a prayer session in the chapel led by the Mumbai team.

### **25 September 2019**

Though some of the delegates returned home the previous day, the remaining delegates along with Fr Francis, Sr Lini and Fr Wilfred travelled to Karjat and visited two places:

The premises of the Gethsemane Prayer Home.

The plot of land purchased by PMI for constructing the office and rehabilitation home for released prison inmates.

Everyone was very happy with the building and facilities. The plot is very accessible. Fr Fernando said a very beautiful prayer of blessing and protection for the completion of the project. After lunch, everyone went to Karjat Church to visit the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima. Everyone felt satisfied and inspired, promising each other to meet next month in Bangalore for the celebration of the PMI Silver Jubilee function as they left for their homes.



In the beginning, God created Man and Woman in His own image and likeness to live happily for all eternity. But Man, due to his disobedience to God, lost this Grace. But God loved Man and so He did not disown him but promised him a Saviour (Gen 3:15). God chose many prophets and kings to deliver His message of love and compassion. And finally at the appointed time He sent His only begotten son our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. John (3:16) clearly says that God so loved the world that He sent His only son so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have Eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to be its judge but to be its Saviour. Jesus' whole life on this earth was about unconditional love, compassion and forgiveness. Jesus lived like any of us except with regards to sin. He was tempted in the desert; he cried when his friend Lazarus died; he felt compassion for the crowd who came to him; he was angry with the people who were selling things in the temple; he experienced joy, pain, hunger, rejection, persecution etc. So, he can understand us better than any other person in this world. It is this unconditional and compassionate love of Jesus that helped great sinners to become great saints. We, as his disciples, ought to do the same. Each of us is called for a different mission but the aim is the same; that is, to love and serve all those whom we encounter in our journey of life.

In the year 2003, I was called to be a volunteer for PMI Goa which I willingly did. In the 16 years of my ministry, I have

seen how many **h a r d c o r e** sinners change their way of life. And today they live a renewed life by reaching out to those in need. I know of



**Mrs. Goretti Martins**

a person Jack (name changed) who was in jail and who initially kept his distance from us. But as days and months passed, he started taking part in the prayer services, games and various other activities. Finally, when he was released, he thanked the PMI volunteers for their regular visits, different activities, love and care. Today he is leading a normal life, working for a very good company. Let us praise and thank the merciful God for touching the hearts and minds of so many of our brothers and sisters behind the bars through this special ministry. And as we continue to carry on this good work, let us always remember that we are just instruments in

## MERCIFUL TOUCH OF THE LORD

the hands of the Lord and he is at work in and through us. Before I conclude, I would like to congratulate our present National Coordinator and founder Rev Fr Francis Kodiyan MCBS and Rev Fr Varghese Kariperry who were led by the Holy Spirit to start this singular ministry. I would also like to thank each and every member, past and present, for their immense contribution without leaving out anyone. God bless you all a hundred-fold for all your sacrifices for this ministry. Luke (15: 7) says that there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine good people who do not need to repent.

## EVERYTHING THEY SHARE WORTH LISTENING TO



**Charmaine Edwin**

*Volunteer, Trivandrum Zone, PMI*

**M**editating upon the goodness of God is always refreshing for all of us. When I reflect upon my journey over the last two years as a member of PMI, it actually brings to me many memories, both good and sad. I would like to pen down some of the unforgettable moments.

During the prison visits along with the Sisters of the Poor of St Catherine of Siena, I always get the opportunity to witness the pain and joy, hopefulness and hopelessness, sickness and good health, sad and happy moments of the prisoners. Every word, the experience, the story they share are worth listening to.

What I learned was that we all go through these (at least some of them) in our lives in one or the other way and it is quite natural, but what we become out of or learn from these experiences is what actually matters. The time we spend with the person behind the bars is a precious moment for them. He/she does not have to be a Christian to talk to or share with us. After all he/she is a human being and that is all that matters. The respect and love they show us is priceless. This increases with every visit.

There is a well-known saying, "If people get sick, we take them to the hospital and give them medicine to get better. If people's behaviour is sick, we bring them to prison, but we forget the medicine."

This is exactly what happens in the Women's Rehab Centre, (Snehashramam), Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. The nuns in charge here belong to the congregation of the Sisters of St Catherine of Siena. Once a women inmate is accommodated in Snehashramam, every care is provided to ensure that someone is there to take care of them and that they have hope to live on. Because most of the inmates from prison have no place to go to when they are released and are very poor. Also, they would usually have been subjected to emotional and physical abuse from childhood itself. Thus, they need more care, love and attention at this stage of life.

The Sisters here provide them not only shelter but also an opportunity to live with hope. They make them train in skills like stitching, kitchen work, bead-works etc. so that they can make their own living once they are out from under the nuns' wings.

To my knowledge, the nuns here strive their best to transform the inmates' lives - teaches them techniques to reduce stress, heal trauma and provides practical knowledge on how to handle negative emotions in order to live up to one's highest potential and contribute to society in a positive way.

A while ago, I remember a set of twins, who had lost their parents at the age of

24-years, came to Snehashramam. They were around 37-years when they arrived at Snehashramam. After they lost their parents, they were accommodated by their brother and his wife. But as time flew, the brother's wife started ill-treating them and threw the twins out of their house. With no place to go to, a neighbour contacted the Director of the Rehab Centre. Thus, they were accommodated here and later by the grace of God, both got married and are now living happy married lives with children.

The stories of the rehabilitated prisoners will never end...

As Mrs Thulsi Annie Thomas mentioned in her last article, regarding the marriage

of a deaf and dumb girl who is currently staying in the Rehab Centre, this is really going to become another "Golden feather" in the book of the Rehab Centre, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. Really, hats off to Sr Beena Thekkan (Director of Snehashramam) and all the nuns who are supporting her, for their dedicated service and the commitment they show to every inmate that they accommodate.

One can hear the inmates calling out the word "Amma" everywhere on entering the building. That is the love, care and intimacy they get from the Centre.

*Invitation* **PMI Jubilee Memorial Building**

**R.R.D.C.**

PRISON MINISTRY INDIA

Glorifying Jesus who came to call sinners to repentance, Prison Ministry India most cordially invites you to the Blessing of the PMI Jubilee Memorial Building adjacent to Kolbe Home, Carmelaram on **20 November 2019 at 8 AM.**

**Most Rev Dr Allwyn D'Silva, the Chairman of Prison Ministry India** has kindly consented to bless the newly constructed building meant for Research, Documentation and Volunteers' Training Center.

**Most Rev Peter Remigius, the Former PMI Chairman and Mar Jose Pulickal, the Auxiliary Bishop of Kanjirappally** will jointly inaugurate it.

Please accept our sincere thanks for your valuable prayer and generous contribution and kindly bless us with your esteemed presence and continued prayer.

Rev Dr Francis Kodiyon MCBS  
National Coordinator

Sr Lini Sheeja MSC  
National Secretary

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# Prisoners' Welfare Day



**Sr. Mary James**  
Asst Coordinator, PMI,  
Visakhapatnam Unit.

On 2 October 2019, the Central Prison authorities invited PMI members to the occasion of *Prisoners' Welfare Day* (Gandhi Jayanti) celebration in Central prison, Visakhapatnam to give the message and perform cultural programmes there.



A team of members and children from Kotak school along with the assistant coordinator, Sr. Mary James, attended the programme on 2.10.2019 morning. The joint collector of Visakhapatnam was the chief guest and the Adalat secretary, other advocates, and officials were present as guests of honour.

The meeting was conducted as prison officials' proceedings for one hour. After that, PMI member Mr Ravi Gotteti presented a song on Prisoners' Welfare Day and gave an inspiring speech on the occasion. The children of Kotak School performed patriotic and religious dances on the stage.

Superintendent Sri N. Rahul Garu presented a memento to Sr Mary James and distributed prizes to the students who performed cultural programmes.