

WARRIORS OF PRISON MINISTRY INDIA

illustrates the amazing deeds of PMI warriors and unveils the saga of an emerging ecclesial movement dedicated to the reformation and reintegration of prisoners. This book demonstrates how a small prayer group sprouted at St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Kottayam, Kerala outreaches the 1350 prisons in India serving 4,78,600 prisoners, taking care of the released prisoners and their children. It delineates how the mission of Jesus to seek and save the lost being continued by the PMI volunteers by reaching out to the incarcerated and leading them to release, repentance, reconciliation, reformation, rehabilitation, reintegration, and redemption.



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Prison Ministry India

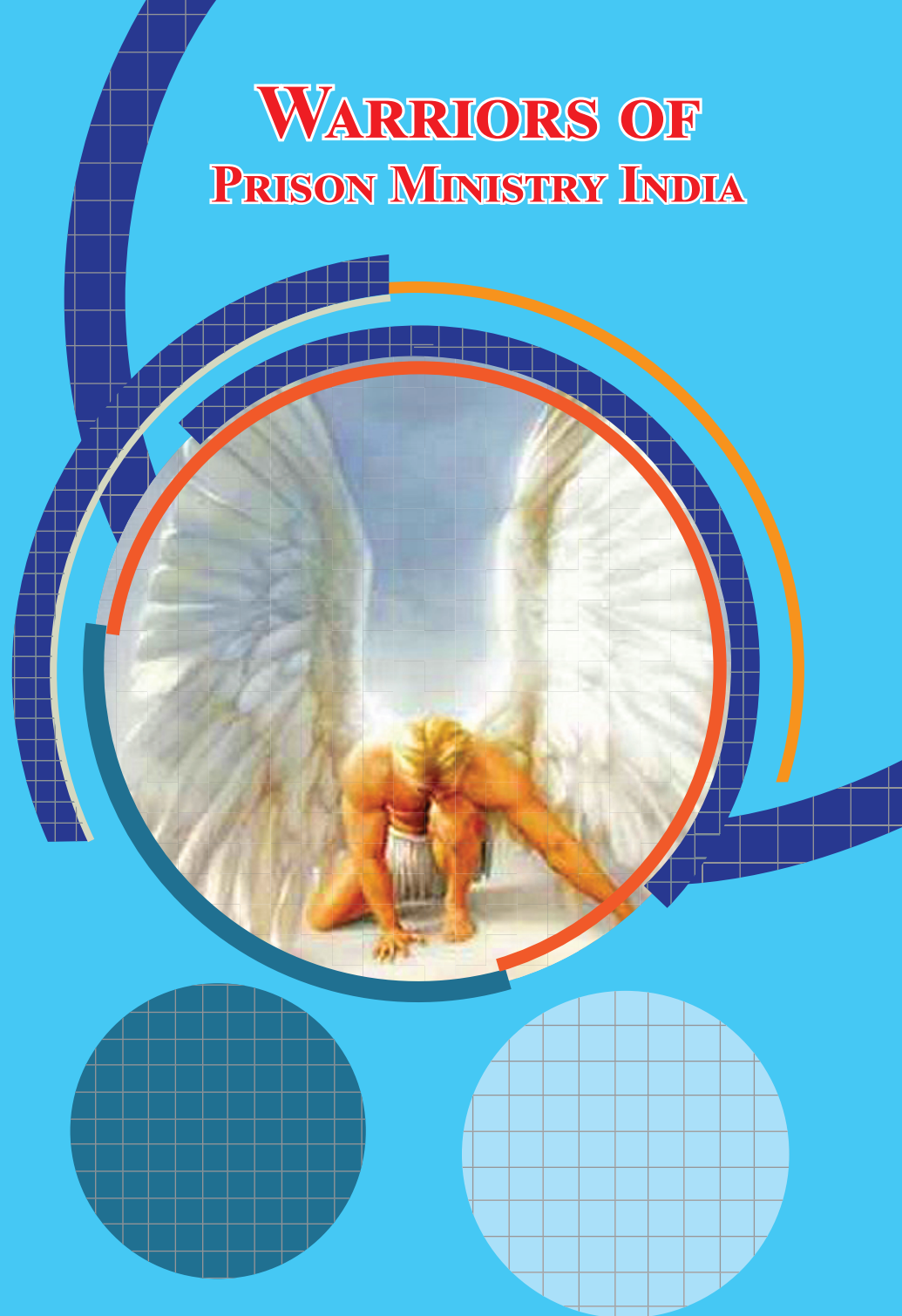
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Dedicated to
All PMI Warriors
Who Marched Ahead of Us
And Enjoying Eternal Bliss

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THE ARMOR OF GOD

Put on the whole armor of God,
so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.
For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh,
but against the rulers, against the authorities,
against the cosmic powers of this present darkness,
against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Therefore, take up the whole armor of God,
so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day,
and having done everything, to stand firm.
Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist,
and put on the breastplate of righteousness.
As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready
to proclaim the gospel of peace.

With all of these, take the shield of faith,
with which you will be able to quench 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 (Eph 6, 11-17).

Acknowledgements

“If a man hasn’t discovered something that he will die for, he isn’t fit to live” observes Martin Luther King Jr. *Warriors of Prison Ministry India* is the saga of PMI gladiators who were called by Jesus, the super dynamic love bomb, to die for the cause of searching, serving and saving the lost. I praise and thank Jesus who came to this world to proclaim liberty to captives and to seek and save the lost. I praise and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ who out of his unfathomable love called us to be warriors of Prison Ministry India to reach out, release, reform, rehabilitate, reintegrate and redeem the incarcerated. I praise and worship the Lord Jesus Christ for the PMI warriors who fought a good fight in liberating and redeeming our brethren behind the bars. “Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Tim 6,12). I am sure that in the last judgement God Almighty will say to PMI warriors, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me... Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Mt 25, 34-36, 40).

As the PMI cofounder, the PMI national coordinator and secretary to CBCI desk for prison ministry, I am honoured to offer our highest

tribute to our beloved PMI warriors who fought a good fight for the redemption of prisoners. PMI is greatly indebted to Most Rev Peter Remigius, the first PMI chairman who served us like a gladiator, Most Rev Allwyn D'Silva the present chairman who is the PMI ignited mind, Mar Jose Pulickal, the PMI spiritual guru who offered his whole land and property for the integral development of prisoners' children, and Mar Joseph Kundukulam who like a Father paternally encouraged the PMI founders. I place on record my most warm thanks to all those PMI warriors who dedicated their lives in redeeming the lost. My highest appreciation and most warm thanks to all those who found time in scribbling the life-stories of our great PMI heroes.

I express my special indebtedness to Most Rev Dr Allwyn D'Silva for an insightful foreword and for his generosity to grand nihil obstat and imprimatur to this book. My highest appreciation and most warm thanks to Rev Dr Arokia Nathan MMI who painstakingly read the whole manuscript and made grammatical corrections. I thank Bro Joseph P.T., Dinto Tom and Joshy P.E., of the Sevasadan Press for formatting, designing and printing of this book. Who dares, wins. Who sweats, wins. Who plans, wins.

Foreword

Prison Ministry India, a spiritual movement sprouted in a prayer group at St Thomas Apostolic Seminary for the integral human development of the incarcerated, was recognized by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India in 2000. CBCI has a separate desk under Justice, Peace and Development Commission for prison ministry and I am delighted to be its chairman. The pioneers of this movement did heroic deeds by reaching out to various prisons and leading them to integral human liberation and redemption. They were like warriors who did not always win, but always fought faithfully. The PMI warriors with their profound faith, spiritual exercises and ascetical practices heroically fought for the rights of our brethren behind the bars and worked tirelessly for their wellbeing. They established rehabilitation centers for released male and female prisoners, launched homes for prisoners' children and commenced a research center to formulate theories of reformation and reintegration.

Be a warrior, not a worrier is the motto followed by PMI volunteers. They put their trust in God alone, who called them to surrender themselves in the service of the lost, the last and the least. "I'm not a survivor, I'm a warrior", says a PMI warrior who has dedicated his/her life for this noble ministry. I acknowledge and appreciate the prison authorities who have always been a great support in fulfilling the mission of our warriors. I am grateful to my brother bishops who wholeheartedly support the PMI warriors in their venture in releasing, reforming, rehabilitating, reintegrating and redeeming our incarcerated brethren.

During the PMI sixth national convention held in Hyderabad, having witnessed the selfless services of Sr Leena Kattookaran FMM, a PMI warrior from Telangana, Shri Devandra Gaud, the then Home Minister made the following statement, "A gun cannot change a prisoner, but a nun can." Shri Das, Central Prison Superintendent, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu remarked about Sr Selvi, a PMI warrior who goes to the Central Prison every day after spending considerable time in prayer, "When Sr Selvi comes to the prison, this prison is no more a prison, rather a place of peace and harmony"

Some commit mistakes as they lack guidance in life and some innocents are put behind the bars through no fault of theirs. People lose hope when they enter prison. The dark prison cells tend to make their lives even darker. It is at this juncture that our PMI warriors step in to reach out to them as Jesus our Good Shepherd went in search of the lost. We have different type of warriors: The warriors who offer all their sufferings and do acts of mortification for the well-being of prisoners are called spiritual warriors. Many of our volunteers work on restorative justice, as part of the ministry of rehabilitation among victims and offenders and they become warriors. Those who are unjustly imprisoned need to be freed from bitterness, frustration and our volunteers give them courage and also instill hope in them by giving constant accompaniment. As a consequence of imprisonment, the families of prisoners suffer loneliness, financial hardships and here our volunteers become warriors by reaching out to these families and educate their children.

Prison Ministry is a struggle towards creating an atmosphere of joy for the brethren behind the bars. Hats off to every PMI volunteer who endeavors with joy for the well-being of our brethren, their families and children. Many a time they allow themselves to be humiliated and thus become down-to-earth persons. Rev Dr Francis Kodiyan MCBS, PMI cofounder, a warrior of insight, innovation and inspiration, and the mastermind behind the recent fruitful innovations in PMI, has taken genuine effort to bring out this book to acknowledge the noble services of our great PMI volunteers who did their ministry heroically in the past decades. PMI celebrates its Ruby Jubilee in 2021 and this book is a gift dedicated to all our volunteers who shed their sweat and dedicated their lives for the cause of our brethren. This book runs through the life stories of PMI warriors who responded to the call of God and spent their lives in redeeming souls for God. As I congratulate Dr Francis Kodiyan for his tireless effort in bringing out *Warriors of Prison Ministry India*, I salute all our PMI warriors for their great work in redeeming the souls.



Most Rev Dr Allwyn D'Silva
PMI Chairman

Prison Ministry India: A Militia to Regain the Lost

Rev Dr Francis Kodiyan MCBS

Introduction

Jesus categorically proclaimed his mission on earth by reading from the book of Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Lk 4, 18-19). Going to the tax booth of Mathew, Jesus again professed that he has come to call not the righteous but sinners (Mk 2,17). Visiting the family of Zacchaeus, Jesus emphasized his mission that he came to seek and save the lost (Lk 19,10). Jesus illustrated the significance of visiting prisoners in his portrayal of the last judgement, “I was in prison you visited me” (Mt 25, 36). Prison Ministry India, the militia to regain the lost, continues the significant mission of Jesus to seek and save the lost by reaching out to prisons, releasing, reforming, rehabilitating, reintegrating and redeeming them.

Jesus Fraternity

On 8th December 1981, Bro Varghese Kariperry and Bro Francis Kodiyan MCBS during their friendly conversation in the telephone cabin at St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Kottayam decided to be love bombs. Not to kill but to heal the broken-hearted. They formed a prayer group and began to visit the peripheries of Kottayam such as slums, beggars’ colony, old-age homes, orphanages and the subjail of Kottayam. On 28 February 1986 the Jesus Fraternity prayer group members set forth for an All Kerala Prison Pilgrimage which brought forth innumerable blessings both on prisoners and the pilgrims. They found great joy in seeking and saving the lost as Jesus who said,

“Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent” (Lk 15, 1-7).

Ecclesiastical Recognition

The Kerala Catholic Bishops Conference (KCBC) recognised Jesus Fraternity on 8th September 1989 under its justice, peace and development commission and gave an office for it at the pastoral orientation centre and appointed Fr Francis Kodiyan as its staff member to do fulltime service to prisoners. On 24th August 2000 Prison Ministry India was officially recognized by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) and Most Rev Dr Peter Remigius was appointed as its chairman. On 17th August 2003 CBCI had officially recognized St Maximilian Kolbe as the patron of Prison Ministry India. On 1st October 2014 PMI was made a separate desk under Justice, Peace and Development Commission in CBCI and appointed the PMI National coordinator as the secretary to this desk.

Prison Ministry India

In 1994 Fr Varghese Kariperry who was appointed to extend Jesus Fraternity ministry to all over India convened a national conference at the Christian Workers’ Centre, Bengaluru from 13-15 August 1994. In this meeting Fr Varghese Kariperry was elected as the first national coordinator and took a secular name Prison Ministry India (PMI). In 1995, he established PMI national office at Jacob’s farmhouse, Huskur, Bengaluru. Today we find PMI national headquarters at 52 Thomas Layout, Carmelaram, Bengaluru. Most Rev Dr Allwyn D’Silva, the auxiliary bishop of Bombay, is its chairman.

Prisons in India

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) as per 31st December 2019 there were 1,350 prisons and 4,78,600 prisoners in India. There were 617 sub jails, 410 district jails, 144 central jails,

86 open jails, 41 special jails, 31 women jails, 19 borstal schools and 2 other jails. There were 1,44,125 convicts, 3,30,487 undertrials, 3,223 detenues, 765 other inmates. There were 19,913 female prisoners, 1942 children, 5,608 foreign prisoners and 1,543 women prisoners with children.

Reach out

Jesus' style of action was to go out to the peripheries and outreach to the lost, the least, and the last such as the marginalized, the oppressed, the neglected and rejected of the society. "He went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness" (Mt 9,35). Following the footprints of Jesus, PMI volunteers go out to the peripheries in search of the lost to places like prisons, rescue homes, juvenile homes, observation homes and so on.

Ministries Inside the Prison

PMI organises various ministries for prisoners all over India such as celebrating sacraments to Catholic prisoners, conducting spiritual discourses and moral instructions, organizing cultural and entertainment programs, arranging counselling and spiritual directions, writing letters of personal concern, setting-up of libraries, establishing job-oriented training programs, providing vocational training facilities, steering literary, arts and sports competitions, preparing prisoners to write school and university exams, conducting medical camps, providing free legal aid, releasing prisoners, etc.

Release

Jesus outreached to many of the lost sheep and set them free from their bondages. He went to the tax booth of Levi and made him his disciple. He went to Zacchaeus' family and liberated him from his bondages. PMI volunteers visit prisons and release them by means of legal aid, legal clinics and through government agencies and financial assistance.

PMI Ministries Outside Prison

PMI establishes rehabilitation centres for released male and Female prisoners, launches homes and educational assistance for prisoners' children, founds research and documentation centres, organizes volunteers training programs, counselling and moral instructions in rehabilitation centres, contacts families for reconciliation and forgiveness, provides treatment to the sick, reconciliation of prisoners with victims and their families, helps prisoners' children with educational scholarships, arranges marriages and job settlements, vocational training arrangements, conducts awareness programs for the public, prints literature like books, magazines, brochures, provides legal aids to prisoners, etc.

Reformation

Release, repentance, and reconciliation shall lead to the reformation of a prisoner. The word reformation means restoring to the normally straight condition that which is crooked or bent. This is a process of bringing back to the normal behavior and lifestyle or the rectification of conditions or setting things to rights. Most important mystery in the reformation of a released prisoner is the unconditional and forgiving love of Jesus. The released prisoner has to experience this through the PMI volunteer.

Rehabilitation

One of the major goals of Prison Ministry India is the rehabilitation of released prisoners. PMI has many such centres in different Indian states. Given below are some of the PMI rehabilitation centres for released prisoners.

PMI Rehabilitation Centres for Men

- 1) Snehashramam, Vettukad PO, Thrissur 680 014, Kerala; Director – Fr Sunil, Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (SCJ), Tel. 7558914919; Estd 1 October 1991.

- 2) Santhinivas, Pathadipalam, Changampuzha PO, Edappally - 682033 Kerala; Director – Fr Binoy, Claretian Congregation (CMF) Tel. 9961272928; Estd 6 August 1995.
- 3) Snehatheeram, Market Road, YMCA, Alappuzha – 688 001, Kerala; Director - Fr Thobias, Tel 9526389005.
- 4) Kolbe Home, KG Kandigai, Tirutanni 631205, Tamilnadu, Director - Fr Thomas, Society of St Eugene De Mazenod (SDM), Tel 894 080 3689, Estd 2017.
- 5) Van Thuan Home, Thomas Layout, Carmelaram, Bengaluru, Karnataka; Director – Fr George Kalassery VC, Estd 2020.

PMI Rehabilitation Centres for Women

- 1) Snehashramam, Monvila, Kulathoor PO, Thiruvananthapuram 695583, Kerala; Directress – Sr Beena, Sisters of the Poor of St Catherine of Sienna (SDP) Tel 8078818239; Estd 11 October 1992.
- 2) Ashadeepam, Vettukad PO, Thrissur 680014, Kerala; Directress - Sr Ajita, John the Baptist Sisters (SJB) Tel 994320488, Estd 16 February 1993.
- 3) Jeevodaya Ashram, Doddakannalli, Janatha Colony, Carmelaram PO, Bangalore 560035, Karnataka, Directress – Sr Clara, Holy Cross Congregation, Tel. 0802 843 9926; Estd 22 January 1995.
- 4) Karunasadan, Kannur, Kerala, Ursulines Mary Immaculate (UMI), Estd 2004.

PMI Homes for Prisoners' Children - Boys

- 1) Snehadeepam, Inchiyani, Kanjirappilly Kottayam 686512, Kerala. Directress – Sr Beena, Holy Spirit Congregation, Tel. 94479 33675, Estd 3 July 1994.
- 2) Kolbe Home, 52 Thomas Layout, Sarjapur Road, Carmelaram, Bangalore -560035, Karnataka. Directress – Sr Gertrude, Satya Seva Catechist Sisters (SCS) Tel 8296304931, Estd 2016.

PMI Homes for Prisoners' Children - Girls

- 1) Asha Sadan, A 43, Sector 33, Noida, UP 201 303, Franciscan Clarist Congregation, Estd 3 May 1977.
- 2) Karunyashram, Thoppil, Thrikkakkara PO, Kochi 682021, Kerala, Director – Sr Anne Maria from Sisters of the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (SABS) Tel. 04842 425270; Estd 8 January 1999.
- 3) Premodaya, St Francis Xavier's Cathedral, St John's Church Road, Bangalore 560 005, Karnataka; Directress – Sr Raji, Sisters of St Anne's, Tel. 080 555 4683.
- 4) Jeevan Jyothy, St Joseph's Convent, Anavilasam PO, Idukki – 685535, Kerala, Directress – Sr Savio, Augustinian Congregation, Tel 9747627889.
- 5) Bonal Bhavan, Kadumeni PO, Kasargod – 670511, Kerala, Directress – Sr Tresa Chacko, Sisters of Charity of St Anne, Tel 8606350100.
- 6) Marie Pushpan's Home, Ranchi, Jharkand, Directress – Sr Jini, Order of Dominicans (OP), Tel 7254043957, Estd 2017.
- 7) Ashakiran, Ranji, Jharkhand.

Reintegration

Reintegration aims at regaining the lost image, esteem, personality, and property and thereby return to the mainstream of the society by living like a responsible citizen. When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people (Gen 14,14-16). The released prisoner after going through the different stages of reformation such as release, repentance, reconciliation, reawakening and rehabilitation will come back with renewed vigour and vitality to lead a powerful life witnessing Christ.

RRDC - PMI Research Centre

The long-cherished PMI dream to have a research center was realized on 20 November 2019 when Most Rev Dr Allwyn D'Silva blessed the newly constructed Reformatory Research and Documentation Centre (RRDC). This center will also function as the volunteers training and documentation center. From RRDC PMI publishes besides *Prison Voice* a research journal called *Reformatory Explorations* – a psycho-spiritual and crimino-social quarterly for prisoners' reformation and reintegration. PMI has a publication center from where we recently published *Love Bomb – Prisoners' Reformation Trajectory*, *Rainbow – the Theological Foundations of Prison Ministry*, *The Lost – An Eightfold Path for Prisoners' Reformation* and so on.

Redemption

The promise given in the garden of Eden was fulfilled with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Jesus was born to give us the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of our sins and through the tender mercy of our God. Jesus the rising sun incarnated to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the path of peace (Lk 1,77-79). Before Jesus was ever born the angel told Joseph that the child conceived by the Holy Spirit would save His people from their sins.

Conclusion

Lord Jesus Christ identified himself as a prisoner saying, "I was in prison and you visited me". Jesus assured great reward to those who do prison ministry when he said, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world". Prison Ministry does not end with visits to the prison; it goes beyond the prison walls, to their families, their children and victims. Anointed by the Holy Spirit, let us serve the Lord in harmony to renew the face of the earth and to glorify the Lord. I conclude with Pope Benedict XVI's words in *Sacramentum Caritatis* "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" (SC 59).

Warriors of Prison Ministry India: Traits

Rev Dr Francis Kodiyan MCBS

Introduction

A *warrior* is a very brave, skilled, fearless and experienced combatant like Benaiah one of David's mighty men who killed a lion in a pit on a snowy day (2 Sam 23,23) or Spartacus, the Thracian gladiator (111-071 BC), or the legendary female warrior and a Roman Catholic Saint Joan of Arc (1412-1431) who approached the France's King Charles VII and offered assistance in his efforts to expel the occupying English in the later days of the Hundred Years' War. Every Christian is a warrior. Every Catholic priest, every consecrated religious is a super dynamic warrior. Prison Ministry India (PMI) volunteers are called to be the most super dynamic warriors like Jesus the greatest warrior who accomplished his entrusted task surrendering himself to be crucified on the cross. PMI volunteers are called to be warriors, heroes and heroines to release, reform, rehabilitate, reintegrate and redeem prisoners. PMI had many such warriors, heroes and heroines who did marvellous deeds for the Lord among Indian prisoners. We honour them, imitate their heroic virtues and receive inspirations and mediations from them to do prison ministry in the complexities of twenty-first century. This article focuses on the ten salient features of PMI warriors so as to make use of them in our adventurous ministries for the lost.

Know Your Commander in Chief

Jesus the righteous, the holy, the true, and the mighty warrior is the commander in chief of PMI warriors. St John in his *Revelations* insightfully illustrates the features of Jesus, the Holy warrior: He rides on a white horse; with justice He judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on His head are many crowns. He is dressed in

a robe dipped in blood, and His name is the Word of God (Rev 19, 11-16). PMI Commander in chief is Jesus the Good Shepherd who searches the lost, heals the wounded and commits his life so that they may have life in abundance (Jn 10,1-18; Ezk 34; Ps 23). PMI commander in chief is Jesus Christ crucified who offered paradise to the good thief on the cross (Lk 23, 32-43)

Know Your Enemy

Our enemy always is Satan and his different manifestations. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. He is a liar and the father of lies (Jn 8,44). St Paul illustrates it better in his letter to the Ephesians: “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Eph 6, 12).

Know Your Target

The target group of PMI is clear – the lost such as prisoners, prostitutes, human trafficked, drug addicts, beggars, alcoholics and so on. Jesus’ purpose on earth was to inaugurate a system of redemption for Adam’s fallen family. “God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (Jn 3,17). “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners” (Mk 2,17).

Know Your Armor

Prayer and fasting are the most powerful weapons of PMI warriors. St Paul elucidates excellently well the spiritual armor in his letter to the Ephesians: Take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times

in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints (Eph 6, 13-17).

Know Your Task

Jesus' entrusted task was to redeem humanity from the clutches of sin and death. He accomplished this task by obeying unto the cross, through his passion, death and resurrection. PMI warriors shall remain steadfast in their faith and to imitate the humility of Christ, who "emptied himself" and obedience of Christ who "became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2,7-8). As a warrior for Christ, we train ourselves daily under the direction of the Holy Commander, and become ready to immolate ourselves.

Know Your Style

Like Jesus and his Apostles who were led by the Spirit, PMI warriors are called to be led by the Holy Spirit. To be led by the spirit means to have high spiritual intelligence. To grow in spiritual intelligence, we need to take care of our daily spiritual exercises, especially the Eucharistic celebration, Eucharistic contemplation, Eucharistic adoration and relentless prayer (Eph 6,18).

Know Your Battleground

Like the battlegrounds are often very tough terrain such as deserts, Rocky Mountains, snowy peaks, marshy valleys, and violent ocean, PMI warriors are called to heal the hardcore criminals in different notorious prisons. Hence their maxim itself is maximum inconvenience. Inconvenience is PMI's convenience.

Know Your Battalion

One of the Spartan army tactics was to fight shoulder to shoulder or back to back. Fighting alongside is better than fighting alone. PMI is a prayer group under the patronage of CBCI and we do our ministry

representing the Church keeping her norms and teachings. Make sure that the whole Church intercedes for us when we fight.

Know Your Mantra

“Thank You Jesus” is the mantra of PMI warriors. “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved” (Acts 4,12).

Know Your Bank

Bank of Divine Providence - BDP is the bank of PMI. Complete trust in the Lord is the PMI style. “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Mt 7,7). PMI follows the style of St Peter, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”

Conclusion

The ten traits of PMI warriors are 1) know your commander in chief, 2) know your enemy, 3) know your target, 4) know your armor, 5) know your task, 6) know your style, 7) know your battleground, 8) know your battalion, 9) know your mantra, 10) and know your bank. PMI warriors shall aspire for these traits and shall make use of them in their day-today adventerous ministries for the lost, the least and the last.

Most Rev Dr Peter Remigius: A Heroic PMI Warrior

Sr Lini Sheeja MSC

Introduction

A gladiator is the protector of those in need. He is the guardian of the ways of honor and courage. A gladiator will not put his own desires above what is right. Above all, a warrior is always motivated by his respectful duty. This courageous warrior is none other than our former chairman Most Rev Dr Peter Remigius, who tirelessly worked for the growth and welfare of Prison Ministry India. He was a man of optimism, audacity and relentless service true to his episcopal motto. He served for 25 years as the chairman of Prison Ministry India. Bishop Peter Remigius was the first chairman of Prison Ministry India who guided the ministry towards greater glory of God and represented PMI in CBCI.

Alter Christus

Bishop Peter Remigius, the eldest son of Mr Peter, an accountant of St Andrew Church, Melmanakudy and Mrs Clara Peter, was born on May 20, 1939 at Melmanakudy in Kanyakumari District, Kottar Diocese, Tamilnadu. After completing his school education, he joined St Aloysius Minor Seminary, Nagercoil. He did his priestly studies at Sacred Heart Major Seminary, Poonamalli and was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Kottar on 18 April 1966 in Madras by Most Rev Dr Arulappa, Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore.

Shepherd

After ordination, Fr Peter was appointed as assistant priest of Saral Parish (1966-1969), Palliady (1969-1970) and Parakunnu (1970-1973). At Parakannu he had a rich experience of assisting the Belgian

Missionary Rev Fr James Themper, who started the Kottar Social Service Society. In 1973, at the age of 33, he was appointed Director of Kottar Social Service Society. He served as the director of the Social Service Society for nine years and then served as the Parish Priest of St Francis Xavier Cathedral, Kottar (1980-1990). In his capacity as Vicar Forane, he became a shepherd of 29 Parishes and 35 churches. He was the Director of Caritas India, a Christian Social welfare organization from 1973 to 1975 and was the Chairman of the Famine Commission of the Diocese of Kottar from 1974 to 1976. He also served as the secretary of the Christian Continental Development Forum (CCDF), Asian Partner of Human Development (APHD), the executive member of the International Migration Commission (IMC) and the projects' director and coordinator of the diocese.

Episcopacy

Fr Peter Remigius was consecrated and installed as Bishop of Kumbakonam on 3 January 1990 by His Eminence Cardinal Simon Lourdasamy. His motto is Hope, Dare, Serve. As the committed good shepherd, he served the diocese of Kumbakonam for 18 years. He was appointed Bishop of Kottar on 30 June 2007 and took the canonical possession of the Diocese of Kottar on 24 August 2007.

PMI Chairman for CBCI

The CBCI standing committee meeting held at St John's Medical College Hospital, Bengaluru on 13-15 September 1999 recognized PMI on an experimental basis. CBCI asked PMI to amend its bylaws according to the terms and conditions of CBCI and Bishop Peter Remigius took interest to obtain its complete approval from CBCI. Finally, on 24 August 2000 Prison Ministry India was officially recognized by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) and Most Rev Dr Peter Remigius was appointed as its first chairman. On 17 August 2003 CBCI officially recognized St Maximilian Kolbe as the Patron of Prison Ministry India. On 1 October 2014 PMI was made separate desk under Justice, Peace and Development Commission in CBCI.

Prison Ministry Sunday

After getting the recognition from the CBCI, Bishop Peter Remigius approached and requested to allot a Sunday for the ministry. It was agreed that Prison ministry Sunday can be celebrated in connection with the feast of St Maximillian Kolbe (14th August) the patron saint of the Prison Ministry India and also allowed to have a second collection from the faithful. During every Prison Ministry Sunday Bishop Remigius used forward a pastoral letter to all bishops in the country. He not only forwarded letters but he also used to offer Holy Masses and collect money for the ministry.

PMI Spokesperson to CBCI

In CBCI meetings Bishop Remigius used to speak for PMI and encourage bishops to begin the ministry in their dioceses. He literally cried and appealed to the bishops insisting that Jesus came to the world for the sinners. Quoting the gesture of the Holy Father John Paul II who forgave Mehmet Ali Agha the one who attempted to assassinate him, he requested to continue the ministry in all the prisons of their dioceses.

Conclusion

No one can love this ministry without a profound spiritual foundation. We have seen him reciting his daily prayers without leaving a day even during busy travel schedules. He is indeed a warrior of prison ministry and will continue to be so. As one cannot imagine the history of Indian freedom movement written without mentioning the name of Mahatma Gandhi, so also the history of Prison Ministry India written without the name Most Rev Dr Peter Remigius. We remain ever indebted to him for his tireless service for the brethren behind the bars.

Most Rev Dr Allwyn D'Silva:
An Ignited PMI Warrior
Sr Lini Sheeja MSC

Introduction

Bishop Allwyn D'Silva, the Chairman of Prison Ministry India, a man for creation and the marginalized was born on April 20, 1948, in Amboli. He was parish priest of St. John the Baptist Church, Thane (West), when the appointment came on December 20, 2016 as bishop. He holds a master's degree in political science from the University of Mumbai. He was ordained priest on April 19, 1975. As part of his priestly ministry he spent 21 years in the slums of Mumbai where he was deeply involved in human rights issues, social concerns and more recently in environmental matters at the local, regional and national levels. Actively involved in environmental concerns, he was also secretary of the Office for Human Development and Climate Change Desk of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) and is visiting professor of the archdiocesan seminary.

Appointments

After his ordination, he served as the assistant at St. Anthony's Church, Vakola from 1975 to 1983. From 1983 to 1986 he was on the staff at National Vocation Centre, Pune. He served as the incharge for vocations in the Archdiocese of Bombay from 1977 to 1986. From 1986 to 1994 he served as assistant priest and later parish priest, St. Jude Church, Jeri –Meri. From 1991 to 1994 he served as the Dean, South East Salsette Deanery. From 1994 to 2000 - Priest incharge, St. Jude Church, Malad East. From 2000 to 2007 he was priest incharge, St. Anthony's Church, Dharavi. From 2002 to 2007 he served as Dean at North Mumbai Deanery. From 2007 to 2011 he served as the Parish Priest in Our Lady of Nazareth, Bhyandar and was also the Dean of

Dharavi Island and from 2011 to 2017 at St John the Baptist Church, Thane. In 2012 he was appointed as the Episcopal Vicar. On 20 December 2016, he was consecrated as the Auxiliary Bishop of Bombay by His Holiness Pope Francis and on 28 January 2017 he was ordained as the Auxiliary Bishop of Bombay by His Eminence, Oswald Cardinal Gracias, Archbishop of Bombay.

Call of Human Beings to Care for Creation

Care for Creation is the motto of Most Rev Dr Allwyn D'Silva and he lives it. In his episcopal logo, the background with the Cross supreme represents the Church of Christ; the hand stands for the care for all of creation, represented by the Earth. People, nature and the environment are interdependent which make 'care for creation' paramount. Care for Creation', is the Episcopal motto of Bishop Allwyn, which truly embodies what he believes in and stands for. The Bishop feels that the Church should take it upon herself to educate and motivate the people to adopt a green way of living. He is known as the Green Environmental Leader of the Archdiocese of Bombay and is actively involved in environmental and social concerns.

The Bishop says that he became involved in environmental issues during a time when the awareness of the same was minimal in the church and the society at large. Therefore, he believes that his initial duty was to create awareness on the magnitude of this issue, and now he is happy to see the church – both religious and the lay persons – taking up this cause and working towards the betterment of the society. Bishop Allwyn is thus a true inspiration to the church's efforts to honour our Planet and Creation. He strongly believes that we as citizens need to have a good relationship with our Creation in order to save it and help it to grow as a clean green planet to pass down to our next generation.

Father of the Marginalized

As part of his priestly ministry Bishop Allwyn D'Silva, he spent 21 years in the slums of Mumbai where he was deeply involved in Human Rights issues, social concerns and more recently, in environmental

matters at the local, regional and national levels. He has a big heart for the poor and is a down to earth person. His simplicity and humility are always appreciated by the people who live with him. He was the head charge of the Justice and Peace Commission for the Archdiocese of Bombay and coordinator of the Prison Ministry. Bishop Allwyn is the Secretary of the Climate Change Desk and Human Development Office for the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). He is also incharge of the Thane, Navi Mumbai and Raigad Deaneries. Some of the honorary posts that have been held by him were: Director of Institute for Community Organisation Research; Founder Director of Jagruti Kendra – Jerimeri; Regional Vice-President of International Human Rights Education Consortium; President of South Asian Human Rights Education Consortium; President of Mumbai Initiative on Human Rights Education; Member of Asian Justice and Peace Commission; Member of Executive Committee of Indian Network for Ethics and Climate Change.

Ignited Mind

Abdul Kalam in his book Ignited Minds insightfully illustrates the Indian ignited minds. Our chairman Most Rev Allwyn D'Silva is one of the prodigiously ignited minds of the Indian church. It was he who ignited and inspired us to launch online programs during the lockdown period of COVID-19 and he always ignites our minds with new ideas in our journey with our brethren behind the bars. On 29 July 2018, his Lordship, Bishop Allwyn D'Silva conferred the Order of the Diaconate on five seminarians and in his homily, he exhorted the candidates to model their life on Christ, the humble and obedient servant, who loved his mission on earth till the end. He cited the example of our Holy Father Pope Francis who washed the feet of prisoners on Maundy Thursday this year, surprisingly wearing the stole of a deacon, to emphasize the role of service which a deacon is called to exercise in a special way in the Church. He invites the volunteers of PMI to be rooted in Christ's love to bear fruit in humble service as we reach out to the lost. Our chairman calls the PMI members to be the servants, gazing upon our Master who became the servant of all.

A Man for Social Integration of Prisoners

Bishop Allwyn D'Silva, Chairman of Prison Ministry India, has advocated for the dignity and real social integration of prisoners. He says, "Real social reintegration begins by guaranteeing opportunities for development, education, decent work, access to healthcare, as well as generating public spaces for civic participation. Those prisoners who already served their sentences for the evil committed, should not be subjected to a new social punishment with rejection and indifference". Bishop D'Silva reiterates the importance of respecting the dignity of prisoners as a means to the important end of real social integration. If prisoners are prevented from regaining the full exercise of their dignity, they will once again be exposed to the dangers of violence, insecurity and desperation and the Bishop believes and emphasizes the importance of respecting the dignity of prisoners.

Repentance and Reconciliation

PMI Chairman D'Silva says that the major task of PMI is to "lead prisoners to repentance, reconciliation and reformation. True repentance leads to reconciliation with God, society, family and self. We are, therefore, to "bear fruit worthy of repentance" (Mt 18:3). In the same way, reformation and reintegration reach the summit with redemption. Like Jesus who forgave the good thief (Lk 23:42-43), ministry to prisoners helps to redeem the lost" He says convincingly that the prisoners are our brothers and sisters and so we must be ready to provide them with a second chance to repent, reconcile and renew themselves. We always hold them in our prayers for their repentance, reconciliation and renewal.

Gesture of Closeness

Turning his thoughts towards the nation's prisoners, Bishop D'Silva says: "Dear brethren behind the bars, we love you, we are with you, we pray for you and we are ready to do whatever is possible for your reformation and reintegration." He has firm devotion to Our Lady and Saint Maximilian Kolbe, the patron of PMI as he always prays to them to bless the ministry for the lost ones behind the bars. Prison

Ministry India (PMI) advocates for the rights of prisoners in the country. It is involved in the reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners back into society. PMI has more than 8,000 volunteers who work in the nation's prisons. It also has homes and rehabilitation centers where it caters to the needs of prisoners' children in several states all over India. Bishop Allwyn loves the creation, respects the creatures and all the more, he is a man for the last and the lost ones.

Publications and Awards

Bishop Allwyn has co-edited, published and presented a number of articles and papers. He is also the recipient of awards from: Federation of Centers for Community Organization; Bombay Catholic Sabha; Dignity Foundation; CPCI Award (Human Rights); World Peace Movement Trust; The Examiner Award for Journalism/ Golden Pen Award.

Conclusion

Bishop Allwyn was appointed as the Chairman of PMI in 2018. One cannot do this ministry without having passion. He has a passionate heart for the brethren behind the bars. He is always with innovative ideas and initiatives. He talks less and walks more. Also, he is ever approachable and reaches out to the needy without counting the costs. In this ministry for the lost, the least and the last one may not get any appreciation. Nevertheless, he guides the 8000 volunteers of PMI with his simple lifestyle without expecting any reward on earth. In his every address to the volunteers, he emphasizes the passion and love for the brethren behind the bars and their families. May he live long and his service touch and transform the hearts of many a unfortunate behind the bars and beyond all barriers!

Mar Jose Pulickal:
An Anointed PMI Warrior
Dr Francis Kodiyan MCBS

Bishop Mar Jose Pulickal, a true Apostle of Prison Ministry India, was born in Inchiyani, in Kanjirappally diocese Kerala, India on March 3, 1964. The late Antony and Mariamma Pulickal are his parents. After completing his primary school education from Holy Family School, Inchiyani, High School at CMS, Mundakayam, and Pre-degree at St Dominic's College, Kanjirapally, he pursued his priestly studies at the Minor Seminary of Mary Matha, Kanjirappally. He was sent to St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathoor, for his philosophical and theological studies.

Jesus Fraternity

Bro Jose was a dynamic member of Jesus Fraternity/ Prison Ministry India movement and a close associate of bro Varghese Karipperry and bro Francis Kodiyan MCBS who pioneered this movement for the least, the lost and the last. When both of them were ordained priests it was Bro Jose Pulickal who led the movement heroically and continued to give its members vigour and spirit in the seminary. Bro Jose Pulickal and Bro Sebastian Kochupurackal were the leaders of Jesus Fraternity in 1987-1988 at St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Kottayam.

Priestly Ministry

On 1 January 1991 deacon Jose was ordained a priest by Mar Mathew Vattakkuzhy, the former bishop of Kanjirapally and his first appointment was as the assistant vicar of Kanjirapally Cathedral. Fr Jose also served as the director of catechetics, vicar of Pathanamthitta forane, diocesan consultor, protosyncellus, and bishop's deputy for Ranni and Pathanamthitta. He did his Master's degree in Theology at

St Peter's Institute, Bengaluru and Doctorate in Biblical Theology from Dharmaram Institute, Bengaluru.

Director of Snehashramam

Taking into consideration of Fr Jose' active involvement and great interest in Jesus Fraternity activities he was appointed as the Director of Snehashramam, the first rehabilitation centre for released men prisoners at Vettukad, Thrissur in 1994. Following the footsteps of his predecessor Fr Varghese Karipperry, Fr Jose introduced many innovations at Snehashramam. He invited the service of sisters at Snehashramam for the better and faster reformation of its sons and with that intention constructed Bethania Bhavan. The sisters were requested to give motherly and sisterly love to the sons of Snehashramam with the expectation that this would accelerate and make easier their spiritual renewal.

Return to Paradise

Fr Jose, a man of insights, inspirations and innovations, had rich ideas about Snehashramam which he implemented one after the other. At the very entrance of the Snehashramam there is a board on which it is written: *A Return Journey to Paradise*. The Snehashramam land itself is arranged in a such a way that those who come to it should reach its objective of radical return to the paradise which man lost through sin. He gave a new shape and meaning to the 11 acres of land at Snehashramam and transformed it as a mini Bible Land where one can easily remember and meditate upon the important places and events in the life of Jesus. For instance, there is the manger of Bethlehem where Mary gave birth to Jesus (Lk 2, 1-20; Mt 1, 18-25). This was a stable that the pioneers of Snehashramam converted into a small chapel for personal prayer and sharing. Later this became the retreat hall where weekend retreats and night vigils were conducted both for the public and the inmates. There is the house of Nazareth where Jesus lived in obedience to Mary and Joseph (Lk 2, 39-52; Lk 4, 16-30).

The small stream represents the Jordan River in which Jesus was baptized, was filled with the Holy Spirit and heard the voice of the Father, “You are my beloved son with whom I am well pleased” (Mt 3, 13-17). The desert where Jesus defeated Satan (Mt 4, 1-11) solicits one to win over bad tendencies and habits. The Galilee lake reminds of the first disciples of Jesus and the miraculous calming of the storm (Mt 4, 12-21; Mk 4, 35-41; 6, 45-52). It also recalls the miraculous fishing expedition and the breakfast of the risen Lord and his disciples thereafter (Jn 21). Beatitude Mountain proclaims the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). Bethsaida Pool calls to mind those sick people who waited for miraculous healing (Jn 5). Jacob’s well solicits conversions like that of the Samaritan woman (Jn 4). Lazarus’ house in Bethany where Mary and Martha served and listened to Jesus, speaks of the value of authentic friendship (Lk 10, 38-42; Jn 11). Zacchaeus’ house in Jericho challenges us to say yes to the call of personal religious conversion just as Zacchaeus did (Lk 19, 1-11).

All these symbolic representations invite the inmate to profoundly contemplate the life and message of Jesus. Snehashramam landscape is arranged in such a way that those who visit it should experience the love of Jesus who saved the world from the bondage of sin by his passion, death and resurrection. They cannot but hear the inevitable call of Jesus to transform their lives by turning away from sin and crime and turning towards God who loves them unconditionally. Snehashramam encourages every visitor to return to paradise. Furthermore, this is an indirect catechism, teaching the inmates that Jesus is the pivotal point of their renewal and rehabilitation, that as Jesus, they have to carry the cross of their lives to reach the stage of resurrection, and that with Jesus everything is possible, even those things they consider impossible. You can read more about these reformatory concepts and innovative visions from his book *Divine Heartbeats of Love Explosion* (Snehavispodanathinte Divya Spanndanangal).

Snehadeepam – A Home for Prisoners’ Children

Snehadeepam - lamp of love - a home for the rehabilitation and reformation of children with behavioural problems and criminal

tendencies – is the brainchild of Fr Jose Pulickal. Out of the overflow of his selfless love for the lost, the least, and the last, his whole family – father, mother and only son decided to donate their whole ancestral property with the residence for the integral human development of these children. The running of the whole project was entrusted with the community of the Sisters of Holy Spirit (SHSp). Snehadeepam has become the icon of Fr Jose Pulickal's love for the lost and his commitment to renew and rehabilitate prisoners' children and released child prisoners, under the age of 16. It also welcomes abandoned children and juvenile delinquents, who if they are not helped, could end up by becoming prisoners themselves. Therefore, this centre plays a great role in the preventive aspect of crime and imprisonment. Snehadeepam aims at accomplishing the following goals such as, spiritual renewal, physical and psychological healing, facilities for counselling and education, opportunities in developing talents and skills, reconciliation with their parents and finally their total development. On 3 July 1994 Mar Mathew Vattakuzhy, the former Bishop of Kanjirappally blessed Snehadeepam and Sheela Thomas the then collector of Kottayam inaugurated it.

Shepherd of Kanjirappally

In 2015 the Syro-Malabar Synod elected Fr Jose Pulickal during its meeting at Mount Saint Thomas in Kerala as the Auxiliary Bishop of Kanjirappally Diocese. On 12 January 2016 Pope Francis confirmed this appointment. His Episcopal consecration took place on February 4, 2016 at St Dominic's Cathedral, Kanjirappally. His Eminence George Cardinal Alenchery, the Major Archbishop of the Syromalabar Church and Mar Mathew Arackal, the Bishop of Kanjirappally presented the bishop-elect with the insignia of Episcopacy. On 15 January 2020 Pope Francis appointed him as the bishop of Kanjirappally and his Episcopal enthronement took place on 3 February 2020. "Salt of the Earth, and the Light of the World" is his motto.

Literary Contribution

Bishop Mar Jose Pulickal is a prolific writer. His Master's Degree thesis based on the Jesus Fraternity and Prison Ministry India

Movement entitled *Jesus the Dynamic Way: Pilgrim Dynamics of Jesus Community* is a must-read book by PMI volunteers. His book named *Snehavispodanathinte Divya Spandanangal* in Malayalam Divine Heartbeats of Love Explosion is a masterpiece on Snehashramam, the first rehabilitation centre of PMI for released men prisoners at Thrissur, Kerala. His other books are *Dynamics of Jesus Community: Towards the Discipleship in Lucan Theology*, *Hrudayanilathe Mazhapeythu* (Malayalam), *Puzhayude Hrudayampole* (Malayalam), and *Pilgrim Perspectives of Eastern Ecclesiology*.

JPDC Chairman of KCBC

In 2020 Mar Jose Pulickal was appointed as the chairman of the Commission for Justice, Peace and Development of the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Conference under which comes the activities of Jesus Fraternity/ Prison Ministry India. As the JPDC Chairman I am sure he will reawaken the original spirit of Jesus Fraternity among the volunteers of PMI and will revive the various rehabilitation centres of PMI all over India.

Mar Joseph Kundukulam: A Paternal PMI Warrior

Fr Varghese Karipperry

Archbishop Joseph Kundukulam, popularly known as the father of the poor, can also be called as the father of prisoners and Jesus Fraternity known today as Prison Ministry India. Born on 26 September 1917 at Parappur, Kerala, Mar Kundukulam became the Bishop of Thrissur on 16 August 1970 and embraced eternal bliss on 26 April 1998. Bishop Joseph had a burning heart beating for the poor, prisoners, the marginalized, the outcast and for those who live in the periphery. This article briefly sketches his valuable contributions to prison ministry.

Father of the Poor

Mar Joseph Kundukulam was well known in Kerala as the Father of the Poor due to his extraordinary care for the poor and the suffering. He was a man of deep conviction, faith, and prayer who always relied on providence of God. He was certain that serving the poor is serving the Lord and believed that they are the visible sign of Jesus. He truly lived the words of Jesus “truly I say to you, as you did to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25, 40). Archdiocese of Thrissur was really an abode of the last, least and the lost. He launched various homes for the homeless, differently abled people, sick and dying, leprosy patients, HIV patients, unmarried mothers, mentally challenged and many more such category of people.

Father of Prisoners

Archbishop Kundukulam can also be called as the father of prisoners as he loved and cared for them unfathomably. For this great soul there are only two types of people in the world: sinners who are caught and sinners who are not caught. Prisoners always were happy to see him

and hear from him. He was very particular to visit the Central Prison, Thrissur during every feast such as Christmas, Maundy Thursday, Easter, etc. He took a special interest in establishing the first renewal and rehabilitation centre for released prisoners in his archdiocese. In March 1991 when PMI volunteers informed him regarding their plan to open a centre for released prisoners, he immediately referred of a plot of land at Vettukad. Prior to the concrete launching of the fund raising for this project, Varghese and Francis visited Bishop Kundukulam to obtain his guidance. He encouraged us by sharing his own experiences of pastoral ministry for the unwed mothers in the city of Thrissur. Before concluding the discussion, he gave his signed and sealed letterheads to Francis saying, "Write whatever you want and give these to whomever you think helpful". After this meeting the bishop had to go for a blessing. He asked Francis to accompany him in his car. On the way as he pointed out different charitable institutes run by religious, he told Francis that these institutes had been donated not by many but by single individuals and counselled him to approach the rich to channel money for the released prisoners' renewal centre.

First Rehabilitation Centre for the Released Prisoners

On first October 1991 the first PMI renewal and rehabilitation centre was blessed by Mar Joseph Kundukulam where released prisoners, who had been rejected by society and family, were invited to undergo the six months' training program. This is a reintegration process that leads one towards living a normal life which proves the fact that everything is possible to God. The precious blood of Jesus is so powerful that it could save even those hardened criminals.

Chapel-Temple-Mosque

God is everywhere. God is very well present in prison too. With this conviction in 1992 Archbishop Kundukulam planned a project in which different religious people shall have a place to experience God in their own religious way. He approached the authorities and got permission to build a small church, temple and mosque in the central prison of Thrissur. He entrusted this task to Fr Baby Shepherd CMI

and asked the faithful of Lourdes Cathedral to financially assist it. Today this church-temple-mosque has become a great sign and symbol of religious harmony.

Released Prisoners' Hope

Mar Kundukulam was the consolation and hope of released prisoners. On 16th February 1994 he blessed Ashadeepam, a home for the renewal and rehabilitation of released female prisoners run by the Sisters of John the Baptist. On 20 December 1998 Nirmal Bhavan – a home cum vocational training centre for released juvenile delinquents under the initiative of Malabar Missionary Brothers was launched in Thrissur archdiocese. On 20 December 2003 the Reformatory, Research and Documentation centre (RRDC) of PMI was launched in a rented building at Anchery in Thrissur archdiocese.

Comrade of Saints

Thrissur archdiocese was blessed with the presence of many great saints during the reign Mar Kundukulam. On 7th February 1986 Saint John Paul II inaugurated the centenary celebrations of eparchy of Thrissur at Saint Theresa's Nagar (Sakthan Thamburan Nagar) in the presence of one million faithful. On 18 January 1994 Saint Mother Theresa of Calcutta visited this eparchy and inaugurated Divya Hrudaya Ashram at Chennaippara, a home for the rehabilitation of wandering beggars under the care of the Missionary Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament (MCBS). Hence Archbishop Kundukulam can be considered as a stalwart of charity like Saint Pope John II and Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

PMI Warrior

Prison Ministry India is very much owed to Archbishop Kundukulam and the Archdiocese of Thrissur. Fr Varghese Kariperry, the cofounder of PMI hails from this archdiocese and the first rehabilitation centers for the men and women released prisoners as well as the PMI research center were launched in this archdiocese. Archbishop Kundukulam, the father of prisoners and a great PMI warrior continues his mission in assisting the prisoners from heaven.

Fr Varghese Karipperry: A Pioneering PMI Warrior

Rev Dr Francis Kodiyan MCBS

Introduction

Fr Varghese Karipperry, a great prophet of the 21st century, is a PMI warrior of insight, innovation and inspiration. Like Steve Jobs the great innovator, Varghese gave birth to many movements for the emancipation of those living in the peripheries. Together with Fr Francis Kodiyan, he founded Jesus Fraternity and Prison Ministry India, a Catholic movement working under the CBCI for the release, reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners. He proved himself to be a mighty PMI warrior by his commitment to prisoners' reformation, his selfless service as director of Snehashramam and national coordinator. His greatest contribution lies in his 3R theory for prisoners' reformation and rehabilitation which has become a roadmap to thousands to liberate themselves from the clutches of sin and crime. This article briefly highlights his great contributions to humanity.

Love Bomb Exploder

Born on 10th April 1959 at Nellikunnu, Thrissur, Kerala, India as the 9th son of Mr Karipperry Pyloth and Kunjila Adampukulam, Varghese joined the Minor Seminary of Thrissur Archdiocese. For his priestly studies he came to St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathoor. On 8th December 1981 both Varghese and Francis were appointed to attend the phone calls. During their friendly conversation in the phone cabin Varghese told Francis "Be a love bomb. Let it be exploded. Not to kill but to heal the brokenhearted". They became friends and decided to pray daily before the Blessed Sacrament. This fraternity and friendship with the Most Holy Eucharist led them to go to the peripheries of

Kottayam which in the course of time guided them to the Kottayam Sub jail.

Jesus Fraternity Cofounder

The attempt to visit the Kottayam prison with the assistance of prison Fellowship inspired Varghese and Francis to form a prayer group in their batch to pray for the people in the peripheries. Their visit to the neighbouring prisons led them to initiate the All Kerala Prison Pilgrimage in 1986 and the formation of Jesus Fraternity- a prayer group for the welfare of prisoners, their families and victims - which was later recognized by the KCBC in 1989.

Snehashramam Director

When Jesus Fraternity launched its first rehabilitation center for released men prisoners called Snehashramam, the KCBC found none other than Fr Varghese as its first director. He victoriously served as its director from 1991-1994 and again from 2003-2009. As its director he tirelessly toiled to release, reform, reconcile, rehabilitate, reintegrate and redeem more than 500 prisoners.

3 R Theory

Fr Varghese's prolonged experience with the release and rehabilitation of prisoners gave him the insight to form a theory for their reformation. It is known as 3R Theory which consists of Release, Renewal and Rehabilitation. Release involves providing hope in life, leading them to forgiving love, strengthening their willpower, and thereby to self-transformation. Renewal comprises of mental resetting, reconciliation with those whom he/she hates, visualizing good in others and self, work therapy, prayer, and living in the present. Rehabilitation consists of initiation to a normal family and social life with **job facilities done with the assistance of local police and local Catholic parish.**

National Coordinator

In 1994 Fr Karipperry was appointed to extend the Jesus Fraternity ministry to the national level. Like an explorer he travelled all over India and convened a national convention in Bangalore on 13-15 August 1994. During this convention the new name Prison Ministry India was taken and Fr Varghese was elected as its first national coordinator. In 1995 he launched the national office in a cowshed at St Jacob's Farm, Huskur, Bengaluru which was later shifted to the leprosy rehabilitation center at Sumanahalli. In 1996 PMI office was shifted to the Teacher's colony at Koramangala and finally to Thomas Layout, Carmelaram, Bengaluru.

Author

Fr Varghese Karipperry wrote the following books which shed light on the founding charism, spirituality and lifestyle of Prison Ministry India: 1) coauthored with Latika, *Prisoners our Own Brethren* (1998), 2) *Star of Hope in Dark Cells* (2000), 3) *Mochanayatra* (Malayalam) (2000), 4) *Fube Therapy* (1995), and 5) *Aantharika Saukyathinte Suvarnna Thakkol* (Malayalam) (2000).

Innovator

Fr Varghese is a man of great creative intelligence, innovation and insight. Besides Jesus Fraternity and Prison Ministry India, he innovatively launched many relevant and timely ministries. 1) *Sarathi* – a movement for the welfare and coordination of taxi and autorickshaw drivers recognized by the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Conference (KCBC). This is an implementation of the labour actualization theory by transforming the employees to become maximum productive. 2) *ChrisGold* – a movement for the retirees so that they spend the evening of their life in joy, peace and serenity glorifying the Lord. 3) *Lady Global* – an initiative meant for the education of nursing students by the cooperation of women themselves. 4) *Global Children* – an association for the welfare of children by the assistance of children themselves. 5) *Shanti Samaj* – a

drive meant for the welfare of wandering beggars, mental patients and street children in Thrissur City.

Archpriest

Fr Varghese like the good shepherd served as assistant parish priest at St Thomas Forane Church, Palayur (1989), and St Antony's Forane Church, Ollur (1990). He was parish priest at Little Flower Church Poomala (1991), St Joseph Church, Vettukad (1992-1994), St Antony's Church Chuvannamannu (2003), St Joseph Church Kuriachira (2016-2019), and at present he is the Archpriest of St Thomas Archiepiscopal Church, Palayur.

Conclusion

With his motto “think globally, act locally and reform personally” and with his practice of the “maximum utility theory of commitment”, Fr Varghese Kariperry has become an embodiment of empowerment of prisoners, drivers, retirees, women, children, beggars, headload workers, mental patients and street children. With his creative intelligence and unquenchable thirst to serve the lost, the least and the last wherever he is appointed, he made an enduring difference.

Rev Dr Francis Kodiyan MCBS: A Groundbreaking PMI Warrior

Sr Lini Sheeja MSC

Introduction

The call to become a love bomb for the reformation, rehabilitation and redemption of the lost was given to the PMI warrior Fr Francis Kodiyan MCBS at St Elijah Ashram, Niravilpuzha, Kerala on 11 March 1983. This God experience sparked in him the commitment to dedicate his entire life for the cause of prisoners and prostitutes. His whole life can be summarised in an answer to the question “Why can’t you dedicate your life for the conversion of sinners?” which the Eucharistic Jesus asked him at Elijah Ashram Chapel. Thanks to his response to this question PMI has grown with 8000 dedicated volunteers to visit the 1350 prisons in India and 18 rehabilitation centres for released prisoners and their children. This article highlights the trajectorial heights of a PMI Warrior, Fr Francis Kodiyan, the current PMI National coordinator.

Cofounder of Jesus Fraternity/Prison Ministry India

Born on 20 May 1961 at Chendamangalam in Ernakulam district of Kerala as the 9th son of Mr Kodiyan Vareed Itterah and Athanasia Payyappally Kovulan, Francis joined the Missionary Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament (MCBS). For his priestly studies he was sent to St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathoor. On 8th December 1981 Br Varghese Karipperry and Br Francis Kodiyan shook their hands and said, “Let us become love bombs to explode among the people, not to kill but to heal the bruised hearts”.

Prayer Group

To become love bombs they first decided to spend their daily siesta at the Malankara Chapel of St Thomas Apostolic Seminary adoring the Eucharistic Jesus, the sacrament of love. This fraternity and friendship with the Most Holy Eucharist were extended to the seminarians of their batch by forming a prayer group which in the perfection of time became the seedbed of Jesus Fraternity prayer group in 1986 which later came to be known as Prison Ministry India in 1994.

Go to the Periphery

The friendship and fraternity with the Most Holy Eucharist extended to the seminarians was further extended to the suffering people living in the periphery of Kottayam. Every Thursday afternoon they visited the neighbouring orphanages, beggars' home, old-age homes, slums and medical college. It was during one such visits that they providentially noticed the Kottayam Subjail which sparked in them the concept of prison ministry.

All Kerala Prison Pilgrimage

In 1986 the Jesus Fraternity members organised an All Kerala Prison Pilgrimage with orchestra, rhapsody, and other cultural programs. This pilgrimage showered upon them innumerable divine providence experiences and benedictions. Their personal encounters with prisoners all over Kerala strengthened them to develop the unique lifestyle of Jesus Fraternity which was recognised by the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Conference 8th September 1989.

PMI Rehabilitation Centres

In 1990 immediately after his priestly ordination, Fr Francis was invited by the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Conference to become the assistant director of Jesus Fraternity and was appointed at the Pastoral Orientation Centre, Palarivattom. While serving there he masterminded the first rehabilitation centres for released male and female prisoners known as Snehashramam. The first one for men

released prisoners at Vettukad, Thrissur in 1991 and the second one for women at Monvila, Thiruvananthapuram in 1992. On 29 February 2020 Fr Francis launched Van Thuan Home – a rehabilitation centre for released men prisoners in Bengaluru adjacent to Kolbe Home.

Reformative Research and Documentation Centre

In 1993 Fr Francis was sent to Rome for higher studies by the Missionary Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament (MCBS). His life question was: how to reform and rehabilitate a prisoner or a criminal? Finding answers to his life questions in 1998 he defended his doctoral thesis on personal religious conversion trajectory at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome. Coming back from his European experiences in 2003 Fr Francis launched the PMI Reformative Research and Documentation Centre (RRDC) in a rented building at Thrissur. On 20 November 2019 RRDC was shifted to the newly constructed PMI jubilee memorial institute at Carmelaram, Bengaluru. In this new building he established the PMI Documentation Centre and Volunteers' Training Centre.

Eightfold Path for Prisoners' Reformation

Anchoring on his doctoral thesis Fr Francis formulated an eightfold path for prisoners' reformation and rehabilitation which he explains well in his book, *The Lost: An Eightfold Path for Prisoners' Reformation*. This eightfold path consists of Reachout, Release, Repentance, Reconciliation, Reformation, Rehabilitation, Reintegration, and Redemption.

Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

In 1996 Fr Francis Kodiyan brought the light of PMI to the international horizons by participating in the ninth world congress of the International Catholic Commission for Prison Pastoral Care (ICPPC) held from 7-12 September at the Metropolitan Seminary, Warsaw, Poland. Recently he was invited by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development in the Vatican to present a paper on the "Initiatives and Contributions of Prison Ministry India"

in an international meeting on prison pastoral care for worldwide prison chaplains held on 6-7 November 2019.

Periodicals

Fr Francis commenced his literary career as a seminarian by publishing a magazine called *Pulari* (Dawn) in 1987 for prisoners. He also took leadership in publishing a book called *Thadavarayile Sangheetham* (Prison Melody) a compiled work of prisoners' poems, short stories and pencil drawings collected through the All Kerala Art and Literary Competition for prisoners in 1987. When he became the assistant director of Jesus Fraternity, he launched the magazine known as *The Echo* to convey the news of prison ministry which later paved the way to *Prison Voice* and *Vimochanam*. In 2003 he launched the research magazine called *Reformative Explorations: A Psycho-Spiritual and Crimino-Social Quarterly* on reformation and rehabilitation from RRDC, Thrissur which is now published from RRDC, Bengaluru.

Books

Fr Francis has written the following solid books very precious to PMI volunteers. 1) Religious Conversion Trajectory (1998), 2) Conversion Trajectory of Charles de Foucauld (1998), 3) Saga of Divine Providence: The History of Jesus Fraternity and Prison Ministry India (2000), 4) My God and My Lord: The Ecclesial Identity of the Syromalabar Church (2002), 5) The Holy Eucharist: Theological and Missionary Perspectives – Malayalam edited (2006), 6) The Eucharist: An Antidote to Death Culture, edited (2007), 7) Rainbow: Theological Foundations of Jesus Fraternity and Prison Ministry India (2007), 8) Love Bomb: Prisoners' Reformation Trajectory (2018), 9) The Lost: An Eightfold Path for Prisoners' Reformation (2019) and 10) Warriors of PMI, edited (2020).

PMI Special Task Forces

One of the great contributions of Fr Francis Kodiyan is the introduction of PMI Special Task Forces such as Terrorist Saving Squad (TSS),

Death Row Commandoes (DRC), Mafia Redeemers (MR) Antihuman Trafficking Brigadiers (ATB), Serial Killers Reformers (SKR), Habituals Saving Squadron (HSS), Hired-killers Liberating Squadron (HLS), Antidrug Trafficking Warriors (ATW), Prisoners' Releasing Team (PRT), Prisoners' Children Educators (PCE), Purgatory Souls Redeemers (PSR), Foreign Prisoners Expatriators (FPE) and Psychiatric Prisoners Consolers (PPC).

Incessant Intercessory Invocation for the Incarcerated

Covid19 Pandemic brought forth many challenges and changes in our day today life. Journeys were restricted, work at home became the culture and custom, training programs became online. Rising up to the occasion Fr Francis launched many online training programs for state coordinators, diocesan directors, fulltimers and so on. PMI convened online retreat known as *Il Resveglio – The Reawakening* for its volunteers and as its follow-up commenced the Burning Bush Program on every first Friday. As a valuable fruit of the retreat Fr Francis commenced the Incessant Intercessory Invocation for the Incarcerated worldwide. PMI volunteers from all over India will join together and intercede for the reformation, reintegration and redemption of prisoners worldwide 24 hours of the day, 7 days of the week and 365 days of the year.

Conclusion

Fr Francis Kodiyan, a mighty PMI warrior and the mastermind behind the Prison Ministry India, is a true love bomb who inspires people with his love for God and compassion for humanity. His simple lifestyle, friendly and pleasing manners, hard work habit of doing everything for the greater glory of God certainly inspire many. As Jesus went in search of the lost sheep his heart always goes for the weaker ones in the community and society at large. He is a man of mission with vision and a man with conviction, who always dares to reach out to the needy and the marginalized. Together with PMI family I salute this PMI warrior and wish that God may work many more wonders through this Man of Compassion.

Fr Joseph Mackolil: A Shepherding PMI Warrior

Sr Lini Sheeja MSC

Lifeline

Fr Joseph Mackolil was born in a devout catholic family on 29th December, 1945 to pious parents, Mr. Chacko and Mrs. Rosa. He is the second among their seven children and he has three brothers and three sisters. He belongs to the parish of Ayavana in the eparchy of Kothamangalam. He was raised in good catholic faith and his parents' staunch faith was great inspiration, spiritual nourishment and sustenance for his early faith formation. He did his primary and middle school in Sacred Heart School, Ayavana and later he joined Infant Jesus School, Vazhakulam for high school. He then joined Kothamangalam minor seminary in the year 1964 aspiring to become a priest. After years of priestly formation, he was ordained as priest by his Excellency Mar Mathew Pothanamuzhy on 21st December, 1973 at his home parish, Ayavana.

Priestly Ministries

Fr Joseph was appointed as Vice Principal & Lecturer of Malayalam at St Aquinas College, Muthalalkodam while serving as Eparchial Director of CML, KCSL & Vocation Bureau from 1974 to 1982 and also as Parish Priest at Perumpallichira (1981-1982). He then served as the State Vice Director of CML from 1984 to 1987 as well as Visiting Lecturer of Malayalam in Paurasthya Vidyapeedam, Vadavathoor and Kottayam from 1985 to 1987 and from 1987 to 2003 he was the Resident Lecturer in the above places. He became the National Executive Member of Prison Ministry India, Director of Institute of Dynamic Involvement, Snehashramam, Vettukad, Trichur and first KCBC Director of Jesus Fraternity from 1989 to 1995. He moulded

seminarians as Rector in Minor Seminary from 2003 to 2006 while serving as Parish priest at Thrikkariyoor for the same period. He continued to serve as Parish Priest at Muvattupuzha (2006-2011), Nellimattam (2011-2016), Vandamattam (2016-2018). Currently he is the Parish Priest at Vijnanamatha Church, Thodupuzha East from 2018 till date.

CML and KCSL Director

Cherupushpa Mission League (CML) and Kerala Catholic Students League (KCSL) were two organizations of school children and college students. The organization CML had a magazine called 'Mission' in every month. As the chief editor of this magazine for several years, he had published sixty editorial articles in these magazines.

Jesus Fraternity

In 1987 Fr Joseph became the resident professor at St Thomas Apostolic seminary and was appointed as the director of Jesus Fraternity. In 1989 when Jesus Fraternity was recognised by the KCBC he became the first KCBC director of Jesus Fraternity. As Fr Joseph was resident professor in the seminary to assist him the newly ordained Fr Francis Kodiyan MCBS was appointed as the assistant director with residence at the Pastoral Orientation Centre, Kochi. A paper presented in KCBC conference by Fr Joseph Mackolil, really made the bishops to think about the concept and idea of Jesus Fraternity and as a result of this presentation, this new concept called 'Jesus Fraternity' was included in one of the commissions named 'Justice, Peace and Development.' It was a voluntary, charitable movement, basically a prayer group of catholic faithful, united in the love of Jesus and committed to the cause of the least, lost and the last in the society especially prisoners, prostitutes, drug addicts, street children and the victims. Jesus Fraternity was founded totally in a prayer context. Though it was started primarily for the welfare of the prisoners in Kerala, gradually and steadily soared to greater heights by going national and even international by the special providence and grace of God. God has immeasurably blessed this pious organization by

appointing right persons in right time so that it could grow and spread as a big, good tree which bears fruits to the marginalized and needy.

Jesus Fraternity Director

Jesus Fraternity had a publication wing and Fr Joseph oversaw it too in the capacity of the director. To give the charism and dynamism of this ministry, Jesus Fraternity published magazines every year called '*Pulari*,' and '*Thadavarayil Sangeethem*.'

Pulari

In *Pulari* he had written almost thirty editorial articles in which he shared the love of God and proclaimed the original charism of Jesus Fraternity loudly through this magazine. The charism reads as 'Release, Renew and Rehabilitate'.

Thadavarayil Sangeethem

This magazine mainly aimed at the conscientisation of the general public informing the pain of people behind the iron bars. During his time, there were magazines of this kind, which had been published. There were inspiring articles and editorials which influenced the society largely.

Thadavarayil Oru Kaithiri

This is a book written by Fr Joseph Mackolil, published in 1997. This is one of the renowned contributions to Malayalam Literature and to the organization called Jesus Fraternity as a whole. Drawing inspiration from this book, it was taken up by the Government of Kerala and copies of this book were made available to every government schools' library. It was accepted because it really helped the students to lead a good life devoid of criminal tendency.

Institute of Dynamic Involvement (IDI)

The Kerala Jesus Fraternity, under the able guidance of Fr Joseph Mackolil as director, could establish many renewal centers in Kerala

for the total spiritual renewal and rehabilitation of ex-prisoners. Among these many renewal centres, three are for women ex-prisoners and two for men and the other for children who have criminal tendencies. In 1996 again an institute was started for the volunteers who wanted to dedicate for the cause of the marginalized people in Snehasramam, Vettukadu, Trichur. It mainly aimed at training the volunteers to give the original charism of Jesus Fraternity among the marginalized people.

Prison Pilgrimage

From 1987 onwards, every year under his leadership and guidance, the seminarians performed biblical and social skits, rhapsody, orchestra, and one-act plays based on biblical and social themes in jails, in different rescue homes and *Abalamandiram* of Kerala.

Reformative Experiences

While Fr Joseph was the KCBC director of Jesus Fraternity and resident professor at St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, once he received a call from the director of Snehashramam, Thrissur informing that one of their workers had threatened to kill him. Fr Joseph assured him that he would reach there in the morning and settle the matter. He asked the director to pray for divine providence and intervention. The next day Fr Joseph reached Snehashramam and met that person privately. He was inebriated with frustration and anger and not ready to heed the words of Fr Joseph or be reconciled, inspired by the Holy Spirit, Fr Joseph told him, “You need not kill the director instead you can kill me.” These words of really shook him and made him to accept his mistake and to reconcile with the director.

On another occasion an ex-prisoner came to meet Fr Joseph and asked for some help. This released prisoner had undergone the renewal program at Snehashramam and wished to start a new life with a new job. He said to Fr Joseph that he was good at aluminium fabrication and would be well and good that he gets a job of this kind. Fr Joseph knew a friend who runs a company of aluminium fabrication. Responding to his request, Fr Joseph called his friend immediately

and requested him to admit that person in his company. He agreed. Fr Joseph gave a letter to the ex-prisoner to give to the owner of the company, enclosed with his renewal certificate. That person went to the company and submitted the letter to the owner. The owner, after reading the letter, came to know that he was an ex-prisoner. He immediately called Fr Joseph that he was not interested in admitting him because he was an ex-prisoner. He also added that he was afraid that he would steal and defame the company. Fr Joseph told his friend that if he stole or brought any insult to the company, Fr Joseph himself would pay and would even be ready to go to prison. Hearing these courageous words of Fr Joseph, the owner without any further thought employed him in his company.

International Seminars

Jesus Fraternity was widely accepted and acknowledged as the organization of greater movement of the Church, by taking part in international seminars. There were two international seminars held in Mexico in 1999 and in New York in 2001 in which Fr Joseph presented papers. This was a great platform to bring to spotlight the ministries undertaken by Jesus Fraternity in India. In the paper presentation, new methods in the field of renewal of prisoners were introduced to the whole world. This was also a great opportunity to mingle with different organizations of the world, different people and various church leaders. The two seminars really paved the way for accepting different ideas and creative thought process to work for the betterment of prisoners worldwide.

Fr Sebastian Thekkanath: A Burning PMI Warrior

Sr Joby Thekkanath DCPB

St Thomas Apostolic Seminary

Fr Sebastian Thekkanath who, belongs to the Major Archdiocese of Ernakulam –Angamaly, was a first-year philosophy student at St Thomas Apostolic Seminary in 1986, when Bro Varghese Karipperry and Bro Francis Kodiyan MCBS initiated a prayer group for the least, the last, the lost, called Jesus Fraternity, later came to be known as Prison Ministry India. Fr Sebastian Thekkanath got opportunity to be part of the prison pilgrimage team many years and visited many prisons in Kerala and imbibed the original charism of Jesus Fraternity. He also started visiting on a regular basis with senior members of JF to the nearby district hospital wards, colonies, Thiruvanchiyoor juvenile home and Kottayam district prison. During his theology studies he actively involved in prison pilgrimage, chain fasting, weekly group prayer, letter writing ministry etc. To start Snehashramam, Vettukad, together with other seminarians, Sebastian Thekkanath actively participated in the fundraising campaign. To purchase the land for Snehashramam Monvila, Trivandrum, he spent two weeks at Marianivas, Kesavadasapuram, the home of Mr Sam uncle. Sebastian Thekkanath was the editor of “Pulari” Publication, which the Jesus Fraternity members publish before the prison pilgrimage every year. He was one of the team members in editing *Thadavarayile Sangeetham* the poems, short stories & drawing done by the inmates of the prison.

Pastoral Ministry

Fr Sebastian was ordained as a priest on 29 December 1993 and was appointed as the assistant parish priest at the St Thomas Forane Church, Kottekavu, North Paravoor. During this time, he continued prison

ministry activities, by visiting nearby Aluva sub jail with the local team, being part of prison pilgrimage, inviting Jesus Fraternity state director and team to his parish and conducting awareness campaign for young people, helping the state team financially by collecting fund from his parish and selling hundreds of Divine Word Calendar to every family etc. During the busy schedule in the parish he also completed his master's degree in sociology from Kerala University. Then he was appointed as parish priest at St. Thomas Church, Kizhakkumury, Cherthala. During this period, he did B.Ed. course at Sree Sankara University. Fr Sebastian was appointed as the assistant director of diocesan family Apostolate Centre, which conducts regular marriage preparation course and Family life Retreats in the parishes. In this ministry he could share his prison ministry experiences and create awareness among young people about prison ministry of the church. At the same time, he visited Ernakulam sub jail frequently with the local group.

PMI National Office

In February 1998 with the permission of Mar Varkey Vithayathil, the Archbishop of Ernakulam – Angamaly, Fr Sebastian was appointed as the PMI National coordinator and moved to PMI National office, Bangalore. Even though he took charge, Fr Varghese Karipperry remained with him in Bangalore, to give him experience, and they made many trips to various parts of India together. After a few months, Fr. Varghese Karipperry went back to Kerala, entrusting the responsibility of PMI, to Fr. Sebastian Thekkanath at the national level. He started visiting various places where there is a prison, to meet prison officials as well as the religious sisters and priests of that area to start local units of PMI. He organized with the guidance and support of Fr. Varghese Karipperry, a National Convention in Mumbai, in which, he was elected and officially declared as National Coordinator of PMI.

PMI Local Units

Fr Sebastian continued his pilgrimage to various prisons in India and organized Regional and State level meetings of religious, priests and lay people and started hundreds of local units of PMI attached to the prisons. He addressed Regional bishops' conferences, CRI meetings and formation houses, seminaries and created awareness among them all about the need of this noble mission of Christ for the brethren behind the iron bars.

PMI under CBCI

Fr Sebastian's continuous effort brought PMI under CBCI on 27 September, 2000. He met CBCI President Most Rev Dr Alan De Lastic, Archbishop of Delhi and all CBCI standing Committee members and many other member bishops of CBCI and convinced them of the importance of this ministry and the need of being it under the Catholic bishops' conference, officially. Convinced by the good works the PMI volunteers were carrying out at various prisons in different parts of the country, CBCI formally asked the Chairman of JPD Commission, Bishop Rt. Rev. Dr. Peter Remegius, to make a detailed study about the ministry and present it in the next standing Committee of CBCI. Thus, Fr Sebastian Thekkanath presented it to the Standing Committee and the standing committee of CBCI unanimously accepted PMI as an official ministry of the Church in India. Holy Spirit works wonders for the greater glory of God Almighty.

PMI Regions

By the time, there were about 800 local units of /for PMI and it was not easy to co-ordinate all these local groups from the national office and so, Fr Sebastian divided these units into Three Regions, South, North and North-East Regions. Fr. Joseph Kavalakkatt VC was appointed as North Regional Coordinator and Fr. Joseph Puliylakkatt MSFS was appointed as North-East regional coordinator and there was no separate Regional Coordinator for South then as the national office was in the South. This was a further boost to the activities of PMI all over India.

State Conventions

Fr Sebastian Thekkanath, then concentrated more in strengthening local units by creating awareness among volunteers and imparting the original charism of PMI and its main pillars - “Be a love bomb, let it be exploded, not to kill, but to heal the broken hearts”; “inconvenience is our convenience”; “prayer is our power”; “our bank is providence of God”; “sharing is our lifestyle”. In order to spread these, he organized and conducted several state level and local level meetings with the support of local bishops and CRI groups and as it was a new ministry that time, there was a wonderful cooperation from the Religious superiors of India. He appointed state- coordinators for PMI in several states, during these state level meetings.

National Conventions

Fr Sebastian Thekkanath convened three national conventions of PMI. The first one was at Bandra Retreat Centre in Mumbai. There were participants from eighteen different states of India. The next one was at Nitika, Kolkata. This was also rich with participation. The Hyderabad PMI National Convention was historic because the concluding ceremony was conducted at Mushirabad central prison Hyderabad and inaugurated by Mr Rangarajan, then AP Governor. It was during the inaugural address of this convention, by Dr. Devendra Gaud, then Home Minister of AP stated that “No gun can change the world, but a nun can”.

PMI Rehabilitation Centers

Fr Sebastian motivated many religious congregations to open new rehabilitation centres for released prisoners and children of the prisoners. St Anne’s Sisters opened two centers for children, Premodaya in Bangalore and Arunima in Chennai. St. Elizabethan sisters opened a centre called Snehavivas for school going girls, SABS sisters converted their existing St Thomas convent, Edappilly Thoppil to Karunyasramam for ladies and Malabar Missionary Brothers (MMB) opened Nirmal bhavan at Maiyapuram for young boys.

PMI Prison Quarter's Ministry

It was because of the timely intervention and leadership of Fr Thekkanath, PMI now has the Prison quarter at Bangalore Prison, where our volunteer sisters stay and work in the prison. This may be the only place where we have such facility to work in the prison. When prison was shifted from the city to the present place there was less transportation facility to reach the prison and it was unthinkable for our very senior volunteers to reach the prison very frequently taking many public busses. Fr Sebastian Thekkanath requested the then DGP of prisons Mr Revannah Siddhaiha to provide us with a staff Quarters. With the full support of Jail DGP, it was sanctioned by the Government and PMI still makes use of this facility.

Fantasy Drawing Competition

In 2000 Fr Sebastian launched a national level drawing competition for prisoners. There was a wonderful response from all the prisons and there were hundreds of entries from various prisons. And is continued all through these years and cash prizes were given to winners. This helped prisoners to give wings to their creative ideas and ventilate their pent-up emotions too.

National Meetings

He was also invited by National Human Rights organizations and Regional Bishops Conferences and CRIs. He addressed Western Regional Bishops' Conference in Mumbai, TNBC at Kumbakonam; APBC at Hyderabad, Orissa Bishops together with all major superiors of Orissa at Jarsaguda and also presented PMI Reports to KCBC and CBCI. For many years he was a regular visiting faculty to talk on Radical Ministry of the Church in the context of Prison Ministry in all major Seminaries and Formation house all over India like Mater Dei, Goa; NBCLC Bangalore; RTC Bhopal. Through all these interventions, he could reach out to almost all the states of India and start PMI units as well.

International Meetings

Fr Sebastian participated in the ICCPPC Mexico City conference together with Fr. Joseph Mackolil and Sr Fidelis from Jeevodaya, Bangalore. Fr Thekkanath presented a report of PMI ministry in ICCPPC. He was invited by ICOPA (Canada), IPCA (South Africa) and CURE (USA), in the consecutive years and presented papers on various aspects of prison ministry.

Books

He reworked and reprinted *Prisoners our Own Brethren* edited by Fr Varghese Kariperry and Sr Latika SJB. He published a new book entitled, *Beyond the Iron Bars* and *Petals of Life*. He wrote many articles on various aspects of prison ministry in many magazines, journals both in English and Malayalam.

Conclusion

Within a short period of 5 years PMI became a vibrant and notable ministry of the Catholic Church for the renewal and rehabilitation of prisoners. It was because of the team work and leadership of Fr. Sebastian Thekkanath, who really had the original Charism of the ministry and the fire within his spirit.

Fr Sebastian Vadakumpadan: An Innovative PMI Warrior

Rev Dr Francis Kodiyan MCBS

Introduction

Fr Sebastian Vadakumpadan, born in 1968 at Muringoor, Kerala and ordained priest in 1996 in the Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly, like the Good Shepherd spent 14 precious years seeking after the lost behind the bars. As the national coordinator and CBCI secretary to PMI he led the movement with the faith of Abraham, passion of Elijah and leadership qualities of Moses. Under his able leadership, PMI reached the pinnacle of recognition by Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI), Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC) and International Catholic Commission for Prison Pastoral Care (ICCPCC). With immense gratitude, highest appreciation and great tribute to him, this article briefly delineates some of the significant contributions of Fr Sebastian Vadakumpadan to PMI.

PMI Family

Fr Sebastian was well acquainted with prison ministry while he was studying at St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Kottayam, the birthplace and motherhouse of PMI. As a seminarian he actively involved in the prison ministry of the Jesus Fraternity. In 2002 he was appointed as the national coordinator of PMI which he meritoriously did until 2006. In 2011 he was again appointed as PMI national coordinator and since 2014 CBCI secretary to PMI. On May 31, 2019 he was transferred to his archdiocese and took charge as the director of Bharat Matha Law College, Aluva and parish priest of St Joseph's Church, Karukunnu.

Great Leader

Fr Sebastian was a loving and approachable person to whom all can share their joys and sorrows. He respected all, encouraged all and made everyone feel that she/he is good and capable. He was wise in

his approach in solving problems. His diplomatic talents were evident in situations such as obtaining permission from prison authorities. His art of negotiation, manifested in dealing with parish priests in connection with the Prison Ministry Sunday celebrations, was truly remarkable. Being a creative and proactive person, he trained large number of priests, seminarians, sisters, lay faithful especially college students inspiring them to do prison ministry.

Prison Quarters Ministry

It was Fr Sebastian who launched the prison quarters ministry at Bangalore Central Prison with Sr Carmelita. Seeing the struggles and inconvenience of the sister to come to prison, a quarter to stay was allowed on 4th of May, 2002.

Prison Ministry Sunday

Another great achievement of him would be the introduction of Prison Ministry Sunday Celebration on every second Sunday of August in all Indian Catholic parishes. When we approached the CBCI for Permission to have a Prison Ministry Sunday, the Sunday prior to Independence Day was given to PMI to celebrate as Prison Ministry Sunday since 17th of August, 2003.

All India Coordinators Meet

From 27 to 28 of March 2004 he convened an all India PMI coordinators meet in Delhi to strengthen the volunteers. This was a planning session which helped to chalk out the PMI future projects.

PMI National Conferences

He was privileged to organize 4 PMI national conventions: 7th national conference in Chennai in 2002, 8th National conference in Bhopal in 2004, 11th national conference in Faridabad-Delhi in 2014 and 12th National conference in Guwahati, Assam.

Prison Voice

It was Fr Sebastian who changed the name *The Echo from Prison* to *Prison Voice* to the PMI national news magazine with registration number and postal concession in December, 2004.

Full-timers' Course

Anchoring on the IDI course – Institute of Dynamic Involvement, Fr Sebastian launched full timers' ministry in June, 2005 with the first batch of 29 full-timers for 24 days intensive training.

10th Anniversary of PMI National Coordination

There was a mega function at St Johns Medical College Auditorium to commemorate the 10th Anniversary celebration of prison ministry national coordination in 2005. At this function we inaugurated four things: 1) Mission of Indian Nationals in foreign prisons, 2) Prison Ministry India Flag, 3) Prison Ministry India Anthem both Hindi and English, 4) Video CD on Prison Ministry.

Regional, State and Diocesan Units

For the easy and better administrative purpose, he divided the PMI ministry into four regions under different states and units and launched regional offices in Delhi, Guwahati, Nagpur and Chennai. Credit goes to him in launching the North East Regional Office in Guwahati, Assam in collaboration with Ursuline Franciscan Congregation.

CBCI Secretary to PMI

The appointment as the CBCI secretary to PMI is another growth for prison ministry. We have now the privilege of taking part in CBCI as the separate desk under JPD Commission and privileged to attend the bishops' conference meetings. We have the special privilege of presenting our report in CBCI along with other commissions.

Asian Delegate of ICCPPC

Fr Sebastian was blessed to participate in various international conferences and present papers on Prison Related Topics. In 2011 he was appointed as the Asian Delegate of ICCPPC and could initiate ICCPPC in many Asian Countries such as Philipppians, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Hongkong.

Kolbe Home

His dream to have a home for prisoners' children was realized through the establishment of Kolbe Home in 2015 in Bangalore adjacent to the PMI national office where 18 children pursue their studies. He also purchased another plot of land adjacent to Kolbe where we have today the RRDC and Van Thuan Home.

Karjat Land

He Purchased a plot of land at Karjat between Lonavala and Mumbai for the Central Regional office and a rehabilitation centre for released prisoners.

Books

Fr Sebastian authored many relevant books published by PMI. They can be called text books and are very significant in the formation of prison ministry volunteers. Some of his major writings are: Prison Ministry India — Volunteers' Guide, Our Hearts Were Burning – Prison Ministry India Volunteers' Handbook, Undertrials in Criminal Justice System of India, The Justice that Heals Not that Kills, Create Homes Not Cells and Best Practices of PMI.

Golden Phrases

Let us recall some of the golden phrases of Fr Sebastian: "Prisoners no more but brothers and sisters"; "Rehabilitate a prisoner today better the world tomorrow"; "Create home not cells"; "We are all in prison, there is only one difference; the distance between the wall and us".

Conclusion

PMI family is greatly indebted to Fr Sebastian Vadakumpadan's commitment to prison ministry. Like the Good Shepherd he left behind the 99 and sought after the one who was left behind and entangled in thorny bushes. PMI shall always be grateful to him and shall express our continued gratitude towards him by praying and offering Holy Masses for him.

**Fr George Kuttickal MCBS:
An Insightful PMI Warrior
Fr Mathew Thundathil MCBS**

Introduction

God, in his infinite mercy, has allowed man to participate in his work of creation through various channels. Fr George Kuttickal was used by the Lord as one such channel of mercy and compassion through the ministries of Jesus Fraternity and Friends and Birds of the Air (FBA). Fr George firmly believed that man was created to be a steward of the earth and that his work is a profound continuation of God's compassionate love. When Fr Francis Kodiyan and Fr Varghese Karippery began prison ministry at St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Kottayam, Fr George was doing his MTh studies at Paurastya Vidyapeetham and was an active member of their prayer group called Jesus Fraternity. He was one of the spiritual animators of the first prayer group which paved the way to the great Prison Ministry India movement conveying the forgiving and merciful love of God to the lost, the unwanted and discarded of the society.

Lifeline

Fr George Kuttickal (1950-2017), a zealous and ascetical priest of the Missionary Congregation of Blessed Sacrament (MCBS), was a powerful instrument in the hands of the Eucharistic Lord. He was born on 11 January 1950 in the Kuttickal Puthenpurayil family at Purakkad in Alappuzha District, Kerala, India. PC Joseph and Thressiamma were his parents.

Vocation

When Fr George was a child, the then parish priest, Fr Geevarghese Attuvathalackal, during a Sunday homily, was explaining the letter of St Paul to Romans “But how are men to call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And preach unless they are sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!” (Rom 10:14,15). These Bible verses touched his heart and he heard an inner voice calling him to become a priest, and without hesitation, he chose that road for the rest of his life. He was led by the Lord to join the Missionary Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament (MCBS) and took his first religious profession on 17th May 1970. Fr George was ordained on 15th March 1977 by Bishop Sebastian Mankuzhikkary, the Auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly.

Pastoral Ministry

To train Fr George for his future apostolate, the Lord, in his amazing providence, sent him to work in the parishes of Palakkad and Thrissur Dioceses. He built up a strong communion of zealous lay apostles who were dedicated and committed to the church. He was a catalyst in building up the parish into a closely knit community.

Diocesan Director of Charismatic Renewal

Having understood the extraordinary success in the parish ministry and his special charismatic grace to renew individuals, families and parishes, the then Archbishop Joseph Kundukulam appointed him as the first Diocesan Director of Charismatic Renewal in the Archdiocese of Thrissur. Blessed with the Charismatic gifts received from the Holy Spirit through the charismatic renewal, he was able to lead the Sunday school teachers, youth and the families of the Archdiocese into a Eucharistic centred life and teaching.

Eucharistic Retreat Ministry

The MCBS community appointed him to the Eucharist Retreat Ministry. This allowed him to travel to different parts of India. His heart was aflame from the Eucharistic renewal experience and his inner eyes were opened through a mystical experience from the Lord. He realized that there was a vacuum within himself due to a lack of infilling of wisdom and power from the Eucharistic Lord.

Higher Studies

MCBS sent Fr George to do his post graduate theological studies at Paurastya Vidyapeetham, Kottayam. The topic selected for his research was “The Eucharistic-Ascetic-Monastic Life Blossoming from the Eucharistic Altar”. From his research study and from deep contemplation on the Eucharistic mystery, he felt a strong call from the Lord to serve those who have been convicted and put behind the bars and neglected by society.

Founder of FBA

One of Fr George’s habits was to spend long hours before the Blessed Sacrament in Eucharistic adoration. The Lord opened his eyes and ears to the cries of the mentally disturbed orphans and abandoned children who were wandering in streets. He wished to bring them to the main stream of the society by showering them with love and affection. This prophet, chosen by God, later founded the Friends and Birds of the Air (FBA), a rehabilitation and evangelization ministry for the marginalized in society. He also founded two religious communities for serving the abandoned ones of the street, namely Sons of Eucharistic Covenant (SEC) and Daughters of Eucharistic Covenant (DEC). Fr George was very much influenced by Pope St John Paul II (1978-2005). During this period, the world was already attracted to Eucharist centred works of mercy through St Mother Theresa of Calcutta (1910-1997). The spirituality of these saints highly influenced the life of Fr George. Pope St John Paul II, in his visit to Haiti in 1983, invited the Catholic Church to utilize the moment of *kairos* and to “*Look to the future with commitment for a New*

Evangelization: One that is new in its fervour, new in its methods and new in its expressions.” This invocation for a new evangelization echoed as a prophetic call in the mind of Fr George. He wanted to become a “New Evangelizer” in its true meaning. In the jail ministry, he proclaimed the Good News of Jesus in a humble and simple way, but in a new style, new in its fervour, methods and expressions totally enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

PMI Spirituality

During the seminary life, God allowed the buds of love to bloom in the hearts of Francis Kodiyan and Varghese Karippery. The original spirituality of Jesus Fraternity was developed in a prayer group at St. Thomas Pontifical Seminary, Vadavathoor. Even as young seminarians, they whole heartedly embraced the call through prayer, penance and an earnest desire to work among the prisoners. Fr George spiritually enlightened this group. He taught them to trust in God’s providence, have a deep faith in our Lord Jesus and to always search whole heartedly to do the will of God in their everyday lives.

Contributions to Prison Ministry

The PMI members were able to see the prisoners as God’s children and not thieves or robbers. They had an intense thirst to proclaim the Good News of Jesus from the Manger to all the prisoners irrespective of their religion. Whenever Fr George met the prisoners at the jail, he embraced them with true love and kissed their feet showing God’s love for them. His love could be compared to that of the merciful love of the father when the prodigal son returned to the father’s house in the parable quoted by Jesus in the Gospel of St. Luke. This act of compassionate love transformed many prisoners and made them shed tears of repentance and they all became renewed persons and totally changed their lives after their release.

Not a Visit but a Pilgrimage

For Fr George, the visit to the jails was a pilgrimage. Not a simple pilgrimage but a pilgrimage to share the merciful love of God. Prior

to the jail visits, the members of the fraternity (3 priests and 8 brothers) prepared themselves through prayer, chain-fasting, self-sanctification and various other mortifications. They were always in prayer while travelling and also during their long waits in front of the jail to seek permission to see the prisoners. Even during the many difficult circumstances faced in their visits to the jail, they would courageously use prayer as their weapon to overcome barriers. Fr George always strengthened and induced them to pray in faith during such times of struggle. The verse “with God nothing is impossible” (Lk.1:37) strengthened them through all such situations.

Spiritual Weapons

Fr George believed that the most powerful spiritual weapons/funds of a renewed evangelization were Prayer Fund, Suffering Fund, Penance Fund and Self-Sanctification Fund. He also believed that the four funds, of the victorious, suffering and militant churches, offered together with the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, are a great source of divine power for speeding up the evangelization of the world with lasting fruits. The funds mentioned below were powerfully used by the Jail Ministry for all their pilgrimages across Kerala.

Prayer Fund: Jesus spent 40 days of prayer in the desert before starting his public ministry of evangelization. Even during His three years of public ministry, Jesus started His day with solitary talks with His Heavenly Father and ended with prayerful nights on the mountain. Whenever Fr George planned his ministry visits, he would always start with a Holy Hour before the Holy Eucharist accompanied by Holy Mass and the prayers of the Church and ended his day with another sacred hour before the Eucharistic Lord.

Suffering Fund: It is the passion and death of our Lord Jesus that has redeemed the world from sin and eternal death. Over the centuries, the sufferings of the martyrs and the saints offered in the name of Jesus have continued to transform humanity. Suffering fund is collected by uniting all our sufferings with the sufferings of Jesus through the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Penance Fund: Jesus started his public ministry only after 40 days of fasting and prayer in the Judean desert. All the great Christian mystics, throughout the centuries, liberated human souls by their penances. The Church always encourages her faithful sons and daughters to involve in fasting, abstinence and other such acts of penance for self- sanctification, especially for the conversion of poor sinners.

Self-Sanctification Fund: In the Gospel of John, Jesus prayed to the Heavenly Father with the words “And for their sake I sanctify myself, so that they may also be sanctified in truth” (Jn 17:19). The grace of self-sanctification flows out from the Sacred Heart of Jesus and from the Immaculate Heart of Mary and it is an infinite source of sanctification for persons, their families, the Catholic Church and the whole world.

Sacrificial Love

During the initial years of the Jail Ministry, it was found that the society generally marginalized the people like prisoners, gangsters or criminals. But Fr George showed the world that there can be reconciliation even between warring factions through the following story: while travelling in a bus from Kottayam to Kadappara near Malayattoor, he noticed two groups of people ready to attack each other for some political issues. He heard Jesus saying in his heart to go there in the midst of the two groups. Immediately he got down from the bus and stood right in the middle of the two groups and asked them to kill him before they started hurting each other. This act of sacrificial love by an unknown person completely took them by surprise. Fr George took the weapons from their hands and threw it into a nearby lake and asked them to return home to their families. He said that he was able to get the strength for showing the sacrificial love of the Lord through his daily solemn Eucharistic celebration which was the centre of his life. These acts of courageous love helped the Fraternity to form its vision, mission and spirituality.

Home of Love Home - Snehashramam

During his second stint at Vadavathoor Pontifical Seminary for his M.Th. studies (1984-85), he heard a challenging inner voice from the Lord saying, “There are enough and more theses written being eaten by moths, let there be a thesis lived”. This was revealed to him during his solitary prayer and contemplation for 45 days in the famous monastic centre of contemplation known as Kurisumala Ashram on the mountain of Vagamon in the district of Kottayam, Kerala. It was to start an Ashram life with a new vision and mission.

Characteristics of Ashram Life

1) An ashram community owns nothing other than God: “God is my chosen portion and my cup” (Ps.16:5). Even the land of the ashram should be one that is given for use only and not as a possession. 2) An ashram community should be able to truly and sincerely pray “give us this day our daily bread”, which meant sharing the food with the people who are hungry rather than amassing it for tomorrow’s luxury. 3) An ashram community, in incessant divine worship and prayer, proclaims throughout the day: Our total dependence is on God Almighty only. 4) An ashram community resembles a *Thumba poovu* (Leuca Indica – one of the smallest flowers), where the least, the last and the lost of the society become co-pilgrims in the search for God.

Instead of writing a thesis based just upon an in-depth research and closing of study, Fr George was led by the Holy Spirit to translate into his very life-the findings of his spiritual search and his intellectual research. With the permission and blessings of MCBS Congregation and the ecclesiastical Superiors, he started living in a humble and small hut - ‘Snehashramam’; (June 1989 to May 1990) built by Mr. Pulimparambill Ramankutty in his own land in an interior poor Hindu village at Edappallythopp (Thrikkunnappuzha) in Alappuzha District. The villagers here earned their livelihood by making coir and related products.

At the hut, there was nothing of his own other than providence of God. He was divinely provided for his daily meal from the

neighbouring Hindu families and lived a life of incessant prayer, contemplation and *lectio divina*. He would have only two meals a day which consisted of gruel (*kanji*) and raw bitter guard. Fr George always lived with the bare minimum. Sometimes there would be no kerosene to light a lamp. Darkness, solitude and hunger beautified the richness of poverty and he was led into a deep intimacy with the Holy Trinity and was being trained to become another Eucharist for everyone, irrespective of caste, creed or religion. The neighbouring Hindu families called him ‘*Snehadasachan*’ (priest filled with love) and they were ready to share with him from their poor livelihood. Fr George had to walk a distance of 7km daily to the nearest chapel to celebrate the Holy Eucharist. It was from here, that the first home of the jail ministry got its name ‘*Snehashramam*’. There were no locked gates and doors in *Snehashramam* and they were divinely provided for their bread.

After one year of incessant contemplative prayer at Thrikkunnappuzha, Fr George came to the ‘*Snehashramam*’ at Vettukad as their spiritual father. He involved the neighbouring families and made them the guardians to take care of the prisoners and their families. Although there was initial resistance from them, he could convince them that they were also God’s children. Gradually, they started to visit ‘*Snehashramam*’, and started to love its members.

The members of the fraternity relied totally on God’s providence to become the Covenantal Eucharistic presence and to identify themselves with the poor Jesus of Bethlehem and Nazareth. They lived the “poverty and insecurity of Christ” (Mt. 6:25-34) and find security, joy and contentment only in the Holy Eucharist (Jn. 6:35; Ps. 23:1). This total dependence on God liberated their hearts from all anxieties and the Eucharist became their only possession. It made them fully available for the service of the poorest of the poor.

Role of Laity in Prison Ministry

Even till his moment of death, Fr George deeply contemplated the *koinonia* of the most Blessed Trinity. He had a deep realization that ecclesia is the koinonia of priests, religious and laity. He involved lay

people in his field of jail Ministry and various other ministries. While at Snehashramam, he trained lay people to be active participants of the ministry for the beggars and wandering ones of the street. Thus, the lay people became the first members of the FBA ministry. They shared their pain and tears in the initial days of the ministry along with Fr George. They conducted night vigils and sanctified themselves by prayer with penance and even climbed Malayattoor continuously for 52 Saturdays without a break for the setting up of the first ashram for the ministry. Fr George had a special gift from the Lord to bring the best out of even ordinary people who were less capable than other people.

The Mullanchal area of Vettukad in Thrissur Dt. was a centre for drunkards and criminals and even during the day, women and children feared to pass through this lonely place. But God chose this place to be the beginning for 'Snehashramam'. In the early days of 'Snehashramam' it was hard to get any visitors or supporters. When Fr George was appointed as its spiritual director, he realized that there was not much difference between 'Snehashramam' and the jail in which they were previously living. The inmates of Snehashramam experienced the same loneliness which they experienced earlier in jail. He visited the neighbouring families and convinced them that the prisoners are not thieves or criminals and so they deserve to be treated as their own family. His regular visits, prayer and way of life began to influence the neighbouring families, and they soon became regular visitors of 'Snehashramam'. When the number of visitors increased, Fr George conducted a one-day program of prayer which slowly evolved into a five-day retreat program. Through the prayers and retreats, 'Snehashramam' got a new life and anointing of the Holy Spirit and the members of the '*Snehashramam*' became new persons. God allowed them to forget their past life of sin and begin a new life in communion with Jesus.

The Eucharistic Dance

“O, Parama Divyakarunyame – O Most Holy Eucharist” is a beautiful Malayalam hymn, composed by Fr Thomas Edayal MCBS, giving

tune to the Eucharistic cosmic spirituality of the founding fathers of MCBS. This hymn happened to be the song of the Eucharistic dance at Snehashramam, Vettukadu, Thrissur, Kerala in October 1992. One day Fr. George was awakened at 2 O' clock in the moonlight morning to perform this Eucharistic cosmic dance singing the Eucharistic hymn, moving upward and downward of the hills and dales of Snehashramam. The single dance gradually developed into a group dance by 5 O' clock attracting the volunteers and later extending to the children by 5.30 am.

The Eucharistic hymn of Very Rev Fr Mathew Alakalam and Very Rev Joseph Paredom, Founders of MCBS Congregation, formed into a Eucharistic dance that transformed both "birds of the air" and their friends; the volunteers and inmates of 'Snehashramam'. The birds of the air who were craving for cigarettes were set free of their habits of the streets.

Insights to PMI Volunteers

"I was in prison and you visited Me" (Mt 25:36). According to this Word of God, to visit and serve Jesus in prison through this ministry is a wonderful work of the Holy Spirit who started this ministry through two seminarians only. The word says "The Almighty has done great things for me; Holy is His name" (Lk 1:49). When the members of Jesus fraternity prepared themselves spiritually, before visiting the jails, they saw miraculous conversions of prisoners taking place. We too have the responsibility to encourage and strengthen this ministry. The persons coming out of jails after serving their sentence have to be given consolation and proper guidance. Society, by and large, should accept them and give them compassionate love guided by the jail ministry. Fr George had a wonderful dream that if there is a dedicated religious congregation for those coming out from jails, with the nature and charism of Jesus Fraternity, they can reach beyond boundaries to save these souls. They will also be able to rescue families of the prisoners. In a family when one of the parents is in jail, there are chances to be insulted by society and hence there is a possibility that their children too would fall into wrong company if they are not given

proper education and guidance. It is imperative that these families should be saved from the clutches of the evil one.

Conclusion

During his 40 years of priestly life, Fr George was always faithful and committed to God and to the MCBS religious community. He always chose the will of God in his daily life and was highly appreciated by religious and lay faithful alike. Even though he died from the earthly life, he will live forever in our hearts. He has made a remarkable impression on the Catholic Church in Kerala as well as other parts of India and overseas. He showed the world that we must live the Gospel which is the true witnessing of our Lord Jesus. He lived for the upliftment of the poor and firmly believed that the church can be renewed through these ministries for the poor. The focus of the ministries founded by Fr George can be summed up from the following verse in the first book of Samuel. “He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honour” (1 Sam 2:8).

Sr Fidelis HCM & Sr Clara HCM: Adventurous PMI Warriors

Sr Fidelis HCM

Sr Clara Alappat

Sr Clara was born on 10th December 1954, in a village called Vallachira, Thrissur, Kerala as the 5th child of Anthony and Mary of Alappat family. She joined the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Cross - Menzingen, Switzerland, in the year 1972 and made her 1st profession in 1978. She did community health training course, and operation theatre course and served as theatre technician till 1989 in Kerala, Tamilnadu and Karnataka. In 1995, she joined Prison Ministry India along with Sr Fidelis and launched prison ministry in Bangalore in collaboration with Fr Varghese Karipperry. In 2007 she was sent for one-year theology course in Dhyavanava, Mysore, and then one year to UK for the Franciscan Formation Course and she went on working in different capacities in different missions of the province and re-joined PMI in 2013, and from 2015 Sr Clara continues to be in-charge of Jeevodaya Ashram.

Sr Fidelis Nedumpara

Sr Fidelis was born in 1948 at Muvattupuzha as the 2nd child of Thomas and Mary Nedumpara. She belongs to the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Cross – Menzingen, Switzerland. After PUC in 1967 she joined the Holy Cross congregation and had her first profession in 1973. She has a master's degree in Social Work (MSW), from Loyola College, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. Sr Fidelis has rendered her services to the Social Service Society of the Diocese of Quilon and to the Social Work Department of St. Johns Medical College Hospital, Bangalore. She served as the directress of Jeevodaya Ashram from 1995 to 2004.

Sisters of the Holy Cross

The origin of this congregation occurred in Menzingen, Switzerland on October 16th 1844, with the able leadership and guidance of a great visionary, Fr Theodosius Florentini, OFM, Cap., along with three co-founding sisters – Sr Bernarda Heimgartner, the 1st Superior General of the Congregation, Sr Feliciana Kramer and Sr Cornelia Mader. It was started as Teaching Sisters of the Holy Cross and the Spirit of the Congregation is ‘the Spirit of the cross and the paschal mystery of Christ.’ In 1906, these teaching sisters of the Holy Cross were invited to India for nursing the sick in the govt hospitals, at the request of the Maharaja of Travancore – Kerala, with the help of the then Archbishop of Quilon, Rt Rev Aloysius Maria Bemziger OCD, who was from Switzerland. The pioneer sisters, who were teachers, were trained by the doctors much like an in-service training as they started working and slowly gained confidence in working as nurses. The motto of the congregation is ‘Need of the time is the will of God’. As Holy Cross sisters we follow the example of St Francis of Assisi and respond to the prophetic call of Jesus to rebuild the society by living the paschal mystery and empowering the marginalized especially the disadvantaged and the discriminated.

A Leap into the Unknown

Sr Fidelis was involved in the formation of our candidates at Madivala, in the year 1994, and Sr Clara was in-charge of our Social Centre at Madivala, through which we were reaching out to the slum dwellers and the poor and marginalized around the area. Responding to the invitation from Fr Varghese Karipperry, Co-Founder of PMI and Fr Alexander Kureekattil CMF, we attended the 1st National Conference of Prison Ministry India (PMI) held in Bangalore, in August 1994. Inspired by the message of this conference, “Be a love-bomb. Let it be exploded. Not to kill, but to heal the broken hearts”, enkindled in us ‘a call within a call’, to jump into this unfamiliar field of service, to commit ourselves for the welfare and transformation of the people behind the bars - the prisoners, the marginalized and the exploited, especially the women prisoners. When we shared this idea with Fr Varghese Karipperry and Fr Alexander Kureekattil CMF they

encouraged and supported us as they were looking for someone to start and spread this mission out of Kerala and to the different states of India. With the permission of the then provincial, Sr. Louisa Poweth, we were happy to jump into the dark with faith. The main attractions for us in this mission was the simple lifestyle demanded in this ministry, with no project writing and getting no money from abroad and do the ministry with local contribution.

Since begging is our lifestyle, we were anointed as professional beggars. In the month of November 1994, Frs. Karipperry and Kureekattil were preaching retreat to the parishioners of St Sebastian's church, Mathikere. On the last day of the retreat they called Srs Fidelis and Clara to come to the church in the evening and we went. After the talk, Fr Karipperry called us to come to the front and kneel down before the people who were about hundred and fifty and asked them to extend their hands on us and pray. After the prayer they gave us two baskets to go around among the people on both sides and collect the contribution which amounted to Rs 6867/- Though now we don't go about with baskets, this lifestyle continues and God provides for all our needs and wants.

Jacob's Farmhouse

We started searching for a house to stay and start the mission. While enquiring we came to know that one of our sister's brothers-in-law Mr Jacob had a farmhouse at Huskur, off Hosur Road, and he was happy to give it to us for a short time. On January 22nd, 1995, Fr Varghese Karipperry, the first PMI National co-ordinator, Sr Clara and Sr Fidelis moved into the farmhouse of Mr Jacob, accompanied by a few of our sisters. It was a one-room house with a small entrance and a kitchen, with a cow shed on one side. As Jesus was born in a cow shed, the PMI national office took its origin in the cow shed on 22nd January 1995 and the house was used by the sisters to begin our PMI mission in Bangalore, and to start the rehabilitation centre. We had the blessing of the house in the afternoon and the sisters all went back, Fr Karipperry went to Kerala and both of us started living there. In the morning we went for Mass to a nearby institution run by the

sisters for the blind children. On the way we just joked saying if only those sisters call us for breakfast, we could escape the ordeal of making it as we did not have kerosene to light the stove. Exactly, the superior sister called us after the Mass saying, ‘sisters you are coming for the first time here, come and have breakfast and go’. At the very start we started experiencing the providential care of the Lord as we believed, and it went on all through the days of our life.

Lepers’ Colony, Sumanahalli

The Archbishop of Bangalore, Rt Rev Dr Mathias Fernandez told us that there is land available at Sumanahalli, the leprosy colony, for which the land was leased out by the government. Since we did not get anywhere else, we decided to go over there. There were five small houses like huts, also in awfully bad shape; and we cleaned, fumigated, and made it liveable. In the month of May 1995, we gladly shifted from Huskur to Sumanahalli and lived there for two years. “Challenges are what make life interesting and overcoming them is what makes life meaningful” (Joshua Marine).

One day when we went out and came back, we saw that the asbestos doors of the toilets outside, the bulbs and hundred meters of wire stolen. Another day when we got up in the morning, the lock of the prayer room was broken and since there was nothing to steal, we imagined, the person who came to steal something, burned one of the candles, sat inside and prayed, got converted and went off. He did not do any harm.

On another time, when Sr. Clara was on home holiday, only one of our inmates – the first one and Sr. Fidelis were alone, there was an attempt of theft around 3.00 am. By hearing some sound, we got up and went to open the door, but it was latched from outside. Even though we were really scared, we did not make any noise; we put on the light and immediately we heard the sound of stone falling on the sheet; luckily, it fell on the other room which was used as kitchen. They tried to break the lock but did not succeed. From 3.00 a.m. to 6.30 a.m. we sat inside praying and experiencing the fear and anxiety of a prisoner when locked inside. When the lady who brings milk

came to take the can opened the door and freed us and then only, we knew that they latched all the doors from outside. Any way we believe that it was good that they locked from outside; otherwise we would have opened the door and something unpleasant would have happened. All these incidents made us grow stronger in faith and our belief in the providential care of God.

Jail Visit

In order to get permission to visit the jail, Fr Varghese Karipperry and we both prayed and prepared ourselves to meet the IGP. We were welcomed to his office and he patiently listened to us and to all about the ministry we were planning to start in the jail. After listening carefully to us he said, “I appreciate your work, but no conversion”. We immediately responded to him that we have no plan to convert anybody, but to have a conversion of heart. Finally, he agreed and gave us permission to visit the jail once a week.

On our way back Fr Karipperry carried a small packet of sand from the prison premises and brought it home. In the evening when we came together for prayer, he took it out and spread on the floor and all the three of us knelt down on the sand and prayed and it continued for days. “Save the last person outside the prison and then come for these wretched creatures inside”, was the reaction of a prison official as we began our ministry. It was so difficult for them to understand and believe that prisoners or criminals could be renewed, transformed, and brought back to a normal life. Our accessibility inside the prison always depended on the interest and good will of the IGP and the prison superintendent. Since prayer is the powerhouse of PMI, we decided to spend an hour in prayer before meeting our brothers and sisters behind the bars. At that time since the central prison was in Bangalore city near Majestic, we chose the convent chapel of St. Martha’s Hospital, from where we could walk to the jail. “God never said that the journey would be easy, but He did say that the arrival would be worthwhile”.

Teachers' Colony Koramangala

As the number of inmates started increasing, it became necessary to think of having a separate office for the National office to function. We were at the lookout for a building and came to know that there was an unfinished building in Koramangala, Teacher's colony, which was kept for sale. By the middle of 1996, that unfinished building was bought by Fr Karipperry, completed the work, and shifted the National office to the new building in the same year. It was also located in a very congested area with lot of houses huddled together and not spacious enough but could be managed for the time being.

Thomas Layout, Carmelaram

As the ministry started growing and the workload increased, more staff members were added, so it became again necessary to look for a little bigger place for the office. In 2009, under the leadership of Fr Josekutty Kalayil MST, the then National co-ordinator, PMI purchased a new building at Thomas Layout, Carmelaram and shifted there the PMI National office.

Jeevodaya Ashram

In 1995 June we got the first inmate and started functioning as the rehabilitation centre. Then we had two HIV positive cases referred by some sisters as they were roaming about and then two more released prisoners. It was really a great challenge for us to keep them together with us in the same room, eat together without having any discrimination of keeping the plates and glasses separately for them, play together and so on when twenty-five years ago HIV positive patients were even thrown out of their homes. Sisters of the Holy Cross purchased a plot of land in Doddakannalli, Carmelaram, constructed a house and gave the name *Jeevodaya Ashram* and inaugurated it on 24th June 1997. "God's road is all uphill. But do not tire; rejoice that we may still keep climbing higher" (Arther Guiterman).

Jeevodaya Ashram is a 'Home away from Home' for all who come seeking newness and a renewed and transformed life. We treat them as our own children and provide them with everything they stand in need of. While taking them to court, we have experienced attack from their opponents. We also become anxious about their behaviour whether they may harm themselves or do something to others etc. It is exceedingly difficult for them to undo whatever crookedness they have learned in life and to make it straight. In all such moments, prayer and God alone are our strength and support and we can boldly say it from our own life experiences. We also had the experience of the attack of evil powers in some of them who became so wild for long hours challenging us to stand firm and never to lose hope.

Jeevodayites' Education

Completed GNM, ANM, or Home Nursing	11
Beauty Culture	15
MBA	01
Diploma in Computer Course	04
Graduation B. Com	02
Library Science	01
4 Year Degree Course in Fine Arts	01

All the impossible becomes possible when we allow Him to take over and that's what our experiences during the past twenty-five years of our life in this mission and ministry have taught us.

Reintegration

Number of Reintegrated families	360
Number of Living on Their Own Choice	271
Number of Runaway Cases	026

Silver Jubilee

With all such challenges and problems, we have successfully completed 25 years of service in this ministry. We have had about seven hundred and sixty-six women come and gone through this Ashram. Seventy-five of them are married and settled in life. How do we get these marriages conducted without having any bank balance? Or the education of the girls done? Here is the challenge!!! We put our step forward in faith and God put His steps down towards us-God then mixes with us and great things happen. Lot of good things happen when we surrender ourselves to the plan of God. People donate in cash and kind and then miracles happen. Even for the education of our inmates... providence of God works as our bank account. We never had to quit any activity or programme because of the lack of funds. "The dream is not what you see in sleep, but which does not let you sleep" (Dr Abdul Kalam).

**Fr Alexander Kureekkattil CMF:
A Valiant PMI Warrior
Sr Lini Sheeja MSC**

Introduction

“Have you met a sobbing God? Have you found a God aimlessly wandering on the streets? Have you seen a starving God begging for a morsel?” These are the lines which urged the Claretian Fr Alexander Kureekkattil CMF, ordained priest in the year 1984, to delve into the depths of religious life. With a firm intent to live a priestly life that conforms to the example of the crucified Jesus, he set out to hug humanity to his bosom, taking extraordinary efforts at seeking and searching for the abandoned and the deprived, and then serving them with the compassionate and merciful love of the Lord, irrespective of their caste or creed. His indomitable spirit never let him give in to fatigue or listlessness. He literally toiled in order to meet, not just their important spiritual needs, but also their emotional, and worldly requirements as well. Thus, he became the stronghold and the pacifying shelter for the weak, the infirm and the deficient.

Priesthood

He completed his schooling from St Joseph’s School in Karimanoor, and when he was in Grade VIII with another 80 students in his class, it was momentous when Sr Philagia looked at him and said, ‘Alexander, don’t forget to invite me for your Ordination Mass’. He was amazed to hear those words as a young boy, to say the least. Yet, he did recognize her words as a call from the Lord and that was his first call to the priesthood. It was through Fr Joseph Koonamparambil CMF that the final call came. He lured him into the Claretian congregation. He joined the Minor Seminary in March 1973.

The Stranger at the Gasoline Station

During one of his journeys from Claret Bhavan on his bike that he stopped for petrol, at a petrol pump in Kothamangalam. While he was waiting his turn, a stranger came up to him and handed him a chit of paper. The words on the paper read, “Have you met a sobbing God? Have you found a God aimlessly wandering on the streets? Have you seen a starving God begging for a morsel?” He left after handing the paper to Fr Alexander. He stuck that bit of paper on to the handle bar of his bike and continued his 45 km journey to his native place, Udumpanoor. As he rode his bike, he automatically hummed the words that he had read. It may sound peculiar, but ever since that remarkable day, whenever he passed by that petrol pump in Kothamangalam he tended to almost inadvertently bow his head in reverence as the place holds such a significant turning-point in his life.

The God on the Street

As he neared home, he noticed a man lying in the afternoon sun on the burning hot pathway. As soon as he entered his house, he informed his mother about the man he had seen on the street. She said, ‘Yes, even I saw him when I was returning from church. Why don’t you take some clothes to pack beneath his body to ease his distress?’ Fr Kureekattil came to know that he was a Cancer patient by name Mathew. With the help of a few young friends he lifted him up from the ground and took him to the nearby police station to report the matter. They had to knock on the doors of so many hospitals to admit the dying man. Finally, the Government Taluk Hospital agreed to admit him. The doctor on duty told them, ‘As you have taken so much trouble to bring him all the way here, let him be here for today, but please shift him elsewhere tomorrow. You can see how the other patients here are feeling uneasy to see the maggots that are wriggling out of his body. Some have even taken a discharge and gone home.’ The next day Fr Alexander and others moved him to the Samaritan Home in Muvattupuzha, run by the S.D. Sisters. I call to mind how the Sister queried, ‘Is he a destitute? Did you find him on the street? Is he dying?’

He answered, ‘Yes Sister, my answer to all the three of your questions is a ‘Yes’, therefore my patient is eligible I guess.’ They carried him in, cared for him and nursed him. Three days later he went home peacefully, to be with the Lord.

The Prisoners

Nothing happens without God’s permission, was clear from this incident in his life. Once he had to catch a train from Ernakulam. When he reached the station, he learnt that the train would be delayed in arriving. Intending to relax during the waiting time he headed for the POC Office and there he met Fr Francis Kodiyan MCBS, the cofounder of Prison Ministry India. He invited him to serve in the prison ministry and he happily volunteered to join, and soon was appointed the State Director of the Jesus Fraternity, the ministry for prisoners. Serving as a young priest in this role for 8 years, he made good use of the opportunity to visit the 46 jails all over the state and to interact with the prisoners. He perceived the dejection in the faces of the crestfallen prisoners, brethren who were denounced and written off by their near and dear. His heart was drawn to these children of God behind the bars. On his first visit with a batch of Seminarians to a jail, one in Quilandy, he saw the prisoners locked up in their cells and he was emotionally moved.

He spoke to the Jail Superintendent as he said, ‘Sir, these brethren of mine are neither mad, nor are they bitten by a mad dog. Can you please open the cells and let them out so that we can get closer?’ The superintendent agreed, the cells were opened and the prisoners came out one by one. Fr Kureekattil looked at their faces, into the eyes of those hapless brethren and found anguish brimming over. There were both Christians and non-Christians. They opened up, unburdening their heavy hearts, revealing personal and intimate details of their lives, top secrets and truths that they had not disclosed even to the police despite excruciating torture of varied kinds. He firmly believed that it was his priestly habit that spurred them to confide in him, to confess to him. They trusted him only because he was a priest.

The Professional Killers

Mr Jamie, nick-named Killer Jamie extended his hand towards Fr Kureekattil and gave him a vigorous hand-shake. He could not believe that he had committed 7 murders. He was a Killer by profession, the head of a gang of Professional Killers! He talked with him, for over an hour and handed him a copy of the Bible. He warned him, and convinced him to give up his so-called profession, or so he presumed. That night he was woken up by the ringing of his phone at 3 a.m. in the morning. The caller told him that Killer Jamie had been stabbed and was in hospital - St Joseph's Hospital in Vytilla. He reached the hospital 2 hours later and found him. Yes, it was true. Jamie was stabbed.

In due course Jamie introduced Fr Alexander to the world of professional murderers. He got to know from him that when a quotation to murder someone was received, the killer had 4 options of incapacitating the victim - sit, walk, lie down or sleep. Putting the victim to 'sleep' was the most lucrative. Determined that Killer Jamie should not kill any more, he took it upon himself to cater to him. He did so for almost one and a half years. But he succumbed again. He committed his 8th murder, at a liquor shop in Ponnurunni and fled to Shanthampara. But the police easily traced him out and he was jailed. When Fr Kureekattil went to visit him, he muttered, 'O Father, I slipped again. It just happened.' Returning from visiting Jamie, the former acknowledged one fact, that it was the heart-rending and harrowing experiences of these alleged criminals that landed them in mire. So, Fr Alexander felt that his heart necessarily needed to ooze Christ-like love and mercy, if this man is not going to commit another murder. Jamie spent his term of 12 years in jail. After his release he settled him and his family consisting of wife and 2 children.

The Alcoholics

Most Rev Dr Soosai Packiam, Archdiocese of Trivandrum got the idea that if a priest who targets the lost and works to reform and rehabilitate hard-core criminals is designated to catch hold of Alcoholics, many a fisherman family could be reinstated. With this in

mind the Bishop sent Fr Kureekattil to the fishermen families who lived on the beach, during his 10-year term there, he made efforts to attract drunkards to the Sadhana at Monvila for residential retreats. His sole intention was to set them free of their craving for alcohol and to consequently convert them. He nurtured great dreams for these families - that the fishermen would be liberated from their addictions, that starvation and abject poverty would go, and that their dilapidated houses would be replaced by beautiful terrace-roofed houses. Even in his busy schedule the Bishop would make it a point to visit Sadhana at least once in every month. He too believed that the main culprit in the lives of these simple fishermen, was, alcohol. They were in for a disappointment. The toddy shops in the beach area made attractive offers, like giving away eggs for free, free conveyance by auto rickshaw to and from their shops and the like. It was a sad irony that a critically ill patient could not get a free drive to the Medical College Hospital, but a drunkard could avail of a free lift to the liquor shop. Thus, his renewed brethren were once again enticed to toddy and liquor. It really was a pitiable state of affairs. Fr Alexander felt distressed, told the Bishop that he would give up, as his efforts did not seem to fructify. Bishop consoled him with the words of Mother Teresa of Kolkata, 'What is important is not to be successful, but to be faithful.' That thought did give him solace of course, there were no further Spiritual Retreats however.

The Mentally Deranged

Waste management was becoming a problem in the city of Trivandrum. The residents of Vilappilsala were under protest against the authorities for their disregard in the matter. That was when, one day while travelling on the Kazhakootam route Fr Alexander happened to see a mentally deranged man digging into the heaps of waste to satisfy his hunger. He had quite a few stray dogs also for company. Fr Kureekattil was horrified! 'My goodness! Isn't he too a child of God like me?' He had a bundle on his shoulder, which he never kept down. He wondered why he carried it. He too may not have known why. These mentally disabled who roamed the streets rummaging into the garbage for food do not have a language. They speak to no one, they hardly laugh,

rarely cry. Nudity is not an issue of shame. They do not even think of taking a cover under the shade of a tree when it rains. Yet they are real human beings like you and me. He caught hold of one, 'But...where do I shelter him?' He approached the Bishop. 'Your Grace, the building of the Minor Seminary is now lying vacant isn't it? Can I have it for use?' 'Okay, take it.' So quick was his response that he wondered whether what he had said had even registered in his mind. That building today houses 72 mentally disabled inmates. They are taken care of by young Claretian priests. It is a wonder that no food needs to be cooked at the home. 'All the meals are provided by various benevolent groups', says Fr Dominic Kuttiyanikkal. With the support of a sympathetic society, the recognition of the Church, and the enthusiasm of young priests, this home for the mentally ill - Sadhana, stands as a wonderful manifestation of God's providence.

The Bedridden

Fr Alexander heard of a paralyzed man who had successfully attempted to commit suicide by hacking off his leg. He was disgusted with life, sick and weary, had reached the end of his tether, could go on no more. Being incapacitated, lying on his cot, he could not get up to tie a rope to the ceiling to hang himself. Neither could he get poison for himself to end his life. Therefore, this was the novel thought that came to his mind to finish off his seemingly useless life. He had the wrong impression that his wife and children would be saved of much trouble if he wasn't there. Fr Kureekattil's heart went out to him, and to the scores of his brethren who have been paralyzed for months and years. He needed to do something to alleviate the anguish of the laid up. Their suffering is crushing indeed. He went in search of them and found one more - Ashokan.

Ashokan lived in a 2-cent plot of land atop a rocky hill near his house. He got some really saddening news about him and went to visit. He lay on the bed, pinned to it by a broken backbone and the resulting paralysis. Fr Alexander gently took his hand in his and held it, for a full 10 minutes, saying nothing. Words seemed unimportant. Only a heart full of Christ-like love was the need. That did it. His eyes

brimmed over and tears flowed down his cheeks. He let him cry for some time, then asked him why he was crying. He was sad because his 16-year-old son had gone without living in that newly built house for even a day. Lying on his mat, Ashokan had asked his son for a glass of water, a bit crossly so said Ashokan. The boy did not think twice before hanging himself to death in the next room. Fr Kureekattil too felt the agonizing pain that Ashokan was going through. He prayed for him, and being with him he helped him to reconcile with his lost son by leading him in prayer to forgive his son Vishnu and also guided him in psycho-spiritual proxy prayer for Vishnu to receive forgiveness. They then prayed that the precious Blood of Jesus washes, cleanses, heals and sanctifies both Ashokan and his deceased son. After the session was over, he looked at Ashokan, his face shone, his eyes glistened.

Work Aplenty

“A young girl once rang up Mother Teresa to tell her that she wanted to come to Kolkata to serve the needy. Mother responded, ‘Not necessarily dear. You just need to open your eyes and look around to find the deprived. Serve them.’ Yes, that is the unadorned truth. If we the priests, nuns and religious look about us, beyond the walls of our ashrams and convents won’t we find plenty of field-work? Out there, there are a great number who are in lack. Let us go out and tend, catering not only to their spiritual requirements, but also to their emotional and physical wants. For the one, who does not look around, there is no work, but for the one who, like Jesus seeks out the lost, there is work aplenty! There are many more domains out there waiting to be captured. Let us not lose out on these blessed chances to serve the wholesome love of Jesus to the bereft. Working hand in hand with the Church and in submission to the authorities let us give our mite to mitigate the sufferings of humanity irrespective of caste or creed. Oh, so wonderful is this life of priesthood which provides the platform to serve the lost and the least. A whole lifespan seems insufficient to continue the work of the Lord”, says Fr Alexander Kureekattil CMF.

Sr Leena Kattukaran FMM: A Legendary PMI Warrior

M D Vincent MBA

Introduction

Having heard the knock at the door, Sri BP Acharya IAS, Collector of Warangal stood up to welcome warmly an elderly smiling short sister. After serving her a cup hot tea, the collector enquired what he can do to her. She introduced herself as Sr Leena Kattukaran FMM, a retired nun. She said, “Sir, I request you to permit me to visit prisoners behind the bars.” “What!” the collector wondered with shock and said, “Why on earth you want to visit prisoners?” Sr Leena presented her point very politely. “Well they are lonely, discouraged and no one to talk to them affectionately. Hence, I wish to see them and console them. Kindly grant me necessary permission Sir.” The collector scratched his head and said, “But it’s risky for you to visit those unpredictable criminals know sister.” Sr Leena smiled and said, “Let it be Sir, I have no one. I gave up everything. I have no family bindings. Being all alone I can afford that much risk to make them feel that there’s someone to care them and to convince them that every saint had a past and every sinner a future.” Staring at Sister’s sincerity Mr BP Acharya said, “Okay sister, give me a couple of weeks and I will come back to you.” Hardly few days after the above incident, in 1988, Sr Leena and her community were surprised to receive a letter rather an order from the Director General of Correctional wing of the Police Department of then United Andhra Pradesh that Sr Leena Kattukaran FMM is granted permission to visit not only the jail in Warangal alone, but all the jails and sub jails in the State of Andhra Pradesh !!!

The second Innings of Sr Leena began. She soon became a legend in the history of Andhra Pradesh. She was known as the Love Bomb to

explode not to kill but to heal. The police department, her colleagues soon recognised her as an Iron lady with strong will and concrete skills in getting things done. Definitely the second innings (she called it as "call within a call") brought her many laurels and feathers in her cap as it was more adventurous more thrilling and more rewarding like the second wine served at Cana wedding. No wonder that Mgr Searna Bernard, the spiritual director, always proclaims that Prison Ministry is the favourite ministry and most pleasing ministry to our Lord Jesus. Surely, she lived every second of her life for the prison ministry and managed several golden milestones on her way. I am fortunate to be closely associated with her from the year 2009 to 2018. I happened to be the first General Secretary of PMI AP unit as she was the first State Coordinator. Though we were in office for 8 long years, she fondly introduced me to every one as her secretary, till she breathed her last. Having walked along with her magnificent journey let me explain her Legendries and glorious achievements as much as I can.

Prison Ministry

As soon as she got that blanket permission to visit all jails in Andhra Pradesh, she rounded off all 12 Dioceses, recruited, motivated by thoroughly training 360 volunteers in AP. She will make use every opportunity to address during CRI gatherings, Bishops conferences requesting them to spare priests and sisters for the ministry and to organise Diocesan level and Parish level gatherings to get lay volunteers.

6th PMI National Convention, Hyderabad

With the help of other legendries like Sr Alice Crasta (Charity), Sr Nazarene (charity), Sr Zavaria (Sisters of St Anne's, Providence), Mrs Balaiah, Mrs Samantha, Mrs Rose Mary, Mr Christopher, Fr M Marraiah, Fr P Chinnappa Reddy, Mrs Brigitte, Mr Edwin, Mrs and Mr Sunder, Sisters from St Anne's Guntur, St Anne's Catechetical, JMJ and Nirmala sisters, she organised the 6th PMI National Convention at Birdy Hyderabad. The VIPs graced were Mr Devendra

Gaud, then Home Minister along with IG Krishnarao IPS, for inauguration, while the closing ceremony was presided by Governor couples Mrs and Mr. Rangarajan. Till date this is applauded as one of the best conventions of PMI attended by 200 volunteers from all over India in the year 2000.

Nuns Are Better Than Guns

Few minutes before the function began, the Home Minister Devendra Gaud enquires from Sri Krishnarao, “IG sab, you always tell me that it’s extremely difficult to deal with prisoners. Then what on earth this little Sister and team are doing in prison? Do the Prisoners care them?” IG Krishna Rao was more than delighted to answer, “Sir, it’s astonishing that the prisoners listen to this sister and team better than us.” “Is it so!” The stunned HM probs, “What is the magic behind their abilities to get that much attention from prisoners?” “Well Sir” IG Krishnarao explains, “We the official staff approach the prisoners with law in one hand and the loti stick on the other hand, whereas these sisters and volunteers meet the prisoners with Holy Scriptures in one hand and love on the other hand. No wonder that prisoners quietly sit, listening to them hours together like small kids.” That eye witness of the DG prompted the Home Minister Sri Devender Gaud to make a public Statement that “Nuns are better than Guns”. Next day all Newspapers flashed those words as headlines.

Local Collection for the Convention

Sr Leena along with Sr Alice Crasta and team managed to raise sufficient funds to meet the expenses involved in boarding, lodging, mementos, transport, media coverage plus printing of 1500 copies of a colourful souvenir on this convention. 100% expenses were met from locally raised funds for the occasion.

Idea Presentation Contest

Often the jail superintends used to say, your work in the prisons is satisfactory. Your visits are like vacuum exits in pressure cookers, through which the prisoners who are like pressure cookers boiling

with worries, stress and strain, vent out the excess steam of pressure and relax. Inmates are benefitting indeed by your visits. But how about doing something to the outside society, which has to accept the prisoners once they are released?

This question prompted Sr Leena to discuss with us, the executive members and organised “an idea presentation contest” to educate the society at large by developing positive attitude towards the people like unfortunate prisoners and at the same time raise some funds to build a rehabilitation centre for the released prisoners who can use the rehab centre as a stop gap to prepare themselves to be accepted by their kith and kin or stay there still they find some living. Under the dynamic leadership of Sr Leena, we organised, a state-wide idea presentation contest on a given slogan of famous psychologist Normen Vincent, who stated, ***“Every day in every way I am becoming better and better.”*** Students were asked to purchase an entry coupon for Rs 10/ and write five lines only on a post card and post it. The response was fantastic. The campaign was a grand success. After meeting all the expenses involved for all the 12 diocesan units in organising the contest and after giving away 12 costly sets of first second third prizes to students, we could generate substantial amount to start the construction of Rehab Centre at Medchal with the kind cooperation of St Anne’s Sisters of Phirangipuram. She also managed to get Rs 5 lakhs from MPs lap and 25 sets of beds, steel coats, shelves etc to the tune of 3 lakhs worth from SBH. The rehab centre now serves women in distress and children in need. Thanks to our Megastar Chirangeevigaru who permitted to print his photo on the coupon. Thanks to our State Diary which sponsored the printing of the coupons. Thanks to our 12 Diocesan coordinators and 360 volunteers who made it a memorable lasting success indeed.

Vimochana Bible Diary

Initially Sr Leena was struggling to meet administrative expenses such as telephone bills, electricity bills and her driver bills (Someone donated her a four-wheeler, to visit prisons). She appealed to the transport department and got exemption of Rs.45,000/- life-tax on the vehicle. She introduced Vimochana Bible Diary not only to meet

incidentals but also publicise Prison Ministry Sunday, Prison Ministry Mass, prayer for prisoners and to popularise prison ministry services. Under her encouragement and support AP unit successfully published it for ten long years. Bishop Remigius advised never to give up the publishing of the diary. I am glad to state that Fr Francis Kodiyan has taken interest to revive the Diary and advised me to take lead. Sr. Leena's brain child Vimochana Liturgical and Biblical Dairy will come into life again from the year 2021. All coordinators, volunteers, priests, religious and laity are requested to support Prison Ministry Diary.

Awards

The legends create records after records. Sr Leena Kattukaran FMM is no less than anyone.

A) Deena Bandu Award

Dr Vijaychander of Karunamayudu (Dayasagar film fame) who presided over a Christmas programme in jails at our invitation, was impressed with the work of Sr Leena and organised Deena Bandu award for Sr Leena in film club at Film City Hyderabad. 300 priests, sisters, lay people transformed the film cultural club into a mini Church for few hours of prayer and worship to the astonishment of the employees who for the first time witnessed a different kind of prayerful atmosphere in otherwise glamorous film club. Rs 50,000/- cash award with memento was presented to Sr Leena through the hands of Professor Kurian who was the chairman of Rajya Sabha at that time.

B) Best Social Worker Award

Apart from District Collectors award in Chenchelaguda jail, Govt of Telangana honoured Sr Leena at Ravindra Bharathi with Rs 50,000/- cash and memento through the hands of the Home Minister Raja Narasimha of TRS Party.

C) Two Chief Ministers Felicitation

It's again a record that a nun being felicitated in one public function, by two chief ministers of Telangana and Kerala at Shilpa Kala Vedika, Hi-tech City.

D) Inauguration of an International Commercial Outlet

We took up a new venture to produce a feature film on Saint Mother Teresa, who had a special tender heart towards the prisoners. But then to get the finance was a tremendous task. Sr Leena managed to communicate the idea to the Gold Business magnet Mr Joy Allukas. To everyone's surprise, one day the illustrious Joy Allukas stepped into Rosary Convent to meet Sr Leena. Over a cup of tea Joy Allukas said that she will inaugurate his new Jewellery store at Hi-tech City. Sr Leena laughed aloud and said, "Usually you people invite film stars for such events know? How come you invite this old and aged lady? Then Joy Allukas more firmly said, "Under Prison Ministry, your works are noble and impressive. The serving hands are better than the star hands. So Sister Leena, you please do me the honours". Thus, on that inaugural day of the new posh outlet just in front of Google office at Hi-tech City, Sr Leena's photo along with Joy Alukkas dynamic daughter and other dignitaries was published in the first page of all leading newspapers.

E) The Final Reward

In recognition of all her mighty contributions to Prison Ministry the Hyderabad unit headed by Fr Dian Isaac, Monsignor Swarna Bernard and the Chairman Bishop MD Prakasam were pondering over to propose Sr Leena's name along with Fr Francis Kodiyan and Fr Varghese Karipperry, the two founders of PMI, for a papal award. In the monthly meeting it was proposed to forward to Vatican those three names to be bestowed with "Knights of Faith" award. Having heard this proposal Sr Leena's reaction was different. She said, "Dear all, enough of these awards, I am waiting for the Lord's final award."

Last Days

Just one month before her death with all her strength the 83-year-old Sr Leena climbed all the stairs to DGs office, only to plead to open the prison doors for Prison Ministry in Telangana. Adding to that she got wet in the rain while returning to Rosary Convent from DGs office. The effect was she was badly infected with pneumonia. She was

admitted in the hospital. Apart from affectionate Superior Sr Vimala and community, Mrs Brigit Michael, Mr BP Acharya IAS, Sr Rose Linda, Superior General of CSA, Sr Leena Fernande of Nirmala Sisters, Sr Regina PMI general secretary together with her relatives who rushed from Kerala, Mumbai etc, were closely witnessing the progress of her health. At one-point smiles were on the face of her well-wishers as she seems to have recovered. But alas, doctors' good efforts did not yield good results. Though Sr Leena known as Iron Lady she was also known for her great obedience and reverence to her Master. She finally submitted to her Lord breathing her last as if whispering "Lord let thy will be done." She fittingly went for her final award on 13th October 2018 which happened to be her 84th birthday. Only one in a million get such an opportunity to die on their birthday. Surely once again she proved even in her death that she was a legend.

Mr Narasima Rao IPS, Mr Ahmad IPS, the former IG and Mr Sidaiah DG, Mrs Basheera madam the retired superintendent of women's central prison, Mrs Mini Mathew IAS and former principal secretary of Andhra Pradesh, Mr BP Acharya IAS and several others attended the last rights and offered floral tributes to Sr Leena. As he was about to leave the premises, the DG said, "Whenever we meet Home Minister, Vincentgaru, he tells us only one thing. "You please take care of Sister Leena. Don't trouble that elderly lady." Mr BP Acharya also called and asked to fulfil her last desire. We shall definitely attend to her last wish. "See! Even non-Christian officials recognised and respected her ambition for Prison Ministry. Home Minister admonished the prison authorities keeping in mind the new restrictions that they imposed on PMI volunteers in Telangana stating that they will take in only professionals who have done MA in Psychology and Sociology." In this context Sr Leena along with Fr Dian Isaac and me, went to meet principal Secretary Home, and Home Minister himself requesting them to relax latest rules for PMI visits, as several IAS officers like Daana Kishore IAS, Mini Mathew IAS, BP Acharya IAS, Mrs Rajeev Acharya IAS, Mr Raymond Peter IAS are convinced that PMI volunteers mere visits alone fetch lots of joy in prisoners by bringing down their stress levels. In fact, in countries like Canada its team of

doctors, psychologists and social workers work for reformation of Prisoners. Sr Leena the Legend who worked for prisoners with pain and suffering till she breathed her last rest in peace. May the doors of prisons open soon for PMI unit of Telangana.

Conclusion

Because of her extraordinary contributions to PMI, Fr Sebastian Vadakumpadan invited her to Assam conference and offered her air tickets, when she expressed her inability to travel due to her health and advanced age. She for the last few years was unable to climb even one step without peoples' assistance on her sides. She gently refused the offer but prepared 20 volunteers to attend the meeting by motivating the diocesan coordinators on behalf of Fr Dian. About 2 weeks before she breathed her last, she visited the DG Mr VK Sing along with 5 Fathers and 5 sisters as her last effort requesting D G to ease rules for PMI volunteers. I got the last phone call from her towards September end. Her last words were, "Vincent, Visited DG. His new office is on the second floor. Imagine the hard task I had to climb so many stairs. The DG said he would allow those who did BA and M.A. in psychology to council and teachers to teach to languages and subjects. Where to get psychologists? I said, "Let's request all our religious heads to train few of their candidates in psychology. Let's also propose to our national office to create an educational wing to cater to this special requisition which may slowly spread to other states also. "Sister Leena said let's prepare a new list and approach D G once again." These were her last words I heard from her. Alas within two days we had to see her in coma in Apollo Hospital! As Fr Dian said the strain, she underwent in climbing so many stairs brought her health down to ruins. Further she got wet on the way to DG's office that led to pneumonia making her admitted in ICU till she closed her eyes permanently. But it's amazing that FMM superiors and community encouraged and supported Sr Leena's every effort to PMI unconditionally. In fact, Sr Leena herself often used to say, "But for the extraordinary support and encouragement of my superiors and community, my services for PMI would have not been what you have witnessed. Thanks to FMM sisters for giving us a legend! So much

so when she left office, she left the bank accounts of Vimochana with impressive savings consisting of her awards, money from friends, relatives and gifts donated to her. All resources are pooled into PMI account. She lived and gave her last breath for PMI only. All of us are sure that she is in heaven praying for everyone in PMI. If this world could see her noble services and rewarded her time and again “Don’t the Heavenly Father know how much more to bestow upon (Mt 7,11) her beloved daughter! “Eternal rest grant to her Lord! Let perpetual light shine upon her. May her soul rest in Peace. Amen.

**Rev Dr Joseph Kavalakkat VC:
A Vibrant PMI Warrior
Fr George Kalassery VC**

Introduction

Rev Dr Joseph Kavalakkat VC was a love bomb exploded and healed the broken hearted at the Tihar central prisons. Rev Dr Antony Plakkal VC, the former Superior General of Vincentian Congregation, observed that Fr Joseph was a “cheerful donor, an open dictionary, a great missionary and a North region PMI visionary”. Rev Sr Archangel SABS, who served at the Tihar prisons more than 25 years gratefully recalls Fr Joseph as the Tihar prophet and a reformatory psycho-spiritual revolutionary who established a civilization of love among his friends and colleagues. This article briefly analyses the contributions of Fr Joseph Kavalakkat VC, to prison ministry.

Family

Fr Joseph Kavalakkat, the vibrant PMI warrior of North India, was born in 1944 at Kallur near Irinjalakuda in Thrissur District of Kerala, as the 5th son of late Mr Kochuvarkey and Mrs Eliamma. Inspired by the Vincentian motto “He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and to let the oppressed go free” (Lk 4,18), after his high school studies, he joined the Vincentian Minor Seminary at Angamaly in 1962. He took his first religious profession in 1966 and was ordained by His Eminence Joseph Cardinal Parekkattil on 17th December 1970.

Academic Studies

Fr Joseph completed his under graduate course (PDC) from the university of Kerala in 1972 and obtained degree from Newman College Thodupuzha in 1975. He completed journalism from Bharatia

Vidyabhavan in 1977 and did B. Ed from Sardar Patel University, Gujarat in 1985. He did PG from CSRD College Ahmednagar, under Puna University in 1993, diploma in management studies from Puna University 1994, diploma in law and labour welfare from Puna University in 1995 and obtained doctorate (PhD) from Jamia Islamia University in social work.

Priestly Ministry

Fr Kavalakkat served as assistant parish priest at St Thomas Church, Malayatur in 1971, assistant director at DePaul Orphanage, Thottakam, Vaikam in 1972, administrator at Christu Nivas Seminary, Thrikkakkara in 1973, director at DePaul orphanage, Kuravilangad in 1974, director at DePaul orphanage Kalur, Thodupuzha and parish priest at Lourdu Matha Church Palakkad Diocese.

Contributions to Prison Ministry India

Besides the regular prison visits Fr Joseph organized psycho-spiritual counseling for prisoners, awareness training programs for Delhi school students, obtained prison permission for NGO's, open university exam registration in IGNOU for prisoners, conducted media and computer training course for prisoners, established tailoring centers and houses for released prisoners and found government aid for prisoners. The best contribution of Fr Joseph to PMI was his love for prisoners. He used to cry while giving talks to various groups. He was so attached to prisoners especially the Tihar prisoners. Besides visiting them regularly he organized many programs during various occasions such as Christmas, Easter and other national festivals. He was so moved with the spirit of prison ministry and started his own ministry for prisoners when he was working in Satna Diocese, M P.

PMI North Regional Coordinator

When Fr Joseph was appointed as the regional coordinator, he was the parish priest of the Krishnapark Syromalabar Church. He used all his parish relationships for the development of prison ministry activities. The PMI begging style was practiced by Fr Joseph. He had

never asked any money for the running of regional office from the national office. He had managed all the expenditure keeping good relationship with the people. Fr Joseph was the convener for the arrangement of 8th PMI National Convention in Bhopal in 2014. Fr Sebastian the former PMI national coordinator gratefully cherishes many trips that they had conducted to various states of North India in order to accelerate the work of prison ministry in the Northern states.

A Pastoral Visionary

He was so fond of orientation programs in the parishes, formation houses and diocesan and religious meetings. PMI cannot exist without proper orientation for the religious and diocesan priests. He was so keen to arrange various classes for those groups as he travelled across North India. He had also addressed the regional bishops' conference. Fr Joseph was a great supporter to launch PMI national magazine, *Prison Voice* in 2004. He arranged many meetings with officials for the registration of our national magazine and was the constant supporting presence in our national executive meeting, national conventions and coordinators' meet.

Coordinators' Meet

Another contribution of Fr Joseph was his input for the coordination of coordinators' meet. To accelerate the work of prison ministry there was a major gathering of all the coordinators at national level from 15th to 17th November 2011 at Archbishop's house, Nagpur, Maharashtra. His able support in the coordination of this meeting was praiseworthy.

Hospitality & Benevolence

Fr Joseph Kavalakatt was an excellent host. He was ever ready to gracefully extend his hospitality to prison ministry coordinators and volunteers. He was always helpful to arrange the regular meeting with friendliness, generosity and care.

Heavenly Warrior

After completing his long years of service in prison ministry, as Jesus said on the cross Fr Joseph commended his spirit to Father God on 2nd January 2016 and was buried at Vincentian Asharam, Angamaly. The service of Fr Joseph was written in golden letters not only in the annals of Prison Ministry India but also in the Book of Life which makes sure his eternal bliss. Certainly, he is our heavenly warrior as he intercedes for the fruitfulness of PMI mission for the lost, least and last.

Mrs Marlene Lalhmingangi: A North Eastern PMI Warrior

Elizabeth Gualnam and Marlon Dixon Mason

Introduction

“Let us do good deeds as much as we can without delay as we shall be passing through this life only once” Marlene Lalhmingangi. In the early months of 2006, I met Marlene for the first time. She was very friendly, humble and small in stature. We talked a lot for more than an hour, over some tea and biscuits, just like old friends who were meeting after a long time. She was humorous, loveable, caring and very religious minded. We shared our dreams and obsessions for God and humanity. From that moment I knew that here was someone who could listen to me patiently, without making any judgement. She became one of my close friends, my guide as well as a sister to me. My relationship with her strengthened gradually over time. One day Zoram Entu Pawl (ZEP) introduced to her the concept of Prison Ministry India. I will not forget her words, “In all of my life I have seldom served God, limited as I may be, I would like to devote the remaining years of my life for the service of God”. With the approval of the Bishop of Aizawl, Most Rev Stephen Rotluanga CSC, she was appointed Coordinator of Prison Ministry India: Mizoram Unit in July 2006 and continued in that capacity until she departed from this world on the 7th June, 2011¹.

¹ We dedicate this article in her memory emphasizing her missionary work in particular. Starting from the day she was married to Mr Marlon Dixon Mason in 1989 and became a Roman Catholic. The following is an excerpt from individual interviews conducted with people she was associated with during her ministry.

Missionary Work at Adra, West Bengal

In 2001, Mrs Marlene went to Adra, a sleepy little Railway colony in Purulia District of West Bengal. She lived there for about 10 months with her husband and three sons. In the time spent at Adra she developed a very close bond with her mother-in-law and two sisters-in-law. This bonding served as a strong base and foundation for the starting of her missionary work. It was during this period that she began her first missionary work at Adra and realised her calling from God. She was deeply moved by the lives of the poor and socially deprived children of the busties (slums) in the railway colonies of Adra. She felt a great compassion towards them, and together with her mother-in-law and two sisters-in-law, she began working with the children, teaching them bible stories, enlightening them on the word of God. The children and women folk of the colony and the busties (slum areas) who gathered around to listen to her, were people of different faiths. She conducted prayer sessions, listened to their problems and prayed over them individually. Many of them received healing during her prayers. Her good deeds and healing prayers were known in Adra town, and people came to attend her prayer services. She organized a prayer team of eight devoted members. They would meet at least three times a week for prayer and healing service. Many people, mostly women and children of the colony, would attend these prayer meetings. She could not speak Hindi fluently so her talks were translated by one of her prayer team members. Amazingly, by the grace of God, many people were truly touched by her preaching and healing services.

The Catacomb Prayer Group

She was compelled to return to Mizoram due to her father's illness but after a while she had a longing to go back to Adra and continue her work, but God had other plans for her life. She had experienced God's blessings and inner reconciliation that inspired her to continue with her special call. As she could not go back to Adra due to family constraints, she launched a prayer group called 'Catacomb' in August of 2005. The members consisted of some youth members of the parish

who were struggling with substance abuse and addiction. Eventually other boys and girls who had overcome their bad habits volunteered to help the ones who were combating their addictions.

Initially there was much apprehension and scepticism from the church leaders and the diocese office. The Catacomb group did not receive any encouragement and acknowledgement or financial help from the congregation or the diocese office. However, they continued their good works undeterred. They focused on prayer and worship and faithfully believed in God's love and mercy, basing their faith in Christ. They prayed the Divine Mercy prayer every day at 3:00PM in the Church for two consecutive months. Gradually more youth members got involved in the mission, and the group increased from 10 to about 30 in number, consisting of boys and girls. In collaboration with the Parish Priest, she organised overnight prayer services in which the Divine Mercy Prayer, adoration, confession and Holy Mass were celebrated for the group members. They engaged in prayer and adoration for the entire night till 5AM. Fr Alban, a capuchin priest used to offer Holy Mass for them at 1AM and counselled them.

In those days only a few boys had their own means of transportation, so most of them had to walk to and for at least 8 kms to attend this night service. They would spend the entire night in prayer, meditation and worshipping God. Through this prayer group many drug addicts and alcoholics had turned from their bad habits and started to lead good and clean lives. Some of them became active youth leaders in their parishes within Aizawl City. Raymond, a group member, mentioned that after joining Catacomb he gave up drinking. He expressed great gratitude and said, "Mrs. Marlene loved us all, like we were her own children. We had a strong relationship among the group members and would like to meet as often as possible. When we didn't meet for a long time, we had many things to share, we would go on and on talking. We would feel so happy and contented in our hearts that we longed to pray and thank God for everything." "Prayer was our food!" he cried out.

Mrs Marlene spent her own money and time to mobilize the youth in those difficult and challenging days. Later on, the group would get

invitations to perform songs and deliver talks to other people who were addicted to drugs, drinks and prostitution. They sold merchandise and foodstuffs to collect some profits for the group. They sang songs on many different occasions and gave their testimonies. The group also coordinated with the Diocese evangelical team for preaching the Good News of Christ. After working and guiding Catacomb group for a year, she had a dream and a calling from God to start the Prison Ministry in Mizoram.

Prison Ministry India, Mizoram Unit

With a dream and passionate zeal for starting PMI Mizoram Unit, she went to Bangalore to learn and train with the sisters, brother and priests in the Prison Ministry of India. After completing her training for a month in Bangalore she returned to Aizawl with the passion to start Prison Ministry of India in Mizoram. Thus, the Prison Ministry of India, Mizoram Unit was officially inaugurated on 27th July 2006 by Most Rev Bishop Stephen Rotluanga CSC, Bishop of Mizoram, Aizawl Diocese. Mrs Marlene Lalhmingsangi was appointed the co-ordinator of Prison Ministry India, Mizoram Unit. She worked tirelessly to officially start a unit of the Prison Ministry India in Aizawl, Mizoram. She was the pillar of PMI, Mizoram unit. She initiated the effort and took care of the ministry that started from nothing and graduated to a state level unit. Its work now covered Prisons of Central Jail and District Jail, Aizawl; and eventually extended to the district jails of Lungle, Champhai, Saiha and Kolasib.

Prison Ministry Sunday

She was a believer in the principle of lobbying, and went helter-skelter begging for money to organize programs in prisons. Some of the programs conducted were: medical camps that included doctor's check-up and free medicines, games, recreational activities, preaching and counselling for the inmates. Skills training in handicrafts, mushroom cultivation and cooking lessons were also organized in prisons. A special day in the year is set aside for Prison Ministry India, called Prison Ministry Sunday. All the State Units observe this day with a special liturgy. Speeches and reports are given by respective

co-ordinators to highlight the work and outreach of the Ministry. Initially the collection on Prison Ministry Sunday was handed over to the PMI State Unit as financial help and support. But, through her initiation, the collection on Prison Sunday was given to PMI. A special program was always held in the prisons on Prison Sunday.

She invited medical doctors within the Christian community of Mizoram to conduct medical camps and distribute free medicines. Her persuasive nature and genuineness won the hearts of many people. She was able to mobilize sections of the community to respond to the needs of those behind bars. Catholic schools within Aizawl town, actively took part in helping Prison Ministry, Mizoram Unit in many ways. The children performed different items on various occasions in the prison. They also contributed clothes, and things like soap, tooth paste and tooth brushes for the prisoners.

However, there were many times when she felt overwhelmed and frustrated. She felt hopeless and was on the verge of giving up this ministry. She said, “I feel very lonely at times and feel that I am the only one in this ministry”. There were times when all the volunteers backed out and she had to walk alone towards the prison gates. “I sometimes cry inside my heart, she once said, feeling depressed. But my love for God and my work for Prison Ministry was so challenging that I could not just give up or walk away. The prisoners always waited for me, expecting me just as a child expects its mother. The joy and smiles on their faces had given me the strength to persevere”.

There were people whom God had used as instruments in her life when she was in conflict with herself. Her husband, Bishop Stephen, the Priests and Nuns in the diocese, and her close confidants among the laity encouraged her in her times of despair. But she didn't give up even though she felt drained and at times fatigued and burnt out. Her husband mentioned that whenever she felt upset and exhausted with the ministry, he would encourage her not to give up and supported her in her work. She loved her work for the love of God and served them irrespective of caste, creed or religion. She treated them equally, and never discriminated them on the basis of their lives or the nature of their crime. To her, they were all the same- they were lost and

needed God in their lives. At the loss of Mrs Marlene Lalhmingangi, Bishop Stephen lamented, “I realise how deep was her dedication and how much pain she had undergone.”

Challenges

As PMI had no funds nor sponsors, it depended solely on begging for help. She went around, begging and requesting people to contribute and join the Prison Ministry. She invited them to visit jails and help convert prisoners through their kindness and love for God. At the outset, it was difficult for her to get help or financial support from the church. The church already had a number of evangelical and developmental works going on at the time. Nobody seemed to care about prisoners and people considered them really bad human beings. Nevertheless, she did not stop seeking help, she was persistent and determined in her efforts. She fought like a mother, who fights for her children’s subsistence. She humbled herself and bowed down, knocking on door after door, and stood up for the rights of the prisoners and advocated for their rehabilitation. She never stopped seeking help and mercy for the welfare of prisoners.

Combatting Cancer

In October 2010 she was diagnosed with cancer. Her illness was never an obstacle to her mission, in spite of her health deteriorating, she consistently gave her mind to her mission. Prison Ministry remained ever dear to her heart and soul, saving even one prisoner would bring much joy and peace to her heart and a feeling of mission accomplished. She was diagnosed with cervical cancer in October 2010. She underwent treatment and seemed to have recovered somewhat. But in the beginning of 2011, she developed thyroid cancer and by May of 2011 her condition had become critical and she became very weak and could not take chemo therapy. She never complained of pain nor did she show any signs of much suffering, God was with her. She received the last sacrament at 3:15p.m. on 6th June, 2011. She was well prepared having received the sacrament of Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick and Holy Communion. She had enough time to

recollect, and underwent a great spiritual healing, her prolonged illness had prepared her for the inevitable end, grieved Fr Arullappan, the Parish Priest of St, Mary's Parish. He was by her side to give her the last sacraments. He mentioned that when he was giving her the last sacrament, he said to her, "This is food for your journey to heaven, are you ready to go", to this she answered, "Yes I am". Eventually she passed away peacefully at 7a.m. on 7th June 2011.

Conclusion

Her dedication was tremendous. Prisoners simply adored her and called her mother. Religious conviction, cast and faith was no barrier, she loved her work and her love was rooted in Jesus Christ. Bro Devassy, Principal of St Paul's Higher Secondary School, Aizawl, Mizoram said, "Prisoners will miss her, she is a role model for everyone even the priests and the religious. Her dedication is truly noble. She prioritized her ministry above her family." Most Rev Stephen Rotluanga, Bishop of Aizawl said, "She is a woman of great humility, who advocated the thought that "They shall increase and I must decrease". Fr Arullappan, Parish Priest, St Mary's Church said, "She had a loving heart, she had concern for other people who were in need, and she possessed an inner perseverance". "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten by God, and everyone who loves the father loves the one begotten by him" (1 Jn 5:1). "And the King will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me' (Mt 25: 40). "Jesus heard this and said to them [that], 'Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners'" (Mk 2:17).

Fr Paul Akkara CMI: A Fascinating PMI Warrior

Sr Alphonse Jaya FCC

Introduction

Fr Paul Akkara CMI, born on 23 April 1943, a multi-colored personality, disperses vibgyor, when we watch him through Jesus-Prison, who was his constant model. V stands for Valiant, I-Impartial, B-Benevolence, G-God centered, Y-Youth Vigor, O-Ordinary, but outstanding, and R-Responsible. During his life voyage of 63 years he experienced the amicable blending of perfect divine and human nature. The love of Christ urged (2 Cor 5:14) him to do selfless services to prisoners and the mankind. For him service to God and mankind are the two sides of a coin.

Strong Pillar of Jesus Fraternity

Without Fr Akkara, we cannot think of Chavakkad unit of Jesus Fraternity. Prayer units are the nuclei of prison ministry. They play a vital role in enriching and motivating volunteers as well as prisoners. With grateful heart, let me give a brief picture of his unique personality, which was manifested during his service as the president of Chavakkad unit and as director of Thrissur zone during 1989-1995. By God's providence, as he was the prior of Pavaraty Carmelite Monastery, automatically, he took charge as the spiritual director of 3 convents inside the Little Flower College campus, Guruvayoor. Every second Saturday, when he came to hear confession, he used to render very effective and inspiring talk to us, quoting up-to-date events from day-to-day life, giving stress to the last judgement. All were motivated to do the service for the marginalized, especially for prisoners.

PMI Unit Gathering

Just as the family gathering, about 50 volunteers including business men, bank officers, and even retired staff would meet together in the classroom of St Joseph School, Pavaraty, where Fr Paul Akkara was the sole authority, as manager and prior. After praying for 15 minutes for prisoners and volunteers, with genuine laugh, Fr Akkara, the president would welcome all, to the gathering. He would enquire about the whereabouts of the participants. If any news they had, about the prisoners, victims or about their own house, they would share.

Zonal Level Director

By God's will I got a chance to assist, Fr Paul, as the zonal secretary, while he was the director of Jesus Fraternity of Thrissur Zone. Fr Paul's horizon of service was widened, further the zonal gatherings and executive meetings were conducted in Vettukad Snehashramam or Asadeepam. The representatives of Chavakkad, Thrissur and Irinjalakuda units were present. By this, we could collect first-hand knowledge of the real problems of the rehabilitation centers and could find out solutions for the same.

Chavakkad Prison Visit

Every Saturday, PMI volunteers reach at the gate of the Chavakkad prison 2PM. Soon after the prayer by holding hands and forming a circle, the staff would open the gate, welcoming us into the prison. After the prayer song Fr Akkara would explain the unconditional love of Jesus towards sinners. With his genuine talent he would make Jesus their intimate friend to depend on! Joining with Fr Akkara all volunteers and prisoners would sing songs about the love of Jesus. Thus, for a while all could forget their sorrows and hatred and with a little more refreshed mind, the prisoners would be gone to their own cells. Then we would go near each cell to talk with them. They were waiting for us to flush out their sorrows to us. Praying for a while and assuring our prayer thereafter we would show the willingness to visit their houses. We were very particular to talk to them about Snehashramam and guide them there, after their imprisonment. Fr Akkara took initiative in establishing a new library in Chavakkad prison.

Christmas Celebration

Once for Christmas celebration, the whole program was arranged with the differently abled girls of Little Flower Convent. The skit performed by the polio-affected girls, the mime by deaf and dumb girls, mono act by the girl without hands and carol song by the girls on wheelchairs moved prisoners a lot. All had to control their tears. Overwhelmed by the great encouragement of Fr Akkara, Baburaj, a prisoner, within few minutes, composed a song and sang wonderfully. We changed his name as Kaviraj. We distributed to them Christmas cards with stamps so that they could send them to their dear ones. The superintendent, our dear president, along with the eldest prisoner, cut the Christmas cake and shared among us. To our surprise, one of the prisoners, thanked us, from the bottom of his heart saying “It is for the first time, we see the performance of the differently abled. You people found time to make us happy, who are the terrors of the society; we are in full health in body; the girls without proper leg or hand or hearing came here to remove our mental loneliness and distress. They really moved us. We won’t go back to our sinful past. By crying aloud, he stopped with his words of gratitude. All cried. We returned with satisfaction. After a few days one of the prisoners sent back the Christmas card to me, saying, “Sister I, have nobody dear to me. I feel you people are the only ones dear to me so I send it to you, with thanks. Please pray for me!”.

Conclusion

There is no word “impossible” in the dictionary of Fr Paul Akkara and he firmly believed in the words of the Bible “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil 4, 13). His firm foundation was on Jesus alone and He believed nothing on earth would separate him from Christ who called him to this ministry for the lost, the last and the least. His conviction was “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Rom 8, 35). Being aware of his weakness and failures as well as of God’s graces in his life, he lived a life in Christ, with Christ, for Christ surrendering himself completely.

Sr Noella SJC: A Gentle PMI Warrior

Sr Adele Korah SCCG

Sr Noella was the backbone of the Prison Ministry during the period of her service as a generous volunteer. She served the suffering brethren without counting the cost. Though she was the headmistress of a School, she travelled to Parappana Agrahara from her convent in Malleswaram, Bangalore, rather than taking rest in the convent. She used to spend all her free time on Saturday afternoon and Sundays in the prison, meeting the needs of the prisoners in whatever way she could. She was a hardworking person who served with a smile and shed sunshine in the lives of every brother and sister she served joyfully and gave comfort and consolation to every one irrespective of caste and creed.

Sr Noella was very sensitive to see the needs, pains of the brethren even before they expressed them to her. There were persons in pain who said, “I would have died with sorrow if not for her compassionate love bestowed on my aching heart. One inmate of the prison said, “She made me a new person by sharing with me God’s unconditional love. She was the first to talk with me, when no one else cared or bothered about me, that too in my life’s difficult and worst time I spent in prison. Almighty God who saw my pain sent Sr Noella to me in the year 2002 so that I may receive motherly love and care from her. Several brethren would wait for her arrival, because she loved all the brothers and sisters, making no difference among the brethren who was in need.

When Sr Noella met a prisoner, who was a habitual offender she was moved to tears and begged him, please keep away from crime, revealing to him that our God is a forgiving God who accepts every sinner if one turns to him in repentance. She shared with him God’s word and helped him to turn to the Lord, who accepts him as he is.

She was a mother to the prisoners who were missing their mothers and she was ever ready to visit the houses of the inmates to reconcile their parents with their sons and daughters who were in prison, so that they may accept them back home after their release. When the officials refused the entry of volunteers to the prison once, Sr. Noella managed to get the needed permission and continued her visits. Her zeal for the ministry helped her to mount over the problems and continued her services.

I entered the Prison Ministry on a fulltime basis in the year 2004. I was staying in the Government quarters allotted by the Inspector General of Police, Sri Revanna Siddhiah for the stay of Religious sisters for facilitating our services in the prison. But Sr Noella was travelling by two buses and auto to reach the prison, after her teaching hours in the School. I found Sr Noella filled with zeal and generosity. She was a person filled with a sacrificing spirit and she counted no obstacle too difficult to overcome. She never came empty handed to the prison. With the permission of the prison authorities, she would provide the brethren toiletries, clothes and so on when they were in need. She was known as “Chocolate sister” and even the D.I.G of the prison used to enquire “Where is the Chocolate sister?” From the year 2004 onwards, I used to meet her coming to the prison, and I found that she is a person who counts no sacrifice as too much when the poor prisoners expressed their need.

Whenever we had to organize cultural programs for the celebrations in the prison, she would get the program ready, practicing dances, skits and so on, providing the inmates with the needed costumes, dancing bells, etc. I wondered often whether she had flying wheels under her feet, as I saw her in the men section and women’s section of the prison moving at lightning speed. Love of God and people in need urged her to move ever forward. She was a very good companion to me in my ministry and I always received her companionship and cooperation. When I served as a Unit Coordinator in the Central Prison, Bangalore, she was my right hand in fulfilling all my responsibilities. I could entrust any service because I knew she was ever reliable. We travelled together for the National Conference of Prison Ministry India

to Delhi. I recall the beautiful experience we had in Delhi in her company. Sr. Noella was a shining figure in the cultural program we organized in the evening at National Convention held in Delhi. I cherish even now the video of her dances, which I saved in my laptop.

The unfortunate and most unexpected accidental sudden demise of Sr Noella, shocked all, and we questioned, “Why O Lord you plucked away this beautiful flower, from the garden of the Congregation of Cluny and from the family of the Prison Ministry?” She was the beloved of her bridegroom Jesus who wanted her to be at his side close to him amidst the angels to sing his praises along with the heavenly choir. I considered Sr Noella as a person who could never be replaced by any other person in our ministry. Sr Noella’s name, is etched in my heart and in the hearts of all those who know her. She stands before me as a person who emptied herself in generous, selfless service for the welfare of the suffering brethren behind the bars and consumed herself, burning out herself like a candle lit to bring comfort in the lives of others in need of help. May she enjoy the eternal reward in her heavenly home and pour down blessings on all of us who are rendering service. May we ever strive to emulate her in our life of service.

Swami Sadanand:
A Reconciling PMI Warrior
Sr Selmy FCC

Fr Michael Porathukara CMI, known as Swami Sadanand, had a praiseworthy role as the mediator in the process of repentance, reconciliation and reformation of Samundar Singh. “I prayed through Rani Maria. I believe my relationship with Samunder Singh is the result of her favours”, testified Swami Sadanand. Though many prayed and desired for the reconciliation, it was the Swami, who initiated the first step for the reconciliation. The reconciliation with the assassin was the fruit of his long years of prayer and penance. The Swami was a great ascetic, who had already enabled thousands to embrace the path of love and peace. The divine providence brought Swami Sadanand, then residing in the Diocese of Jabalpur, to give classes to the FCC novices in Udainagar. He had never met Sr Rani Maria. Hearing that Mr Samunder Singh was condemned to imprisonment, he had an inner call to visit him in the prison in Indore. He testifies: “I had an inner urge to meet Samunder Singh. And all night I felt restless. Next morning after Mass I told the sisters about my desire to meet Samunder Singh and enquired about his whereabouts. But they could not help, as they did not know. Then I asked the Priests at Udainagar, the Bishop and his secretary at Indore. They also could not help me. Then finally with the help of a jail Superintendent at Narasinghpur, I met Samunder Singh at Indore Central Jail.”

At his first visit to Samunder in the prison, Swami Sadanand embraced him and told him that God has forgiven him. However, Samunder exclaimed: “But how can I believe that you have really forgiven me? Even God cannot forgive me. I have committed a great crime”. Realising that he needed a more realistic symbol of the expression of forgiveness, he sought the new ways. He made frequent visits to

Samunder Singh in jail and developed a good rapport with him. Samunder was moved and asked, “Are there still people who love me?” The Swami reassured him saying: “I am your elder brother”. Swamiji thought that the best way to make him experience the forgiveness is to go beyond the barriers of religion and caste.

Samunder Singh recalls “I was not even worthy and I asked pardon falling at his feet; he forgave. On 29 February 2002, I met Swami Sadanand in the jail and he told me to consider him as the brother of Sr Rani Maria. He told me that Sr Rani Maria’s sister wanted to make me her brother by tying a rakhi.”

On 15th July 2002, I got a phone call from Fr. Swami Sadanand CMI whom I have never seen before. He asked me “Are you ready to go and visit Samunder Singh in the jail on the next Rakshabandan day? It was a great joy and surprise for me. I replied “I was waiting for this since long. But who will take me to jail?” Father agreed to make arrangements for the visit. He took permission from my Provincial Rev. Sr. Lissy Jose and Rt. Rev. George Anathil Bishop of Indore.

Rakshabandan

Reconciliation is a process of restoring the trust and relationships. Words alone are not enough to restore trust. It has to be expressed in genuine action. On 21 August 2002, Swami Sadanand and myself accompanied by my Provincial Superior Rev. Sr. Lissy Jose and fellow-sisters reached the Central Jail, Indore. On reaching the jail, the police men presented Samunder Singh before us. Fr. Swami introduced me to him. He was shivering... Then he prostrated in front of us and pleaded “Forgive me... forgive me... I am doing penance... forgive me.” I said in reply “God has forgiven you. We too forgive you... be at peace.” As the religious custom of tying the Rakhi requires, I put a white towel on his head, performed Arati, applied ‘tilak’, tied Rakhi which proclaims the greatness of brotherhood and offered him sweets. Samunder trembled with excitement when the unconditional forgiving love was poured on him. Fr. Swami embraced him. My heart was filled with peace and joy much more than ever before. It was really a

heavenly experience for me. I received the grace to feel that he is my own brother.

It was indeed a moving scene that touched the heart of everyone. I believe that my mission is to bring the assassins of my sister to new life by forgiving them and enabling them to experience a bit of the love of God the Father. The effort made by Rev Fr Swami Sadanand for the fulfilment of my mission is praiseworthy.

Indeed, the Hindu festival of Rakshabandhan of 2002 was a great occasion of breaking the wall of hatred and tying the knot of loving relation. I tied Rakhi on Samunder as a sign of accepting him as my brother. I had forgiven him on the very day my sister was martyred. I could see those assassins as merely human instruments in the hand of God. In my daily Eucharist I used to offer Samunder and all those who instigated him to the murder.

It was a golden day of the opening of the door of mercy. According to the tradition, on the day of Rakshabandan, the brothers give gifts to their sisters. However, the convict Samunder had nothing to give except his grateful heart. In utmost simplicity, he said: “I am a convict and have nothing to offer. What could I give when I am indebted to you for my life?”. The darkness gave way to the True Light, giving him a new hope, a new vision and a new life. In his words: “Compared to the crime I did this imprisonment is nothing. Now I want to do penance for what I have committed since nobody has the right to take away another one’s life”.

This gesture of forgiveness was followed up in the subsequent years and it became a powerful proclamation of Christian forgiveness. “I was longing to kiss the hands for his hands are stained with my daughter’s blood”. This unquenchable thirst of my Mother Eliswa was fulfilled on 24 February 2003, Samunder Singh narrates as follows:

“Sr Rani Maria’s mother and her brother Stephen came to meet me in 2003 along with Swamiji and didi (Sr. Selmy) Her mother considers me as her son. Those days I used to get headache and while I am reading, tears would come. If I were speaking to someone, I used to

go away from them abruptly. I told this to Swamiji and he along with Sr Rani Maria's mother prayed for me keeping their hands on my head. Then onwards I was healed of my headache”.

Swamiji visited him occasionally in the prison and maintained regular contact through correspondence. By the providence of God, I was shifted to Vandana hostel Indore for my Post graduation study. It helped me to establish a sisterly relationship with Samunder Singh through regular visit in Central prison Indore. Since Swamiji was very far from my place Fr. Prasad Kuzhivelil SVD accompanied me to visit Samunder in prison. On 2 January 2005 Samunder Singh wrote to me: “Dear Sister, you people have opened all the doors for me. I will remember all that you have told me ... Let me give same response to God. Sister, I cannot forget your love that has opened every door of my intellect, while now living in this prison. In this world I received your love. Nobody in this world has the great wealth that I have today”.

The forgiveness extended to Samunder Singh cleansed him from his resentment and bitterness. It led him to the repentance of his own sin and forgive everybody, including those who made him a criminal. The other inmates and the jail authorities began to notice the changes taking place in him. Samunder and I became true brother and sister, addressing each other ‘didi’ and ‘bhayya’. Samunder had given a letter to my family members when I went to tie Rakhi on 11th August 2003. In that he had asked pardon to everyone. He had expressed his desire to meet his parents when he comes out on bail.

As a result of contact with the high officials Fr. Swamy could succeed in bringing him out in parole. After nine years of his imprisonment I felt that if he is my brother and he was forgiven why should he remain in jail. When I shared my feelings to Swamiji he was very happy and suggested me about probation. When we approached Bishop Anathil he was very happy and co-operated whole heartedly. Swamiji's words: “I contacted the District Collector of Narshinghpur and enquired the process for applying for a mercy petition for Samunder Singh. He arranged for me to visit the District Collector of Indore and Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM) who was in-charge of the prisons. The District Judge of Narshinghpur was an associate of the advisor to the

Governor of M.P. who counselled the Governor in legal matters concerning mercy petitions.”

The civil authorities commented that in the history of the civil court, it seldom happens that the aggrieved party forgives the murderer unconditionally and presents a mercy petition for his release. Only a Christian can forgive this way. The Magistrate was very cooperative and he himself drafted the applications and explained to Swamiji that course of action to be followed. Thus, on behalf of the diocese of Indore, the FCC Sisters, and the family members of Rani Maria, the mercy petition was submitted to the Governor, Shri Balram Jhakar. Swami Sadanand says that he got a chance to take up the case with the Governor: “I also got an opportunity to talk to the Governor personally and he listened to me patiently and dealt with the case in a compassionate way”. Copies of the mercy petition were also given to the Inspector General of the Prison, the Jail Superintendent, the Sub Divisional Magistrate, and the District Collector. The Governor was instrumental in executing the mercy petition immediately and finally on 22 August 2006 (Rani Maria’s feast day) Samunder Singh was free again. As soon as he was released from the prison, he rang up and told me: “Didi I am released in probation.” The next day he went to the tomb of Rani Maria along with Swamiji and myself in thanksgiving. “It was only because of her blessing that I got released from jail”, explained Samunder Singh.

13 January 2007

One day while we were talking through the phone, I mentioned to Samunder about my father’s serious illness. Immediately he expressed his desire to visit my parents at home in Kerala. Since he has no language, I discouraged him. Then he contacted Fr. Swami Sadanand. Swamiji agreed to take him to my home. I went home early. On 13th January 2007 Swamiji and Samunder reached my home at Pulluvazhy in Ernakulam Dt. Kerala. It was a great event in my life. Samunder prostrated at the feet of my mother. She accepted him as her own son. Then I took him to my father who was bed ridden for long time. Samunder kissed his hands and sat down asking pardon. When I

introduced him to others, he was struggling to face them. After receiving blessing from parents and siblings he had lunch with us. Then he was taken to the room where Rani's photo was kept. When we sang a hymn, he could not control himself. He cried bitterly...My mother hugged him ... consoled him. Though she was in tears. The whole family was in sobs and tears...Before leaving home Samunder told me again and again.... "I can bear everything ... but not the tears of mother... How can a mother do this?" I told him, "She has forgiven everything and has accepted you as her own son. He looked at me in surprise.

Samunder was profoundly moved by the profuse gesture of forgiveness shown by my parents and the siblings and he wept bitterly. After the initial commotion, Samunder regained his self-composure and was re-energised to the extent of saying: "Why should I be afraid of coming here? This is my house; I am the one who lost the way; my sister Selmy tied rakhi on my hand and adopted me as her brother and even as a member of this family. This mother and my brother Stephen even visited me in the prison. Whom should I fear as they have blessed me? Rather, it is my duty to visit this ailing Papa and Mamma. I am lovingly obliged to seek pardon from them too. My ardent prayer now is to come again here with those who made me commit this horrible crime 12 years back. They too should experience this peace and joy".

In fact, language was not a barrier for our communication. The smiling faces, loving and tearful eyes and affectionate embraces spoke volumes about what had just transpired in silence. It was an unforgettable experience for everyone concerned and its memories would linger long in our minds.

Footsteps of Rani Maria

"I have a strong desire of doing the unfinished work of Didi (Sr. Rani Maria). I cannot become St Paul because I do not have that much ability but I will try in my own small way", he said, "I try to follow her example, helping those who are less fortunate than me". Swamiji

tried his level best to settle him but he remains in his home with family people doing cultivation.

On 25th April 2016, Fr. Swami Sadanand who was a heart patient breathed his last. It was a heart-breaking news for me. When I informed this sad news to Samunder he mourned like a son who lost his father. Fr. Swami was on his way to Dewas jail to release a priest on bail. His mortal remains were entrusted to AIMS medical college Bhopal for the medical students according to his wish. A man alive after death... 24th August 2016, I got the news of my mother's serious sickness, I started to Kerala. Her condition was worsening day by day. One day Samunder rang up to me. I could not but tell him about my mother's condition. Now Fr. Swami is no more to care him. However, Samunder managed to reach my home on 31st August 2016. He gave a spoonful of water to my mother and she drank it. From then on, she was in a coma stage. He spent almost two to three hours with mother. I sent Samunder to Sagar mission house. As if my mother waited for Samunder to reach, at 11 p.m. on 2nd September 2016 her holy soul flew away to heaven for her eternal reward. As soon as Samunder got the news, he reached home, to pay his last tribute to mother. He carried the coffin of mother along with other sons and fulfilled his duty as a son.

I rejoice in my Lord because he has done great things in my life. One of the great things is the martyrdom of my own sister Sr. Rani Maria and reconciliation with her assassin. I thank Almighty God for He has chosen Swamiji to fulfil His mission. It was not an easy task. He was led by the Spirit of the Lord facing many criticism and challenges. He was my spiritual guide and I was supported all through these paths. Now I gratefully remember this holy soul and believe that Swamiji's holy soul helps Samunder to go forward courageously².

² For testimonies I am indebted to the book Rani Maria: The Palm of Martyrdom by Bincy Therese Kottackal FCC

Sr Mary Jane: An Angelic PMI Warrior

Goretti Martins

Introduction

I would love to begin this article with one of my favourite quotes, “Whatever we do for ourselves dies with us, but whatever we do for others remains forever, for it is immortal.” Late Sr Mary Jane was a gem of a person. What I really appreciated in her was her beautiful smile and her loving and understanding nature. I met Sr Jane in the year 2003 when I first joined Prison Ministry India. Ever since that time, I had been very closely associated with her. She was like my best friend and at the same time a spiritual mother to me. I used to always look up to her. One day as we were talking, I asked her, how she got her calling to join Prison Ministry, and she told me that she was inspired by the life of Mrs Kiran Bedi.

Kiran Bedi

On the 30th of December 1995, during a seminar at Goregaon seminary, Mrs. Kiran Bedi was one of the speakers and she spoke on the life of prisoners. In her speech she had said that we need to care for our brethren behind bars and that we should never look down upon them, as the prison is not a place of punishment but a place of reformation, where one can get time to go back and reflect on one’s life. After listening to this talk, Sr Jane felt that God was calling her for this special Ministry, so she began to pray over it. During her prayers she got the message, “The Sovereign Lord has filled me with His Spirit. He has chosen me and sent me to bring good news to the poor, to heal the broken hearted, to announce release to captives and freedom to those in prison” (Is 61:1). This particular verse from the Bible confirmed her calling to start this Ministry in Goa. She felt deeply that our brothers and sisters behind bars are hardly helped by

anybody. This is how she remained open to the calling of the Holy Spirit. On 18th October 1994, Rev Fr Varghese Karipperry was invited by CRI Goa Unit to speak on the General Assembly. This talk too motivated her and now she felt that for sure God was calling her for this great service. Ever since that day she began to think how she could achieve this mission.

The New Beginning

Her first visit was to Aguada Central jail. It was during Christmas season and she thought that this would be the right time to visit the prison and bring cheer on their faces. She applied for the necessary permission which was granted and thus they had their 1st Christmas program for the inmates of Aguada Central jail. During this program many of the inmates broke down, and after that, a number of them came to request her to come and visit them often. This is how the Holy Spirit led her to start Prison Ministry in Goa. Initially they had to face many challenges to get the permission. But later by God's grace, everything fell in place. The very first thing she did was to start literacy classes and moral education. During her visits she used to make them feel loved and wanted. She told them that God loves them just the way they are despite their weaknesses and shortcomings. Her positive talks gave them a boost. But she always felt that all this was made possible due to the strong support from Archbishop Filipe Neri Ferrao, Fr Gregory Naik SJ, Fr Desmond SSR and the sisters of her own community. When asked what was her greatest happiness that she felt in this ministry, she said, "Many of them call me mother, what other bigger happiness can I get than this?" Her greatest concern was towards the women prisoners, especially towards those who had given birth to their babies in the prison cell. These children could not be kept with their mothers for more than 4 years. I remember late Sr Jane sharing her experience with me about a child who was born in the prison. One day, when she was bringing him out from the jail, he was so amazed to see the big cars, buses, so many people moving about, so many children playing around and so on. She used to take these children after the age of 4, and she herself used to take care of them with great affection and love. She would make the children sleep

next to her and many a time she spent sleepless nights when these children fell ill.

Achievements

Sr Jane became so popular among the inmates and the staff that the inmates seemed to be waiting eagerly to meet her. Many of them were so close to her that they could very easily open to her. Yes, they knew very well, that no matter how grave their crime be, she would always be there for them with her words of motivation and comfort. She saw that they had different talents and so she started art, music, sports, baking classes, tailoring classes, electrical wiring and computer training for them besides craft, candle making, screen printing, painting, wood works, paper bag, basket making, bamboo work and clay work. She also organized Eucharistic Adoration, Mass, Prayer services besides conducting medical camps. She too played a big role in setting up a center of IGNOU & NIOS within jail premises with the help of the jail administration. In recognition of her efforts, the Directorate of Woman and Child Development, Government of Goa, honoured her with prestigious Rajya Mahilasanman Award for the year 2014.

One day when asked by a reporter, how the prison ministry has worked on transforming the inmates, she said, “Some can change very fast when they are genuinely loved, cared, accepted and appreciated. Then from a world of crying, it is a world of love. For a crime, the only, healing is love. The hunger is more for love, not for things.” Her love for the prisoners was so deep that they would wait for her, worry about her failing health, and perform little gestures of concern like carrying her bag for her.

Tributes

On Prison Ministry Sunday 2016 in his message, Archbishop of Goa and Daman wrote: Late Sr Mary Jane Pinto, SFN served the church in many capacities, including that of the Superior General of her Congregation, for twelve years. She had a special place in her heart for the suffering and the abandoned. She was also known as Mother

Jane. After being a ‘Mother’ to her Sisters, she was a doting mother to the orphans being cared for by her Congregation. She worked for Prison Ministry for 19 long years. She was a much-loved Mother to the prisoners throughout Goa, trying to convert - and to a great degree of success - our prisons into homes. Just as Mother Teresa was known as the Angel of the slums, Mother Jane earned for herself the Sobriquet of Angel of the Prisons. Has this Angel disappeared? To our senses, yes. But we believe the Prison Ministry has now earned a powerful intercessor in heaven.

Fr Maverick Fernandes, Director, Caritas Goa

The Prison Ministry India celebrates the Sunday closest to 15th August as the Prison Ministry Sunday. It is a day on which the PMI volunteers are reminded that their sacrifice of reaching out to the brothers and sisters in prison is an extension of giving of themselves, regularly. In this sense, we participate in the martyrdom of St. Maximillian Kolbe. Late Sr. Mary Jane would fondly begin every prison visit with a prayer to St. Maximilian Kolbe urging the volunteers to consider every visit in a spirit of sacrifice. She reminded us to heed to the Lord’s command, “I was in prison and you visited me” Walking in the footsteps of St. Maximilian Kolbe, Sr. Mary Jane has returned to the heavenly abode to enjoy the company of the Patron Saint of Prisons.

Fr Sebastian Vadakumpadan – PMI National Coordinator

The demise of Sr. Mary Jane is a great loss to Prison Ministry India. The Ministry in Goa is kept alive because of her love towards prisoners. She was the best coordinator who could deal with all with love and care. We lost a good mother of Prison Ministry. She likened the volunteers to farmers who sowed the seed and wait with hope. A great treasure is gone from us leaving behind memories.

IG of Prisons, Goa

Inspector General of Prisons Goa pays a rich Tribute to Sr. Mary Jane, “Man becomes great exactly in the degree in which he works for the welfare of his fellow-men.” - Mahatma Gandhi. Sr. Mary Jane was the first Coordinator appointed for the Prison Ministry, Goa Unit, in

1997 when she was also chosen as the area coordinator by the Central Office of Prison Ministry India. She worked in close coordination with the Prison Authorities to ensure that the prisoners are treated as human beings with dignity. By her sheer dedication and commitment towards the welfare of the convicts, their families as well as the victims, she has carved out a niche for herself as the Angel of Prisons. She worked for the rehabilitation and resocialization of prisoners after their release trying to build up an acceptance both by the family members and the victims. Her death is a great loss to the initiatives started with the Jail Administration. The convicts and under-trials whom she tended with assiduously loving care will miss her. The Prisons Department salutes her as she takes the final journey to her eternal home.

Tribute by Rajan Singh Dhole, a Prisoner

Prisons are not the most popular places to visit and are in fact the most neglected and abandoned parts of society. However, the love and affection which Sr. Mary Jane had for us prisoners made prisons an abode where love, hope and enthusiasm were given a chance. She also worked for prisoners to go home on Furlough and Parole. For those who had no family to go to, she arranged family substitutes and other alternatives. Her love and concern towards us were that of a good shepherd who was willing to give his life for his sheep. She was God's own Angel who gave us a taste of the goodness, kindness and love of God Himself. What better support can a lost prisoner hope to get?

Tribute by an Inmate's Mother

Sr Mary Jane came into my life when I was at the lowest ebb. She was a source of strength during the turbulent times I passed through. She gave me her shoulder to lean on. She accepted the prisoners as her own and brought joy and light in their lives. They have indeed lost a MOTHER.

Sr Carmelita SSAM: An Incredible PMI Warrior

Joyce Teresia SSAM

Family and Childhood

Sr Carmelita was born on 15th November 1931 to Mr Joseph and Aleyamma at Chemplave, in Palai diocese, Kerala. She was the sixth of 8 children and was blessed with 4 elder brothers, 2 younger brothers and an elder sister. She chose the religious life and one of her brothers embraced priesthood; and 3 nieces, the religious life. After schooling in her home town, she joined the Congregation of the Society of Sisters of St Anne's Madras in 1950. She made her first profession on 17th May 1955 and the final profession on 17th May 1961. Though her mother tongue was Malayalam she was well versed in English, Kannada, Hindi, Tamil and Telugu. She served her congregation in various capacities as a teacher, principal and superior in different institutions and was also passionate in serving the poor. She fought for their basic human rights with the help of the local authorities in order to provide a dignified life to the broken hearted. Her heart moved for the underprivileged like the slum dwellers in Delhi, Lambadi community at Wadi, in Karnataka, tribal and leprosy patients in Andhra, the poor in Tamilnadu and the earthquake stricken at Lathur in Maharashtra.

The Blossom of Prison Ministry

In 1997, while Sr Carmelita served as a superior of the Wadi community of the present Gulbarga diocese after her retirement, it was then Sr Joyce Teresia after her final profession joined the Wadi community. Sr Joyce who was pondering over the prisoners' plight after having attended the second national convention of Prison Ministry India in 1995, shared about Prison Ministry India to Sr

Carmelita. The Almighty God stooped down to inspire the then Superior General Mother Inigo who initiated and asked Sr Joyce Teresia to attend the second national convention in Delhi held in 1995. Thus, the second national convention had a great impact, was the basic foundation and a first approach to prison ministry in the society of St Anne's of Madras. When Sr Carmelita heard about the plight of the prisoners, her heart moved for the suffering brethren. With this background, Sisters Carmelita and Joyce ventured into the prison walls with the spark and entered the Gulbarga Central jail in 1997 to render their service and later became the members of Prison Ministry India in Bangalore in 1999. Sr Carmelita with an ignited spirit began her prison service to the brethren behind the bars who were totally dejected, damaged, deformed and disfigured.

Bengaluru Central Prison

In 1999 at the age of 68, Sr Carmelita started her work in the Bangalore Central prison. In the beginning the jail authorities looked at her with suspicion, later they realised the importance of her genuine service and permitted her to visit the prisons on a regular basis. Very soon with the simple acts of pure love, kindness, single-handed dedication and courage, she touched the lives of hundreds of prisoners in a powerful way and was popularly addressed as the icon of hope, Mother Teresa of Bangalore and saviour of many poor inmates of the Bangalore Central Prison by the prison inmates. She maintained a diary to record the details of the innocent prisoners and those that were arrested under mistaken belief. Whenever she came across a poor innocent prisoner, she would first make a clear case study and then proceed. If the prisoner was arrested without any fault of his/hers, she would take the matter to the Police Commissioner or Superintendent or other IPS Officers and see that his/her case was duly justified. She obtained B reports from the police of the concerned jurisdiction and released the innocent prisoners. She arranged advocates for the innocent prisoners and raised funds for the deserving cases so that they were released at the earliest. After releasing them from the prison, sometimes the police again filed false cases to close the undetected cases. Whenever they called the released persons to

the police station to fix them in such new cases, Sr Carmelita took the help of the higher-ranking police officers and saw that those innocents were not arrested on the pretext of false cases. She argued with those advocates who took big fees and failed to do justice because of which the inmates were kept in jail permanently without bail for months and years. Sr Carmelita counselled the disorganised prisoners, gave moral courage to the broken hearted and found accommodation for the deserted prisoners. She spent hours together listening to their stories, outpouring of grief and even outbursts.

Prison Ministry - Not a Profession but a Vocation

Sr Carmelita would address the gatherings of prison volunteers exhorting that prison ministry is not a profession but a divine vocation. She urged that the Church needs to explore and promote this noble ministry and quoted the scriptural models who had experienced prison life including Jesus who being an innocent prisoner faced capital punishment of brutal murder. She invited many more hands to join her in the noble venture in order to bring happiness into the hearts of the bereft prisoners. She would often state that “It is indeed a great responsibility to shoulder the least, the lost and the last to build a harmonious society, thereby creating a New Jerusalem. “Give yourself no rest, give God no rest, unless He creates a New Jerusalem” (Is. 62.7). Sr Carmelita had to face the onus of threats, which came her way from members of the public who opposed her every move of releasing the prisoners and threatened to decapitate by chopping her limbs but with the co-operation of the prison authorities she courageously sorted out those problems. Sr. Carmelita always concluded her awareness sessions to the prison volunteers as follows, “Prison ministry has become my first priority and I devote my entire time to its cause”.

Reaching beyond the Prisons in Bangalore

Sr Carmelita and Sr Joyce Teresia were busy venturing together and taking initiatives in promoting prison ministry in different places and congregations. Sr Carmelita visited the jails of Gulbarga, Raichur,

Yadgir, Bellary, Tanjore, Mangalore, KGF, Chittoor, Mysore, Mandya, Pune, Goa and many more places where she started PMI units to help and cater to the need of the prisoners. She visited Remand Homes for boys and girls, Juvenile Centres, Drug Rehabilitation Centres, and Reception Centres for women where the inmates were detained.

Premodaya – A Home for Prisoners’ Children

On July 1st in 2000, a home for prisoners’ children was blessed inaugurated at Lourdes Convent of the society of sisters of St Anne’s Madras in the premises of St Francis Xavier’s Cathedral, Cleveland Town, Bangalore. The initiative to establish this Home, “Premodaya”, a brainchild of Sr Carmelita aged 70 years and Sr. Joyce, the then Bangalore province co-ordinator for prison ministry. Sisters Carmelita and Joyce Teresia sought the permission from the then Superior General Mother Inigo and she was generous enough to grant permission for the same. Premodaya was blessed by Fr Pascal Coutinho, CP, the then president of Navajyothi unit in Bangalore and director of Sneha Jyoti, the rehabilitation centre for released male prisoners. Mother Inigo, the then Superior General spoke briefly, on the establishment of the congregation of the Sisters of St Anne’s Madras in the 19th century, primarily for the upliftment of women through founding of schools, health centres, orphanages, old people’s homes and Premodaya, the Home for prisoners’ children. Sri Revanasiddaiah the then DGP/IGP said that in general society shuns prisoners and their families and as a result prisoner’s children find themselves on the street and become victims of slavery, prostitution and petty thefts, ultimately leading to more crimes in the society. It is organizations such as Premodaya which provide shelter, food and education to the prisoners’ children that can convert these unfortunate children into responsible citizens.

Prison Quarters Ministry

Sr Carmelita found inadequate time to meet the demands of prisoners’ day by day. Hence, she obtained special permission from the Congregation authorities to stay in the Prison Quarters beside the Central Jail Bangalore. By the generosity of Sri L. Revanasiddaiah,

the then DGP/IGP, she was allotted a prison quarters to reside and serve the prisoners. Once again with the help of the DGP she arranged for Lok Adalat where judges of 15 to 20 courts visited the central prison Bangalore in a day to put an end to long standing cases and to the problem of lack of escorts to take the prisoners to courts etc. Prisoners were pardoned and released on the spot for petty cases and when pleaded guilty and when found the detention longer than the stipulated time. During the Lok Adalat, Sr Carmelita took drastic effort to survey and produce statistics of the innocent inmates for their quick release. From 1999 to 2007 within a short period of 7 years of time, Sr Carmelita was able to release and rehabilitate about 1500 prisoners successfully.

Activities Inside the Prison

Sr Carmelita spared no effort to arrange many facilities for the prison inmates with the kind co-operation of the prison authorities. Programmes such as retreats, yoga, career guidance, seminars on positive approach, reconciliation and art of self-confidence to the quarantined boys were made possible. Educational facilities were bestowed for the prison children by placing them in the residential institutions like So Care Ind, Mithra Foundation, Janodaya, Premodaya and Prison Fellowship. Job opportunities, rehabilitation, attendance to courts with the prisoners were taken care. She arranged escorts for prisoners, admitted seriously ill prisoners in the hospitals outside specially the diabetes, cancer, TB, HIV and heart patients. She assisted the differently abled inmates to get artificial limbs, organised Cardiac check-up with the help of Dr Devi Prasad Shetty, the heart specialist and the chief of Narayana Hrudyalaya Hospital, Bangalore who had also performed few open-heart surgeries for prison inmates. Sr Carmelita helped the jail authorities to approach the doctors at the time of emergency heart attacks and to get advises through video conferencing.

A Day with God

She enhanced the practice of “A day with God”, every month apart from the physical treatment since the prisoners were in need of inner

spiritual healing. With the help of the team members from Mangalore and many other priest volunteers, Sr Carmelita realised the dream of a day's recollection on the theme *A Day with God* in the prison chapel which was very often packed with the inmates, irrespective of caste, creed and language. All the inmates broke down during the prayer service and the spirit of God helped them to realize the seriousness of their crimes deep down in their conscience. The need of repentance blossomed in many inmates of the prison and moved them to make their confessions. Sr. Carmelita also organised Aids awareness programmes, diabetes, eye and heart medical camps accompanied with the distribution of medicines and spectacles with the help of local hospital authorities in Bangalore. Deserving convicts were brought out and sent for 12 days holidays on furlough by paying Rs. 1500 each to see their old and sick parents or children's marriages. Life-prisoners were sent out on parole for three months by paying Rs. 6000 deposit, 2 sureties and other formalities. The rotation of parole amount was utilised for many desperate prisoners. Apart from visiting the central jail Bangalore, Sr Carmelita also kept visiting the open jail inmates in Devanahalli.

On one occasion of Christmas in 2002 when the brothers of Dharmaram College wanted to write greetings to the convicts, Sr Carmelita visited all the convicts' cells and got their addresses and later saw that about 800 people received the greetings, thus brought cheer to their worn-out lives. A special Mass was offered for all the prison inmates followed by entertainment and distribution of snacks. She was instrumental to start driving school inside the Central Prison Bangalore. Sr Carmelita brought prisoners' children from various hostels to the jail and showed them to their parents and took them back to the hostels. Jail authorities arranged a vehicle for Sr Carmelita for her yeomen service in the prison.

Jobs Placements

Sr Carmelita aspired to restore human dignity to the dejected prisoners, hence the released prisoners found jobs in various factories, offices, building contracts, workshops, printing press, hotels, garment export

companies as electricians, drivers, securities, masons, helpers, printers, gardeners, painters, servant maids in bungalows, etc. All this was made possible with the help of wealthy and high-ranking officials. These men come forward by contributing money or job opportunities for their less fortunate brethren either during their incarceration in prison, or after their release.

Police Tortures Came Across

With the close association with the prison inmates, Sr Carmelita came to know the miserable tortures the prisoners were succumbed to. The police arrested these people without any proper inquiry. They then proceeded to ask these men to sign on blank papers and later fill up details to suit their purpose. If the criminals paid up large sums of money, the police arrested other innocent people who were sent to the jail in place of the criminals. The criminals arrested on a single charge, very often before their release were booked for several charges. Under police custody these prisoners were forced to accept crimes not committed by them. The tortures included, beating under the feet, passing electricity through the private parts of the body, stamping and bursting their feet with heeled boots, pricking pins into their nails and hands, aeroplane beatings etc. Having known these inhuman treatments, Sr Carmelita stood in solidarity with the innocent prisoners who unwillingly or knowingly resorted to crime and consoled them.

Conclusion

Sr Carmelita was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2005 and had to undergo many chemo therapies. Even during her treatment for cancer, Sr Carmelita did not waste her time but was found in many of the programmes concerning prisoners and prison ministry awareness talks to various target people. She attained her heavenly abode on May 1st the international labour day in 2007 after her untiring service to the least, lost and last in the society. Her busy loving soul found rest in the Omnipresent Lord after her tireless service to the prison brethren behind the bars. She has written the following precious lines in her personal diary:

My ramblings have thus come to an end. I set out to write this, so that those who will come after me, may take up where I have paused. I have always believed that if we show respect for people as they are, we can be more effective in helping them to become better than they are. These men and women face ignominy and it has been my humble endeavour to help them rise above the indignities imposed on them. Every word in this book is written with blood that flows in my vein and every beat of my pulse. Their pain and misery have become mine. And all my efforts are turned towards directing these poor prisoners. What they need is our understanding and as I listen to each individual and his miserable story, I climb out of my sense of hopelessness and helplessness and with recharged determination set about to right a wrong. They have been denied justice and as I feel this was a divine call, I am infused with vigour and energy as I work with them and help them in their process of reformation. God sends me his crumbs of comfort through hints and whispered words, when I am in despair. Life cannot stand still and from the inner most depths of the soul we must make love burst forth like tiny shoots from the womb of the earth. We should listen carefully to these suppressed cries. We can live and love again where we may be. Before I bid adieu, I would like to share this saying by William Penn for it reflects my own thoughts, "I expect to pass through but once. If therefore, there any kindness I can show, or any good thing I can do to any fellow being let me do it now, for I shall not pass this way again."

Sr Zaveria Alphonso: A Zealous PMI Warrior

MD Vincent MBA

God gifted three-star warriors to take Prison Ministry India (PMI) to its peak in both Telangana and Andhra Telugu States. Sr Leena Kattookaren FMM, Sr Alice Crasta SCCG, Sr Zaveria Alphonsa, St Anne's, Providence are the three main pillars on which the PMI is built strongly in both Telugu States. Sr Zavarior breathed her last on 13th May 2020 on the feast of our Lady of Fathima. We trust that all the three went to their heavenly abode telling us loud and clear "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith, now there is in store for me the crown of glory which the Lord will award" (2 Tim 4:7). Sr Zaveria with her simplicity and tremendous commitment won the hearts of all the prisoners and volunteers. She deserves a great tribute from all of us by recollecting some milestones in her sacred life. True to her name, our dearest Sr Zaveria too was a missionary within the four walls of the Convent. She preached the Gospel by her exemplary life. She was prayerful and self-sacrificing, zealous and generous, kind and compassionate, faithful and dedicated, honest and sincere, working hard, day and night, rendering valuable services to the poor and needy and to the Congregation at large.

Early Days

Sr Zaveria Alphonso was born in Suratkal, Mangalore, on 29th May, 1932 to Mr Marian Alphonso and Mrs Seraphina D'Silva. Almost all her life she spent in Secunderabad community, doing various services like taking care of the building constructions, maintenance and supervision of the campus and also as a Community Bursar, except for five years, where she worked in Eluru, as a warden of St. Theresa's College Hostel. From 1968 to 1973, she was appointed as Provincial Bursar during Mother Margaret's tenure. She was also actively

involved in Prison Ministry and formation and development of Small Basic Christian Communities.

Vocation

Sr Zaveria came in contact with our Sisters at Angelore, Mangalore, where she assisted in serving the elderly people in the Home for the Aged, run by our Sisters. She stayed with them for 14 months helping the Sisters in every possible way, seeing the situation there, of life of poverty followed by the Sisters, she was determined and decided to join the Congregation of the Sisters of St Anne. Entered the Novitiate on 3rd January 1952, had the religious habit on 1st January 1953, first profession on 1st January 1955 and perpetual profession on 1st January 1961.

Prison Ministry

While rendering multiple services to her community, she spared quality time for Prison Ministry at Hyderabad. At the request of Sr Leena Kattookaren, she rendered her services as PMI's (A.P. Branch) first Treasurer. Sr Leena Kattookaren had always high praises for her accounts work as extremely neat, orderly with Cristal clarity. As a volunteer, she always takes the first step in supporting our visits and all the programmes in all four prisons in Hyderabad. We celebrate important feasts like Christmas, Easter, Holy, Rakhi, Independence Day, Republic Day and International Women's day. During the unit meeting, whenever the State Coordinator asks the volunteers how they would manage the celebrations in jails, Sr Zavarria is always the first one to say that she will take up A to Z activities in Open air Jail that she regularly visits. She will arrange cultural programmes organising transport and snacks to all inmates, guests and volunteers totally on her own. Inmates and prison officials have tremendous respect for her simplicity and heart rendering services. She was great strength and companion to Sr Leena Kattookaren and Sr Alice Crasta. She was the great inspiration to all volunteers too.

What They Say

In the words of Mother Ernestine: For almost a span of a decade that I lived with Sr Zaveria, I had much to learn from her. As a young Sister, Sr Zaveria was an embodiment of commitment and conviction with no compromise. She was a person of deep faith, virtuous and very religious minded. Her life was characterized by simplicity, austerity, credibility, hard work, loyalty to authority, diligence and dedication. Her love for the Congregation was great and remarkable. Her love for the poor and marginalized is noteworthy and countless are the young girls she helped settling in life and accompanying them thereafter. She would never turn away the poor who knocked at our door. Her pastoral zeal and love for the Church was truly edifying. She would go to the different sub stations for animating the Liturgy, teaching Catechism and BCC etc. Later in life she was drawn to the Prison Ministry and carried it out very faithfully. To sum up, I can say dearest Sr Zaveria was an exemplary religious worth emulating. May her tribe increase.

Sr Sylvia

Her heart would melt at the sight of the misery. She also got a few of them married and settled them in life. She would do anything to uplift the marginalized.

Sr Monica Francis

She would not keep any extra luggage; she would give it away to the needy. To teach catechism was her pleasure. She has accompanied the prisoner's children to complete their studies and even settled them in life. She is the icon and a true model for every consecrated woman.

Mrs Indira Narayan

Sr Zaveria was an affectionate person and spoke to everyone in a friendly manner. I was always happy to see her as I entered the school each day and she would ask me how I was and enquire after my children too. She carried herself with elegance, uprightness and

firmness and commanded respect from all and from her staff and workers.

Mrs Patty

May her soul rest in peace. She was one generous soul, hardworking and full of energy, she was very efficient, firm yet kind in her dealings with us, indeed I will always Remember her with great love and gratitude. Sister went to her Heavenly abode on a beautiful day, the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima.

Mrs Margaret Mcloud and Miss Celene Stafford

Sr Zaveria was a very unique person in her own way. She was motherly, kind and understanding. She may not be with us physically, but we will always cherish her fond memories. May her soul Rest in Peace.

Regina, The Secretary PMI, Andhra

Sr Zaveria was a silent worker like St. Joseph and always willing to say “YES” to render her services to Prison Ministry with a smile.

Sr Jesintha Maiappa, Provincial Superior

Our dearest Sr Zaveria Alphonso followed the philosophy of kindness, compassion, love and generosity. She is to us the sisters of St. Ann, a guiding light. we appreciate and admire her faith and service. As we bid adieu to the mortal remains of our dearly beloved sister, let us pray that the lord who called her, may show her the beatific vision and make her enter into his mansion. We thank the Lord for the precious gift of Sr Zaveria and entrust her soul to Our Lord through the intercession of Our Lady of Fatima whose feast we celebrate today. With all due respect and gratitude to the departed soul, I would like to convey my Condolences to the Sisters of the Congregation of St Ann, to the family members of Sr Zaveria, to Fr. Dian Isaac the State Coordinator of PMI, Mgr. Swarna Bernard, the spiritual Director and all the volunteers of PMI.

Walter Kamble: An Inspiring PMI Warrior

Walter Kamble

Genesis

I was working for the Indian Railways since 1979 and was posted at Bhusawal and was put under a commission looking after the workers working hazards. One fine night the commission was wound up under the direction of the ministry and I was transferred to Nashik Road in 1980. I was staying all alone at Nashik Road and my parents were at Ahmednagar. I started going to the Shrine of Infant Jesus every Thursday where I met a few senior people coming together every Monday to prayer together. The Lord has given me a big voice and I loved to sing in the Church, which attracted these seniors and they invited me to join their prayer group. This group was just 6 to 7 people with one priest. I was just 24 years old then. This was just a small prayer group meeting to pray and intercede. Slowly and steadily, a new priest came as a chaplain of the Shrine and he started inviting people to join this prayer session. This new priest late Rev.Fr. Hillary Miranda SJ became my Spiritual Director. The prayer services every Monday was being held in the Shrine Hall wherein many people started coming including people of other faith. Father Hilary would speak in English and I was asked to interpret for him in Marathi. As the prayer group was growing, we formed a core group. The core group started meeting on Saturdays for intercession prior to the Monday main prayer service. With the help of this core group, we started our outreach programs in the district of Ahmednagar specially during Lenten season where the local priest would invite us to visit a village in his parish and stay there for 3 days giving retreats in Marathi. The strength and guidance came from the Holy Spirit during our intercessory prayers every Saturday.

Call Within the Call

One fine Saturday morning in the month of November 1990, as we were praying intensely for the people of our Diocese and others who had requested for prayers. We were reflecting on the gospel of Matthew 25 on the Judgment of the Nations. We were trying in our prayers to justify ourselves in the presence of the Lord and suddenly everyone stuck at verse 36 “When I was in prison and you visited me”. We were 6 of us from the core group and when this verse stuck us, it did strike hard and we were speechless. We looked at each other and knelt before the Lord and asked for forgiveness. We prayed, we cried and during the pray session, asked the Lord to give us guidance. We started making enquiries as how to enter the prison. We took a letter from the Shrine Chaplain seeking permission to conduct a Christmas program in the prison. To our great joy, the Superintendent that year happened to be a Christian person and with his help we got permission. With a grateful heart we started preparing ourselves as how are we to conduct this program. The Superintendent sent a message that someone should come and give a detailed schedule of the program which should not exceed 1 hour. We adhered to his instructions and gave the necessary details and the list of people attending the program. However, only 10 people were allowed.

First Program

25th December 1990 was a day full mixed emotion of excitement and nervousness. When we reached the gates of Central Prison Nashik Road, all our baggage was checked and only necessary things allowed to be taken in which included the Mass Kit, prayer books and Bible. To our great surprise, we found that a big stage was set with all necessary PA system and lots of prisoners sitting in front of the stage.

We had praise and worship in the presence of that large gathering, as there were almost 2000 plus prison inmates listening intently to the words of prayers, we were praying for them. After the Holy Eucharist, Father Hilary asked me to give my testimony as to how I was turned to God. I prayed to the Holy Spirit to give me the courage and the words to speak. I spoke for the first time in front of the inmates about

my life's journey from wretchedness to being saved by Jesus Christ and how he is now using me to preach his love and mercy. As it was the year 1990, not much of restriction to mingle with the prisoners, after the Mass and program, our team members started talking to the inmates who approached us. One prisoner named Rajan (name changed) came forward and said, "मैं अपना येशू मसिह को देना चाहता हूँ." I was not very sure about him, as he was guarded with two police personnel, which I later learnt that he would become aggressive any time and was always tied up. After the service was over, cake pieces baked in the prison itself and paid by Fr Hilary was served all who were present. As we went to the Superintendent's office, we requested him that we would like to come regularly to conduct prayer and counseling service for them. He asked us to write a letter asking for permission, which we wrote and were allowed to come every third Sunday of the month.

Journey with the Inmates

Seeing the results in the behavioral pattern of the prison inmates, the jail authorities were very much satisfied and then later, it was easy for us to visit them regularly. We were given a big hall where about 300 prison inmates could be accommodated. During our prayer services the number of prison inmates would be around 200 to 250 as only those interested were brought in. We used to carry a lot of bibles to be distributed which the inmates happily received. During our first visit, the person named 'Rajan' was very regular during these prayer services and later on he started a prayer group among the prisoners and called his prayer group "येशू मसिह की रहस्यमय कलीसा" (The Secret Church of Christ). He then painted on the walls these words. "Every Saint has a past and Every Sinner a Future". Every Sunday he would gather the inmates who were interested and would pray with them, reflect upon the scriptures as the Spirit led him.

One day, as we were conducting a prayer during our regular visits, he came forward and said that as I have received Jesus and Jesus has accepted me, I want to be baptized. It was a matter of great joy for us that someone from a Hindu background has asked for a baptism. He

was told to pray intensely, and we provided him catechesis during our visits for almost two years. It was during this time of his reformation, the jail authorities told that he is a completely changed person. Earlier, he would abuse, quarrel with his fellow inmates, in one instance he had also tried to man handle a jailor. But since he started attending the prayer services and counseling sessions, the behavior changed and became a prayerful person. When he asked for baptism, we were not able to say yes immediately, but then after intense prayer and fasting, we found a way. And on 25th December 1995, Rajan was baptized and that day it was a day of rejoicing for us, but we had to keep a prudent silence on this baptism issue.

Those days, we received a blanket permission to visit the prison throughout the year, which lasted till the year 2000. As the prison ministry work was being carried out by our Prayer Group, under the spiritual guidance of the Shrine Chaplain, we were free to work. But later on, when the Diocese started Social Work Cell, known as Nashik Social Service Society (NSSS), it took over the prison ministry under its care. And since then, the prison ministry work was carried out by the NSSS. As I was also associated with NSSS because of his Lordship late Rt Rev Bishop Thomas Bhalerao's intervention, my work with the prison continued.

Achievements

Because of the involvement of the Nashik Social Service Society with the blessings of his Lordship late Rt Rev Bishop Thomas Bhalerao, the prison ministry work was backed up with finance and the leadership of the then Directors of NSSS.

1. Through NSSS the prison inmates were given Masala Grinding Machines which was happily received by the Prison authorities and used extensively in the Prison kitchen.
2. Sewing machines were donated to the women inmates and were taught to stitch clothes.
3. The Central Prison did not have Public Announcement system those days, so with the help of Fr. Wilson Rodrigues, the then

Director/NSSS Public Announcement system was donated to the Prison.

4. One year, the Superintendent made a request that the Sports Team of the Central Prison did not have a proper uniform, they felt embarrassed when they used to go for participation in their Zonal sports. So NSSS provided them with Sports Uniform and to much amazement, that year the Nashik Central Prison won many prizes.
5. Computer classes were also started through the NSSS in the Central Prison.
6. There were small children in the Women's Cell who were deprived of basic education. To overcome this, a "Balwadi" was started in the women's cell and a teacher was appointed who was paid by NSSS and with the help of Shrine of Infant Jesus chaplain.
7. The relatives who came to meet the prison inmates had to wait outside the prison gates for quite long time and there was no drinking water available for these visitors. Taking this into consideration, Fr. Wilson Rodrigues, Director/NSSS constructed "Panpoi" a stand placing taps where drinking water was made available. This act of kindness was very much appreciated by the prison authorities. In fact, it was inaugurated by the then Secretary/Prisons, Maharashtra State Late Mrs Neela Sathyanarayan.
8. A free legal aid cell was also established and inaugurated by the then Session Judge. Because of this legal aid cell, it was possible to arrange for release of women inmates who had committed petty crimes knowing/unknowingly and could afford even petty fines.
9. In the year 2004, a Maharashtra State Seminar-cum-Workshop was organized in the Bishop's House under the Chairmanship of His Lordship late Rt Rev Bishop Dr Thomas Bhalerao wherein the then National Coordination Fr Sebastian Vadakumpadam, Sr Grace Castelino, the State Secretary, Fr Rocky Banz, Director/Social Service Society, Mumbai Archdiocese, the Central Jail

Superintendent Mr Chawan and Members of Prayas, Mumbai. Almost 40 participants from all over Maharashtra attended this workshop.

10. In the beginning medical health camps were also organized in collaborations with prison authorities wherein talks on health were given to the prison inmates.

Regular Programs:

1. Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter celebrations on a regular basis wherein we take the help of the local school children to perform cultural programs.
2. Patriotic cultural programs during 26th January and 15th August. Here also we bring school children to conduct patriotic songs and cultural program.
3. Raksha bandhan celebrations: We take the women, Nuns from different parishes in the city and they tie rakhis to the prison inmates and the prison personnel.
4. Women's day celebrations are conducted every year in the women's cell.
5. Pencil Sketch drawing competitions announced by the Prison Ministry India are being conducted every year.
6. We try to give buckets, blankets, clothes in the women cell as and when there is a need.

Constraints

1. These days, especially during the last 3 to 4 years, we are forced to seek permissions well in advance, but due to certain difficulties, the permissions arrive late, but yet the local authorities in good favor allow us to continue with the programs.
2. In this COVID-19 pandemic all visits have been curtailed since March 2020. But still we could at least make an attempt to distribute pocket sanitizers and liquid sanitizers to the jail personnel which they appreciated a lot.

3. One month's Grocery was provided to a prisoner's family in remote adivasi area. But could not extend more help to others due to financial constraints.

Conclusion

Being in this ministry, I have guided spiritual and mentally by initially first by late Fr Hilary Miranda SJ, Rev Fr Rasquina SJ, blessings of late Bishop Rt Rev Thomsa Bhalerao and now his Lordship Rt Rev Lourdes Daniel, Bishop of Nashik, many pioneers in the ministry Sr Grace, Fr Sebastian, Fr Francis Kodiyan, Fr Varghese, Sr Diana, Sr Lini, Fr Wilfred and the blessings of Rt Rev Dr Bishop Allwyn D'Silva. I thank God for this wonderful ministry He has given me. I pray with folded hands that He may give me the strength, courage and wisdom to carry out this ministry in a more concrete manner. I am aware and know that I am sinner myself. As it is said "We are all in prisons; there is only one difference, the distance between the wall and us". With God's grace, Jesus my Shepherd, and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit "I do what I can, and for who I can, with what I have, and wherever I am. I will be the carrier of Love Bomb and explode it over and over again wherever I go." In the words of Mother Teresa "Love is not be satisfied with just giving money, as money is not enough, money can be got, but the inmates need your heart to love them, so spread your love everywhere you go." Praise be to God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, Amen

Sr Adele Korah SCCG: An Amazing PMI Warrior

Sr Lini Sheeja MSC

Introduction

From her childhood days, Sr Adele had a longing in her heart to serve the least and the lost. She was one of thirteen children and was brought up in a devout Catholic family. Her parents regularly attended Holy Mass along with all their children. For Sr Adele, every Eucharistic celebration was a heavenly experience, not just a routine. She was deeply touched by the love of Jesus who deigned to come down to the earth out of his infinite love and laid down his life to save the whole world. His love is so intense and therefore he does not want a single soul to be lost. When she dwelt deeply on the love of Jesus, she felt that as Jesus breathed his last, he was also breathing his spirit into her saying, “Now it is your turn Adele to live as I lived carrying my love to others, especially to the sinners who have not known my love for them so that they too may be saved.” This was a personal call for Sr Adele, after which she prayed every day after Holy Communion, “Jesus, help me to carry your light to all those who are living in the darkness of sin and ignorance.”

Passion to Renounce

When she finished her High School studies, she expressed her desire to become a religious. But her father expressed his desire to see his daughter as a doctor. He said, “I will give you in marriage to a doctor and I will build a clinic for you both.” That was his dream for her. But Jesus had a different dream for Sr Adele. Somehow, she managed to get the permission of her parents to join the congregation of Sisters of Charity in Mangalore after her graduation. Soon after her first profession she was sent to teach in schools and later on to take charge

of a D.Ed. college for training students after P.U.C to become teachers. As she was conscious of her call to bear the light of Christ to people who are living in sin and in darkness, she also made visits to the prison in Mangalore with the help of a priest who could hear confessions of the Catholic prisoners and to give them holy communion.

Dream Comes Alive

After her retirement from the field of education, she was able to join the Prison Ministry to be a bearer of the light of Christ to the rejected brethren living in prison cells. Thus, after a period of life spent in teaching, she was able to realize the dream she had received at the age of seven to be a bearer of the light of Christ to those living in sin. She was fortunate to attend the orientation course organized in Bangalore for those who wished to enter the Prison Ministry. Shri B S Abbai DIG of Central prison Bangalore welcomed the participants to begin the ministry inside the prison in June 2004.

Inconvenience Our Convenience

During the first year of her fulltime ministry in the prison, Sr Adele worked hand in hand with late Sr Carmelita SSAM, a veteran and experienced sister from St Ann's congregation. She felt privileged, to work with her and to learn from her. Along with her she learned and both worked selflessly for the welfare of the inmates of the prison without counting the cost. In the first year of her ministry, Sr Adele stayed with Sr Carmelita in Prison Quarters provided by the Government for those who serve in the prison. That was the year when she lived in practice the principle of the Prison Ministry, namely, "Inconvenience Our Convenience." There was no cooking facility and so they had to depend on the food prepared in jail for prisoners. There was no proper toilet in the room where they lived. They had to use a toilet outside the room which had a broken commode. No running water was available in the room, they had to collect it from outside in buckets. Yet, Sr Adele didn't mind the difficulties because of the fire, Holy Spirit had kindled within her which gave her a thirst for saving souls.

Central Prison Bengaluru

Sr Adele was welcomed to enter the central prison, Bengaluru without any restriction and was free to visit the inmates of both men and women sections. Whenever she met the brethren behind the bars, she felt it was Jesus whom she was meeting, because Jesus said, “When I was in prison you visited me”. Jesus reminded her to see him and serve him in every brother or sister in the prison. She considered all the inmates of the prison as her brothers and sisters who are in pain and are in need of understanding. That was a helpful thought to continue meeting their needs whether it was convenient or not for her to reach out to them.

She recalled once when she was coming out of the prison to have her lunch, a lady came to her and said, “Sister, my son is missing from home for one month”. Could you please enquire whether he is arrested and brought inside the prison”? As she was hungry and was eager to have some food in the quarters and return later to prison, she was about to leave in a hurry. But she felt that she should understand the anxiety of a mother without minding her own need to have food. She questioned herself, “If it was my brother who was missing at home and if my mom had requested me for this favour would I not do the needful immediately?” She felt that her service will be genuine when she considers that the brethren inside are her brothers and sisters. She rushed back to prison and searched for the name of her son in the list in the record section and found out his name among those who are under trial. The lady was in need of a letter to her parish priest who had agreed to help her to bring the son out from prison if she gets the fact confirmed. She gave her the letter she needed and the lady went away in peace.

Mother to Restless Children

Whenever, she entered the prison, she found that many of them were waiting for someone to listen to their woes. She met persons who were filled with guilt and remorse, who wanted to empty their burden by expressing to someone who would listen to them. So, she spent hours with those who wanted to pour out all their suppressed feelings

of pain and guilt. They would speak to her as to their own mother explaining all that happened in their lives which brought them to the prison. She recalls how a person who was arrested after he had killed his wife by smashing her head with the gas cylinder recently in a moment of frustration, was unable to sleep at night because whenever he closed his eyes, he could see only blood and he was weeping bitterly. Persons who have committed heinous crimes of murder become restless and after some sessions of counseling, they regain peace.

Launching Prayer Meeting

Her mission in the prison is geared towards Release, Reformation, Rehabilitation, Redemption and Reintegration of the brethren behind the bars. She has facilitated the inner release of a number of brethren from the fetters of guilt, sinfulness, anger, unforgiveness, hatred and from the desire to take vengeance on those who were the cause of their imprisonment. She turned to Jesus the healer in trustful prayer, besides praying with them and guiding them with appropriate Word of God. The Lord of love and forgiveness touched their life and to set them free from their bondages gradually. “If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36). Thus, they went through a process of inner transformation gradually and came to a firm decision to turn from their crime filled life. To help such persons to return to the Good shepherd and to help them to continue living a renewed life she was inspired to start a prayer meeting in the hall allotted by the prison authorities. This initiative taken by her sixteen years ago has helped many brethren in their Reformation from a life of crime to a life of value. As they started reading and listening to the lifegiving Word of God, they started experiencing the love and the light of the Saviour and were liberated from their inner bondages of hatred towards their enemies. Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from the heart of Christ (Rom 10:17).

Her Belief System

During her ministry in the prison, the Lord granted her the opportunity to witness the changes and transformation in the hearts of several criminals. The lost sheep who had turned away from the right path

and were caught up in the thorny bush of crimes were touched by their loving God and were able to take a U-turn in their life. She was convinced of the fact that no human being can become a hardcore criminal, but the grace of God and the touch of a living God can give them a new heart and a new spirit. Her deep faith and trust in God was rewarded as she witnessed the change in the hearts of double murderers, hired gundas and serial killers.

Reintegrating Prisoners

A prisoner, named Sunil was brought to her for counseling because he was found sitting always alone, gloomy and not speaking to anyone. When she sat listening to him, she came to know that he was once a seminarian and had left for certain personal problems, came to Bangalore and worked in a company as an assistant manager. He was a good supervisor and was well accepted by all. One day he found that without his knowledge someone had withdrawn quite a large sum of money from his bank account. He doubted some body in his office who knew where his cheque book was placed and concluded that he was the one who cheated him. He became furious and in a fit of anger he murdered him when all the others had left the office. He managed to burn up the dead body and thus covered up his heinous crime. But he was arrested and brought under custody. Sunil was unable to accept that he had become a murderer instead of becoming a minister of God which was his childhood dream. He lost sleep on several nights.

It was after several counseling sessions Sunil started accepting his situation and all that happened in his life. But when he was able to surrender himself to the God of forgiveness and love, he started attending prayer sessions; he was able to be reconciled with God, attended Holy Mass and regained his former self. Sunil was fortunate to get a very good advocate, to plead his case in the court and he got himself acquitted. Sr Adele sent him to the rehabilitation center where he continued his studies and secured his master's degree in computer science. He responded well in the reformation which was continued in the Rehabilitation center. He was able to find an employment and has gone abroad later and is reintegrated in the society.

Prisoners Becoming Powerful Agents

Persons who accept themselves and come to understand what led them to criminal activities at the counseling sessions in the prisons showed drastic changes in their conduct. A few of them became catalysts within the prison and were turned to be powerful agents to find out others who needed to be brought for counseling and prayer. I found many persons who are filled with hatred towards persons who made their life miserable, turned towards God all in forgiveness when they listened to God's word from Ephesians 4: 24-32. A prisoner said after the prayer, "Until now I was contacting people who could help me to set the houses of my enemies on fire. But now I know that I should forgive them and ask God to bless them because, I realize that it was good that I came in to the prison or else I would have continued to live a life of crime".

Reintegration with the Families

When she meets certain inmates in the prison who are very sad and lonely because of the rejection by their own parents and dear ones, she visits their families to bring reconciliation between those inside the prison and their families outside. When a prisoner by name Mohith told her that he had not received a single letter from his parents or dear ones, she contacted his parents requesting them to write a letter to him. Since they did not write or contact him even after 6 years of imprisonment, she took him to his house on parole with the assistance of a priest. When they entered the house of the prisoner, they did not show any sign of acceptance of their son. But when the priest and Sr Adele started praying for the family the son fell at the feet of his parents asking forgiveness for his past life. There were reasons for the indifference shown by the parents because he was a prodigal who disobeyed his parents and ran away from the house, lived as a drug addict, married a girl of his choice, became an alcoholic and a cause of his wife's death, got arrested and had become a convicted prisoner. As the prayer was conducted standing beneath a crucifix referring to the forgiveness taught by Jesus on the cross, the family experienced the Lord's touch. The prayer was followed by moments of exchange of forgiveness among all the members of the family. All rejoiced in the acceptance of the prodigal in the family.

She has many similar experiences of bringing reconciliation between the brethren in the prison and their relations. When Sunitha had no visit from her husband for three years, Sr Adele helped her to get released from prison with the help of legal aid. But when she reached her home the husband asked her, “Why did you bring her out, she is not wanted here.” In that moment of rejection by the husband, Sister offered to take her back and to a rehabilitation center. But the two small kids of the lady called out “mummy” and started clinging to their mother. Thinking of the kids, the husband accepted her back. Though more than twelve years have passed, till this day, this lady so gratefully remembers Sister, sending her the photos of her family.

Raised to Release

Sr Adele extends her help and support to the inmates of the prison for their release from the prison, by contacting advocates, paying their fine and, court fees, supporting them in their medical needs, meeting the expenses of their children’s education and extending support to the families of released prisoner. So far, she has spent about Rs. 23/- lakhs received from various sources for giving support to about 1000 prisoners before and after their release. Even during the locked down period several released prisoners who lost their jobs are receiving support from sister. She says, “God never left me in want. Mother Theresa started her ministry with a five rupee note, they say, I had not a single rupee in my pocket, but the good Lord supplied all the needs of my ministry through generous people of good will, and with St. Paul I can say, “My Lord will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus”(Phil 4:19).

Awards

Sr Adele Korah received “Namma Bengaluru’ award from the government of Karnataka in 2020 for her noble and outstanding services in the prisons in Karanataka state. She also received “Janaseva Award” from the Conference of Religious India in 2013, Bangalore for her dedicated and committed service to the brethren behind the bars, the victims and their families.

Jesu Raja: A Remarkable PMI Warrior

Jesu Raja

School to Prison

In 1993, my daughter joined Our Lady's Nursery, Holy Angels School Chennai run by the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. We had a Bible session for the Catholic parents once a month. Fr Joe Antony SJ gave us classes on Bible relevant to our daily life. During the course of time along with Sr Rosakutty Kottaram FMM, principal, the Parish Priest and we the parents felt that the gospel we read and study must be put into practice. We started a program that once in a month we come for a class that is theory. But the other three weeks we must live the gospel that we had heard from the class. In order to practice that we divided the parents into four to visit various places such as old age homes, hospitals, orphanages, and prisons. Many were afraid of going to prisons. Even my wife was reluctant to let me visit the prison. Members of each group, then shared their experiences with the others in the class.

Central Prison Chennai

It was in the year 1994 that we got the permission from Sri T S Panchapakesan IPS Inspector General of Prisons (Order No 53722/94 dated 24/08/1994) to visit the Central Prison Madras regularly. My experience was really an unforgettable one. When we got the permission from the Inspector General of Prisons, we had to get the time of visit from the Central Prison Superintendent; and for that we went to the Central Prison Chennai. Although I had the letter of permission, it was much easier for my friend and me to get into the prison as the Jailor was known to me. We met the superintendent and after finishing our discussion with him, when we came out leave, we were not allowed to leave the prison premises, because we had not

got the mandatory token or signature to enter the prison. As we trembled in fear not knowing what to do for a moment, one of my acquaintances came to our rescue and ushered us out safely. We, then started our regular visits. After some time, due to political situation we were asked to shift our visit to the Sub Jail Saidapet, Chennai. Two sisters visited the female section while two men (sometimes with a priest) visited the male sections.

Tamil Nadu State PMI Gathering

In 1996 we contacted Fr Varghese Karipperry, the cofounder of this challenging ministry. He arranged a Tamil Nadu State level two days gathering from 31st January to 1st February 1997 at the Archbishop's House, Madurai. Archbishop Most Rev Marianus Arockiasamy inaugurated the session. We had only a few members then. Sr Leena of Kumbakonam as well as Sr Amala of Vellore and myself besides a few others attended the 1st gathering.

We had our second state level gathering at Dhyana Ashram, Chennai on 28th and 29th May 1999. Madras-Mylapore Auxiliary Bishop Rev. Dr. Lawrence Pius was invited to be the Chief Guest. He presided over the function and assured us of his full cooperation to Prison Ministry India. He also presented a cheque of Rs. 10,000/- towards this ministry. There were fifty-two participants in this gathering, among whom were Fr Sebastian Theckenath, the then National coordinator, Fr. Alexander Kureekatil CMF, the director of Santhi Bhavan, Sr Latika SJB the directress of Asha Deepam. Their presence and encouragement motivated the group to work for this noble ministry with deep commitment and total involvement. Sisters of Bon Secours Convent also started to work in Prison Ministry India.

The Third Tamil Nadu State gathering of Prison Ministry was held on 27th and 28th of April 2000 at Udayam, Tiruchy. Most Rev Devadoss Ambrose, Bishop of Tanjore, inaugurated the gathering with the Holy Mass. 75 members from several dioceses took part.

The Fourth Tamil Nadu state gathering was held in Sacred Heart, Yercaud, Salem on 26th and 27th April 2001. Most Rev A.M. Singarayan, Bishop of Salem, Most Rev Peter Remigius, Bishop of

Kumbakonam and JPD Commission chairman, Honorable Justice A. Packia Raj, High Court Chennai, Sri. B.M. Ezra, DIG Prisons and many priests, religious sisters and laypeople were amongst the 120 participants of the gathering. The concluding session of this gathering inside the Central Prison, Salem on 27th April 2001 was an evergreen memory to all those who took part in it. Sr Joyce of Clunny and Fr. Johannes Gopu of Salem diocese were behind the success of this gathering.

The Fifth Tamil Nadu State gathering was held in Idaya Jothi, Causanal Puram, Palayamkottai on 1st and 2nd of February 2002. Most Rev Jude Paul Raj, Bishop of Palayamkottai inaugurated the gathering. Br Augustine of the Sacred Heart Brothers and Fr Antony Cruz of Palayamkottai Diocese played a vital role in the success of this gathering.

PMI National Gathering

The third PMI National Gathering was held at Thrissur in Kerala on 24th, 25th and 26th of October 1997. Out of the 120 people who participated, three were from Tamil Nadu- two from St. Anne's convent, namely Sr Srima and Sr Roseline and myself. Fr. Varghese emphasized the need for a state coordinator. We elected Sr Srima as the first PMI State coordinator of Tamil Nadu.

The fourth National level gathering was held in Mumbai on December 4th, 5th and 6th 1998. There were 130 participants. There were four participants from Tamil Nadu. Sr Srima, the State coordinator, Sr Roseline, Sr Lumina of St Anne's sisters and myself. Due to the efforts of Sr. Hermina, the Provincial of St. Anne's, Chennai many began to work for the Prison Ministry of India.

The Fifth National gathering was held in Calcutta on 12th, 13th and 14th 1999. It was a turning point for the Prison Ministry in Tamil Nadu. There were 35 members from eight different congregations of sisters, laypeople and Fr J. Antony Raj. We had decided in consultation with the National coordinator, that a priest should be appointed as the State coordinator. Accordingly, Fr J. Antony Raj was selected as the new State Coordinator unanimously. Most Rev Peter Remigius, Bishop of

Kumbakonam and the Chairman of JPD Commission of CBCI also gave the approval to the appointment of the State Coordinator. Sr Rosakutty Kottaram was selected as the treasurer and I as the secretary. The sixth National level meeting was held in Hyderabad on the 25th, 26th and 27th of October 2000. Two provincials along with the state coordinator and forty people from Tamil Nadu participated in this gathering.

Christmas Celebrations in Prisons

On 20th December 1997, we conducted a Christmas Program inside the Central Prison, Chennai. We showed the video clippings of how Jesus become an innocent prisoner from Gethsemane to Calvary. Most Rev Dr Arul Das James, the then Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore gave the message that all is not lost and there is still hope for them - the way is coming to the wayfarer. Sr Hermina, Provincial of St Anne's, Sri Vijay Narayanan DIG and many others participated in this memorable event.

Great Jubilee Celebrations in Prisons

While we celebrated the Jubilee year of the Innocent Prisoner Jesus Christ, Pope John Paul II invited the people on 9th July 2000 to celebrate the Jubilee for the prisoners too. On hearing this Tamil Nadu Prison Ministry India celebrated the jubilee conducting programs in many prisons of our State to show that the inmates are also our own brethren.

Visiting Prisoners' Families

There was a time that Prison Ministry was meant to meet the Prisoners in times of festivals but this concept changed and the members of the Prison Ministry India started searching for the families not only of the prisoners but also of the victims and served them. The members of the PMI gave a new life to them.

Vaigarai Malargal

There was another milestone in the history of Tamil Nadu in the Jubilee year. In an answer to the long-awaited unanswered question of the prisoner, ‘Won’t you give me a chance?’, through the tireless work of the sisters of Bon Secours Congregation, and their Mother General Rev. Sr Fatima Ram along with the Provincial Sr. Jayaseeli, there was set up a woman’s rehabilitation center known as “Vaigarai Malargal” on July 10th 2000. It stood as a lighthouse for the women who did not know the way to lead their lives. The women’s rehabilitation center “Vaigarai Malargal” made the young women forget all their sorrows and made them new flowers that bloom in the wee hours of the morning. Sr Ralph Mary and Sr Sahaya Mary are the two sisters who totally dedicated themselves for this venture.

Inconvenience Our Convenience

The Tamil Nadu Prison Ministry also followed the Prison Ministry India ways and actions: “Inconvenience is our convenience”, “Begging is our style”, “Bank Balance is the Providence of God”. On August 2000 with the help of Sr Prudentia FSJ the Assistant General of the Franciscan sisters of St. Joseph, we conducted a fund-raising program for our ministry in all the schools of Tamil Nadu. An essay competition was held on the topic: “Is religion a barrier to love others?” which saw an overwhelming response from many quarters of the State.

Vidiyalin Geetham

To give wings to the spirit of Prison Ministry, we arranged diocesan level gatherings in many dioceses. In September 2001, we brought out a quarterly newsletter named, *Vidiyalin Geetham*.

7th PMI National Gathering, Chennai

After conducting six national gatherings in Bangalore, Delhi, Tiruchur, Mumbai, Calcutta and Hyderabad we had the chance of conducting the seventh National level Meeting in Santhome, Chennai on 12th to

15th November 2002. The CBCI president Most Rev Mar Baselius, the Archbishop of Trivandrum, Most Rev Lawrence Pius, Auxiliary Bishop of Madras Mylapore, Most Rev Peter Remigius, Bishop of Kumbakonam and JPD Commission Chairman, Honorable Justice A. Packia Raj, High Court Chennai, Sri Bhola Nath IPS, ADGP Prisons, Smt. Kiran Bedi IPS were some of the personalities who shared their experiences in this august gathering. The State Coordinator, Fr Anthony Raj, State Treasurer, Sr Prudentia FSJ and all the State Executive members left no stone unturned for the success of this national gathering burning midnight oil for many days.

State Coordinators

Fr Anthony Raj was succeeded by Fr F.J.X. Eucharist as the Tamil Nadu State coordinator. On 24th May 2005 Fr Vincent Xavier SDB took Charge as the state coordinator of the Tamil Nadu State. We got the general permission to visit all the Central prisons & sub jails in Tamilnadu for the rehabilitation works of the prisoners and their families as per order No.51861/PW3/2007 dated 16.4.2007. In 2013 Fr G J Anthonysamy was appointed as the state coordinator of the ministry. It was indeed a great chance to meet the Honorable President of India Smt Pratibha Patil along with the national team of Prison Ministry on 25th July 2008 and submitted a petition to abolish the capital punishment in India. The State Prison Department on 9th February 2009 was appointed as the Non official visitor to Central Prison in Puzhal by Govt of Tamil Nadu Prison Department.

Premature Release

Realizing the agony of the inmates in the prison, the Prison Ministry officials met the Honorable Governor Sri K. Rosaiah and submitted the petition for the premature release of long-term prisoners, old age prisoners and the handicapped prisoners on 16th August 2012. A They also had an opportunity to meet Shri Banwarilal Purohit, the Honorable governor of Tamil Nadu and presented a petition for the same cause on 31st October 2017.

Repatriation of Foreign Prisoners

Mr William, an inmate from Holland who was in Puzhal prison expired and his family could not afford to come to India. On 22nd February 2013 with the help of the Embassy and the Prison department, we conducted his cremation ceremony in Chennai cemetery. During the visit, we came across many women from Bangladesh. They were languishing in prison unable to get released and go to their native places for more than four years. With the help of Bangladesh Embassy and the Catholic Church in Bangladesh, particularly Most Rev Bejoy Cruz OMI Bishop of Khulna, we visited Bangladesh from 19th to 23rd August 2013 and repatriated Bangladesh girls from Chennai. On 15th November 2014, we helped to repatriate a Netherlands prisoner who was released from Puzhal. There was a lady named Lakshmi from Andhra who was held up in Kolkatta Home. With the help of the Kolkatta PMI coordinator, on 18th March 2015, she was released and reunited with her family. On 29th September 2016, we had the chance of presenting the report of the repatriation of foreign prisoners in the Fifth national conference of prison heads in Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD) in New Delhi. As our church is universal, we have the access to go all over the universe. On 4th November 2018, a Vietnam lady prisoner was released from Puzhal and repatriated to her family. On 5th November 2019, we had the chance of presenting a lecture on *Humanity is Service* to nearly 2000 SIs and cops in Bangladesh Police Academy in Rajshahi.

Conclusion

I started my Prison ministry journey in the year 1994 when my daughter was in LKG. Today in the year 2020 my granddaughter is in LKG! God has blessed me with a golden chance to continue in the ministry even to this day. I am very much thankful to the Lord Almighty for His abundant blessing on my family and me. I am experiencing the showers of His grace upon me every day. “Kindness to the poor is a loan to the Lord, and He will repay you” (Proverb 19:17). All Glory and Honor to the Lord Almighty.

Prayer for Prisoners

Lord Our Loving Father, we praise and worship you/ together with Jesus Christ/ who taught us to visit the incarcerated. We thank and glorify you/ for sending your only begotten Son Jesus/ to proclaim liberty to the captives/ and saving us through His unjust imprisonment/ and death on the Cross. Merciful Father, give us the grace/ to see your face in our brethren behind the bars/ and help us to remember them/ as though we were in prison with them.

Beloved Father, we entrust into your compassionate hands/ our imprisoned brethren, sanctify them by your precious blood/ and anoint them with your Holy Spirit. Illumine their hearts/ to accept the present traumatic situation, give them the grace of repentance and forgiveness. Inspire their family members and society/ to accept them in spite of their frailties and failures. Fill us with the fruits, gifts and charisms of the Holy Spirit/ so that we may be empowered to transmit/ the unconditional and forgiving love of Jesus to prisoners.

Bless the prison staff/ that they may be kind, gentle and understanding/ towards those under their care, sanctify and strengthen the victims/ that they may reconcile with those who offended them. Mary, Mother of Jesus/ pray for the reformation and rehabilitation of our brethren behind the bars. We ask this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be
Mother Mary, Pray for us
St Maximillian Kolbe, Pray for us
Venerable Francis Xavier Van Thuan, Pray for us