



# JESUIT RESTORATIVE JUSTICE INITIATIVE

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NEWSLETTER | SEPTEMBER 2021

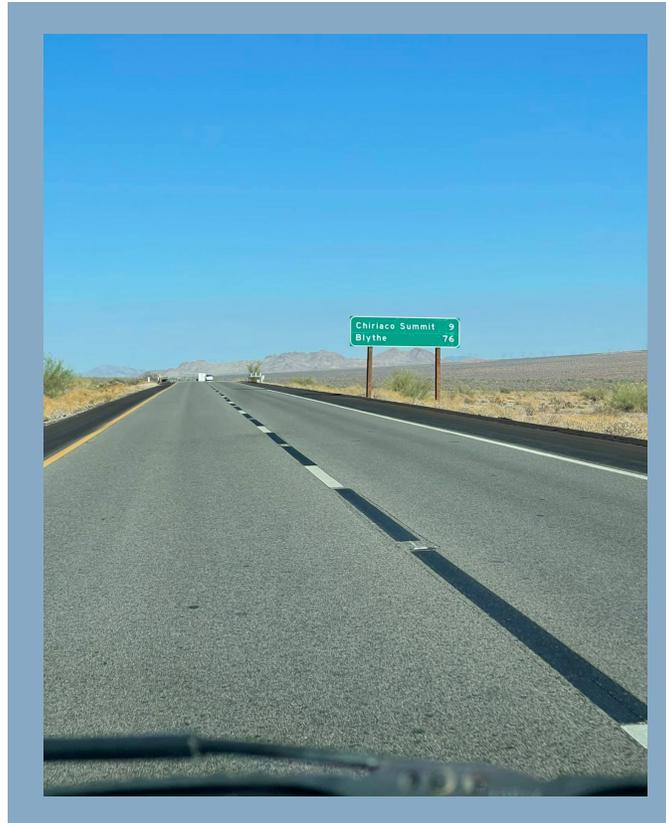
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For the first time in almost two years, things seemed almost back to normal for JRJI. Each week during the month of September, the JRJI team was able to travel to four different facilities, go inside, and actually celebrate a retreat with the JRJI participants. While COVID restrictions are still in place, it was wonderful to be able to have that one-on-one contact with our brothers inside.

## RETREATS

This month, the retreats were held on the following dates and places:

- September 7th: California State Prison-Los Angeles County in Lancaster, CA
- September 14th: California Correctional Institution in Tehachapi, CA
- September 20th: Ironwood State Prison in Blythe, CA
- September 28th: Calipatria State Prison in Calipatria, CA



*The photo was taken by Bobby Garcia on their way to Ironwood State Prison.*

We have a reflection from our visits this past month, which was written by our Assistant Executive Director, Bobby Garcia:

*It had been almost two years ago that I had last visited Calipatria State Prison. So it seemed like an eternity had passed for me when Fr. Mike, Arturo, and I finally drove into the prison on September 28th for our retreat. I could not pinpoint exactly what had sparked my interest in visiting the men at this particular prison, though I suspect it was the mystery behind what Fr. Mike and the JRJI Team had formed over the years at this prison. What the team had formed was a "monastic community" in which everyone participated and had close-knit relationships with each other.*

*I remember that as we drove up and approached the prison, Fr. Mike said, "Get ready for a spiritual transformation." I thought to myself, "I've been in many prisons throughout my years of incarceration, and Calipatria is just another one." We then passed a "Do not pick up hitchhikers" sign, and I knew the prison was now getting near. Once inside the prison, we settled into the groups, and Fr. Mike was right: I was blown away by the level of intimacy among the men and the sharing of their personal experiences. I was blessed by hearing their testimonies and witnessing the level of spiritual growth that had taken place.*

*This September was another spiritual blessing because JRJI was finally able to go back inside to accompany the men after the many hardships they had endured because of the pandemic. Many of the men expressed to us that they had experienced the loss of loved ones out in the community. Some had lost good friends and cellmates in prison, and prison programming was all but shut down during these difficult times. The participants expressed that they were grateful for the JRJI correspondence programs and the contact we had maintained with them via mail and phone calls. The video monthly Masses that Fr. Mike, the JRJI team, and Loyola Productions, Inc. had put together to be aired via the CDCR institutional channels especially touched the participants. We shared with the participants our mission of accompaniment and that we had missed them as much as they had missed us. CDCR assisted us in ensuring our video masses reached everyone inside the thirty-three different prisons. We could not have done that without so much support, and it could not have happened if CDCR had not recognized the healing process within JRJI's work.*

*One participant from my sub-group circle shared that JRJI helped to improve his spirituality, giving him a sense of meaning in his life and a roadmap on how to move forward. Another participant thanked us for believing in him enough to write a letter of support for his parole hearing in which he received his parole grant.*

*I am sure there are many studies on prisons and on those incarcerated, including how it feels to live without freedom and the loss of identity. I can say from personal experience that it is quite impossible to comprehend such a harsh reality without living in those cells and being in the recreation yards of CDCR.*

*Life imprisonment for me placed me in a state of desolation for such a long time. My life spiraled out of control until I hit rock bottom. Once I fell, there was nowhere else to go but up. My upside was finding consolation in my spirituality with Jesus, and from there, I found a direction that was directed outside of myself. I bonded with my prison fellas to build a more humane community, and new inspirations resulted in helping others. I was restored back to whom I was supposed to be.*

*This visit showed me that the men at Calipatria State Prison have remained faithful to their spiritual edification and rehabilitation processes. This was evident in all our visits this past month of September, and I'm sure it will continue to show in the other prisons we will soon visit as well. Without the public support that we receive from you, the friends of JRJI, we would not be able to do this work. So I sincerely thank all of you who have taken a couple of minutes to read this reflection.*

## **FOOTPRINTS PROGRAM**

One of our JRJI participants, Valentino, offered a reflection on the JRJI Footprints Program:

### *Why I Am Taking the Footprints Program*

*I've heard a lot of good things about Footprints, and I want to discover my past and grow into my future. I would love to discover new tools to cope with my past. I know my footprints in the past have led me to crime and a life of incarceration. Now, I want a life of happiness and freedom. Life in prison has led me to more pain and crime. I want to learn how to take the right steps that will reach the gates of freedom, mentally and physically. I will be going to the Board soon, and I want to know who, what, when, where, and how I am who I am. I want to gain knowledge from people who have already taken the steps I am taking in order to stay out of prison. I have a family waiting for me. I also have a wife who wants to start a family with me. I hope this program can show me why I have to stay away from my red flags and become the person I should have always been. For a long time, I didn't take the time to ask myself why I committed crimes. Now I want to retrace my steps and see why. My hope is to shine a light on my past and see the past that caused my negative behaviors. I know this class will be hard, and it will take work. I am committed to change and I am looking forward to the footsteps to healing.*

*-Valentino*

## **CORRESPONDENCE REPORT**

We continue to send correspondence to Avenal, Corcoran, and Pelican Bay, as within these institutions there are communities that we presently are not able to visit. The participants continue to return their reflections to us by mail.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

The institutions that we will be visiting during the month of October are:

- California State Prison-Los Angeles County in Lancaster, CA on Monday, October 4th
- California Correctional Institution in Tehachapi, CA on Tuesday, October 12th
- Centinela State Prison in Imperial, CA on Monday, October 18th
- Calipatria State Prison in Calipatria, CA on Tuesday, October 26th

Our next Parent Retreat/Meeting will be held on Sunday, October 24th. If you or someone you know has a family member incarcerated, you are invited to participate in this Mass and retreat meeting. Please contact our office at (310)559-0777 or email us at [info@jrji.org](mailto:info@jrji.org) to sign up for the retreat.



## LITURGICAL GUIDES

Every week, we send liturgical guides that are used on the JRJI retreats. The liturgical guides are sent via email. If you are interested in receiving the weekly liturgical guides for the upcoming Sundays, you can sign up on our website ([www.jrji.org](http://www.jrji.org)) or by emailing us at [info@jrji.org](mailto:info@jrji.org).

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