



JESUIT RESTORATIVE JUSTICE INITIATIVE

NEWSLETTER | AUGUST 2021

JRJI is almost back to normal as the prisons are slowly opening up. On August 24th, Fr. Mike, Arturo, Bobby, and Deacon Bill were preparing to do a retreat for the first time in over a year at Avenal State Prison. But at the very last minute, just as they were about to leave, the chaplain from the prison called and said that the retreat had to be canceled because of problems inside. Nevertheless, the fact that the prisons are now receptive to volunteers is good news for our work, and more visits to prisons are planned in the coming weeks.

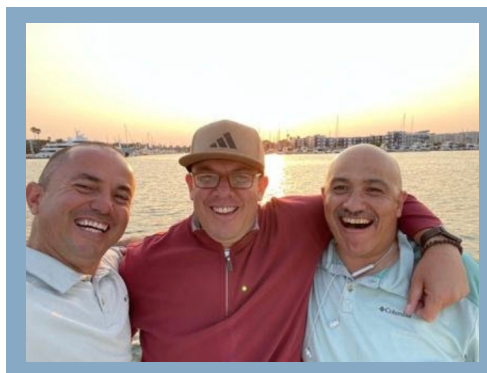
CORRESPONDENCE REPORT

August was our last month of mailing correspondence and other materials to all of the different institutions. This is because beginning with our visits in September, we will be personally bringing the participants the materials and resources they need to work on their healing process. However, we will still send correspondence to Avenal State Prison, California State Prison in Corcoran, and Pelican Bay State Prison, as within these institutions there are communities that we presently are not able to visit. Nevertheless, they continue to work with the JRJI material and they are returning their reflections to us by mail.

We ask for your prayers during this next month, since we are now ready to start and it will be the first time in more than a year that we have been able to visit these institutions to carry out the retreats. Although there are still restrictions and protocols due to COVID, we have been allowed to carry out the retreats with a minimum number of people.

JRJI INTERSHIPS

During the last few months, JRJI has had the good fortune to have two interns working in our office: Ignacio Medina and Adolfo Real. As their internships come to an end this month, we wanted to thank both Nacho and Adolfo for their hard work and help, both inside the office, and in various other JRJI activities.



Left to Right: Bobby Garcia, Ignacio "Nacho" Medina, and Adolfo Real

JRJI INTERNSHIPS

On Sunday, August 15th, right after Fr. Mike celebrated the 11:00 am Mass at St. Albert the Great parish in Rancho Dominguez, CA, JRJI sponsored another retreat for parents who have children in juvenile detention centers and prisons in California. During the Mass, the parents received a healing blessing. It was a very pleasant meeting with a lot of healing. JRJI intern Ignacio Medina had some thoughts about helping out with this retreat:

The greatest takeaway from our Mothers' Retreat for me was looking out towards the very people who helped my own mother better cope with her suffering when I was in prison. I was there with only three hours of sleep, and when I felt all the emotions in the room, it made me very nervous because I had been preparing for this day for a couple of years. My mom had shared what she had experienced during the retreats, and I had pictured myself standing there in front of my brothers' moms many times. I always prayed to have the strength to share my testimony without shedding a tear, but the tears came, and I feel better for them today. It was difficult to look out and not feel the pain present during our retreat. Every single mother needs to have their sons or daughters home with them. They need to feel whole and to heal from the emptiness a mother feels when no one understands them when they say their kids are good people. I remember learning how my mother was judged by people because I was in prison. I remember feeling mad because I didn't understand how my actions affected her in her role as a mother. My mother felt responsible for my actions, and I didn't know the extent of her pain. But during the retreat, I had the opportunity to experience what she felt through the words I heard from the other mothers present there. One thing I take away from the retreat was the honor I felt in speaking to such a great group of people. The love was infectious because the love coming from a mom who has a son or daughter inside is huge, especially when we factor in the support and patience it takes to stand by us when we are away. The mothers told heartfelt stories of their kids, how they grew up, and shared their pictures with such pride. I appreciated the trust I felt to share my own testimony. The mothers who attend are in need of spiritual support, especially given how few places there are for them to feel understood. They are proud of their kids, and they love and miss them. I hope the mothers will write their sons and daughters and share with them how much they wish for them to join a retreat like this when they are released. I will take the pictures. They will make it because for God there is no impossible mission. Thank you to Luisa for coordinating this retreat, and for Fr. Mike, and the team at JRJI who invited me to share my testimony.





In these retreats, we usually follow the same dynamic that we use in the prisons with their children:

1. A spoken testimony
2. A reading of the Gospel
3. A reading of a meditation written by Father Mike Kennedy, SJ
4. The laying on of the healing oil
5. A question for reflection

Our next parent retreat/meeting will be held on 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 to sign up for the retreat.

JRJI TEAM RETREAT

The month of August began with Fr. Mike being away on his annual eight-day retreat. But on Thursday, August 4th, he took a day out to go with other members of the JRJI team on a short “Whale Watching Retreat”. Bobby Garcia wrote a reflection on what that boat retreat meant for him:

I had the opportunity to join JRJI on a team retreat that set sail from Long Beach, CA, last week. It was an opportunity for me and two other former lifers to be together with the JRJI team and share brand new experiences for us after twenty-plus years. By taking this excursion, it meant more than just jumping on a boat and setting sail. The boat meant we would be leaving the land and taking a break from the hectic routines of 21st-century life. Time for us became elastic, and we could measure our trip by the sunset, sunrise, and phases of the moon. We had the opportunity to silence our smartphones and get into a natural rhythm of the wind, sun, the stars, and the sea - nothing to remind us of our day-to-day worries. During this time we spent together on this great adventure, I shared my reflections of mentors that impacted my life and how that day with Ignacio and Adolfo helped me gain a renewed appreciation for the power of mentorship...On another level, we shared about the strength of our peers in the prison system who were able to identify and make us aware of things before we could. It was rare for us to sit in the yard, classrooms, or even in the chapel and have conversations in which they did not urge me to pursue a more profound understanding of my dysfunctional past. No matter how difficult the stakes, they constantly challenged me to go that proverbial extra mile in my spiritual transformation, believing that effort and faith would translate into progress and that I would emerge better for my future. When I worked alongside Adolfo and Ignacio as they facilitated the JRJI program, JRJI would always give them that extra push to press on in the path they choose for themselves. When both began their spiritual transformation, JRJI would push them to facilitate it well for others who just started the process. The time together on this retreat evoked reflections for Adolfo and Ignacio as they transitioned into civilian life. They have engaged in many different areas of their lives since their recent parole—progressing through concepts in family reunification to those completing transitional housing and now making it on their own. However, that commitment and tireless pursuit of spiritual transformation has served them well throughout life.

BOAT RIDE CELEBRATION

Last month, we dedicated the July JRJI Newsletter to Mr. Mike Roide who has published so many of Fr. Mike's books of meditations with no charge to JRJI. We also listed in that Newsletter all of the books that he published just over the last year and a half during the pandemic. In order to thank Mr. Roide, the JRJI team took him out on a boat ride “dinner cruise”. Once again, our intern, Ignacio Medina, wrote some reflections on this event:

(continued on page 5)

The trip was scheduled to begin at five p.m., but the team arrived early, preparing to receive our special guest, Mr. Mike Roide. We called it "tailgate waiting," and we listened to music and snacked on food until around four-thirty our guest arrived, and we boarded with a hefty load of food and snacks. Everything was set in the cabin. Onboard were the guest of honor, Mr. Mike Roide, Father Eddie from Loyola Productions, Father Roy from Mumbai, India who is new to the city and was enjoying the harbor greatly, Deacon Bill and his wife Judy, Monica, Arturo, Bobby and his daughter Ximena, Adolfo, and of course, Father Mike who made this all come together. We then parted the dock and began our cruise. Soon thereafter, Father Mike called us into the cabin, and we all took our places. After we all "checked in" (as we would during a group on the yard), Bobby set the topic of gratitude for what our guests have done in passing along the message. He introduced me, and I shared how I struggled to find my way. I remembered the first book JRJI sent me and the difference I felt when I worked on the material. I related to the meditations and felt lighter after answering the questions. I thanked Mike Roide, who published that book, and many others like it. Then came Father Eddie's turn. We thanked him for filming the JRJI videos of Fr. Mike's masses for all of us when we were living some of the darkest times of our lives. The pandemic prevented everyone from visiting our institutions, and the sole purpose of JRJI is to take the message inside. So Father Eddie heard the call and set up the equipment to film the masses we all saw in our cells. I thanked him for his kindness because I needed to hear from JRJI during those sad, difficult days. Adolfo shared his testimony, and then Father Mike presented Mike Roide with a gift, which was his favorite painting. This is a beautiful piece of Mary that has hung in his office for a long time. Next, Father Eddie received artwork that Father Mike's brother drew, another great piece. We took pictures, and each of them humbly shared how much they enjoyed helping us. We then took the deck, set up the food, and began to eat. The sun started to creep behind the sails of passing boats, and dolphins surrounded the boat escorting us on our cruise. The sun set as we talked about the beautiful weather and the clear skies...



Left to Right: Deacon Bill Smith, Mike Roide, Fr. Eddie Siebert, S.J., Fr. Mike Kennedy, S.J., and Bobby Garcia



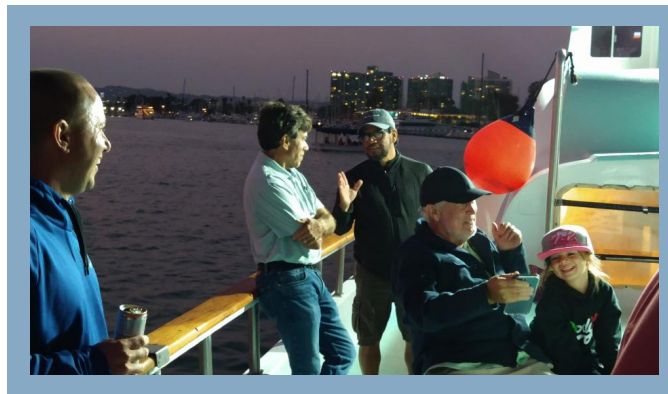
Mike Roide with the JRJI Team



Left to Right: Bobby Garcia, Ignacio Medina, Fr. Mike Kennedy, S.J., and Adolfo Real



Left to Right: Fr. Roy Pereira, Judy Smith, Monica Tenorio, and Deacon Bill Smith



Left to Right: Bobby Garcia, Mike Roide, Arturo Lopez, Fr. Mike Kennedy, S.J., and Ximena

UPCOMING EVENTS

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


- California State Prison-Los Angeles County in Lancaster on Tuesday, September 7th
- California Correctional Institution in Tehachapi, Tuesday, September 14th
- Ironwood State Prison on Monday, September 20th
- Calipatria State Prison on Tuesday, September 28th

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) or by emailing us at info@jrji.org.

FOLLOW US

 Facebook: @jesuitrestore

 Instagram: @jrjinitiative

 Twitter: @jesuitrestore

 LinkedIn: Jesuit Restorative Justice Initiative