



JESUIT RESTORATIVE JUSTICE INITIATIVE

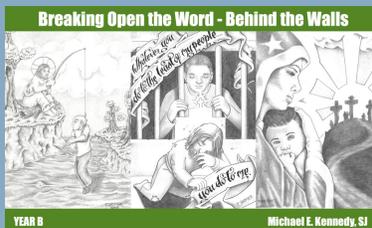
NEWSLETTER | FEBRUARY 2021

There are still no volunteer clearances to enter any state prison, and therefore the prohibition for JRJI to enter the prisons still continues. We maintain our work through contacting our incarcerated brothers and sisters through the mail by sending books, meditations and letters to our participants on a regular basis (see our report below). It is amazing to us how many participants of the JRJI programs have stepped up to become leaders in our absence. The men gather on their own to work through, reflect on, and write down their responses to the books and meditations we send them, as well as to the Footprints program started by our Assistant Executive Director, Bobby Garcia. Here is a brief update on some of our work from Arturo Lopez.

REPORT ON OUR CORRESPONDENCE METHOD OF WORKING WITH THE PRISONS

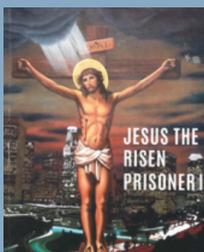
From the beginning of the pandemic, JRJI has maintained our method of correspondence with our brothers and sisters in prison. Every two weeks, we have sent material and information to more than 200 persons in different prisons. Afterward, we have continued to receive on their part their profound personal reflections which have put in motion the internal healing in their lives, while at the same time helping to alleviate the adversity they experience during this time of COVID 19. The prisons that we are accompanying by means of our correspondence are the following: Ironwood, Calipatria, Tehachapi, High Desert, Avenal, Pelican Bay and others where individual persons have asked us for material for them to work with to better their lives.

The material that they are working with at this time are the following:



- ***Breaking Open the Word-Behind the Walls***

This is a book of weekly liturgical reflections that contains a reflection called "Wisdom from the Cells", the three readings from each Sunday, a meditation written by Fr. Mike, and a reflection question that they respond to and share with us. After we receive their reflections, we respond with some spiritual guidance and orientation from our team or from JRJI volunteers.



- ***Jesus Risen Prisoner I***

This is one of three books and contains the Gospel, a meditation written by Fr. Mike and eight reflection questions. They only need to respond to one or two of the questions – whichever seems to speak to where they are in their lives right now and from their personal experiences in the past. Afterward, they once again send us their reflections.

For us, even though it has been difficult not to be able to accompany our brothers and sisters directly where they live, this method of correspondence has been a new experience that we will be able to amplify in the future into other institutions that we cannot visit for different reasons, such as a lack of time or a lack of personnel, etc. We have received an enormous amount of personal correspondence from our participants thanking JRJI for continuing to provide them with hope in their process of healing. They report that they are especially grateful, because of the correspondence, that they do not feel alone or abandoned.

As an example of the kind of work that is going on inside, Eric shares his "Wisdom from the Cells" from doing the Footprints Program:

Footprints

I have done the Footprints course before. So I was familiar with the group, and this time around I was now the facilitator, alongside Ismael. What made this so special was that this time we were doing it during the Pandemic, the COVID crisis. Nobody was doing anything in the dayroom or in their cells. I was busy with PREP, JRJI, two college courses, and yet the dayroom needed something. Putting together our thoughts (Ismael and I), we asked Bobby for his approval and received his blessing to go ahead. The group of men we had was amazing. We had people in different stages in their lives, and it made the group unique and special. To see others open up, and break that shell to share, was something I appreciated of because I was once there! I was glad to see their growth. What was very touching was how the participants were with us, even when we couldn't run the group. Through each module, through each exercise, I saw the growth of others. I saw them dig deep. Even more impressive was how they all gave up one hour of their time from the dayroom to participate. To Bobby, thank you for allowing us to run Footprints, for helping us out, and giving us advice and support. To JRJI thank you for everything! To the housing unit officers in my building, thank you. To Ismael thank you for your friendship and support in running Footprints, and I can't wait for the next one. To Juan, Richard, Richard P, Juan, Kyle, Eric, Eugene, Luis, Peter, thank you guys for participating and committing to the group. That means a lot. God gave us the courage and strength to do this. As I follow my Footprints program to a better life, I look to continue my healing, as I am redeeming both my soul and renewing my mind. Thank you, guys.

-Eric

PUBLICATIONS

Regarding Fr. Mike's writings, there are three volumes that are still in the process of being published:

- **Trust** (2021) A smaller book of meditations + artwork on the topic of trust within the Gospels.
- **Ponderings from 2020** (2021) In this book, Fr. Mike shares some of his journal reflections from 2020 that include JRJI's dealing with the COVID crisis while trying to maintain our work.
- We will also soon publish a book of Prayers written by Fr. Mike, Bobby, Arturo and Dick for use inside.

JRJI MASS

Once again, with help of Fr. Eddie Siebert, SJ of Loyola Productions, on February 16 we have filmed another Mass with the theme "Hope for the Future" to be shown inside each of the prisons in California. This Mass included a personal reflection by Bobby Garcia on Hope with music provided by Arturo Lopez. The Mass also included four reflections from the men inside regarding what has given them Hope during these difficult times. The Mass will appear on the institutional TV Channels in all the prisons up and down the State of California during the first week of March 2021.

BOARD MEETING

Our yearly JRJI Board Meeting will take place on March 15, 2021 over Zoom.

ONLINE RETREAT

As we continue during this time of COVID, where we are all spending a lot of time at home, we would like to remind you that JRJI still sponsors an online retreat for you and your family. The Gospel passages were read by our friend and JRJI Board Member Janne Shirley, and the meditations were read by our friend, the actor Martin Sheen. These meditations are taken from Fr. Mike's published book *The Jesus Meditations*.

There is no set schedule for listening to the six meditations. You can listen to one each day, for example, if you would like to set aside a week for a mini-retreat. Or you could listen to one each week if you would like to spread out the experience. The written texts of the meditations are also on the website if you would like to follow along as you listen. You can find the online retreat on our website: <https://www.jrji.org/online-retreat.html>. We pray as the JRJI team that by spending some time in meditation on these themes, we will be better ministers to bring God's word to the world when we return to our work.