



JESUIT RESTORATIVE JUSTICE INITIATIVE

NEWSLETTER | MAY 2021

The prisons are slowly moving towards opening up, and JRJI has been planning for a return to full-time ministry inside as soon as it is feasible to do so. We hope this may include some preliminary visits to certain prisons during the summer to gauge how things are inside, and then a return to full-time JRJI retreat ministry and Footprints program starting in September 2021. We continue to communicate with JRJI retreat and Footprints participants through our regular monthly mailings which Arturo organizes.

GRADUATE RETREAT

On the weekend of May 14th-16th, JRJI held a retreat for 12 ex-lifers who were JRJI participants while inside and have continued to stay in contact with us since their release. The retreat was held at a house right on Hermosa Beach, and the weekend was a powerful experience of remembering how God continues to work in helping transform lives. Two "Wisdom from the Cells" reflections from David and Edin speak about this retreat later in the newsletter.



JRJI MASS

Our last video-taped "Special Prison Mass" with the theme of "Mothers" for Mother's Day has continued to be shown this month up and down the state in the various prisons. Many of the men have commented to us on how grateful they are that this kind of contact was able to be maintained throughout the pandemic. Once again, we are very grateful to Fr. Eddie Siebert, SJ and Loyola Productions for making this video ministry possible for the men inside during this last year.

PUBLICATIONS

- **Mothers (2021):** This a book of meditations and reflections on the experience of motherhood, and especially that of Mary to her Son, Jesus, and how that relationship connects with the experiences of mothers whose sons are incarcerated, just as Jesus was. It is at the printer's and will soon be available for use inside.
- **Hope (2021):** This book is still in the editing process and should be available for use in June.

FOOTPRINTS PROGRAM UPDATE FROM BOBBY GARCIA

Early this May 2021, a graduate of the JRJI Footprints program, Ignacio Medina, was released from Centinela State Prison, CA. Mr. Medina began our JRJI retreats at the prison located at Tehachapi in 2017. From Tehachapi to Corcoran and lastly in the state prison in Centinela, Ignacio continued to participate in the JRJI programs. He was an integral part of transmitting the Footprints curriculum to all three prisons. Today Mr. Medina is one of our interns, seeing the group he formed before being paroled reach completion. Mr. Medina continues to facilitate the group he began and aspires to access the prison to conduct graduation for the participants there.

As a formerly incarcerated individual myself, it brings me great joy seeing a fellow brother get out of prison and be a part of the larger community. Ignacio has a lot to offer and we are all there to support him in his endeavors. When I was incarcerated "doing my time" and participating in groups, I remember all of those brothers who were in the self-help groups longer than me and were my mentors. These mentors allowed me to be in the place I am today. So, today, Ignacio is another brother who can make a difference in their lives as well. How so? His level of knowledge by sharing the similar life experiences they all have felt at Centinela. This closeness of relationships between Ignacio and the participants provides a shared experience that creates meaningful connections and a more profound sense of understanding and empathy. Secondly, it reduces isolation. Each prison is unique to its specific challenges. Mr. Ignacio is someone who has been there providing inclusiveness by providing a more comfortable platform to open up and connect with others. Lastly, as a fellow peer who has lived experience, he offers valuable insight through the recovery process.

So today, I am happy Ignacio is doing an internship here as he gets on his feet and figures out what direction he chooses to go. Freedom has one thing that we did not have in there - choices! There's so much to choose from, and that in itself can be overwhelming. So pray for him as well as he re-enters society.



Ignacio (between Fr. Mike and Bobby) three days after his release and after speaking at the 11:00 am Mass at St. Albert the Great Parish offered by Fr. Mike Kennedy, SJ (left)

CORRESPONDENCE UPDATE BY ARTURO LOPEZ

We want to let you know that we are still waiting for CDCR to give us the green light to continue our ministry in the different institutions we visit. While we are in this waiting period, here at JRJI we continue on with the correspondence process, sending material to more than 200 people so that they can continue working on their healing. It is a very special feeling to receive the reflections that the participants send back to us and which become "Wisdom from the Cells." This wisdom is shared in different ways with communities so that it can be an instrument of conversion for many in our society. We share wisdom that we have received from Edin Madrid during the month of May. We hope you can also share this within your own ministries:

I have been home for 3 months now and every day I'm reminded of all those days I spent behind those walls. Many of those reminders come in the simplicity of opening my bedroom door and walking outside without having to yell for the tower to open my door. Life out here is very fast-paced, and like everybody else, I get caught in the shuffle of life really quick.. Working, paying bills, spending time with family, job interviews, iPhones, saving to buy my first car, dealing with people that don't care that I spent over a decade in prison, and most importantly, trying to find my identity as a free man. All of these things can be distracting and for many, it can become too much. I was very fortunate to be invited to a retreat at Hermosa Beach with many of our brothers who at one point in their incarceration sat in those same meditation circles that you guys often find yourselves in every time the JRJI team hits your yard. The scenery of the beach was beautiful, and I can attest that the sand out here is amazing. The last time I had stepped on "sand" would have had to be in the volleyball courts in the yards. Stepping on real sand for the very first time after 13 years was an unforgettable experience, and I'm sure that every one of you that has that strong desire to get out of prison will get to experience it one day. This retreat was full of happiness, FREEDOM, unity, brotherhood, about 100+ years of incarceration, and without a doubt filled with the presence of GOD. We shared many amazing stories and built a strong support team that day. The peace and clarity that I received that day is the same peace I would get when I would wake up early in my cell to pray and read my bible before my celly was up. It was THAT peace that I received early in my cell that fueled my change and desire to get out of prison, and I was reminded of that peace that weekend on our retreat. Leaving the retreat with this peace has helped me to continue striving out here and continue living with peace and being grateful that I'm out here. No matter what GOD brings my way, things will be ok.

WISDOM FROM THE CELLS

As another example of the ongoing inner work of our brothers inside, we once again share some "Wisdom from the Cells" this month from David Morales. David participated in the recent JRJI retreat from May 14th-16th, and in this letter to those still inside, he shares his thoughts on that retreat and his appreciation for JRJI:

Dear Brothers and Sisters, my name is David Morales. I am formerly incarcerated, having served 26 years on a double life sentence. I am new to freedom, only home for thirteen months now. While incarcerated, I had the opportunity to participate in JRJI, which was very special for me because of the genuine love and compassion that the JRJI team brought to us from their hearts. I believe they specialize in the art of the restoration of humanity for the lost, hurt, lonely, and broken souls of those that they visit. JRJI was a Godsend for me during my incarceration journey, an oasis of love, brotherhood, and compassion.

During this past weekend, I had the opportunity to attend a JRJI retreat here in the free world. As always, the love and compassion abounded, but what was different was being able to enjoy this time with the brothers doing real world activities. We ate delicious homemade foods, lovingly prepared for us by Bobby's lovely wife and mother-in-law. We went on bike rides along the beach, hung out on the beach, and even at one point stopped our retreat to take pictures of the beautiful sunset.

This was the first time I had seen my brothers since my release, and it was very emotional for me. God is good and was it not for Him, and the mighty love he has provided for me through these amazing individuals, I would not have made it home to see my dad before his passing, or to be there to continue to learn and grow within the love and nourishment of my brothers and sisters.

Now that I am home, the learning and growing only continue, and I learned at this retreat a deeper understanding of love for my brothers and for myself. I love my brothers. I am far from perfect and yet they love and embrace me. What I have reflected on during and before our beach retreat is to focus on the humanity of others: to appreciate one another, to give my love unconditionally, and to appreciate my brothers always. I am so grateful for JRJI: for Bobby, Arturo, Father Mike, Bill, and the entire organization, who are reapers and sowers of genuine human love and compassion.

Brothers and Sisters, I was the worst of the worst. There was a time in my life, while incarcerated, that I hated myself, everyone, and everything. The vision for my life was to die in a hail of violence on a prison yard. I promise you if you take the time to do the hard work of healing and forgiving yourself and others, you too will be at a beach retreat with us continuing to learn and grow. Last weekend I sat on Hermosa Beach with the JRJI brothers, and today as I write this letter of love to you, I sit on Newport Beach with my lovely fiancé.

Do the work, heal, offer healing to others, love, and give back. I promise you that you can be free. Life is not easy out here, but all of the struggle and pain, if handled appropriately, will prepare you with the strength you need for life out here in the real world. Please, never normalize that place you sit in today. It is not normal, and it is a place that can easily have us thinking we are less than human, and that we deserve less than others. Love, opportunity, and humanity are for us all EQUALLY. Never doubt this.

You are all in my prayers. I love you. We are waiting for you.

Sincerely,

David Morales

UPCOMING RETREAT

JRJI is planning a retreat for parents of JRJI participants who are still inside. This one-day retreat will be held at St. Albert the Great Parish on Sunday, June 6th. The agenda for this short retreat will be the following:

- 11:00 am: Mass at St. Albert the Great Church
- 12:30 pm: Lunch
- 1:30 pm: Testimony from a JRJI participant
- 1:45 pm: Meditation and Prayer
- 2:05 pm: Questions, Answers, and Sharing
- 3:00 pm: Announcements
- 3:15 pm: Closing Prayer




JRJI Parent Retreat in 2019


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.

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