



# JESUIT RESTORATIVE JUSTICE INITIATIVE

SPRING 2022 | NEWSLETTER

## RETREATS

After having opened up toward the end of 2021, the prisons in California closed down again for a few months at the beginning of 2022, and JRJI was prevented from visiting our brothers inside once again. All of our visits that had been planned for January and February of 2022 had to be canceled.



*This photo was taken by Bobby Garcia before a retreat at the California Correctional Institution in Tehachapi, CA*



*This photo was taken by Bobby Garcia before a retreat at Centinela State Prison in Imperial, CA*

Just recently, the prisons have opened up again and during these past few weeks, JRJI has been able to visit the following prisons:

- March 14th - California Correctional Institution in Tehachapi, CA
- March 22nd - Centinela State Prison in Imperial, CA
- March 28th - Calipatria State Prison in Calipatria, CA
- April 4th - California State Prison-Los Angeles County in Lancaster, CA
- April 12th - California Correctional Institution in Tehachapi, CA
- April 25th - Calipatria State Prison in Calipatria, CA

## UPCOMING RETREATS

MAY

**May 2nd**

California State Prison (LAC)  
Lancaster, CA

**May 10th**

California Correctional Institution  
Tehachapi, CA

## PARENT RETREATS

On Sunday, February 20th, Fr. Mike Kennedy, SJ celebrated a mass and led a retreat focusing on the theme of healing for the parents of those incarcerated at St. Albert the Great Catholic Parish in Rancho Dominguez, CA. A JRJI graduate shared his testimony with the group during the retreat. The retreat ended with a small celebration for Fr. Mike's birthday. On Sunday, April 10th, JRJI hosted another Parent Retreat similar to the one in February, which focused on the theme of healing at St. Albert the Great Church.

### *Photos of February's Parent Retreat*



### *Photos of April's Parent Retreat*



## LIFERS RETREAT

JRJI had a very special retreat that focused on healing for those who were formerly incarcerated. All of the men pictured are now leaders from Homeboys, ARC, Healing Dialogue and Action. It was a time to refuel the spirituality and head back out and do what they do best - serving our community. A special thanks to Fr. Mike and Fr. Frank Buckley for their great contributions.



## A STORY: TRANSITION OUT OF PRISON

By: Bobby Garcia

*Hector was paroled out of prison after serving 22 years. When he was imprisoned, he met Veronica from a hookup he received from one of his cellmates. After seven years of Veronica waiting for him to be paroled, he was finally paroled last year.*

**Veronica:** Hector, I am so glad you are out after all these years. Now we can live our lives and move on from the prison stuff.

*(Veronica gives Hector a hug)*

**Hector:** I love you, Vero. Right now, I am going through some difficult times. I can't get health insurance, I need to get my driver's license, I work at a retail store that doesn't pay much. As for getting housing, it will be hard for me to get our apartment since there are those credit and criminal history checks they do to approve someone.

**Veronica:** Hector, you need to get something quick, because I am on Section 8, and you can't be living here. My kids and I will be on the street if they find out. Talk to your friend Marcos who got out last year, and see how he is doing it.

*(Hector goes to see Marcos)*

**Hector:** Hey, Marcos, good to see you, Bro. I need to talk to you.

**Marcos:** What's up, bro? How can I help?

**Hector:** Marcos, man, I have to be honest with you, Bro. The painful experiences of incarceration are hard to forget, and it has had mental health effects on me. Being locked up for so long, being in the hole for years at a time, and living in that gang stuff, full of stress and anxiety. It took a toll on me. Adjusting to life after prison has been challenging, and I feel like I need the ongoing support we had.

*(Three years later)*

**Veronica:** Hector, after three years, I see that we haven't moved on from living paycheck to paycheck. You work long hours; you hardly spend time with the kids and me. Yet, you always want to be out and about. Sometimes you say you feel like I am acting as your new warden. You are here physically, but your mind is somewhere else. I stood by you while you were in there. I paid for your packages, I visited you when I could, and now you are hardly here. I didn't plan on life being like this. But, it would help if you did better.

*(Continued on p. 4)*

**Hector:** Vero, I don't know why you keep getting on me about why I am never home. I do my part, but after three years, I am still continuing to get on my feet and develop myself out here. You always cast blame, you tend to think I just used you, and you don't even want to work on the relationship. I gotta go out and decompress for a while.

*(Hector walks away and calls Marcos on the cellphone)*

**Marcos:** Hey Bro, I am glad you came out to my pad and saw me. I have learned from the self-help groups in prison that it is good to meet up with your friends when going through some stuff. To be honest with you, my last wife and I broke up a couple of months ago because we couldn't communicate. It was always one-sided, and we both wanted to win the conversation. Argument after argument, it just became toxic. I couldn't grow because it was a mess. She got kicked out of the house, and I was homeless for a bit. Yes, I stayed with friends from time to time, but I struggled, Bro. I didn't have a sound support system and I started drinking and smoking weed.

**Hector:** Sorry to hear about that, Marcos. It has been hard on me as well. I am lucky my relationship has survived this far. The dynamics of our relationship changed from what we had while I was in prison. Although I didn't know I would have problems with Vero out here, I also had problems fulfilling the expectations of others and my own expectations as well.

**Marcos:** Bro, you need to have a conversation with your girl. You said you loved her, and you married her. Marriage is a strong bond that God gifts to us. However, in order to manage your life, you have to get your house in order.

*(Hector arrives home)*

**Vero:** Hector, where have you been? You know you had to clean and do stuff around the house today. You know I am not your maid. You told me you would always do your part and some. What happened to all that?

**Hector:** Vero, it has been a long time since you played a lead role in handling much of life's challenges. Now that I am out and doing things contrary to what you want, it bothers you to some degree. I know it must have been a difficult adjustment for you since you were the person who would take care of me when I was behind those prison walls. However, now that I have been out for a few years, we need to find ways to build healthy boundaries and trust together.

**Veronica:** Hector, you know I have had some toxic relationships in the past, and you know very well how my life was while growing up. It isn't easy for me to just trust you. I see how you look at women when I am out with you. You look at them differently from the way you look at me. You don't even comment on how I look any more compared to how you did when I saw you in prison. We don't even communicate as much as we did on our GTL 15-minute calls or the hours spent in prison visiting.

*(Veronica starts crying)*

*(Continued on p. 5)*

**Hector:** You're right, Vero, I have been reflecting on my actions. I admit I haven't been the best husband or friend to you. Life has been an adjustment for me out here. The prison was a life of survival. Surviving prison was difficult. I was affected by the violence, lockdowns, predatory behaviors, isolation from family, and lack of intimate relationships. Having peer support in my self-help groups allowed me to re-open some of my childhood scars. I had a chance to look at what my life became during the last few years in prison. I thought I was healed after some time. I now realize that I am still in the process of healing. I know I may still be broken inside. I focused on building my life out here, but I missed one critical thing: I was not taking care of my household. I did not have my own house in order.

**Veronica:** So what do we do now? You say all these things, but I believe you should know better. For me, you always say the same things.

**Hector:** Vero, that's a point I am trying to make to you. Although you may not understand what I am telling you, I would like you to see that I am trying. Unfortunately, you are not making it easy, and sometimes I feel we should just cut our losses.

*(A year later)*

**Marcos:** So how's everything in your relationship, Hector? Did you end up going to couples counseling like you said you would do?

**Hector:** I did, Bro. Vero and I went to church and heard about how husbands and wives are divorcing at high rates because they don't get along anymore, or they find someone else who they feel is better than the one they have. Sort of like trading a car every year because there is a new and better model.

**Marcos:** So what happened?

**Hector:** We went to a couple's retreat. It was a retreat that was held every Friday for three months. Couples from all walks of life shared their testimonies with everyone, and we all worked together to get our house in order. It was really a new chapter in my life. I saw that in prison, the brothers all worked together to heal from childhood traumas, the life in prison itself, conflicts we endured from day to day, sobriety issues, and isolation from life out here. Out here in the community, the brothers continue to support each other to find housing, jobs, resources and other matters. However, one thing I neglected was my family and my home.

**Marcos:** So what are you saying? Isn't the goal of getting out to become successful? Make a difference in people's lives? To bring the brothers home to enjoy what we have?

*(Continued on p. 6)*

**Hector:** That is what confused me while I was in prison. I set my goals in prison to help others, but I forgot about the blessings God gave me in the first place. God gave me a wife and family, and I forgot about making that a priority in my life. How could I help others but couldn't even save my own household? How could I say I achieved a lot in life, but couldn't show much to my family? Working on my marriage and my commitments with my family is what saved me. I had to become willing to work on myself to become a better husband. Although I am not perfect, I continue to do what God wants me to do.

**Marcos:** Damn, Bro! You are right. I jacked up a lot of shit, thinking I had the answers. Although I am doing okay in my heart, I still lack the love I seek, and to be a part of something greater. I thought helping others would fill the void in my heart, but you are right. I still need healing in my life, and I thank God we continue to have our peer support networks to help us in our journey.

**Hector:** I don't have all the answers. But what is essential is putting God first. By putting God first, I am learning the value of life and love. I am learning that I will be alone if I try to do it alone.

(Hector hugs Marcos)


**Hector:** Thank you for always being there, Bro. If it weren't for you, I am sure I wouldn't have worked on my relationship.


**End**

## 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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