



JESUIT RESTORATIVE JUSTICE INITIATIVE

NEWSLETTER | MARCH 2021

Even though there are areas of the State that are slowly opening up, there are still no volunteer clearances to enter any state prison and this continues to affect our work. We maintain our work by contacting our incarcerated brothers and sisters through the mail by sending books, meditations and letters to our participants on a regular basis.

CORRESPONDENCE REPORT

Since we are still waiting for the green light to return to prisons, we continue to connect with those who are part of our ministry through correspondence with the different institutions. In the previous newsletter, we informed you about which institutions we send correspondence. Most of those who receive the material are very focused on continuing with their healing and their process of forgiveness. They send us back very profound reflections regarding their spirituality, and it is clear that their relationship with God grows every day. Others, due to their college studies, have less time to write their reflections, but from time to time they send us letters of thanks for our constant connection and for encouraging them. We also wish to thank the JRJI volunteers who help us respond with letters that help to provide spiritual guidance for the men in their healing process. This is a huge support, both for them and for JRJI.

Here we share one of the hundreds of insights we have received during this time of pandemic:

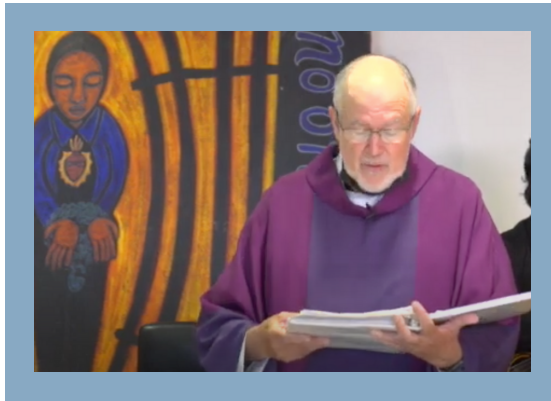
"I remember making many promises in my life. I remember the outcome was always that I broke my promise. I began to feel ashamed and guilty for not just breaking a promise, but for also hurting someone I loved and cared for. I told myself once, 'The only promises I'll make are for myself, so that I will be the only one hurt.' That changed when my mom passed away, and I got a different outlook on life. It took seven months to be ready to change fully, having taken baby steps towards it at first. I promised my mom I would change for good, that I would come home sooner, and I promised my dad as well. That was in 2018. Today we are in 2021. My actions have been my spokesperson. They speak volumes of what I want each day. I know that God, and my mom's blessings, are with me."

BOARD MEETING

On Monday, March 15th, we held our annual JRJI Board of Directors Meeting via Zoom. Fr. Mike, Bobby and Arturo gave the Board a brief summary of the JRJI work over the last year, which primarily focused on how we have been managing to keep contact with the men during the COVID pandemic. We also welcomed two new members to the Board: Fr. Travis Russell, SJ from Georgetown University in Washington, DC, and Fr. Humberto Bernabe, who is the pastor of St. Albert the Great Parish in Rancho Dominguez, CA. The meeting was highlighted by a very moving video message from Mr. David Morales, who was formerly incarcerated, and who spoke to the Board about how instrumental JRJI has been in his own rehabilitation and healing process.

JRJI MASS

We continue to film our Masses since we still cannot go inside. Our most recent Mass was filmed on March 16th and will be shown inside the prisons on the CDCR TV channels during the first week of April. Since April 4th is Easter Sunday, the theme of the Mass was "Bringing Life Out of Death". The Mass was filmed in both English and Spanish. Bobby and Arturo shared their personal reflections of how this theme has played out in their own lives. Our next video Mass will be filmed on April 20th and the theme will be related to Mother's Day since the Mass will be shown during the first week of May. Once again, we thank Fr. Eddie Sibert, SJ of Loyola Productions for his expertise in helping us record and edit the Mass for viewing on the CDCR TV channels. His help has been tremendous. You can find the Masses from the previous months on our website.



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 Anthony:

When we are unforgiving of ourselves, we experience the same harmful emotional and physical effects as when we are unforgiving of others. Holding on to self-blame keeps us stuck in a prison of the past, and limits the potential that lies within the present moment. We can so easily make ourselves victims of our own thoughts and feelings of guilt and shame for what we have done. Make no mistake, we must be accountable for our actions. But when we stay stuck in the unhappy story of what we have done – when we make our identity out of our past actions – we deny ourselves the gift of transformation that Christ desires for us. We can learn from the mistakes of our past. Learning from the past is not the same as being held hostage by what we have done. At some stage we must let go of the past and begin again. We have said repeatedly that no one is undeserving of forgiveness, and this includes you and me. God is good.

-Anthony

PUBLICATIONS

We have recently published two more books of Meditations for use within the prisons and for friends of JRJI:

- o **Trust (2021)**: A smaller book of meditations + artwork on the theme of trust within the Gospels.
- o **Prayers During Time of COVID-19 (2021)**: reflective writings and prayers written by Fr. Mike, Bobby, Arturo and Dick for use inside.
- o The next book to be published will be a book of meditations around the theme of Motherhood and Mary.

FOOTPRINTS PROGRAM

On April 12th, the next semester of JRJI's Footprints Program for Facilities A and B of the Distance Learning Program at Lancaster State Prison will take place. The syllabus of the course is available on our website to give you an idea of what the program entails.

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.

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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