



CLARET VIDA AWARDS

**CLARETIAN INVOLVEMENT IN PRISON
MINISTRY**



Shanti Bhavan, Pathadippalam, Ernakulam

Reformation and Reintegration of Prisoners & Rehabilitation of Ex-prisoners

Prison Ministry India was born in 1981 from the spiritual conversions of a couple of seminarians of St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathur, Kottayam, Kerala. They undertook an All Kerala Prison pilgrimage and formed 'Jesus Fraternity' to serve prisoners in an organised way. In 1988 Kerala Catholic Bishops' Conference (KCBC) recognized Jesus Fraternity under its Commission for Peace, Justice and Development. In 2000, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) officially recognized Prison Ministry India (PMI). Today more than 10000 volunteers regularly visit about 1300 prisons in India and extend the inmates of the prison opportunities for release, reformation and reintegration. PMI has more than 20 rehabilitation centers for the released prisoners and homes for the prisoners' children. It is a spiritual movement for the integral development of prisoners.

The ministry among prisoners and ex-prisoners is one of the social activities of the St. Thomas Province of the Claretians in India. In 1992 the Kerala Catholic Bishops Conference (KCBC) requested the Congregation to make available Fr. Alexander Kureekattil CMF for the prison ministry under its Commission for Justice, Peace and Development and appointed him as the Assistant Director and later as the State Director of Jesus Fraternity. Later, the Congregation got involved in a larger way into this ministry and Fr. Cyriac Kollamparampil CMF joined Prison Ministry as the spiritual director of Snehashram Rehabilitation Centre for ex-prisoners at Vettukad, Thrissur, where the first stage of ex-prisoners' renewal program is conducted. In 1994 the executive meeting of Jesus Fraternity entrusted the Claretians the second stage of rehabilitation and renewal program for ex-prisoners.

Thus on 7th September 1994 in a rented house named Shanti Bhavan on Mother Teresa Road, Edapally in Kochiwe began the second stage of rehabilitation of those people who have completed their jail term but are not wanted by anyone and have no place to go about. Later in 1998 when we purchased a house for this ministry at Pathadipalam, in the Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly the activities of Shanti Bhavan rehabilitation and other involvements in prison ministry were continued from here.

The activities of Shanti Bhavan rehabilitation centre are designed for the integral development of the persons who complete their jail term. It includes spiritual exercises like prayers, meditation, retreats, recollections, yoga, bhajan services, experience sharing etc. At the psychological realm the inmates are provided with counseling - both personal and group, group dynamics, programs on personality



development, stress management, training in positive approach to life, motivations, resource management and therapy according to the individual needs of the inmates. At the physical level the inmates receive regular physical exercise, learning of new skills, manual work, cooking exercises, etc.

During the renewal process, our missionaries visit the homes of ex-prisoners and prepare the ground for re-establishing the lost family ties. At least twice a month the families are visited. Once the inmates show the desired maturity to be sent for work outside, they are helped to find out some jobs, which enable them to gain financial security for their future. It is really a difficult task to find people who are ready to offer job for these people with criminal backgrounds. Often, they are forced to find jobs in such avenues as helpers in workshops, cleaning staff, daily laborers, security personnel, salesman, etc.

When the inmates are able to settle in their life and show the kind of maturity to lead a family life Shanti Bhavan helps them to find life partners for them and arrange marriages. More than 50 such marriages have taken place through our efforts. Through the help of some funding agencies and the generous hearts of the people around, Shanti Bhavan was able to provide housing for around 60 families.

The relationship between the centre and person rehabilitated is continued by follow-up programmes, family visits and occasional gatherings and get-togethers for the family, their children, study aids and scholarships for the students of prisoners and ex-prisoners etc. This seems to be encouraging factor for them in the struggle to lead a normal life.

Appreciating the active involvement, committed service of the Claretian Missionaries in Prison ministry, the Kerala Catholic Bishops Conference (KCBC) entrusted the first phase of the rehabilitation of ex-prisoners also to the St. Thomas Province in March 2023. Thus Snehashram, Vettukad in Thrissur and its activities are taken care of by the Province.

Besides the rehabilitation and renewal programs, our ministry includes regular visit to the prisons, liturgical and sacramental services to the inmates of the prisons, counseling, guidance, life-orientation programs for the persons in jails etc.

There are a good number of volunteers, well-wishers, benefactors, associations, clubs, NGOs, agencies etc. joining hands with us for the promotion life for these less privileged ones in the society. Though Prison Ministry as such is organised by Jesus Fraternity under the patronage of KCBC, the Claretian Missionaries are in the forefront of its activities.



Activities of Shanti Bhavan

- Visit to the prisons and families of the convicts
- Rehabilitation of ex-prisoners
- Counseling, career guidance,
- Settling the inmates in life through marriage, reuniting them with families and relatives
- Providing housing
- Education of the children
- Follow-up programs like retreats, gatherings, renewal programs etc

Rehabilitation through Shanti Bhavan

- More than 400 persons rehabilitated over 25 years
- 60 plus marriages arranged for ex-prisoners
- More than 50 houses provided for the rehabilitation of ex-prisoners
- Over 500 children given scholarships and education aids