

TRANSLATION

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PRISON MINISTRY SUNDAY

9 August 2026

Hear the Cry, Heal the Wound, Revive Hope

Dearly beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

Grace to you and peace in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. On the second Sunday of August, observed as Prison Ministry Sunday, the Church invites us to turn our hearts towards our brothers and sisters behind bars. Contrary to general perception, not all those incarcerated are hardened criminals. Among them are individuals who stumbled into error in a moment of weakness. There are those who have ended up in prison cells due to financial collapse. Furthermore, there are completely innocent, entirely helpless individuals thrown into prison as a result of orchestrated false accusations. Inspired by the words of the Psalmist, *"To hear the groaning of the prisoners, to loose those appointed to death"* (Psalm 102:20), let us reflect upon this year's theme: **Hear the cry, heal the wound, revive hope**. This theme is not merely a slogan; rather, it is a Gospel mandate. It echoes the mission of Jesus, who came to proclaim *"liberation to the captives"* (Luke 4:18) and healing to the broken-hearted.

Hear the Cry

Behind prison walls, locked gates, and iron bars are human beings whose cries often go unheard. Many prisoners live with guilt regarding their past actions and painful memories of broken relationships. Some have been abandoned by their own families and friends. Others battle depression, anxiety, trauma, addiction, or mental illness. The pain of isolation and the feeling of being forgotten by society haunt many. Therefore, the prisoner's cry is far more powerful than a mere plea for release. When Jesus says, *"I was in prison and you came to visit me"* (Matthew 25:36), He identifies Himself with prisoners. When we hear the cry of prisoners, we hear the cry of Christ Himself. Our God is a God who listens. He pays heed to the cries of the forgotten, the rejected, and the imprisoned. As the Body of Christ, the Church must do the same.

Ministry of Listening

Liberation often begins through listening. Pope Francis has repeatedly reminded us that prisoners should never be reduced solely to their crimes, but must always be acknowledged

as individuals loved by God and capable of renewal. Therefore, listening with compassion is a sacred ministry. Through attentive listening, we help prisoners rediscover their dignity, humanity, and hope.

Heal the Wound

Every prisoner carries wounds. The Church's presence in prisons is fundamentally a ministry of healing. Consecrated sisters, priests, volunteers, counsellors, and prison ministers continue Christ's healing ministry for those behind bars. Often, healing begins through simple gestures: a willingness to listen, prayer, a visit, a letter, an encouraging word, or an act of kindness. Through these, God continues His healing ministry.

Empathy: The Core of Prison Ministry

Empathy is the capacity to enter into another person's suffering. Jesus manifested profound empathy throughout His ministry. He touched lepers and forgave sinners. Even amidst His suffering on the Cross, He spoke words of mercy to the repentant thief—this should serve as an inspiration to every prison minister. Empathy enables us to listen without prejudice, to understand wounds, and to promote reconciliation and the restoration of relationships. Through empathy, volunteers become living signs of Christ's compassionate love.

Revive Hope

Perhaps the greatest tragedy occurring within prison walls is the loss of hope. Without hope, rehabilitation becomes difficult. When hope is lost, people cease to believe that repentance is possible. However, the Gospel is fundamentally a message of hope. Throughout His ministry, Jesus restored hope to those rejected by society. Reviving hope means assisting prisoners to reintegrate into society and supporting their families. Children of prisoners must not be made to suffer for faults that are not their own.

Abolition of Capital Punishment

The Catholic Church upholds the sacred dignity of every human life. Consequently, the Church opposes the death penalty. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: capital punishment is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person; the Church works with determination for its abolition worldwide (CCC 2267). This teaching does not deny the gravity of the crime or the necessity of justice. Instead, it asserts that no individual ever forfeits their God-given dignity. Saint Paul was transformed from a persecutor into an Apostle. The prodigal son was welcomed back home. The good thief entered Paradise. God never abandons the sinner. The possibility of repentance must not be denied to anyone.

Accompanying Those Sentenced to Death

According to statistics provided by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, there are approximately 11.5 million prisoners worldwide. More than 23 million children are suffering

because their parents are in prison. According to Amnesty International reports, by the end of 2025, 113 countries had completely abolished the death penalty. Meanwhile, at least 25,508 people worldwide are awaiting execution. As Christians, we are called to accompany these brothers and sisters through prayer, spiritual care, sacramental ministry, and legal aid.

A Call to Our Diocese

I affectionately invite all parishes, religious communities, institutions, and pious associations in our diocese to actively participate in the mission of prison ministry. Let us pray for prisoners and their families. Let us support all volunteers engaged in prison ministry. Let us promote rehabilitation and restorative justice programmes. Let us welcome prisoners who seek a fresh start. Let us foster a culture of mercy. Let us become a Church that listens to the forgotten, heals the wounded, and imparts hope to the despondent.

Gratitude and Blessings

Dear brothers and sisters, behind every prison number is a human face. Behind every judicial sentence is a story. Behind every prison wall is a heart longing to be heard, healed, and renewed. On this Prison Ministry Sunday, may the compassionate heart of Christ be renewed within us. Let us hear the cry of the prisoner. Let us help heal the wounds of broken lives. May Saint Maximilian Kolbe and Venerable Van Thuan, the patron saints of prison ministry, intercede for all serving in this ministry. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy, accompany all prisoners, their families, prison staff, and volunteers.

Together with my brother Bishops, I express heartfelt gratitude to all dioceses, consecrated communities, well-wishers, and faithful who support the Prison Ministry through prayer, service, and generosity. I specifically commend the dedicated volunteers of the Jesus Fraternity.

With prayerful blessings, in Christ who sets the captives free,

Bishop Sebastian Thekethecheril

(Chairman, KCBC Commission for Justice, Peace and Development)

Bishop Mar Jose Pulickal

(Vice-Chairman, KCBC Commission for Justice, Peace and Development)

Bishop Thomas Mar Eusebius

(Vice-Chairman, KCBC Commission for Justice, Peace and Development)

N.B.: *This circular shall be read on 9 August 2026 in all churches and in all institutions where Holy Mass is celebrated under the Syro-Malabar, Latin, and Malankara Catholic Churches in Kerala.*