

February 2003



**CROSSROADS
PRISON MINISTRIES**

STAIRWAYS

TESTIMONIES OF ANOTHER KIND

Crossroads is inside a prison every Saturday; teaching, preaching and introducing Jesus to inmates. Even before their release we exhort them to lead law abiding lives, to come to us for employment. It is with joy that we reproduce two stories of reformed lives touched by the love and saving grace of our Lord Jesus and one that shows how human effort can be deceptive.



Ashok Pandey

Down but Not Out

This is a story of resilience. About a man caught for taking something in lieu of a long overdue payment and getting punished for taking their things by force.

Ashok Pandey was a regular at the English classes and the once a month Saturday programmes in Byculla District Prison. He took our challenge to lead a clean life after release seriously. But it took a lot of soul searching before he actually came to our office. Immediately after being let out he telephoned a friend for some money and a place to stay. The friend promised to meet him the next day but never turned up. Ashok wandered around the whole day. He befriended another lad who was also out in the street because he had some misunderstanding with his family. Hungry and penniless the two walked and walked and walked. At the end of two days they decided to rob someone. They were sitting in a park contemplating whose chain to snatch or whom to waylay. Since they were too tired, they said they'll wait until morning before doing anything rash. Next day was Sunday, a thought

occurred to Ashok and on impulse he called Aroon Gorey at home. He asked him if Crossroads would help. Aroon assured him that he will do his best but said that he'd have to come to the office on Monday. Monday he and his new found friend, Nihal walked into CPM office and told his story.

Three days of roaming had left its mark, Ashok's feet were sore, swollen and infected. An ointment was bought, both of them were given food, a chance to wash up and an offer to work in the courier service. They were also given permission to sleep outside the office with the facility to use the toilet in the mornings. Niteen got a change of clothes for them. Every day till they received their salaries they were given money for food and travel.

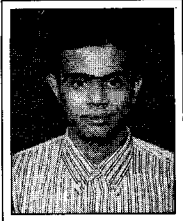
Ashok hungered for spiritual food. He had already begun reading the New Testament and at our insistence he and Nihal started attending church – Bread of Life, Andheri. Pastor Tommy Lopez was told to take special care of our wards. Ashok goes regularly to this fellowship as also our Wednesday prayer meets. All this in spite of periods of trials and testing.

One night as they slept outside the office, the police on their night rounds roughed them up. The security guards of the society intervened on their behalf and were let off with a warning not to be seen there again.

Joy Singers from the German Crossroads Prison Ministries will be our guests from 17 to 23 Feb. 03 in Pune. We welcome them and wish them a happy sojourn.

They slept on news papers, braving the heat and mosquitoes, but never complained.

Nihal always wanted to work as a driver and left as soon as he got a breakthrough. He did visit us a few times. Ashok says he would like to get back to the business of hiring-out movie equipment but that is a long way off as it involves high investment. He says he will always help Crossroads even if he leaves ...Till then he cheerfully goes about his courier duties. He continues to attend Bread of Life and helps us write letters to prison inmates in Hindi.



Vasant Pujari **Back to Square One**

Released from Byculla District Prison, Vasant was sent to us by the Greater Grace Fellowship. Of course he was also being ministered to by us, for he used to attend our English classes every alternate day there. He too had no place to stay and in need of a job. Niteen (read about him elsewhere in this issue) took him to his hostel in Girgaon for the night, for the next three nights we accommodated him in our office. Before his arrest he worked as an hospital orderly, so while he waited for a suitable opening we employed him as office boy. God certainly was with Vasant, for out of the blue Lawrence Sarithi (from Taylor Methodist Church), a young marketing officer from HSBC volunteered to put him up in his house at Borivili.

Spiritual growth of wards is our topmost priority and since Vasant was recommended by Greater Grace we insisted he attend that fellowship every Sunday. But after a few services he began to attend Bread of Life, Andheri where Pastor Tommy Lopez made him feel comfortable and wanted.

Vasant took this new lease in life very seriously, he would come early to office clean up the whole place before any of us got there. Prior to this he had to prepare breakfast for Lawrence and his brother, cook and pack lunch for himself and clean house. He took all of this in his stride, always smiling. We had an unwritten code in the office; whoever came first would pray. Since Vasant was invariably first to arrive he would diligently pray. We also have a practice of fasting and praying especially for the needs of CPM

every Wednesday and Vasant was a regular interceder in Kannada.

Somewhere down the line he started to become complacent. He began to neglect the prayer life and since there was not much work at the office, we often found him taking naps. At that time we were planning to start a courier service to offset our funding deficit. Vasant seemed quite excited at the prospect of earning an extra buck through this venture. But when the service actually started and he found the work physically strenuous he started to make excuses that he was illiterate. On more than one occasion he forged signatures and kept the documents home, later claiming that he had posted them. It is at this stage that we came to learn that lured by greed he was even duping Lawrence, while shopping rations. He would buy less at a lower price and claim for more at a higher price. All these confessions came to light only when he was threatened with dire consequences.

Vasant's story just proves that when a Christian backslides he does so depending on his worldly wisdom and intelligence. At this point of time Vasant has been given time to correct himself and seek God's forgiveness. Please pray that this child of Jesus comes back to the Lord.

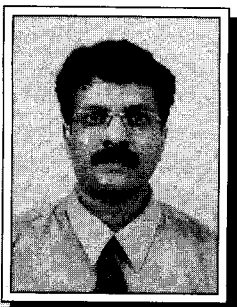
Amit Kumar

Legal Eagle

On a typical working day in July this year, Amit Kumar stood hesitatingly in the doorway of our office. "I have just been released from Thane Jail... And I need your help", he said. We made him sit down, ordered for tea. "You have attended our Saturday programmes"? I asked. "No" he replied "But since I was educated and computer literate the jail authorities kept me in charge of the 'Censor Room' (in prisons all correspondence to or from inmates are read and censored), there I came across a lot of letters written to Crossroads by inmates and your replies to them. I decided that when I get out I will seek your help".

Amit had no place to stay, but said he could manage a few days with a friend. He needed a job desperately. He expressed his desire to work with a lawyer. He said that while he worked in the Censor Room he came across a lot of applications for bail and leave from inmates which were not properly drafted by the advocates. Over a period of time he learned how to frame applications as required by law and helped his fellow prisoners get leave or bail. He had plenty of

time to study the nitty-gritties of legalities. The idea of wanting to help these unfortunate souls took birth then. Amit, born in a Christian family, made an early decision for Christ. After graduation he enrolled for seminary studies in Punjab. Finding the course material not up to his expectations he sought the advice of his professor, who suggested he work in the mission field. He took the challenging task of looking after a mission school in a tribal belt. Helped by a friend Amit soon got government aid in the form of grains, books and building material, but no money. He wrote to friends to help collect funds. One friend wrote back to say that if he came to Mumbai he would introduce him to an acquaintance who could help him. Thus lured, Amit went to Thane near Mumbai and was introduced



Introducing Niteen David Soanes

When God calls someone to serve Him, He astounds us! He picks the most seemingly unlikely of persons from diverse backgrounds. Niteen joined Crossroads in April '02, and therein lies a long tale of mystery...

Niteen was running a restaurant in Nashik quite content with his happy-go-lucky life-style and nominal Christian status. Somewhere down the line he started to feel uneasy with going to church every other Sunday and aimless living. One day while watching Miracle Net, he heard the announcer asking for volunteers and felt the urge to leave for Chennai. He packed a bag, distributed his cash to friends, kept a thousand Rupees for himself and left for Mumbai. On the way he reasoned that if he were to serve God, he needed theological training.

On arriving in Mumbai he headed for St. Andrew's church in Agripada, walked into the Pastor Soholkar's office and told him he wanted to pursue theology. A visiting friend Rev. Endigeri, made him understand that one does not make such decisions without a specific calling and God's leading. He was persuaded to accompany him to a prayer meeting at St. Mary's in Parel.

Niteen met Rev. Roy Varghese (Our ex-executive) at the

to someone who ran a recruitment agency for the Middle East. This person told him he would give a percentage for every recruit. He managed to bring in some prospects and was rewarded for his efforts. When next he took more candidates, he found the office locked and a restless crowd outside its door. Soon the police were called in and Amit identified as one who was party to the fraud. Before he knew it Amit found himself behind bars.

Having heard his story, we telephoned K. T. Thomas, our panel lawyer and requested him to see if he had any openings for this young man. K. T. Thomas has employed him. He stays in Panvel and pursuing law studies. He accompanies us to jails, where his testimony touches inmates; for they can identify with him.



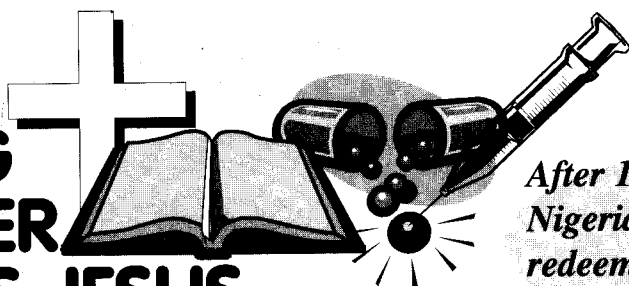
prayer meeting who suggested that it would be a good idea to try out Crossroads Prison Ministries. He called Aroon Gorey for an appointment – not once but on three different occasions – and did not turn up. Finally he convinced himself to meet Aroon. After much talking he was asked to experience the ministry for a month and then decide if he was cut out for it or not. The month stretched to three, during which time God laid the burden of the ministry on his heart. Niteen joined CPM.

Gifted with a sharp mind and keen perception he was quick to suggest that the need of the hour was to help prisoners with legal aid. Crossroads had always wanted to get into this area but had failed to persuade lawyers to come forward and give time for this work. It was Niteen who pointed out that advocates needed to be paid for their efforts. He suggested that inmates pay for their cases, the lawyers get paid through CPM; a portion of the fee is retained by CPM to help poor prisoners fight their law suits. Soon on its heels came another suggestion; to start a courier service to enhance Crossroads' financial stability. Both the 'Legal Aid Cell' & 'Crossroads Express' are functional.

Niteen David Soanes looks after the visits to four prisons which include Arthur Road, Kolhapur, Nashik and Pune. He has procured permission to cover the women's cell in Arthur Road every Tuesday. He has taken up the challenging task of entering schools with a view to encourage them to participate in the ministry.

Crossroads Prison Ministries is now recognized as the only ministry worth its salt.

A DRUG DEALER MEETS JESUS



After 14 years as a drug carrier, Nigerian Vincent Johnson met his redeemer inside a prison in Pune through Crossroads...

Born into a devout Roman Catholic family, Vincent Johnson did not even have a passing acquaintance with the Bible. Trained for waste water treatment, he worked for the Nigerian Petrochemical Refinery.

All was well for some time. He then started to notice that some of his friends were living beyond their earnings. He learnt that they were indulging in the illicit trade of drugs. Attracted to the life-style, he ventured into the trade. His first assignment to carry Brown Sugar to Spain earned him a sizable bounty of US \$ 20,000!

Thereafter there was no looking back. Of course there were profitless trips, but then, that was all part of the ball game. He married and had a baby. The already rich life-style became even costlier, so he decided to launch his own network. His new business brought him to India. Through some quirk of fate he was caught red handed by the Mumbai Police. For this he spent the next five years (from 1991 to 1996), in the Mumbai Central Prison.

On his release he needed money to return to Nigeria. He located a friend in Brazil, who was willing to loan one kilogram of Cocaine for two kilograms of Brown Sugar - in the drug trade they do not deal in money transactions with each other. Thinking that Pune will be a safer than Mumbai, he set up a rendezvous there. He did not know that the Brazilian was being watched by Intrapol, who informed the Pune police about the consignment. On the day Johnson went to collect his packet he walked straight into the arms of the waiting cops... And landed unceremoniously inside Yervada Central Prison. That was on October 12, 1996.

Life in an Indian jail can be quite harrowing, especially for the uninitiated. All transactions are in cash. One has to sell food to buy your toiletries from the canteen. With

experience Johnson learnt to buy certain items that generally go out of stock and later sell it for profit. Money so procured is very useful when one is taken to the local courts. If you are well stashed, you can even hire a rickshaw, pay the cops, have tea and Samosas, get your papers processed faster by the court clerk... So on and so forth.

Once 60 prisoners were being taken to the court. Enroute the van failed, while the officials were busy with the repair of the van the prisoners got a chance to escape. All but Johnson fled. Superintendent Jadhav was very impressed by this and allowed Johnson a lot of liberties within the confines of Yervada. He was granted the permission to teach English to inmates for which he was later compensated for with a handsome pay of Rs. 350/- per month. Just when life inside began to be a little tolerable, a change in superintendents brought Johnson's Utopia crashing down. He was forced again to sell food to eke an existence.

God does not test us beyond our capacity to endure. Just before he broke down, Crossroads started their work inside Yervada. For the first time in his life he got a chance to read the Word of God. He was introduced to Jesus, accepted Him as his saviour and began to understand what peace of mind really is. Along with this he also started getting utilities like pens, copy-books, postage, slippers, spectacles and reading material. He attended the CPM prayer meetings without fail. All stress disappeared, he experienced the joy in the Lord; he was born again!

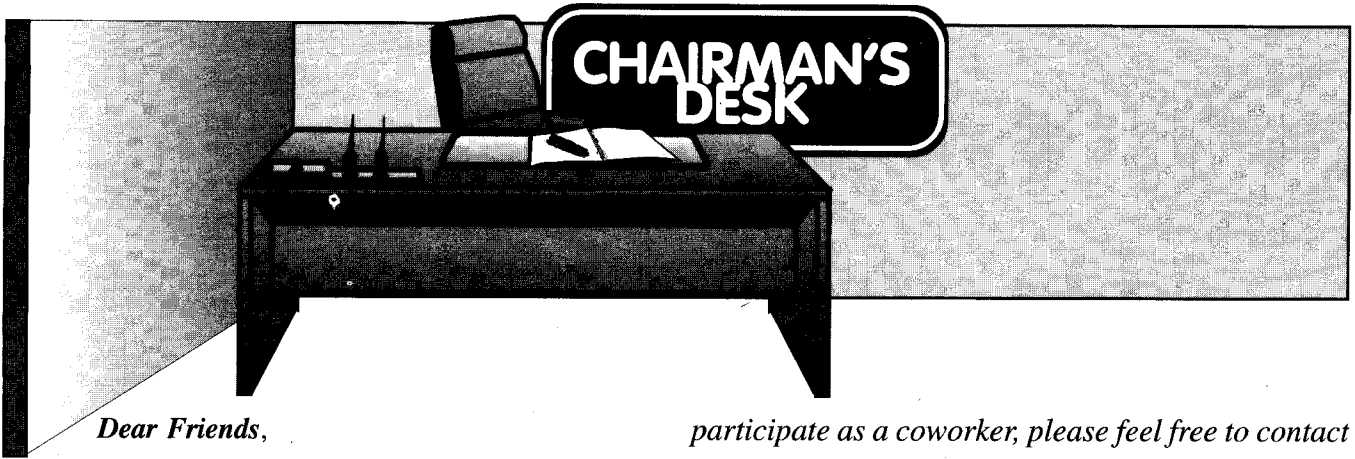
Through Crossroads Legal Aid Cell Johnson was finally released and is now busy trying to go back to Nigeria legally.

Legal Aid



Crossroads now has a Legal Aid Cell and we solicit your helping hand...

- We need lawyers on our panel. We pay legal fees!
- We need donors for inmates who cannot pay legal fees
- We need your prayer support



Dear Friends,

We thank God for enabling us to minister to the prison inmates and their families for the last eleven years in the state of Maharashtra. The Lord has indeed sustained this ministry through a lot of vicissitudes encountered by the Board as well as the volunteers. Undaunted, we have marched forward trusting in the promises of our Lord and Saviour. In spite of some discouraging incidents, we have moved along with His guidance to take up new challenges. We know there will be difficulties in future too, in sowing the Word on account of a perceptible change in the socio-political scenario in our country, still we continue praying to overcome all hurdles.

All these years, we have come across people who were interested in visiting prison merely to see a prison and what a prisoner looks like. While we do not encourage such visitors, we have given a chance to some in the hope that such a visit would arouse sympathetic feelings to make a commitment for the ministry. We thank God that it has worked, albeit only in a few cases. However, we do have good a number of volunteers to take the Gospel behind bars. As you read this issue and are led by God to know more about our work and want to

participate as a coworker, please feel free to contact us.

In the second half of last year, the Lord led us to establish a Legal Aid Cell with the help of some lawyers to take up cases of inmates who have no means to pursue their suits in the court of law; as also to launch another ambitious project of a courier service under the banner of Crossroads Express. We are now working out modalities to approach educational institutions with the sole objective of creating awareness and to invite them to become partners in Crossroads Prison Ministries. Along with this, we will also be visiting Churches in the cities of Mumbai, Pune, Nashik and Kolhapur with the same objective because it has to be the church which should give strength to this ministry.

Crossroads has existed absolutely on faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who has supplied us with the necessary means to conduct programmes and meet expenses. Therefore, through these columns I would like to thank all of you who are specifically praying for our ministry and encourage you to please continue upholding us in prayer.

Yours in Christ,

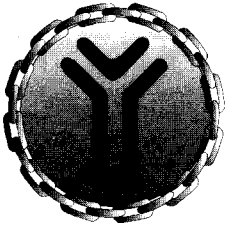
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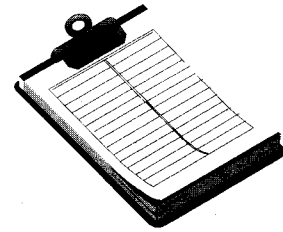
The Crossroads Express courier service has been started primarily to create a venue of employment for released inmates who desire to lead clean lives but are denied opportunities by employers.

Dear reader, if you wish to be a partner in the rehabilitation process, send your documents, parcels and letters through us. The service is for intracity, domestic and international markets.

Send a Document... Change a Life



CROSSROADS DIARY



PUNE CPM SPREADS IT'S WINGS

God has really blessed us this past year. Newer activities are being added inside prisons and at CPM office. We praise God for his provisions

Anil Singh reports from Pune:

Crossroads Prison Ministries is really making an impact in Pune. Gone are the days of being illtreated, checked and questioned for permissions. Then our visits were fortnightly that too not regular and only in the main jail. Today, we go inside every week in four wards – the main jail, the open prison; the womens' ward as also the hospital cell for Aids and infirm.

God has been very faithful. Through Mr. Subhash Bhonsale, Finance Director of UBS we got four volunteers as understudies to learn practical prison ministry. These youngsters are taking keen interest, joining in praise and worship and sharing the Word.

During Christmas all three prison programmes were well attended. The main jail had around 350 heard the message. Spicer college choir looked after the singing and Rev. M. A. Daniel gave the message. At the open jail Uma Silas and Brother Anil Singh lead the singing, the Word was brought by Rev. Ashok Joglekar. In the ladies' ward was handled Violet Prem, our volunteers helped in the singing, Rev. (Mrs) Sulabha Ahaley gave the message and a Christmas skit enacted by inmates' children. Everybody appreciated our efforts and have requested us to come regularly.

August 3, saw the launch of the Legal Aid Cell in Yervada Prison. Niteen Soanes comes from Mumbai every first Saturday briefing inmates about their cases and taking new ones. Till date more than 15 cases are in hand.

Work load at Pune is increasing and there are other snags that keep cropping up like transfers of officers and keeping tabs on released prisoners, We are sure with more experience we will be competent to face any exigency.

We are looking to God to strengthen us and guide us in all that needs to be done to expand His work behind bars.

MUMBAI MARCHES AHEAD

Since the last publishing of Stairways Mumbai has seen new areas of operation. In July 02 the **Legal Aid Cell** came into being. As we started announcing in prisons there was a lot of response from inmates in Mumbai, Kolhapur, Nashik and Pune. Applications are still coming in.

A seminar was held at the Tamil Methodist Church in September 02. The seminar was called for by CPM with the active cooperation of the Bombay Baptist Church. All churches and para-church organisations involved in prison work were invited. More than thirty people came. The idea was to share our strengths to make a better impact inside prisons of Maharashtra, and to network with agencies. It became very evident from the proceedings that nobody has a more wide based ministry as CPM. November 02 saw the launching of **Crossroads Express**, our courier service which has a two fold purpose. It will give a job opportunity for released prisoners and profits will be handed over to CPM. This will go a long way in helping CPM tide over its financial inabilities. The operation is still in its infancy but in a couple of months Crossroads Express will be self-sufficient. In the meanwhile three ex-inmates were employed.

Among other new developments was the starting of teaching Silk Screen Printing to inmates of Thane prison, and the entry into Arthur Road Womens' cell, with the help of Janet McMahan and Maureen Gomes who have a unique way of presenting the gospel through puppets. We have embarked on a awareness drive in schools. Senior students are told of the harsh realities of prison life as against the glorification of crime through the mass media. They are warned so that they opt for a law abiding life-style.

Normal programmes are going on without break through the wonderful loyalty of our volunteers. Byculla District

Prison is being handled by the Ambassadors and street evangelists they arrange for, Arthur Road is in the capable hands of Stephen Pillai and his team from Bombay Baptist Church (BBC), Kalyan is looked after by Pastor Tommy Lopes of Bread of Life, Vivek Samudre and team take care of Thane Central, Kolhapur has Pastor Nelson of House of Prayer and Nashik is under of Ajitkumar of Sowing & Reaping Ministries.

We had special programmes in all the jails for Independence Day, Christmas and Republic Day. We were host to Rajan, a dacoit turned evangelist. We took him to Byculla and Arthur Road jails where his testimony was well received by inmates. Another reformed Goon Santosh Hiranwar, healed from the deadly Aids spoke in Thane prison. Ex-inmates Amit Kumar, Vasant Poojari and Pandey gave their testimonies in various prisons.

Help to prisoners, their dependents and released inmates have been extended to:

Julian's (Yervada lifer) daughters. School fees for last and the current year.

Kishore Vaity (Yervada lifer) wife's delivery and hospital expenses and a loan to set up a business of vada pav.

Ankush (Byculla, robbery) was given a loan to continue his stall of electronic toys.

Vijay Tiwari (Kalyan, robbery) was helped through the purchase of his home cleaning goods.

Amit Kumar (Thane, middle man for illegal body shopper) was employed with our panel lawyer K. T. Thomas.

Vasant Poojari and Ashok Pandey (Byculla, robbery) were employed by Crossroads Express.

Jeetu More & Ronnie (Yervada, lifers) were helped in their leave application processing.

Read... Think... Act

Prisoners are regarded as dregs of society, to be shunned, looked down upon and treated with utter disdain... How many think of them as human beings like ourselves?

Do you know that the innocent undertrials are easily swayed into a life of crime by hardened thugs inside our prisons?

Have you ever thought of the plight of the families of those in prison?

Think about it!

Maharashtra has 75, 000 inmates in 213 prisons.

95% of inmates are undertrials... Not yet convicted.

75% of these are innocent!

Is this fair?

Help us change this!

Crossroads Prison Ministries needs your help for these activities:

- Legal assistance for bail & representation
- Employment of released inmates or a family member
- Clothes, utensils, household articles, rations and study material
- Sponsorship for education, professional training and medical care



We are eternally grateful to our Father in Heaven for His hand upon us, else we would not have survived for these more than eleven years. The Lord has been faithful, He has always answered our prayers, He has never failed to sustain us. We can only raise our hands in praise.

Thanks be to God for:

Giving us more inmates to reach out to. Crossroads is now operational in 10 jails in Mumbai, Pune, Nashik and Kolhapur. This means that every Saturday we bring the Gospel to some 250 prisoners in 3 jails.

The cooperation of prison authorities, who recognize our contribution to the betterment of their wards.

Enabling us to start the Legal Aid Cell and Crossroads Express. This has widened our prisoner help base and putting us on the road to self sufficiency.

The loyalty of our volunteers who are willing to give

their time for the ministry. Also for the new one who have expressed their desire to come with us.

Allowing us to start teaching Silk Screen Printing to inmate of Thane Prison.

Our board members. They give us time, advice, money and prayers.

Niteen David Soanes, who joined us spearhead the increased work.

Special donors – Janet McMahon, Sheila Garware, Ms Biem of USA, R. Jacob, The Sahara Charitable Foundation, All Saints Church, Oldham Methodist Church & Sunday School, H. Dicaud, Rev. M. A. Daniel, The Womens’ Society for Christian Service (North & South Bombay), Queen Mary Staff Association, for their prayerful financial support without which we would never be able to bring succour to inmates’ families... And others who gave Bibles, Tracts and helped us with letters.

The continuous prayer support from individuals, churches and house groups.

Do uphold Crossroads Prison Ministries in prayer in the year ahead for:

We will be able to increase our activities to other cities in Maharashtra. Remember there are 213 prisons in the state and we are active in 10.

The rehabilitation and reformation work, so more and more will trust to Jesus behind bars.

Crossroads Express & the Legal Aid Cell, so that we extend God’s helping hand to the unrepresented and Jobless

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BOOK POST

