

NEWS FROM CROSSROADS, PUNE

In June, 1998, J. Arthur Prem, Chairman, CROSSROADS was transferred from Mumbai to Pune. He joined Oldham Memorial Methodist Church at Pune and shared a word about the ministry with Rev. M. A. Daniel and some other elders of the church. He got a very encouraging response from them so much so that even MYF was quite enthusiastic about the prospect of visiting Yervada Prison to counsel the prison inmates. At the same time he had a long discussion with the Inspector General of Prisons, Maharashtra about holding counselling sessions for the prison inmates who readily agreed for the same keeping in mind our contribution in this direction at Mumbai Prisons. After establishing a rapport with the prison in charge, Sr. Supdt. Sh. R. B. Choudhary and other officers, we started planning our programmes there. Efforts were made to organise the local volunteers for these programmes. The following important persons associated themselves with the activities of the Crossroads at the initial stage in a big way:



Rev. M. A. Daniel	Pastor Incharge , Oldham Methodist Church, Pune
Anil Singh	Deputy General Manager, Tata Honeywell, Pune
Sunil Khisty	Manager, Suprabha Enterprises
Samson Manuel	St. Joseph Technical Institute
Rev.(Dr.) L. Pohsngap	Principal, Union Biblical Seminary

Inaugural Visit to Yervada Prison on 26th August,1998

Though we had visited the Yervada prison once before in February, 1998 along with Joy Singers, a German group of reformed prisoners/criminals, but we always dreamt of having a regular ministry in the Yervada prison. This was not possible because of manpower and financial constraints. However, the Lord solved these problems when Arthur came to Pune on transfer and approached like-minded persons of Oldham Church so as to organize a visit to Yervada.



A group of UBS students, volunteers from Oldham Methodist Church, Aroon Gorey, Member, CPM Board from Mumbai, Roy Varghese, Executive, CPM, Mumbai visited Yervada Prison to present a programme of songs, skits and moral teaching to a group of about 300 prison inmates. The skit presented by the UBS students was the highlight of die programme as it conveyed the message to die inmates that God alone can help them to change their lives so that they do not have to come back to prison once they were released. This programme was attended by Sh. Choudhary, DIG(Prisons), Maharashtra along with other officials of the prison, who praised the work being

undertaken by Crossroads amongst the prison inmates of Mumbai and Pune. He desired that Crossroads should also visit other prisons of the state.

Regular Visits

After our inaugural visit to Yervada, we started receiving letters from the inmates which showed that the prisoners were interested in knowing more about us and through us, our Lord Jesus Christ. While on one hand we tried our best to counsel the inmates through our replies, on the other hand we organized ourselves so as to pay at least one visit every month to maintain some sort of continuity. It was amazing to find that many from the Oldham Church were willing to join us. Through our friends, the word about the prison ministry was spread and the members of other churches and institutions also showed interest in joining hands with us. It was very encouraging indeed!

Through the columns of this newsletter, Crossroads would like to acknowledge with thanks the great support extended to Crossroads by the followings for their valuable contribution during several visits to Yervada Prison:

1. Rev. Uday Kumar, Professor, UBS, Pune
2. Mrs. Jyothi Uday Kuinar, Professor, UBS, Pune
3. Mrs. Debora Samraj, Professor, Spicer College
4. Youth group of City Church, Pune
5. Volunteers from St. Paul's Church, Pune
6. Dr. (Mrs.) O. Matthews, Former Principal, Hutchings School, Pune
7. Col. (Dr.) C. G. Wilson, Professor, AFMC, Pune.
8. Students of UBS & Spicer College and Hutchings School
9. Rev. M. Devdas, Professor, UBS, Pune
10. Rev. Paul Augustine, Professor, UBS, Pune
11. Rev. Pothan K and Dr. P. Kurien, Spicer College
12. Rev. (Dr.) Boxter Kharbteng

Holy Communion to the Christian Prisoners under most During our interaction with the inmates and the prison authorities, we felt that die stage was set for taking bold steps in building up spiritual bridges between die Christian community outside and die souls rejected by the society within the four walls of die prison. Also, die zeal of die inmates prompted us to organize holy communion services within the prison. This was another challenge as we anticipated trouble in carrying die elements through die security gate of die prison. Though we prepared ourselves for die communion service without any member of the group knowing of our apprehension, we were confident of Lord's help at the right time. When we reached the main gate of the Yervada prison and were undergoing die security drill, we were questioned about die red syrup but our simple explanation that die syrup was required as a 'samagri' for prarthana, satisfied die Hawaldar on duty without any further query. We praised God for His timely help to us. After that we never had any problem in taking die elements in die prison for our communion services. We thank God that Rev. M. A. Daniel, Rev. Uday Kumar, Rev. Ashok Joglekar, Rev. M. Devdas and Rev. Paul Augustine could

administer the Holy Communion to the inmates on several occasions without any fear. During the Communion services we could see tears rolling down the cheeks of prisoners on their knees, probably because of remorse and repentance.

Ministry in the Female Prison

Several visits were organized to the Female section of Yervada Prison under the leadership of Violet Prem and Usha Silas. Some of the salient personalities joining hands with them along with many volunteers were:

1. WSCS, Oldham Methodist Church, Pune
2. Mrs. Sarla Wagmare, Principal, Ethel Gordon School
3. Mrs. Dimpy Narang, w/o Commissioner of Customs, Pune
4. Mrs. Shashi Minz, Jt. Commissioner of Central Excise, Pune
5. Mrs. Kanu Verma, Dy. Commissioner of Central Excise, Pune
6. Volunteers from Oldham Church, Pune
7. Sister Andrews from
8. Students of Ethel Gordon School
9. Rev. (Mrs.) Ahade
10. Dr. Shama Singh

The Lady Jailor Ms. Pallavi Kadam has always been very cooperative during all the visits to the female section and took special care of the arrangements for our 'prarthana sabhas' in the prison. There are about 280 inmates in the female section and we were shocked to discover the fact that about 80 of them were convicted murderers. On talking to the authorities, we found that most of the female criminals were those who were forced to commit a crime under most compelling circumstances. Almost all of them repented having committed a crime of heinous nature and were worried about their relations outside the prison. They wanted to make amends to their broken lives but who will give them a helping hand? To their families they had brought a lot of disgrace and in some of the cases even a family member, for whose respect they committed a crime at the spur of the moment, was not willing to visit them in the prison for the fear of being identified with a criminal. Our visits to the prison provide opportunities to some of the inmates to open up and ask for prayer for changing their lives.



Distribution of Bible

It is almost three years now since we are ministering to the inmates of the Yervada prison. During this time we have experienced an urge in the inmates to read Bible. There has been a tremendous demand for Bibles in different languages. We prayed to God for this need of ours so that the word of God could reach to the inmates. We had very good response from the members of various

churches. In particular, the following persons donated Bibles in English, Marathi, Hindi, Malyalam, Tamil, Kannad, Gurmukhi, Bengali and Nepalese languages for the prisoner:

1. Mr. Falvo Fowler
2. Anil Singh
3. Ujwala Andrews
4. Prashant Macwan, Gideons, Pune
5. Oldham Church
6. New Life Church, Pune
7. K. Naidu
8. Mrs. Ovicegin, Taylor Church, Mumbai
9. Bishop Stanley Downes
10. Rev. Ahade
11. Spicer College

So far we have distributed over 300 Bibles to the inmates and the authorities of the Yervada prison and the demand is there for more Bibles. We are looking up to God to provide us more Bibles to cater to this demand.

Support from the Church

The Oldham Memorial Methodist Church Pune has remained as forerunner for taking up the cause of prison ministry in the city of Pune. Every year, Prison Ministry Sunday has been observed since 1998 in the church to focus the attention of the members the aims and objectives of the prison ministry and seek their involvement in visiting the prison. Crossroads Prison Ministries (CPM), Pune was asked to conduct the entire service on these occasions and enlighten the members about its activities. Rev. Roy Varghese, Executive, CPM, Mumbai , Aroon Gorey , Vice Chairman, CPM and some of the inmates of our Community Home at Nallasopara have participated in these special Sunday services and exhorted the members about the work being done by the CPM. The members have responded very well to support the work of Crossroads.

Though we have not been able to reach out to other churches in Pune on account of lack of proper coordination, we have had support from City Church and St. Paul's Church in the form of their volunteers who could witness to the inmates through singing during our visits to the prison.

Counselling through Letters

Prison inmates have been encouraged to write letters to us as letter writing has been found to a channel through which a prisoner could vent out his inner thoughts, anger against his accomplices, anxiety about his dear ones, apprehensions, grievances about the circumstances, remorse, confession, repentance, spiritual hollowness, desire to come dose to God, desire to be freed and uncertainty about future etc, etc., In a way, this is considered to be essential as during our visits it is not possible to listen to each of them but when they write letters, their personal needs arc properly addressed. Many a times, letters from the prisoners contain their request to arrange for their ball or asking for something for himself or asking us to contact some of their relative to request them to

come for Mulakat or contact the advocate to take up their cases expeditiously or asking for a Bible in their own language. Some letters are full of questions about God and why He does not listen to their cries as they felt that they were innocent and must be out of the prison. Others write to us about their experiences of knowing more about Jesus through the prayer groups and their desire to accept Jesus.

We read these letters with concern for their feelings and expectations. We counsel them to be patient, tolerant, have friendly attitude towards their fellow inmates as well as with the representatives of the prison authorities and pray to God for peace and the personal transformation. They are also advised to associate themselves with prayer groups to overcome inner turmoil with the knowledge of Jesus Christ but at no point of time they are pressurized to adopt any particular faith. Some of the letters vividly reflect that the inmates do spend a lot of time in reading Bible as they quote verses in their letters, write about change of heart and their faith in Jesus Christ. Also, it is amazing to find from their letters that they even pray for Crossroads, its ministry and others believers.