

L.M.Bag 1  
June, 2005

Dear *Michael*,

In June, 2005, I wrote to the Swag (Newsletter of the National Council of Priests of Australia) telling them something of my experience in gaol and my concerns about the damage done to inmates, and ultimately to Society, by the present gaol system. ( I enclose a copy of that letter rather than repeat my concerns here).

I received a copy of the Swag in mid October with my letter printed in it. In that same week I received three letters that started me thinking. One was from an 85 year old retired priest who picked up on the "listening" mentioned in my letter and expressed his desire to listen. Another letter was from a priest friend who has carried on his personal gaol ministry, of letter writing and visiting , for years mainly to priests and religious in gaol. His letter was an expression of joy at a letter he'd received from a young lay inmate friend of mine from another gaol. That letter of the inmate expressed the joy and strength the Holy Spirit was giving in his life in the midst of great difficulties. The third letter was to me from that same inmate, "---it's the power of Jesus at work and the Holy Spirit and I feel that loved it's amazing----" he wrote. He finished his letter by quoting Psalm 16 verse 5, "you Lord are all I have, you give me all I need. My life is in your hands." That night during my meditation period I had a very strong message that it was only through the power of God's Holy Spirit that attitudes could change and with that systems, like the justice system, could change.

I've spent the last week finding ways to avoid writing a letter to include with my Christmas cards. The usual excuses, what can one person do, don't stick your neck out, etc. But here is the letter. I'm reminded of the words from the Hound of Heaven "\_\_\_\_\_He chased me down the labyrinthine ways---" I really had to write this letter.

What am I asking? I'm asking for your thoughts, ideas, suggestions, reactions to the idea of a Prayer Network. What would we pray for? It seems to me that our society is often led into forming an opinion by media which doesn't often give a balanced presentation. As a consequence I see a society which, it seems to me, is damaging itself more and more by becoming increasingly vindictive and vengeful. This is very apparent in the gaol system. I believe a healthy society should always be at least open to

the possibility of healing, forgiving and reconciling. I believe a change of attitude cannot be achieved by just words but only through the power of the Holy Spirit working in the hearts of people. That's what a prayer network would pray for.

WHO exactly would we pray for? All involved. Victims of crime and their families for their healing. That they wouldn't destroy themselves through hatred but be open to move towards forgiveness. For perpetrators of crime. That they would face their crimes and open themselves to everything that could help them to change and make whatever reparation they can to their victims. For Gaol Officers and staff that they realize the importance of their vocation and work for healing. For gaol Chaplains that God strengthen them in their difficult task. For Police, courts, judges to always act for what is truly best for society and not just what is popular or demanded by peer pressure. For society to move away from vindictiveness and revenge toward forgiveness, healing and reconciliation. For media and politicians for a well formed conscience and the courage to do what is right.

It would be wonderful if people from all the above groups, victims, perpetrators, gaol officers and staff, chaplains, police, courts, judges, members of society, politicians, media people, could all gradually be drawn into a unity of prayer to change attitudes and systems and build a healthier society.

#### WILL YOU PRAY WITH ME?

"I am the vine and you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, and I in him, will bear a great deal of fruit, for you can do nothing without me."

John 15: 5

Happy Christmas.

*Perhaps there are others you could invite to join in this prayer.*

*Vince*