

Beyond Bars

The official PJPS newsletter



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PHILIPPINE JESUIT PRISON
FOUNDATION, INC.



Serving inmates to the maximum!

Upcoming activities

Prison Break Fun Run
Recollection of PJPS stakeholders
Concert for a cause
Raffle

June 21
July 26
September 20
December 2014

2014

Bilibid or Not

by: Christa Schwendener

To be a volunteer in prison ministry is a mixed blessing. I recall my experiences with the Philippine Jesuit Prison Service (PJPS) and it's hard to select which one to pick for an attractive article. The truth is that there are many, very many things I could write about: good memories, happy memories, touching memories, sad memories, hopeful memories and so on.

It's very inspiring to see the local outreaches, with their caring, loving, and engaged volunteers. But being a volunteer from abroad is a different story. Indeed one goes to "help" or try to do so, but I realized this is the wrong thought. It's crucial to understand that this is not a one way deal, it's synergy. It's the combination of your actions and the actions of the local people that creates an interaction, and inevitably creates changes in the life of the foreign volunteer.

For me it was a completely different world from the one I've been in. I'm still shaken by the first impression and hours in remote Manila. People, tricycles, shops, food, cars, children, people, dogs, laughter, noise, people, smells, people, jeepneys, people --- it's absolutely amazing!

Inmates are not the end of the social structure, as many would think. They are just human beings who in a certain point of their lives took a wrong decision...The time I shared with them was a lesson in values and solidarity.

It's impossible to have only one first impression of a country but it's very easy to remember the first one in Bilibid Prison. If I can give everyone who hasn't been in prison an advice, it would be: forget everything you've seen in movies! Bilibid is nothing like that! It can be better or worse than what you'd imagined, it depends on you. Inmates are not the end of the social structure, as many would think. They are just human beings who in a certain point of their lives took a wrong decision...The time I shared with them was a lesson in values and solidarity.

When first crossing the prison's gate I realized that the whole atmosphere inside is full of a sense of belonging.

Inmates are not the end of the social structure, as many would think. They're just human beings who, in a certain point of their lives, made a wrong decision. I dare say they changed my point of view in many aspects of life. The time I shared with them was a lesson in values and solidarity.

There's still a lot of work that needs to be done inside and outside prison but it's slowly happening. I have no doubt that with the support of the current and hopefully new volunteers change will certainly take place.

Thank you Philippines for cleaning my soul and teaching me so much! Thank you Filipinos for being so happy and cheerful! Thank you Bilibid for opening my mind and heart! I understand now that it is really more fun in the Philippines...in every single way!!

