

"I was in prison and you visited me." Mt. 25:36

Santa Ana, California

December 18, 2014



This was the third Christmas that we, the Sisters of the Company of Mary together with a group of volunteers, visited the incarcerated youth in Sylmar, California, approximately 60 miles north of Santa Ana, California. We were able to make these visits through a program directed by the California Jesuits Restorative Justice Office, under the direction of by Fr. Mike Kennedy, SJ, i.e. meaning that the needs of victims are acknowledged and that offenders are accountable for harm done, which potentially can lead to inward healing and transformation of people, relationships and communities.

On November 1st we sponsored a festival to acquire the funds to purchase the necessary items for the imprisoned youth at our Santa Ana community and also educated those present about the meaning of Restorative Justice. Those in attendance could make a commitment to join the Christmas celebration and visit the youth or contribute monetarily to purchase the Christmas dinner for the incarcerated youth, keeping in mind to prayer for the victims and their families.



Nidorf Juvenile Hall houses underage youth ages 8-18 years old. Many of them come from Los Angeles, San Diego, California, or other distant places, so they receive few visits. Not only that, but many are immigrants from other countries: Latin American, Central American or Mexico whose families cannot visit them.

Some of the youth at the juvenile hall are charged with minor infractions, such as skipping school or fighting, while others are charged with far more serious offences, such as an armed assault or murder. They are mostly males with approximately 400 boys and 60 girls. Of

this total, up to 200 could be charged as adults and sent to adult prisons; most are Latinos or African American.

At Nidorf Juvenile Hall there is a compound where youth are being tried as adults who may be as young as 14 years old. If they go to trial and are found guilty, they could be sentenced to 25 years to life, and sometimes up to 150 years. Which is why for them, this Christmas celebration will be a memorable one.



On December 13, we visited four units: two units were of young people who are being tried as adults and the other the girl's unit and the camp unit. For all, it is a time of joy, a visit long coming, tasty food and a festive party. It is an opportunity to celebrate and forget what their future may

hold as they wait for the outcome of their cases. Many of them share the poetry they write and the songs they compose. They feel honored that we would want to hear their thoughts.

For all fifty of us who visited them, it was a privileged time, for we felt we were in solidarity with *Jesus the prisoner*. We trusted that our Lady of Advent accompanied us in this mission.

We remembered Jesus' words: "*I was in prison and you came to see me.*" Mt. 25:36.

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