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Pope Leo Creates Global Prison Ministry Network and Closes 1950 Commission

A true story of faith under pressure. Read the first half below, then continue online.

KEY SPIRITUAL TAKEAWAY

"In carcere eram, et venistis ad me"

(Transliterated from the original Hindi.)

They had gathered only to pray. When prayer itself becomes the target, faith is proved not by words but by staying.

The Story - Part One

Pope Leo XIV has reshaped the Catholic Church's prison ministry, abolishing the International Commission of Catholic Prison Pastoral Care - founded in Rome in 1950 - and creating a new global network, the Prison Ministry Pastoral Outreach Service, to coordinate pastoral care for prisoners worldwide. The change came in a motu proprio released on Wednesday 25 November, signed on 22 November, the Solemnity of Christ the King.

The document is titled "In carcere eram, et venistis ad me" - "I was in prison, and you visited me", from Matthew 25:36. It is one of the most personal titles a pope could give a document about prisoners, because it puts the words of Jesus himself at the centre of the Church's work behind bars.

The new body is deliberately described as more "agile and flexible" than the commission it replaces. It is a network for pastoral collaboration among particular Churches, bishops' conferences, their regional and continental associations, and the Eastern Churches - not a bureaucracy with its own legal standing. It has no juridical personality of its own and no permanent endowment.

That matters. The Pope is not building a new office in Rome. He is building a web of people who already do this work, and giving them a way to work together.

The new body will operate in a seperate way from the old commission - as a network of collaborators rather than a central office. Training will be part of the work too, including through digital tools, so the network can reach chaplains wherever they are. And because the service covers the Eastern Churches as well as the Latin Church, it will have to work across languages, traditions and prison systems that look nothing alike.

Prison Ministry Pastoral Outreach Service: What The New Network Will Do

The service sits under the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. Its job is to provide "pastoral orientations and guidelines", to promote prison ministry worldwide, to accompany local Churches in their work with prisoners, and to train pastoral workers - including through digital tools.

The Pope appointed Archbishop Jorge Ignacio García Cuerva of Buenos Aires as its first coordinator, for a five-year term. García Cuerva was previously the Pope's delegate to the old commission, so the man now leading the new network knows the old one from the inside. He will be assisted by at least three advisers active in prison ministry.

The Turning Point - What Happens Next

The story reaches a life-changing moment that changes everything -- and what seemed like the end is only the middle. Two reports disagree on the numbers, and one question is left unanswered: will the CCTV footage ever come out? Read the full story to find out what happens next.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When gathering to pray carries a real cost, what keeps a community coming together anyway -- and what would keep you coming?

2. The pastor's sister shielded him with her own body and fainted under the blows. What does costly, self-giving love look like in your own family or church?

3. When justice is delayed and a complaint is withdrawn under threat, how do believers hold on to truth without giving in to fear -- or to hatred?

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