

My Experience of Prison Ministry

by Sister Viera Farinelli, SFP



My work with the women at Rebibbia Prison consists of counseling the women prisoners both in their psychological and spiritual journeys. After my first two meetings with the women, I thanked God because in this environment Mother Frances' charism is present. Like her I felt and feel very small, insignificant and inadequate; but I trust God, giving him my work, listening, and speaking.

I must say - much to my amazement – that I am a gift for them. Many have thanked me for my way of spending time with them. When one of the women left prison she wrote:

“Dear Sr. Viera, my prayers helped, and so did the growth in my faith in God. What was most useful however, were the few conversations with you. They helped immensely, because – besides giving me the strength – it led me closer to God. I thank you for all you did for me, for the shoes and for being available to me.”

The Lord uses also evil to get good out of it because he is our Father, who wants what is good for us. In my case, the two months in prison, besides leading me closer to him, helped me to finally come out of meth dependence. I would not have been able to do it by myself. I saw how much good you can do there ...”

In the women's section of the prison, there are more than 450 prisoners. Most of them are foreigners, gypsies and some are Italian. They have been incarcerated for drug use and trafficking, theft, scams and homicides. Each Wednesday I go there for the sessions that average five to six participants. Afterward I go by the offices of the educators to see whether there are any particular cases; I give an update to the Chaplain and then leave.

On Saturday I go to the infirmary and visit those who are sick and those who are addicted to drugs. Most of them are addicted to meth. This is a ward where tranquility and respect do not exist.

In this environment I enter on my tippy toes, asking Mother Frances to give me her courage, love, energy and determination, so I will have the right words to say to give these women relief and comfort.



Rebibbia Prison, Rome, Italy

I went to the Prison in Ariano Irpino with Brother Beppe and some volunteers. I met many men who were aware of the crimes they have committed; I saw sadness and repentance in their eyes. Besides the Rebibbia Prison, I have the opportunity to hold the Missions in the Italian prisons. During the missions we share free time with the prisoners, this is their time for socializing, individual counseling, meals and the Liturgy and we give them the Tau Cross.