



16 April 2020

## Leaning into the Darkness

As most of the world “shelters in place” because of COVID-19, COO Dave Van Patten shares how an army of 36,000 staff and volunteers in 116 countries are finding ways to minister to prisoners and their families.



**By Dave Van Patten, COO of Prison Fellowship International**

“See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you” (Isaiah 60:2, NIV).

The COVID-19 challenge is unprecedented; its scale still is not understood. At this writing (Good Friday), 100,000 people around the world have died and the numbers are still rising.

By any measure, this is a dark time. Fear and anxiety about the pandemic have gripped our communities. And psychologists tell us that if we let feelings of fear, anxiety, confusion, and dread grow unchecked, we can begin to feel hopeless and helpless. When this happens, we are immobilized by fear and are **unable to act** to help ourselves and those around us.

Clearly, this is *not* the case in Prison Fellowship International. **We lean into the darkness.** As most of the world “shelters in place,” an army of [36,000 staff and volunteers](#) in 116 countries are finding ways to minister to prisoners and their families. They act, while others around them hesitate. For example:

**PF Chile** launched a live worship and prayer time via Facebook Live *every evening*. The Prisoner’s Journey® and Sycamore Tree Project® facilitators, former prisoners, PF Chile staff and volunteers all come together virtually to worship and pray for an hour.

**PF Czech Republic** volunteers provided 11 prisons with soap, sewing machines, and material to make face masks for prisoners.

**PF Guatemala** volunteers produced hundreds of hygiene kits for prisoners throughout the country.

**PF Zambia** volunteers distributed soap, hygienic supplies, and needed food to hundreds of prisoner's families.

**PF Brazil** (FBAC) prisoners began making hundreds of face masks for hospital workers *on the outside*.

**PF Uruguay** volunteers started a hand sanitizer business, producing sanitizing solution for hundreds of prisoners and needy families. See the product [line here](#).

**PF Colombia** volunteers delivered food baskets to hundreds of families of prisoners.

Prisoners in **PF Costa Rica** wrote: *"From APAC Costa Rica we salute you, we are together in this world crisis, that your prayers and ours be one. Let's follow all the hygiene rules and the recommendations of the authorities. And remember, to enjoy the rainbow we have to get through this storm."* Video [here](#).

**PF Romania's** social cafeteria, while closed for dine-in, prepared to-go meals for 268 beneficiaries (former inmates, families of prisoners, elderly, and children) who otherwise wouldn't have daily food.

**PF Northern Ireland** began preparing activity packets for prisoners which will include crossword and math puzzles, art activities, a bar of chocolate, and reading materials. They are also working with released prisoners via telephone to meet essential needs.

**PF England & Wales** hosted an online national prayer event and over 200 people joined to pray for prisoners, prison staff, chaplains and leaders, families of prisoners, programmes, staff, and volunteers. Their volunteer training is being adjusted so it can be delivered over video call. And staff has contacted every prison to offer prisoners sign up for Letter Link, a correspondence program to communicate and encourage prisoners.

Especially in dark times, **we lean in**. We act with confidence as children of the Light. Remember that light shines the brightest in the pitch black of night.

"You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness" (1 Thessalonians 5:5, NIV).

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Footnote : **PF Malaysia** is actively pursuing various initiatives to provide the 42 Prisons in Malaysia with PPE items. Todate we have already supplied/made arrangements for 18 Prisons and we hope to reach all Prisons by end May 2020.