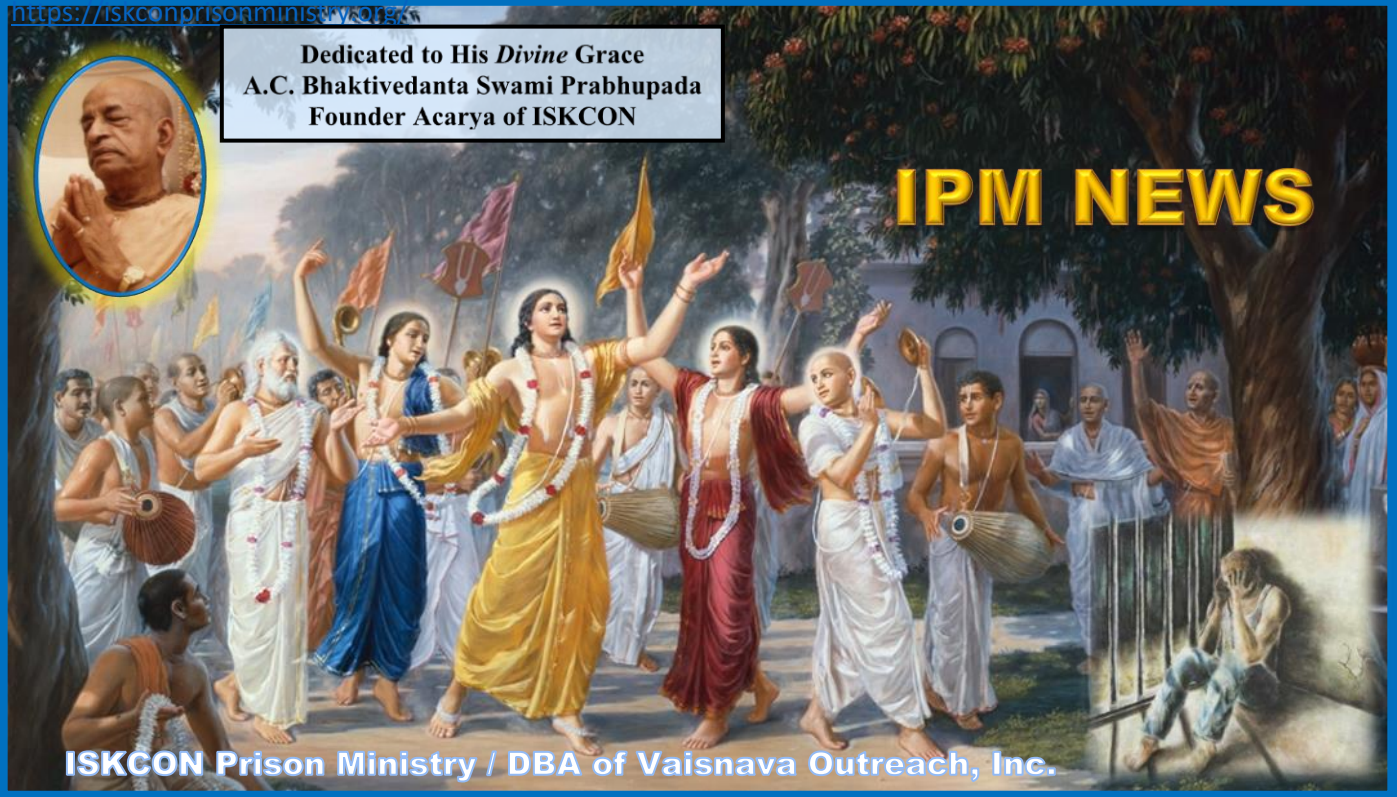


Dedicated to His *Divine* Grace
A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
Founder Acarya of ISKCON



IPM NEWS



ISKCON Prison Ministry / DBA of Vaisnava Outreach, Inc.

“In this age, Kali-yuga, to kill the demons means to stop their demonic activities by the weapon of kirtan, Hari-sankirtan, which is spread by Lord Caitanya's associates.”

Srila Prabhupada in London, March 10, 1975

January-April 2023

VICTORIES AND OBSTACLES

By Bhakti-lata Dasi

As the year was ending, I was reflecting on the prison ministry’s victories and obstacles in 2022.

One of my most treasured feature of this year is that, as a result of sending book offers to all the women’s prisons in USA (135 of them), nine institutions received Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books for the first time and three more are presently in communication with us with the intention of getting books as well. I expect more chaplains to respond to our book offer and reach out to us in the coming year. Out of these nine prisons who already responded, six accept hardbound books and were therefore donated a whole set of Srimad-

Bhagavatam, in addition to other books from Śrīla Prabhupāda and Back to Godhead magazines. Since chapel libraries often don’t have the space needed for full size sets of Bhagavatam, Jitarati prabhu generously donated sixty smaller format sets.

Another generous donor (who prefers to remain anonymous) sponsored 2,000 back issues of the Back to Godhead



magazine and pledged to sponsor as many as we can distribute beyond that. We were therefore able to send about fifty BTGs to twenty-four chapel libraries. One chaplain in Pennsylvania even requested us to send him fifty BTGs every month as the inmates grab them all as soon as they hit the shelf.

Many chaplains, some for the first time, some with whom we have had contact with for years, reached out to IPM, either for books (or more books) for their chapel library or for particular inmates. Sometimes an inmate doesn't speak English and their chaplain reach out to us to get a Bhagavad-gita and other books in their languages (Hindi, Gujarati, Spanish, etc.)

Many new groups of inmates have formed this year, and they meet regularly to chant, do kirtan, and read together. Some have access to devotee DVDs and CDs in the chapel library.

Delightfully, this year, devotees from, Suriname, England, France, and Estonia reached out to us, asking for tips on how to start prison preaching in their part of the world. It was an honor to share some tips and ideas with them and to sometimes be able to connect them with other devotees in their area. I am very enthusing to be part of this network!



However, since the material world is not a bed of roses, a massive obstacle manifested itself this last November. All Florida prisons transitioned to an *electronic* mail delivery format. This means that the Florida inmates are no longer allowed to receive books, magazines, and newsletters. A terrible tragedy for the inmates. Apparently, this new policy aims at reducing the number of contraband finding its way in the prison system. There are a couple exceptions; prisons who accept book packages from the prison ministry as long as they are stamped, "Religious Material", but, for now all others closed their door to the mercy of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books.

This new policy in Florida, is a major setback for book distribution. Apparently inmates can order books through a single company who serve prisons exclusively; I am trying to find out if it is really so. If it is, I'll inquire if that company would accept our books in their inventory. I'll let you know how this turns out.

The snail mail letters to Florida inmates are now all digitized and sent to inmates on their tablets. Inmates who, as a result of their housing designation or status, are not permitted to access email kiosks, or tablet services, have their scanned mail printed and delivered to them in person. Some prisons loan tablets to their inmates.

The reality is that henceforward, Florida inmates will not have the pleasure of receiving paper letters from their loved ones; no drawings from their kids to put on their walls, no letter to treasure and hold in their hands. It is a sad state of affair.



Fortunately, the different prison email systems allow devotees to correspond even with Florida inmates, encouraging them and answering their questions.

If you want to read more about this new Florida policy, you can read this [article](#).

Overall, it was a fruitful year for prison preaching and I am very grateful to still be part of this service for Śrīla Prabhupāda's pleasure. You can see the book scores for this year on [page 4](#) of this newsletter.

My deepest gratitude to our volunteers, donors, and well-wishers without which there wouldn't be a prison ministry. I also want to thank my husband Mukunda who always encourages me to plod along despite all the challenges that this service can bring. 🙏



Chaplains' Appreciation

8/25/22

My name is Chaplain Julie Bell. I serve at the Iowa Correctional Institution for Women here in Mitchellville Iowa. I recently received your letter offering Hindu materials for our religious library. We have been searching for resources that would supply materials for our Hindu population. It is amazing that your letter arrived with the answers we have been searching for. This will help fill the void in our Hindu section of our library.

We can accept all of the materials you offered in your letter because they will be stored here in our place of worship for the women to access.

We would love to have a set of the encyclopedia [Srimad-Bhagavatam] for the women's reference section. Thank you so much for sharing your items with us.

Chaplain Julie Bell —Mitchellville, Iowa

9/7/22

The facility chaplain provided me your 8/13/22 letter wherein you offered Hindu religious books for our prison library. We thank you in advance, for your donation. Currently we have a very limited amount of religious books on the Hindu religion; your generous donation will significantly expand our religious library. Again, thank you for generous donation to our religious library.

Warden Timothy M. Lang —Lusk, Wyoming

9/12/22

These items are such a blessing to so many individuals in our facility. I have already handed out a couple of the magazines and loaned out a couple of the books. I took time to watch and listen to a few of these items myself. Our facility tries to facilitate all opportunities for those to practice their beliefs and in situations such as segregation, they don't have this option, so it helps when I can provide a book for them.

Chaplain Christopher Back —Bunker Hill, IN

9/30/22

I've just recently been searching for a venue to get donated Hindu religious books/literature and thus far I've made no progress. I was so glad to receive this letter from the ISKCON prison ministry. My facility could really benefit from your generosity. I rely entirely on donations to meet the religious needs of the inmates I serve.

Chaplain Ryan Seabolt —Bunker Hill, West Virginia

10/19/22

Dhanyavaad and Namaste - sincere thanks for your gift of books, magazines, CDs, and DVDs to our inmates - it was received a few days ago. I will be sure to let anyone who is interested in different religions or who identifies with these traditions about this addition to our library. Best blessings to you and yours.

From the magazines you sent us, I put one copy into the library for inmates to borrow and put the rest out for inmates to take and keep - whatever I put out from you disappeared quickly - so if you want to send more copies of BTG, I am sure someone is interested in them.

1/4/23

Thank you -I received the box of magazines. I saw again that whatever I put out to take was all taken! Could I also distribute these magazines to a mental hospital where I work?

Rabbi Joseph M. Kolakowski —Bellefonte, Pennsylvania

11/8/22

I have received your generous donation; thank you so very much. We are currently getting the items prepared for our library and updating our Chapel Library list. Once the Chapel Library list is completed it will be distributed to the inmate population. The Inmate population then may elect to select these new items.

Thank you again and may you be blessed.

Rev. Stacy Allan Shaffer —Marienville, Pennsylvania



Prabhupada's Books total: 3,262

Breakdown:

Booklets: 2,067

Small: 664

Medium: 58

Big: 41

Maha-Big: 432

Books by other devotee authors: 159

BTGs: 2,096

BBT Art Calendars: 60

CDs: 195

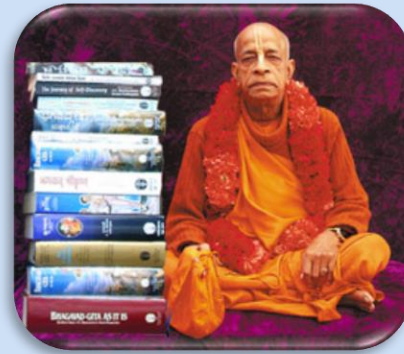
DVDs: 33

Japa Mala sets: 55

Neck beads: 41

Tilaka: 10 pieces

Harinama Chaddars: 10



GRAND TOTAL of all Books and BTGs in 2022: 5,517

Srila Prabhupada, ke, Jaya!!!

SURINAME PRISON PREACHING

Gopeshvara prabhu first contacted me last July, from Paramaribo, Suriname. He and his wife Gaurasakti dasi, are conducting a weekly jail program. Below is what Gopeshvara prabhush wrote:

I am one of the board member of the local temple in Paramaribo. We have only one temple in Surinam and one nama hatta in district Nickerie .

Suriname is A poor country with lots of people struggling for a daily meal. The income for a local workers is about 5 to 10 US dollar a day and the cost for living is higher than most European country, because 90 % of our products are imported from different countries.

The criminal rate is very high and a lot of young people become the victim of suicide, Suriname has the fourth highest suicide rate in the world .



done with bhakti Sastri course online . My age is now 63 years and I have some experience in life.

We have started our program already, and once every week we go to the prison. We also bring prasadam for them. We have three prisons in Suriname and one jail. I.am in Nickerie it is a nice district and here we have 75 inmates . Our program is visited by 25 inmates and we hope to extend our program in time to the 2 other prisons in Paramaribo that is the



I am running a few bhakti vriksha group in Suriname and I, am full time busy with preaching and reading Srila Prabhupada Books . I am almost



capitol of Suriname. There they have 300 inmates and in the next one there is about 200 inmates. Our language is Dutch and we get books from Italy or from Belgium Radhadesh . It is very difficult for the inmates to read and understand in English.

I have spoken to the director of the prison and he want me to come to show him the beads and books we want to distribute among the inmates. I don't think it will be a problem to give the inmates beads and books. This coming week I am invited to show the beads.



We are not allowed to take pictures inside so I am sending you a photo of outside the prison. My wife

Inmate Letter Excerpts

My name is William and I have been practicing Krishna consciousness for little more than a decade. I have been incarcerated for many years, since 2003, and by practicing the teachings of Bhagavad-Gita and Srimad-Bhagavatam, the Supreme Lord, Sri Krishna, has saw fit to deliver me. I feel I am free from the sufferings and miseries of my prison life (although still incarcerated). I now want to share, with others who are incarcerated, the way to true freedom through devotional service.

Also I direct other inmates to Swami Prabhupada as their spiritual guide and master for the greater knowledge and benefits of Krishna consciousness. I



also goes with me to distribute the prasadam.

I am very grateful for your help and advice . Hope to inspire a few inmates to change their life and maybe become a devotee. Most of them are following Christian and Muslim religion ,but they are really listening to the message of the Bhagavad-Gita and they ask questions.

Hope to give you very soon an update about our meeting with the director of the prison Hare Krsna



Your servant in the mission of Srila Prabhupada, Gopeshvara Dasa



am only trying to establish an interest and enthusiasm towards Krishna.

William S. —Ontario, Oregon

I am so, so thankful to you for sending us reading materials and teaching us Krishna consciousness. It's brought such peace into my life. Two other inmates have joined me on this path and we are all so, so thirsty for more knowledge. I'm a very new to this. Can you please send me a Bhagavad-Gita and any other Srila Prabhupada books you can?

I am starting a small shelf library and a study group with discussion amongst the three of us (for now!).

Trying to petition the chaplain and chapel library to open its own section of Krishna consciousness in the library too. This is what I needed to fill my voids inside, and my belief and faith in it all was instantaneous; unlike all other religious/spiritual endeavors. With this overwhelming peace, I'm no longer anxious and am off psych meds. It feels great. "I'm home" is the feeling closest to what it feels like. Thank you, thank you, thank you... A very thirsty devotee,

Brindel S. —Florida City, Florida

I want to tell you a bit about myself and how I came to be enchanted by Lord Krishna's beauty.

I grew up in Columbia, South America on a farm.

My mom had bought some art where Krishna, Arjuna and some other Vedic characters were displayed. I remember observing these beautiful faces in awe! I studied in my elementary years in Catholic schools but wasn't too enthusiastic about the whole religious thing.

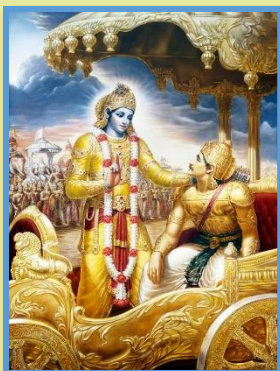
Fast forwarding to my coming to the USA and growing up without parents or my sister (as everyone was incarcerated). I promised to myself to

never participate in any criminal activity. Yet I joined a gang and ended up participating in crimes throughout my teenage years. Of course I went to jail but was always bailed out (it had to be God showing me the way and what not to do). I held jobs and provided a living for my girlfriend, her children and I, but Maya was stronger and had its hooks in me.

I thought I'd get control of my life and felt semi-okay selling drugs (I developed anxiety, depression, stress) but ended up in prison for 27 years.

In prison I had to find myself and still joined a gang, got into trouble, and decided to drop out. My spirit was nearly destroyed and I tried finding a path. I practiced Christianity, Native American and finally found Krishna, the Bhagavad-Gita, and a movie on Krishna's people.

These things brought me back to the years I spent looking at those pictures my mom had of Lord Krishna, those eyes looking at me with love and compassion and welcoming me to leave everything. Practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness in Federal prison is not easy as the most known religions are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Sometimes there isn't any literature, DVDs or anything relating to Krishna consciousness or even Hinduism, which is confused with Buddhism. But at the end, with Krishna's



blessing, I always found a way to praise and offer obeisances to our Lord.

I still fight my old ways and that's why I'm in the SHU (special housing unit) waiting for the approval of the region on my disassociation from the gang I belonged to years ago. It's a process that takes time, but the only gang I belong to now is Krishna's.

José A. —Ray Brook, New York

Dear (anonymous volunteer), I was just rereading the last letter. In it you had told me that you have the strength to resume your normal routine of chanting your rounds two days after the surgery. This was both inspiring to me and also a reminder to me how

merciful Krishna is to us that he would provide a way for us to practice our devotional service to him no matter what the circumstances.

Also, you spoke of one's fellow devotees, singing and chanting or playing audiotapes of chanting if one is in a coma or severe bodily pain. That a devotional atmosphere is created so that a sick devotee can quit the body in a perfect devotional atmosphere. This struck me right in the heart. That Krishna cares so

much for His devotees that even when they are physically unable He would provide a way to remember Him. It also speaks to the core tenet of a Vaishnava to direct others to Krishna and make sure that the environment for the sick devotee was provided for.

The art calendar has become a vital part of my practice over the last four years, as I use it not only to remember fasting days, but also as a visual focal point when chanting. It also serves as the trigger that every time I enter my cubicle and see it, it reminds me to always remember Krishna.

In closing, please know that I truly enjoyed the Forbidden Voices book you sent me. I could relate to so much in it. I've never written poetry before, however after seeing a few examples in the book by other inmates, I was inspired to try my hand at it. I try the best I can to express my devotion to Sri Krishna and my appreciation for IPM.

Scott G. —Beeville, Texas

I received the Spanish Bhagavad-Gita you sent, as well as the Spanish *Science of Self-Realization* and *Upadeshamṛta*. Thank you, Didi! All will be distributed nicely. I've already given a devotee from Honduras the Spanish Bhagavad-Gita as it is.

Janardan Dasa —Coleman, Florida

Pressing Need

The Prison Ministry needs someone to produce the monthly inmate newsletter, *Freedom Newsletter*. This person needs to be comfortable using Word.

It usually takes 5 to 8 hours a month to produce the newsletter.

For the first six months I will work closely with this person to train them on content and format.

Please contact me at: IskconPrisonMinistry@gmail.com

Your servant, Bhakti-lata Dasi

POEM CORNER

LOCKED AWAY TOO

By *Bhakta Scott Gardner* —Beeville, Texas

*Though I came to prison, through my own fault
Here I discovered something precious, locked away like in a vault
There was no other way, this lesson to me to teach
Krishna directed me to come here, so me He could reach
Through many a test and travail
His grace and mercy did prevail
He introduced Vaishnavas into my life
To show me how to get out of the struggle and strife
Through IPM U. Dasa I did meet
Who told me I should surrender at Sri Krishna's feet
Follow Prabhupada he instructed me
For he has the knowledge that will set you free
Chanting Maha Mantra as Swami said in his books
I gave it my all, until I trembled and shook
With goosebumps and hair standing on end, I cried out
From this ocean of birth and death, please pull me out
Now every day I fall at Sri Guru's lotus feet
To drink the nectar so nourishing and so very sweet
Chanting 16 rounds and praying three times a day
Prabhupada told us that this is the way
Also this is the path that was meant for me
Don't be blinded, don't fail to see
Don't let Maya, take you for a fool
In Martyaloka you are locked away too
Escape from the big prison house, it's not that hard a task
If we only follow Prabhupada and do what Krishna asks* 🌸



THANK YOU to ALL our SUPPORTERS!

Your generosity is what keeps this program going! ☺ Because of a senior moment, I may forget to mention someone, so please forgive me, and let me know so I can include your name in the next IPM NEWS.



Our donors since last newsletter:

Devotees of Silicon Valley
Dhira Govinda Dasa
Inmate Dennis Law
Inmate Shaqoon Johnson
Prema Manjari Dasi
Valerie Whelan



And our monthly Donors:

Amala Gaura Dasa
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Elizabeth Elson
Gene and Claudine Moore
Jitarati dasa
Kalindi Dasi (Hopping)
Maya Sudhana dasa
Mickey Singer
Pancaratra dasa & Atita Guna dasi
Pritam Dey
Ram Tulasi Dasa, Ananda Shakti Dasi



Rene Waisvisz
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Shashi Shefali Majmudar
Radha Vinod Dasa
Raina Dasa
Rāma Kīśora Dāsa
Śrutadeva Dasa and Deanna
Vamsidas Dasa
Vegavati Dasi
Vikram Kumar
Vraja Kishore Dasa
Yudhisthira Dasa
Anonymous (you know who you are:
thank you!)

4 Donation Options:

- 1) Send a check or postal money order to: **ISKCON Prison Ministry, PO Box 2676, Alachua, FL 32616**
- 2) Donate through PayPal at: www.paypal.me/IPM or look for IskconPrisonMinistry@gmail.com
- 3) Donate through pay.google.com to iskconprisonministry@gmail.com

For automatic, monthly donations, you can do so on our website IskconPrisonMinistry.org (with the PayPal button), or through your bank “Automatic Bill Pay” option, which is free and easy.

We will send you a **tax-deductible receipt** at the moment of the donation, provided you give us your legal name and mailing address.

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