



Katia Rocks

Link Letter no. 29 | December 2024

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Location: Florianópolis, Brazil



What I do: Through a church I helped start, I encourage people, particularly women, to connect with Christ



Bringing hope where people have given up on God and the church

Dear friends,

Thanks to the Lord's goodness, this year my family and I are preparing for a Christmas full of hope. Last year, at this time, I had just been diagnosed with cancer in my intestines, and my heart was full of uncertainties about the future. After emergency surgery, I spent the next eight months undergoing treatment, including chemotherapy. Now, just a few months later, I am in remission, with follow-ups every three months for the next five years. I praise God for his caring hand on me, because in the most difficult moments, I have felt him very close.

Despite the challenges of treatment, I've been able to continue with my responsibilities at Vineyard Floripa. I remain a part of the leadership team, involved in Sunday services, small groups, the women's group and the prison ministry.

The prison ministry in particular has been a great experience. There have been challenges, but also rewards, especially when we hear the testimonies of the women whose lives are being touched by the programme.

Recently, we concluded a course for a group at the female prison. This particular group was especially challenging, as most of them were very young. All 12 of them were in the same cell, each with a different background and conviction, from shoplifting to more serious crimes like murder. Some weeks, only a few of them were able to attend the course because others were being punished for bad behaviour. These punishments include being denied access to TV and radio for some weeks, being denied family visits and not being allowed to go to prison programmes.

It is disheartening to see that instead of fostering an environment that encourages redemption, growth, and transformation, the prison system often seems to prioritise punishment over rehabilitation. Unfortunately, the facility is also severely understaffed, which contributes to overcrowding and an environment of inadequate oversight.

Despite these challenges, we had the endorsement of the local criminal judge, who had not only recommended the course for all the prisons in Florianópolis but had also asked for it to be extended to 12 weeks instead of the original eight, allowing the inmates to earn more remission days for their sentences. However, despite this judicial recommendation, the female prison governor decided to cancel the course, with no clear date for when, or even if, we might be allowed to return.

This decision has been very upsetting. The course has been well received by the inmates, offering them



Joanna helping me to deliver some sanitary pads that women from church donated to the female prison

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To the edges**



a rare chance to experience hope, healing and purpose in the midst of their pain and despair. To have this opportunity taken away feels like a major setback. It is hard to understand why such little importance is placed on spiritual growth and transformation, which are essential to breaking the cycle of crime. These women, like all of us, deserve the opportunity to change.

Sadly, in many cases, prison authorities seem to treat the inmates as numbers or problems to be managed, rather than individuals with the potential for change. There is little regard for their human dignity and even less attention paid to providing the necessary tools for personal transformation.

During the last session of the course, I met a woman named T. She came to every class. She shared with me that she was doing her best to stay out of the drama and conflict that was common in her cell. She wanted to complete the course to earn remission for her sentence, as well as to grow spiritually.

T is in prison for fraud and is currently in the final phase of her court case. She comes from a Christian family and she shared with me how, when she was younger, she suffered a stroke that left her completely paralysed. She believes that God healed her through the constant prayers of her family. After her recovery, she fell into the trap of getting involved with people who sold lottery cards (a common scam in Brazil). What started as a way to make a quick buck grew into a lifestyle of greed and dishonesty, until she was caught and arrested.

Now, in prison, T reflects on how far she has strayed from the life God intended for her. She dreams of being a better mother to her children, someone they can be proud of rather than ashamed of. She has been very active in our sessions, always asking thoughtful questions and sharing how her routine in the cell has changed. She has started setting aside time for prayer and Bible reading, and her commitment to growing spiritually has been truly inspiring.

Not every woman on the course shares T's desire to get to know God more deeply, but we have still encountered many who are hungry for God. Some have been forgotten by their families and are isolated and desperate for hope. For these women, the course is a lifeline – a way to reconnect with God and find meaning even in the darkest of places.

I ask you to keep this ministry in your prayers. Next week, we are scheduled to meet with the criminal judge again in hopes of setting a new date to resume the course at the female prison. Unfortunately, the judge can only recommend the course; she does not have the authority to force the prison to allow it.

Please also keep the Vineyard Floripa community, my family and our health in your prayers. We are deeply grateful for all the support we have received and for God's faithfulness.

I finish this letter with gratitude to God, who is always faithful, and to all of you who have supported us here in Brazil. We wish you a very Merry Christmas and a New Year filled with God's blessings and peace.

With love, Katia, Joanna and Davi



Photos from top to bottom: T on the last day of the course; women's meeting in October, a time for sharing and praying; with Joanna and Davi on a day out; Sunday service at Vineyard Floripa



Bringing hope where people have given up on God and church

I've loved hearing recent mission stories from others in my area of work. Jonathan in Ecuador has grown spiritually and got his first job as he's gained life skills, and a Breakfast Club in Hull celebrated 25 years of food, community and steps of faith. Read more at churchmissionsociety.org/bringhope

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