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Location: Brazil

What we do: Working with local church partners in Florianópolis, helping people in challenging contexts to find hope in Jesus

Discovering creative ways to share the hope of Jesus with people unconnected to church

Dear friends,

We are grateful to be able to share an update on some recent developments across our mission in Florianópolis.

One of the most significant moments came during what we assumed would be a routine Saturday morning prison visit.

"You're 20 minutes late!" the prison guard exclaimed as we arrived at the gate.

We were slightly puzzled. We were exactly on time, expecting to begin our usual evangelistic work along the perimeter fence with the men inside the prison.

Together with the men after the service in the prison chapel

"You're supposed to be in the chapel right now!" the guard insisted.

"The chapel?" I replied.

What followed took the three of us completely by surprise. As we were escorted through the prison grounds, it became clear that something significant had shifted. Our routine visit was suddenly an unexpected opportunity.

I (Andy) am learning that this is often how things unfold in this mission; unexpectedly and without announcement. God is at work quietly and steadily, without us needing to force outcomes. We also see this clearly in Acts 16, where Paul's direction changes not through planning but through an unexpected opening from God. In the same way, we simply found ourselves stepping into what God had already opened before us.

As we entered what was formerly a training room, we found ourselves in a chapel. Around 25 men were already seated, waiting for the first church service to begin. What we stepped into that morning was the beginning of something we, along with many of you who support and pray for this work, had been praying for over the last couple of years.

Throughout our involvement in this mission, we have sensed God leading us beyond routine prison visits towards more sustained discipleship and pastoral care. We have prayed for ongoing opportunities to teach God's Word, including through the Prison Fellowship International course. Ultimately this vision points towards the model Christ established of the local church gathering and aligns with our partners in the Brazilian Baptist church who long to see a church in every penitentiary. Taking this vision forward, over the last 12–15 months we have engaged prison governors across the region with proposals for church services to be established within the prison system. The prospect of approval often felt more than ambitious. We received feedback such as, "It can't be done," or, "There is no real appetite for this right now." Even though Brazilian law allows for regular

religious services within prisons, this is rarely allowed in practice.

What we have now stepped into at Palhoça penitentiary is the fruit of prayer, relationship-building and faithfulness in our work. Regular church services have been taking place on Saturday mornings since March. Together with the men, we worship, open the Scriptures, preach the gospel and lead prayer ministry. Each gathering is a profound encouragement and a living testimony to God's love at work.

This means that each prison we serve is now at a different stage. In one, we continue evangelism through a hatch or in a courtyard. In three prisons, the discipleship course is established, providing structured teaching over 12 weeks. And now, in Palhoça, regular church services are underway. We are not doing all this simultaneously; rather, we go where the work is – sometimes with Pastor Antônio, sometimes to courses in progress, but always to Saturday morning church services!

Together, these developments represent a growing and holistic approach to prison ministry across the region. Palhoça now serves as the model that we hope to replicate in other prisons. With that in mind, we met with Governor Flavio of São Pedro de Alcântara, the region's maximum security prison, together with the chief of security, Adelmo. We were encouraged by their willingness to engage seriously with the proposal. However, we learned that the prison is currently operating at around 150 per cent capacity, and this level of overcrowding makes approval impossible at this time due to safety concerns.

It was nevertheless a disappointing outcome, as I had hoped we might begin something simple and easy for prison staff to implement. I had proposed a Friday evening gathering for around 25 men who already meet for Bible study after work. Many of these men have already completed the Bible course I lead in other establishments.

At the end of our conversation, Adelmo turned to me with a smile and said, "We cannot forget that Brazil is a nation of miracles." It was a gentle reminder to keep hoping, and that this is not a "no" but a "not yet".

At the end of our meeting, Pastor Antônio invited me to pray. I prayed simply that, in God's timing, this establishment would become a place not only of incarceration, but also of encounter – where men discover forgiveness, and begin lives marked by restoration in Christ.

For now, we are required to wait, but we continue to hold the vision with patience and faith, trusting God with the timing.

We are grateful for prayers regarding the women's prison. After a long period of resistance from the previous director towards our work, there is now a change in leadership. This renews the possibility for us to re-engage later this year.

We are encouraged by the progress within the Vineyard church. We have continued to strengthen the leadership structure. We were pleased to receive Pastor Marcelo and his family from Vineyard Brasília, who preached and greatly encouraged the congregation. Marcelo has kindly agreed to act as my local supervisor, for which I am very grateful. We look forward to returning to the UK in mid-August. We will spend time with family and visit some of our supporting churches. These opportunities to reconnect and share are always a great encouragement.

Thank you once again for standing with us in prayer and your support. We are deeply grateful to walk this journey with you.

Andy, Kati and Eva

Photos from top to bottom: *With Pastor Marcelo and family from Vineyard Brasília; reunited with Jorge, baptised course graduate, after release; Eva helping Mummy with shopping at the greengrocer's*

Discovering creative ways to share the hope of Jesus

We love to hear from other CMS partners sharing the hope of Jesus with people not yet connected to church. Read Andy Roberts's reflection on his time with the charity ReVive in Brazil and hear his thoughts on how mission needs to keep creatively changing. And be challenged by a thought-provoking piece on the role of migration in mission. Read and learn more about creative mission at **churchmissionsociety.org/bringhope**

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