

Update: Peace Education Program in Maryland

[The TPRF Peace Education Program](#) (PEP) is bringing Prem Rawat's message of peace inside the walls of prisons around the world. Inmates and prison officials alike have expressed their appreciation and enthusiasm for the program.

Chris Taney, Luis and Clara Lopez, and Linda Fox-Novak have formed a volunteer team to implement PEP at the Montgomery County Jail in Maryland. Chris, Linda, and Luis have written the following reports to bring our readers up to date with developments in the past year.

Chris Taney: "One Year Later"

It has been just over a year since we started the Peace Education Program classes at the Montgomery County Jail in Maryland. The jail was built in 2005 and is home to just over 1,000 men, women, and juveniles. Most are awaiting sentencing. The average length of incarceration is between 12 and 18 months.

When we first started in September 2011, there was only one PEP class in Spanish. Now, Luis and Clara Lopez monitor a class in Spanish, and I have a class in English. Linda Fox-Novak, a new PEP team member, has started a class in the women's unit. The classes run between one and two hours and comprise a curriculum specifically created for use in correctional and educational settings.

It took us over a year of working with the administration of the jail to get the classes approved. So we have actually been affiliated with the jail for over two years. It's a good feeling to walk down the hallways and bump into the Volunteer Coordinator, Education Director, or a Corrections Officer and hear them say, "How are you doing? How's your program going?" We also run into inmates who have graduated from previous classes, and it's always nice to catch up with them.

The Montgomery County Jail is close to Washington, D.C., and a number of volunteers who live in the area have offered to help out with the PEP program there. Some contribute financially, and others have offered to print materials to distribute. The inmates enjoy taking something to read with them when they go back to their cells. This makes it necessary for us to keep a constant supply of high-quality print materials on hand.

The DVDs tend to generate a lot of interest in the class. It's a real pleasure to listen to the inmates share their thoughts, feelings, and impressions about the subjects that Prem Rawat talks about. Many inmates bring a pen and composition book to class and take careful notes.

I remember one person saying how much he enjoyed the classes because they weren't focused on problems. He described how many of the programs offered in the correctional facility focus on an individual's problems. He felt it was a relief to be able to attend a class that offered solutions that

could be found inside.

Often, people will ask if their cellmate or someone in their unit can come to the class. "I think he'd really like to hear this. Can you put him on the list?"

After seeing a photograph of Prem Rawat addressing hundreds of thousands of people in India, you could hear an exclamation of amazement, "WOW!!"

Women's Class: Linda Fox-Novak

"A Journey of Kindness"

The Peace Education Program was launched for the women inmates at MCCF in August of this year. This area of the facility has a considerably smaller population in comparison to the men's section, and the numbers fluctuate based on their length of stay.

The housing area is much smaller, and the women have fewer opportunities available to them. Many are required to attend mandatory classes provided by the facility, and in our class one day someone said to the others, "I wish they would let everyone take this class because it is much more helpful. It should be mandatory. You feel so much better after this class." And they all agreed!

Each week someone comments, "I wish we didn't have to wait so long between classes. Why can't we have this class more times in a week?" (We're working on it!) It's a joy to see the calm on their faces at the end of the period. The Prem Rawat Foundation is bringing such a beautiful gift to all who are interested, and I get to witness the kindness Prem Rawat shares with everyone.

Spanish Class: Luis Lopez

My wife Clara Lopez and I started the Peace Education classes in Spanish more than one year ago, after more than a year of dealing with protocols, procedures, and paperwork.

It has been a delightful experience to see these guys enjoying the classes in a very comfortable and friendly environment. After the DVD screenings the class members can comment or formulate questions. Unlike a typical class, no homework is required. The hope is that people will enjoy the program, and we can see in the eyes of class participants that they surely do.

The Spanish classes have been attended by 10 to 15 students each week. The students listen to the DVDs with remarkable concentration and attention, and most of the time their comments are limited to just few words of admiration, respect, and gratitude toward Prem Rawat.

We have become very popular in the correctional facility. The staff knows us very well.

It is a really rewarding experience to introduce these people to Prem Rawat's message and to see how their expressions change throughout the weeks. Their smiles and shining eyes say more than a thousand words.

