Valdeci Ferreira, volunteer for more than 30 years, received the Social Entrepreneur of the Year award last November, a very prestigious award in Brasil. He is the director of the federation that unites the APAC (Associations for the Protection and Assistance of Prisoners). Today in Brasil, there are about fifty such Associations. To be admitted, the prisoner [someone “in recovery”] must be sentenced definitively, must have spent time in a traditional jail, and must request to enter.

One day he told us the story of Washington, someone “in recovery”. “He was very aggressive; we had had so many difficulties with him: he did not want to do anything and his attitude was contagious for the group. We were ready to transfer him, when there was one of our ‘Days of Freedom with Christ,’ which is one of the twelve pillars of our method. Washington was the first in the front row, only because he was forced to go. We were in a room where there are eight doors that open and close one after the other. When I asked: ‘Why don’t you escape?’ he jumped up: ‘Because the doors are closed.’ Then I gave the order to open them. One by one. ‘Why don’t you go now?’ ‘And who can guarantee that outside there will not be anyone to catch me?’ ‘You don’t trust us? Go out and bring back something to tell me that you went outside.’ He got up, and left. Absolute silence. Those were the longest five minutes of my life. Washington came back, with a branch in his hand. I asked him: ‘Why did you come back? You’ve spent so many years in jail…,’ but he started to cry: ‘No one ever trusted me.’” And Valdeci concluded: “Love can recuperate everything. Starting from a name and an encounter.”

1 Fraternidade brasileira de assistência aos condenados.
* M. Montrasi, “Una nuova paternità per sperare”, from Aleteia.org.