

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE COMMITTEE ON INSTITUTIONAL WORK IN CALIFORNIA

Selected Chaplain and Corresponding Chaplain Fruitage Reports December 2021 – February 2022

Chaplain: Another COVID virus shutdown of prisons in California. One is tempted to think this is the “new normal.” Reminds me of the “Godzilla” fires last summer where I live in the northern Sierras. It was called “A Big Palooza” because several monster wildfires conjoined into one big deliriously consuming Godzilla-like fire that fed on its destructive rage, leaping over large bodies of water, consuming townships and creating smoke plumes that looked Godzilla. Impressed? Where I lived there were long lines at the gas pumps and people were all about bumping into one another in fear. I was one of them, thinking, Where to go? What shall I take with me? What to leave behind in a panic. And then I stopped, and thought, this is fear, it’s all fear-based, it’s feeding on fear. The nothing monster that appears to be an all-consuming entity is feeding on our “run for your lives” FEAR. I thought of Franklin Roosevelt addressing our sovereign nation during the Depression with “The only thing to fear is FEAR itself.” And with that I retreated to my study and read the chapter “Christian Science Practice.” From the reading I became emboldened in my thought and not at all impressed by the rearing up manifestations of mortal mind that, like this monster fire, feeds on itself. Like David with his one smooth stone, I walked back out to my front yard, faced the monster, and shouted out, “ENOUGH!” A few moments after, a breeze picked up that within minutes became a strong northeasterly wind, and that wind blew Godzilla back on itself to choke and die. Threat removed. Three days later came a hard rain to take care of the rest. I submit that Christian Scientists are “first responders,” leaving the other responders to clean up after.

ENOUGH with the specter and fear of contagious disease. As for the Prison: There is no lapse from and then return to the Word of God. The Word of God is omnipresent within the walls and community of the Prison. During this reporting period I was able to visit once before the “shutdown.” As always, I come away from my chaplain visits enlightened within the power and intelligence of Soul. My exchanges with the incarcerated are right out of the gospel of Love. It is this way because I see those I work with the way God sees them: universal in adaptations and bestowals.

Corresponding Chaplain: All the individuals with whom I correspond express deep gratitude for the healing letters written to them along with the Bible Lessons and periodicals. One individual, CJ, reports a full year of spiritual growth and regeneration, having gone from a sense of hopelessness and illness to a viewpoint of optimism, hope, renewal, and purpose. CJ expresses profound gratitude for the spiritual support and for being made to feel truly blessed. CJ has asked to pray for me, his Chaplain, and I have stated I would be most grateful for his prayers. Another individual, JS, describes the fluctuating claims of discouragement and anger yielding to a sense of hope and self-worth. This guy is ever so grateful to have the support of a Christian Science corresponding chaplain to bring a spiritual view of life right where all the

negative claims of prison life appear to be. He expresses his deep desire to learn how to pray more effectively, and he greatly appreciates having a spiritual mentor. JS states he loves the book *Science and Health* and is reading it every day. JS referred his cellmate, LP, to me since LP sees how his cellmate is benefiting and feeling supported.

Chaplain: I started the month of December with great anticipation and hope. I was looking forward to taking a “deep dive” into the Christmas story with the eight inmates and a couple of their family members with whom I’d been in touch. The first full week of December was very promising. Each of the inmates I was able to see had done their assigned homework with pages filled in their journals which they eagerly shared with me. We were studying “God the Preserver of Man” and I had shared the thought with the inmates that God didn’t just create us, dump us here, and leave us to our own devices. I asked them to make a list acknowledging all the ways God had shown His/Her great care for them. I also asked them to make a list of life decisions they had made that they could see as God-directed decisions and also decisions they had made that were self-willed...and reverse those as never occurring in God’s harmonious universe. Those two things were the basis of our conversation when we met one-on-one. On December 12th the week culminated in a Christian Science service with a Chaplain’s assistant. The service was very productive and inspiring with each inmate participating in English or Spanish!

Corresponding Chaplain: My daily prayer affirms the ever-presence of divine Love with each man and worker at the jail. Love is not dependent on a “person” for its distribution. I know there isn’t a person “out there” who needs the information that I have “over here.” God, Love, is All!

Chaplain: We had visits to the Prison in the first two weeks of the month; our scheduled Bible Lesson Study group is on Thursday afternoons. We had three women attend, one who had attended in November. We had time to read through parts of the Bible Lesson and discuss it. One young woman was interested in understanding how we use *Science and Health* and it seemed to help her to explain that we study it to enable us understand the teachings and healings of Jesus and the science behind his healing work. She asked for a copy, and we will give her one as soon as we are approved to bring them in. We had a sweet moment with one older woman in the group who seemed a bit distracted but was willing and able to take a turn reading part of the Lesson. When I called her by her name and asked if she would read, she seemed genuinely touched and thanked me for using her name. She said all the women in the facility just refer to her as “old lady,” and it meant a lot to have us use her name. It’s a simple thing, but it felt like a way we were honoring her dignity and a small way to comfort her.

Corresponding Chaplain: I corresponded with seven different inmates this month. An inmate who was transferred to a different state sent one last letter (he now has a Corresponding Chaplain writing to him in his new state) expressing his gratitude and letting me know what a difference the study of Christian Science has made in his life. He said he feels hopeful about his future now, instead of despair. Another inmate let me know how important the subscriptions he is receiving are to him, and that he shares them with others. And I know that to be true because another inmate I’m writing to said he learned about our program from this very inmate. An inmate

and I take turns suggesting passages to read so we can respond in our next letter. Last time he recommended Ezekiel 34, which I read and we discussed. We assign and share “homework” in this way – it’s fun and beneficial. All the inmates are progressing and always express their heartfelt gratitude. Serving as a Corresponding Chaplain is a rewarding endeavor in so many ways!

Corresponding Chaplain: One letter received and one letter and package sent to my corresponding and ever-so-earnestly-receiving inmate at the State prison. Our correspondence was on the ‘still small voice” / the omnipresence of God that speaks to us in intimate ways, finding us just where we are, and meeting our every need in our personal spiritual journey. He is so receptive the Word of God that I see a transformative healing in the works. He is currently reading *Science and Health* cover to cover, studies the many Bible lessons I send, and responds as a seriously engaged student of spiritual insights, so that I also benefit from our exchange. A true student of Christ healing.

Chaplain: A young Jail inmate I’ve been seeing, who’s been a most enthusiastic student for the past several months, had his two most serious charges abruptly dropped, resulting in a new scheduled release date in April 2022 (he had been previously facing three to five years in prison). Another inmate, who had been facing a life sentence in prison, had his sentence reduced to eight years, which after time served in the Jail, may only require a few additional years in prison. Several inmates expressed gratitude for how helpful Christian Science concepts were to them as they had to endure a 7-10 day lockdown due to a widespread Covid outbreak earlier in the month. Some of the inmates I’m visiting are getting to know one another, helping each other on their spiritual journeys, while others are helping cellmates/neighbors who might be struggling with various issues. One of the Jail inmates, who I’ve been seeing off-and-on for more than five years, tragically took her own life in the women’s pod. I met with virtually all the other inmates of that pod later that same day and used some of the ideas in the Bible and *Science and Health* to help them work through their grief and to see their own situation from a more spiritual perspective. Even the on-duty deputy seemed benefited and uplifted from this exchange.

Corresponding Chaplain: I received a very warm and grateful letter for all the packets and notes sent, and all the love an inmate felt from all of us making these packets possible. But the inmate was feeling that he already has all he needs (except church services which he would love). Otherwise, he says he feels “comfortable and safe” there in the prison, has saved up the Bible Lessons to keep reading, and requested that I discontinue sending the packets! So it is a wonderful time to share applicable truths with him about the real source of safety; fresh views that come from the new Bible Lessons weekly; learning who he really is – who God’s man is and what that man’s spiritual mission and “niche in time and eternity” is! I confessed that my “job” is to “wake him up” from human comfortableness (and apathy) to a new view of himself full of opportunity to freely expand his thinking and his range of options from the very limited “prison” to the joy of serving God in God’s own way—a way he may never have thought about (or words to that effect.) I know that God’s angels are uplifting him at all points, every moment, hour, day, week, month and so on because divine Love is irresistible, the one God, the only Mind or Life. I gladly “step back” so that he and God can commune together uninterrupted. What a joyful and

tender but firm experience is going on between God and His child, disguised as a prisoner at present!

Chaplain: An inmate was telling me all about the fast that he was on. He was on this fast to know God better and be spiritually sharper. While I could not tell him what to do, I ended up telling him the healing I had of anorexia. We are never dealing with a physical situation, but always dealing with thought. The thought that woke me up and healed me is from page 258 in *Science and Health*. He turned to his *Science and Health* and I turned to mine and we read together: “Man is more than a material form with a mind inside, which must escape from its environments in order to be immortal. Man reflects infinity, and this reflection is the true idea of God.” This gave us lots to talk about! Like other inmates I visit, he wanted to understand how to pray more effectively. He said he has been working with the Lord’s Prayer up to seven times a day and wanted to feel that presence of God. We talked about the importance of being childlike in our prayers, that is, being totally open, curious, eager, “expectant and joyful,” ready for God to reveal Himself. We never need to push on our prayers! But yield to God’s presence. He wanted to know what made me different from all the other people who had visited him from other religions. He said there was nobody like me and wanted to know why I was so full of faith and light. I told him that it was Christian Science. Christian Scientists expect something of their prayers, we know that Christian Science treatment results in regeneration, reformation, and healing. They are not just nice words for other people to hear and think that we are Christians. It is living our faith every day and in all ways that may set us apart from people who practice other systems.

Another inmate expressed concern about Covid and asked if I knew of anyone who had been healed of Covid. In fact, I do! I told him of a couple of healings that I knew about firsthand from people that had called for help. I was even able to mention a healing related to Covid from the other institution I visit! This was a special moment of getting to tell an inmate about a healing experienced by another inmate! He was very heartened to know that Christian Science heals Covid, and that nothing is beyond God’s reach. We talked about how to address fear and how to address the thought of Covid, not being distracted by what seems to be a disease or pandemic.

Corresponding Chaplain: One dear student states that in the past year he went from feeling depressed, sick with Covid, and as low as can be, to feeling fully supported, realizing he is indeed a child of God, that he is spiritual, and he has a purpose of life—to pray for others. He also says that he has the “dire need to surrender my ego of fear, judgment, hate, and indifference, and to this degree I feel God’s presence in my heart, and become more receptive to a purposeful and boundless capacity to surrender to Love.” He states that he has a growing understanding of the truths as expressed in the Bible Lessons and feels he is more and more receptive to the Word of God.

Chaplain: One inmate had a sudden pain in his foot and declared, “No!”, knowing that he did not have to agree to a suggestion of pain because he is a spiritual idea who cannot suffer if he doesn’t accept it. He was thrilled to share this because the pain vanished instantly. It was his first physical healing and it showed him that he has dominion over his thought and body. Another

inmate asked for prayers for his girlfriend who'd been diagnosed with Covid and was suffering greatly on a ventilator. She was afraid and so was he. He got special permission from her for me to treat her. I showed him how I would pray for her, and we prayed together. By the following week, his girlfriend was improved, but what he was most ecstatic about was his total release from a sense of false responsibility; he felt what it was like to entirely trust her to God, and he felt so free and inspired. People were stopping him in the halls to ask what was up with him because he seemed like a different person. He was surprised that praying for someone else could liberate and heal him!

Chaplain: An inmate revealed that he was to be released in March and was considering doing drug runs because they paid up to \$6,000-\$8,000 a night. He wondered what I thought about this. I very directly told him what I thought—that he has a tender heart and wants to do good and bless others, but for every individual he supplied drugs to, he was not only destroying their life, but their family's and their communities. Imagine supplying multiple people with drugs, the damage that is doing to our whole community. On the other hand, I told him to think about how *not* dealing for just one night could be the opportunity to turn around one life and what a difference that would make to so many. His eyes were big, he'd never thought about the direct and indirect consequences of those who were using the drugs he "supplied." He told me he then didn't want to have relationships with his old homies (gang members), but wanted to have real friendships and relationships. But, he said, people were starting to call him "soft," even some of the females at the jail. We talked about Jesus' softness and how it did not make him vulnerable but formidable since Love is the only power. The inmate very much appreciated this line of reasoning. What stands out to me with these visits are the deep discussions, the willingness to ask hard questions, the curiosity and readiness to dig and challenge their current convictions. It is truly remarkable and the kind of inspiration that keeps me going all week!

Corresponding Chaplain: An inmate found a Bible Lesson from our committee "floating around" in his dorm. He used the Committee address on the Lesson to contact us and ask for Bible study materials and to be put on our mailing list. I sent him a welcoming letter along with two Bible Lessons and a description of my duties as a Corresponding Chaplain. He will also receive from the Committee a Sentinel and a Monitor Weekly. I assured him that God already knows and loves him right now, that we don't have to DO something in order to be beloved and cherished.

Chaplain: Pure and immediate is the presence of the Christ. Pure and immediate is the feeling I get in my chaplain work. Pure and immediate in a maximum-security prison. Pure and immediate in the prison chapel, where I sat with 2 inmates separately, one-on-one. They had requested "prayer treatment" and told their stories: one from Guatemalan highlands of Mayan ancestry who'd cross the US border as a teen and worked illegally in the garment industry; became lost in the streets of Los Angeles, befriended by the "gang culture," shot a rival gang member, now serving 50 years. The other a Black man from south central LA, also gang violence related. Chaplains come with a fitness to receive the pure and immediate: the presence of the Christ. I say, "It was not you, nor was it your parents, that delivered you to this isolation, but that the works of God be manifest in you, here and now, pure and immediate, right now in this room, the presence of Christ healing known and felt." Right out of the gospel stories. We're living them.