

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE COMMITTEE ON INSTITUTIONAL WORK IN CALIFORNIA

Selected Chaplain and Corresponding Chaplain Fruitage Reports January – March 2023

Chaplain: Two new incarcerated women started coming to the main yard services at the encouragement of one of them that has been very impressed with Mary Baker Eddy's *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (which one of them had and was reading). They both have been reading it now. They were both in a room where they felt threatened by an aggressive cellmate. We talked about our home in God, divine Mind, and how Jesus demonstrated safety in the midst of hostility. Within two weeks, they were moved into new rooms with quieter and more cooperative cellmates, and one was eventually transferred to another facility which she had expressed a desire for. Reading *Science and Health* was bringing more stability to the thought and experience of the one woman who stayed at this facility, and she stated she was so happy to have had her faith renewed and re-invigorated by what she was finding in Christian Science.

Chaplain: After my shift in the Chaplain Library each week, I visited with the men on my list, which now contains 6 names. During our sessions, the men raised some interesting questions: How long did it take to build the ark? How can I get closer to God? Why is the word "Science" put with the word "Christian?"

For the first question, I was able to do some online research when I got home, and took some printouts with me the next week. For the second question, I suggested that it wasn't the correct question. Asking how to get closer to God would require that we first be separate from Him. Since God is everywhere present, we cannot ever be separate. Instead, our prayer (the answer) celebrates our oneness with Him – now and always. Several examples were helpful, including how a shadow cannot be separated from its source, nor a reflection from its source. I've been talking with the man who asked the third question for nearly 2 years; we laughed that he was just asking about the word "Science" now. To answer him, we talked about the laws of natural science a student demonstrates in a chemistry class. While the exercise is called an experiment, it's really a demonstration – the students and teacher know the expected result. The same holds true with the laws of God. They are demonstrable, as shown by the prophets, Christ Jesus and his disciples, and present-day disciples. We talked a bit about the testimonies found in the periodicals and shared each week at testimony meetings. And also, the testimonies in the back of our textbook that resulted from reading the book.

As part of my desire to have the men read the Bible Lesson during the week, I bring a topic from the Lesson each week to discuss. For example, one week the Lesson included the story of Jacob – at first running away from home to escape from his angry older brother, and then getting back on the right track and returning home, only to find Esau with 400 men coming to see him! Thinking about the text in terms of our lives today, sometimes WE may feel like we are finally

back on track and turning to God for direction when a huge problem confronts us. As we learn from the story of Jacob, we, too, can continue to move forward with confidence as we trust God.

Another week the Lesson included the passage from Romans 8:38. In the KJV it says, “For I am persuaded...” I prefer the JB Phillips translation (which I shared with the men): “For I am absolutely convinced...” Wow! What a difference to be “absolutely convinced” that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Chaplain: I made two in-person visits, where we provide a Sunday type service, or more like a Sunday School service, as we read the Bible Lesson, ask questions, and pause and share ideas on how the passages from the Bible Lesson are impacting our lives. One individual is very consistent in attending each week and enjoys sharing the insights and understanding he is gaining. He’s the fella that gave copies of *Science and Health* to his two daughters. He states that our CS visits are like an oasis, a safe place to feel accepted and to grow spiritually. He shares that, although other guys tease him (about his relatively new turn to religion) or tempt him (with drugs), he feels a strong sense of conviction and strength with the power of prayer. Another individual says that he loves reading the book of Matthew, especially chapter 5 in the Sermon on the Mount. He shares that he needs CS and these weekly sessions to keep him on track. A newer guy attending appears so sweet and gentle and promised to bring another man to our services, which happened last week.

Chaplain: One incarcerated individual that I correspond with says that the Bible Lessons and Sentinels received and the letters from the chaplain have offered tremendous support. This individual says they are transgender and this has resulted in persecution and neglect. They say that their family has no contact with them and they feel very alone, except for the Christian Science support. They have recently moved to a lower level of supervision and feel this progress is due to the prayers and support of the Christian Science chaplain and their study of the Christian Science materials provided.

Corresponding Chaplain: This individual replied right away to my letter sent two weeks ago. He loves to receive the Monitor Weekly, Sentinels, and Bible Lessons I send. He liked an article in a Sentinel so much that he sent it to his former landlady who has been a good friend for many years. He had a copy of *Prose Works* by MBE in his previous location but it didn’t arrive with his belongings to this location. He is concerned for his beloved dog, because this person is not able to keep it for him, and he thought the friend may pass on soon. He also mentioned a wish for companionship and thought that maybe his age was a deterrent. I said that his dog is one of God’s creatures, and he could pray for it, and that age is no automatic reason for not finding companionship. As God’s beloved son, all things are possible.

Chaplain: As I was told when I began this chaplain work: “See those you work with the way God sees them: intact, blameless, untouched, and hid with Christ to serve.” One individual with whom I spoke at his cell during this reporting period, spoke of strangers as “angels entertained unawares.” He was referring to us at the cell door—the sense of the immediacy of the Christ presence. I am continuously struck by such encounters in my chaplaincy encounters at the

prison. It never fails: something like that is always delivered, it seems, right out of the Bible stories themselves.

Corresponding Chaplain: The man I'm writing to has asked for a *Science and Health* and received it this month. He also receives subscriptions to the full text Bible lessons, the Sentinel, and the Monitor. He's so appreciative. He doesn't ask many questions, just tells me how he is and where he's working (the bakery). In his recent letter he simply said he was "in a good place." So I shared some thoughts on "place" and where we belong and that we get blessings and love from God wherever we are.

Chaplain: We've been so grateful to be back at this facility on a regular basis, although holding services on the intake yard A has been sporadic due to difficulties at the prison with staff calling in sick. They seem to be experiencing the same belief as the much of the labor force with the claim of a lack of work ethic since the pandemic, so I am giving that prayer. However, the A yard sergeant has been very friendly and accommodating, which is a huge blessing. The former sergeant, who had exhibited discriminatory behavior toward us, has been put on special assignment elsewhere in the prison and we have not encountered him again on A yard. Other good news is that the services that we have been able to give have been met with a high interest in Christian Science, and good reports from the incarcerated individuals and staff, and commendation from the Rabbi. We've had 15 requests for *Science and Health*. We've also had some improvement on issues where prayer was requested by an individual. And I have been meeting one-on-one with a longtime attendee of the services as she has an appointment with the parole board on the 14th. Prayer about discernment and justice on this would be appreciated. This is the first time the Rabbi has acknowledged that an individual has the right to and need for one-on-one time with the chaplain of their choice. This is a huge improvement. He also offered to write a letter of support and provided credit to an individual for their faithful attendance at the CS services.

Corresponding Chaplain: This report will focus on an incarcerated individual I have corresponded with for over two years who believes/hopes he will be released soon. He is completing an application with Embraced Fully to receive support from an Angel Team when he's released. He is a perfect candidate for this assistance because he has totally embraced Christian Science while incarcerated. He is a Mother Church member and conducts a Bible study class and a Christian Science church service each week with up to 27 participants. He carries his *Science and Health* with him, and if an individual is interested, he'll open his textbook and read from whichever "God-directed" page he opens to. My nickname for him is "Paul," a name he really likes.

Chaplain: I made a special effort to get to the facility early in the week because of the very wet, windy storms expected to start the next day. I had three individuals to visit that day. I was not able to visit two of them because an individual had escaped and the jail was put on lockdown. Fortunately, I had started visits early that day, before the escape happened, so I was able to visit one man. The visit with him was very interesting. He mentioned others in his unit sometimes gave him a hard time about our (lack of) popularity, and that some said we are a cult. I replied

that if we don't seem popular, at least we are in good company. Jesus wasn't popular in many circles either, although that improved after word got out of his healing works and that he was the Messiah. He left towns where he was not welcome, shaking the dust off his feet as he left, and the established churches rejected him to the point of crucifixion. We discussed that popularity doesn't necessarily mean something is the right, or best, thing. I gave the example that we generally are the only family on our block walking out to our car to go to church on Sunday morning, but I don't believe that means it isn't the right/best thing to do. As far as being a cult, I shared that Christian Science doesn't do the things commonly associated with cults: worship their leader (we appreciate, love and respect Mary Baker Eddy, but we don't worship her); try to separate people from family/friends; and pressure people to contribute considerable wealth/property to the cult. We are a very Christian church! We worship God and Christ only, no false gods or idols. We do study the entire Bible, but especially focus on doing our best to understand and follow the things Jesus said, taught, and did – not cult behavior at all! We talked about the common comment, "Oh, you're that church that doesn't believe in doctors." I told him we appreciate what doctors are trying to do and think they are good people working to help others. I explained that the option to use medical help is a personal decision, and is not dictated by the church. However, I personally always choose to pray first, and when the problem is handled I just don't need to go to the doctor. He thought that made good sense. The man has been sharing information about Christian Science with others in his unit and says two of his friends have signed up for visits.

Chaplain: What a difference I saw today in one woman! When I first started visiting her, she listened intently, but cried throughout the visit. After several weeks of that, she was able to visit without crying. I always asked how she was doing and one day she said she was very taken aback when I first talked about God's love for her, that He was always with her, loving her, protecting her, even in the jail. And she said, with a quiet smile, she was starting to feel His presence. It has been several months of regular weekly visits since then. When I came in today, I could see her bouncing as she walked towards the visiting booth. I said I was glad to see her doing so well and asked what was going on for her. She said it was because she was so glad to see me and was looking forward to our visit. Such a lovely demonstration, such a change! She loves Bible stories, so today we talked about the woman with the issue of blood for 12 years. I talked about some of the customs of the area so she could fully appreciate the courage and faith of the woman and how special Jesus' reaction to her was, including breaking some of their customs. Another individual had a court date the following week in which he expected to be released. We talked about his plans, should that happen. He was thinking of a small business he could start to be able to make some money using his artistic skills. The subject of following-the-rules vs. doing-things-under-the-table came up. I shared with him the Biblical statement, "As ye sow, so shall ye reap," as something he might consider as he makes plans, and explained what that meant in practical terms. If you plant an acorn, you get an oak tree. Then we looked at the 7 synonyms of God. If you plant love, you get back lots of love. The same is true for Truth and Principle. Whatever you want to experience in your life, however you want to be treated, be sure that is what you are planting.

Chaplain: One topic I discussed with each man one week was the account from Daniel 3 – the three Hebrew boys who refused to bow down to the golden image. Sometimes we may find

ourselves up against a big challenge, and our prayer may be to ask God that we don't need to go through it. Thinking about the furnace situation, if the boys had prayed to be spared from going into the furnace, they might think that prayer didn't work. However, they were able to walk THROUGH the "valley of the shadow of death" with God, and found themselves untouched when they got out. The same holds true for each of us. A new thought struck me: other people benefit by witnessing our victories. In this example, not only did the king see the Christ, but he proclaimed "that every people, nation, and language" only praise "the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego." Right in the middle of a trying circumstance, we can rejoice in God's allness, and know others will have their eyes opened to see the Christ (reality revealed), too.

A man is getting ready for trial. When his lawyer asked why he wouldn't accept the bargain offered, the man replied that he was following God's direction to proceed with a trial and trust Him. The lawyer could not understand how or why someone would turn wholeheartedly to God, and is having the man examined by the mental health team. Just like the Hebrew boys, we today can trust in God, who is infinite Good.

Another man had been very anxious when we talked in December, and asked me to pray for him. When I saw him this month, he was happy, hopeful, and excited to tell me that he applied for a program and was accepted in just two weeks, whereas he had been told the process could take several months. He is thrilled to be taking a college class, and to have Bible study with men in his dorm three times each day.

Corresponding Chaplain: I wrote to an incarcerated individual and shared (paraphrasing) some of what Mrs. Eddy writes in her piece, "Love Your Enemies": "Simply count your enemy to be that which defiles, defaces, and dethrones the Christ-image that you should reflect [that which would cause you to doubt your dominion, with God's authority to do what is right and necessary]. . . . Shakespeare writes: 'Sweet are the uses of adversity.' . . . 'Love thine enemies' is identical with 'Thou hast no enemies.' You have no enemies. Whatever struggle, doubt, confusion, uncertainty — the never-ending or never-improving motives that govern mortal mind — whatever these try to do, shall 'work together for good to them that love God.' . . . The present is yours; the future, big with events. Be to-day a law to yourself — a law of loyalty to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount." (*Miscellaneous Writings* 1883-1896, pp. 8-12)

In return, I received this reply: *Chaplain, I laughed so hard when I read the words, "You have no enemies." I am not laughing now, but I did use this info in a very tangible way recently. One of the young bucks in here wanted to test out his new rack and is always running round acting up, doing push-ups and puffing up his chest and he started a fight with me. I pushed him back and tried to talk him down. He came at me again & I kept my cool & didn't take it personally even though he was physically attacking me. I almost lost my temper when he got a punch in that hurt, but I reminded myself that he is not my enemy and I subdued him. Given where I've been at lately, it's ONLY in God that I didn't kill him. The old me would've put him in the ER & [given] the stress I've been living in, it's a miracle I didn't. As it is, a little of what you're sending me got through. I LITERALLY told him, "I'm not your enemy kid."*

Chaplain: These visits have been very rewarding, with lots of discussion before and during our Sunday-type service. The guys share how they've been feeling, the progress they feel they've made, and they ask questions regarding the Bible Lessons. One, who has experienced severe depression, has been going out of his way to engage the other guys, to thank them for their participation, and to acknowledge their contributions. This shows how he is gradually being transformed into a more thoughtful, helpful, and sincere student. Another man often has humorous comments or questions, showing a sense of humility and delight. Another fellow consistently attends and consistently demonstrates that he has read the Bible Lesson and the Sentinel articles and that he has a growing understanding. Another fellow smiles the whole session and offers quiet comments. In a recent Lesson there was the idea expressed that God doesn't know evil or iniquity, so God doesn't know of their violent past or wrongdoing. He was so delighted and excited about this that his little smile turned into a full beam!

Two fellows asked for specific prayerful help. One asked for help due to bouts of depression, sometimes severe, as he thinks of his violent past. The other asked for help due to "restless leg syndrome" and difficulty breathing. The first man had missed three of our visits due to illness and depression and says he was even suicidal. When he returned, he stated that he was glad to be back, glad to be in a better place mentally, and realized he must continue to study and pray and stay on this spiritual path. Three weeks after asking for prayers, the other man said he thought he had experienced a "miracle" because the restless leg syndrome was gone and his breathing felt more normal.

Corresponding Chaplain: I continue to correspond with two incarcerated individuals in two separate facilities. One is a Muslim woman who writes long letters with thoughts on her faith but she always comes around to sharing her thoughts on how Islam and Christian Science intersect. She believes in "Divine Purpose" and "Divine Truth" and, as a convert to Islam, she now wants to bring the teachings of Christian Science into her understanding of what life is all about. When I write to her, I pick up the threads of her musings on Christ and Mary Baker Eddy to give her a foundation to build on. She has requested a Bible and *Science and Health*, which have been sent for a second time because the facility rejected them the first time. The other individual is a man who has been studying Christian Science for a while and gets the periodicals by subscription. This month his subscriptions expired, and we helped get them renewed and sent to his new facility address. He is eager to keep getting them regularly because they help him remember that being there is "only temporary and Jesus has a plan for me."