

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE COMMITTEE ON INSTITUTIONAL WORK IN CALIFORNIA

Selected Chaplain and Corresponding Chaplain Fruitage Reports October – December 2023

Corresponding Chaplain: An incarcerated individual with whom I correspond asked for prayerful help for an injury and reported a healing of his shoulder. We were talking about dealing with struggles from a divine perspective. Paul helped us, in his second letter to the Church of Corinth, Chapter 12. Here Paul discusses the “thorn in his side:”

“At first, I didn’t think of it as a gift, and begged God to remove it. Three times I did that, and then he told me, My grace is enough; it’s all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness. Once I heard that, I was glad to let it happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ’s strength moving in on my weakness. Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size—abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become.”

Chaplain: I visited both Alfa and Bravo compounds. The Alfa visit was in response to an Embraced:Fully returning citizen referral. The referral was the returning citizen’s former cell mate who requested Christian Science (“CS”) services. We met at the compound chapel and had an engaging conversation for some hours, much on his religious/spiritual affiliations while incarcerated. I spoke on behalf of the CS practice of healing, emphasizing that it’s “universal in its adaptation and bestowals.” I left him with a CS Bible Lesson to study (and respond to), and a Science & Health. —The Bravo chapel service was well attended by 6 at the table. I do have one highlight of this service to relate: — A formerly incarcerated individual, a chapel clerk whom I had come to know quite well some years ago, a Paiute American Indian, who transferred to another correctional institution 7 years ago, had returned to prison. He saw me walking towards the chapel and called out to me from across the yard. He briskly walked towards me as I waited. Big smiles and arms opened we greeted each other. It should be mentioned that chaplains and chapel clerks work very closely together in arranging things. Chapel clerks are the prison “go to’s” for making arrangements between staff and other incarcerated individuals. In these interactions something of our life stories is shared, often one-on-one; for example he knew about the passing of my dear wife, and I knew something of his lifetime story. A closeness develops, an institutionally enclosed friendship. My friend had with him a hand carved Paiute Indian flute. He explained that he knew he would see me again, and that he had composed a flute song he wanted to play for me. I invited him to our service to play that song. American Indian flute playing is culturally unique. It is unlike anything you have ever heard and very spiritual in its intonations and sudden quick stops of echoed silences. It is deeply moving to listen to. It does bring one closer to the omnipresence of God that Mary Baker Eddy speaks to. There is something to it that brings you closer to the Word of God as the first sound. This is what my former chapel clerk played for us to close our service. — These are the extraordinary things that happen in institutional work within the confines of a maximum security prison.

Corresponding Chaplain: I correspond with two incarcerated individuals. One had been silent for well over a month, so I wrote to tell him I was thinking of him and ready to respond any time he felt like writing again. And I also needed to tell him that, in order to continue receiving periodicals, he needs to be in regular communication with a chaplain. He wrote back right away and does want to continue the magazines. He said he read one of the Bible Lessons that included the story of David and Goliath and took messages from it about keeping faith. He said my most recent letter “put (him) back on track” after some disturbing news from home. The second individual continues to write very long and appreciative letters to me. Our letters in December crossed because she moved and forgot to tell me. She writes many times about the love of God and His goodness and that she wants so much to bring what she’s learning in CS to her Islamic friends. She says its teachings are “truly transformative.” I don’t know enough about Islam to be able to address her questions there, but I do continue to keep my messages to her simple and basic.

Chaplain: The incarcerated individual who regularly comes to our services had to go to medical, which I found out later is mandatory. This left an opportunity for a one-on-one with a less-regular individual who is scheduled for release within weeks. Last I saw him, he shared his job anxiety, and so this time I shared with him a sample job description I’d found online that fits his skills and experience as a “data entry specialist.” He was elated to see that the job ad was for the company providing his transitional housing (thanks Mind!) and the job description really boosted his confidence that he was already skilled to work. He could get a job! He shared a common concern (I’m guessing) that people would judge him negatively. I raised the possibility of some tattoo removal and he laughed and said he already knew he’d need to take care of this and knew where to go (Homeboy Industries). I assured him that his obvious qualities—sincerity, humility and willingness to learn and grow—would stand out. He is prepared. I also related that the moral compass he has discovered through his program work is crucial and suggested he stay close to stable family members who would support his growth. The next time I went, he’d been released.

On another visit I had a one-on-one with the long-time student of CS, and we did a deep exploration of the Bible Lesson. He really likes to dig into the metaphysics. He mentioned how the synonym sheet (released years ago by the Publishing Society) helped him put words to how he expressed God that he’d never known before. And how the qualities related to the synonyms made it “more real.”

Four men came on another visit; two were new to these services. The group is building. We read the Bible Lesson on Christ Jesus. So many questions. We explored the spiritual sense of the virgin birth, the spiritual nature of everything, what Christian warfare means in CS, and quantum physics was brought up too, since one of the guys is really into the sciences. Our long-time student did a great job at presenting to the others that the nature and quality of thought is paramount in CS, that Mary Baker Eddy “introduced the power and protection of right thinking coming from divine Mind.” It is such a gift that this man is able to minister to the needs of his fellow incarcerated individuals, as relates to their shared mental environment. Since he had mentioned loving the synonym sheet (provided by CSPS), I had some printed and laminated

and gave them to the group. The long-time student was especially touched by the thoughtfulness. I also brought MBE's article on Christmas as well as a JSH article.

Chaplain: Each week when I prepare for the 1:1 meetings, I select several ideas from that week's Bible Lesson to discuss with the men. One week the Lesson included the passage from II Cor 1:22 that God has sealed us. I realize the author probably intended the word "seal" as in showing ownership, but what came to me was "shrink wrap" or a Tupperware container. Once sealed, nothing goes out or comes in. The contents are safe, preserved, intact. The Kingdom of Heaven is infinite, filling all space, and we are sealed in it! A man referred another dorm-mate to see me. We've spoken twice and have covered a lot of ground. He likes what he is hearing about CS, and says it makes sense to him and answers questions his previous religious experience left unanswered.

Chaplain: The men were facing an array of challenges: from long prison sentences away from family, to fear over entering a new program setting, to trying to ascertain if there is a point in religion, and how to pray. The central understanding of CS was the answer they sought in each case. In each meeting we began by asking and answering very fundamental questions about spiritual capacity, and the necessary "size" of God. Each one leads us to the correct understanding of St. Paul's observation that we all "live and move and have our being in God." Coupled with examining our spiritual nature, and seeing that it is only our spiritual qualities that are valuable to others, each man also saw and felt the fact of God's continuous forgiveness of sin. And that this applies not only to each of them, but to each person they encounter or think of.

Corresponding Chaplain: I have been chaplain corresponding with an incarcerated individual for two years now. Our correspondence exchanges have been reciprocally meaningfully and spiritually supportive. As of our latest correspondence, he spoke of his upcoming parole hearing. He feels confident that he will be granted a release date, perhaps as soon as February 2024. I have spoken of Embraced:Fully as possible post-release support. In my return letter, I included an Embraced:Fully Candidate Application. This man has been involved with the PREP Correspondence Program that helps the incarcerated prepare for their parole hearing. PREP has also invited this man to participate in its post-release program in Southern California. PREP's post release resources are comprehensive, and well respected by the Parole Boards. This is an excellent opportunity for him. He has indicated other plans and to go it on his own. I bring this up because I felt I knew what was best for him and wanted to tell him what that was. And then I paused to reflect on my role as CS Chaplain. In response to that prayerful pause, I wrote him a letter clarifying my role as CS Chaplain as NOT one to give release planning counsel or advice, but rather that of spiritual guide using the resources of the CS healing practice, and to offer CS prayer treatments for divine guidance.

Chaplain: This report will focus on the work one incarcerated individual, who is a member of The Mother Church, is doing to share CS. He and several of his "brothers" (men who regularly attend his Bible Lesson study group) were so moved by the poem, "The Path of Freedom," written by Kenneth Wells, Jr., published in the October 23, 2023 CS Sentinel, that they printed 70 copies to pass out to others. It is wonderful to see how inspired they are and how willing they

are to be disciples sharing CS. The man leading the Bible Lesson study group will soon be released, and Embraced Fully is preparing an Angel Team to help him when he gets out. He is really looking forward to attending church and continuing to share CS.

Chaplain: Our activity at the prison is going very smoothly, especially on the induction yard, where custody personnel are being helpful and cooperative. The escorting process is working well and we are grateful for uninterrupted services. We were able to provide a Thanksgiving service to all who were able to attend on both the main yard and on A yard. When we arrived on the induction yard to hold the special Thanksgiving service, we found that the chapel was flooded with 2" of water. Normally, this would have cancelled the service, but the Yard Captain was accommodating with a little reassurance from us. He gave us permission to move the chairs out into the yard so we could meet in a lesser utilized area of the yard. We were so grateful for this, and all of the women expressed gratitude for 1) being alive, 2) having a second chance, 3) the CS services and chaplains, 4) their families, 5) for healings this past year, 6) the friendship and respect of the other women, and 7) the respect from cellmates in not interrupting them when studying the Bible Lessons.

Chaplain: We are happy to report progress in our services. We have a regular attendee in C yard and just met three enthusiastic individuals in A yard. One A yard attendee states he has been a student of CS since 2009, and can quickly quote from the textbook. He has encouraged his cellmate to attend along with another individual. They were all eyes and ears at our first regular service in A yard this year. I have often noticed the men sitting forward in their chairs...not wanting to miss anything. We anticipate more individuals at future services. Our prior attendees from that yard have either been released (yay!) or transferred to other facilities.

C yard has a clerk from the Admin department who has been attending regularly and was happy to receive the textbook. He has lots of questions, which is wonderful.

We were invited to attend a graduation program in the visitor's room in between our services. This Christian Protestant event featured songs performed by members of my prior Bible songwriting class. A wonderful song titled "When I Pray" was very well received. The men were animated and joyful. It was lovely. Prior to our performing Psalm 23, I was able to give a quick testimony regarding my singing ability returning after a car accident. With my CS Chaplain name tag, and the men knowing me for the past 7 years, it was a great opportunity to share at a delightful event celebrating their achievements. The Protestant Chaplain has been very supportive of our efforts, and we enjoy working with him.

Chaplain: Each week when I prepare for the 1:1 meetings, I select several ideas from that week's Bible Lesson to discuss with the men. One week the Lesson included two of the three stories in I Kings 17. As we discussed the whole chapter, we recognized that the carnal mind would attempt to present another challenge, and yet another challenge, attempting to turn us away from God. Yet we can confidently stick with the truth of our oneness with our Father-Mother and witness the fulfillment of all our needs. Another week I was excited to share that "failure is

not an option” (see II Cor. 2:14). When it appeared that Jesus’ disciples had failed to cure a boy, Jesus pointed the way to success.

Each of the three times I went to Juvenile Hall, one youth requested a 1:1 with me. During my last visit, another youth who I’ve met and talked with before wanted to talk about prayer. The conversation moved in a direction where I could share my interaction with a man in San Mateo County who informed me that prayer did not work. This is what I shared: “I asked the man if he would mind telling me how he prayed. He explained that he gets on his bed, closes his eyes, folds his hands together, and tells God what God needs to do for him. I suggested he read the chapter ‘Prayer’ in Science and Health, and mentioned that we have two ears and one mouth for a reason. Prayer is more about listening than about talking. The next week he came to our meeting with his Science and Health in his hand, wearing a big smile on his face, and told me all about how prayer works.”

Chaplain: When we first visited the yard and asked if anyone was interested in attending CS services, one man said he was not interested in religion – PERIOD. He now is our regular, has Science & Health, asks great questions and picks up on metaphysical concepts quickly. When initially asked if he believed in God, he wasn’t sure. Now he says YES. He asked me to pray for him about a physical problem. So this is good healing – from non-receptivity to receptive engagement.

Chaplain: The two individuals new to CS asked really good questions about whether God causes sickness and natural disasters, and the Bible Lesson on God, the Only Cause and Creator, answered them well. Also, one man found in this lesson an explanation for why he didn’t get COVID when so many others had. He said he just wouldn’t believe in it. His elation at the lesson’s explanation of the mental nature of disease and the spiritual mandate to prevent it was visible on his face. After the session, my fellow chaplain brought it to my attention that the guys were leaning forward on the edge of their seats, so engaging was the conversation.

There was one “disappointment” this month. On my first scheduled visit alone and without my fellow CS chaplain, I called the staff chaplain to escort me on arrival and he told me that a man had tried to escape so the whole prison was shut down. I was deflated. My round-trip commute is 3 hours. But I told the staff chaplain I would wait in the visitor cafeteria for a while in case anything changed or, since I was there, could I help him with anything? To my surprise, he graciously met me in the café, and we sat down and had a wonderful conversation for about an hour. I asked him many questions about his work, and he shared much insight and wisdom that will be very useful to me going forward. We also shared our love of the Bible and its application to prison work. My disappointment melted away as I realized that this was a God-given blessing for me to connect with him, when otherwise he is so often busy.

Chaplain: A recent visitor, who I knew from a music I class I used to teach (Bible Based Songwriting), told us how he has used his knowledge of Christ to turn away anger expressed by a custody officer. Another individual related his own passage from anger and frustration to peace and growth through his growing understanding of the Christ. He agreed for me to share this: He

had a cellmate who denied everything Christian, and seemed angry all the time. He was thinking of asking to be moved so he did not have to be around this cellmate anymore. But one day, the cellmate said, "Well, maybe there is something to this after all." His attitude changed dramatically. I expressed to him how his own calmness and faith helped bring about a change in thought for his cellmate. He says he will be signing up for our services.

We are happy to be the banner carriers for Truth in this maximum security state prison, which houses over 3,000 men. Many have been sentenced to life without parole or have lengthy sentences. We continue to hear of men who were convicted while minors, who have received reduced sentences and/or parole. We are continuing to develop our program and are again looking at changes in our time schedule. God, the great I AM, has a plan and we are working it out. We are happy to bring the light of Christ to this location.

Chaplain: An individual I've been visiting for over two years came across this from Science and Health (p. 9:14) and agreed wholeheartedly with it: "There is a cross to be taken up before we can enjoy the fruition of our hope and faith." He said to him this means he needs to take responsibility for his own actions and growth. He knows that "the cross" is the "hard stuff" and when you stick with it and know that God is helping every step of the way, you get to see and feel the healing benefits. A new person I've met with a couple times originally requested to see a Catholic priest. When I showed up, he said wryly, "You'll do for now!" I asked him if he was familiar with Christian Science. He said he first heard about it when he was put in a solitary cell due to a violent outburst he had when he first arrived. He called it the dungeon. He found several copies of the CS Sentinel and some CS Monitors there. He started reading them. The Bible lens section in one of the Sentinels especially stood out to him. As a student of the Bible, he found this quite helpful and asked if I could get him more. As I was leaving, he said he'd like to learn more about Christian Science and didn't need to see a priest anymore.

Chaplain: Initially two of the incarcerated men we spoke with said they were not interested in any religion, period. Last week, for the first time, both came to the service. We read some sections of the Bible Lesson and discussed the Jonah story, how it was representative of our own lives—our call to serve, to contribute, and how we respond, with obedience or disobedience. And what the results are. And how merciful and just God is, always. One of the guys said, "This story tells my life." I am finding this ministry humbling. The individuals we connect with want to know their goodness, what they have to offer, and want to make positive contributions to their community. I always leave feeling grateful to bear witness to the wondrous things of God's law.