

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE COMMITTEE ON INSTITUTIONAL WORK IN CALIFORNIA

Selected Chaplain and Corresponding Chaplain Fruitage Reports April – June 2023

Chaplain: A woman submitted a request form for “*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy.” Since she knew the full title of the book and its author, I added her to my list for visits. She had been transferred to Santa Clara County (CCW) from the Chowchilla Prison. She mentioned the lovely couple who serve at Chowchilla that introduced her to Christian Science. She also said she requested *Science and Health* so she could explain to the other women at CCW that Christian Science is not Scientology. I offered to visit her again or meet with others if they have additional questions.

One of the men I’ve been visiting will be getting released this fall. We have talked about being patient, “blooming where planted,” and the Joseph stories about waiting to be released. I mentioned Peter Henniker-Heaton who was incapacitated for 10 years, but that he used his time to read/memorize *Science and Health* and write poetry. The man was interested in learning more about Peter, so I gave him a copy of the book “Peter Henniker Heaton, Man of Joy,” which is now available in paperback.

I’ve witnessed a lovely transformation in a man. Before he began his study of the Bible, he would respond physically to conflict. Now he leads Bible study in his dorm, and this past week he stopped two fights. A Sentinel article includes this sentence, “Labels are for cans.” We talked about how he can drop the label of anger — how he thinks of himself, and how others think of him.

Chaplain: One new attendee at one of the induction yard services had been acting with loud bravado as she entered the chapel with a large number of women. Sometimes when this happens, a group forms in the very back of the chapel in order to use the time inappropriately. But now, this same woman grew quiet, engaged in the service and attentive to the testimonies of healing we shared. In response, she shared a healing she had just had in turning wholeheartedly in prayer to God after the pain medications prescribed had been ineffective. All the attendees were moved and delighted by her healing, and it had opened the way for her to be assigned to a fire camp outside the prison.

One guard has multiple times been tough with us and has not wanted to cooperate in calling out the women who had signed up for Christian Science Bible Study services. Last week I thanked him ahead of calling out the long list of signups, recognizing how the process puts a strain on the much-reduced number of guards in each unit. Although he continued his seeming style of angrily calling out the women, I continued loving what I knew to be solid and true about him. We prayed to know there was no stress, and harmony could reign within the unit as well as in his life—that “all things work together for good.” After I brought the women back to the unit following

services, he came up to me and apologized for being so angry. We had a lovely exchange of gratitude for each other, and I walked out praising God. Such wide-reaching blessings in this work.

Corresponding Chaplain: My incarcerated correspondent has informed me that he has a parole hearing scheduled for November 2023, and possible release date of February 2024. We have been working together in the Christian Science healing practice through correspondence for well over a year, faithfully and with evidence of true spiritual growth within this healing practice. He has been incarcerated for many years, and therein this upcoming transition, if not transformation of character, will require a “leap of faith” in the same way we all experience that in some fundamental transition in our lives. I have mentioned the Embracedfully.org support for these “returning citizens,” and he has expressed an interest in applying for release support as well as pre-release preparations. This is the track we are on. I have asked him to contact The Principle Foundation by letter, to establish that key support relationship. This is a first step. Most important is his individual study and application of Christian Science. This will give him the courage, strength, and confidence to meet his “leap of faith” transition.

Chaplain: A man asked me to pray for him; he had fallen, and his forearm was swollen. He didn’t understand why I wasn’t saying my prayer aloud! I mentioned how Jesus instructed us to go into our closet and shut the door when we prayed. The following week I shared some of the inspiration from my prayers; we both saw his arm was completely normal. This same man came to another meeting with black eyes and bruises on his arms. After I left, I acknowledged that nothing but God’s harmonious government had ever been going on, which meant a fight could not possibly occur. Thinking also of Mrs. Eddy’s use of the word “shadow,” I reasoned there is no effect from two shadows colliding. The next week his skin and eyes were normal, which we both acknowledged.

Chaplain: Three men who join us for our weekly visits have expressed such joy, hope, and gratitude during our sessions. They thank us for our Bible Lessons and the opportunity to share. One fellow continues to demonstrate greater alertness and he no longer exhibits the continual “neuro” type movements — he sits quietly and listens.

The visits to the prison continue to be a joyful and rewarding experience. We have a shifting crew of men, depending on their work, school schedules, and other issues. We are conducting Sunday School type sessions as we dive into portions of the weekly Bible Lesson, and pause often to ask questions, share ideas, and dig into the dictionary for more clarity on the words.

I had an extra visit this month as the staff chaplain asked our Christian Science chaplains to participate in the National Day of Prayer on May 5th. It is wonderful that the staff chaplain expresses an openness and receptivity for all the religious activity at this prison. I had the opportunity to do a 15-minute presentation on the universality of the Golden Rule in all major religions and on the depth of beauty and inspiration as we study the Sermon on the Mount in the book of Matthew.

Corresponding Chaplain: I have been chaplain corresponding with a man now for well over a year. I believe he was recommended to the CS healing practice by a cell mate, and therein, though well versed in the fundamental Christian “doctrine,” he had little understanding of the metaphysical practice of Christian Science. We come to understand this through healing, physical and mental, Soul over body, and then want to know more. This was the basis for Mrs. Eddy’s discovery that over a lifetime became Science and Health, and all the others by association. In my correspondence mailings I send the Bible Lessons and stress that they are the heartbeat of Christian Science healing practice; that it is an individual study, and as “divinely authorized,” the passages will speak to you directly, just as and where you are. I ask him to mark up the Lessons and on his return letter to share his insights and personal applications therein. He has done that faithfully. I believe in the course of our back-and-forth correspondence, and with my on-going treatment work, he experienced a healing of his hand. Now he is preparing for his parole hearing and has indicated a possible release date within 9 months. I’ve indicated that my treatments and his own metaphysical prayer applications should be consecrated to the expectation of a healing unfoldment leading to his release. I have further indicated the pre-release and post-release support of Embraced:Fully, should he choose to apply. My prayers for healing unfoldment continue.

Chaplain: An unusual event happened this reporting period. The Warden called an in-person meeting for all outside “program providers,” and all visiting chaplains included. The purpose of the meeting was to acknowledge, praise, and support all outside programs as essential to the operations of the prison community. The Warden couldn’t go on enough about it, vowing that he has instructed his staff to operationally support our outside programs to the fullest extent, and that he would be holding these meetings on a quarterly basis to hear and answer any questions and to respond to our institutional needs as they arise. He cited San Quentin prison as a model for outside program support. San Quentin currently supports 5,000 program volunteers! This leads me to believe that this is a California state-wide correctional initiative. — Wow! This is a shift in the correctional mind set. Previously, outside programs were thought of by staff as an imposition on prison operations. After the meeting, the Community Relations Manager approached me and asked if the Christian Science institutional committee had any pre-release curriculum, and if so, to submit it to her for review and approval. If approved, she would see to it that it merits RAC credit (time off sentence). This is news, and opportunity beckons visiting Chaplains, post COVID shutdowns.

Corresponding Chaplain: One man has written several times since we started communicating last November. He so appreciates the Monitor, the Bible Lessons, and the Sentinels I have sent. He will soon be released, and since Christian Science was in his life as he grew up, I sent him contact information for The Principle Foundation and Embraced/Fully, which he appreciated. Since he is still incarcerated, I happily sent him more Christian Science Monitors, Sentinels, and Bible Lessons, which he requested. Then a new corresponding contact came because this individual had sent a letter to the Monitor in Boston requesting to be on a mailing list and to receive periodicals. The Monitor forwarded it to our Committee. The man said that when he first saw and read the Monitor, he was “so excited to see there are like-minded believers in Science.” He said that he had been feeling alone, and receiving the Monitor filled him with joy and confidence again and it restored a faith he had lost. I sent him a welcoming

letter and the description of my role as a Corresponding Chaplain and will see that he receives the periodicals.

Chaplain: Before we started our service, I told the men about something I had recently read in Viktor Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. He was writing about the mental choice prisoners made in the concentration camps to live or not. When they gave up, their typical reply in resisting any encouragement was: "I have nothing to expect from life anymore." Frankl wrote: "We had to learn ourselves, and teach the despairing men, that it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us." And we spoke of "Life" as one of Mrs. Eddy's synonyms for God. We had a good service, and afterwards spoke about the new tablets that have been provided to every incarcerated individual in the prison. Apparently there is some religious material on them and they are eager for Christian Science to have its own section.

Chaplain: Although I didn't have as many one-on-ones this month, it was still wonderful. This past month I had 16 one-on-ones, quite a number of great "bench talks," gave two Bibles, gave a children's book on Moses to one youth who has trouble reading, and prayed for a staff member who asked me for prayer for his family. All but one of the one-on-ones were long and wonderful. I have a couple of boys who would stay and listen forever if they could, which is fun. I had quite a few rather lengthy "bench talks" where the guys had some great questions and we had good discussions. They have gotten to trust that I'm there to help and not pressure them to have to come into a one-on-one to get the help. I also love talking with the staff and especially love it when they ask for prayer or ideas. The staff member who asked for prayer let me know that all was good the next week.

Chaplain: We have a growing number of men attending our Sunday School-type services, with lots of give and take, questions and discussions. They seem very touched by the words in the Bible Lesson which state they are the beloved children of God and that they are God's image and likeness. We have had lively discussions of what it means to repent, change our basis of thought, and turn to God. These men and several others attended the Christian Science lecture given by Mark McCurties, with sincere questions and comments afterwards.

Chaplain: I've shared ideas from the article "Do we act or react?" (Aileen Wavro, Christian Science Sentinel) with a man who has been moved to different dorms after confrontations with other incarcerated individuals. One week he shared TWO examples of diffusing aggression toward him. First, a man came up behind him and hit him really hard. My friend turned around, saw the man running away, walked up to him and said, "I forgive you." Another time another individual told him to shut up; my friend didn't react. We rejoiced in these examples of progress.

Rather than take copies of the full text Bible Lesson with me, I continue to instead distribute copies of the Citation Quarterly. In addition to using less paper, this encourages the men to open up their Bibles and our textbook and read directly from the books. Often our eyes continue reading beyond the passages outlined in the Quarterly, and we can underline favorite passages for future reference. One week a man continued reading past a passage in our textbook that we

were discussing, which ended with a question about why someone would stop sinning while they believe sin brings pleasure. He paused and commented, “That is a good question.”

In keeping with this idea of having a focus on the Bible Lesson, each week I take one or two ideas from the Lesson that I discuss with the men in detail. One week the Bible passages included how Jesus’ would-be disciples were fishing. Jesus instructed them to launch out into the deep. I spoke with the men about what that could mean to us today: are we comfortable staying in the shallow water, doing familiar things? Or are we willing to go where our feet may not touch, but be open to infinite possibilities?

One man, who was hoping for a better deal with the judge, admitted being depressed. As we talked, we found examples of good/God’s grace in the outcome, and discussed the importance of moving forward (like in the Joseph stories). I asked him where he looks when he drives his car: out the front windshield, or the rear-view mirror? We laughed at the thought of using only the rear-view mirror. But he quickly saw the connection to his life. When we drive, the scene in the rear-view mirror gets smaller and smaller as we go forward, until it finally can’t be seen anymore. So too with events in our lives. We can learn from them but can’t be paralyzed by them. Like the children of Israel, we must also go forward. In my visits since, he has been upbeat as he finishes the remaining few months in jail.

While serving in the library, I was talking with the chaplain who directly supervises me. I mentioned the ideas from that week’s Bible Lesson that I planned to discuss with the individuals I would be visiting. He enjoyed listening to the inspiration I planned to share, and said he is always looking for helpful Bible verses. After I got home that day, I sent him the Golden Text, Responsive Reading and Lesson Sermon passages for the week. I did the same the following week.

Chaplain: From his cell in the solitary confinement unit a man called me over to his cell and declared, “Chaplain, we are not guilty. But we are responsible.” After a thoughtful pause I responded: “That is a complete statement, my friend. I cannot add to it nor take away from it.” It was one of those statements that stays embedded in your thought. I might add it to the astounding beatitudes. I believe it applies also to our “house divided” times, leading to much blaming and dark behaviors. I use the statement in my chaplaincy work when the issue of self-justification rears up. “No,” I’ll say, “we are not guilty in the eyes of God. But we are responsible.” What constitutes “responsibility,” then, becomes our discussion at the chapel table. Most often we will draw from the week’s Bible Lesson, as we did this reporting period with the lesson on “Everlasting Punishment.” For example: “Set thine house in order”—our own house, not our adversary’s house. This was brought up at a recent Christian Science lecture I attended. The term “repent,” meaning “rethink,” was brought up. The speaker pointed out that repenting is done in our own thought (house), not in the thought (house) of a perceived adversary. As our own thought purifies (house in order), the perceived wrong transforms to the highest right, even to that which Mrs. Eddy declares in “Love Thine Enemies”: “your enemy is your best friend.” In that repentance of self/responsibility in thought, that’s often how it turns out. Your perceived adversary becomes your best friend, and a counternarrative begins to emerge that meets the needs of both sides, and in ways you could never have imagined. “Not guilty, but responsible.”

“Work out your own salvation ... to this end God works with you.” This was the gist of our discussion at the chapel table on the issue of “self-justification.”

Chaplain: A man I visit and minister to every week reported a recent healing he’d had. He woke up one morning with a stiff, immovable neck. His first thought was “I wonder what I did to make this happen?” Then he said very quickly his thought went to “No! That’s not from God, He didn’t make it so I can’t feel this way”. He said – I didn’t even need to pray, just remember God was in charge. Shortly after that he was busy helping clean up something for a deputy and realized he was fine. We talked about it a bit. I mentioned the speed at which his thought went to “No! that’s not from God” is a direct result of his dedicated study and practice of what he’s learning in Christian Science. His response was automatic, clear, and immediate. There was no room for doubt or worry.

One individual I’ve visited over the last couple years was released from jail. We had talked about him coming to visit the Reading Room and coming to church when he got out. He did! He happily came to the Reading Room several times and chatted for a while. He also came to church and brought a friend one Sunday, and his mom another Sunday! He asked if there was anything he could do for the church, as he’d been a carpenter for much of his career. It turned out our church had a repair and some painting that needed to be done. He and another person he works with came and did the work this past week. It looks great! He is a wonderful addition to our church family. A woman I’ve seen on and off over the past couple years is making some progress and finding peace about when she is released in early June. She is so receptive to spiritual ideas and says she shares them with others in the jail. The other individual I see has made significant progress in his study of the Bible and the Christian Science textbook. In fact, he reports he’s read the Bible five times front to back and then back to front. I have no doubt that this is true because he knows every Bible story and how he can apply it to his current situation. He loves the spiritual interpretation of the Bible he learns from studying Science and Health. He is abundantly clear that God is guiding and guarding him each step of the way as he waits for sentencing. He looks for every opportunity to help someone, share what he knows about God’s love with others, and do anything to help the deputies, and fellow incarcerated individuals. He is a most unselfish individual. This quote sums it up perfectly –

“No evidence before the material senses can close my eyes to the scientific proof that God, good, is supreme. Though clouds are round about Him, the divine justice and judgment are enthroned. Love is especially near in times of hate, and never so near as when one can be just amid lawlessness, and render good for evil.” (Miscellaneous Writings 1883–1896, Mary Baker Eddy, p. 277:22–28)