

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE COMMITTEE ON INSTITUTIONAL WORK IN CALIFORNIA

Selected Chaplain and Corresponding Chaplain Fruitage Reports January – March 2024

Corresponding Chaplain: An incarcerated man, whom I have been writing to for years, seemed overwhelmed with what he thought was a conspiracy by the doctors in the prison; he feared they were injecting the men with poison. He said he was grateful he could tell them he was a Christian Scientist and therefore didn't have to have the shots. The reports of these allegations have been the main discussion in his letters. In addition to this, he has had a rash all over his body that he says keeps him from sleeping. He has asked me to pray for him, and I have done so. For many months, in addition to prayer, my letters explain that each of us is a child of God and that our job is to not judge others, including the doctors, but to work out our own salvation. I have shared with him that we don't pray to "fix" our bodies and that even though the rash seems real, it is actually an illusion. Imagine my joy and gratitude when I received this letter from him: *"This is the most important letter I've ever written to you. I just received your letter and as you pointed out, we, as God's perfection, never need to be fixed. The rash is gone and so is the itching. It was an illusion by Satan. You wrote that we all need to work out our own salvation in Christ. I'm certain that this is true."* What a rewarding position it is to serve as a Christian Science Chaplain and to witness God's work in action!

Chaplain: One incarcerated man said that his new cellmate is disturbing to him and seems to be "worshipping Satan." The group of men I meet with spoke for a while on the power of divine Love to meet all the needs of this man *and* his cellmate. Some offered that this experience may lead to an opportunity to grow spiritually as he strives to see his cellmate as God's beloved child. Others said perhaps his cellmate has something to learn from him and that his cellmate may be sincerely seeking God. The next week when we saw him, our friend said he'd been transferred to a new unit away from the troublesome cellmate and where he now has the opportunity to serve in the kitchen as a worker. This felt like a healing from our prayers for this man.

Corresponding Chaplain: The opportunity to serve this population of incarcerated men through letter-writing me to grow spiritually and to broaden my tent (as in the prayer of Jabez). Letters were sent out to 11 men, twice during the month, with the Weekly Bible Lessons, used Sentinels and Monitors, and some articles from the periodicals. One fellow wrote a long letter, saying: *"Thank you for your letter, it brought tears to my eyes. I was thankful to be heard; it was comforting to know that someone cared and that you are praying for me. I believe the Lord is answering prayer through you. Today I believe I hear the Lord tell me I had no more demons, which I say halleluiah!"* This dear fellow is taking a course on the Bible and studying the Hebrew and Greek words. He looked up the word "wonderful" from the verse from Isaiah 9:6: "His name shall be called wonderful," and *wonderful* means a miracle, marvelous thing, to make great, accomplish, marvelous. He said he feels like he doesn't fit in (at this prison setting), as his zeal for the Lord has him feeling socially awkward. But he finds peace by reading and studying the Word of God, as he ponders what life will be like on the outside and tries to work through his

feelings of worthlessness, stupidity, and depression. He feels betrayed by his attorney and unjustly sentenced, and feels helpless and unable to help his family members who are struggling. But he says he is working on forgiving himself and others, and for these reasons he is deeply grateful for my letters and for the CS literature sent to him. He says he really needs to hear that God loves him! And he is so grateful for the messages of hope and deliverance.

Chaplain: We have a consistent 4 to 6 men attending our weekly services; they attend with big smiles and active participation, expressing their gratitude for our volunteer time with them. A favorite Bible verse for many of us is from Psalms, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." We focused on the line from Science and Health (p. 242) that says, "Through repentance, spiritual baptism, and regeneration, mortals put off their material beliefs and false individuality." We looked up these terms and put them into our own words. Repentance, meaning having a change of heart and turning away from evil and wrong thinking. Spiritual baptism meaning to us, being washed clean, made new, redeemed, purified. Regeneration meaning to reform, to be uplifted, to rejoice because we are whole now, to be renewed. Our little group agreed that these are the steps we all need to take to be made new. One man in our group is fairly new to the prison system and says he is so grateful to have found our CS group because it gives him hope and gratitude, and helps him in his desire to be transformed and to resist temptations when he is released. We had quite a good discussion on the Bible Lesson which had part of the story of the walls of Jericho coming down. One man said that one of the biggest "walls of resistance" is the identity crisis that the incarcerated face in prison, that they see themselves as bad people, worthless, and hopeless. Another participant shared that it takes coming to our CS weekly sessions to realize that we all have a better identity, that we are actually the children of God. We all agreed this little group of men attending our weekly service have the *desire* to grow spiritually and to feel God's presence.

Chaplain: Because many incarcerated individuals are not familiar with the Bible at all, much less the King James Version, reading in a Sunday School setting, with the men taking turns, takes some time. Even reading the advanced vocabulary of the Christian Science textbook needs pauses to learn the meaning of words like "corporeality, materiality, substratum, omnipotence...." Last week, the word "harmonious" became a topic of discussion. How to pronounce the word, and what it means. While we may think of it as a very familiar word, imagine if you had never heard that word, ever. The word "discord" also is unfamiliar to most. Some of the men in attendance have been coming for over three months; some have attended just once or twice and do intend to keep coming. But a lively discussion of what "harmony" means in our daily lives was not what I expected. And it was lively! At the end of our program, some incarcerated men from a chapel singing group popped in and we sang a few hymns together. One man showed me a version of "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" from another program he attends. We sang it together with the verse, "Everybody on the yard, is in His hands...." I thought this was an interesting adaptation of this very well-known folk song. Sometimes I observe a look that I am familiar with: someone new to Christian Science, with eyes wide open, and drinking in every single word. Very new to the promise of a new life, a new way to see himself, and a new way to see others.

Chaplain: I was prompted to have an in-depth conversation with the chapel clerk. The conversation found itself centering on longing and loss of those most loved. It was the kind of conversation in which one feels most alone, but that aloneness shared becomes a communion of hearts within the everlasting arms of infinite and intimate Love. It is felt where two or more are gathered. I experienced that once at a CS Reading Room seeking spiritual solace from the loss of my dear wife. I had that kind of intimate conversation with the RR Librarian, and from it I was prompted there and then to join the church. Joining the church led me to CS institutional work, as well to eventually serve as the church's appointed Reading Room Librarian. — In the midst of my conversation with the chapel clerk, there came a knock on the chapel door. It was an incarcerated man I had seen on my last visit, and there too had spiritually communed one-on-one on deep and personal matters. I had left him with a copy of Science & Health and the current CS Bible lesson to study. He was all prepared to share his study of the Bible lesson (on Soul) and in a manner of presentation that was clear; he was a sincere seeker. He is seeking a true transformation of self through the healing practice of Christian Science. Our sharing was of an intimate and open nature, seeking to get to the heart of the matter. We did, and in a way that made me think of this gospel line from Christ Jesus: "What you do unto the least of them, you have done to me." There was the sense between us of Christ in the room.

Chaplain: One incarcerated woman reported that her cellmate was getting up at 3:30 every morning to exercise beside her bed without seeming to be conscious of the fact that this practice was waking her cellmates up. This woman prayed for herself, trying to read the Christian Science textbook, but she felt she was so exhausted that she couldn't come up with a single spiritual thought. Then she realized it was a mistake to EVER think she could originate a spiritual thought, and that a well-rested brain never could. She realized her role was to simply listen for the thoughts that God was ever providing her, and that these were the true source of her rest. She reported that she was healed of being disturbed. Another time, a woman attended one of our services and was very excited after hearing the CS Bible lesson read. She said that the truths in the Bible lesson were what she has believed for many years. She related to us that she had been quiet about her faith beliefs with others, as she felt it was so different from other Christian faith teachings. She was deeply grateful to find Christian Science.

Corresponding Chaplain: I have been writing to one particular incarcerated individual for about two years and I thought all this time the person was a female. Now I found out that he's a male. His name can be either gender, but he spells it the way females usually do. In his last letter he told me, "Christian Science is making me a better man." Mystery solved! The "unusual comment" in his last letter was that he thought either I would lead him to the woman he is supposed to marry or else maybe I am that woman. I know this is not out of the ordinary, but I did address it directly by saying this: "God, being Love itself, loves you with the greatest and most complete love there is. Have you read the entire chapter "Marriage" in Science and Health? It's an excellent resource for gaining a clearer, higher understanding of both human love and the human institution of marriage and family. Succinctly put, we gain the highest sense of love by spiritualizing our understanding of it....And remember, you already quoted one of the best ideas in your letter to me, 'Thoughts unspoken are not unknown to the Divine.' That passage continues, 'Desire is prayer, and no loss can occur from trusting God with our desires; that they may be molded and exalted before they take form in words and in deeds.' (S&H 1:10) I doubt

there's a single Christian Scientist who hasn't prayed to understand that passage more deeply while looking for a mate. It has the power of the law of Love behind it." I haven't heard back from him yet.

Chaplain: An inmate whom I visited several months ago is back for a parole violation. She requested a visit from me. It can be difficult to find an open conference room for visits in the women's area, but as I walked there, I thought about the lesson I learned in preparing for our Christian Science lecture in the jail: that infinite Love fills all space, and THAT is enough! As expected, there was an open room. She was so happy to see me. She requested a list of CS churches in the area. I enjoyed sharing citations from the Bible Lesson the week that focused on "peace." The next week had the account of Saul's conversion. In each discussion, we dug into the two scenes in the story (Saul on his journey; Ananias receiving instructions) and the various emotions they might have been feeling, and qualities they expressed to move forward and obey. Another inmate pointed out the need for Ananias to forgive Saul from his earlier treatment of Jesus' followers such that he could greet Saul by saying, "Brother Saul." It reinforces the desirable quality of childlikeness – willing to move forward without the baggage of resentment or holding a grudge. I also looked up the meaning of the name Paul. It means "little one" or "humble."

Another inmate had been released to a program but was returned to jail because his name wasn't on their list. I shared the example of my mom "helping" a flower open so her bouquet would be complete. The flower died. So, too, we can't force our "flowers" to open through our own willfulness, but need to await God's direction.

Corresponding Chaplain: Here's a sample of one of my recent letters to an incarcerated man: *As it is written, "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived – the things God has prepared for those who love him." (1 Corinthians 2:9 NIV). We may not have seen or heard the things that God has prepared for us, but let's listen and be led by the Spirit, and let's find the deep things of God. Let's be receptive to God's love and guidance, be receptive to the infinite blessings being poured out to us, be receptive to God's wisdom and God's thoughts, and turn away from the noise of mortal mind (or as Paul says, the carnal mind). And we shall be transformed! This is knowing ourselves as God's beloved children.*

Chaplain: The Weekly Bible Lessons cannot be beat in explaining how the Bible and the textbook work together. These incarcerated men are learning so many new ways to view God, Christ Jesus, and themselves. I was somewhat surprised when one man had no knowledge of the phrase "David and Goliath," as I have heard it used many times in the news in a variety of ways. Yet he did not know what it referred to at all. This is the challenge: bringing the Bible stories we have known our whole lives to life and make them helpful in their everyday lives. Putting on the "whole armor of [Love]." We have been learning about spiritual armor, being ready for every day, studying every day, and using our spiritual knowledge to assist in every situation. God is good, and this is sometimes news to these men. What a revelation and comfort!

I get great satisfaction from my continuing contacts with incarcerated men who were released two or three years ago. They are progressing in their daily lives and in their study of Christian Science. Two are members of The Mother Church and are attending local churches.

Chaplain: One incarcerated man requested he come to the chapel. This man was a practicing Odinist, associated with “White Pride.” He had been incarcerated for 40 years, 21 of those years in solitary confinement. He explained himself as a white pride Odinist leader, respected in the prison community that way. His leadership status was hard earned. But he also confided to me that he is privately seeking a higher understanding of his sonship with God, and that a former cellmate, who had embraced the Christian Science practice, had encouraged him to attend a CS service at the chapel as a way to understand his birthright with God. This he has to do without anyone knowing or it would compromise his current prison status as an Odinist leader. We spoke together about the fundamental principles of the CS practice of healing, and then I gave him a Science and Health to read the Preface and the chapter on Prayer. I also gave him the Bible lesson on “Soul” to study and mark up for sharing on my next visit. On my next visit this inquiring individual had studied up on the lesson in a manner that would put the rest of us to shame. Not only did he have passages marked to share, but testimonial applications to share as well, that were transformative. Truly remarkable how what seems a great wrong can transform to the highest right. There simply is no greater thing. Heroic! It is the “come-from-behinders” that become our heroes, because they show us how. Christian Science, especially in institutional work, is indeed “universal in its adaptation and bestowals.”

Corresponding Chaplain: One fellow wrote that he felt very low, isolated, and forgotten in his maximum state prison. He said he has given up on God, on CS, and on everyone. But I have continued to send him the Bible lessons and letters, plus a Science and Health. The most recent letter from him indicates that he is feeling the support and realizing that all is not lost. He wrote to express gratitude for the letters and CS Bible lessons, and that he receives much comfort and guidance from them. Another incarcerated man in state prison writes that he is attending a Bible study course. Recently he wrote to say he has felt lost and depressed because of negative correspondence from family. However, in his last letter his tone appeared to be shifting to one of gratitude and perseverance towards the good.

Chaplain: A new man appeared at our meeting. He had been at the prison about a year and did not know there was a Christian Science meeting; but he had just been transferred from West Block to A Block where he had heard the “Christian Science is good” announcement, so he came. He told us that he found Christian Science over a decade ago when he was in the L.A. County Jail, and he described a healing he had from reading Science and Health that was published in the periodicals (which I have verified). He also said he is a member of The Mother Church! He had his own copy of Science and Health. He stayed after one of our meetings and told me that since his healing a decade ago, he has never had another one. Then he described a long-standing problem he has had with digesting food. He asked if I were a Journal-listed practitioner. I said no, but that I would be happy to pray for him. He asked me to do that and I gave him daily treatments, and over the next couple of weeks also gave him citations in Science and Health that deal with that particular issue. Later, he again stayed after our meeting and described to me again the problem he had been experiencing with digesting food. Then he said:

“I’m healed.” We thanked each other. The next time we met, he again stayed after the service, and I asked him if I could share his healing, and he said yes.

Chaplain: A new attendee to our service came for the second time. I’d given him Science and Health two weeks prior and he’d been reading the chapter on Prayer. He said he likes that the book encourages thinking for oneself and questioning beliefs. He said he was corresponding with the mom of a former cellmate who preached very rigid Bible teachings and discouraged asking questions. He was going to write her and tell her he had found CS and was sticking with it. He has tried many religious paths. He knows a lot of Bible stories and knows how to relate them, not just as old or miraculous stories, but to his own life, and he said he learns from them how to do better.

Chaplain: We continue to be grateful that we generally are allowed now to walk down the halls in the induction yard section of the prison and invite the incarcerated women to the services directly. There have been some wonderfully inspiring sessions with women who are being touched by what they’re hearing. Those who request a Science and Health at the end of the services are given a past Bible lesson printout and asked to study it during the week, make notes, and write out any questions they may have. Then when they turn it back in to us, we know they are serious about studying, and are given Science and Health. We are grateful too, that a few of the women are using the Bible printouts as a study in their cell Bible study group. The Sentinels and Monitors continue to be much wanted by the women. We now have been cleared to submit every few months up to 1,000 pieces of literature (Monitors, Sentinels, and past full-text Bible lessons). Numerous churches have been helpful in getting these quantities.

Chaplain: Two local branch churches sponsored a jail lecture by James Shepherd, “Why Everyone is Needed” (application through Board of Lectureship and coordinated details), and our local committee provided the funding. When the speaker and I arrived, the deputies could not have been more accommodating. An inmate I visit sat near the Spanish speakers and gave a simultaneous translation of the talk. Six Science and Health’s were taken—three English and three Spanish. One incarcerated man told me he opens Science and Health randomly when he’s feeling anxious, and his eyes always fall on a passage that brings him a sense of peace. He asked if the textbook is available in Spanish. He was asking for the benefit of his mother; he shares with her what he has been learning about Christian Science when they talk. I gave him a copy of the flyer to our church’s upcoming public lecture and said she could pick up a Spanish textbook at the literature table. Another man mentioned a fellow inmate had jumped on his back. He chose to act rather than react (see CS Sentinel article by Aileen Wavro). The situation did not escalate. This same person leads a Bible study in his unit, and the group wants to talk about marriage. I referred him to the chapter on Marriage in the textbook.