

# **The Christian Science Committee for Institutional Work in Texas**

## **Houston Zone – 2016 Annual Report**

In the Houston zone, the harvest is great and the laborers are few, but many are they having fun in the process. There are three areas that Houston volunteers are addressing: letter writing, prison and jail ministry. In the past year, letter writing has touched 33 inmates in parts of the state that would not normally have contact with a CS chaplain. Through this correspondence, inmates are receiving books, periodicals, monitors, hymns and lots of love, the most important thing.

We have a number of requests for prison visits. Some are in the process of being set up at facilities earlier supported. There is an active program at the Huntsville Unit, in Huntsville Prison, where inmates are supported with two church services a month. Those inmates are also given books, periodicals, bible lessons and lecture DVDs. The lecture DVDs are extremely popular and can be watched over and over by a wider audience.

Three chaplains Carlos, Jeff Tinkham and Tina Huston began holding weekly services at The Ramsey Unit in November. The services had dwindled to one or maybe two a month for the second and third quarter, so having weekly services has been a blessing for the volunteer chaplains and the dedicated inmates who regularly practice Christian Science.

At the Harris County Jail, three chaplains have volunteered over the past year. For six-months, weekly services for women were provided and on average 5-15 women were in attendance. Science and Health, Bibles and bible lessons were shared and much fruitage was witnessed. Tina Huston will say more about that program and why it ended.

With the male inmates, we (Arthur Mays and I) have a different approach due to the sheer number of the population. There are on average 9000 inmates in the jail, the third largest in the nation. Most of them are male. While once restricted, CS chaplains now have free access throughout the jail. We walk into cell blocks and ask if anyone wants to talk about the Bible or God. Sometimes inmates are met in the hallway and they ask us to visit their cell block. Over the course of the past year, we have had 1,375 contacts with inmates. We have visited special cell blocks such as military veterans, transgenders, protective custody, re-entry/education programs, medical and mental health units. The veterans, many who suffer from PTSD and substance abuse, are very grateful for our visits. The transgender inmates feel especially isolated and are not visited by many of the other churches. They keep a little library of CS materials in the center of their cell block.

We have shared 521 copies of Science and Health. We have given out hundreds of bible lessons and periodicals. Houston churches (4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, Bellaire and The Woodlands) have contributed funding and materials in this effort. More serious students of Christian Science have begun requesting Prose Works and the Manual. Even better, many inmates are sharing Science and Health and the periodicals with others who then become interested. The overall receptivity of inmates, of all faiths, to Christian Science is both eye-opening and inspiring. Truly, the Truth cannot be resisted. We all feel deeply blessed to be a part of this spiritual mission. We look forward to sharing some of our fruitage in a few minutes.

### **The Wolf Lies Down with The Lamb**

While many of my visits might be one-time encounters, I had the blessing of seeing the spiritual growth of one inmate over the past two years. For me this is like being in the laboratory of Christian Science and seeing how Truth transforms

from old to new. Willie, known by the prison nickname of “Wolf,” was one of the first inmates I met in the Fall of 2014. Over the course of two years he was moved around in the system but we kept being brought into contact by unusual circumstances. Willie, who approved of my testifying, was kicked out of the house at age thirteen. He has been in and out of prison his whole life in multiple states and for different offenses. He is currently waiting for an appeal to a murder conviction in a 28 year old case. His ex-wife testified against him in court. He was also estranged from other family members and friends. He admitted that he was skeptical of CS at first and thought it might be like Scientology. However, he enjoyed our discussions and did read a little of Science and Health. At one point he said that CS must be like graduate-level Christianity.

Despite his interest and CS study, he continued to be isolated from friends and family and suffered from a number of health concerns. He also could not wait to get out and return to a materialistic lifestyle. After his conviction of murder and sentence of 33 years, this all began to change. First, through his study of Christian Science he found peace with the verdict. Next, he complained that his desire for revenge and lack of contact with family and friends was keeping him awake at night and depressed. We discussed preying for our enemies as Jesus taught and forgiving and asking for forgiveness. He took up this duty daily and after about two-weeks, he said he found peace and sleep. Soon after, family and friends began to write him and visit. Even a girlfriend he had not seen in 25 years began writing and visiting him. Later he experienced healings of chest pain, neck pain, colds and high-blood pressure. He also began sharing his new Christly perspective with other inmates and led prayer sessions.

Willie was then transferred out of the jail and into the Texas prison system. After a few weeks, he wrote me that when he was given a prison medical exam, the doctor said he was surprisingly healthy for a middle-aged inmate. Willie asked about a number of physical issues he had and the doctor said there was no sign of them. This included Hepatitis C which he had for 15 years and which took the life of a girlfriend 5-years before. Willie was so excited to tell me and so grateful to God. Willie is receiving the weekly bible lesson and we continue to correspond.

### **More Inspiration**

Just this week, an inmate I just met last week, told me that seven years ago while in prison he prayed with all his heart to know absolute truth that comes from God. Having tried different religions, he has been searching for the past seven years. In jail on a parole violation, he recently got to borrow a Science and Health from another inmate and read 20% before the inmate transferred with the book. He did, however, write down the address for 8<sup>th</sup> Church and sent a letter asking for a Science and Health. I received the letter and went to meet him two-days later. He told me yesterday with tears in his eyes that this is the truth for which he was searching. He also began to tell me like “Zacchaeus” told Jesus, how he would correct a number of sins and make good on dishonest interactions in the past. He is now studying Science and Health, Prose Works and sharing with others in his cell block.