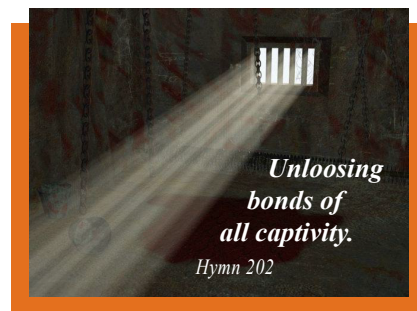


Institutional Service Committee for the State of Oregon



Message From The Board



Volume 11 Issue 3

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HATS

My name is Ken Bennet. I am currently serving as Second Reader at my branch church in Bend. I have been a member of the Oregon State Institution Services Committee going on four years. My passion for Christian Science, and for the Institutional Services activity in particular, began in a jail cell in Los Angeles County in 1967. For me it was not a experience, it was just one more discouraging event in a long history of such events. Anyone who has experienced addiction to a drug like heroin over the course of many years knows exactly what I am talking about. For years you think that you will just be able to quit when the time comes. But the more you try and fail, the more you begin to buy into the notion that you will never be free from that cycle of drugs, crime, and inevitable incarceration.

This time I was charged with grand theft and parole violation. Having been in and out of juvenile institutions, jail, correctional facilities, and rehabilitation centers for many years, I was more than a little discouraged to find myself back in these familiar surroundings once again. But this time something seemed different. That familiar feeling of discouragement was particularly overwhelming. I was in a cell by myself, and there was nothing in the cell but a copy of the King James Bible. The more I read the more intrigued I became with what this book had to say. I was particularly taken by the message in Psalm 139, and I read it over and over. It became clear to me that this book would show me the way out of this dead-end cycle if I would read it and faithfully adhere to its teachings.

Within days I was transferred to a holding facility for parole violators. Returning to my unit from the dining hall I noticed some copies of the *Christian Science Journal* and *Sentinel* on a bookshelf at the entrance to the unit. The first thing that occurred to me as I read was that whoever wrote these articles understood something I desperately needed to learn. It was so perfectly obvious to me that what these publications were saying was based on a demonstrable truth, and on a concept of God that I had never encountered before. I read all the time. I attended the Christian Science services and chatted at length with the Christian Science Chaplain.

After my release I joined The Mother Church and a Branch Church. Eventually I was appointed and served for five years as the Christian Science Chaplain at the facility I had been paroled from. I also served in that capacity in several other prisons and correctional facilities in California. I was elected to the State Committee for Institutional Work there and served for five years. I have been involved in this Institution Services activity in one role or another since that time. And of course, I have been blessed to serve in pretty much every position available in a Christian Science branch church. I could say how grateful I am, but I think that probably goes without saying.

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Affirming God's Power

When I arrived, I was told the young girl I was to meet with was unwell, but I could take a chair and sit by her bed. However, she struggled out of the bed area with her *Science and Health* and we went to the classroom to have our discussion. She said she'd had severe stomach pains for a few days. We immediately began praying together, affirming God's all power, ever presence, and the absolute fact that sickness or pain does not come from God, but God's law destroys it. We read parts of the lesson together. In the last section, after reading the 2nd Great Commandment, to love your neighbor as yourself, I asked her if there was anyone she had trouble loving. She said yes, her mother, and referred to a list of issues. We talked about separating in thought the wrong actions from the person and so on, and she was receptive to this idea, but this didn't seem to be meeting her need. I soon realized that what we needed to focus on is God as Father-Mother - that she has a perfect Mother in God. This young girl is working on reading the chapter on prayer. She is substituting her name for "man" wherever she finds it as she reads. We ended our session by talking about the Daily Prayer for herself, claiming her right to health, safety, joy, purpose, etc, each day before she gets out of bed in the morning. This young girl walked out straight and with a smile. When the guard let me out, she informed this girl they had saved a brownie for her, and she was happy to get it.



Feeling God's Love

One inmate was having a problem with other inmates. In using what he learned in Christian Science, he distanced himself from the those inmates, letting them know that if that was the way they felt, they didn't need to be around him any more. And he was quiet, not rancorous about it. He was then moved to a quieter dorm with a lot fewer men and was given a job that he enjoys. So he felt that, on the one hand, he'd been hurt, misjudged, vilified; but on the other hand, he was being blessed, feeling God's love for him being expressed in other ways.

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