



Western District Conference

Joy Mennonite Newsletter
November 2006

Pastors Corner

My wife Sadie and I have been visiting prisoners at the federal prison in El Reno, Okla. once a month for fourteen years. We are part of a national program called, prison visitation and support group (PVS), begun by a Quaker woman over twenty-five years ago. While this woman believed prisons as we know them should be abolished, when she went to visit prisoners she was not there to reform the prison but to visit and recognize the value of the person she was visiting. She believed every person must be recognized as a worthy human being, worthy of attention and love from the outside world.

Once a year PVS holds a training workshop, usually close to one of our nations major prison centers. This year we met at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas. Here we met with about seventy-five other visitors from Calif. to Maine. We heard many stories, some good stories and some very sad. There was also an ex prisoner present. He was very helpful in understanding a prisoners point of view. We also get to meet with prison staff at these annual meetings. This is very important to us as prison staff often have the same concerns we have. One of the problems of our prisons, it is not the people who understand prison life best who make the rules.

Visiting one hour a month is a small percentage of the time prisoners spend in prison. There is much we do not understand, but we do get a feel for prison life and it is important that we pay attention to what we feel. Fort Leavenworth is prison city, over twenty-thousand prisoners in the area. One cannot help but feel that building prisons and filling them with people has become a growing industry. Now making a profit stands along side public safety in the building and operation of prisons.

Crime has remained fairly constant, yet our prison population has exploded. It seems to us that many of our prisoners are not criminals but rather dysfunctional. They are more guilty of making improper decisions that hurt people then of criminal intent. We incarcerate many of our citizens because we are afraid. We have become a nation governed by fear. Our incarceration practice, the war on terror, and our immigration policies are all driven by fear, and fear impairs good judgment. Time has proved in all of these areas our national leaders have made gravely flawed decisions, often at the demands of the American

people. If our goal was to make a useful citizen of every person we could do much better with the seventy-thousand a year we spend to maintain one person in prison.

We read in the epistle of John, perfect love casts out fear. There is not much we can do about the prison system but we will continue to visit. One way to understand perfect love is to love expecting nothing in return. That is the challenge we are left with at our annual meetings, we visit because every person is worthy and we expect nothing in return but to be loved.

Moses Mast

Christmas is already upon us the year is nearly gone. We had a pretty good year. I've been trying to get people to write articles so you don't have to read my rambling's but I'm not having much luck. One person was intending to write about summer camp for your kids. So send your children or grandchildren out to Hydro this year for camp, you won't be sorry and the kids won't be either. It will be a great experience for them. We will let you know the dates and all that information. Also I expect they will have a work day this spring, I'd like to invite any adults that wish to participate to ride along with us. Jake and I went last year and had a good time and got some work done.

Another person was going to write about the work he's doing with conscientious objectors. I am at a loss to tell you much about this, best advice I can give is if you don't want to be a soldier, sailor, airmen or marine, it's a voluntary military, don't join. But I'll keep after him to write his article, maybe he can give you more insight.

There will be many changes this new year with Moses retiring. We have greatly appreciated him and Sadie these many years. Thank you both very much, we wouldn't have made it this far without you.

I wish all of you a wonderful Christmas and a wonderful new year.

Terry

Recent News

Oct. 22 Dave Gerber from MCC central states spoke at Joy Mennonite about his experience in India of aid to tsunami victims.

In our fourth Sunday peace event we showed the video, *You Chiefs are Peacemakers*, showing the experience of the Cheyenne Indians and their practice of peace. Afterward Sam Hart spoke about his experience of growing up with the Cheyenne ways. It was very impressive

This month Oklahoma's for Conscientious Objectors sent James Branum and Risa Wilkinson to the workshop in San Antonio, Texas for training in counter recruitment and also alternative ways to serve our country.

Coming events

Dec. 10 Lupe Aguilar will speak at Joy about his work with immigration issues on the Mexico border.

Dec. 17 We will be singing Christmas Carols at two nursing homes. A member of Joy in one and a dear friend in the other.

Dec. 24 We will sing carols to our neighbors. One of these is One Hundred and two.

Preaching schedule:

- Dec. 3 Moses Mast
- Dec. 10 Lupe Aguilar
- Dec. 17 Cheryl Crichley
- Dec. 24 James Branum
- Dec. 31 Norman Berry

Our prayers are with:

The Warkentine family whose father in Kansas is very ill.

Martha Shoemaker, she continues to get chest pains.

SPECIAL NOTES

Happy birthday to Amanda Hostetler on Dec. 9, she'll be 21 years old.

And a very HAPPY anniversary to Bill & Thea Klassen

In Closing

We had a wonderful time caroling at the VA hospital on November 26th. I think this year our children were the stars of our show. I would like to thank you all for participating, it was great.

Terry