Religion & Texas Chaplaincy: Full of Superlatives

---Health care costs have risen faster than any other correctional costs. Prisoners are adversely affected beyond the intentions of prison mission goals, often developing more severe emotional problems added to their own criminal behavior problems and outside the realm of abnormal diagnosis in DSM IV. Religion gives faith, hope, meaning, optimism and security to persons, impacting the well-being of persons and their ability to handle stress. In a review of over 200 articles, religious commitment indicated a positive impact on morbidity and mortality, with over 80% of the studies indicating longer life. Prisoners are at risk for suicide, and “published studies consistently have shown that religious commitment is inversely related to suicide rates.” Furthermore, given the ever-increasing cost of health care to corrections, Johnson and Larson state, “there is considerable empirical evidence concerning the beneficial effect of religious practices and commitment upon various health-care issues.”

Religion & Institutional Adjustment

---Religion helps inmates deal with criminal behavior and issues of denial, helping them cope with the deprivations of prison life and understand the issues inherent in the loss of freedom; religion provides them with the opportunity to start a new life while in prison. No one doubts that religion fosters coping skills in prison.

Religion & Recidivism

---Given the above, reduced recidivism is a by-product, clearly the more healthy and well-adjusted inmates are the ones who stay out. Every chaplain (and regular volunteers) know several inmates who have stayed out as a direct result of their programming. Moreover if two ex-inmates do not return, such offsets more than entire TDCJ monetary cost for a single chaplain in a given fiscal year. For example, Senior Chaplain Gerald Saffel of the Ferguson Unit tracked inmates baptized in three months (12-91 to 2-92) to July of 2000 and found a 7.7% recidivism rate; 13 did not return; Senior Chaplain Saffel more than recovered the entire cost of his own salary for seven plus years in three to six months. With the volunteers supervised, the facts and vision go far beyond expectations; Texas’ full time chaplains reduce recidivism and recover more than their entire operating cost several times over. WHY are superlatives like these not blazoned in the sky?

TDCJ Need

---Good News: from 1990 to 1997 the total crime rate dropped 30%; from 1988 to 1998, the crime rate has dropped significantly in direct proportion to TDCJ’s increase in inmate population. ---Greater Needs Coming to TDCJ: from 1970 to 1999 the mental health system has increasingly de-institutionalized mental health services, down from 12,413 in state hospitals in 1970 to 2,309 in 1990. “Between 1988 and 1998, while the TDCJ incarcerated population increased by 626%, the number of mentally ill offenders in prison receiving outpatient mental health services increased by 429%.” Work’s increasing.

TDCJ Professional Chaplains: The Greater Picture


---152 Chaplains Led or Did in One Month, July 2000: 152

---572 Catholic ---120 Methodists ---200 Pentecostals ---535 Lutherans ---259 Presbyterians.

---152 Chaplains Led or Did in One Month, July 2000:

---Employee Volunteer 65 w/ 552 hrs - Mentor Volunteers 1,729

---Hospitality Volunteer 150 w/ 853 hrs - Volunteer Chaplains 403 w/ 3,712 hrs - Marriage Seminar Volunteers 41

---General Volunteer 10,697 w/ 41,897 hrs - General Volunteers 10,697 w/ 41,897 hrs - Contract Chaplain Hours 926

---152 Chaplains Led or Did in One Month, July 2000:

---Primary Worship Services 2,158 - Chaplain Classes Taught 705

---w/ Volunteers 2,859 - Chaplain Counseling Groups 465

---Total # of Inmates Attending 150,190 - Individual Counseling Interviews 5,126

---Additional Services 1,701 - Family Death Messages to Inmates 931

---w/ Total # Inmates 69,192 - Inmate Crisis Calls Supervised 2,066

---Spiritual Growth Classes 1,734 - Inmate Deaths Worked 59

---w/ Total # Inmates 73,102 - Hours of Off-Unit Staff Ministry 692

---Community Service Hours 699 - Community Speaking Promotions 194

---Chaplaincy: the only department that supervises, facilitates & instructs inmates in the finer aspects of family values rooted in faith

Religion: Human History’s Most Significant & Powerful Source for Change

---Harvard Professor Gordon Kaufman said addressing the ultimate questions of life is a necessity for thinking persons. Professor John Newport of Fort Worth’s Southwestern Theological Seminary (the largest in the world) said this necessity is built into human nature and “has been true through the ages; as long as humans have existed, we have asked ultimate and crucial questions.” “Religion has existed in every society, from the most primitive to the most culturally advanced.” All of the major religions have always spoken to and provided interpretations about existence and influenced every aspect of human behavior, thought, feelings, family, culture, life, death and afterlife. There is no more complex a profession.

Religion & Texas Chaplaincy: Full of Superlatives

---How can a 22 year old entry level Programmer or Engineer make more than a fully credentialed chaplain?

---Most Texas Chaplains have decades of experience (and graduate degrees), supervise older volunteers, counsel Texas’ most troubled persons, impact general inmate morale and reduce recidivism in a hugely cost effective manner. With the cost savings and superlatives like “human history’s most powerful source of change” and a “no more complex a profession,” the superlatives show a clear case and need for Parity and Professional Equity for Texas Chaplains. Let’s empower Texas’ Chaplains to do more of what they already do and grant Chaplains parity with the other professions—Chaplains more than earn it. They deserve it.


7 Ibid., Johnson & Larson, 30.


10 Gerald Saffel, Independent Study, Maximum Security Ferguson Unit, Midway, Texas (July 2000). Of course, Saffel did mention the faith work prior to and after baptism for the group prior to release, which certainly impacts whether it was actually three or six plus months of faith work for the 13; but of those he did baptize, there was a 7.7% recidivism on an 8 year span, which is still far better than the current rate of 30-40% recidivism on a 1 to 3 year span of general population inmates in other programs. And Saffel is still baptizing. See also, Byron R. Johnson, et al, “Religious Programs, Institutional Adjustment, and Recidivism Among Former Inmates in Prison Fellowship Programs,” *Justice Quarterly* 14:1 (March 1997).


14 TDCJ Chaplaincy Department Statistical Run, Huntsville, Texas (August 29, 2000).


16 Ibid.


20 See Kaufman, *Relativism…*; Newport, *Life’s Ultimate Questions…*; Gaer, *What the Great Religions Believe*; the Bible, the Quran, the Torah and all of the millions of volumes in the major seminary libraries of the major faiths in the world.