

NEWSLETTER



Christian Science Institutional Committee for New York State

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“The effectiveness of Christian Science Practice”

was the theme of our Annual Open Meeting on Sunday, November 17, 2019, at Fifth Church of Christ, Scientist, New York. It included a talk by a recently released inmate who was introduced by the volunteer who mentored him.

We wish to thank the Christian Scientists of New York State. Your prayerful and financial support made this inspiring story possible.



Introduction

Good Afternoon. Thank you all for coming this afternoon. I am Charles Levitt, Chairman for the Mid-Hudson Zone.

I would like to introduce a friend, Robert, whom I have known over 20 years while he was incarcerated and who had gone through many challenges which at times seemed so dreadful that most hope was given up.

It was then that he discovered Christian Science through both a religious article in *The Christian Science Monitor* and a talk on Christian Science, which he heard on the radio. This led him to write The Mother Church to find out more about Christian Science, how it could help him with the many disappointments he had experienced, and the future challenges which lay ahead.

That letter finally made its way to the desk of our Executive Administrator, who in turn sent it to me, while I was serving as the Chairman of the Westchester-Rockland Zone.

When I received the letter from Robert in 1998, I wrote back to introduce myself. I gave him a brief overview of Christian Science, and its effects of practice, and scheduled a visit to the facility where he was housed at the time. In that first visit, I was quite impressed with Robert's receptiveness toward God and his recognition of the healing effects of Christian Science practice. However, he needed to know how it could be applied to his own situations. His receptivity inspired him into the study of Christian Science, reading much of Mrs. Eddy's writings and the Christian Science periodicals—learning of the spiritual interpretation of the Bible and its application to his situations.

During those 21 years of study and the many letters and visits I made to the various facilities he was transferred to, he continued to grow and demonstrate healings of the many challenges and disappointments which he endured.

Mary Baker Eddy writes in *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*: “The sharp experiences of belief in the supposititious life of matter, as well as our disappointments and ceaseless woes, turn us like tired children to the arms of divine Love. Then we begin to learn Life in divine Science. Without this process of weaning, ‘Canst thou by searching find out God?’ It is easier to desire

Truth than to rid one's self of error. Mortals may seek the understanding of Christian Science, but they will not be able to glean from Christian Science the facts of being without striving for them." (page 322)

Robert's experiences and how he handled the challenges and constant human disappointments through Christian Science practice were many. He was turned down for parole several times without being given a reason, and was harassed by Correctional Officers who tormented him in many ways. They entered his cell, turned over his bunk, and threw his belongings off the shelves about once a week. This went on for some time!

He handled through Christian Science practice antagonistic internal relationships which were at times quite threatening. During these challenges, I worked with him to realize that there is but one Mind and that everyone within his consciousness is the expression of Mind, and the child of an all loving God.

One situation appeared when he was in the "yard" and a fellow inmate, with whom he had prior difficulties, deliberately spit in his face while passing him. Knowing what he had been studying in Science, Robert did not react in a negative way but kept his peace, recognizing and affirming that the man was a child of God, as he continued to walk away from him. He never had a problem with this man again.

Despite the many other obstacles he had to overcome, Robert still demonstrated great things. His accomplishments while incarcerated include teaching English and literature to inmates so they could pass their high school equivalency exam and reading books on tape for children with personal challenges. He also conducted a ministry class which was part of a program at one of the facilities he was in. He got approval for a talk on Christian Science with its healing effects to the class attendees. I got in touch with Paul Hannesson, who was the Committee on Publication for our state at that time, and he gladly accepted the opportunity. It was a great success.

About two years ago, two weeks before he was to be released, he was informed that a psychologist from the state Attorney General's office wanted to interview him. Feeling a little suspicious as to whether he should speak with him at that time, he contacted his attorney who told him to reschedule the meeting with her present. Robert informed the psychologist of this and he said "okay" and left the facility. A few days before he was to be released, he was told his parole was cancelled. The psychologist had written a report, without interviewing Robert at all, that he should not be released. He had used absurd models of his own to evaluate Robert. This was uncovered later, and we learned this was the young psychologist's first report and, I believe, his first case.

Think about how one would feel with hope deferred excitement and future plans curtailed for another two years for his attorney to appeal and set up a court trial.

His attorney finally got a court date for the appeal. Without giving too many details, the trial began with the prosecutor reiterating the distorted statements of the psychologist's report, giving a false narrative of Robert's character. The prosecutor did not mention any of his good qualities nor any productive activity in his over 30 years of being incarcerated.

In the courtroom, over the judge, in very large type there was a sign: "In God We Trust." As I held to Truth through the several days of the trial and recognizing God as ever present throughout the proceedings, the verdict came. "Not guilty!" Robert was to be set free.

Much gratitude was expressed by all. The judge, for the first time during the trial, had a big smile on his face. And then as I glanced over the courtroom, there was the prosecutor smiling as well.

Please welcome Robert

Robert's talk

I'm overcome with gratitude.

In a very practical sense, just being here with you is an answered prayer. Just being here with you is a day big with blessings. And just being here with you is a pure demonstration of Christian Science.

Practice, practice, practice ... is the admonition given to musicians who aspire to play at the premiere concert venue in New York City called Carnegie Hall. Similarly, practice, practice, practice ... is the kind, wise counsel given by Mary Baker Eddy through the Holy Spirit in order for us to play on the stage of everyday life.

Sometimes, however, the stage of ordinary life can seem anything but ordinary. The criminal justice system can feel out of the ordinary to anyone not familiar with it. Other than judges, court officials, prosecutors, defense attorneys, etc. most people experience the system through jury duty. But many don't even do that. If your experience with the system devolves from getting convicted and sentenced to prison for a crime you didn't commit, that experience can seem unsurprisingly *hellish*. It can feel like being sucked into a black hole. All the gravity, light, and life feels like it's being sucked into oblivion.

At such trying times, it can feel almost impossible to practice. Yet in Psalm 139, like David, I learned to pray, "Behold, even if I make my bed in hell, thou art there." Mrs. Eddy calls this spiritual truth the El Dorado of Christian Science, Emmanuel, or God with us. God never leaves us. He is omnipresent. Practicing this thought makes hell disappear as surely as light makes darkness disappear.

Before I came to Christian Science while in prison, I began to believe that so many bad things were happening to me because somehow my life was cursed. It wouldn't make a difference what I did, everything would turn out bad. For instance, at my trial there was a transcript that showed that part of my trial was held in secret. Specifically, the judge called both counsels to the bench without the jury present for no other reason than to exclude me from being personally present. And he ordered the stenographer to go off the record, his last words being that he wanted to "know more about the facts." Simply, when "facts" are the topic, a defendant must always be present to know what so-called facts are being used against him. Otherwise there is no way for him to defend himself. Presence at a trial is a fundamental constitutional issue.

So, although I had been found guilty of a crime I didn't commit, I had confidence that the trial transcript would show that, among a number of issues, I didn't receive a fair trial. There was DNA but the prosecution claimed it was contaminated and couldn't be conclusive one way or the other. But the transcript could not be tampered with. And so when I learned that the transcript was said to be "lost," *I lost it*. I considered suicide.

That's when Christian Science came to the rescue. I had been reading *The Christian Science Monitor* for its objective reporting, fine writing, and in-depth coverage. But this time my eyes fell on the Spiritual Article. The article claimed that our lives are not cursed but blessed. It expanded on God as Love. The fear I was feeling, therefore, was not of God. In the essay, a verse was cited that I continue to this day to go back to whenever my thoughts stray. It's from Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the thoughts I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." The evidence was unequivocal. This was a God I could worship and adore. This was a God I could put my faith in, no matter what. "God is love," as the Letter of John succinctly puts it. And love never fails.

Afterward, I was listening to an interview on the radio with Virginia Harris, Christian Science Practitioner and Teacher. I became vitalized the more I listened to her talk about God as Love, as one of the seven synonyms for God articulated by Mrs. Eddy. I wrote Ms. Harris a letter about hearing her on the radio and about how moving it was for me. I wanted to know more about Christian Science. She wrote back and informed me that she would be sending someone to visit with me in prison.

That's when I met Charles Levitt, who has since become my kindred spirit, my mentor, and my dearest friend. Charles helped me understand how nothing is lost in Christian Science. Most of all, he showed me that my life had value in a system that can make people feel their lives are worthless. Charles would reiterate to me how the kingdom of God is within. Prison wouldn't be where I found God. It was within my heart, soul, mind, and strength. I would love God that way, and practice the thought of Him "in whom we live, move, and have our being." Charles and I shared a liking for a country/western song, the chorus of which goes "If you're going through hell, keep on going. You might get through before the devil even knows you're there." The One who knows there is only Love loves the prisoner. Indeed, we know from the scriptures that a condemned criminal crucified beside Jesus was told by Jesus that he would enter Paradise with him.

Nevertheless things didn't work out for me for a long time. And at times it felt excruciating, but at last the lost transcript was located. My case climbed up the ladder to the state courts and then the federal courts. It went up to the highest federal court beneath the Supreme Court. But there it happened again. My attorney didn't submit the transcript to support the argument she made in her brief about a part of my trial being held in secret. I had friends there, including Charles and Paul. They witnessed the panel of judges chastising my attorney for not submitting the transcript to support the legal argument. And, like a horror movie, it happened again. Relief didn't come there. Eventually, I had to go on trial to win my freedom.

Still, nothing was lost. While I was in prison, I got married to a woman I had been dating before the trial that sent me to prison. Kate made faith, hope, and love seem effortless. She was grace incarnate. We were married for over twenty years before she passed on. Yet her love is alive within me.

I attained a graduate degree in sociology at an onsite experimental college program with professors from different universities in NYC. Subsequent to that I recorded books on tape for students with special needs for almost seven years. I taught college classes, facilitated Alternatives to Violence Programs, worked as a paralegal, and presided over numerous educational workshops, from conflict resolution to yoga classes. Because of Christ, there remained a light the darkness could neither put out nor comprehend. Yet I had to practice day and night. I had to get up each time I fell with doubt or fear.

The championship boxer, Floyd Patterson, spoke at my graduation. He said that after he retired he came across a news article that said he held the record for being knocked down, more than any other boxer. He said how it had put him in a funk, to be remembered for that data point. However, as he thought about it, he recalled that he had never been knocked out. So if he held the record for getting knocked down, he had to hold the record for getting back up. His practice was directing his thought to get back up. He lifted his thought in the process. Ultimately, it was through the grace of Christ and not the law that freed me. It was love. And it takes practice.

And that's why just my being here with you is an answered prayer. Just my being here with you is a day big with blessings. And just my being here with you is a pure demonstration of Christian Science.