



Forty-five percent of inmates are incarcerated within the Greater Toronto Area. This does not include those who would be housed in the GTA, but for capacity pressures creating a lack of space.

In the last 30 years, the inmate population in Ontario has increased 80 percent, while bed capacity has expanded by only 20 percent. I do not have to tell you the stress this puts on the system.

Infrastructure challenges such as these, combined with a massive shift in the proportion of those in custody on remand awaiting trial and other criminal proceedings, versus sentenced, created tremendous challenges in our programming goals to reduce the rate of recidivism in Canada.

Let me use a few numbers to illustrate: in 1995-96, for example, the ministry had 43,196 remand offenders admitted to custody. A decade later, the number of remand offenders admitted into custody was 62,404. That's an increase of more than 44 percent.

The length of time spent in custody on remand has also increased, while the average length of provincial sentence declined from 87 to 67 days.

In Ontario, the incarcerated population is now comprised of 65 percent remanded individuals, and Ontario is not alone. In Manitoba, for example, that number is 70 percent and this national trend shows no sign of reversal.

The system must now cope with: Fewer and shorter provincial sentences, higher risk individuals under supervisions in the community, and more credit for time served on remand.

A key challenge is that often, accused persons on remand and sentenced offenders are not with a correctional service long enough to benefit from meaningful program intervention and this after all is a primary objective.

In terms of taking action to replace our aging facilities, the ministry is furthering the work that began in the mid '90s to improve our infrastructure. Some of you may know of the government's plans to locate a new modern detention centre in Etobicoke to replace the

aging Toronto Jail. The 1650-bed Toronto South Detention Centre will be located on the site of the current Mimico Correctional Centre.

By examining the changing face of corrections, we hope to inform decision makers on the offender/inmate population. By adapting for this future, and what will be its drivers, we hope to inform the discussion on how best to meet the needs of inmates and offenders in terms of our structures and design of corrections responsibilities – and what we will need to support it.

One thing of which I am confident of – spiritual and religious care will always be one of our key supports. All inmates have a right to spiritual and religious care from a recognized faith group of their choice.

The ministry recognizes the vital role that chaplains and the council play in providing advice and consultation to the government on chaplaincy in out provincially run institutions. Much has been done to help ensure that chaplaincy services keep pace with the changing face of corrections, starting with making sure that there are adequate chaplaincy resources in out institutions.

We have also been actively developing new ways to meet the religious needs of clients. One of the ways we have accomplished this is by using modern methods in preparing and delivering religious meals for inmates. Halal meals for Muslim inmates that meet faith group and dietary standards; chaplains working in consultation with food services and correctional staff to develop diet plans and schedules for faith specific diets – these are just some examples.

Some of you may recall that in the past chaplaincy services were seen by some as a “soft” service. That has also changed, by providing spiritual and religious care programs and services that have more emphasis on rehabilitation. Nowadays, it forms an integral part of the programming and services we offer. Programs and services at many institutions focus on helping inmates to connect to the community, find resources that they can use when discharged, and assist them to use their faith.

At the Ottawa-Carlton detention Centre, for example,

chaplaincy services organizes a twice yearly workshop entitled “Faith and Law Dialogue” for faith group representatives.

At Thunder Bay Correctional Centre, through a partnership involving chaplaincy and Aboriginal services, we've had success in helping to build a strong, supportive environment for Aboriginal inmates who make up approximately 70 percent of the male inmate population.

The creation of a Shkode-Kaan or Aboriginal praying arbor on the grounds of the Thunder Bay Correctional Centre is something Correctional Services is proud of. We believe it symbolizes how attitudes and practices are changing in Ontario Correctional Services. Its creation was the first in a Canadian correctional setting.

We believe it is important for the ministry to maintain ongoing collaboration with faith groups in Ontario and to work to ensure that there's a forum for discussion and policy development. Within our ministry, we maintain regular consultation with Chaplaincy Services Ontario and the Ontario Multifaith committee through an identified process.

I began my remarks by talking about the changing face of corrections and how it signifies a new era and raises questions as to whether we are managing the offender population as effectively and efficiently as possible.

To help us understand the impact of this change, Ontario is leading a review of the changing nature of adult corrections across all provincial and territorial jurisdictions in Canada. The goal is to better understand the characteristics of the correctional population and its impact on the delivery of correctional services, both in the institution and the community. There are some areas where change is essential. Corrections relies on chaplains to perform some very important functions: humanize, minister to the community both staff and offenders, encourage working out the many complex issues, work in multi disciplinary teams, and as we move forward it is important that we maintain these important elements and build on them.

## **The Founder's Award Essay Winner!**

The Founder's Award Essay 2008 program sponsored by the Ontario Multifaith Council is the second such program in a series of bringing multifaith awareness issues to the community.

Our first program offered in 2004 had over 80 high school students participating in response to a quotation by Hans Kung - Theologian, "There will be peace on earth when there is peace among the world's religions." Two other questions were also offered as topics: How does living in a community that respects the faith and religious rights of others create a more peaceful and hopeful world? And, How can I living in a community that respects the faith and religious rights of others make a contribution toward a more peaceful and hopeful world? Our winner of the first essay program was Ken MacDougall, St. Joseph's High School, in Braeside, Ontario.

This year's Essay 2008 program was directed to all Chaplains in spiritual and religious care provision in Ontario. There were 16 entries in both English and French, of high writing quality and interesting contexts for ministry. The topic was: "Caring for the Human Spirit: in faith and practice." Chaplains were invited to reflect on their faith and practice within the contexts of their own ministry.

The winning essays, as with the last program, were chosen by a large number of readers from different walks of life, who were not aware of the writer's names or contexts.

This year's winning essay was written by the Rev. Barbara Moulton from Orangeville, Ontario. It is presented here for your reading pleasure. Future Newsletter editions will carry the essays of the other winners.

Any comments or suggestions for future Essay Programs will be appreciated.

The Rev. Dr. Ron Hunt  
OMC Essay Program Coordinator

## **"Caring for the Human Spirit"**

*By Rev. Barbara Moulton*

Working in spiritual care compels us to examine our own belief systems and practice. Some argue that chaplains leave their own faith at the door, yet the reality is that our journey to this ministry does not occur in a vacuum. We are shaped by a personal faith. While this faith does not set the agenda for the spiritual care we provide, it does provide the motivation.

For those who were raised in an evangelical tradition, chaplaincy can create a tension within our spirits. How do we care for the spirit of the person who is beside us, when our tradition asks that we take every opportunity to share our own personal faith? How do we take the words of strength and inspiration that we hear at our weekly worship to heart without feeling compelled to share those same words with those we meet in our role as chaplain?

The Christian faith follows the teachings of one who exemplified a life of spiritual care. If we allow ourselves to move beyond some of the narrower concepts of evangelical tradition and truly emulate his compassion and empathy, the beliefs and practices that flow from these teachings will shape our hearts to care for others, whatever their spiritual expression.

It was he who reminded us that something as simple as a cup of cold water, given in his

name and spirit would be never given in vain. If we are motivated by that simple truth, we understand that we do not need to speak of the faith that motivates us to give a cup of cold water; we simply need to be obedient in our own spirits to that motivation. The cup of cold water speaks of being in the moment with those in distress, caring for a need with the resources that we have. In that moment, the cup of cold water, although very simple, is a precious and meaningful commodity.

What is the cup of cold water that grieving parents need as they cradle the body of their precious child? What is the cup of cold water that the patient in chemotherapy needs as she deals with an uncertain prognosis and wavers between hope and despair each day? What is the cup of the cold water that a family needs as they gather around the bedside of someone they love, knowing with certainty that a life will soon be at an end? When we start to explore these questions, we begin to see that the faith and practice that has brought the chaplain to this moment, allows her to care for the human spirit in this moment.

The cup of cold water is, above all other things, presence. When a chaplain enters the sacred space created by a patient's need, he is there so that they will not be alone. It can be maintained that our belief system is predicated on one simple truth, that it is not good for us to be alone. We are created to live in unity with our creator and with each other. We are created for companionship. It is not difficult to bring this into our chaplaincy as we enter into the ministry of presence with

others.

The cup of cold water is also communication. The heart that is in distress, for whatever the reason, needs to cry out. The scriptures that we read as part of our faith and practice are full of cries of anguish, despair, frustration, pain and sorrow. The one whose teaching we follow gave expression to those emotions as he neared the end of his life and searched through the crowd for the faces of those who knew him best. He did not want to be alone in his moments of suffering. When a chaplain listens she is acknowledging another truth of our belief and practice. The very heart of the Christian faith is one of divine communication and we are created to listen to God and listen to each other.

The cup of cold waters is also comfort. When someone is desperately thirsty, water brings a comfort which cannot be measured. It provides sustenance and strength, when all around is dry and barren. The scriptures which we follow in the Christian faith tell us that we are to comfort each other with the comfort that we ourselves have received. We are not given the resources of divine comfort in order that we might hold on to them. We draw alongside others and comfort their spirits by helping them connect with the spiritual resources they have revealed to us.

One day in chemotherapy in this hospital, the most mundane of all subjects was being discussed. We were talking about the weather. It was a cold but sunny winter day and we commented on the clarity of the blue sky.

This led to a further discussion of cold winter nights when stars that we didn't even notice before, become brilliant against a black canopy.

One older patient listened for awhile and then suddenly began to reminisce about his childhood on a farm. He told us of coming home late on a clear night, looking up into the sky and being filled with a sense of wonder as he stared up at the sky. As he spoke, it seemed like a transcendent moment. He was not in that chemo room. He was a little boy, walking up the path to the farmhouse again and marveling at what he saw.

It was a sacred moment for all those gathered, who fell silent for a while after he shared. We each drank from a cup of cold water in those moments. We were all present with each other. We had shared thoughts. We had felt comforted by entering into the memory of someone else. For some it was a true moment of worship. For others it was a moment when their spirits were nurtured by the joy of another patient. But each of us experienced a moment of presence, communication and comfort. This was spiritual care.

This was a cup of cold water that resonated with my belief and practice.

### OMC AT A GLANCE

The Ontario Multifaith Council:

- consults and advises the government of Ontario on faith group matters relating to the provision of spiritual and religious care in government run or funded institutions
- ensures the availability of persons (Board members/appointees and volunteers) with adequate understanding, ability, qualifications and appropriate status within their faith group
- collaborates with the Government in providing multifaith awareness training and education to persons who work or volunteer in government institutions and transfer payment agencies

Please email us with your suggestions and content submissions. If you would like to write something for the newsletter, please let us know.

Send all newsletter comments and inquiries to:

**newsletter@omc.ca**

For other inquiries contact:

The Ontario Multifaith Council,  
789 Don Mills, Suite 208, Toronto, ON  
M3C 1T5, (416)422-1490, [www.omc.ca](http://www.omc.ca)