

CLF Prison Ministry (*Spring 2009 report to the Board*)

2008 was another banner year for the CLR Prison Ministry, as we introduced new programs for our prisoner-members and strengthened and expanded existing programs.

Our **Book Project** was launched in May 2008, and has already proved to be very popular. With the cooperation of the staff at Skinner House Books, I've re-formatted the texts of a dozen basic UU books so that "reading packets" containing several chapters can be printed on regular 8.5x11" sheets of paper and mailed on request, just like a letter - thus *by-passing* prisons' many restrictions against sending books to prisoners! Over 100 prisoner-members have requested "reading packets" (packets must be requested individually, max. one per month); over 50 have finished reading at least one book this way, and half-a-dozen steady request'ers have already read 3 or more books. I'm in conversation with the staff at Beacon Press in hopes of continually adding more UU titles that prisoners can read this way.

Correspondence courses continue to be popular with our prisoner-members, and in 2008, we were able to work through most of the backlog of prisoners on the waitlist. Most classes consist of about a dozen students who work through the lessons at the same pace, returning responses every six weeks in order to receive the next lesson and a sheet with excerpts from their own and other students' responses to the prior lesson. About 130 of our prisoner-members have completed our 3-lesson *NewUU* course (with another 30 currently enrolled; as of March 2008, all new prisoner-members must complete *NewUU* before taking other correspondence courses and/or applying for a 'penpal' through our Letter Writing Ministry). About two dozen students have completed our 11-lesson *World Religions* course, with another two dozen currently enrolled (half almost done, half just started); about two dozen students have completed *Spirit of Life* (9 lessons), with another dozen just started; and about two dozen (half almost done, half just started) are working their way through our 9-lesson *UU History* course (David Bumbaugh's Narrative History of UUism plus several original sermons from the 1800s and later).

And of course, our **Letter Writing Ministry** continues to be popular with both our prisoner-members and the 'free-world' UUs (currently 150, about 1/3 of whom are CLF/CYF members) who are corresponding with them. We usually have about 140-180 active matches, so at any time, about 40-50% of our prisoner-members are participating in this program. A few penpal-pairs have been corresponding for several years, but many matches last for 1-2 years before "writing themselves out" and coming to a natural conclusion. I'm in frequent email contact with many of our 'free-world' letter-writers to offer advice / support and to intervene when matches need help. Many of them have been with the program for several years, writing to a series of prisoner-penpals and gaining new experience with each new 'match', and some have gone on to become active in other prison programs in their local facilities.

Our prisoner-members continue to express appreciation for Quest and UUWorld, which many describe as "life-saving" publications in a prison context. As we've expanded the support we're able to offer our prisoner-members, and as printing and postage costs continue to rise, we instituted in 2008 several measures to increase our good stewardship of the CLF's financial resources and ensure that our mailings are going to prisoners who really want to receive them. We recently started 'suspending' the memberships of (and the mailing of publications to) prisoner-members who've been out of contact for a year or more (and new prisoner-members who don't complete *NewUU* in their first year of membership) *if they send no response* to a note asking if they want to continue receiving our publications, and so our prisoner-members now number 360 (after crossing 400 in late 2008). I continue to find the CLF prison ministry a gratifying and satisfying outlet for my own professional skills and interests, and remain grateful to the CLF for supporting me and our UU letter-writers in offering this important and valuable ministry.

-- *Rev. Patty Franz* ("Chaplain Pat"), *Director of Ministries for CLF prisoner-members*