

PRISON PAX CHRISTI CHAPTER TAKES OFF

NON-VIOLENCE AT ITS CORE

by Timothy J. Muise

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What follows is an article written by members of Central Massachusetts Pax Christit who now come into ShirleyWorld and work with the men here to promote non-violence in a very real and meaningful way. Read about in their words. Let them tell the story.

The guards will hate us, and they do a good job of it, and the administration will doubt our motives, but that cannot destroy our work or negate the spirit our work brings to our Church here. Hate us, doubt us, think what you may of us, but just realize that your opinion means nothing to us. It is the opinion of the people, like the people who wrote the following article, that matters to us. We are serving the community in spite of your very real boycott of such efforts.

More to come from the men of faith here at ShirleyWorld. If we can save just one man from a future life of crime, from the lifestyle of hopelessness that this prison promotes, then we are successful and God is pleased.

Thank you Charlotte, Roger, and Brian!

"Never believe what they about us,  
only believe it is them you should distrust.  
Our worth will shine like polished gold,  
while we make the changes with stories told.  
Men can rise above with God in their heart,  
and that is why the faithful here all do their part."

\* \* P A X C H R I S T I \* \*

" P E A C E O F C H R I S T "



#### +Pax Christi Central Massachusetts Breaks new Ground

Two years ago, Pax Christi Central Massachusetts was contacted by a group of parishioners from Our Lady of Guadalupe Community in Shirley, MA who wanted to know more about Pax Christi and its vision. After an initial introduction about Pax Christi and our small group efforts, they eagerly encouraged us to come back so they might learn more and become a part of our group. This past August we began meeting regularly with them and have officially integrated them as Pax Christi Central MA/Our Lady of Guadalupe. What took so long? *Our Lady of Guadalupe is located inside of the medium security prison at MCI Shirley and its members are all inmates.*

Pax Christi was born inside a prison of French resisters during World War II when Bishop Theas called on them to love their enemies - Germany. Now we are bringing Pax Christi full circle with (as far as we can find) the first chapter located inside of a prison, precisely where the ideals of justice, peace and nonviolence are needed most (and often the most difficult to follow).

Although we will never be able to actually join both groups together we have tried to maintain a unity in our activities. We use Mary Lou Kownacki's book "Love Beyond Measure, A Spirituality of Nonviolence" as a basis for instruction and adapt the chapters for the prison environment. Meanwhile the rest of our group "on the outside" meets monthly to discuss the book but without the editing. Pax Christi Massachusetts has generously given us a grant to purchase copies of this wonderful book for 30 inmates.

The three of us who visit our new Pax Christi members in the prison agree that this has been a very rewarding experience. When we signed up for the task, we expected it to be a ministry TO the inmates; now we realize it is a ministry WITH the inmates. Together we are journeying to be more understanding, more forgiving, and more nonviolent in thought, word, and deed. Together we will work to make this world, wherever we find ourselves, a more nonviolent and just place by prayer and when we can by our actions. We are also most humbled and honored that we are able to share the Eucharist after each session.

Even before our invitation to the prison the congregation of Our Lady of Guadalupe was and still is very active in numerous ministries, and we are only adding to the work already being done by God through them. They raise money each year for Toys for Tots by receiving pledges to walk multiple miles around the exercise yard. And they have gone cell to cell seeking donations help stock food pantries in the local area outside of the prison. In this effort they told us of an inmate who gave \$1 of the \$1.50 he had in his account toward the cause, an excellent example of Christ's teaching of the poor widow in action. In addition they do letter campaign writing of support and change. A recent effort was to allow dying long term prisoners to be home with their families. *It is interesting to note that besides being a 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of Pax Christi in a prison, they are also the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter in a prison of the Thomas Merton Society and both were started at approximately the same time.*

This ministry is not without its great and unique challenges. We do not know which way to go next or where it will ultimately lead. We have no particular expertise. As Bishop Oscar Romero said "We plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise."



But we have a desire to do God's work both inside and outside of this prison and a mantra that we repeat together before every session "Holy Spirit, go before us and lead the way."

Because we had no actual prison resources to work with we hope to develop a handbook so that future Pax Christi groups will have the benefit of our experience if they too are led by the spirit to prison ministry. But we are still in the early stages of our work and we ask for prayers and support of our fellow Pax Christi members.

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Article written with the collaborative efforts of Brian Ashmankus, and Charlotte and Roger Stanley of Pax Christi Central Ma