

MODEL INMATES **NOT** MODEL TREATMENT

I have come across many comments that sum up "who" the Department of Correction (DOC) really is but none so aptly express the most recent events here at MCI Shirley much like the following:

"The DOC has an ingrown idea that when a person is convicted he is to be punished for a very long time and while he is being punished he's to be punished in as many ways as possible."

MCI Shirley is in the midst of an internal pre-audit. However, the DOC has never and will never fail the official audit. No matter the circumstances, the auditors always watch the backs of their colleagues. Yet, they have guards running around with pre-audit staff niggling over homemade hooks on the walls, empty soda bottles, making sure photos are within the 2'x3' square on the wall, beds are tidy, towels are not being used as doilies, no one has a clothes line, shoes are under the bed, no one covers the window when they use the bathroom or shower (even if there's a female working the block) and other extremely important pre-audit preparations which apparently have an overwhelming impact on a prisoners rehabilitation, as well as enhances public safety.

In the meantime prisoners can safely gamble, smoke weed, snort Suboxone, tongue their medications, steal and sit on their asses all day because everyone is preoccupied with making sure no one has a dirty bowl in their sink.

There are two things that stand out which puts all of this into perspective. First, I have two friends that are wrapping up their sentences the first week of July, 2015. And while the guards are scurrying around like ants to a chocolate bar looking for ID's clipped to a prisoner's chest, no one in the DOC is concerned if my friends will leave here and go get high, commit a crime or fall into their old criminal habits. No one cares if they have a reentry plan or a solid foundation for recovery. Rather, photos inside a square are more important than the potential for creating another victim.

Second, is what happened to me? I have become a casualty of the pre-audit preparations. Twice they asked me to clean/arrange specific things in my cell—both times I "complied" (their words not mine). But

the third time they had a problem with how my bed was made; something that was not an issue the two previous times. So, rather than tell me to "fix it" they decided to remove me from my single cell and house me in a double cell inside of a restrictive block used for orientation called A-1. Thus, stripping me of my single cell and the seniority I earned through years of good behavior. If that wasn't enough, the Superintendent ordered the guard to issue me a disciplinary report for an "unmade bed". A report which will have untold consequences down the road for institutional employment, program participation and parole consideration.

As a second degree lifer, parole is my only way of obtaining freedom. So, my angst is understandable. But it again puts into perspective "who" the DOC is. I don't do drugs, sell drugs, gamble, make weapons, drink homebrew or get into fights. Rather, I gained international news for my part in bringing the International Thomas Merton Society to MCI Shirley (first of its kind inside of a prison in the world), facilitate PAX CHRISTI (another first of its kind inside of a prison), co-facilitate Project Youth (where I speak to local high school kids), coordinate/facilitate the Alternatives to Violence Program, I'm a Eucharistic Minister and active in all church programs, as well as, have several articles on prison reform published in both academic and non-academic journals. I even had an essay featured at the 15th Annual International Conference on Penal Abolition in Ottawa Canada.

Despite those achievements and others, I was treated as though I had just been caught with homebrew. But that is "who" they are. They punish for the sake of punishing. As a Captain recently told several guards, "be tough on them (the inmates). Stop being easy and do your job." In the end all that's created is anger and resentment toward a system that knows little about rehabilitation cares little of reentry but knows everything about punishing. It makes the wrapping up of my two friends all the more worrisome for me and for those in society. I pray they succeed and another victim is not created because of the ignorance of DOC staff.

As for me, my faith in God will guide me through this. Instead of taking the low road HE has afforded me the chance to turn adversity into opportunity. It has only been 48 hours since arriving in A-1 and I already have two young men committed to attending church services. Maybe some good can come of this after all.