

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

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The Jewel In the Crown

The term "jewel in the crown" means the best of the best. The crown in a monarchy signified the supreme ruler - the highest person who ruled everything. The jewel was always the brightest, biggest decorative piece of the crown - generally the focal point of the crown around which the rest of the crown was designed.

At the church service last Saturday, the Salvation Army volunteer who delivered the message referred to the congregation of Christian prisoners at Stanley prison as the "Jewel in the crown." He was comparing Stanley's church to the churches in other prisons throughout Wisconsin. Tom and Jan (the volunteers) travel to different prisons delivering sermons on Saturdays and Sundays. They have a chance to see how the Christian prisoners at those prisons exemplify their Christian beliefs.

When it comes to unity, sincerity of belief and zealousness for the Lord, Stanley prison stands out. God is present every day, both in our resident chaplains and the prisoners who attend chapel services. In my opinion, there are several reasons for this positive state of affairs.

First of all, Stanley is a miserable place to be. This drives prisoners to look for a way to ease their suffering. Turning inward and focusing on the reality within instead of external reality makes it easier to bear up under adversity. Many people turn to Christianity because it is the dominant belief system in the United States.

When these suffering prisoners come to a church service they encounter other men who are joyous, positive and totally committed to the Lord. They are not afraid to lift up their voices to God. They are strong in their beliefs and not afraid to show it. In Christian terms, you would say that they are filled with the Holy Spirit.

According to the Bible, when Christ ascended to heaven he sent a "Comforter" to strengthen his followers so they could stay true to God in spite of adversity. That Holy Spirit comes upon a believer and gives him (or her) the ability to follow God's will in their life against any obstacles. As these new comers experience the Holy Spirit they are also transformed thereby increasing the positive energy in the Stanley church.

Finally, the chaplains who work at the Stanley chapel are strongly committed to that department and do everything possible to make chapel resources available to everyone who wants to use them. They schedule videos, CD listening, Bible study and church services to ensure that every available minute of chapel time is utilized productively. But don't think the chaplains only look out for the Christians. They also ensure that muslims, pagans, jews and Buddhists have access to chapel services as well.

In my opinion, it is more important that you have a spiritual path than what that path happens to be. I am a Christian because Christ called me as one of His own. But before that I studied many different systems and benefited from each one. I've done ceremonial magick, Buddhist meditation, yoga and shamanism. It is up to each of us to find our own path and follow it. I am thankful that I am part of the Jewel In the Crown and pray that others may experience a spiritual transformation the same way I did.