Summer has departed with Fall beginning to nip at us. Political winds blow now with election season. Our goal of sustaining monthly Newsletter representation hasn’t been successful recently. Priorities of staff families have taken precedent. From deaths to travel and sibling support, our children’s needs, injuries, courts and location change, and the struggle for the legal tender, our plate has been inundated. However, these travails of family, friends, extended members, are too often a luxury denied to those in state exile.

Families do amazing things to maintain inclusion with their kinfolk, sometimes even moving to be in close proximity to the institution of incarceration. Some prisoners deny themselves all contact with outsiders to spare them the agony of separation. This process has certainly increased with the onslaught of lengthier sentences over the last thirty years.

Continued on page 2

Another Suspicious Death in Maine State Prison’s Lockdown Unit
James Ridgeway

Maine Attorney General Janet Mills reportedly will review the results of an investigation by the state police into the death of a prisoner named Victor Valdez, who died last November in the Special Management Unit (SMU) of Maine State Prison. While the Maine Department of Corrections says he died of natural causes, inmates who say they witnessed the incidents insist he was beaten and abused by prison staff, who also hindered him from receiving treatment for a serious medical condition.

Lance Tapley, who has written before about abuses in the SMU, published a lengthy article on Valdez’s death last week in the Portland Phoenix. As Tapley described the situation:

[Valdez] was a very sick man. His kidneys had failed, and he had required dialysis treatment several times a week for eight years, via a stent implanted in his arm. He also suffered from congestive heart failure, cirrhosis of the liver, and lung problems, according to court documents filed prior to his sentencing in 2009 to four years’ incarceration for a 2008 aggravated assault in Portland. While at the prison, which is in the coastal village of Warren, he received his dialysis at Miles Memorial Hospital in Damariscotta.

Various inmates described the treatment of Valdez in letters to the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition, a group that actively opposes the abuse of solitary confinement in Maine’s prisons. One reason for the beating by guards, one letter said, was their anger at having to take Valdez to dialysis treatments at a nearby hospital early in the morning. An inmate wrote to Coalition member Judy Garvey that staff had “ripped out” Valdez’s dialysis tubes in order to cart him off to the SMU for breaking a prison rule, “and he bled all over the place.” Another inmate, a friend of Valdez, wrote to Garvey in Spanish (here translated by Eda Trajo of El Centro Latino in Portland).

I saw how the officers abused Victor Valdez. I saw the officers

Continued on page 6.
Continued from page one,
Family and community contact is the most signif-
significant part of any rehabilitative process
through the incarceration experience. Even
long sentences require family reentry. Family
support succeeds best in preventing re-
institutionalism. Communities and their insti-
uitions, churches, schools, must take responsi-

bility for the returning offender and see that they
adjust positively to civil responsibilities. The
positive employment of ex-prisoners needs
community resources in a pro-active approach
involving employers and favorable regard.
County commissioners, council men and
women, politicians and civic groups need to
provide support and increased opportunities to
those in transition from institutions.
To the families who suffer in their own re-

sidual punishment, mothers and sisters, brothers
and extended members who suffer too with a
state sentence, deprivation is on both sides of
the wall. Loved ones often wisely decline to sub-
ject their incarcerated family to news and hap-
penings within the family that are of negative
effect. Nothing can be more aggravating and
 vexing than the frustration of not being able to
affect anything for the better of loved ones out-
side. The value of family relations often be-
comes enhanced through incarceration.
Families of prisoners did well in coming
together to show support to enact LD1611,
despite communication obstacles and delayed
notice by prison authorities. This organizational
activity must continue and grow to meet the
challenge for full representation through the
next legislative session. MPAC will have an
organizational meeting Saturday, gathering at 9:30
to 10:30 A.M. at the IBEW Hall in Manchester,
Maine, 16 Old Winthrop Road, October 16.
We encourage participation of family members
to join us in developing actions and programs to
best serve prisoners and their families. Phone
contact for information is 479-3675 and our
new address for The CALL, Liberty News Ser-
vice, or MPAC is now 298 Knox Rd. Bar Har-
bror, Maine 04609.

Development of means for transportation
to assist visitation, car pooling, re-entry support,
bail assistance, local advocacy, and volunteer
caseworkers are topics necessary to tackle
Incorporation and fundraising as well as our leg-
sislative agenda will be given attention. Join us in
solidarity to organize for a more humane and
effective system of community justice.

Cracks in the Walls of Maine Corrections
By Rev. Stan Moody
It was 1977, early in my ill-fated candidacy for Governor. In
an effort to learn more about our prison system, I made an appoint-
ment to visit Maine Correctional Center in South Windham.
I was met at the front lobby by the Superintendent. After a
long conversation, he made a statement that I never forgot: “96%
of the people in this institution should be taken out back and shot.
It is the other 4% that we are here for.”
At the time, I thought well of that statement. Maine’s state
prison population was about 1/3 of what it is today (around 800),
and I shared in the public perception that only the worst of the
worst were incarcerated. The fact that an entire prison staff was
dedicated to saving 4% of Maine’s incorrigibles was impressive to
me at that time.
The problem is that the statement, “96% of the people in this
institution should be taken out back and shot,” remains a key obsta-
cle to prison reform after 3 decades of nepotism, favoritism and
political patronage.
The walls of the system, however, are beginning to crumble.
The recent disclosure by the Attorney General’s Office that
the State is investigating the possible fall 2009 homicide by prison
staff of a prisoner at Maine State Prison in Warren is a departure
from past deflections of information by State government. The
whereabouts of the prisoner’s demise — whether in Solitary, the
Infirmary or the hospital — is indeterminate at present, but that he
was declared dead without a medical examination and was cremated
without an autopsy is confirmed. The evidence having been de-
stroyed, confirmation of what happened to him is now a matter of
the word of witnesses — primarily other prisoners.
This was the second of three suspicious deaths within the
prison system over the period of a year. The first prisoner died of a
ruptured spleen in Solitary at Warren in spring 2009, within two
hours of my request that he be given toilet paper. He had been
using his pillow case, but it techni
cally didn’t matter because he had no pillow either. His death has been attributed to an assault re-
ceived four days earlier in suspicion of which another prisoner re-

mains in Solitary but uncharged with the crime. The investigation
drags on, while the man’s widow and family reel from receiving his
ashes with the official word that he died of natural causes, not to be
corrected for six weeks.
Another prisoner died in solitary at Androscoggin County Jail
by hanging himself with torn bed sheets in early 2010. He had been
placed there in full view of staff for his own protection.
Meanwhile, officials have suddenly become aware of drugs
being carried into the prisons and jails by staff, a long-standing tra-
dition. Several guards are reported to have been released at War-
ren. One of Maine’s most prominently publicized prisoners at-
tempts suicide in April with an overdose of prescription drugs.
From where, one might ask, was he able to obtain those drugs? It is
doubtful that the answer to that question will be soon forthcoming,
as this prisoner is confined to the mental health wing of Solitary for
the foreseeable future. He has been charged with “trafficking in
contraband” for carrying drugs within his system, while whoever
provided the drugs thus far remains anonymous. The notion that
they came in through the mail or visitors is absurd in light of such
policies as the banning of a child’s crayoned picture to Dad because
the wax might be laced with drugs.
The public will not long permit the Department
Continued on page 8.
Candidates Response to Corrections Issues

Questioned by a citizen, Libby Mitchell and Paul LePage had similar simple answers to this complex issue. Both basically said they would get their experts together and decide what their priorities would be and proceed accordingly. Independents Moody and King did not respond. The most detailed and quick response was from Independent Elliot Cutler. Following is how the question was put to the candidates.

The Pew Center reported in 2008 that for the first time in history more than one in every 100 male adults in America are in jail or prison. And in Maine, according to N.A.M.I. (National Alliance for the Mentally Ill) estimates, mental illness is part of the condition of 64% of Maine’s inmates and substance abuse is part of the lives of 84% of this nation’s inmates.

Incarceration costs taxpayers over $44,000 per year per inmate (C. Glassman, Maine Supreme Judicial Court, estimate.) Do you have ideas about how we can spend our Corrections dollars more wisely to get our people out from behind bars and moving forward in life?

Elliot Cutler Response: You’ve raised an important question. Maine has the lowest incarceration rate of any state in the United States. Nonetheless, the imprisoned population still exceeds 4,000 and, as you pointed out, the citizen cost of housing these people is expensive. Currently, the jail population in Maine is growing at 9 percent a year.

Stan Moody, a former state legislator and current chaplain (Ed: not officially fired) at the Maine State Prison, has written a lot about this topic and has offered some interesting ideas for cutting costs in Maine prisons.

The most vulnerable population of ex-offenders in Maine is males who have been previously incarcerated. He suggests we can cut the first-year recidivism rate from 56 percent to less than 7 percent by offering housing, volunteer mentoring and job training for the first 6 months. At a cost of $10,000 per released inmate to enter and graduate from a community based program with mental health care, housing, job training and mentoring, and job placement, the state would save around $1 million for every 100 enrollees on recidivism reduction alone. I need to further examine these numbers, but they are a compelling place to start.

I am very interested to have any ideas you may have for approaching this problem. Thank you for writing and I encourage those interested to visit my website at www.cutler2010.com to learn more about my plans.

Elliot Cutler may not be our next state Governor but it is clear the message of The CALL and those who speak for Humane treatment of prisoners is having an influence.

VOTE!

Prisoners held in the state of Maine can vote. Voting rights have been repealed in most of the few states that allowed prisoner suffrage. Vermont is the only other state known to currently allow its prisoners to vote in outside elections. There have been efforts in the past to refuse Maine prisoner voting privileges in previous legislatures, but they haven’t succeeded. Ex-prisoners and community supporters have come out strongly in these public hearings to support prisoner voting, but it is doubtful they were the persuasive force to keep the right remaining. More likely legislators saw that the cost to implement a system denying the right would be more costly and a difficulty that they couldn’t justify.

Prisoners should contact their N.A.A.C.P. chapter members in the Warren facility who are active in getting prisoners registered to vote. In other facilities you should make your request to exercise this right to the administrators of the custodial institution. In some cases, it may even be more effective to apply right to the town clerk where you are from to get sent an absentee ballot. You may even be able to accomplish this over the phone, particularly if you are already registered to vote in your home town. Election day is Tuesday, November 2nd. Get working on this now to make sure your vote is counted!

We all complain about our politicians and the government. If you participate, you will either feel less likely to complain about it or maybe even more. Still, you will have taken your personal measure for the responsibility of the outcome. This element is reward in itself and will bring some sense of satisfaction. Get active! Democracy only truly works if everyone is involved!

REMEMBER: REGISTER TO VOTE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE FOR NOVEMBER 2, 2010
FROM Larry Parks . . .

Someday I truly hope changes will be made for the current segregation policies at Maine State Prison. Although I am no longer in Maine I still want to share my last experience in segregation in hopes that people will take a more positive view of the LD 1116 bill. I strongly feel that a civic action is needed to get something accomplished. Then again, with high hopes, perhaps those who were against the LD 1116 will see the light and realize that the current policies and procedures of segregation are not working and there is much discrimination going on.

If a prisoner is high risk he must go through four steps to be released back to population. The first step is that one has to talk with the mental health people so they can evaluate the person and give their opinion as to what the person needs. In reality it's a mind game that is being played out, for most prisoners know what to say to the mental health workers in order to get drugs and to get out of segregation in the quickest way.

There are numerous prisoners who truly have mental health issues and need drugs as well as guidance and help. Making prisoners go through all four steps to get out of segregation is just another way of the prison playing mind control with the prisoners, especially for those who do not want to take the psych drugs that the mental health workers so easily try to put everyone on.

They give prisoners numerous tests of questions in which they ask the same question several times. Everyone knows what to put down for the answers. Some will even put false answers just to mess with the mental health workers, for as everyone knows they form their opinion based on what prisoners say to them. Have they ever attempted to talk to me? Yes, but they see no need to analyze me after I tell them the following joke:

A lady goes to a psychiatrist for a psychological examination. She knocks on the door and the psychiatrist opens it and says please come on in and lay on the couch. The lady goes over and sits on the couch. The psychiatrist sits on a chair beside her and says “If you were out in the desert and all of a sudden a submarine appeared, what would you do?” The lady thinks for a minute and then says “I’d throw snowballs at it.”

In bewilderment the psychiatrist says “But where would you get the snowballs?” Whereas, the lady replies “same place you got the submarine.”

In this day and age most prison administrative staff and employees always want to print only the negative things that prisoners do. Rarely do they want to speak on the positive things. There are a few employees who will speak out and tell the truth about a situation or the good that some prisoners have done while in prison. These are the ones who should be running the prisons because they are the ones who want the recidivism rate dropped.

Perhaps one day society will wake up and realize that in order to rehabilitate prisoners and keep them from returning to prison they must educate them and teach them trades and vocational skills. Today all they seem to want is to warehouse prisoners and to put them on psych drugs in hopes of easily controlling them.

This type of treatment has never worked and never will. Society needs to take a deeper and closer look at how the present penal institutions are failing to help rehabilitate it’s convicted citizens who will one day return to society. -

-Larry Parks
The Walls

Behold the walls
the world crumbles
but there in the ruins
the silence brings our gravity to rest.
Sometimes at night
a forgotten voice is singing
and it prays us back to sleep again.
This may be the dark house of God
or the alphabet of caves.
But sometimes
it is the word left out between us
that we can love the most.

Richard Freeman

Printed in “Words From the Well”, The Church of Our Father Newsletter of Hulls Cove, Maine. Prisoners are invited to submit their poetry for consideration by this venue.

We seriously need more contributions of art, drawings and poetry for future issues. Share with us your talent and expression. Release the hidden humanity locked away from public view. Share yourselves.

Paradox

It fills me like an unborn child
I wonder does one give birth to emptiness
or does it die inside?

Richard Leete

The Fruit of a Prisoners Day

I ride on yesterdays rocking horse
Going faster before the dawn
breaks my midnight travels to pieces
I travel fast on many horses
All fitting to my needs
And worthy of many rides that fill my half of day
I ride my camel through drifts of snow
To see an igloo on the desert
In the half true world of sleep that feeds me.

Richard Freeman

Thus says the Lord of hosts: “As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.” (Zechariah 9:11-12)

Victoria Trans Captivus

By Peter Mills

Insanity like invasive roots wends
through the broken minds of men.
Behind steel doors like scared children are
these proud and bold men from afar.
Stripped of choice and love and friends,
the evil upon them does descend.
The worst of habits and thoughts and ways
become the way they pass their days.
A poison mist engulfs and blinds.
There is only one light that through it shines.
Some find their shield of peace and calm.
The love of Christ a healing balm.
And for the rest, we pray and love
That they too will find God’s endless love.

Peter Mills
Warren, Me
Suspicious Death continued from page 1

cover him with pepper spray and they took him away to check his blood pressure, and afterwards they put him back in the cell without cleaning the cell or him. When the officers put him back in his cell I could smell the pepper spray because it’s so strong. And Victor fell on the floor and he stayed like that with all that stink of pepper spray.

In 10 minutes they called code blue. When the medics came Victor was foaming at the mouth, which came from the pepper spray. They left the pepper spray on him and they didn’t clean it. I thought he was dead because he was a sick man and the pepper spray made it difficult to breathe. The next day they brought him back one room closer to mine, and he tells me that they didn’t want to take him to dialysis and that they forced him to sign a document that says he doesn’t want to go to dialysis. And he doesn’t read English and they don’t even translate for him. He can’t miss dialysis or he’ll die and therefore they’ve forced him to sign for his own death.

Shortly before his death, according to Garvey, inmates were ordered to return to their cells immediately. Valdez, who was hard of hearing and had limited English, did not respond right away. Other prisoners told Garvey he was then beaten and pepper sprayed. Valdez died less than a week later.

Initially Denise Lord, the Associate Corrections Commissioner, told the Bangor Daily News that Valdez had died of “medical causes in the hospital.” However, as Tapley points out:

No state medical examiner looked at Valdez’s body, despite a prison protocol requiring the prison to notify the state police to see if they wished to investigate a prisoner’s death. The medical examiner’s office, part of the attorney general’s office, works hand in glove with the state police. The medical examiner’s office assistant told the Phoenix that Valdez’s death “didn’t meet our criteria” because he was “sick enough” to have died from natural causes. In such a case, a prison physician would sign the death certificate, she said. But who signed it and the cause of death listed is information unavailable to the press and general public, according to the state’s Office of Vital Records.

According to Tapley’s article, Valdez’ mother, at the time traveling out of the country, gave permission for his body to be cremated. After Garvey and other prison reformers launched a campaign for an investigation, Attorney General Mills asked the state police to prepare a report on the causes of death. She is expected to announce the findings soon. In the meantime, Garvey has sought information from Associate Corrections Commissioner Denise Lord on the details surrounding the death. She forwarded to me some of her questions, followed by Lord’s answers:

1) Did officials from MSP/DOC notify the State Police following Victor Valdez’s death? Did these officials ask the State Police whether they wanted to conduct an investigation into the death?

Lord: The department, by our policy, routinely notifies the State Police of a prisoner death.

2) Was there an autopsy performed on Victor Valdez?

Lord: This is medical related information and is confidential. The department cannot release this information. This information can be provided by the next of kin.

3) Who certified Mr. Valdez’s death and at what date and time?

Lord: Medical information is confidential and we cannot disclose this to a member of the public without consent…

5) Did Mr. Valdez’s family make the decision about cremation or did the DOC make that decision?

Lord: Our policy is to notify the prisoner’s next of kin to discuss the arrangements.

6) Where did the cremation take place?

Lord: Again, this is information that should be provided by the next of kin…

8) Do you have contact info for Victor Valdez’s out-of-country family and if so, would you please share it with us? Were Victor Valdez’s out-of-country relatives notified of his death or was there not a contact?

Lord: Our policy requires notification of next of kin in the case of a prisoner death…

10) Would you please supply the start and end dates during November 2009 when Mr. Valdez was in the SMU?

Lord: Housing assignments within a correctional facility are not public information.

Tapley cites Paul Wright, editor of Prison Legal News, who told him that it is “quite common for prisons to cover up and restrict the info on prisoner beatings, deaths, etc., and it generally works quite well. . . . The use of laws on medical privacy to cover up wrongdoing is also fairly widespread.” The State Attorney General’s Office of Janet Mills has yet to release its conclusions based on the investigations as of this writing. This is not the first suspicious death to take place in Maine State Prison’s SMU. The death of an aging prisoner named Sheldon Weinstein is referenced in Tapley’s article, and was also described in Solitary Watch by former Maine State Prison chaplain Stan Moody.
The View from Prisoner X

Prisoner X is currently writing us from inside the Maine State Prison in Warren.

I write to you today to offer my views on the subject of parole in Maine. I have a somewhat unique perspective on the issue, I believe.

As a law abiding taxpayer for most of my life, I know we need prisons and I am willing to pay a reasonable amount for the operation of them. I expect the prison system to keep the public safe. This must be done in two ways. One is to keep those that cannot play by the rules and not hurt people, locked up. The other, and most important part of a prison system, is to do everything possible to change those individuals in its care, so they will not hurt society again. This is a big task, but an absolutely necessary one.

As an inmate in the Department of Corrections I have an unvarnished view of what is happening with and for prisoners.

The DOCK through no fault of their own, is structured to warehouse inmates. It is almost completely an institution to satisfy the punitive wishes of the Judiciary.

There are some minuscule funds for substance abuse, education, and counseling available. They are doing what they can with the tools the state gives them.

One of the most effective and simple methods of improving bad behavior in humans and animals is positive re-enforcement of good behavior. This will get the individual in the habit of good behavior.

As the system stands now, if you are a client of the DOC and you break the rules you will be sent to the prison in Warren. If you break the rules within the Warren facility, you will be sent to the super-max portion of the prison.

Punishment heaped on punishment does not rule abiding citizens make. Here, within the prison, it is a constant mentality of "us" against "them". Many men spend their every moment trying to "get one over" on the administration. Some of the inmates consider a punitive trip to the super-max as a badge of honor.

I tell you, these men (mostly) are not getting prepared to reenter society. They are not motivated to do so. There are resources available such as the Education Department, but it is sorely under staffed and under funded, and in fact, most of these men have not ever developed habits of self improvement.

So here is the perfect opportunity to offer a chance for serious change.

We, here in the State of Maine hand out some of the harshest sentences in the country, so we have some room to implement parole. Maine judges often give out sentences on a par with judges in Texas. The difference is that in Texas you go to your first parole hearing when you have completed 10% of your sentence.

So how does an inmate qualify himself for parole? Obviously by staying out of trouble in prison, and by self improvement. Getting his GED, and perhaps even a college degree. Even if an inmate does these things only to satisfy parole, it never the less is getting him into the habit of rule following and self improvement.

This is an immeasurable service to society. Not only will the improved individual not be so apt to re-enter the corrections system, he will more likely become a taxpayer and a functioning member of his family and his community. Then there is the huge financial benefit of parole. The numbers are hard to nail down, but $43,000.00 per year per inmate seems to be ‘the most solid number to house an inmate in prison. Compared to $2500.00 per year to keep a man on parole would clearly be a benefit to the people who shoulder the burden of paying for the system.

Our mindset as a nation has become almost purely punitive, hence we shamefully have the biggest per capita prison population in the world. It is time for a change.

We need to look more to the European model of prisons where the recidivism rate is less than half of ours. They sentence and rehabilitate their lawbreakers with the mindset that they are human beings who need help. The investment in humane treatment will pay off long term.

If we reactivated parole, or some other form of reward for good behavior system, we could motivate inmates to at the least get in the habit of positive behavior.

I assure you that as it functions now there is no or very little rehabilitation going on in our prison. Let Maine lead the nation off this misguided path that it has been on for so many expensive, and counter productive years.

Sincerely, an inmate

Maine Prisoner Support Workshop at the 2010 Burdock Gathering

Members of the Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition hosted a workshop on the issues facing incarcerated Mainers at this years Burdock Gathering. The annual event focuses on bringing together participants from both rural and urban areas, and across generations to help build a free and sustainable future.
The Editorial Collective  P.A. Finn and R.W. Bothen
Production Assistance  Wendy Copson-Higgins  Debb King
Contributors  Rev. Stan Moody  Lance Tapley
Prisoner X  Larry Parks
James Ridgeway  Judy Garvey

Many thanks to those who contributed to our postage:
Church of Our Father, Hulls Cove, Maine

THE BREAKNECK BOYS

After nearly three years of negotiations with successive prison administrations, Augusta officials, former and present Governor aides, finally the stabilized administration of Warden Patricia Barnhart has approved a concert for the prisoners by the Hulls Cove band, Jeff Davis and the Breakneck Boys. This band with country and eastern roots, has performed consistently over the last 17 yrs for the Church of Our Father annual Church Fair. Jeff’s voice has often been compared to Randy Travis and Huey Lewis.

Recreation staff and management has suggested that the acoustics of the prison gym is too resonant for an amplified performance. We will try to adjust the sound accordingly. Unfortunately due to a painting accident, the drummer (yours truly) broke his wrist and I will need continued recuperation. We expect to perform before Thanksgiving. Sponsorship and support is courtesy of Church of Our Father and MPAC.

Please send any submissions for the next issue to:
Liberty News Service
298 Knox Road
Bar Harbor ME 04609
The Call is also available in electronic format. You can access it by checking out our website at maineprisoneradvocacycoalition.org.

National Religious Campaign Against Torture
316 F. St. NE, Suite 200
Washington, DC  20002
Email: campaign@nrcat.org
Phone: 202-547-1920   Fax: 202-547-1921
Website: www.tortureisamoralissue.org

“When the prisoner’s punishment is over, society leaves him (her) to him/her self, that is to say it abandons him(her) when it’s highest duty towards him(her) begins. Society is really ashamed of it’s own actions, and shuns those whom it has punished, as people shun a creditor whose debt they cannot pay, or one whom they have inflicted an irreparable, an irremediable wrong.”  

Oscar Wilde

Continued from Moody, page 2, of Corrections to make such blanket statements as “drugs are rare in the prison system” or “our investigation will support (that the prisoner whose death is being investigated by the AG died of medical issues).” The Shroud of Secrecy that has heretofore kept information from getting out of Maine’s prison system is slowly being shredded. Along with that, we hope as we look forward to a new Governor in January, will be the hiring of professionals with no ties to the Old Boy’s Network that passes judgment on who should and should not be taken outside and shot.