

# INSIDE VIEW

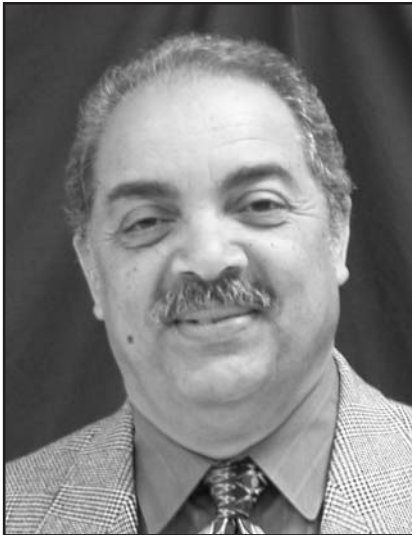
CIC Ministries

"...when in  
prison, you  
visited me..."

Matthew 25:36

Spring 2009

Correctional Institutions Chaplaincy of Santa Clara County, Inc



The Rev. Jose Ruiz



The Rev. Raul Avila

## Pastors offer services in English and Spanish

Jose H. Ruiz, senior pastor of Comunidad Cristiana de San Jose, was a bit hesitant to commit to seeing men at the Main Jail - not because he didn't want to do it, but because the press of the ministry is so heavy, particularly at his growing and active congregation.

But after meeting with the many men who speak Spanish and who need the guidance of an experienced pastor, Ruiz said he was ready to start his training in one-on-one pastoral care to those who are incarcerated.

He was accompanied by Associate Pastor Raul Avila during the initial training session, and Ruiz said that after seeing Avila and a

team of men and woman from his church involved at Elmwood Correctional Center, he knew he needed to become involved.

He had done jail ministry early in his career, but it wasn't until now that he was able to delegate some of the administrative details at the church in order to gain time to talk with individuals who need to speak with a pastor.

He said he isn't interested in the crime they stand accused of. He's interested in "coming as a spiritual supporter to them."

When they are locked up, he said, they have a lot of time to think about their lives and are ready for a

Please see PASTORS, Page 2

## Calling on the 'Curegiver'

THE REV. RA AMEN

JUVENILE HALL CHAPLAIN

I would like to share a story with you about one of my pastoral visits with a young girl in Juvenile Hall who was fast approaching 17 years of age. We were not long into our conversation, before she began to bare her heart. I sensed that something had her very troubled. She was the mother of a 1-year-old son, had been active in a gang and had been using "meth" (methamphetamine) for several years.

What troubled her the most was the deterioration of her mental state, which she attributed to her "meth" use. She had been using "meth" since the age of 13. Although she had been clean since she arrived in Juvenile Hall three months ago, she felt and feared that the drugs had damaged her brain. She told me about her feelings of anxiety, confusion, moodiness, and memory loss.

She expressed concern about the future for her and her child because of her feelings of mental impairment. As I listened, I tried not to let her sense how deeply the pain and uncertainty of her dilemma was affecting me. Her being so young and being responsible for the life of a baby and the thought of having to handle that responsibility added to the pressure and uncertainty she was feeling.

Please see CARE, Page 4

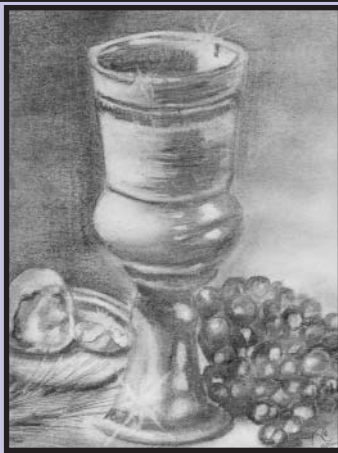
## Sharing helps both sides

By **BETSY BALASSONE**

Being able to share something as sacred as communion with others in need is always special. The transformation of the wafers and grape juice into the sacrament of communion, even in the office vestibule, reminded me that God is found everywhere and in all things. Individualized prayers spoke directly to the pain and fear each person must have felt in such a stressful situation.

I was struck by the connection we felt with those who chose to accept the sacrament. The power of our prayers felt palpable. Yes, the "body and blood of Christ which is given for us" is a graphic reminder of God's presence and strength, but it also ensures a connection between at least two people, the giver and the receiver. We all need these connections.

Surely, there were a variety of reasons why individuals chose to celebrate Communion: From their firm belief in Jesus Christ's crucifixion and resurrection to the simple need for a moment of civil interaction, communion is the unifying force. I know these



Please see **SHARE**, Page 4

# With eyes wide open

By **THE REV. SUE ANN YARBROUGH**

Before Christmas I volunteered to help serve communion in the Santa Clara County jail. As a staff minister for SpiritCare Ministry to Seniors, I bring worship and pastoral care to the frail and elderly living in various care homes and hospitals. Consequently, I feel a deep commitment to bringing communion to those who are isolated.

However, as I was introduced to, and cautioned about some of the procedures of serving communion in a jail setting, I began to wonder if perhaps I was out of place. I suspect I am not alone in envisioning jail as a place where frailty and vulnerability cannot exist. I wondered if I was strong enough.

Yet, as the four of us moved through the floors we were assigned to serve, I found myself thinking a great deal about human frailty.

I heard it as men prayed for their family members who had been stranded in the wake of unrelenting struggles with addiction, fear, and poverty. It could be seen in the faces of those who refused to join us for communion, but who pressed their faces to the tiny windows of their cells to listen to the four of us sing *Joy to the World* in less than perfect harmony.

Frailty could be heard in the labored breathing of a large man whose chest was covered with tattoos declaring his loyalty to a powerful gang, but who was so weak he could barely sit up to take communion. It reverberated all around us as a man repeatedly banged and kicked the door of his cell. I experienced it in myself as I tried to remember never to pray in jail with my eyes closed.

### Pastors ...from the cover

new direction, Ruiz wants to be there to remind them that "even if they make mistakes, God still loves them."

His role isn't to promise them that they will get out of jail, but to find out what will help them.

"The first thing I have to bring them is that they can trust God and believe God," he said. "When I say faith, I mean trust God."

People always say they have doubts, but Ruiz tells them "if anyone knows what people have done, it's God."

And he focuses on having them look at God, not as a judge, but as a father who wants them to come into relationship with him.

He remembers a young man coming to him years ago when he used to do jail ministry and asking him not to talk about the Prodigal Son, because that is what so many visiting preachers did. Instead, mingle with the people, he said. "The type of pastor I am now is one of those who mingles with the sheep until we smell like sheep."

Preaching the gospel means more than opening the Bible. It means showing you care, he said. It means reminding folks that we all are changing and that the Christian life is more than what we are.

"I don't have to manipulate people," he said. "God will lead the

change."

Pastor Avila agreed and said he doesn't feel discouraged when he talks with the men, even those who have returned again and again. "I have a compassion for when a person has to be incarcerated. They could be a three-striker and feel no one cares."

But, in fact, "there is someone who loves you and I am just a messenger," Avila said. "On a one-to-one basis, I am not the judge. I'm here to tell you someone loves you, and even if you are behind these bars, He wants your soul and spirit to be set free. God loves bad boys."

## One night in the Main Jail...

**BY RONNIE PHIFER**  
**CIC BOARD MEMBER**

I would like to share a couple of thoughts of my first 'real visit behind the scenes, in a correctional institution, an evening in the Main Jail.

I was moved by the neediness of the inmates. One needed just a "moment" of time, another, just a touch, another, a prayer, another one-on-one pastoral care, and others, just to be seen or heard. I thought I was pretty good at time management and multi-tasking, and I see that you couldn't survive without those skills. Being compassionate, and spiritual, are absolute requirements. However, one would become overwhelmed without some practical skills.

As we were going down the stairs at the beginning of the evening, there was a little trepidation as to what I was getting into.

We started to fill the inmate



**Ronnie Phifer**  
**CIC Board Member**

requests, and I saw the enormity of the task. The Holy Spirit and the love of Christ moved me to just serve.

Again, after praying with probably the second inmate, the love of Christ allowed me to see them as individuals in need. I don't need to worry about the deeds they have committed, or have been accused of committing. The love of Christ dismissed the "agenda" for the evening, removed the concept of time, and allowed me to minister to

their needs.

When I visit my nephew in prison, I am looking from the outside, in. Last night, I had a glimpse of the inside, and was overwhelmed by the amount of people behind bars. The age span, the mental illness, and again, the neediness.

The services that CIC provides are invaluable. Again, this was *just one night*.

I was moved by the counseling session with an inmate an officer brought to our attention.

Attempting to discern his real needs that night was difficult as he rambled in his speech because of his alcohol withdrawal. Then we went to the medical area, and the chaplain turned in paperwork asking for a mental-health evaluation because the man was "hearing voices."

The clinician noted that "suicide and Satan are a bad combination," and the interview made much more sense.

*But for the love of Christ, where would I be?*

## Jail chaplain reflects on lessons learned

**BY THE REV. PEGGY BINGHAM**

*"There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven,"* wrote Solomon in Ecclesiastes 3.... *"a time to plant and a time to uproot."*

As this season of Chaplaincy with CIC Ministries has drawn to a close and I have begun to plant on new soil, I am grateful to reflect on this beautiful experience and to share a few of the lessons that God has taught me.

**We are more complex than we realize. Every person has been made in the image of God and is capable of great good.** Many inmates reveal their most beautiful, loving and repentant sides to us as Chaplains. They are vulnerable people, concerned for their family's well-being and desperate to change. **At the same time, humans are fallen creatures capable of evil.** The actions of many

we serve have inflicted intense pain on themselves and on others. As we minister to people in an honest and authentic way, we hold these two dynamics of the human condition in tension.

**Love is powerful.** God's love expressed through feeble human beings breaks down the walls that life's pain has constructed and opens a way to healing. When we walk into the jails, we represent the God who is love. Our presence with those who feel isolated reminds them that God is with them and has not abandoned them. When we listen to inmates and give them our time, they begin to understand that God will listen if they reach out to Him. When they experience our acceptance and love for them, they can begin to grasp the idea that God will forgive them and that they could possibly forgive them-

selves.

**Every life has value. No one is so far gone that grace cannot reach him or her.** When a boy in Juvenile Hall learned I was leaving this ministry to work at a women's prison, he gave me a note.

"I wish you the best and I know that God is leading you on the right path," he wrote. "I appreciate your knowledge and God bless you. Also, I changed my life on 12/12/08."

This last sentence caught my attention as I remembered that 12/12 was the night of our Christmas service when the gospel was preached through word and song.

This boy heard a message heralding God's shocking and scandalous grace. The Spirit worked in his heart and his life changed. While we can't control the outcome, we know we

# Interns join CIC for pastoral training

Two interns from theological schools are working in the jails as part of their pastoral training.

Diane Lovelace comes to us as a deacon in training from the Episcopal School for Deacons in Berkeley. She is a member of Saint Joseph's Episcopal Church in Fremont.

She is working with men and women in Elmwood leading Bible studies and one-on-one pastoral counseling.

Here are some of her observations:

*"With regard to making a connection with women in prison, the Chaplain affirmed that this is a calling. One needs to know the Lord and know that he/she is serving the Lord.*

*"In the hardlock sections of the jail, I was struck by the smallness of the cells and the surroundings of concrete. No sense of privacy. No green plants. Little outside light. The doors clang shut before another opens. Some prisoners were hand- and waist-shackled before being moved to another area.*

*"I was struck with how many young women there were. This is a world very much outside my own experience.*

*"While I understood the types of crimes that brought these women to Elmwood, I have difficulty knowing their experience.*



**Diane Lovelace**

**Cathy Stambaugh**

*"Indeed these women who are angry, frustrated, hurting and rejected people, need the redemptive message of hope, forgiveness and Christ's love -- both for their present situation and for the future of returning to society."*

Cathy Stambaugh comes to us from Western Theological Seminary in Los Gatos. She is working toward a Master of Arts specializing in pastoral care to women.

Cathy is a member of the Church of the Chimes in San Jose. She is working with the women at Elmwood doing Bible studies and also doing one-on-one pastoral counseling. Cathy chose jail ministry as her

internship because:

*"A speaker at a leadership conference I attended said that if we as leaders want our leadership to matter, then we must lead in areas that matter to God.*

*"And what areas matter to the heart of God?"*

*"Micah 6:8 tells us to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God. Justice matters to the heart of God and therefore it must matter to me as well."*

Cathy chose CIC to learn about God's heart. She will visit women that matter to God.

We're happy to be to participating in the training of these ministers.

## SHARE ... from Page 2

opportunities provide a lifeline to the inmates who struggle daily to survive these circumstances.

When we served communion in the "snake pits," an officer stood watch as we went down calling out "Chaplain on deck!" The dorms remained locked, and those wanting communion lined up behind their doors.

We asked them what they would like to pray about and then dipped the

wafer in the grape juice and handed it to them, with a short prayer tailored for each person.

The cells in the max tier where mental health patients are held have a steel mesh area only large enough to try to speak through. For communion, the guard unlocked the slot where food was usually passed through. I was struck by the fact that those cells each had a small window overlooking the hills and highway. Yet every single inmate I saw was looking inward.

## CIC offers training

**The next Going In/Staying In jail ministry training course, for both new and veteran volunteers, will be offered April 26th at Grace Baptist Church - 484 E. San Fernando St, San Jose. The class runs from 1:30-5:30 pm.**

# Mother seeks better life for her baby

**BY THE REV. LOUANN ROBERTS  
CCW CHAPLAIN**

A tall pregnant red-head, Donna, appeared at my office door asking if I knew anything about adoptions.

I invited her in and as we talked it became evident that she was intent on giving up her child for adoption. Donna said she did not want to terminate her pregnancy but wanted to give her child a chance at a life that she would not be able to provide. She already had two other children and knew she was not in a position to raise a third.

We talked at length about the difficulty of carrying a pregnancy to term and then the grief of giving up her baby. She continued to be determined throughout the weeks that we discussed this.

We contacted an adoption agency and they sent Donna a book of prospective parents interested in open adoptions. The prospective couple she chose came to visit her at the jail several times.

The first time they came, I set

*Dear Chaplain Louann,*

*We cannot thank you enough for all that you did for us in facilitating our "match". You were so helpful throughout the process and made us feel comfortable in a unfamiliar and inhospitable place. We so enjoyed getting to know Donna and it helped to have those weeks to talk through the adoption process and to learn more about each other....*

*I am happy to report that (the baby) is doing great. She's a quiet, calm baby and our older daughter is a great big sister.*

*Thanks from the bottom of our heart and we wish you all the best.*

**Because of concerns for the privacy of the baby, the mother and the adoptive parents, we didn't use their real names or photos. This is the thank-you note Chaplain Louann received from the adoptive parents.**

them up together in an interview room. As they began to share about one another and their dreams, I quietly backed out of the room. It felt like I was witnessing holy moment as God was giving a gift to these three parents.

God gave Donna a couple who were not only were willing to adopt her baby but who wanted her to be a part of their lives. God gave the adoptive parents both a friend and a child.

It was amazing to witness their relationship grow, how they almost looked as if they could have been family and how they held many of the same values.

It was one of those little glimpses of God's love and grace in a hard and cruel place like jail.

Donna gave birth to a healthy 7-pound, red-haired daughter.

Both Donna and adoptive parents are thrilled! So am I!

## *CIC grateful for support, love, prayers*

**BY THE REV. DAVID ROBINSON  
CIC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

In these difficult economic times I am proud of the ways so many of our CIC supporters have recognized the desperate needs of the prisoners and youth incarcerated in our county. You have seen how many more people are coming into custody and that they need the love of God even more critically than before.

Even though you may be financially unsure you have supported CIC to help people in greater need than yourself. I am humbled by your devotion to the Call of Jesus.

A number of churches and individuals have had to eliminate their support for CIC; we respect this necessity.

We continue to serve to the best of our ability through the Grace of the Spirit and your charity.

Some might see this as a time to cut back. However, we see the needs of the people growing and we must respond. This is our Call. Therefore, we are in the process of hiring another chaplain.

We are so grateful for all your love, prayers and support.

We recognize each of your donations as a gift entrusted to us to share our Lord's love with some of the least of our brothers and sisters and children. This is a holy honor that binds us all together with Jesus.

Thank you for your devotion and each blessed gift.

**LESSONS, from Page 3**

never labor for the Lord in vain. Though we might witness cycles of success and failure in our own lives as well as in the lives of others, we do not despair. The cross tells us that in every tragedy, there is hope for redemption.

When we serve together in unity, we live out the message of the Gospel and more fully reflect God's kingdom. While the Chaplains, board members and volunteers of CIC Ministries come from different churches, backgrounds and perspectives, our love for God and for each other allows us to accomplish more together than we ever could alone. As we work together, we model healthy relationships and reveal an earthly glimpse of God's heavenly family.

It has been an incredible privilege to serve alongside so many compassionate and dedicated men and women who



**The Rev. Peggy Bingham  
Former Juvenile Chaplain**

give of themselves and their time to love those society has cast aside.

Thank you for the investment that you have made in my life and in the lives of those who feel forgotten. You will be in my thoughts and prayers as I continue to answer God's call to love and serve the incarcerated. May we feel God's love surrounding us and may we be foolish enough to believe that we can make a difference.

**CARE...from the cover**

She also had to face the possibility that she had done irrevocable damage to her brain. Her sense of forlornness, bewilderment and frustration was unnerving and a bit scary, to say the least.

She asked me to pray for her child, family, health and that she had not irrevocably damaged her brain. I prayed a prayer to God our "cure giver." I prayed for the restoration of her health, that she would be cured of her addiction and that she would continue to surrender her life to God. Lastly, I asked God to send helpers and caregivers to aid her in her journey.

I have visited with her twice, since praying for her that first time. Once I did a follow-up visit where I prayed for her and taught her the Lord's Prayer because she had confided in me that she did not know how to pray. Also, I gave her a Bible and a Daily Bread devotional, which she and her roommate read together daily.

The last time I visited her unit to see another young girl, the young girl of the story saw me and asked the

counselor if I would talk with her, to which I obliged. She told me that the news was good in some ways and bad in others. She said the bad news was that she had been promoted to a higher-level dorm but had disciplinary problems and was demoted back to her old unit.

After awhile, she said the truth was that she acted out because she missed her friends in the old unit and wanted to be back with them. We talked about maturing and learning to make decisions in her best interest and that of her child. With tears in her eyes she promised to work to be more responsible to herself and her child. Then she told me the "good news."

She was beginning to notice a marked improvement in her mental faculties. She was thinking more clearly and starting to sense that a full recovery was a good possibility. Additionally, she felt that she was beginning to grow in her faith as a result of regular prayer and worship.

Before I left to visit another youth, she told me she would regularly put in request forms for me to talk and pray with her. For the simplicity of this article, I have spoken only of the young woman and myself, but behind the scenes, there were countless staff, volunteers and family members who, through their work and prayers, gave guidance, hope and the promise of a future.

*As the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:6-9:*

*6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.*

*7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.*

*8 The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each.*

*9 For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.*

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Donations can now be made online at our web site:

**WWW.CICMINISTRIES.ORG**

CIC Ministries is a not for profit (501c3) ministry.

Your donations are tax-deductible.



**The Christian's life journey**

This is a drawing by CIC volunteer Christina Lim. It symbolizes the Christian's journey and is a

wonderful teaching tool in youth and adult Bible studies. Where are you on your journey?

# Reaching out to our senior inmate population

Senior inmates have needs that differ from the younger men and women who come into custody. Older inmates may need reading glasses, bigger print in their books and Bibles, assistance in reaching their loved ones. The list is endless.

CIC Ministries is aware of their needs and is reaching out to them in many ways, including offering special programs designed just for them. Chaplain Ra Amen has been meeting with the seniors housed in the minimum camp at Elmwood Correctional Center.

The meetings consist of a devotional period, time to discuss their concerns and a period in which he assists them in getting their requests for various types of spiritual, mental and physical assistance met. The meetings conclude with planning the agenda for the next meeting.

While this program is under way at Elmwood, the other facilities are developing programs under the direction of the facility chaplains. The initial steps include asking the men and women what kind of services they need and what can be done to help them spiritually and emotionally while they are incarcerated.

Already many wonderful stories about how God is working in the lives of these men and how they are

being a blessing to each other have come out of these weekly meetings at Elmwood since they began in October.

Following are a couple of verses from a poem written and read by a senior inmate during one of the meetings.

**I FREE**

He died on the cross,  
 To set thee free.  
 Understanding my children,  
 Have faith and believe.  
 In thy heart and mind  
 Thy shall be free.

This soft still voice  
 Inside of me,  
 Leading, guiding, restoring me,  
 in this strange land,  
 Lord, I free...

**Langston D.  
 12/26/08**

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# Giving time while doing time

BY GENIE MILLER  
VOLUNTEER CHAPLAIN  
AT CCW ELMWOOD

"We would like to give time while doing time." stated a group of women in a felony dorm at Elmwood's Correctional Center for Women. Thus began "Project Linus."

Project Linus is a nationwide program that provides handmade blankets and caps to high-risk infants, toddlers and youths requiring



Volunteer Genie Miller

extended hospital stays.

It's the first time this has been offered to inmates in Elmwood. The prisoners in this unit who know how to crochet have graciously offered to teach other inmates who want to learn.

The 'each one - teach one' approach means the women put aside whatever differences might exist between them so they can come together as a group to crocheted blankets and little caps for hospitalized children.

These women remind us that no matter our situations we can help those more needy than ourselves.

*Rev. Louann Roberts (CCW facility chaplain) would like to thank Lieutenant Bernice Notari for authorizing Project Linus and giving it her support, Genie Miller for providing the supplies, and Rena for providing the leadership and for coordinating the craftswomen in her unit.*

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