

RELEASED FOR
FILING
Voluntary Service

GENERAL
CORRESPONDENCE
FILE

MAR 6 1951

November 21, 1949

Helen Dorkeon
Brandon Mental Hospital
Brandon, Manitoba

Dear Fellow Christian Workers:

Having just received a copy of Dave Schroeder's letter to you as a unit, I should like to give further my word of encouragement. As one visualizes the total witness of our Mennonite group across the face of the earth, each little outpost takes on new significance in this work of the Kingdom. At a time when the world is abused and even bleeding, it seems to me that the Lord is calling us as a group particularly to shed forth the light in every way possible--to be the gospel message in word and deed.

A part of this work we are doing as individuals wherever we are. A part of it our communities at home should make. But certainly also a part of it is made by a group just such as yours. Your contribution is that which you do individually and which you are strengthened to do by the group. Your contribution, however, is also greater than the combined individual contribution each of you are doing for as we ban together in the name of Christ and work in His spirit, we represent Christ much more completely.

Your unit is a part of the total effort in the Mental Health field. It seems to us that this is an area which people such as ours should be among the first to be concerned; and because of their belief in Christian love, it should have a big contribution to make. Because of this our churches are increasingly moving in the field of mental health. At present, your unit and the unit at Topeka State Hospital in Kansas represent the two year-round units which we have in state hospitals. During the summer we add to this almost 200 young people in Canada and U.S. government hospitals. I am sure that a real contribution is being made to the state hospitals in this regard. For a long time we have been feeling that Christian groups should make more of a direct contribution to society as a whole rather than just to our home communities, and through our churches in the mission field. This government mental hospital field seems to offer this opportunity for an additional service beyond all of these. It helps to show that we believe in a Christian citizenship which is not just one of wanting freedom and leaving the country if we don't get it, but also one which makes a direct contribution to the problems of the whole group.

In addition to our work in the government hospital field, we are trying to promote work in two other areas. This is represented by our own church mental hospital. The Bethesda Hospital at Vineland, Ontario, represents the pioneering aspect of this in Canada and in North America as a whole. A year ago we opened a small hospital for treatment cases at Brooklane Farm, Hagerstown, Maryland. This is really our first effort of this type in America. As you may know, there are plans for three hospitals in the U.S. We are beginning to build our second one in California this winter. Eventually, we hope to have another in Kansas. So you can see that in addition to working through

Helen Dorkson / Elmer Ediger - November 21, 1949

2

the state hospitals, we are trying to render a special service for our own people and others through a hospital which is completely under our control. I am sure you have felt sometimes how much more of a testimony you could make if all your efforts could be concentrated on one ward and perhaps completely staffed by Christians such as we hope to represent.

A third part of our effort is very much in its infancy and that is mental health education. Delmar Stahly, now in the Mental Health Section at Akron, is just beginning to push forward our work in this regard. We hope to prevent people from falling off the cliff. Those who work in our units and as they go out into the communities should be ^{the} best informed in this regard. Therefore, I hope that not only do you learn about the causes of mental illness but also how to prevent, how to remain mentally health. There are some very good books available on these subjects, and some which are not necessarily highly technical. You should feel free to consult the Mental Health Section in Akron concerning such information. I hope also that each of you prepare yourself so that if you are called to give talks in regard to your work that you can give this matter emphasis also. Certainly Christian faith, if rightly understood, can help a great deal in this regard.

It would have been much better if I could have visited your group. However, since that is not possible, I hope in some measure to have become a part of your fellowship and you of the larger fellowship. I hope particularly that there may be some exchange of information between yourselves and the Topeka unit.

Perhaps if nothing else is remembered concerning what I have said, I would like to underscore the one thing which should be taken seriously. This is Dave's statement which points up the fact that daily devotions of the unit should be held if at all possible. It may even mean having two shifts of devotions.

I realize that not everything is ideal in connection with the Brandon institution, but I hope you folks can help to make successful this first year-round unit in Canada.

Sincerely in the name of Christ,

Elmer Ediger
Mental Health

EE:lk

cc: Ray Horst
Delmar Stahly