



313 CR 1270, Warren, TX 77664, [www.LydiasPorch.com](http://www.LydiasPorch.com)

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Texas Legislators  
Honorable 82nd Legislature

*You Should See It in Color*

Dear Texas Senators, Representatives and Budget Decision Makers:

There are residential sites across our State filled with thousands of men and women that need your attention today. It is those inmates of the Texas Prison System. Texas has had paid prison chaplains from the beginning. (In 1888, the prison chaplain from the Rusk Prison led in prayer at the Dedication of the State Capitol Building.)

It is an honor to speak on behalf of the Texas Prison Chaplaincy Program. I have been a Volunteer Chaplain for over five years, and realize the absolute necessity of our prison system sustaining the Chaplaincy Program, with paid staff Chaplains. Volunteers cannot substitute for the knowledgeable, trained position of a staff Chaplain. Volunteers come and go on an irregular, as-they-please basis. Volunteers do not have the rapport with the State of Texas or with Wardens, officers, staff, the community, or with volunteers that staff Chaplains have. I have witnessed first hand how the experienced Chaplain at the Gib Lewis Unit has patiently handled anxious grandmothers on the telephone, in-distress officers with personal issues, and 'life purpose searching' inmates. Our Chaplain has traveled to Houston hospital ERs to visit suicide victim families, as well as being at our own Tyler County Hospital for emergency health situations of inmates as well as for officers and volunteer chaplains. No part-time volunteer could ever reach that expertise position or desire to practically be on 24-hour call.

Have you heard the song, "You Should Have Seen it in Color"? It is a conversation between two men, one older, one younger. The older one is sharing black and white photographs of days gone by, some of war, some of his sweetheart. As the older man tells the younger about the people and places in the pictures, he keeps repeating the phrase, "But you should have seen it in color."

When some people think of men/women in a correctional institution, they may only see the black bleakness of the place, and the white uniforms worn by the inmates. But, I'm telling you, "You ought to see it in color." You should see the varied blues in the hearts, the deep purple stained dreams not realized, the stark red fires of broken relationships, the yellow jaundice of premature lives lacking the sunshine of hope, and the brown and pale flesh empty hands never receiving cards or letters from home.

As one walks through the razor wire fences, eyes focus on the huge dull gray dormitories with tiny windows cut out. You get past the first check point showing your identity, having left everything else, cell phones and such in the car. You get to the second check point; pull off your shoes, coats, empty pockets, get rechecked, patted down, and waned. Now the stage is set to experience the black hole of loneliness of the incarcerated.

It is the mission of the Chaplaincy program to offer color, the golden ray of sunshine of hope, inside that black hole. There are endless pages of data substantiating the necessity of the Chaplains as well as showing the financial benefits to the State of Texas for their services.

Chaplains have the greatest opportunity to paint a rainbow of restoration to that bleak gray and white world within the prison walls. Chaplains can train and monitor the volunteers and mentors as no officer or other staff member can or would care to.

Senators, Representatives, State of Texas decision makers, I am pleading with you, glare into the black and white photographs of the incarcerated. Pick a pretty jasper stone of sea-green, a fine blue sapphire, or an amethyst, a gem generally of a purple or violet color, and hold it in your hand to remind you of the incarcerated that live only in black and white, that have no chance of ever experiencing life in living colors of green, blue, or purple in their life again without the services of Chaplains.

Thank you for your time and wisdom in considering the facts of the Chaplaincy Department (and the deep heart convictions of one volunteer).

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