



March 22, 2020

Hello, all you [Freeing the Human Spirit](#) volunteers

This is my first President's letter and possibly the first one since 2013. You know the story, generally, as you have been affected by it. After Sister Elaine retired from the leadership role at Freeing the Human Spirit ('FTHS'), the charity was tucked under the wing of the John Howard Society, who have maintained the charitable status of the organization, as well as the insurance to cover volunteers teaching in prisons (or driving to/from same). However, like a lot of small charities, the John Howard Society didn't have the capacity to match Sister Elaine's vigour and drive, and, as a result, the central hub of the organization of you volunteers, became less of a thing. I hope to be able to add some vision, enthusiasm and certainly some horsepower to better ensure decent communications amongst all volunteers. **My first ask of you all is to make sure I know all the active locations where FTHS is continuing to deliver teaching of meditation and yoga in prisons around the country.**

I would direct you all to the website that we have created, since the last one was not maintained, and the domain name was purchased by an Asian herbal remedy company whose purpose was either to promote or reduce hair growth! In any event, I bought a new domain name and we have a new website at [www.freeingthehumanspirit.com](http://www.freeingthehumanspirit.com). **Please take a look and I'd happily receive any feedback, but most importantly, I'd like to ensure that we capture all the locations we collectively serve.** We count ten institutions and about 30 volunteer teachers, aside from the board volunteers, but that is the result of reaching out to those from a contact list from 2013, so we may have missed some, whose contact information has been lost. But having a proper list of institutions and volunteers will also help with the liability insurance that the organization holds for your benefit.

This being an introduction as well as a newsletter, I don't want to go on and on, but I would like to inform you on the following matters:

1. I fell into this job. I was in a zen group in Kingston, after returning from Ireland as a new retiree. Malcolm Griffin who was active in FTHS and teaching in Bath prison, asked me if I would take over from him, as he was ill and didn't have the energy to continue. I said 'sure' and asked my friend and yoga teacher from Brockville, Dan de Luis to come and teach the yoga part. We thought that the mission and experience of teaching in prisons was very good, for both the inmates and ourselves. So we added Joyceville, and then Millhaven. I have now been teaching in these prisons for over two years and became a yoga teacher, just to teach in prisons. Being a high tech guy, I thought that this was a good mission to try and get to scale, with prisons across Canada and there was the vehicle



of FTHS to do so! So we organized accordingly, with a new board and with me as the President. It is intended to be a hands-on, grassroots organization.

2. One thing we did before throwing ourselves at this project was to develop a business plan. The plan maintained the mission and goals largely as they were under Sister Elaine; laid out our strategy and tactics to achieve the goal of serving more prisons in Canada; and captured these elements with a financial forecast over the next 5 years.
3. On the financial front, we are solvent, and while we have cash, we have little working capital (i.e. we still have considerable accounts payable). The John Howard Society of Toronto forgave us the monies that were owed to them, which was very generous and helpful. In fact, the John Howard Society has been very helpful in housing the charity's records, maintaining the books and completing tax returns, paying for insurance and helping where they could. We have their presence on the board on a going forward basis.
4. In the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020, we have:
  - a. Developed our business plan
  - b. Reached out to as many as we could identify of the volunteers and institutions served, updating the database
  - c. Bought a domain name and built out a new website. This includes our initial efforts to engage with Facebook as well. With the domain name and website, I will shortly have a new email address: [richard@freeingthehumanspirit.com](mailto:richard@freeingthehumanspirit.com) , replacing the current [fths@johnhoward.ca](mailto:fths@johnhoward.ca)
  - d. Joined Techsoup, <https://www.techsoupcanada.ca/en>, an organization that offers technology to charities at a good price or just free. We then acquired a license to Zoom, a very effective teleconferencing capability, which can permit people to see one another, show material from their computer and change whose computer the group is viewing. <https://zoom.us/>
  - e. Updated our presence at Canada Helps, <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/>, an organization that helps make the process of donating and receipting monies easy.
  - f. Held a fundraiser at Dan de Luis' yoga studio and raised just under \$2,000.
  - g. Obtained a Globe & Mail article about FTHS and have another 2,000 word article coming this summer (it will be posted on the website, just as the G&M article was)
  - h. Obtained assistance from the Sivanada organization to find graduates who were looking to perform karma yoga and teach in the prisons. Two such volunteers will be teaching at La Macaza and Donnacona prisons once they obtain their 10 year approval to work as volunteers in Canadian federal prisons. I believe that this will be the first time that FTHS has been teaching in Quebec. A similar initiative has been started in Nova Scotia, but it is early days.
  - i. Bought, were given and provided yoga mats and blocks to Millhaven(a maximum security prison which is new to FTHS, with no mats) and started acquiring same for the Quebec insitutions



- j. Wrestled with the federal institutions' personnel involved in approving volunteers for teaching with the new, 10 year, pan-institution approvals. That process is taking undue amounts of time and effort.
5. A few comments on COVID-19 and its impact on the volunteers teaching in federal and provincial prisons:
- a. On March 13<sup>th</sup> there was an announcement of CSC about the curtailment of family and friends visiting inmates in federal prisons. It excluded mention of volunteers. <https://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/001/006/001006-1003-en.shtml>
  - b. Also on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of March, there was an Ontario announcement that didn't specifically mention volunteers, but it stopped visits by all except 'professional visits, including legal counsel'. <https://news.ontario.ca/mcscs/en/2020/03/statement-from-minister-elliott-and-solicitor-general-jones-regarding-ontarios-adult-correctional-fac.html> I believe volunteers fall below the threshold of 'professional visits'. I have had an individual email from Ontario Correctional Institute that they are now closed to volunteers, which synchs with that assessment
  - c. Additionally, I have had individual notices of the termination of my volunteer activities by Millhaven and Bath.
  - d. So it looks like there will be no volunteering in prisons until further notice. That seems entirely reasonable to me, but, of course disappointing to all of us

I hope that you find this communication open and helpful and that our efforts sound both considered and considerable. The new board and I look forward to working with all of you throughout the balance of this fiscal year and into the next. **And please, advise me of any prison locations (and information on those volunteers) that are not shown on the website.** I am sending this email out with all of you blindcopied, as a volunteer or two have asked not to have their email addresses displayed.

Thanks for reading on and stay healthy, everyone

Richard Boadway  
President