

Distinguished Achievement Citation

Winifred Stody Canright

Class of 1920

Winifred Stody Canright has taken to heart the injunction to live her life in the service of others, taught to her by family and Alma Mater. Her energetic and sometimes unpopular efforts to help troubled segments of our society have aided blacks and prisoners, among others.

Upon graduating from Ohio Wesleyan in 1920, Mrs. Canright taught at the University of Michigan and the West China University. She also did graduate work in psychology at the University of Vienna.

After serving as a medical missionary in China, Mrs. Canright returned to the United States to become involved in the civil right movement in Florida. There, she worked with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Andrew Young, braving attempts against her life and the destruction of her home. Moving to New Jersey, she discovered racial prejudice flourishing also in the North. She joined the Plainfield Defense Committee for George Merritt, who was accused of killing a police officer during racial rioting in 1967. For months she daily attended Mr. Merritt's trial, and helped in the eleven-year effort to uncover evidence that eventually released him from prison.

Mrs. Canright also appeared before the New Jersey Council of Churches to predict accurately the prison rebellions at the Rahway State Prison in New Jersey. Impressed with her concern, the Council named her head of the task force on penal reform, whereupon she immersed herself in volunteer work at several New Jersey prisons. In 1972 Mrs. Canright became the first female to volunteer on the permanent basis in Trenton State Prison. She became very involved with the Behavior Modification Program, a series of seminars teaching prisoners how to handle stress and adjustment to prison life. She has served on the boards of several inmate organizations, such as the Rahway State Prison Forum, and also with state groups like the New Jersey Coalition for Penal Reform and the New Jersey Association of Corrections. In 1983, at age 85, she was hired by the state of New Jersey to supervise its statewide prison volunteer program.

Mrs. Canright has been acclaimed both in and outside of prisons for her work in penal reform. Among other honors, the Rahway State Prison Forum has titled her its "most loved member," and in 1983 the New Jersey Council of Churches commended her advocacy of prisoners.

The good faith shared between Mrs. Canright and those with whom she has worked negates society's insensitive attempts to label certain people as worthless or incorrigible. Her admonition to replace apathy toward seemingly hopeless situations with positive action has been underscored by successes she has achieved in the area of civil rights and prison reform.

