

Criminal Justice Topics

for Reflection and Discussion

This section of *Criminal Justice Ministry* contains 12 brief essays that are intended for individual reflection and group discussion. The writers and contributors are a diverse group of people with expertise in criminal justice ministry. Essay topics include:

- An Ounce of Prevention
- Restorative Justice
- Crime Victims and Their Needs
- Standing in the Need of Prayer: Spiritual Healing for Incarcerated Kids
- Women in Prison
- Supporting Offenders and Their Families
- After Prison: Aftercare
- Workers in the Prison System
- Welcoming the Stranger: Caring for Immigrants and Refugees in Detention
- Myth, Reality, and Prisons for Profit
- Is Capital Punishment a Crime or Justice?
- Advocacy Is Ministry

Use these essays among your planning team as orientation to your work. Choose two or three to discuss each time you meet, while you are beginning to explore possible avenues for your congregation's criminal justice ministry. See the Introduction, page 4, for additional suggestions for planning team use.

Once you have decided on a direction for your ministry, use these essays to raise awareness among congregational members. You may photocopy the articles for distribution to the congregation. Select the essays that will help lay a foundation for your efforts, such as "Restorative Justice" or "Myth, Reality, and Prisons for Profit."

Choose an essay topic on which to focus for a youth or an adult forum. Review content of the essay and have participants divide into small groups to discuss the questions printed at the end of each article. Present the information your planning team has gathered on the topic's relevance for your community. Or invite an outside speaker to present relevant information.

Distribute copies of an essay such as "Women in Prison" in the congregation's newsletter. Or, include copies in the worship folder and give a "Temple Talk" the same Sunday about opportunities for congregational participation in your criminal justice ministry effort.

As you plan for your ministry and consult other resources, add relevant articles you find to this section of your manual.





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An Ounce of Prevention

By Norman P. Dake

During a U.S. presidential campaign in the 1990s, one candidate's speech focused on anti-crime proposals. But he did not speak about law enforcement, mandatory sentencing, or other "get tough" topics that are politically popular in an election year. Instead, he talked about prenatal care for pregnant women, child care, quality education, decent housing, adequate health care, job training, and employment opportunities. He was talking about crime prevention. The best way to reduce crime is to create a healthy environment in which children can be raised and given a fair chance to succeed in life.

The cultivation of such a "child friendly" environment is not the exclusive domain of our government. Both family and church have a vital role to play in fostering a climate in which children can be nurtured with love, the knowledge of right and wrong, and a sense of well-being and hope. If all of us take responsibility for helping children grow into responsible citizens, we will have less need for jails and prisons. As the adage goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Prevention looks upstream

The story is told of a man who was standing by a riverbank when he heard a cry for help from the middle of the stream. He jumped in, swam out, and pulled the drowning person to shore. No sooner had he safely deposited the rescued person on dry land than he heard another cry for help. He again jumped in, swam out, and pulled the drowning person to shore. But as soon as he had completed his second heroic rescue, he heard a third cry for help. Again he performed his lifesaving feat. A passerby happened to observe these valiant efforts and commended the swimmer for his noble deeds. The swimmer simply shook his head and said, "I'd do a far greater deed if I could go upstream and find out who's pushing all these people in."

Jail and prison ministry is often a rescue effort aimed at people who are in danger of being swept away in the criminal justice system. This ministry, though vital, focuses on the tail end of the problem. We, as the people of God, can go upstream and find out why so many people are winding up in the river of crime. There we can do godly deeds that help to minimize the social and personal cost of a life going down the drain. This means starting with children.

Love the children

Several years ago, three Washington University female students were abducted from outside a restaurant in St. Louis, Missouri, where I live. The ensuing crime spree left a brutal trail of assault, rape, and murder. In an effort to bring healing to its broken community, the university invited a number of speakers to address the problem of violence. As chaplain at the St. Louis County Justice Center, I was one of those invited to speak. Prior to my presentation a sheriff's deputy asked me what I was going to say. I told him, "I have a number of things to say. But I would hope if the students hear nothing else they will hear this: Love the children."

Loving the children is the most important thing we can do to break the cycle of violence in our society and reduce the incidence of crime. Jesus taught that of such is the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17). Those of us who are parents or inclined toward marriage and parenthood bear witness to God's love by loving our children. Those of us who are not parents can find appropriate ways to love someone else's children.

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What can your congregation do?

Congregations can become creative as they identify needs in their own communities and assess the gifts God has given them for ministry. But here are a few suggestions to get the creative juices flowing.

Tears. Who says that big boys don't cry? Even Jesus wept (John 11:35). Violence is often a substitute for tears. If we can give children, especially boys, a healthy way to express their hurts, they will be less inclined to violence.

Anger management. Anger can be a feeling, a thought, or an action. Too often we jump from feeling to acting, and think about our feelings only later. We can help our children become aware of what they feel and to think about how to express those feelings in a nonhurtful way. Learning the difference between aggressive, passive, and assertive behavior can be useful to children as well as adults.

Conflict resolution. For two years one of my sons attended a fight-free school. Students were taught conflict resolution skills, which in their most basic form include these steps: (1) talk out the disagreement, (2) involve an adult or another person, or (3) walk away. Congregations can advocate and teach this approach too.

Coping skills. Too many of the young people who become ensnared in the justice system have been caught up in the drug culture. Why do youth (or grownups, for that matter) use drugs? Often it is because they want to "get high." Drugs are their way of trying to cope with life's difficulties. Consider where and how they learned that. What are the deeper struggles? Can congregations teach them a better way as well as look at root causes?

Parenting classes. Before we try to teach the children, we need to learn these things for ourselves. The congregation is an ideal setting to help new parents reflect on healthy child-rearing strategies. Experienced parents may be the best teachers.

Hospitality. Congregations can welcome children and make them feel valued through ministry that invites their participation, including leadership, and that addresses their life situations as well as life stage.

Consider your gifts

God gives different gifts to different people for the good of all (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). We can commend both those who serve on the inside of jails and prisons to provide a pastoral response to hurting people and those on the outside who have a prophetic calling to alleviate the sources of that pain. All of us, however, can love the children.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. While continuing to hold people responsible for their actions, we also can think about the societal factors that may have pushed them toward a poor decision. How can your congregation learn more about these societal factors?
2. Think about an experience you may have had with a troubled youth. What were the successes and the challenges? Were you able to make a difference? Do you think some children are totally beyond help? Why or why not?
3. List other ideas you have for ways your congregation can "love the children." What are you already doing? What are three new ideas you could explore by talking to others in the congregation?

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Restorative Justice

By Steven E. Thomas and Sally Wolf

At the end of each episode of the 1970s television program “Hawaii Five-0,” actor Jack Lord would always say to his assistant detective, “Book ‘em, Danno!” Everyone watching knew the bad guy would be caught and sent to prison, and all was safe. Catching the bad guys and “sending them away” seemed to be the solution we as a nation needed in order to get tough on crime. This reasoning resulted in more prisons being built so that bad guys could be sent away.

As people have realized that building more prisons is not the answer to crime, some are looking at a new idea, one that is actually very old—restorative justice. As the term indicates, it is a justice that restores. Restore what—rules that have been broken? No. In fact, at the very heart of the restorative process is a focus on the harm that has been perpetrated on the victim(s), community, and the offender. This heart is the “shalom” of community relationship. Shalom is God-intended living in right-ordered relationships with others and with creation. To repair harm done is to restore shalom.

Restorative justice is a totally different way of thinking about crime. Instead of asking, what law was broken, who did it, and what shall we do to punish the offender, restorative justice causes one to ask: What is the harm? What needs to be done to repair the harm? Who is responsible for this repair?

Restorative justice brings all parties together—the victim, the offender, the community, and the

justice system—in full participation and personal involvement to reach mutual agreement on how shalom is to be restored. The parties involved have to interact and communicate with each other to be successful. Offenders are held accountable to their victims and community. Victims are helped to make sense out of what happened. Participating in the process strengthens the very fabric of the community by rebuilding relationships and addressing problems that lead to crime. Offenders are then reintegrated into the community.

The diagram on this page illustrates how the offender is both held accountable and supported. Common to the current system is the pendulum that swings between being permissive and punitive, from high support with low control to high control with low support. Instead, restorative justice supports offenders (high support) while still holding them accountable (high control). Restorative justice separates the deed from the doer while it teaches the community to hate the sin and love the sinner.

Restorative justice is practiced when the victim of vandalism, perpetrated by neighborhood boys, realizes he didn’t know his neighbors as he used to. So he invites them to join him in a neighborhood meal to get to know each other. When relationships are developed, walls break down.

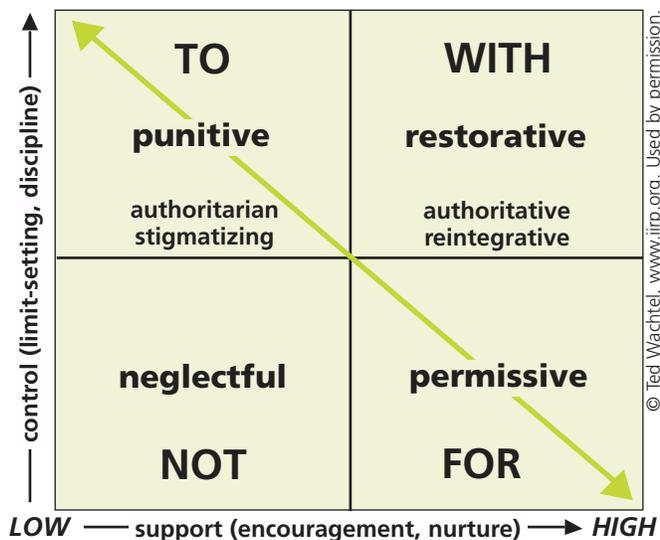
Breaking down walls

Restorative justice may be practiced in the community or within a correctional institution. Restorative justice practiced in correctional institutions helps offenders become aware that they need to make restitution to their victim(s). The goal is for the offender to leave the correctional institution with a sense of community rather than as the self-centered person that entered. Restorative justice creates opportunities for the offender to address the harm and to repair the emotional, psychological, as well as spiritual effects caused by their actions. This approach opens opportunities to examine the harm and then begin the healing process.

Practices inside the correctional institution that raise offenders’ awareness include: **victim impact**, which involves listening to a victim’s



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story; **victim impact panels**; **mediation**, which brings together offenders and victims; and **peace circles**, which use a small-group circle to resolve conflict among the people involved.

For the offender, these practices promote growth, responsibility, maturity, and communication. Outside the correctional institution, offenders can be found working on crime-repair crews that remove graffiti or repair other types of criminal damage done to property. They work on community service projects such as correctional gardens that stock food pantries. Some prisons participate in Habitat for Humanity and Crop Walk programs. What makes an activity restorative is the emphasis on repairing harm caused by crime and building relationships in the community. Thus it becomes a “restorative transformation.”

Even though too many offenders are incarcerated, many more remain in the community on probation or some other form of supervision. In many situations, restorative justice practices can complement or even replace traditional justice system conditions. Trained volunteer facilitators, who coordinate victim-offender meetings and conferencing circles, allow all those affected by the offense to talk about the crime’s effect on them. The group comes to a consensus of what the offender needs to do to repair the harm. Some communities have reparative boards that are made up of volunteers who meet with offenders and victims. All those in attendance agree upon the resulting contract that could ask for restitution and community service. If the contract is completed, the offense does not go to court.

In a peacemaking circle, a circle keeper passes a talking piece, which is usually an object revered by those present around the circle. Each person affected by the offense has the opportunity to talk only when holding the talking piece. Additionally, meaningful community service work often helps to build job-related competencies and relationships that help to reintegrate the offender.

Practicing shalom means finding common ground when previously there was only animosity. The offender faces the victim and explains what exactly was done. The offender hears from that person how he or she was affected by those actions, instead of standing before a judge and simply pleading guilty to a crime. Practicing shalom means seeing things from a different

perspective. It involves understanding how actions harm others, not simply how laws are broken. Practicing shalom is offenders, victims, and community members working together to create wholeness from brokenness. It means transformation.

What you can do

How can you practice restorative justice in your community?

- If you live near a prison, contact the warden or chaplain to see what programs are needed.
- Talk to victims’ groups or someone in the justice system about how restorative justice practices could be used.
- Get more information.
- Question if our current legal system is really addressing crime.
- Question what is presented in the media about crime—is it sensationalism or truth?
- Spend a day in court watching how the system works. Does it listen to human needs or is it concerned only with punishment?
- Talk with other members of community organizations you may belong to. Would they be interested in beginning a study on restorative justice?

Real life isn’t like “Hawaii Five-0.” The truth is that it isn’t “us” and “them” because “they” are a part of “us.” Only when we work together can we build those relationships that lead to shalom.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. “If crime is a wound, then justice means healing.” If you were a victim of crime what would it take to heal your injury?
2. What reassurance would you want if an offender returned to your community? Your church? Moved in next door?

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Crime Victims and Their Needs

In the book *Changing Lenses*¹ professor Howard Zehr writes, “Why is crime so devastating, so hard to recover from? The reason is that crime is in essence a violation: a violation of the self, a desecration of who we are, of what we believe, of our private space. Crime is devastating because it upsets two fundamental assumptions on which we base our lives: our belief that the world is an orderly, meaningful place, and our belief in personal autonomy. Both assumptions are essential for wholeness.

“Most of us assume that the world (or at least the part of the world in which we live) is an orderly, predictable, understandable place. Everything may not happen as we wish, but at least we can provide answers for much of what happens. Generally we know what to expect. How could we live with any sense of security otherwise?

“Crime, like cancer, upsets this sense of order and meaning. Consequently, crime victims, like cancer victims, want answers. Why did this happen to me? What could I have done to prevent it? These are only a few of the questions which nag at victims. Answers to such questions are important because answers restore order and meaning. If we can provide answers to the questions of what and why, the world can make sense again. Without answers, victims tend to blame themselves, others, and God. Blame, in fact, is one important way of providing answers in order to restore meaning and some semblance of wholeness.

“But to be whole we also need to have a sense of personal autonomy, of power over our own lives. To be deprived unwillingly of personal power, to be involuntarily in the control of others, is intensely degrading and dehumanizing. Crime destroys this sense of autonomy. Someone else has taken control of our lives, our property, our space. It leaves victims feeling vulnerable, defenseless, out of control, dehumanized. Here again self-blame may be a coping mechanism. If we can locate the cause of the crime in something we did, we can determine to avoid that behavior, thus regaining a sense of control....

The recovery process

“To recover, victims need to move from the ‘recoil’ phase to a ‘reorganization’ phase. In cases of serious crimes, they need to move from being victims to being survivors. Victims need to progress to the point where the offense and the offender no longer dominate them. However, this is difficult and time-consuming. For many, it may never be fully attained.

“What do victims need in order to recover? Any answer to this question is a bit risky. Only a victim can answer authentically, and needs vary from person to person. In general, though, the needs of crime victims include (but are not limited to) the following.

“Most obviously, perhaps, victims need compensation for losses. Financial and material losses may present a real financial burden. Moreover, the symbolic value of losses may be as important or more important than the actual material losses. In either case, repayment can assist recovery....

“As important as material losses are, surveys of crime victims find that they usually rate other needs more highly. One of these is the need for answers, for information....

“It can be suggested that to find healing, victims must find answers to six basic questions²:

1. What happened?
2. Why did it happen to me?
3. Why did I act as I did at the time?
4. Why have I acted as I have since that time?
5. What if it happens again?
6. What does this mean for me and for my outlook (my faith, my vision of the world, my future)?

“In addition, to restitution and answers, victims need opportunities to express and validate their emotions: their anger, their fear, their pain. Even though such feelings may be hard for us to hear and may not square with what we would wish them to feel, these feelings are a natural, human response to the violation of crime. Anger, in fact, needs to be recognized as a common stage of suffering, and one that cannot simply be short-circuited. The suffering and the pain are part of the offense and need to be expressed and to be heard. Victims need opportunities and arenas to express their feelings and their suffering, but also to tell their stories. They need to have their “truth” heard and validated by others.

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“Victims also need to be empowered. Their sense of personal autonomy has been stolen from them by an offender, and they need to have this sense of personal power returned to them. This includes a sense of control over their environment. Thus new locks and other security devices may be important to them, or they may change their lifestyle as a means of reducing risks. Similarly, they need a sense of control or involvement in the resolution of their own cases. They need to feel that they have choices, and that these choices are real....

“A common thread running throughout may be described as the need for an experience of justice. For some victims, this may take the form of a demand for vengeance. However, a demand for retribution may itself grow out of a victim’s failure to have a more positive experience of justice. Indeed, an experience of justice is so basic that without it, healing may be well impossible.

“An experience of justice for victims has many dimensions, some of which have already been suggested. Victims need assurance that what happened to them was wrong, unfair, undeserved. They need opportunities to speak the truth of what happened to them, including their suffering. They need to be heard and affirmed.”

Who are the victims?³

- Persons whose bodies are assaulted, violated, and murdered, and their families or survivors
- Those who are intimidated, harassed, and coerced
- People whose property is damaged or stolen
- People whose lives are disrupted by criminal behavior of community or family members
- Consumers who pay higher prices due to “white collar” offenses, employee theft, or greed and mismanagement by businesses and corporations
- Taxpayers whose money supports a cumbersome, often ineffectual system of justice and imprisonment

All of these are victims of crime. In short, spiritually and economically, “if one member suffers, all suffer together” (1 Corinthians 12:26).

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Have you or a person close to you ever been victimized by crime? Describe the experience.
2. How do you think individuals can best support victims? Their families?
3. How could congregations best support victims? Their families?

Notes

¹. From *Changing Lenses* by Howard Zehr, ©1990 Herald Press, Scottdale, PA15683. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

². Adapted from Charles Finley, “Catastrophes: An Overview of Family Reactions,” Chapter 1 of Charles Finley and Hamilton I. McCubbin, *Stress and the Family*, Vol. II: *Coping with Catastrophe* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1983).

³. From *Justice Jottings Program Guide for Criminal Justice Sunday, Feb. 13, 2000*, © Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Used by permission.

Standing in the Need of Prayer:

By Anne Tracy Carlson

Spiritual Healing for Incarcerated Kids

Nowhere is the fragmentation of our community, culture, and spirit more evident than in the experience of being incarcerated, and then, as a minor, trying to rebuild wholeness in one's life after incarceration. Many congregations are in denial and lack knowledge about the nature and extent of abuse and violence in our communities. Collaboration is lacking between the various service programs designed to help incarcerated youth. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to provide a healthy, safe, and faithful community for all children to grow into healthy, faithful adults. At the very least, we are called to visit them in prison and allow their spirits and lives to touch ours.

The experience of incarceration

The correctional institution segments a person into basic needs and rights. These “rights” are part of the U.S. Bill of Rights for all people, and thus form the institutional rights for those incarcerated. So the institution provides:

- Shelter for the body
- Food for life
- Security for safety
- Education (school and teachers)
- Medical services
- Mental health services
- Programs for diversion into other community settings, such as drug treatment
- A chaplain

Each need is addressed by specialists, professionals, and agencies dedicated to that particular need. The spiritual needs of those incarcerated are also segmented into a narrowly defined time, place, and person. This fragmentation has torn into the very souls of incarcerated youth. Scripture reminds us “we must grow up in every way into ... Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love” (Ephesians 4:15-16). Recognizing that this passage was written about the body of

Christ—the church, so too we understand that children are not only individual bodies, but part of a larger body which nurtures and sustains healthy growth.

Emotional and spiritual responses

When a youth (ages 10 to 17 or younger) is arrested and brought into a juvenile detention center, this is seldom his or her first encounter with the justice system or the social welfare system. Given the possibility of truancy, petty crime, dysfunctional families, poverty, or homelessness, a child has encountered one of these systems long before she or he is detained. However, getting arrested and locked up carries the same internal responses every time, whether the first or tenth.

The first reaction is *shock*, *disbelief*, or *paralysis*. The adrenaline is high, the fight or flight response has set in, and the brain is unable to shift into clear, reasoned thinking. “How do I get out of this?” or “What will my parent(s) do?” are the questions swirling around like a whirlpool sucking them under. “Oh God, get me out of this mess!” is one of the most instinctive prayers in our beings. At this stage, their view of God oscillates between magical rescuer or judge and jury.

The second reaction is *anger* or *depression*—opposite ends of the same continuum. These feelings paralyze their reasoning capacity. At one extreme, the youth will become angry, and possibly physically or verbally assaultive: “You have no right to do this to me. I'm not going to give you anything!” Depression at the other extreme leaves the youth with “I don't know. I can't remember,” or voiceless tears fall. The youth can be distracted, not able to hear or answer any questions. In this stage, God is rarely thought about: “Who cares about God, anyway?”

The third reaction is *denial*, *justification*, or *diminishment*. “I didn't do it. This isn't fair. I just stopped there to see what's up.” The God-response here is “The devil made me do it. God is not fair. God's out to get me.” We all are guilty of justifying ourselves to God. This should be familiar territory for us.

The next reaction sets in the second or third day after being locked-up, and comes and goes





from then on. It's *confusion* and *frustration*. "What will happen to me? What are my lawyer, parole officer, parents, social worker doing? Who's in charge? What are the rules and expectations? No one ever explains anything. No one talks to me." Spiritually, the youth wonders where God is in this place or in this confusion. "Does God even know I'm here, or care?"

The fifth and sixth responses vacillate between *fear*, *anxiety*, or *panic* and *feeling like a victim*, *feelings of resignation*, or *shutting down*. The first set of responses is brought on by a sense of abandonment and often looks like paranoia: "Everyone is my enemy. Who can I trust?" The God-issues sound the same: "God betrayed me; can I trust God?" The latter response set says: "No one cares. Everyone blames me, so I must be bad. I shouldn't expect any better." At this point, God becomes the punisher and even vindictive. "God put me here to get even. I deserve this—I'm a mistake. There is no hope for me."

These responses can vary in order of occurrence and intensity, and they will cycle in on themselves. Incarcerated youth can get lost in the jumble of emotions and never sort them out or move into any rational resolution to the situation. They often lose themselves in a sea of confusion, frustration, despair, and hopelessness.

The role of the religious community

The spiritual issues any youth faces while maturing are amplified and muddled when incarcerated. All these children need adults besides their parents who will stand with them; share their pain; listen patiently without judgment, disbelief, or blaming; pray and support their healing process; and assist them in regaining control of their lives.

What can the religious community do to support children during and after incarceration?

These suggestions are not exhaustive:

Get involved with your local detention center for youth. Bring in worship or Bible study. Offer Christian music concerts, tutoring, peer relationships, or counseling.

Invite and welcome youth and their families into the faith community. Provide time and space, like a sacred container in which God's presence nurtures and guides children's lives. Provide structured activities for children with too much unstructured time.

Participate with the wider community in developing

- restorative justice projects,
- community aftercare efforts after incarceration,
- housing for foster children over 18,
- detention reform to keep more children out of the justice system.

Pray with and for the kids who are in or headed for juvenile detention. Pray for them weekly in worship. *Re-member* them into the body of Christ as our own children. Can we do any less? Are we not all "standing in the need of prayer"?

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Where is the nearest juvenile detention facility? What do they need from your congregation? What do you have to offer?
2. What do we know about child abuse and domestic violence prevention in our community?

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Women in Prison

By Lori Claudio as told to Robert Elliott

How do I put what needs to be said about ministry to women in prison in the space of a page or two? Shall I give you a day-by-day account of my year as an inmate at Alderson Correctional Facility in West Virginia? Shall I simply give you just the facts, the cold statistics?

The truth is, neither of those approaches will tell you what you need to know—what the 93,031 women in state and federal prisons desperately need for you to know.

Unlike their male counterparts, these women are not serving time alone. Their families—children, spouses, parents, significant others—are “serving time” with them, so to speak. Huge numbers of them are where they are as a result of their relationship with a man.

So where do I start?

It seems to me that any discussion of women in prison, or ministry to women in prison, must begin with a discussion of who these women are and how they came to be where they are. The answers to those questions are at the same time very simple and very complicated. They are complicated by the nature of the American prison system and by the oversimplified and unreal perception most people have of it. On the other hand, when it comes to the women themselves, the stories of how they got there have a disturbing similarity that sometimes differs only in the details.

Tragically, more and more women are finding themselves behind bars in twenty-first-century

During the 1970s, there were about 6,000 women in prisons. At the end of 2001, the figure was 93,031, a 1,450 percent increase over 30 years.

America. Between 1995 and 2001, the male prison population increased by 24 percent. In the same period, the female prison population grew by 36 percent! The feminization of the American prison system is one of the most underreported aspects of American life today. During the 1970s, there were about 6,000 women in federal and state prisons. At the end of 2001, the figure was 93,031—6.6 percent of the total prison population and a 1,450 percent increase over 30 years.

The United States incarcerates people at a rate five times the rate for the rest of the Western industrialized world. It should surprise no one that we are putting more women in prison every day. And a disproportionate number of them are women of color. Just slightly fewer than two-thirds of the women in state prisons in 1991 were either African American or Hispanic. Hispanics are the fastest growing segment of the female inmate population.

In 1991, two-thirds of the women in state prisons had children under 18. The best estimates give similar figures for all jurisdictions today. In these cases it is literally true that the whole family is serving time.

But numbers can give only the bare outline of the story. Although 55 percent of male inmates are serving time for violent crimes, less than one-third of the women have committed violent offenses. Increasing numbers of them are in prison for drug-related offenses. Stiff penalties and mandatory sentencing laws aggravate the situation and increase their numbers even more.

I landed in prison because someone brought drugs into my house, and I was convicted of conspiracy to distribute. I lived and was convicted in New York, but I served my time in a correctional facility in West Virginia, aggravating the separation for my children and family. Prison is supposed to punish the offender, but when the offender is a mother, the family gets punished too.

Most of the women I knew at Alderson were in similar situations. Almost all of them said that in one way or another, they were there because of the man or the men in their lives. Those in for drug-related crimes were introduced to drugs by male friends or by lovers. Women get imprisoned for violent crimes at a much lower rate than men—14 percent versus 47 percent for men. The victims of these women tend to be men who have abused them physically or sexually. Because there seems to be an increase in domestic abuse in this country these days, that probably means the number of women imprisoned for violent crimes will increase as well.

What does this mean for the church's ministry

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to women in prison? It can be as simple as worship and fellowship, but it can also be so much more. God calls and invites us and wants to be reconciled to us, no matter where we are.

Thus says the Lord:

A voice is heard in Ramah,

lamentation and bitter weeping.

Rachel is weeping for her children;

she refuses to be comforted for her children,

because they are no more.

—Jeremiah 31:15

When I was in prison I wished that I could die. I was not alone. Most of the women around me felt the same way. The pain of the separation from our former lives was almost unbearable. Although I didn't know it at the time, what I needed was a witness to God's love and grace. It is a blessing I found only after I returned to the world outside. The church visitors I remember were finger-pointing Pentecostals. They may have reached a few, but for most of us, they enhanced the feeling of separation from the world outside.

Although we Lutherans are very strong and secure in our knowledge of God's grace, we tend, on the other hand, to be uncomfortable when it comes to witnessing to that grace. It may help to know what a pastor-friend once told me when I was having trouble resuming my life: "God forgave you two thousand years ago. Now you need to forgive yourself. The biggest difference between you and the rest of us is that you got caught."

All prison time is hard time. Women bear the additional guilt of what is happening to their children and families. For many there is also the sense of betrayal by a loved one. When I was inside I would have given anything to know that God's grace included me—just as I was and where I was. It is a blessing to be the bearer of that message today, a blessing I hope you will share.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What provision does your community make for children of women who are in prison?
 2. Does your state send convicted women to prisons in another state? If so, do you support such a policy? Why or why not?
 3. Is society justified in imprisoning a person because he or she refuses to inform on or testify against his or her partner who is otherwise beyond the reach of the law? Why or why not?
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Supporting Offenders and Their Families

By Sarah Barnes

Let's take a faith walk together, a walk that the good Lord allowed me to take with him. I was employed in the criminal justice system for many years. I met many people coming to jail from the same families, year after year, generation after generation, the same family name. I began to pray to God, "Lord, I know there have to be some good people in some of these families. They may or may not want to change, but what about the children? Can they say, 'No, I don't want these people to become my parents?' Can they stop their parents from violating the laws of the land?"

We are faced with a generation of children, whom I view as victims, of arrested and incarcerated parents. These children have been allowed to fall through the cracks after their parents' arrest. Many have experienced the trauma of sudden separation from their caregivers and most are vulnerable to feelings of fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, depression, and guilt. Many of these child-victims themselves end up committing crimes.

For generations, when a parent has been arrested, the children have been placed in care that has often been worse than care received at home. In such situations, the child begins to view society and anyone in authority as against

them. Without continued spiritual guidance or support from Christian congregations or organizations, the victims begin to act out. One of the ways

It is up to the Christian community to say with our actions "God does care. God can change hearts."

this plays out is that they become a violent group of people who believe that God is only good to good people. It is up to us, the Christian community, to say with our actions, one person at a time, "God does care. God can change hearts. We are here to prove it."

Living in a St. Louis, Missouri, neighborhood where many victims and families of ex-offenders reside, I made a decision to help each family I was exposed to. This included assisting people inside the jail system, families in the community, and families after a member has served a sentence. With other concerned Christians in the community, I helped form a group called

"Mothers and Children Together." This effort eventually became a group of agencies and individuals who call attention to the harm done to children when they are separated from their incarcerated parent or parents. For several years, Mothers and Children Together also collaborated to develop strategies to seek alternative sentencing for nonviolent offenders.

In June 1995, St. Vincent DePaul Catholic Church, St. Louis, started a support group for female ex-offenders, called "Let's Start." JusticeWorks Network in Brooklyn contacted St. Vincent's to be a part of an annual public action. The plan was to hold a rally on Mother's Day to bring attention to the harm done to children when parents are incarcerated. Let's Start took this request to Mothers and Children Together and a decision was made to collaborate with JusticeWorks. In December 1995, preparation and collaboration began for the community's first public action rally. The following May, a group of 100 people rallied in front of city hall in downtown St. Louis.

Mothers and Children Together realized that a new women's prison in Vandalia, Missouri, was located in an area that did not provide public transportation. Thus families who did not own a car and who rely on public transportation as their sole means of travel were isolated from incarcerated loved ones. To provide bus service for families, we collected individual donations. The bus trips began in 1997 to Renz Correctional Facility, and then to Vandalia. An intern from St. Louis University organized these trips. New agencies and individuals joined the group and together we set our priorities. The original group consisted of five St. Louis agencies: Criminal Justice Ministry, Human Rights Office, Lutheran Ministries Association, Catholic Legal Assistance, and Let's Start.

Once this service was in place, we discovered that ex-offenders who returned to society need a support system. Out of this understanding "The Center for Women in Transition" was formed. This outreach effort echoes the following passage from Psalms: "Bring me out of prison, so that I may give thanks to your name" (Psalms 142:7). To begin to develop this new ministry, women



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who had worked in criminal justice ministry met with women who had been released from jail or prison. As a result of these meetings, a program was established to form mentoring partnerships to help the women become goal-oriented. The primary intent has been to help women make a successful return to society. The first 10 to 12 months of a woman's transitioning out of jail or prison are crucial if she is to break addictive behaviors. Freedom from addiction allows her to develop skills that can free her from poverty, help her to be a positive influence in the lives of her children, and help her to live out her potential. To accomplish this goal, foundations of responsibility, accountability, and dependability are needed. Through the Center, one-on-one mentoring is developed for each applicant. It offers a double blessing by enriching the lives of the women who are sponsored and bringing an awareness to the hearts of the Christian-mentor volunteer.

Most any congregation can develop a group such as Mothers and Children Together. All that is needed is a small group of caring members to meet and develop a strategy for assisting ex-offenders and their families. There are many areas of need, any one of which could become the initial, primary focus. Transportation assis-

tance is one; also, school supplies for children, clothing, utility assistance, and lunch money. Congregations can start a monthly support group for ex-offenders returning to the community. While the ex-offenders meet, the congregation could offer children assistance with homework. Many businesses will donate household or personal items to support such congregational programs.

Today Mothers and Children Together and the Center for Women in Transition collaborate with approximately 25 other Christian organizations. Here in St. Louis a small group of people is changing its corner of the world.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How might you involve ex-offenders and their families in the process of developing your congregation's prison ministry?
 2. Are families of offenders or ex-offenders present in your congregation or neighborhood? What resources within your congregation could help them?
-

Sarah Barnes, St. Louis, Missouri, serves on the staff of the Family Outreach Program, Jail Ministry, for Lutheran Ministries Association (LMA).

After Prison: Aftercare

By Robert Elliott

The United States imprisons a higher percentage of its people than any other nation in the industrialized world. We have two million men and women behind bars, and most of them will get out one day.

How will the rest of us respond to their release? As Christians we are called to welcome them. As citizens we are more likely to ignore or fear them.

Nearly two-thirds of the men and women in U.S. jails and prisons—65 percent—have served at least one previous term. For them, prison has failed as a place for rehabilitation. Even if the released prisoner is ready and willing to be a law-abiding citizen, society—intentionally or not—makes it difficult for the ex-offender to make a fresh start.

Many—perhaps, most—convicts enter and leave prison with significant shortcomings in their academic, social, and job preparation. Combined with a prison record, these deficiencies make it difficult to find and keep a job. They also affect how the ex-offender relates to the community. Prison does nothing to change this. In addition, convicted felons are excluded from many types of jobs and from many state and federal education programs. Some communities deny them access to public housing. As a result, the released prisoner who wants a fresh start finds him- or herself in a catch-22.

Christ, on the cross, welcomed the penitent convict into paradise. Christians of today are called to welcome the ex-offender back into our communities, and to ease their passage into life on this side of the law.

How is that to happen? Who will make it happen?

Since you are reading this, it seems safe to assume you and your congregation are at least willing to consider undertaking the task. It is daunting. A man or woman just out of prison needs a wide range of services

The services needed include:

- spiritual guidance,
- Christian fellowship and support,
- a friendly place to worship and grow spiritually,
- job training,
- job placement,
- emergency assistance,
- reading and math tutoring,
- individual and group counseling,
- legal counsel,
- housing,
- substance abuse counseling.

Research and planning

Because the needs are great and varied and because such a ministry places demands on the resources of your congregation, involve a broad cross section of your congregation—lay and clergy—in the planning. Involve ex-offenders in this phase of the development of your ministry.

Before you launch an after-prison ministry, organize a committee and do research. Talk to organizations already involved in this ministry and ask their guidance. Project COPE, St. Louis, and Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry, Cleveland, operate re-entry programs.

For example:

- The Cleveland ministry includes “care teams” that involve ex-offenders in serving elderly people; the Women’s Re-entry Resource Network that helps women build a healthy, wholistic life-style; and an “education advocates” program that trains and assists ex-offenders to help truant children.
- Congregation + Offender Partnership Enterprise (COPE) in St. Louis serves ex-offenders as they reenter the community, assists and trains congregations that undertake aftercare ministry, and offers transitional housing.

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Through your research, discover the resources and services for ex-offenders that already exist in your community. Which resources are present but inadequate? What needs are going unmet? Can you achieve your goals by networking existing services in your community?

Where will services be located? Who will provide them? What will be the congregation's role in providing services? Will you start a new ministry to ex-offenders or participate in an existing one?

Is there opposition to an aftercare ministry in your community? In your congregation? If opposition exists, how will you deal with it?

After you assess the needs in your community, take a look at the skills and resources in your congregation. Plan your ministry based on what you find.

Build a plan with measurable outcomes and a realistic time line.

- How many people will you serve in three months? In six months? A year?
- How will you measure success?
- If you are helping ex-offenders find housing, how many will you place in three months?
- What skills, knowledge, and experience are needed to work with ex-offenders?
- Can volunteers with training manage the responsibilities, or are professional staff required?
- Will you have to rent space?
- Where will the money come from?

Not everything will go as planned, so be flexible. Allow for the unexpected. Make adjustments consistent with your mission and goals.

Evaluation and next steps

Finally, make periodic assessments of your progress and goals. Based on your experience:

- Are there better ways to use your human, community, physical, and fiscal resources?
- Have the needs of your ex-offender clients, your congregation, or your community changed?
- Are you making a difference?
- Can you do better?

Given the numbers and the needs, congregations also can simultaneously participate in larger aftercare advocacy efforts through regional, state, or national agencies. ELCA and LCMS congregations can contact Lutheran Services in America which has a public policy office as well as state offices for government affairs. ELCA congregations also can work with Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs (LOGA) and related state public advocacy offices.

Don't look for or expect grand-scale results. If you are making a positive difference in people's lives, you are fulfilling your mission.

If you choose an aftercare ministry, go into it for the long haul. Expect disappointments—lots of them. But when you succeed, when you see a life changed because you helped, you will know the joy that comes with doing God's work. And that is what the church is for.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What steps could your congregation take to help ex-offenders gain job skills, find work, and stay out of trouble? What congregational resources are available now? Where might you realistically begin?
2. What businesses in your community hire people with prison records? Could such a person find housing your neighborhood? What might you do to address barriers that exist?

Robert Elliott, Chicago, Illinois, is retired from the Department for Communication, ELCA, where he wrote for the Division for Outreach and MOSAIC, a video magazine.

Information in this article was provided by Charles See, Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry, Cleveland, Ohio.

Workers in the Prison System

By Bryn A. Carlson

For the prison ministry volunteer and staff person alike, the examples of Scripture, the words and life of Christ, and our own faith experience may invite and compel us to minister to those in prison. The Bible includes many examples of imprisonment:

- Joseph, son of Jacob, was placed in prison while in Egypt and developed a unique and trusting relationship with his “keeper” (Genesis 39:19-23).
- Samson had his eyes gouged out, was bound with bronze fetters, and ground at the mill in prison (Judges 16:20-22).
- The prophet Jeremiah was beaten and put in prison (Jeremiah 37:13-16).
 - King Zedekiah was bound in chains and put in prison until his death (Jeremiah 52:1-11).
 - John the Baptist was cast into prison where he met his death (Mark 6:17-29).
 - The apostles, doing many signs and wonders in Solomon’s Portico, were arrested and put into a common prison (Acts 4, 5).
 - Paul and Silas were thrown into prison. Like Joseph, they developed a unique relationship with their jailer (Acts 16:19-40).
 - Jesus exhorts us to visit the imprisoned (Matthew 25:31-46).

As you prepare to serve as a prison ministry volunteer, consider that a prison is a highly unnatural environment for the prisoner, the staff, and the volunteer. This translates into four concerns for you and your congregation:

- the prison environment,
- the incarcerated person,
- the prison staff—workers in the prison system, and
- your motivations for being a volunteer.

This essay focuses on the third concern, workers in the prison system. As a volunteer, there will be no ministry in the prison without interaction between you and the prison staff. Basic to your ministry is an understanding of the dynamics and nuances of working in the prison. This awareness will contribute to your ability to provide indirect and perhaps direct ministry to the worker and increased integrity of your ministry to the inmate. Critical to your role as a volunteer is your recognition and sensitivity to: (1) the motivations for working in a prison environment and (2) the dynamics of the prison culture and environment that produce various stresses.

Motivations

Some years ago, while leading a group of clergy on a tour of the maximum-security prison where I served as a chaplain, I received more than one comment, “Why would you want to work in this environment? What motivates you?” That is a good and fair question to ask any worker in the prison system. As a volunteer, you will benefit from an awareness of the variety of motivations.

- Prison work is steady and dependable, even though it does not always pay well.
- Prisons often are located in small, rural and semi-rural areas. A prison may be one of the few employment opportunities in the area.
- Prison work, like law enforcement, often runs in the family. One generation may follow another in this work.
- Prison work may stem from a desire to reach out, to have a positive impact on the lives of those less fortunate, and to make a difference.
- Prison work may come from a subtle, or even not so subtle, identification with the inmate and the culture of the prison.
- Prison work may come from an unconscious or not-so-unconscious need to exercise power, control, and authority.



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Stresses

A number of work-related stresses contribute to a unique set of dynamics that impact and influence the prison worker.

"It is not my job," or "I am just doing my job."

For the worker, the rigid chain of command perpetuates a clear and distinct delineation of authority and responsibility. This is reality and, for some staff, a method of survival. It may serve as a form of insulation and protection from vulnerability and emotional involvement.

"I can't bring this stuff home with me." The worker often internalizes the stresses of working in prison. Many think it is not fair to vent these feelings upon their loved ones. Friends and fellow citizens don't want to hear it because of the attitude, "They only got what they deserved anyhow."

"I've got your back covered." Some years ago upon meeting our new warden for the first time, I asked him "What do you most want from me as your chaplain?" Without hesitation he responded with one word: "Loyalty!" A prison staff has a professional need to function as a unit in a crisis. The common stresses, environment, mission, and need to be understood all contribute to an exceptional bonding among these workers.

"That is one more off of the count." I heard this comment from a control room officer early one Sunday morning upon learning that the stabbed body of an inmate was found in a TV room. Cynicism can be the most insidious of dynamics for the prison worker. It can affect one quickly or gradually creep up on one over a career.

"I really do wish I could do something for you, but I can't." The worker often feels trapped between wanting to help an inmate and knowing and feeling unable to help because of expectations, rules, and regulations. No one knows better the limitations and boundaries of the worker than the inmate. Both worker and volunteer render a valuable contribution by listening to inmates and making referrals.

Ministry to prison staff

What might your congregation do for workers?

- Create and develop strategies to provide support systems and a recognition structure for the worker in the prison system.
- Develop contingency plans for workers and their families in the event of a crisis at a nearby prison. Such plans may consist of: (1) offering their houses of worship for prayer, for a service of remembrance, or for thanksgiving; (2) offering resources for assisting the families of the worker involved in a crisis; (3) mobilizing resources to provide hospitality to workers called from outside the area to assist in a crisis.
- Establish community service boards to help promote understanding, communication, cooperation, and public relations between the prison and the local community.
- Observe National Correctional Officer Week, which is the first full week of May. Prayers may be offered in worship. Liturgies may be developed to emphasize the role of the prison workers. Individual congregations might invite a prison chaplain, social worker, educator, or another correctional professional to speak about their work.

As you contemplate your volunteer prison ministry, remember the words of Isaiah: "I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness" (42:6-7).

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How would you specifically identify your motives to volunteer for this ministry? What do you assume are the motives of those who work in prisons?
2. What do you see as unique dynamics of volunteer prison ministry as compared with volunteer hospital, hospice, or nursing home ministry?

Bryn A. Carlson, Covington, Georgia, has served as a chaplain and religious services administrator in U.S. prisons for 30 years.

Welcoming the Stranger

By Christiana Lundholm

Caring for Immigrants and Refugees in Detention

When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 19:33-34).

As Americans, we too have a history of being aliens and strangers. We remember our stories, or the stories of our parents, grandparents, or more distant forebears. Their stories recount a journey to this country in search of freedom, safety, or a better life. The words of Leviticus 19 speak to us today. God calls us to honor the immigrants among us as reminders of our own immigrant heritage. We are called to treat these strangers as our neighbors, to love them as we love ourselves.

However, many of our country’s current policies regarding immigrants are at odds with this calling, particularly the policy of immigration detention. The fastest growing prison system in this country is not one for criminals—it is one for immigrants. In the words of Mekabou, a young asylum seeker from Liberia who fled his home

‘I came to this country to protect my life. (I felt I could) grow up here and be free. Instead I was treated like a criminal.’

after his father was killed, “I came to this country to protect my life. I said, ‘America is a freedom country; I can grow up here and

be free.’ Instead, I was treated like a criminal.”¹

This essay describes the detention policy and the people who are detained. It also shows how you can join Lutheran churches in responding to the need through the work of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS). LIRS is supported by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Immigration detention in the U.S.

This brief look at statistics—who is detained, conditions in detention, access to resources, and alternatives to detention—paints a picture of reality for U.S. immigrants today.

Numbers

In 1996, Congress passed stringent laws that mandated an enormous increase in the number of immigrants detained by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). In 1996, the daily detention capacity of the INS was 8,592 beds, according to the Federal Detention Plan, 1997-2001. By 2002, it has more than doubled to at least 20,000 people on any given day, nearly 200,000 people per year.² The INS continued to expand this system. Through legislation in 2002, Congress created the Department for Homeland Security (DHS). It subsumes INS and 21 other federal agencies. Among its responsibilities is oversight of the immigration detention system.

The federal government detains immigrants in numerous locations throughout the country. It imprisons about 40 percent of detainees in either its own detention facilities, called “Service Processing Centers (SPCs),” or in contract detention facilities operated for the INS by private prison companies. The other 60 percent are held in rented space in more than 800 county or city jails nationwide. On any given day, approximately 200 of these 800 jails are in use. There is often intense competition among jails for these immigration detainee contracts, since jails are paid an average of \$65 per day per detainee—more than they are paid to house criminal inmates.³

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Who is detained?

The 1996 laws mandate the detention of many immigrants during the time the government decides whether they will be deported or permitted to remain in the United States. Many of the people in detention are asylum seekers—including survivors of torture, women, children, and long-time legal permanent residents of the United States.

Asylum seekers. The INS admits that they do not have systems to track the number of detained asylum seekers. They estimate that they detain between 5,000 and 6,000 asylum seekers each year. Advocates from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), however, estimate that the number is between 11,000 and 12,000. This number includes people who have escaped from situations of almost unimaginable hardship and face persecution or death if they return home.⁴

Yet when they arrive in the United States, the laws mandate that they be detained. While they are technically eligible for release after they have demonstrated a “credible fear” of returning to their homeland, many asylum seekers remain in detention until they are granted asylum, even if they have families or community support in the United States. They spend months or, if their cases are appealed, years behind bars not knowing when they will be released. In the words of Chen, a young woman from China who sought asylum in the United States after being subjected to a forced abortion, “The worst thing about

‘The worst thing about being an asylum seeker in prison is you don’t know when you’re going to leave. Criminals know there’s an end to the suffering. (For me) there’s no end in sight.’ being an asylum seeker in prison is you don’t know when you’re going to leave....

Criminals get a sentence. Five years. Ten years. They know there is an end to the suffering. I’ve already been here for almost two years and there’s no end in sight.”⁵

In addition, those who have fled persecution and terror in their home countries often suffer medical or psychological problems that cannot receive adequate treatment, and may even worsen, in detention. Some asylum seekers are so

traumatized by their experience in detention that they even accept deportation to their country of persecution rather than remain behind bars.

Children. Every year the federal government detains close to 5,000 immigrant children. The INS has an inherent conflict of interest when dealing with these children: it must arrest, imprison, and remove from the United States the same children it is legally charged to care for and protect. Unlike children in almost any other type of court proceeding, those in immigration proceedings do not have any kind of appointed legal counsel or a special guardian to help them.

Children in immigration detention are often detained in secure juvenile facilities with juvenile offenders, rather than placed in an orphanage, youth shelter, or foster care home. Some children are even detained with adults, in criminal facilities, because of the inaccuracy of the age-determination methods used by federal enforcement agencies. Mohamed, an asylum seeker from Algeria, was only 16 when he arrived in the United States, but he was placed in detention with adults. “I’m a kid. I need to be with other kids of my age... Instead I’m in prison with adults. This is not the way a human being should be treated.”⁶

Long-time legal permanent residents. The 1996 laws mandate detention and deportation for many U.S. legal permanent residents, even for minor offenses committed in the distant past. This includes people who have lived and been educated since childhood in the United States, people with U.S. citizen spouses, children, and siblings, and people who have built businesses and served in the U.S. military. An article in Detention Watch Network News quotes Laurie Kozuba, executive director of Citizens and Immigrants for Equal Justice, an advocacy group devoted to restoring justice for legal permanent residents and their families: “The average American sees the immigrant as a recent arrival. He or she does not think of a long-term legal permanent resident who has been integrated into the United States with U.S. citizen family members.”⁷

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Indefinite detainees. To deport someone, travel documents must be obtained from the person's home country. This can be difficult, if not impossible, for people from countries with which the United States has no diplomatic relations, from countries with inadequate governmental infrastructure due to wars or poverty, or from countries that refuse to accept the return of their citizens. These include such countries as Cuba, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Iraq, Iran, Libya, and China. People ordered returned to these countries are, in effect, detained indefinitely. Some have been held for three years or even longer. In spite of a recent Supreme Court ruling mandating their release, more than 800 of these detainees continue to be held, according to government estimates.

Access to justice

The Executive Office for Immigration Review reports that, due to detainees' lack of resources and detention in remote sites, 80 percent of detainees do not have lawyers to help them with their cases. They likewise often face their ordeals far from community support and U.S. citizen family members. Other hardships often include crowded conditions; limited health care, translation capability, and pastoral care; lack of outdoor recreation; inappropriate use of solitary confinement; unannounced transfers; and verbal and sometimes even physical abuse. Because of their smaller numbers, women are more likely to be sent to county jails, housed with criminal inmate populations, and lack legal help and the most basic services.

Due to their physical, mental, and emotional vulnerability, as well as the conditions mentioned above, detention in a prison setting is particularly inappropriate for asylum seekers and children.

Alternatives to detention

Alternatives to detention do exist. In a few U.S. communities, nonprofit groups have worked with the federal government to create innovative detainee release programs that meet the government's need to ensure appearance in court and to keep costs down, while being more fair and humane. Detention alternatives have proven less costly to taxpayers and still ensure a more than 91 percent appearance rate for asylum seekers for court hearings and other appointments.⁸

How you can help

LIRS has long advocated on behalf of immigrants in detention. Opportunities for advocacy and involvement through LIRS include: Detention Watch Network, uniting service and policy advocates and concerned individuals and groups; Forgotten Refugees Campaign, educating and advocating for fairness for detained asylum seekers, children, and former refugees; and Interfaith Spiritual Care for Detainees, working to provide interfaith spiritual care to immigration detainees. All of these efforts help congregations and individuals become involved in local detention issues. For more information on how you and your congregation can become involved in these groups, see the resource section of this manual.

Called to welcome the stranger

In the face of unjust and inhumane national immigration policies and practices, clearly we are called to work for a restoration of justice to the oppressed. God extends particular care and compassion toward aliens and strangers, including asylum seekers and other immigrants imprisoned in detention facilities across the country. These strangers come to our shores bearing many gifts—courage, hope, and a love of freedom. When we welcome them as neighbors, we follow God's call to love our neighbors as ourselves.

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Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What is your family heritage? Did your family come to this country as immigrants? Which country(ies) did they come from? Did they experience any difficulties on their journey or when they arrived in the United States? How do their stories compare to the situations mentioned in the article?
2. The article mentions some biblical examples of God's compassion for strangers and aliens. List other examples. How do they apply to the current issues in immigration? (For a few examples, see Genesis 18:1-19; Matthew 25:31-46; and Matthew 2:13-18.)
3. Welcoming strangers such as immigrants and refugees is a part of God's call to love our neighbors as ourselves. In what concrete ways does or can your church or community "welcome the stranger" in the person of refugees and immigrants?

Notes

1. From *America: A Freedom Country*, LIRS, 2003. Reprinted by permission of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service.
2. Testimony of Joseph Greene, Acting Deputy Executive Associate Commissioner for Field Operations, and Edward McElroy, District Director, New York, U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, before the House Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims regarding "A Review of Department of Justice Immigration Detention Policies," December 19, 2001.
3. "Immigration Detention in the U.S.: A System Out of Control" by Esther Ebrahimian, *From the Borderline to the Colorline: A Report on Anti-Immigrant Racism in the United States*, National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, prepared for the UN World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance, 2001.
4. For the INS estimate, see "Testimony of Doris Meissner, Commissioner, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Department of Justice, before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, concerning 'INS Reform: Detention Issues,' 9/16/98." In December of 2000, the INS reported that 1000 people had been interviewed for "credible fear," meaning those in detention. Based on this number, LIRS estimates that approximately 11,600 asylum seekers are detained each year. See also Lawyers Committee for Human Rights Report, "Refugees Behind Bars: The Imprisonment of Asylum Seekers in the Wake of the 1996 Immigration Act," August 1999.
5. From *America: A Freedom Country*, LIRS, 2003. Reprinted by permission of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service.
6. From *America: A Freedom Country*, LIRS, 2003. Reprinted by permission of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service.
7. "Profile: One Woman's Fight to Change the Law," *Detention Watch Network News*, Issue 18, Summer 2001.
8. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service "Proposed Alternatives to Detention." See also *Detention Watch Network News*, "Alternatives to Detention," Issue 16, August/September 2000.

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Myth, Reality, and Prisons for Profit

By Robert Elliott

One glaring fact about the American criminal justice and penal system has been kept a dirty little secret in the decades-long rush to lock up criminals and really get tough on crime: The system does not work. The United States imprisons more people for more causes than any other country in the industrialized world, but most Americans feel less safe in their homes and communities than when the war on crime started back in the 1970s. Consider these statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Labor Statistics; the Sentencing Project, Washington, DC; and Human Rights Watch, New York:¹

- Nearly two-thirds of the people entering prison have been there at least once before.
- Having only five percent of the world's population, the United States accounts for 25 percent of the world's prisoners.
- We imprison people at the rate of 699 for every 100,000 of our population. The rate for Russia is 644; South Africa, 400; Canada, 110; Germany, 95; and Japan, 40.
- Since 1971, the prison population in the United States has gone from fewer than 200,000 people to ten times that amount—two million at the end of 2001. In the process, keeping people locked up has become a recession-proof, growth industry.
- The United States is host to the three largest prison systems in the world, the largest being the U.S. federal system followed by the state systems of California and Texas.
- Since 1976, America has built an average of one new jail or prison per week.

We must have law enforcement authorities address the issue [U.S. drug policy] because if we do not, prevention, education, and treatment messages will not work very well. But having said that, I also believe that we have created an American gulag.²

—General Barry R. McCaffrey (USA, retired),
1996, then director of the U.S. war on drugs

Many states spend more on prisons than they spend for higher education. When New York launched its prison building boom, the amount added to the budget for state prisons almost exactly equaled the amount taken from higher education. From 1984 to 1996, the state of California built 21 new prisons and only one new university. From 1987 to 1995, the state increased its spending on prisons by 30 percent and cut spending on higher education by 18 percent.

In 1999, the 50 states spent a total of \$32.5 billion on penal systems. They spent \$22.2 billion on assistance to the poor.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, the budget for the Federal Bureau of Prisons has increased by 1,954 percent since the enactment of mandatory minimum sentences for drug users. The budget has gone from \$220 million in 1986 to \$4.3 billion in 2001.³

In spite of the boom in prison construction, by mid-2001, the federal prison system was operating at 33 percent over capacity.

Prison and race

For economic and political reasons, most new prisons are built in rural areas, where they are welcomed for the jobs that come with them. These rural communities tend to be somewhat isolated and the population virtually all white. The prison inmates, on the other hand, tend to be young urban African Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians.

Which brings up another, largely ignored fact about the war on drugs, the war on crime, and the American criminal justice system: Like virtually every other aspect of American life, these policies are racist. Based on U.S. Census Bureau figures, African Americans and Hispanics constitute 62 percent of inmates in U.S. jails and prisons, although they are only 25 percent of the U.S. population.

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According to the U.S. Census Bureau, as of June 30, 2000, the incarceration rates were:

Whites	235 per 100,000
African Americans	1,815 per 100,000
Hispanics	609 per 100,000
Asians	99 per 100,000
American Indians	709 per 100,000

According to Human Rights Watch, in the United States:

- Twelve states incarcerate between 10 and 15 percent of adult African American men;
- In 10 states, between five and 10 percent of all African American adults are in jail or prison;
- Twelve states jail African American men at rates 12 to 16 times greater than they jail white men;
- Nine states jail between four and eight percent of adult Hispanic men;
- Twelve states incarcerate between two and four percent of all Hispanic adults.

The Prison Policy Initiative compares the U.S. with South Africa. South Africa, in the last days of apartheid (1993), imprisoned adult black men at the rate of 815 for every 100,000. In 2001, the United States imprisoned adult black men at the rate of 7,226 per 100,000—8.4 times greater than the most avowedly racist country in the Western world. Human Rights Watch, puts the U.S. figure in the year 2000 at 4,630 per 100,000 black men.

Prison construction

Recent statistics indicate a slowing down of the overall crime rate, possibly due to the aging of the U.S. population, but prison construction in the United States continues apace. The boom in prison construction began with the war on crime in the 1970s and in the '80s with the war on drugs and the increasing use of mandatory sentencing guidelines in the federal and state criminal justice systems. Each of these policies had a profound effect upon the size and composition of the prison population. The most visible and immediate effect has been massive overcrowding and the demand for new prisons.

In addition to the issue of racial imbalance, most of the people incarcerated for drug crimes

have been imprisoned for nonviolent crimes. More than 80 percent of the increase in the federal prison population between 1985 and 1995 was comprised of people convicted of nonviolent offenses. According to a Justice Policy Institute paper issued in 1999, the number of people in U.S. prisons for nonviolent crimes was greater than the population of Wyoming and Alaska combined.

When President Eisenhower left office in 1961 he warned the nation against the rise of the military-industrial complex—that is, a coalition of defense-related industries and military professionals that threatened to influence legislation for their own purposes and profit.

The prison-industrial complex comprises public and private agencies and businesses that see opportunity and profits in prison construction, administration, and supply. “From architects to academics (who study prisoners and the prison system), from food service vendors to health care firms, from corrections bureaucrats to psychologists and social workers, there is a lot of money being made from the proliferation of prisons.”⁴ The raw material for the industry is the lives of men and women—disproportionately people of color—caught up in the criminal justice system. Under present policies and conditions, the industry is guaranteed endlessly renewable resources. In some states and jurisdictions there has been a revival of the nineteenth-century practice of using prison labor in private industry, including kickbacks to corrupt officials. Because all taxpayers ultimately pay for prison construction and jobs, placing these facilities in depressed rural areas transfers wealth from cities to rural and farm communities. While this makes economic sense for the state, rural prisons often increase the distance prisoners are from their families.

The prison-industrial complex includes a cadre of private corporations created to build and run private prisons for profit under contracts from federal and state governments. In the process they have attained a measure of political clout that assures their continued growth and profits for the foreseeable future. Proponents of private prisons claim they provide secure services more efficiently and at a lower cost than state or federal governments can. The claim is based on the fact that private companies pay lower, mostly

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nonunion wages and salaries to all but their top executives, and they are not held to the strict bidding requirements that bind government agencies. In any case, the argument that private management produces cost efficiencies is yet to be proven. Critics have pointed out that inexperienced personnel in private prison management have been responsible for some serious breaches of security, including riots and the 1999 murder of an inexperienced guard in New Mexico.

The power and influence of the prison-industrial complex has the potential to influence government and policy, and therefore American democracy, for generations to come. While all prisons require basic goods and services, which mean jobs for people, the dangerous effect of an expanding system is that criminal justice decisions may become captive to the economy.

Unless there is a turnabout in policy and practice, the number of prisons and prisoners in America can only increase. The current social and political climate makes it unpopular and risky for politicians and bureaucrats to recommend decreasing the prison population. Anyone who does so is denounced as “soft on crime.” Only a public outcry against the system is likely to change things.

The present system is an abomination. Will your congregation be in the vanguard of those demanding change? To work for the welfare of the imprisoned is not popular, but it is a mark of the church’s faithfulness.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Given the high cost of keeping someone in prison, what are alternatives to incarcerating such a high proportion of people for nonviolent and victimless crimes?
2. What do you see as the reason for the racial imbalances in the prison population?
3. Does your state use private prison management or prisons? If so, how are the private enterprises held accountable, beyond the “bottom line”?

Notes

¹ Statistical data is available online from the Department of Justice, Bureau of Labor Statistics, www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs; the Sentencing Project, www.sentencingproject.org; and Human Rights Watch, <http://hrw.org/backgrounder/usa/race/race-bck-onepage.htm/>.

² General Barry R. McCaffrey quotation can be found at <http://165.112.78.61/MeetSum/CODA/Keynote2.html>.

³ US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics 1996* (Washington DC: US Department of Justice, 1997), p. 20. Executive Office of the President, Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2002 (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 2001), p. 134.

⁴ Lichtenstein, Alexander C. and Michael A. Kroll, *The Fortress Economy*, (Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee, 1990), p. 16.



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C. TOPICS

Is Capital Punishment a Crime or Justice?

The death penalty is a controversial subject. Many opinions and justifications for and against it compete for our attention. Some people assert, and find support in the Scriptures, that if you take a life the penalty should be your life. Others assert that, depending upon the circumstances and nature of the crime, life imprisonment is punishment enough. Some say life without the possibility of parole is comparable to or even more difficult than a death sentence. Opinions such as these are the stimulus of arguments for and against the death penalty.

In a society of “eye for an eye” and “You kill my cat, I’ll kill your dog,” violence is rampant. Senseless murder and random crimes are so common that many of us are numb to the news reports. To get reaction from the average citizen usually takes an extreme case. These extreme cases, however, produce such feelings of outrage, repugnance, and fear that the public, in a knee-jerk fashion, calls for the death penalty. The public rushes to judgment before considering in a rational manner the facts of the case and about the offender—whether that person is fully competent or responsible for his or her actions. In extreme cases, the public refuses to consider the reasons an individual’s responsibility might be reduced, and society’s quest for justice looks very much like revenge. Violence is rampant. Will the violence of the death penalty reduce this violence?

Information available from many sources, including the Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC), based in Washington, D.C., indicates that administration of the death penalty is influenced by the race of the offender and the victim. When the victim is white, the defendant is much more likely to receive the death penalty. African Americans and other racial or ethnic minorities are on death row out of proportion to their numbers in society. As of July 1, 2002, the breakdown by race of inmates on death row was: African American, 1605; white, 1683; Hispanic, 348; other, 82. Further, 80 percent of completed capital cases involved white murder victims, although among the cases brought to the courts only 50 percent of the murder victims were white.

A number of voices say, with good reason, that death sentences are racially biased, that many who sit on death row are wrongly accused. Many of those accused are people of color—particularly African American males.

According to DPIC, between 1973 and 2002, 102 people in 25 states have been released from death rows after evidence of their wrongful convictions emerged.

Consider these statistics:

- In 75 percent of the cases in which a federal prosecutor sought the death penalty in the last five years, the defendant has been a member of a minority group; in more than half the cases, an African American. (U.S. Justice Department, September 2000).
- A U.S. Justice Department study covering the years 1988-1994 found that 89 percent of the defendants selected for federal capital prosecution have been either African American or Mexican American.
- According to the Federal Death Penalty Resource Counsel Project, in 146 cases prosecuted under the Federal Death Penalty Statute since 1988, 60 percent of white defendants avoided a death sentence through plea-bargaining; only 41 percent of African American defendants had the same outcome.

No one knows the number of innocent individuals who have actually been put to death; advocates for death row inmates expend their energies on saving the living. The exoneration of 13 Illinois death row inmates led Illinois Governor George Ryan in January 2000 to declare a moratorium on executions in the State of Illinois. His decision has heightened public discussion of the death penalty and in January 2003, prior to leaving office, Gov. Ryan emptied Illinois’ death row—nearly 170 inmates. In May 2002 the governor of Maryland also imposed a moratorium.

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Related closely to the issue of innocence and whether innocents have been executed is the frequency of error in death penalty cases.

- The Virginia Supreme Court in November 2002 declined to order new DNA testing in the case of Roger William Coleman, executed in 1992 in the midst of great controversy.

- Anthony Porter was two days away from execution in September 1998 when a psychiatric evaluation, arranged by his attorney, found that Porter's IQ was 51. The execution was halted so that the state could do its own testing. In the meantime, Northwestern University journalism students discovered that witnesses had lied; they tracked down the real killer, who acknowledged his guilt. Porter was freed in February 1999.

- In September 1999, Charles Munsey died in a North Carolina prison. He had been imprisoned for six years and sentenced to death for a crime to which another man confessed. Shortly before his death, Munsey had won a new trial.

Where are executions occurring?

Thirty-eight out of 50 states are “death penalty states,” but most executions occur in the South. Texas has the highest number of executions in the country, 454 to date. While listed as a death penalty state, New Hampshire has never had an execution. Since 1997 there have been 389 executions in the United States.¹

Many factors lead to wrongful convictions: community pressure, police and prosecutorial misconduct, inadequate defense, perjured testimony and mistaken eyewitness testimony, racial prejudice, tainted jailhouse testimony, suppression of mitigating evidence, and misinterpretation of evidence, to name a few.

Factors leading to the death penalty include wrongful conviction as well as issues of race, education, and income. If a person has the resources for a good lawyer and therefore a good defense, he or she is not as likely to receive the death penalty as a person of color or with a low income.

The debates surrounding capital punishment will probably never be settled. The arguments are as vast as the personalities presenting them. Because of the Illinois and Maryland moratoriums on capital punishment, new arguments continue

to surface. Death is irreversible, once administered there is no second chance. Yet Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia has publicly acknowledged that, if it hasn't already happened, an innocent person will be executed because human beings make mistakes.

National polls (two-thirds of all voters) have shown declining support for the death penalty and an increase in support for life without parole as an alternative to the death penalty. While none of the 38 death-penalty states has come forth to completely abolish capital punishment, the opportunity for debate may lead to intelligent discussion about the alternative of life without parole. The Illinois and Maryland moratoriums are an opportunity for citizens across the U.S. to examine the many biases, flaws, and injustices in the criminal justice system.

The church debates the death penalty

What do Lutheran church bodies say about capital punishment?

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod stated in a Report on Capital Punishment, published in the May 16, 1976, issue of *The Lutheran Witness* and reissued in 1980, that capital punishment is in keeping with the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. This report was an outgrowth of concern among membership about the moral dimensions of the capital punishment debates taking place in state and national legislatures in the early 1970s.

Four conclusions were offered to guide discussion of questions about capital punishment at that time.

- Government has the authority to apply the death penalty.
- The authority of the government to apply the death penalty can be abused.
- Government is not required to exercise this right to administer the death penalty.
- Christians should exert a positive influence on the government's exercise of its responsibility of bearing the sword. Christians are to use their influence, to whatever degree it is possible, in urging governments either to retain, to reinstate, or to abolish the death penalty, on the insistence that any punishment be administered with utmost fairness.

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Ultimately, The LCMS leaves it to the individual to take a position on the death penalty. (See The LCMS Web site www.lcms.org/ctcr/docs/pdf/capitalpunishment.pdf.)

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America opposes the imposition of the death penalty. By more than a two-thirds majority vote as its second biennial assembly in 1991, the ELCA adopted “A Social Statement on the Death Penalty.”

That social statement reads, in part:

■ “Members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have different points of view with regard to social issues. While the Spirit makes us one in our faith in the Gospel, we can and do vary in our responses to the Gospel” (p. 2).

■ “The state is responsible under God for the protection of its citizens and the maintenance of justice and public order. God entrusts the state with power to take human life when failure to do so constitutes a clear danger to society. However, this does not mean that governments have an unlimited right to take life. Nor does it mean that governments must punish crime by death. We increasingly question whether the death penalty has been and can be administered justly” (p. 2).

■ “For the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, following Jesus leads to a commitment to restorative justice (p. 2). ... Executions harm society by mirroring and reinforcing existing injustice. The death penalty distracts us from our work toward a just society. ... It is because of this church’s commitment to justice that we oppose the death penalty” (pp. 3-4).

To read the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America statement on the death penalty go to www.elca.org/dcs/death.pf.html.

Any system administered by human beings will have significant flaws. As humans, we are limited by our own personal beliefs and prejudices. Until the very vestiges of racism and prejudice are expelled from our society, innocent people will continue to be executed. Until society admits and owns its prejudices, many will continue to be unjustly tried and convicted.

While Scripture passages to support capital punishment can be cited, Jesus tells us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). God is the ultimate judge and jury. God loves us all—the good, the bad, and the ugly. We are saved only by God’s grace.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion²

1. What is the history of laws in your state regarding the death penalty? Who has been executed for what and when? What is the current status?
2. Compare Genesis 4:8-16 with Genesis 9:6. Can you reconcile the seeming difference concerning the death penalty? Or do these two passages reflect competing understandings of the death penalty even in the Old Testament?
3. How do you interpret the Fifth Commandment, “You shall not kill?” Do you believe the government has the right to take life? If so, under what kinds of circumstances?

Notes

¹ From Justice for All’s pro-death penalty Web site: www.prodeathpenalty.com/Resources.htm.

² Questions from *The Death Penalty*, ©1990 ELCA Commission for Church in Society. Used by permission.

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C. TOPICS

Advocacy Is Ministry

By Robert Elliott

According to *American Heritage Dictionary*, Fourth Edition, the word *advocate* means: “(1) One that argues for a cause; a supporter or defender; an advocate of civil rights. (2) One that pleads in another’s behalf; an intercessor; advocates for abused children and spouses. (3) A lawyer.”

When it comes to prison ministry the needs are great and growing, just as our prison population is growing. More than two million men and women live in U.S. jails and prisons. The United States imprisons more of its people than any other country in the industrialized world. We have a prison system that is flawed, inherently damaged, and damaging. We have a system that is heavily weighted against people who are poor, urban, and not white. We have a system that is badly in need of change.

The church’s role

The prophetic role of the church calls congregations and Christian individuals to be in the vanguard of those advocating change. The urgent need for change exists throughout the criminal justice system. The way our communities—including our congregations—treat people who have been caught up in that system, during and after incarceration, also needs to change.

Many Christian congregations visit prisoners behind bars to join them in worship and fellowship. Many also provide a welcoming place for them when they get out. Prison visits and worship make life behind bars more bearable and bring people into a relationship with Christ. A warm welcome may help an ex-offender build a new life outside. But these ministries do not change the basic unfairness of the system or the damage it does to people and communities. These realities challenge us to broaden our conception of what prison ministry is.

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

—John 15:26-27

Christ calls his church to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. Recent American history tells us that prisoners are heard only when they riot or go on a hunger strike. In all but two states, people imprisoned for felonies lose the right to vote while behind bars. In eight states they are permanently barred from voting. Who, then, speaks for them to the seats of power? Who is their advocate?

Popular culture tells stories that document the brutality of life in prison. But there is very little discussion among U.S. citizens of the basic flaws and failure of the criminal justice system in America, most particularly the prison apparatus. Most politicians do not address the problem for fear of being labeled soft on crime. Social service agencies and academics discuss the situation with anyone who will listen.

Speaking on behalf of the voiceless

Here is an opportunity for the church to respond to Christ’s call. Congregations can provide a place to discuss the cruel realities of our prison system—in sermons, adult forums, and temple talks. We can ask why American streets and communities are no safer in spite of the fact that we toss more people into jail for more offenses than any other country in the industrialized world. We can ask why the system disproportionately jails African Americans, American Indians, and Hispanics.

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Education, training, and jobs are probably the best way to keep people from going back to jail after release, or from going there in the first place. But ex-offenders are barred from many types of jobs. In some states they cannot work in a tavern or get licensed as barbers. They are ineligible for many state and federal education assistance programs. In many instances, they are barred from welfare assistance. Some communities ban them from public housing. That could also mean denying housing to their families, or prohibiting the ex-offenders from living with their families.

If imprisonment is supposed to be payment of a debt to society, when is the debt paid? Under the present system, the debt is never paid.

If prison is supposed to rehabilitate the offender and prepare him or her for a crime-free life in the community, it is a massive failure. Roughly 65 percent of the people now in prison have been there at least once before.

Although these problems are rarely discussed in mainstream public media, you can find information and discussion of them on line at the U.S. Department of Justice Web site, www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/prisons.htm and The Sentencing Project Web site, www.sentencingproject.org.

If any program or policy that primarily affects the white middle-class had amassed such a massive record of failure over more than 30 years, a constant drumbeat for change would sound in the halls of government and all the public media. But middle-class America is content to have the victims of this system out of sight in the ghettos and barrios of our inner cities.

Christ came to afflict the comfortable. Today his church continues that mission. The role of advocate is not an easy one. It moves us beyond our personal comfort zones. Not everyone will find it easy to welcome ex-offenders into our communities and congregations, to help them find jobs and housing, and to accept them as

friends and fellow members of the body of Christ.

Speaking up about the failures and unfairness of the present system is not easy, and finding solutions is difficult. The dimensions of the task are awesome and discouraging. Yet this is the task to which Christ calls us. And it can be done.

If groups of congregations and their members across the country demand that something be done to change or reshape the prison and criminal justice system—and hold their leaders and politicians accountable—real change for the better is possible. ELCA and LCMS congregations can work through Lutheran Services in America which has a public policy office as well as state offices for government affairs. Members of the ELCA can work through Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs in Washington, DC, and related state public policy advocacy offices.

How will you become an advocate?

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Based on what you know about your congregation, if you had spent time in prison, would you let members of your congregation know? Why or why not?
 2. Where could an ex-offender find a place to live, work, or receive job training in your community? What local laws and ordinances affect housing for ex-offenders?
 3. Who in your congregation or community speaks up for the rights of prisoners and ex-offenders? Where do they make themselves heard—what media do they use? How might they help your congregation with advocacy?
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Information in this article was provided by Eddie Ellis, Afterprison Initiative, Open Society Institute, New York.