



# FAITH & FACTS

## Criminal Justice Reform

### Civil and Human Rights

### What does the Bible say?

Ah, you who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Ah, you who are wise in your own eyes, and shrewd in your sight...who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of their rights! **(Isaiah 10:1-2)**



You should also look for those able among all the people, those who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain...Let them sit as judges for the people at all times. **(Exodus 18:21-22)**

Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the Kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? **(James 2:5-6)**

### What does The United Methodist Church say?

In the love of Christ, who came to save those who are lost and vulnerable, we urge the creation of a genuinely new system for the care and restoration of victims, offenders, criminal justice officials, and the community as a whole. (Social Principles ¶164 H)

Most criminal justice systems around the world are retributive. These retributive justice systems profess to hold the offender accountable to the state and use punishment as the equalizing tool for accountability. In contrast, restorative justice seeks to hold the offender accountable to the victimized person, and to the disrupted community. (Social Principles ¶164 H)

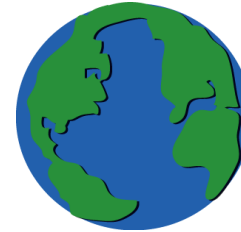
Justice can only prevail when there is healing of the victim, repentance of the offender, and when forgiveness and reconciliation are shared throughout the community. (2004 Book of Resolutions, #248 "Equal Justice")

Prisons have ceased to be places of rehabilitation and have become rather human warehouses...The prison system of his time was one of Mr. Wesley's primary concerns and has remained a concern of the people called Methodists into this century. The prison system in the U.S. today cries out for a major church-wide emphasis. (2004 Book of Resolutions, #256 "Prisons and Criminal Justice")



### What do the facts say?

The U.S. House and Senate Joint Economic Committee reported that "much of the growth in the prison population is due to changing policy, not increased crime. Many criminal justice experts have found that the increase in the incarceration rate is the product of changes in penal policy and practice, not changes in crime rates."



The United States has the highest reported incarceration rate in the world, although crime rates have steadily decreased. While the U.S. incarcerates 750 inmates per 100,000 persons, the world average rate is 166 per 100,000 persons.

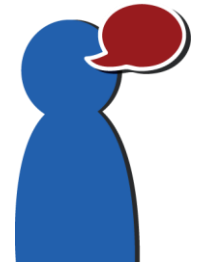
Although over two thirds of crack cocaine users are white or Hispanic, over 80% of crack cocaine defendants are African American.

In 1991, 900,000 children had at least one incarcerated parent; today there are two million kids with at least one incarcerated parent (an increase of more than 100%) and 10 million who have had one parent imprisoned.

### What do you say?

Take action for justice ...

- Tell your Member of Congress that the criminal justice system must be reformed: efforts to support inmates as they reenter society must be supported, mandatory minimum sentences should be eliminated, and prison conditions should be improved. Take action today at [www.umpower.org](http://www.umpower.org)
- Learn more about restorative justice. Read Changing Lenses by Howard Zehr, lead a discussion in your church, and encourage your church and conference to become active in restorative justice ministries such as aiding victims of crime and helping inmates reenter society through offering practical and necessary programs.
- Visit your local prison and build relationships with those who have recently been released.



**For more information contact:**

**Bill Mefford**

**[bmefford@umc-gbcs.org](mailto:bmefford@umc-gbcs.org)**

General Board of Church and Society  
100 Maryland Ave, NE  
Washington, DC 20002  
[www.umc-gbcs.org](http://www.umc-gbcs.org)