



# Intersections

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## Accompanying People in Prison, Countering Mass Incarceration

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In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves (Luke 10:27), challenging us not to place limits on who our neighbor is and whom we are called to love. However, we generally prefer to name for ourselves whom we identify as our neighbor. Too often we have been guilty of marginalizing those deemed unworthy because of acts they have committed, or simply because of who they are. Jesus calls us to the kind of love that refuses to be complicit in the marginalization of people, the kind of love committed to justice by opposing all that exploits and neglects. It is our hope that this issue of *Intersections* takes us further on the journey of compassion and justice for persons too often rendered invisible in our society—specifically, those incarcerated and formerly incarcerated persons who are, and remain, our neighbors.

In recent years, MCC has become increasingly active in responding to the realities of imprisonment and to the needs and hopes of prisoners and returning citizens. In the United States, MCC's response has been shaped by the rise of mass incarceration and a prison-industrial complex marked by systemic injustice and racial disparities. In this issue, several authors examine different dimensions of mass incarceration in the U.S. Elaine Ewert Kroeker and Cherelle Dessus reflect on different MCC efforts to raise awareness among Anabaptist churches in the U.S. of the harms and the racialized character of mass incarceration, while Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz examines the impact mass incarceration has had on Indigenous peoples in the United States. Through an interview, Dwayne Harmon and Ron Muse, themselves former prisoners, reflect on the challenges returning citizens face and the best ways to accompany people upon their release from prison. Barb Toews, meanwhile, presses us to think about physical space, justice architecture and design in the context of mass incarceration and asks us to imagine what a correctional facility would look like that was truly focused on rehabilitation, accountability and healing.

Meanwhile, MCC also supports restorative justice and peacebuilding efforts in prisons outside the U.S. Paul Shetler Fast and Keith Mwaanga describe and analyze MCC efforts in Haiti and Zambia to support people both while in prison and upon their release. Together, the articles in this issue of *Intersections* challenge those who would follow Jesus in the U.S.

A circular blue button with the text "Learn more" in white.

*You Got Booked* will be available to borrow from MCC's regional offices in 2019. Contact information for the MCC office nearest you can be found at <https://mcc.org/contact>.

Bernstein, Nell. *All Alone in the World: Children of the Incarcerated*. New York: New Press, 2007.

The U.S. struggles to find a balance between justice and punishment. Many times, the criminal justice system creates more problems than it solves. Isaiah 1:17 issues a call to learn to do good, to seek justice and correct oppression, to enhance the voices of those sinned against and disadvantaged. Sign up for Washington Office action alerts to contact your members of Congress about important issues at [mcc.org/get-involved/advocacy/Washington](https://mcc.org/get-involved/advocacy/Washington).

To learn more about and to borrow an MCC exhibit about the children of incarcerated parents, visit [mcc.org/learn/what/restorative-justice/exhibit-when-parent-prison](https://mcc.org/learn/what/restorative-justice/exhibit-when-parent-prison).

and around the world to discern what loving our neighbor looks like in the context of mass incarceration.

*Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz is MCC U.S. restorative justice coordinator. Krista Johnson Weicksel works as peacebuilding coordinator in MCC's Planning, Learning and Disaster Response department.*

## You Got Booked: developing a tool to teach about mass incarceration

What are effective ways to help people in the United States learn about the history, scope and pervasive impact of mass incarceration in the country? That question animated an MCC U.S. working group tasked with developing learning resources for congregations, schools and other groups about the many flaws in the U.S.'s criminal justice system, including enormous racial disparities from arrest to sentencing to imprisonment. Recognizing that participatory activities can help people learn more effectively, the working group focused its efforts on developing a life-sized board game experience called *You Got Booked* (to be released sometime in 2019). Participants are assigned identities and resources which will impact their outcomes throughout the activity. These identities highlight the privileges and disadvantages that groups of people face based on their race, gender, citizenship status, culture, age, community and criminal background.

In *You Got Booked*, participants are split into seven groups. Each group chooses a representative to participate in the experience. The players have a goal to make it around the board once, while building their resources and avoiding a life term in prison. As in reality, each player begins with different resources. Some start with more money, housing, jobs and education. Others start without some of these resources. Others even start the game with a criminal record. All players are expected to reach the same goal, despite their differences in starting resources.

Over the course of the learning experience, participants learn about different facets of mass incarceration in the United States today, including:

- the exponential growth in the prison population over the past few decades;
- how the war on drugs, the introduction of mandatory minimum sentences and the design of bail systems have helped fuel that growth;
- how poverty, the ongoing effects of genocide and slavery and the lack of secure housing and access to mental health resources make people more vulnerable to imprisonment;
- how racism pervades the criminal justice system and how, especially in communities of color, youth of color get channeled in to what sociologists have called the "school-to-prison pipeline";
- how the broken immigration system contributes to the mass incarceration crisis; and
- the challenges faced by returning citizens upon release from prison.

This learning tool emerged after MCC Central States sponsored a “pipeline to prison” learning tour in Louisiana. In that learning experience, two dozen people visited prison facilities, met with returning citizens and participated in a learning exercise that highlighted the impact that poverty, charter schools and suspensions have on the likelihood of juveniles entering the criminal justice system. After the learning tour, MCC staff agreed on the need to develop a resource that would help others learn of the many pipelines that contribute to mass incarceration and how policies and structural systems impact various groups differently.

Mass incarceration is a pressing moral crisis that the United States has failed to address. The U.S. incarcerates more people than any other nation in the world. This crisis of mass incarceration is primarily driven by racial injustice at all levels within the criminal justice system and by high levels of recidivism. Prisons in the U.S. today are not serving as facilities that rehabilitate citizens to thrive in their communities, but instead serve solely punitive purposes. In prison, many people are not given the resources they need to reintegrate into society successfully upon release.

Harsh sentences for non-violent drug offenses (disproportionately levied against people of color) and a failing mental health care system that leads to prisons functioning as warehouses for persons with mental illness have contributed to the mass incarceration crisis. So long as the U.S. fails to reform its criminal justice system and to address the root causes of most offenses, such as poverty, racism and economic inequality, the mass incarceration crisis will continue.

Prison records present severe obstacles to returning citizens. Participants in the mass incarceration learning activity struggle to remain active players on the board after going to prison just once. Prison records, in the activity as well as in real life, create barriers to finding employment, housing and government assistance. Meeting parole requirements also presents challenges. “You do the crime, you do the time,” goes the popular motto: the mass incarceration learning tool shows that “doing time” continues far after prison release.

The learning tool also highlights the role that families have on outcomes for people in prisons and the impact that those in prison have on their families. For persons in prison, their families can potentially provide financial and mental support, including through visits and phone conversations. Families, meanwhile, face trauma when loved ones are taken to prison. For some, their imprisoned family members were the primary financial providers or caregivers for the household. Then, when relatives are released from prison, families in assisted-living or government-funded housing may be forced by government rules to move or separate from their formerly incarcerated family members in order to continue receiving assistance.

The impact on children of having an incarcerated parent is profound. More than 300,000 children go to bed each night with a parent who has been incarcerated. As Nell Bernstein has observed, “these children have committed no crime, but the price they are forced to pay is steep. They forfeit, too, much of what matters to them: their homes, their safety, their public status and private self-image, their primary source of comfort and affection” (3).

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Learn  
more

Alexander Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press, 2010.

The New Jim Crow *Study Guide and Call to Action*. Atlanta: Bookbright Media, 2013.

13th. Film. Directed by Ava Duvernay. 2016 Available on Netflix.

The mass incarceration learning tool allows those who feel completely disconnected from the issue of mass incarceration to gain a lived, albeit second-hand, experience of the stark realities of mass incarceration and of how the racial, class and other identities placed on participants shape their outcomes. Participants who are connected to mass incarceration through their families and communities have a chance to receive an overview of their experiences and relate to how a flawed system may have impacted or could impact them. Participants may experience feelings of anger, guilt and bitterness during the activity: a debriefing exercise is essential for processing feelings, but also for discussing opportunities to act to counter and dismantle the unjust system of mass incarceration through public policy advocacy.

MCC hopes that *You Got Booked* will be an effective resource for church congregations, schools, advocates, returning citizens and others wanting to better understand mass incarceration and that participants will leave the exercise ready to act. Let us change the way we think and speak of those in and returning from prison. Let us embrace all people and challenge unjust policies.

*Cherelle Dessus is legislative assistant and communications coordinator for the MCC Washington Office.*

## Learning about the pipeline to prison

In March 2017, I participated in an MCC-organized Pipeline to Prison learning tour in Louisiana. Over the course of the week, which included a visit to the notorious Louisiana State Penitentiary (commonly referred to as Angola Prison), our group confronted the scope of mass incarceration in the United States and its racialized nature.

The U.S. leads the world in incarcerating its people. One-fourth of all the prisoners in the world are held in U.S. prisons. The scope of incarceration in the U.S. has ballooned dramatically over the past decades. In 1970, 357,292 men and women were incarcerated. By 2014, 2.3 million prisoners were held in America's jails and prisons, of whom nearly a million were African-American.

The blight of mass incarceration is particularly evident in Louisiana, the state with the highest per capita rate of incarceration, with one in three African-American men behind bars (compared to one in 17 white men imprisoned). Our group heard from speakers who linked contemporary mass incarceration to ways that southern states like Louisiana, following the Civil War, began using the criminal justice system as an institutional form of slavery by creating laws specifically crafted to convict and incarcerate African Americans, compelling them to work to rebuild the war-devastated states. Legal scholar Michelle Alexander, meanwhile, has argued that mass incarceration of people of color represents a new form of Jim Crow-era laws that disenfranchised African Americans.

A visit to Angola Prison underscores how legacies of slavery live on in contemporary mass incarceration. Angola sits on 18,000 acres of land that formerly belonged to four slave plantations. Today, it houses more than six thousand inmates, three-fourths of whom are black, many of whom can expect to spend most, if not all, of their lives there. Angola is a stark example of multiple facets of the so-called prison-industrial complex, including how prisoners are used as a source of cheap labor by

corporations. Industries at Angola include making wheel chairs, license plates and caskets. Inmates also raise dogs that are crossbred with wolves to sell outside the prison. Vegetable farming by prison labor provides income for the prison, with most of the produce sold rather than being served to inmates. Companies such as Walmart, Koch Industries, AT&T, Aramark, Horizon Health Care, JCPenny, Victoria's Secret and others benefit from the work of cheap labor provided by incarcerated persons. Prisoners are paid US\$.02/hour for unskilled field labor and US\$.20/hour for skilled labor.

Our tour group met Earl Truvia, an unjustly convicted African-American man who spent 27 years at Angola before being exonerated in June 2003. Truvia explained that “Everyone in Angola is victimized. Morally, everyone in there is a victim.” Truvia’s experience reflects how African Americans experience a different system of justice in the United States than whites. Arrested at age 17, the court system waited until his eighteenth birthday, when he could be legally sentenced as an adult, to convict him. He was given a life sentence with eligibility for parole in 40 years. During his nearly three decades of incarceration, Truvia at times chose to go into isolation, allowing himself time to study the prison system and educate himself on what had happened to him. He discovered that the district attorney concealed evidence from the police report that would have exonerated him had it been given to his defense attorney. Without this information, it took the jury only 12 minutes to convict him. Truvia was eventually released through the assistance of The Innocence Project.

Throughout the learning tour we heard from speakers who analyzed the reasons behind contemporary mass incarceration—both the increased numbers of inmates and the racial disparities in the expanding prison population. The so-called War on Drugs from the early 1980s led to the imprisonment of blacks at a much higher rate than whites. African Americans were arrested at a 13% higher rate for marijuana possession than whites, even though studies show marijuana use at the same rates for both groups. At the same time, the War on Drugs promoted stricter sentencing guidelines for crack users compared to powdered cocaine users. This led to longer prison terms for African Americans, since crack users were usually black. Cocaine users tended to be white.

The 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act (commonly known as the “Crime Bill”) exacerbated the escalating problem of mass incarceration with the creation of mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug offenses and the introduction of habitual offender (or “three-strikes”) policies. The efforts by the American Legislation Exchange Council (ALEC) to draft bills for submission to Congress and state legislatures around prison policy is particularly noteworthy. These draft bills pushed for mandatory minimum sentences and the creation of private, for-profit prisons. ALEC thus played a damaging role in the rise of mass incarceration.

The Pipeline to Prison learning tour challenged me to recognize my “whiteness,” and the ways that in our racialized society it shields me in ways that people of color do not experience. I’m still processing what I saw, heard and felt during this intense week. It was indeed a learning tour.

*Elaine Ewert Kroeker of Bingham Lake, Minnesota, a graduate of Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas, holds a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction from Kansas State University.*



MCC has organized Pipeline to Prison learning tours in Philadelphia and New Orleans. From August 5–10, 2018, MCC will host another Pipeline to Prison learning tour in and around Goshen, Indiana. For more information, visit [mcc.org/get-involved/events/pipeline-prison-learning-tour-indiana](http://mcc.org/get-involved/events/pipeline-prison-learning-tour-indiana).

## Designing accountability and transformation

Imagine you had to sit down and deal with a serious conflict with a family member or face a friend hurt by something you said or did. The conversation between the two of you is going to be difficult. Now, picture a room or space in which you would prefer to have that interaction. What would that space look, feel and smell like? How might that space influence how you would feel, think and act, both during and after the conversation? People rarely notice, let alone consciously think about, the impact of spatial design—be it buildings, rooms or outdoor spaces—on their physical, mental and emotional well-being. Yet architecture and design matter, including when considering questions of justice and mass incarceration. How can we design spaces that foster both accountability and transformation?

Justice architecture and design serve as visual representations of justice theories. For example, the judge sitting on a raised dais in the courtroom is symbolic of the judge's power and expertise. Defense and prosecution sitting side-by-side, not facing each other, but rather facing the judge, hints at the competitive nature of the justice process. Crime victims observe judicial proceedings from the back of the courtroom, behind a barrier, physically sidelined in a way that parallels the exclusion of their experiences and needs from the justice process.

The architecture and design of correctional facilities also communicate. Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, built in the early eighteenth century by prison reformers, offers an early example of the link between design and justice theory. The single-person cell with a low door and a solitary ceiling window that opened toward the heavens was designed to isolate and humble the prisoner to facilitate penitence. Today, more modern prison designs have sought to move beyond cellblock prison models—long units that house hundreds of prisoners in multiple tiers of cells, common areas with heavy furniture bolted to the floor and building material that consists of little more than cement, steel and cinder block—to the creation of more home-like settings with comfortable and moveable furniture, pleasant colors and fewer prisoners. While the cellblock model communicates a punitive and marginalizing message through its warehouse-like architecture, more modern prison designs aim to normalize the prison environment, making it more conducive to rehabilitating prisoners and facilitating their reentry into society.

Architecture and design impact our well-being, including our social, mental and emotional health. Prisons are no exceptions. Access to small and flexible spaces, for example, facilitate improved communication and social support in times of crisis. Privacy makes it possible for people to deal with social harms, reflect on their lives and re-energize after periods of intensity. Considerable research shows that interaction with nature, even just through a window view, can improve physical health and mood and reduce depression and anxiety. Research conducted specifically in the correctional environment shows similar outcomes for incarcerated individuals, especially as it relates to interaction with nature through horticultural and gardening programs. My own research with incarcerated women found that they view nature as a critical design feature of spaces in which they can meet personal and rehabilitative goals. The women also

**“ Mass incarceration within better designed correctional facilities is still mass incarceration. We are challenged to start from scratch, inquire about our desired justice philosophy goals, and design new spaces with those goals, and design research, in mind.”**

desired homelike spaces with a variety of rooms and spaces (both indoor and outdoor) for socializing as well as privacy.

The impact of facility design on correctional employees has also gotten recent attention, including from the National Institute of Justice. Correctional work is stressful and dangerous. Research finds that many correctional and security officers experience compromised mental health in the form of depression, anxiety, trauma symptomology, substance abuse and suicide. Facility design has the potential to exacerbate these outcomes for the way design can increase risk of assault and limit privacy and quiet. Research suggests that correctional staff of all kinds desire areas in which to decompress, especially outdoor spaces with trees, water and flowers. These types of spaces have a good chance of decreasing stress, given evidence that views of a simple nature mural reduce heart rates and stress among correctional intake staff.

Private, homelike and nature-based are not words typically used to describe correctional facilities. Yet we have reason to believe that spaces with such design characteristics may assist in a process of accountability that grows out of reflection, transformation of previous victimization and improved mental health. We would do well to consider how to renovate and re-envision the design of correctional spaces to better serve justice goals. We cannot, however, simply make correctional facilities more beautiful and salutogenic while simultaneously retaining the underlying message of punishment for the sake of punishment. Designing for accountability, transformation and humanization requires more than just making the cellblock feel more homelike or sitting in gardens within the confines of a barbed wire fence. Mass incarceration within better designed correctional facilities is still mass incarceration. We are challenged to start from scratch, examine our desired justice philosophy goals and design new spaces with those goals in mind. A society focused on the rehabilitation of persons who commit crimes would likely not design prisons at all, even for those times when some temporary separation from community may be warranted.

Furthermore, addressing the crisis of mass incarceration will entail confronting the dehumanizing impact of architecture and design at the street level. So-called “million dollar blocks”—i.e., city blocks in which US\$1 million is spent annually incarcerating its citizens—are typically characterized by brown fields, vacant lots and industrial sites, all void of green space. Indeed, the design of incarceration, marginalization and dehumanization begins at home.

This article began with an invitation to consider a space in which you could deal with a serious conflict or face someone you had hurt. It is probably safe to assume you did not envision anything punitive in design, let alone anything close to a correctional facility. What can we learn from your space about how to design justice spaces in which those who criminally offend can take steps toward accountability and experience transformation?

*Barb Toews is an Assistant Professor at the University of Washington Tacoma. She is the author of The Little Book of Restorative Justice for People in Prison.*



Toews, Barb. *The Little Book of Restorative Justice for People in Prison*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2006.

## Restorative justice and the prison system in Haiti

Haiti's prison system is considered one of the world's worst. In 2018, the World Prison Brief ranked Haiti's prisons as the world's most overcrowded, at 4.5 times over capacity. With less than 0.5 square meters of space available to each inmate, prisoners must sleep in shifts. Despite Haitian laws to the contrary, children are often housed with adults in prison. This crowding, combined with underfunding, frequently leads to preventable deaths from malnutrition, violence and disease. Additionally, due to a dysfunctional and overburdened judicial system, most of Haiti's 11,000 prisoners have never been tried for a crime and many do not even know the crimes for which they stand accused. According to the Haitian Directorate of Prisons, 74% of prisoners (including 82% of women and 95% of girls) have not had their cases heard before a judge. Without the ability to pay for a lawyer and court fees, even innocent people languish in prison for years.

**“ The future of people released from prison in Haiti is especially challenging. The cultural stigma associated with imprisonment means that released prisoners are often cut off from family, friends and community. Without these essential supports in place, the recidivism rate for released prisoners is high.”**

One 18-year-old, recently released through the intervention of an MCC-supported project, had been in prison for four years without seeing his family, a lawyer or a judge after getting into a fist fight on the street as a 14-year-old. Unfortunately, regardless of actual guilt, the future of people released from prison in Haiti is especially challenging. The cultural stigma associated with imprisonment means that released prisoners are often cut off from family, friends and community. Without these essential supports in place, the recidivism rate for released prisoners is high.

Responding to the stark realities of the Haitian prison system, MCC in Haiti has recently shifted from a strategy of public policy advocacy and provision of humanitarian assistance (such as blankets, food and hygiene kits) to a strategy of restorative justice, legal aid and wraparound support to aid with reintegration after release. After a series of pilot projects to test new approaches, MCC is now supporting two distinct models of work with prisoners.

### **Pro bono legal aid and community connections for imprisoned parents**

MCC's largest restorative justice project is led by Alliance Chrétienne pour la Justice (ACJ), a Haitian organization which coordinates volunteer lawyers who provide free legal aid to prisoners in pretrial detention who are accused of minor nonviolent crimes in pretrial. The project focuses on incarcerated parents, particularly single parents, with minor children. MCC supports training for the volunteer lawyers and required court fees. The lawyers donate 100% of their time. To help with reintegration, the project links willing incarcerated participants with their home congregations (or a new church in their home community) as well as a volunteer community and spiritual mentor from their faith perspective. Due to a primarily volunteer model, the project is highly cost effective at US\$191 per planned released participant. Additionally, the ACJ projects have so far achieved 123% of the planned releases for the same budget, yielding a realized cost per participant released of US\$155. So far, 75% of all released participants have remained in contact with their churches and mentors three months after release, with no known cases of recidivism or reincarceration.

The strengths of this approach include strong local buy-in and voluntarism, cost effectiveness and a holistic approach to spiritual and community reintegration after release. The weaknesses of the approach include reliance on highly qualified professionals to volunteer their time and the lack of additional wraparound supports (such as medical, economic or psychological assistance) that address the common health and financial challenges released prisoners often face. MCC is scaling up its support for this project over the next three years as ACJ grows in capacity. During this time, ACJ aims to facilitate the release and reintegration of 175 parents.

### **Holistic wraparound support for children in prison**

MCC's other restorative justice project, in its second pilot phase, partners with the Haitian organization Zanmi Timoun to provide a more comprehensive wraparound model for supporting children in prison. Given the extreme vulnerability of children both while in prison and post-release, a more holistic and structured model of support is required. The project utilizes paid staff to provide psychological counseling, basic medical aid, preparation for post-release reintegration and education. The project also addresses the stigma families feel from having a child in prison, offers mediation between families and their children upon their release and economic assistance for the most vulnerable children to attend school or start a small business. Due to its resource-intensive approach, the cost per released participant is US\$302. The project's transportation and logistical costs are also high because the imprisoned children which Zanmi Timoun assists are spread out across all 17 Haitian prisons (only one of which is designated as a juvenile detention center). With MCC's support, Zanmi Timoun works with approximately 200 children per year in the prisons (about one-third of all incarcerated children in Haiti) and follows 100 of them through to release. Cases receiving full legal accompaniment are prioritized based on the inability of their families to pay for legal aid and the severity of their accused crimes (with priority going to those accused of minor nonviolent crimes). To date, the two pilot projects with Zanmi Timoun have resulted in the release of 47 children, among whom there have been zero known cases of recidivism or reincarceration.

The strengths of Zanmi Timoun's approach include the comprehensive nature of the wraparound services provided, the way in which family reintegration is emphasized and supported and the involvement of paid staff to provide greater consistency and control over quality and timeliness of services. The approach's greatest weakness is its resource-intensive nature and dependence on paid staff throughout the process.

### **Next steps**

MCC's work in Haitian prisons through these two models has been successful because each model is adapted to the population it serves. Additionally, both approaches include advocacy to the Haitian government about prolonged pre-trial detention, which results in people waiting in jail for years for a trial. The more pared down volunteer model of ACJ allows for the maximum number of adults to be helped with a limited budget and capacity. The more comprehensive model of Zanmi Timoun allows for the higher level of support incarcerated children and their families require given their heightened vulnerability. ACJ is currently out of the pilot phase and at the start of a three-year initiative to scale up its

**“ Given the extreme vulnerability of children both while in prison and post-release, a more holistic and structured model of support is required.”**

work. Zanmi Timoun is in the middle of its second-year pilot project as it continues to refine its approach. Over the coming years, MCC Haiti staff will collaborate closely with both organizations to learn more about how both models can be improved.

*Paul Shetler Fast is MCC's health coordinator, living in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.*

## Piloting peace clubs in prisons in Zambia



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more

Peace club curricula from Zambia, South Africa, Kenya, Burundi and Mozambique can be found here: [apcc.mcc.org/home/peace-club-materials](http://apcc.mcc.org/home/peace-club-materials).

The peace clubs model, first developed by Issa Ebombolo, founder of Peace Clubs Zambia and now MCC Zambia peace coordinator, has been widely adopted in schools across Zambia and has been adapted in over a dozen countries across Africa and even beyond. Through peace clubs, participants learn nonviolent conflict transformation techniques and develop leadership skills. Three years ago, another MCC Zambia peace coordinator, Mturi Kajungu, had the idea to utilize the peace clubs model in a different context within Zambia, founding a peace club within the Choma Correctional Facility in Zambia's Southern Province. Kajungu had a passion for victim-offender reconciliation work and was inspired by the peace club curriculum module, *Journey Toward Reconciliation*. The adoption of peace clubs in Choma Correctional Facility has increased the potential for rehabilitation and reintegration.

Much of my work in the Choma Correctional Facility is a continuation of what Kajungu started. In these efforts, I have enjoyed a lot of support from the facility's top leadership and the inmates. As I give leadership to the facility's peace club, I work alongside the prison chaplain inspector, Fred Musiwa, a committed Christian who is loved and respected not only by the inmates, but also by his colleagues.

The need for peacebuilding work in Zambia's prisons is great. Inmates experience violence in Zambian correctional facilities through corporal punishment and bullying. Zambian correctional facilities are also overcrowded. For example, Choma Correctional Facility was meant to accommodate about one hundred inmates, but most of the time it houses over three hundred people. Prison officers in Zambia too often have negative stereotypes and prejudices towards inmates. For example, many officers believe that all prisoners are criminals and dangerous to society and in turn relate to prisoners in a punitive and fear-driven manner. These negative beliefs about and attitudes towards prisoners in turn serve as justification for corporal punishment, the imposition of longer sentences with hard labor and the denial of food, all in the misguided belief that such punitive measures will promote rehabilitation.

Given these prison conditions, many inmates experience traumatic stress, expressing feelings of shock, fear, grief, anger and difficulty in feeling love. This traumatic stress manifests itself through varied behaviors, such as low energy, eating too much or too little, poor hygiene and poor impulse control. Some inmates experience suicidal thoughts. Upon their release, returning citizens regularly experience feelings of distrust, irritability, rejection and abandonment and may withdraw from or get into increased conflicts with others.

The peace club at the Choma facility is designed to transform the attitudes of correctional officers and to equip inmates with skills to cope with the

challenges of imprisonment and to prepare for reintegration into society. Training prison officers is critical for transforming their attitudes about prisoners and for equipping them to promote and support rehabilitative outcomes for prisoners. While I provide overarching training for inmates and officers, inmates themselves give leadership to the peace club on a day-to-day and week-to-week basis. All peace club members meet at least every Friday. Together, they work through the peace club curriculum to learn about alternative ways to address conflict, the problem of gender-based violence and how to walk along a journey toward reconciliation in their lives. This past January we trained a total of 50 people (45 inmates and five prison officers) in peace and conflict resolution. Several months later, 36 of the 45 prisoners trained continued to participate in the peace club, while the remaining nine had been released.

In my role supporting the peace club in Choma, I visit the correctional facility at least twice a month, and more often as the need arises. My primary role with this peace club project is to provide counseling to inmates in the Choma facility. I try to provide a welcoming space for prisoners, listening to their feelings, accepting them in genuine care and remaining respectful of their experience. I assist them in remembering past experiences of getting through difficult times, inviting them to tell stories of themselves, their families and their communities and encouraging them to both to express gratefulness for victories and to mourn and share feelings of loss. In our conversations, inmates imagine life after prison and we discuss opportunities and challenges they will face after release. I also advocate for them to the higher authorities and help connect them with their families and friends for moral and material support.

The Choma peace club has had a positive impact during its short lifespan. The facility has the highest percentage of early releases in Zambia, due to inmates' good behavior, which prison officers attribute to the positive impact of peace clubs at the institution. Outside the prison, five former Choma peace club participants founded a government-registered organization called the Popota Peace and Environment Club. Former inmate Zebulon Mwale explains the reason for founding Popota thus: "We have chosen to live for the sake of others." Through Popota, the five former Choma inmates share the conflict transformation techniques they learned in prison, training civic, traditional and religious leaders as well as teachers and farmers. Using the peace club curriculum, the group meets twice a week to discuss issues affecting the community and to brainstorm alternatives to violent conflict.

In addition to strengthening interpersonal relationships and reducing violent conflict between people, Popota promotes better relationships between people and the environment. Group members plant trees and sensitize the community to the importance of environmental protection. Popota's members are all volunteers, meeting after normal work hours. Since Popota's founding, the community has witnessed a reduction in crime. Popota also hopes in the future to introduce the peace clubs model to Zambian correctional facilities beyond Choma.

The obstacles to building peace in correctional facilities are enormous. Most inmates question the fairness of life and their own self-worth. In addition, they are permanently on alert for danger. It is challenging to renew their sense of spirituality and self-esteem amidst chaos. Many inmates feel angry at God and other people. Such feelings of anger can be

**“ The Choma peace club has had a positive impact during its short lifespan. The facility has the highest percentage of early releases in Zambia, due to inmates' good behavior, which prison officers attribute to the positive impact of peace clubs at the institution.”**

compounded when inmates are innocent and have been unjustly sentenced. My goal is to connect all inmates with God, people and the environment, yet that task can often prove daunting. That said, involvement in the Choma peace club brings great pleasure and satisfaction, especially when I consider the former inmates and peace club members who were once viewed as dangers to society and who are now actively working for peace in prison and to reduce crime levels in their communities.

Issa Ebombolo and Mturi Kajungu are currently in the process of adapting the school peace club curriculum to the prison context with the hope that the Choma model could extend to other prisons throughout Zambia. As MCC continues to support work for peace in Zambia's prisons, capacity building for prison officers will be especially critical, helping them understand their correctional services role as rehabilitative. MCC must also focus on how best to reintegrate returning citizens into their communities and to find ways to assist returning citizens in supporting their families after serving their sentences. The peace clubs pilot at Choma has shown promise: now MCC must work to build on that promise.

*Keith Mwaanga is peace and justice coordinator for MCC Zambia.*

## Supporting returning citizens

The rise of mass incarceration means that the number of former prisoners is greater than ever. Returning citizens who receive spiritual and livelihoods support upon their release from prison fare markedly better than those who do not, with lower rates of recidivism. As former inmates themselves, Dwayne Harmon of Fresno Pacific University's Circle of Support and Accountability (COSA) program and Ron Muse of MCC East Coast bring distinctive perspectives about the difficulties that returning citizens face. In this article, Harmon and Muse reflect on those difficulties and respond to questions about their work and how community members can be more responsive to the needs of newly released prisoners.

### What work are you doing with incarcerated individuals or returning citizens? What motivates you?

Harmon works with both incarcerated individuals and returning citizens through Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA), a program of Fresno Pacific University that accompanies offenders living in a half-way house and prepares them for reintegration into the community. As someone who spent 20 years in and out of prison, Harmon knows firsthand the obstacles returning citizens confront upon their release. "I took courses to become a water technician and had numerous interviews," Harmon shares, "but the moment they found out I was an ex-felon everything stopped . . . no more emails or phone calls."

Harmon also works with incarcerated individuals through the Victim Offender Education Group (VOEG), an Insight Prison Project program in California that supports incarcerated persons in developing new perspectives on their life choices and the life circumstances that resulted in their imprisonment. Insight's 18-to-24-month curriculum utilizes tools of restorative justice to better address crime and violence within communities and is offered in numerous prisons, jails and reentry facilities for men, women and youth. During the year-and-a-half that

**“ The rise of mass incarceration means that the number of former prisoners is greater than ever. Returning citizens who receive spiritual and livelihoods support upon their release from prison fare markedly better than those who do not, with lower rates of recidivism.”**

participants meet together for the course, many of them speak openly for the first time about their crimes and the impacts of those crimes on themselves and others and reflect together on what their futures might look like after prison.

Harmon also works with Ahimsa Collective, a network of people creating relationship-based ways of addressing violence through restorative approaches. The Ahimsa Collective engages men about what has impacted their lives adversely and encourages them to identify ways to deal with their own victimization so that they can begin to acknowledge the impact of their crimes on others.

Muse, for his part, serves as chaplain in the county prison of Philadelphia and supervises religious services, provides counseling, shares the gospel and offers resource literature to inmates. As a pastor, Muse also helps returning citizens make the spiritual and life adjustments necessary for them to successfully reenter their communities.

### **What has been most challenging for you as a returning citizen?**

“I was released from prison on March 26, 2006, and made the decision to complete my education so I would be able to find a respectable job,” Harmon shares. “I received my bachelor’s degree in organizational management to create better opportunities for employment. But as an African-American man and ex-offender I found more barriers than opportunities.” Harmon continues that he spent three-and-a-half years looking fruitlessly for meaningful work. Not finding any, “I did what I had to do. I worked in ship yards, picking up cigarette butts, because that’s the job I was assigned. I worked in the construction field as well as a union iron worker, but I kept running into walls of discrimination.” Harmon observed that there was “no one who looked like me in positions of authority. I would be hired for time-limited projects, like helping to build one of the women’s prisons in California. I would usually be given the most strenuous job on construction sites and instead of moving me to a different job when the contract was finished, I would be let go.”

### **What does support look like for returning citizens?**

Harmon points to the blessing of having a loving mother and father. “Their love was unconditional,” he states. “They loved me enough to let me go out on the streets and figure it out for myself. But they never turned their back on me.” Harmon continues:

The church was also there for me. I converted to Islam for over 20 years while repeating cycles of recidivism. My home church was always there with prayer, clothing, inviting me to their space. I’m grateful for that support and it’s a well I’m drinking from today. I made the choice to go to church and figure out what it meant to hang out with people I saw as winners. I started choosing something different that I never gave a chance to before.

Harmon also underscores his own motivation. Before his incarceration he was a student at Arizona State on a football scholarship. In prison, he became a jailhouse lawyer and realized how important education was. It made a space for him to go inside and pull things out. “I became very creative inside and out,” Harmon notes. An Arts in Corrections program

**“ The church was there for me. My home church was always there with prayer, clothing, inviting me to their space. I’m grateful for that support and it’s a well I’m drinking from today.”**



Get  
Involved

In partnership with Crossroads Community Center in North Philadelphia, MCC East Coast is welcoming donations of prisoner care kits to distribute to people in the greater Philadelphia area who are currently incarcerated or who are participating in reentry ministries after leaving prison.

MCC East Coast staff member Ron Muse shares that receiving a gift of basic hygiene supplies when he was incarcerated made him feel “loved in an unlovable place.” For more information on assembling prisoner care kits, visit [mcc.org/stories/mcc-welcomes-donations-prisoner-care-kits](http://mcc.org/stories/mcc-welcomes-donations-prisoner-care-kits).

provided him with an opportunity to pursue creative writing, film-making and photography, activities that sustained him through difficult times. Harmon underscores the importance of support he received from the California Department of Rehabilitation upon his release that helped him reintegrate into society. He also notes that his parole officer assisted him in getting a \$500 loan to get his photography business started, financial assistance that helped keep him on his feet.

Muse emphasizes that support must come from the communities from which returning citizens originate, because those communities have typically already dealt with and overcome the obstacles that hinder returning citizens from avoiding recidivism and establishing themselves in secure livelihoods. It is transformed people who transform people, Muse insists. Most secular and Christian programs fail to adequately support returning citizens, Muse contends, because they rarely have staff persons who themselves have experienced how God can transform the lives of prisoners and returning citizens and who are thus well-positioned to give relevant advice to released prisoners. In many organizations that work with returning citizens of color, Muse observes, most of the decision-making is done by degreed or compassionate white people who have not themselves been through the struggle, yet think they have the answers or solutions to the problems returning citizens face. Support looks like partnering with communities of color who are already doing the work and getting results.

### **What would you want people to know about returning citizens?**

Both Muse and Harmon highlight the humanness of returning citizens. They are more than statistics or labels. Know that people who come out of prison have skills, they emphasized. Many were able to develop skills while in prison. They can use those skills if only given a second chance. Sometimes ex-felons feel like jacks-of-all-trades and masters of none. Given more opportunities to use their skills and draw upon their experiences, they can be successful.

### **What would you say to people who want to be helpful to returning citizens? What can or should they do?**

“Our communities need to be more involved and recognize that mass incarceration has negative effects for all of us,” Harmon argues. “We need circles of people to support people through the transition—every day. That support should come from the community, not just the church.” Harmon explains that

Returning to our communities feels lonely because you are often on your own and it’s all an uphill battle when you come out with \$200 in your pocket and a bus pass. Our communities need to provide more in the way of circles of support and accountability. Returning citizens also need advocates. Someone who can be there day in and day out. Not just on Sunday mornings. Provide assistance navigating housing, employment, transportation. Help to implement an action plan.

Muse insists that people seeking to work with returning citizens prayerfully discern their motivation and equip themselves. “As a soldier of Christ, make sure that he has called you to this demographic of people,” Muse urges. He concludes with sober counsel:

For some reason white people think they can serve anywhere their little heart desires. As soldiers we cannot choose our place of deployment. Understand that mass incarceration has many parts and we have to find what part God desires for us to play if he has called us to it. If you are called, now it's time to get trained. Training is mandatory. Most people fail with this demographic of people because they failed to realize the constant demand from inmates and returning citizens and they burn out fast.

Together, Harmon and Muse remind people accompanying returning citizens that their work is a high calling that must be approached with great seriousness.

*Dwayne Harmon works with Fresno Pacific University's Circles of Support and Accountability (COA) program. Ron Muse is prison ministry advocate for MCC East Coast.*

## Indigenous peoples in the United States and mass incarceration

Painting a full picture of mass incarceration in the United States requires a reckoning with how Indigenous peoples in the U.S. are disproportionately arrested and sentenced in comparison to the broader population. In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, North Dakota chief federal district court judge Ralph Erickson confessed that “No matter how long I have been sentencing in Indian Country, I find it gut-wrenching when I am asked by a family member of a person I have sentenced why Indians are sentenced to longer sentences than white people who commit the same crime.” Erickson’s experience prompted him to initiate a federal review of how Indigenous defendants are sentenced and to analyze disparities between their sentences and sentences imposed on the broader population. A similar review was conducted over ten years ago, but resulted in few changes. That no meaningful steps have been taken to address the criminal justice system’s disproportionately negative impact on Indigenous communities would not come as a surprise to Indigenous peoples themselves, who have endured over five hundred years of genocide, oppression and marginalization.

The number of Indigenous persons incarcerated in federal prisons continues to rise. In South Dakota, the state with the fourth largest percentage of Indigenous peoples, 60% of the federal caseload consists of Indigenous defendants, even though Indigenous persons represent only 8.5% of the total state population. This trend repeats itself in other states. So, for example:

- Past studies by the Bureau of Justice Statistics show that Indigenous peoples face a 38% higher incarceration rate than the national average.
- The Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice reports that Indigenous people are more likely to be killed by police than all other racial groups.
- The Lakota People’s Law Project has found that Indigenous men are incarcerated at four times the rate of white men, while Indigenous women are incarcerated at six times the rate of white women.



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The inequities within our legal system are evident not only in statistics but also in comparison of specific cases. In the *Report of the Tribal Issues Advisory Group* from May 2016, Judge Myron Bright points to the ten-year sentence given to a 25-year-old Indigenous mother of three for the death of her newborn, while during the same year, in the same state, for an identical crime, a non-Indigenous woman received a sentence of three years' probation.

The fact that the national conversation on mass incarceration (when it happens at all) tends to omit the realities faced by Indigenous peoples further perpetuates Indigenous erasure within our communities. Just as some have argued that mass incarceration represents a continuation of the legacy of enslavement of African Americans, so should the criminalization of Indigenous peoples be viewed as a continuation of the colonization and confinement that Indigenous peoples have endured.

This legacy of colonization and genocide of the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island has its roots in the Doctrine of Discovery, a theological, philosophical and legal framework established by papal decrees that provided European governments moral and legal rights to invade and seize Indigenous lands and dominate Indigenous peoples. The Doctrine of Discovery's legacy is felt in multiple ways in how the judicial system treats its Indigenous peoples, such as the referral of Indigenous defendants charged with felonies on reservations to federal jurisdictions, meaning that they are not tried by their own tribal authorities and face the longer sentences imposed by federal courts.

What hope can be found for Indigenous communities facing a discriminatory legal system that disproportionately sentences Indigenous peoples to prison? Activist and author James Kilgore calls for renewed anti-colonial efforts to empower tribal courts. These courts, he argues:

have embodied a restorative justice that focuses on healing and community building rather than punishment. Today, many tribal courts sit in peacemaking circles rather than vesting all authority in one judged seated on high. While politicians seek answers to mass incarceration in metadata and cutting-edge risk assessment tools, they might find a more genuine alternative by listening to Native people.

Kilgore's words provide an important reminder that the struggle against mass incarceration, which so disproportionately impacts communities of color, including Indigenous communities, must be led by and be accountable to those communities.

*Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz is MCC U.S. restorative justice coordinator.*

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