



Christians for an Ethical Society Canberra

www.ces.org.au

2008 Forums on Prisons at the
Australian Centre for Christianity & Culture

References to information on Corrections

Relevance of Christian ethics to prisons

The establishment of a prison within the Canberra community is a coming that for at least three reasons Christians cannot ignore: concern for the outcast, justice to the disadvantaged and the need for healing for the victim and community.

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews echoes thoughts that go back to Isaiah when he exhorts his readers to "Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering." There is much for hope that the cessation of transportation to NSW of those who have offended against the criminal law in the ACT will be an improvement on notorious deficiencies of the NSW prison system. Those deficiencies mark the lives of those who have offended and their families. There are also Christ's words to the righteous: "I was in prison and you came to visit me." We should see that both the spiritual and physical needs of prisoners and their families are provided for.

There is, secondly, the need to deal with disadvantage. As the Chief Minister has acknowledged: "Criminal behaviour emerges as a result of joint failures of the individual and the society of which he or she is part. As a result, society must take some responsibility for crime, and at least make an attempt to rehabilitate offenders." The enormity of the obligation there becomes obvious when one considers the situation that Professor Tony Vinson, the speaker at the first forum has done much to document: Australia shoves its most disadvantaged into its prisons. Professor Vinson has found

that those from the three per cent most disadvantaged locations in the ACT are more than seven times more likely to end up in prison than those from elsewhere.

Finally, there is the hurt of the victims and the need to bring about healing for them which naked punishment so rarely does. The ACT Government spoke out strongly in favour of restorative justice, perhaps the most optimistic recent development in corrections thinking. It is a development that owes much to the currents underlying the parable of the Prodigal Son. It is important that conditions exist in the new prison that are necessary for restorative justice programs to operate.

MENTAL HEALTH AND PRISONS

Senate, Select Committee on Mental Health, *A national approach to mental health: from crisis to community, First report* (March 2006) at http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/mentalhealth_ctte/report/report.pdf

This very important Senate report has a broad focus on the many problems associated with how mental health is handled in Australia. Of particular relevance are chapter 13 on mental health and the criminal justice system and chapter 14 on dual diagnosis as 'the expectation not the exception'.

ACT Community Coalition on Corrections, *Healthy or harmful? Mental health and the operational regime of the new ACT prison* (ACT Community Coalition on Corrections, Canberra, April 2008) at <http://correctionscoalitionact.org.au>

Mental Health Council of Australia, *Not For Service: Experiences of Injustice and Despair in Mental Health Care in Australia. A report of the consultations by the Mental Health Council of Australia and the Brain and Mind Research Institute in association with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission* (Mental Health Council of Australia, Canberra, 2005) at http://www.mhca.org.au/notforservice/documents/NFS_Finaldoc.pdf

Like the Senate report, this report has a lot to say on the experience of people with a mental illnesses in the criminal justice system including prison. It includes Australia wide testimony of many mental health consumers and carers.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative justice is a broad term that includes any practices that seek to heal the impact of offending and make things right for victims, offenders and their respective communities.

Peter Norden SJ, *Restorative justice: a new vision for criminal justice* at http://www.jss.org.au/research/documents/restorativejusticeapr04_000.pdf

“Australians generally need to make a cultural shift from an ideology that mistakenly thinks of imprisonment as a simple solution to many of the complex social problems confronting our society today: problems such as homelessness, family breakdown, child and sexual abuse, unemployment, intellectual disability, alcohol and drug addiction, and mental illness, all of which significantly underlie much individual criminal activity.”

Mark Griffiths, Strategies to promote the social movement of restorative justice (RJ) in corrections at <http://www.jss.org.au/documents/SocialMovementofRestorativeJusticeConferencePaper.pdf>

ACT GOVERNMENT

Corrections

There is much material about the new prison (the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC)) in the publications section of the ACT Corrections website at <http://www.cs.act.gov.au/amc/home>. This includes:

Statement of the Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, to the Legislative Assembly in August 2004 set out the Government's objectives for the prison. This is reproduced at the back of the Communication Plan April 2007 at http://www.cs.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/53175/CommunicationupdateApril07.pdf

Office for Children, Youth and Family Support

The Office for Children, Youth and Family Support of the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services is responsible for youth detention. The ACT is building a new youth detention centre as well as a new adult prison (http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/ocyfs/youth_detention_centre)

Health

Overwhelmingly, those sent to prison have mental health and other health problems. The Department of Health is responsible for the provision of health services within adult and juvenile detention centres. The plans for the delivery of these services are at <http://www.health.act.gov.au/c/health?a=dipol&policy=1186965029&did=10107160&sid=> and <http://www.health.act.gov.au/c/health?a=dipol&policy=1186965414&did=10107160&sid=>

ACT Human Rights Commission

The Commission carried out a *Human Rights Audit of Quamby Youth Detention Centre*. The Government's response in August 2005 to that report is at

http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/5416/Govt_Response_to_HR_Audit_Version_2.pdf

The *Human Rights Audit on the Operation of ACT Correctional Facilities under Corrections Legislation July 2007* at <http://www.hrc.act.gov.au/assets/docs/Corrections%20Audit%202007.pdf>

ACT Legislative Assembly

Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, *One-way roads out of Quamby: Transition options for young people exiting juvenile detention in the ACT* at <http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/downloads/reports/cs07onewayroadsoutofquamby.pdf>

Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, *The forgotten victims of crime: families of offenders and their silent sentence* June 2004 report 06 at <http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/downloads/reports/cs06supportservices1.pdf>

ACT Community Coalition on Corrections

The ACT Community Coalition on Corrections is a coalition of organisations and individuals that have an interest in corrections and particularly in the new ACT prison (the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC)), its operation and its performance. Its website (<http://correctionscoalitionact.org.au>) includes submissions to and correspondence with government and links to other web sites.

Australian Institute of Criminology

This website (<http://www.aic.gov.au>) contains a lot of material on offending and corrections. Examples include:

- Chapter 6 on *Corrections of Australian crime : facts and figures 2006* at http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/facts/2006/06_corrections.html
- Jeremy Prichard and Jason Payne, *Alcohol, drugs and crime : a study of juveniles in detention* Research and public policy series, no. 67, Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology: 2005 at <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/rpp/67/rpp67.pdf>
- *Mental health and drug dependency amongst police detainees* at <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/cfi/cfi102.pdf>

Australian Bureau of Statistics

The Bureau of Statistics publishes regular reports of numbers and imprisonment rates around Australia (<http://abs.gov.au/>).

<http://abs.gov.au/websitedbs/c311215.nsf/22b99697d1e47ad8ca2568e30008e1bc/849afeee7a90642dca256ab800804099!OpenDocument>

Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service

Provides best practice and holistic health services particularly to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Canberra and the region. It published an important report in June 2007 on a best practice model of holistic health service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inmates of the ACT prison (<http://www.winnunga.org.au/prisonhealth.htm>).

International Centre for Prison Studies

The website of the International Centre for Prison Studies at King's College, London at <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/depsta/rel/icps/new.html> contains a wealth of challenging material including the following:

Does custodial sentencing work?

Lecture on 21 December 2006 by Professor Andrew Coyle, Professor of Prison Studies, School of Law, King's College, University of London at a conference on Alternatives to Prison held at the Royal Society of Edinburgh. In the course of this he argued that unless society decided otherwise, 400,000 people could end up in prison in England and Wales and 35,000 in Scotland.

Excessive Use of Imprisonment Does Nothing to Improve Public Safety

Lecture by the director of the International Centre for Prison Research, Rob Allen on 18th June 2007.

The reason for a "commitment to a sparing use of prison lies in the substantial financial, social and ethical costs involved in locking up increasing proportions of the population. What is true all over the world is that people in prison are not representative of society as a whole. They are disproportionately drawn from certain poor neighbourhoods where a range of social, health and community problems are concentrated. This reflects in part the fact that people who are economically and socially marginalised are at greatest risk of being drawn into criminal behaviour and in part the way the police and other law enforcement agencies tend to concentrate their efforts on these areas."

He mentions a ten point plan for criminal justice reform. "The first point is to develop Restorative Justice (RJ). RJ – particularly restorative conferencing – involves victims and offenders meeting face-to-face in the presence of a facilitator. Recent evaluations have shown that restorative conferences and victim/offender meetings bring real and tangible benefits to victims: less anger and anxiety, less Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and lower health costs."

National Institute of Corrections, Information Center of the U.S. Department of Justice

Provision of mental health care in prisons (February 2001)
(<http://www.nicic.org/pubs/2001/016724.pdf>)

This is a study of the extent to which corrections agencies in the United States acknowledge the needs of, and provide for mental health care for, not only their acutely or severely mentally ill inmates, but also those with lower level disturbance.

"It is evident that most U.S. prison populations include significant numbers of inmates who enter the system with mental health needs. Some of these inmates must be housed and cared for separately for short or long periods, while others function acceptably in the general population. An inmate's previously recognized mental health issues may be exacerbated in the stressful environment of the prison, or an inmate may first be diagnosed with a mental health problem while incarcerated."

Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies

The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) (<http://www.elizabethfry.ca>) is a federation of twenty-three autonomous societies. All local societies are community-based groups dedicated to the provision of programs and services with and for women and girls involved in the criminal justice system.

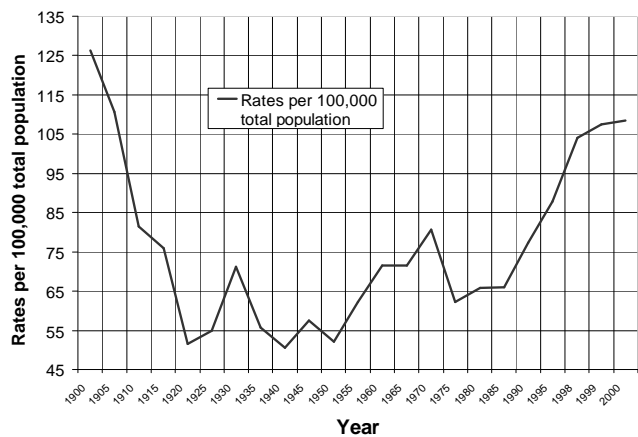
Includes submission on *Five Year Review of the Canadian Corrections and Conditional Release Act* ([http://www.elizabethfry.ca/ccra/page1\).htm](http://www.elizabethfry.ca/ccra/page1).htm) this includes information about Canadian First Nation women in Canada the provision of mental health services.

Jesuit Social Services

Jesuit Social Services works collaboratively with others to engage disadvantaged individuals, families and communities and the wider society to promote health and wellbeing and to address social exclusion. We work in some of the most difficult and demanding areas of human service, including the areas of crime, addiction, mental illness, long-term unemployment and entrenched social disadvantage. The research section of its website includes much material bearing on corrections (<http://www.jss.org.au/research/index.html>).

Daily average rate of prisoners in Australia 1900-2000

Source: *The Cambridge handbook of Australian criminology* (2002), table 1.3, p. 16



ACT Remandees: average daily occupancy July 1996-Dec 2007

Source: *Quarterly Criminal Justice Statistical Profiles* at <http://www.jcs.act.gov.au/eLibrary/crimestats.html>

