

## Criminal Justice

### Ethical Cornerstones

- *“Society’s challenge is to incapacitate offenders in a manner that limits violence, and holds open the possibility of conversion and restoration” (ELCA Statement on the Death Penalty).*
- The rule of law must be applied equally to all regardless of race, class, gender, citizenship or income level.
- When choosing policy options healing needs considered as well as cost effectiveness.

### Situations Needing To Be Addressed

**Rehabilitation while in prison:** Most inmates will eventually be released. It will make for safer communities if they return with more skills than before their arrest.

#### What Will Help

- At least one skilled Vocation Training Program in each correctional facility.
- Public funding for higher education.

**Successful transition:** Removing systemic roadblocks increases parole success.

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- Extend Temporary Release Eligibility to include all eligible for parole or other post-release supervision.
- Restore weekday visiting hours in medium facilities and expand Family Reunion Programs.

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**Parole:** NY grants fewer paroles than 15 years ago. Long termers are repeatedly denied.

What Will Help

- Growth and program achievement should be considered, not just the original crime.
- Use parole prediction indicators to identify those with potential for successful parole.
- Support S6731(Volker/Montgomery)and companion bill (Aubrey) in the Assembly. It eliminates mandatory life parole and restores discretion about discharge from parole supervision to Board of Parole.

**Drug Laws:** Law need to be proportional to offense. Rehabilitation needs to be a goal. Whites make up the vast majority who consume or sell drugs, yet over 90% in NY Prisons for a drug offenses are African-American or Latino.

What Would Help

- Provide drug treatment as an alternative to incarceration.
- Give judges sentencing discretion
- Reduce sentences for low-level, non-violent drug offenders.

**Death Penalty:** New York's death penalty law, was declared unconstitutional. The Senate acted to "fix" unconstitutional sections but the Assembly did not.

Reasons Not to Restore

- Innocent have been executed.
- People of color are more likely to be executed than whites for the same crimes
- It does not deter crime

(2/4/08)

**Member Denominations in New York**

American Baptist Churches, Empire Baptist Missionary Convention, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), Reformed Church in America, Religious Society of Friends, United Church of Christ, The United Methodist Church.

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