

Oklahoma Conference of Churches

Theological Statement on Criminal Justice and Corrections

What We Believe

We believe that restorative justice is a far more faithful reflection of God's will than our current system of retributive justice. We believe that every offender, and every victim, should be involved in the legal process and dignity accorded both. We believe that punishment is not the biblical currency of justice; rather accountability, restitution, compensation and public safety are biblical outcomes. We also believe that biblical justice is pro-active in the sense that it is the community's duty to see that everyone's basic needs are met. Incarceration should be used as sparingly as possible. Policy should favor diversion, treatment and re-entry obstacles removed so that persons are treated as having paid their debt to society. The following are troubling examples that support our concern: (1) Oklahoma leads and has led for some time the globe in per capita incarceration of women; (2) sentencing that includes more than 20 offenses that mandate 85% sentence completion and mandatory minimum sentences that can lead, for example, to life without parole sentences for drug offenses; (3) at any given moment over 20,000 children in Oklahoma have an incarcerated parent.

Why We Believe It

The "eye-for-an-eye language" in the Bible is a law of equivalency. It means nothing should be done to the offender that is more severe than the offender did. The outcome calls for restitution in simple theft or damage cases and compensation in cases of personal injury. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus went even further by interpreting this provision as meaning we "turn the other cheek," commanded us to love our enemies and to "do unto others as we would have them do unto you." The latter he described as the meaning of the law and prophets. In Genesis we are reminded that all people are created in the image of God. Jesus came so that all might have the opportunity of reform, to be a new creation. Galatians 6:1 commands the community to receive back a transgressor in the spirit of gentleness.

What We Advocate

- Drug Courts, Mental Health Courts, Veterans' Courts and other diversion programs
- Elimination of all mandatory minimum sentences.
- Expanding mental health and substance abuse treatment.
- Broader conviction expungement opportunities.
- Readily attainable hardship driving permits.
- Reduction of excessive court costs, fines, and diversion fees.
- Ban the felony conviction box on job applications.
- Restoration of voting franchise upon release from incarceration.
- Utilization of restorative processes as a diversion option.