



## MEMBERS OF THE RELIGIOUS ALLIANCE IN NEVADA



Roman Catholic  
Church



Episcopal  
Church



Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in America



Presbyterian Church  
(USA)



United Methodist  
Church

Corporate Office: Faith Lutheran Church, 2075 W. 7th St., Reno, NV 89503 (775) 747-3246

*Advocates for social justice in Nevada*

## RAIN PAPER: NEED FOR BETTER COORDINATION AND SUPPORT OF CORRECTIONAL AND REENTRY PROGRAMS

June 9, 2008

### I. Why RAIN is Concerned:

The Religious Alliance in Nevada (RAIN) is a coalition of 5 religious denominations in Nevada, all of which have, in varying degrees, been involved in prison ministry and/or reentry programs both in Nevada and in other states for many years. RAIN supported creation of the Nevada Commission on the Administration of Justice (Commission) in the 2007 Nevada Legislature, because the religious leaders of the five (5) denominations of RAIN believe the State of Nevada is at a crossroads in deciding which path to take in dealing with an inmate population that has become too large and too expensive to maintain within existing revenue resources. In addition, RAIN believes that no lasting solution to this problem can be achieved without seriously looking at how well inmates who will eventually be released are receiving training, treatment, and preparation for eventual reentry into society.

The Commission has received testimony that eventually 90 – 95% of those who are imprisoned in Nevada are ultimately released. This means society must absorb 3000 or more inmates each and every year, who will be coming back into our communities, businesses, houses of worship, and various public places (such as parks, libraries, educational facilities, and open spaces.) Where will they live and work? Who will provide the treatment and on-going care required by recovering addicts and alcoholics? What kind of family/community/religious support systems will be in place to help these ex-offenders stay clean, resist the temptation to threaten others and commit crimes, and to abide by the laws of society? Is effective supervision of these people really achievable by government agencies facing budget cuts and expenditure caps that ignore the reality of the real growth in the numbers of people who need to be supervised? *If this Commission does not take these questions seriously or makes the assumption that it is beyond the capability of government to provide leadership and guidance in helping society cope with the problems of having these people come back into society unprepared, then a significant opportunity will be missed and much of the work of the Commission will be in vain.*

RAIN adopted a Statement in February, 2007, entitled "*A Dignified and Effective Transition from Prison to Society.*" \* It is noted therein that preparation of inmates soon to be released back into society is an issue of Christian concern for social justice, so that recidivism is reduced and those individuals who sincerely desire to make a new start with their lives get meaningful help in their journey toward wholeness.

### II. Some Results of the Invitation to RAIN to Make Recommendations to the Commission:

On April 16, 2007, at the express invitation of Chairman James Hardesty of the Nevada Advisory Commission on the Administration of Justice, the heads or their representatives of the five

Advisory Commission on Admin. of Justice  
Exhibit G pg 1 of 19 Date: 8-25-08  
Submitted by: L. Struve

religious denominations that comprise RAIN, met for the purpose of discussing whether these faith based organizations and others could provide assistance in helping inmates prepare for their transition from prison back into society. A copy of the minutes of this meeting are attached.\*\*

Some important ideas were exchanged at this gathering, and the following is a summary of the more important ones:

- A. **In view of the fact that over 90% of all prisoners in Nevada will eventually be released, a clear statement of public policy is needed that, especially as to these persons, the purpose of the criminal justice system is rehabilitative and not retributive.**
1. As noted by Bishop Minerva Carcaño of The Desert Southwest Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church (which serves southern Nevada), *both church and civic leaders must be trained on the need for restorative justice in order to have a healthy society.* A retributive justice system based on a cultural expectation that prisoners will be punished for the wrongs they have done without serious regard for a penal institution's performance in preparing inmates to reenter society has resulted in daunting challenges now facing the criminal justice system. The faith communities of RAIN believe that most human beings respond better to acts of compassion and concern for others based on the unconditional love of God given to everyone.
  2. The *current mission statement of the Nevada Department of Corrections (NDOC)* is narrowly focused on "confining convicted felons according to the law" but *makes no reference to the authorization or mandates also contained in Nevada statutes for the establishment of correctional programs and preparation of inmates for reentry back into society as an integral part of the Department's purpose and function in this State.*\*\*\*
  3. As noted by the Director of the NDOC on April 16, 2008 in front of the heads of RAIN's judicatories, the prison system in Nevada has historically isolated itself from the community, and he wants to change the culture within Nevada's prisons from a "dogs and guns" mentality to a more rehabilitative environment. *RAIN supports the Director's initiative and believes the Advisory Commission on the Administration of Justice should recommend that the Director be given the tools and resources needed in order to make this transformation happen.*
- B. **Faith-based and other community programs designed to help in the correction and reentry of prisoners when released back into society should be better identified, coordinated, and supported with appropriate training and resources, so as to meet the expectable demand for these services.**

The denominations of RAIN are only a few of the many community and faith-based organizations that are trying to help inmates turn their lives around and become better citizens on their journey toward renewal and wholeness after their release from prison. *A common theme among all of these groups is the lack of training and resources, including funding, to increase the number of volunteers and participants in these programs. Even more significant is the lack of any comprehensive study or assessment of the ability of the existing few programs in Nevada to meet the expected demand for services that is being created each year when more than 3000 ex prisoners are released back into society.* Some examples of these programs as identified by RAIN are as follows:

1. The United Methodist Church in Nevada and Episcopal Diocese of Nevada have supported a **Kairos Ministry** within some of Northern Nevada's prisons for 27 years. It provides inmates with an opportunity to gather, worship, give testimony, and engage in fellowship, by which the participants can hear about and understand the unconditional love of God. **Ridge House** in Reno grew out of the Kairos movement, offering a half way facility for released inmates. As has been reported by representatives of Ridge House, the recidivism rate for this facility has been as low as 9%. Only a relatively few inmates participate in this program.

2. **Southwest Prison Ministries, Inc.** is listed on the web site of the Episcopal Diocese of Nevada, coordinating many groups that do various prison ministries and is a source of information for what is available in southern Nevada; but its resources are limited and it does not operate statewide.

3. **My Journey Home, Inc.** is also listed on the web site of the Episcopal Diocese of Nevada, and this support group is in the process of developing several programs and networks to help inmates and their families. However, it, too, does not have the resources or capabilities to serve the expectable demand of ex-inmates being released each year on a statewide basis. Without help, the potential of this organization cannot be realized.

4. **Prison Congregations of America** is a national organization of congregations formed in prisons in 8† different states. It currently does not operate in Nevada, and may not be allowable under current NDOC operating policies and procedures. The initiative for this movement was started by an ELCA Lutheran pastor and is based on the following concept:

"[A] partnership is formed between an inmate congregation and the church in the larger community. This model places responsibility, ownership, initiative, and trust in the members of the congregation to carry on ministry within the institution. Each week, visitors from neighboring support congregations worship and have fellowship with the inmate members, erasing barriers of prejudice and fear and building bridges of trust, acceptance, and affirmation. The support congregations provide volunteers and on-going financial support for congregational expenses and are potential "resettlement" stations for inmate members when they are released and need a base of spiritual and emotional support. The members of the support congregations who become involved in the prison congregation are rewarded with a unique and rich worship experience and get to see first hand why Jesus commanded his followers to 'remember those who are in prison.'"

† [ The states are: South Dakota, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Iowa, Nebraska, Colorado, Washington, and Minnesota]

5. **Ron Wood Family Resource Center of Carson City, NV**, is attempting to institute a re-entry program for ex-prisoners in Nevada. An extensive presentation has been made both to the RAIN Board and the Commission on the Administration of Justice, regarding plans to establish an employment-based program that incorporates housing, mentoring, job training, and other social services. Member churches of RAIN in the Carson City area have expressed interest in supporting this new venture, but the funding necessary to make this program operable is unclear. If successful, it could be a good pilot program, but other communities would need funding and resources to make it happen in their jurisdictions.

6. **Other resources that need to be identified, coordinated, and supported:**  
Some denominations have attempted to provide helpful information on their websites††,

while others have used less formal means to open up their religious facilities to help people in need receive support services, such as 12 step groups, child care, counseling, temporary and transitional housing, food distribution, and payment for medication, etc. There are no central locations where all the places where these types of assistance can be obtained are catalogued and made available in a systematic way, so people can find them. In addition, there are often restrictions that do not allow ex felons to access these programs. Both additional resources and better coordination is needed to utilize these valuable assets in all communities of Nevada. ***A public policy that both encourages and recognizes the value of these faith-based efforts to help society deal with the reintegration of people who are released from prison is both necessary and welcomed by the denominations of RAIN.*** †† [As an example, the website of the Episcopal Diocese of Nevada lists the following treatment centers in Nevada that might take ex-prisoners who need help with addictive problems:

- i. Community Counseling Center, Carson City
- ii. New Frontier Treatment Center, Carson City
- iii. Salvation Army, Reno, NV
- iv. Vitality Center, Elko, NV
- v. Meadow House Community Counseling Center, Las Vegas
- vi. Westcare, Inc. Adult Services, Las Vegas
- vii. Step One, Inc., Reno, NV
- viii. Step Two, Inc., Reno, NV
- ix. Safe Harbor of Nevada, Reno, NV
- x. Steps to New Freedom, Reno, NV
- xi. Crossroads Transitional Living, Reno, NV
- xii. Quest House 1 and 2, Las Vegas, NV
- xiii. Samaritan House, Las Vegas, NV
- xiv. Unlimited Men's Halfway House, Las Vegas, NV
- xv. We Care Foundation, Las Vegas, NV
- xvi. Covenant of Love, Las Vegas, NV
- xvii. Silk Wirth House for Women, Las Vegas, NV
- xviii. Other (as noted on Episcopal Diocese Web Site)]

**C. A comprehensive list of disincentives and barriers that currently frustrate faith-based and other community groups in their efforts to help ex-prisoners should be compiled and held up to public scrutiny, so that state agencies, local governments, non-profit groups, and private citizens can determine whether these measures are necessary or counter-productive in preventing recidivism, promoting transparency, and keeping communities safe.**

- 1. Lack of clear statutory responsibility for providing ex-felons with necessary identification upon release from prison.**

Ex-prisoners need various forms of identification that are required in cashing a check, seeking employment, obtaining housing, and qualifying for other assistance. Under current public policy, there is no clear statutory mandate for the NDOC or some other agency to provide an inmate upon release back into society with the proper and necessary identification, to enable that person to function in society. Often the result is homelessness. ***No prisoner should be released without necessary and proper identification to satisfy all of society's current requirements to verify identity, but such a requirement should be contingent on providing the resources necessary to produce the required identification.***

- 2. Lack of housing and a place to stay is a key barrier for ex prisoners after release from prison.**

Until society embraces the notion that housing is a fundamental necessity for the dignity of the person and conforms public policy to facilitate and not frustrate efforts to develop and provide an acceptable place for every citizen of a community to live, virtually all other efforts to assist people in need, including those being released from prison, will be compromised. *RAIN recommends that the Commission determine how best to persuade and, if necessary, to compel state and local government agencies to accept responsibility for developing meaningful housing plans for their jurisdictions that will result in housing needed by those who cannot obtain it because of their status, i.e. being an ex felon.*

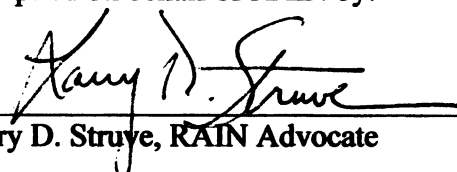
3. **Obtaining a job, employment training, and preparation in seeking a job (including payment of up front costs) are critical for an ex felon to become self-sufficient; but too often resources are not available to help such a person get started or to pay necessary expenses prior to receiving the first paycheck.** Payment of fees for obtaining necessary certificates, enrolling in certain apprentice or education programs, buying uniforms and equipment, taking required examinations, or paying the costs of supervision are examples of barriers that can hinder and even prevent an ex felon from entering the work force. *RAIN urges the Commission to include a recommendation in its final report for an appropriate agency (such as NDOC or the Division of Parole and Probation or even a non profit organization) to establish and administer a fund that can help a released inmate with start up expenses needed in connection with obtaining employment.* Monies for this fund could come from a) the earnings of inmates while in prison or b) from contributions of ex inmates who are out of prison and are earning salaries or c) budget savings or d) other sources, including grants and contributions from people connected with faith-based organizations or e) employers interested in hiring well prepared ex offenders. The important point is that the Commission should recognize that some initial steps must be taken to anticipate what is needed in this area and then provide leadership in recommending how such needs might be met.
4. **Basic education is essential to self sufficiency in today's society, and many inmates are lacking this asset when they leave prison.** Though opportunities for education do exist in Nevada's prison system, there is *currently no requirement that prior to being released back into society, an inmate must possess a minimal skill level, such as the ability to read and to communicate.* However, *any such requirement should be contingent on the existence of sufficient resources* to provide each inmate with a basic education that includes the ability to read and communicate.
5. **The lack of coordination of community networks, support services, and training of those who want to help vulnerable populations, including recently released ex offenders, is a significant deterrent to people in faith-based organizations from getting involved with ex inmates who are reentering society.** Many churches in RAIN's network have participated in a program known as **Family Promise**, which provides temporary shelter, case management services, volunteer mentors, meals, document providers, and transportation services for homeless families with children who are trying to get back on their feet. The goal of this program is to give temporary assistance to families in need, so that they can learn how to be self-sufficient in the long run. It is a model that could work well for helping newly released prisoners get the kind of meaningful help they need in order to

successfully reenter society. Organizations and individuals are already in existence that could help state agencies such as NDOC, Division of Parole and Probation, local governments, and other public and private institutions to develop this type of resource on a community by community basis. ***What is needed are private donations, state grants, and non profit foundations to fund an initiative to assess the potential and provide the initial funds to help a central coordinating agency in each community to develop and nurture a network of people and organizations that either are providing or could be persuaded to provide support services needed by persons who are recently released from prison.***

### III. Conclusion

The denominations of RAIN believe there is a historic opportunity for the Commission on the Administration of Justice to develop a set of recommendations that would move the State of Nevada in a direction that would result in a more cost effective and efficient criminal justice system. By focusing on the need to properly fund and implement correctional and reentry programs that are designed to meet expectable demand, the State of Nevada may be able to avoid the necessity of spending billions of dollars in the next few years on new prisons or prison facilities, which in the long run will not make the streets of our communities any safer, especially if inmates continue to be released onto our streets unprepared to successfully integrate back into society.

Compiled on behalf of RAIN by:

  
Larry D. Struve, RAIN Advocate

Attachments, added as Supplemental Material:

\* *A Dignified and Effective Transition from Prison to Society*, a Statement of RAIN Adopted by the RAIN Board in February, 2007, 4 pages.

\*\* *Final Summary (Rev.) of RAIN Delegation Meeting on 4/16/08 with Justice James Hardesty, Chair of the Advisory Commission on the Administration of Justice for the State of Nevada*, 7 pages.

\*\*\* Letter of July 25, 2007 to Hon. James Hardesty, Chairman, Advisory Commission on the Administration of Justice, 2 pages.



## MEMBERS OF THE RELIGIOUS ALLIANCE IN NEVADA



Roman Catholic  
Church



Episcopal  
Church



Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in America



Presbyterian Church  
(USA)



United Methodist  
Church

Corporate Office: Faith Lutheran Church, 2075 W. 7th St., Reno, NV 89503 (775) 747-3246

*Advocates for social justice in Nevada*

*'Lord, when did we see You . . . in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'*  
Matthew 25:37b-40

## **A Dignified and Effective Transition from Prison to Society** **A statement of RAIN – On Prisoner Re-Entry, February, 2007**

### **INTRODUCTION**

RAIN is an educational and advocacy coalition of the regional judicatories of five mainline Christian denominations in the State of Nevada. RAIN is your neighbor – over 500,000 Nevadans in these denominations' congregations live, work, worship, and witness in the communities across the state. These judicatories and their local congregations reach beyond church walls to serve children and families, the poor and powerless, and those who need justice.

As an issue of Christian concern for social justice in our community, RAIN supports re-entry and other correctional programs that prepare inmates soon to be released back into society, so that recidivism is reduced and so that those individuals who sincerely desire to make a new start with their lives get meaningful help in their journey toward wholeness.

### **THE PROBLEM: Re-joining Society is a Long, Hard Road**

Of the 12,600 people now housed in the Nevada prison system, 97 percent will eventually come out – to cities, towns, and rural communities all across the state. Out to a world they only dimly remember, let alone can deal with. Out to a world both changed and changing so fast that even confronting the choice of breakfast cereal in a supermarket aisle is overwhelming. Over 3,500 men and women are discharged from prison each year in Nevada, 65 percent of them to southern Nevada. All need preparation before release -- and follow-on, residential care.

Some stay out. Many fail. Overall, more than two-thirds of prisoners released in Nevada re-offend -- in 2003, the state's recidivism rate was 80 percent. But with focused care, far fewer fail: in many re-entry programs less than half fail -- in some, only 9 percent.

## **Could YOU Make it – On YOUR Own?**

In *TRANSFORMING CHILDREN INTO SPIRITUAL CHAMPIONS*, George Barna builds a convincing argument that lifelong habits, values, beliefs, and attitudes are formed by age 12. Remember what your childhood was like? Imagine the average prisoner's:

Prison officials and observers report that many were born with fetal alcohol syndrome, have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, have learning disabilities, are clinically bi-polar. Few were ever diagnosed or treated. Statistically, about 80-90 percent of Nevada prisoners grew up in poverty. As one or both parents were alcoholics and/or drug addicts, few ever had regular meals with their family, or normal nurturing, or even positive encouragement. Instead, theirs was a childhood of low self-esteem, little self-confidence, and not much trust in others or in themselves, low expectations, hanging with other “losers,” and trouble. Experimenting with drugs even in elementary and middle school, they were soon in trouble with the law. By high school graduation age (few actually graduated) their “life style” would lead only to prison.

After three years in prison, inmates become deadened to normal life by the experience. They grow used to, and depend on the rigid structure of prison life. They are told when to get up, when to eat, when to work or go to school, when they can recreate (and when they can't), and when to go to bed. They only make a handful of decisions a day. People on the outside make hundreds of decisions every day, barely giving it a thought.

The prison experience alone makes any hope of a later life of positive contribution difficult enough – and with the starting point of the average prisoner, it is nearly impossible.

But with close, focused care that deals with each of their issues, this is not the case. Where these programs exist, studies show that they cost the state far less than discharge, re-offence, and return to prison. **In Nevada, re-entry programs reduce recidivism --** at half way houses like Ridge House, to as little as 9 percent. Reno's U.S. Probation Office experience confirms that re-entry programs helped reduce recidivism in their ex-offender population by 52 percent. The Going-Home Prepared re-entry program has similarly reduced recidivism by as much as 53% among their participants -- and among those who did re-offend, only 14% committed a serious crime.

## **A DIRECTION FOR IMPROVING TRANSITIONS FROM PRISON TO SOCIETY**

These demonstrated successes are why Nevada needs to support – and expand – its re-entry programs to include a variety of professional (secular and faith-based) programs located across the state: to treat people before they depart prison, on their way out of prison, and in the community as they begin their transition back to a full and positive citizenship. This includes small, specialized programs for offenders with specific treatment needs who have done their time and are ready for parole – focused treatment, caring support, a safe place to go (approved by the Parole Board). Treatment, support, training, values, faith, and a job deals with the issues and teaches these very vulnerable members of our community the tools and the way to live and work as contributors in the community. Can we provide these tools and help them build new lives?

Addendum

## **RAIN Membership Denominational Statements on Prisoner Re-Entry to Society**

### **A. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops**

Our faith calls us to hold people accountable, to forgive, and to heal.

Our criminal justice system should punish offenders and, when necessary, imprison them to protect society. Their incarceration, however, should be about more than punishment. Since nearly all inmates will return to society, prisons must be places where offenders are challenged, encouraged, and rewarded for efforts to change their behaviors and attitudes, and where they learn the skills needed for employment and life in community. We call upon government to redirect the vast amount of public resources away from building more and more prisons and toward better and more effective programs aimed at crime prevention, rehabilitation, education efforts, substance abuse treatment, and programs of probation, parole, and reintegration.

Not all offenders are open to treatment, but all deserve to be challenged and encouraged to turn their lives around. Programs in jails and prisons that offer offenders education, life skills, religious expression, and recovery from substance abuse greatly reduce recidivism, benefit society, and help the offenders when they reintegrate into the community . . . effective prevention and treatment programs should also be available in our communities.

Finally, we must welcome ex-offenders back into society as full participating members, to the extent feasible . . .

From *A Statement of the Catholic Bishops of the United States, 2000: Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*

### **B. The Episcopal Church in America**

Seeking Criminal Justice, *The Episcopal Church in America*:

- Urges Congress to repeal the mandatory federal sentencing guidelines and restore the discretion of federal trial judges. . . .
- Urges the Church to be active in public policy decisions affecting the growing prison industrial complex on the local, state and national levels.
- Endorses exploration and study of restorative justice for our nation's criminal justice system.
- (Urges prison systems to) . . . observe human rights and needs of prisoners.
- Encourages Parish Visitation Program to inmates, as well as support and training to newly discharged inmates.

From *The Social Policies of the Episcopal Church, USA: Engage God's Mission, Policy for Action*

### **C. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)**

As a reconciling and healing presence, this church is called to minister to human need with compassion and imagination. . . . This church has a responsibility to mediate conflict and to advocate just and peaceful resolutions to the world's divisions. . . . The example of Jesus invites Christians to see people near and far away, people of all races, classes and cultures, friends and strangers, allies and enemies as their 'neighbor.' Through its congregations, synods, and church wide organizations, and affiliated institutions and ecumenical relationships, this church therefore shall: . . .

- Support its members in their callings to love their neighbor, to mend creation, to advocate justice and mercy in situations of brokenness, and to seek peace where there is conflict;
- Join with others to remove obstacles of discrimination and indifference that prevent people from living out their callings;

As a community gathered in faith: . . .

- We welcome offenders and their families, supporting them in their recovery;

- We welcome partnership with faith communities within the correctional system, joining them in ministries of restoration;
- We welcome people who work in criminal justice and their families, recognizing the special burden that accompanies such work;

As a community of moral deliberation: . . .

- We call for an ongoing reform of the criminal justice system, seeking means of incapacitation that protect citizens while limiting violence and holding open the possibilities for conversion and restoration, and for education for future responsible citizenship in society.

From ELCA Social Statements: *Church in Society: a Lutheran Perspective and Death Penalty*

## **D. The Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.**

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s concern for prisoners has been established for almost a century. In 1910, the General Assembly declared that the church ought to stand:

For the development of a Christian spirit in the attitude of society toward offenders against the law. The Church holds that a Christian society must seek the reformation of offenders, and that it must endeavor to prevent the commission of crimes by furnishing a wholesome environment and by such education as will develop moral sense and industrial efficiency in the young.

In 1915, another General Assembly said:

That we seek to discourage, wherever possible, the spirit of revenge and retaliation in dealing with . . . offenders, and insist that, while they should be dealt with firmly and justly for their own good and the protection of society; yet that it be done in a way which will not render them outcasts upon society, but will rather build up and restore to their proper place those who may be reformed.

In agreement with the statements of the 1910 and 1915 General Assemblies, we believe that the ultimate goal of the criminal justice system should be restorative justice -- addressing the hurts and the needs of the victim, the offender, and the community in such a way that all—victim, offender, and community—might be healed. We realize that, given the limits of our knowledge and understanding at this time, some may need to be incarcerated for life because they are a danger to themselves and others. But we hope that in the future, advances in working with such prisoners through spiritual, medical, rehabilitative, psychological, and educational techniques may some day make it possible for every prisoner to be successfully rehabilitated and restored to their community and family.

From Resolutions of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): *Restorative Justice*

## **E. The United Methodist Church**

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. Restorative justice grows out of biblical authority which emphasizes a right relationship with God, self, and community. When such relationships are violated or broken through crime, opportunities are created to make things right.

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 repair the damage, right the wrong, and bring healing to all involved, including the victim the offender, the families, and the community. The Church is transformed when it responds to the claims of discipleship by becoming an agent of healing and systemic change.

From The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church, *Social Principles*



**MEMBERS OF THE RELIGIOUS ALLIANCE IN NEVADA**



Corporate Office: Faith Lutheran Church, 2075 W. 7th St., Reno, NV 89503 (775) 747-3246

*Advocates for social justice in Nevada*

April 30, 2008

**Final Summary (Rev.) of RAIN Delegation Meeting on 4/16/08 with Justice James Hardesty, Chair of the Advisory Commission on the Administration of Justice for the State of Nevada**

TO: Bishops and Heads of Judicatories (or Their Representatives) Comprising RAIN; and Members of RAIN Board  
FROM: Larry Struve, RAIN Advocate

On Wed., April 16, 2008 from 3:30 pm – 5:15 pm, a delegation of representatives of the five denominations comprising RAIN met with Justice James Hardesty, Chairman of the Advisory Commission on the Administration of Justice, in the Nevada Supreme Court Chambers of the Regional Justice Center in Las Vegas, Nevada. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the effort of faith organizations in Nevada represented in RAIN to help prepare inmates in prison prepare for their eventual release and to examine any barriers or disincentives that prevent faith organizations from helping released offenders from successfully reintegrating into society, so they do not reoffend and end up back in prison at a prohibitive cost to taxpayers.

**A. Participants in the Meeting:**

**I. Episcopal Diocese of Nevada:**

The Rt. Reverend Dan Edwards, Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Nevada  
Rev. Bonnie Polley, Pres. of RAIN, and Deacon at Christ Church Episcopal, Las Vegas

**II. Nevada Catholic Conference (Representing the Roman Catholic Dioceses of Reno and Las Vegas):**

Fr. Chuck Durante, representing Bishop Calvo of the Reno Diocese  
Mr. Tim O'Callaghan, representing Bishop Pepe of the Las Vegas Diocese, Member of RAIN Board  
Mr. John Cracchiolo, Director, Nevada Catholic Conference, Member of RAIN Board

**III. Nevada Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church, USA**

Elder Craig Biddle, Moderator of the Nevada Presbytery, who participated by telephone  
Rev. Jim Houston-Hencken, Pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Las Vegas, Chair of The Nevada Presbytery Committee on Mission Outreach  
Elder Arthur W. Ritter, Member of RAIN Board and First Presbyterian Church, Las Vegas  
Rev. Richard Randall, Past Moderator of Nevada Presbytery and Pastor of Village Presbyterian Church at Incline Village, NV, who participated by telephone

**IV. United Methodist Church**

Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño, Bishop of The Desert Southwest Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church based in Phoenix, Arizona  
Rev. Wayne Brown, Member of RAIN Board and retired Methodist Minister  
Rev. Patricia Spearman, Pastor, New Covenant United Methodist Church, Las Vegas, NV  
Rev. Rob Jennings-Teats, Pr. of First United Methodist Church in Carson City, NV and Personal representative of Bishop Shamana of the Sierra-Nevada Annual Conference Of the United Methodist Church

**V. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)**

Bishop Steven Talmage, Grand Canyon Synod, who participated by telephone  
Bishop David Mullen, Sierra Pacific Synod, who participated by telephone  
Rev. Tom Beck, Vice President of RAIN and Pastor of Faith Lutheran Church, Reno, NV  
Rev. Diane Drach-Meinell, Member of RAIN Board and Pastor at Christ the Servant Lutheran Church, Henderson, NV  
RAIN Advocate Larry Struve, Interim Director of LAMN (Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Nevada) and Legislative Advocate for RAIN

**VI. Other Officials Present**

Howard Skolnik, Director, Nevada Dept. of Corrections (NDOC)  
Attorney General Catherine Cortez-Mastos, Attorney General of Nevada, by phone  
Sen. Steven Horsford, Nevada State Senator, who participated by telephone  
David Sonner, Capt., Southern Command, Division of Parole and Probation, State of NV

**B. Purpose of the Meeting**

Justice James Hardesty called the meeting for the purpose of achieving three (3) principal objectives:

1. Provide an overview of the Advisory Commission for the Administration of Justice, to
  - a) explain its purpose, scope, and function; and
  - b) summarize the work that has been accomplished to date.
2. Explore whether the denominations of RAIN and other faith-based organizations in Nevada had developed programs that could support or assist inmates who have been granted probation, parole, or alternatives to incarceration (such as enrollment in treatment programs); and if so, ascertain whether:
  - a) Any such programs can be catalogued and described;
  - b) There is coordination among the various faith-based organizations in these efforts;
  - c) The extent to which faith-based organizations would be willing and able to make formal commitments of assistance or support to help those inmates who will eventually be released back into society, provided additional resources were available.
3. Examine whether faith-based organizations, including those represented in RAIN, are willing to provide assistance within prisons to help inmates prepare for the transition from prison back into society because of a parole grant or expiration of a prison term, subject to certain limitations imposed by prison administrators.

**C. Themes Emerging from the Meeting**

1. Justice Hardesty noted the Nevada prison system is facing several crises:
  - a. The entire system is overcrowded, even though the prison population is static;
  - b. There is a lack of resources both within and without the prison facilities;
  - c. Inconsistencies in the sentencing of individuals has resulted in disparate terms of incarceration and perceived unfairness;
  - d. Juvenile justice problems threaten to create even larger prison populations in the future;
  - e. Failure to address prison overcrowding will result in exorbitant prison budgets and cuts in prison programs, threatening public safety.
  - f. Even though the 2007 Nevada Legislature passed AB 510, allowing low risk offenders to earn credits toward eligibility for earlier parole, it is estimated that by 6/30/08 there will be 3261 inmates who are entitled to a hearing on their request for parole but who cannot be heard, because of insufficient resources to conduct hearings. Only 700 cases can be heard each month by the existing statutory Parole Board.
  - g. For a large number of inmates who are granted parole or probation, there is no safety net, measured in terms of jobs, housing, needed treatment for various addictions, and other support systems that would significantly increase their chances of staying clean and not reoffending. Approximately, twelve hundred (1200) low risk, non violent inmates are currently eligible for parole hearings and might be ready for release on parole; but there is no place for them to go, and thus their pre-release plans cannot be approved, keeping them in prison, at a significant ongoing cost to the taxpayers. There are about 200 waiting for parole plans which is about average.
2. NDOC Director Howard Skolnik made some additional observations about the difficulty of running prisons in Nevada:
  - a. Capt. Sonner of the Division of Parole and Probation noted that his agency is being hit hard by budget cuts and is not able to fill vacant positions, thereby weakening their ability to oversee a large increase in the number of inmates expected to be released.
  - b. Prison facilities need to free up beds, because there is inadequate space to properly run prisons. As an example, the Southern Desert Correctional Center was designed to safely hold 750 inmates, and its support facilities (kitchen and dining areas, heating system, cell space, areas for correctional programs, etc.) were all designed to handle this maximum number. Its current inmate population is 1800. The Chapel can only seat 50 inmates, though the number wanting to participate in services is much higher. There are 300 people waiting to earn their GEDs in southern Nevada alone, but due to over-crowding, they cannot be accommodated.
  - b. Director Skolnik commented that the NDOC had historically isolated itself from the community, and he wanted this to change.
3. Attorney General Catherine Cortez Mastos chairs a Subcommittee looking for ways to help victims of crime. She noted there is currently no strong data base showing the needs of victims of crime. Several interesting ideas were presented on how victims can be better protected and made whole after being devastated from a criminal attack.
4. Senator Steve Horsford chairs a Subcommittee that is identifying issues related to juvenile justice. What kind of assistance could be given to serious juvenile offenders to deter them from a life of crime. He noted that if nothing is done to keep serious juvenile offenders from "graduating to prison" the incarceration rate could jump 67% by 2017.
5. How much interest is there for faith communities, such as those represented in RAIN, to get

## RAIN Delegates and Justice James Hardesty

involved in the effort to develop community support to help more inmates reenter society successfully, including preparatory work while such people are still in prison?

- a. RAIN President Bonnie Polley noted there was interest in RAIN to get faith communities involved, and she mentioned programs like "Going Home Prepared." However, she noted that there are a lot of barriers and disincentives out in the communities of Nevada that undermine the efforts of faith-based persons and groups to help released inmates. Some examples she shared were:
  - Difficulty in obtaining photo identification;
  - Inability to locate birth records or other form of identification to prove citizenship;
  - Lack of housing (most ex felons cannot qualify for affordable housing);
  - High cost of renovating older facilities to provide group homes for released offenders, driven in large part by local government requirements that result in thousands of dollars of extra cost to provide affordable places to live;
  - Inaccessibility of treatment programs to keep released offenders stable.
- b. Pastor Rob Jennings-Teats mentioned the Methodist Church's Kairos Ministry, which has been in existence in Nevada for 27 years. This program is offered within the Lovelock and Northern Nevada Correctional Centers. It includes a 3 day event, and 30 inmates sponsor 36 other inmates, who gather, worship, give testimony, and engage in fellowship, by which the participants can hear about and understand the unconditional love of God. Ridge House in Reno grew out of the Kairos movement, offering a half way facility for released inmates. Their recidivism rate has been a low 9%. Note: Justice Hardesty commented that the Ridge House had made a presentation to the Commission on the Administration of Justice, but they had no more resources to expand their program.
- c. Bishop Minerva Carcaño indicated that she wanted Methodist chaplains involved in prison ministry. She mentioned the Open Table program in the City of Phoenix. She believed Nevada agencies and institutions (including churches) could partner with other programs, but it will involve a long term commitment. Her main point was this: *We must do joint training of our church leaders on the need to promote restorative justice and not retributive justice. Until our culture changes and parishioners are educated about the need for restorative justice in order to have a healthy society, it will be difficult to adequately respond to the current needs of the prison system that have largely resulted from a retributive justice system.*
- d. Presbyterian Elder Art Ritter noted that the Christian communities of RAIN have no choice but to be involved in the reform of the prison system. "We have been commanded to do so by Christ himself," he noted, citing Matthew 25: 35 -40, in which the Lord notes, essentially, that when we feed hungry people, provide water for thirsty people, provide shelter for strangers, clothe the naked, take care of the sick, and visit people in prison, we have served our Lord and kept his commandments to love our neighbor as ourselves. He noted that it is not an option for Christians to be uninvolved. However, given the challenges facing our State right now, the Presbyterian churches in Nevada believe reforming the system and the prisoners who are released is not a game for amateurs. "We need people trained in reentry and in delivering the social services that prisoners need. The state and Christian communities need to invest in and provide programs which can most impact the

## RAIN Delegates and Justice James Hardesty

single most important factor in the size of our prison population -- the recidivism rate." He noted that Christians need to advocate for adequate funding of agencies—from both state and church sources-- that have the expertise to prepare inmates for reentry. "It is both a religious and civic responsibility for the Christian communities of RAIN to be engaged in the work of reforming the justice system and its treatment of prisoners and victims from a restorative justice perspective in Nevada," he noted.

- e. Rain Board member Tim O'Callaghan expressed his belief that finding a solution to the unavailability of housing for ex felons was a "centerpiece" problem. Until it is solved, any significant reentry initiatives will ultimately fail. Note: Mr. O'Callaghan serves on the Clark County Housing Authority Board and expressed interest in working on this issue.
- f. Pastor Jim Houston-Henken noted that Christian communities can do some things very well. He mentioned a collaborative effort of Presbyterians and Lutherans to jointly operate housing projects serving low income families. He also noted the chaplaincy work of RAIN denominations. However, he echoed the sentiment that training will be needed to empower well-meaning Christians to do more than what they have been doing. Neither RAIN judicatories nor other religious organizations in Nevada can be expected to make a quantum leap in tackling a social problem that has been growing for several years. He suggested that the Commission must identify the greatest needs to met in the area of reentry preparation, and then those needs must be prioritized, so the most critical ones are addressed first. Note: In response, Howard Skolnik indicated that there was a transitional facility for inmates headed for complete release in Las Vegas, where committed parishioners could receive hands on training.
- g. Bishop Dan Edwards of the Episcopal Diocese of Nevada identified 3 foundational needs for a successful reentry program:
  - Housing for ex inmates
  - Employment for ex inmates
  - Social support for ex inmatesWith respect to the latter category (social support), he felt it would be great if the Churches of RAIN could do that, but it would require very clear boundaries and wisdom on the part of those involved—not cynicism and hard-heartedness. He reiterated what others had noted: "We need to equip our parishioners to do this. A training program is essential, so that only trained individuals are providing the social support that inmates need."
- h. RAIN Vice President Tom Beck, a Lutheran pastor, introduced the group to a concept of Prison Ministries of America, developed by an ELCA pastor. In a nutshell the concept involves the establishment of a congregation within a prison, run by prisoners, but with outside support from parishioners in congregations in churches outside the prison walls, who worship occasionally with the prisoners and help match the needs of prisoners with the resources of the supporting churches. As prisoners are released, they are met by members of a supporting congregation, who then monitor their progress and needs in the first days and weeks after release, providing help when needed through members of the support congregation. Recidivism rates among ex inmates in programs like this, which have been tried in 8 states, are a low 7%.

## RAIN Delegates and Justice James Hardesty

- i. Father Chuck Durante, representing Bishop Calvo of the Reno Diocese of the Catholic Church, noted that in order for the faith communities of RAIN to be more involved in the Nevada prison system, there would have to be sensitivity within the Nevada Department of Corrections to the needs and nature of the job that is done by members of RAIN's faith communities. He noted that access to inmates who are sick or dying and need last rites or other ministerial help from their priest is of critical importance to his church. In response, NDOC Director Howard Skolnik stated that he is looking at cultural changes within Nevada prisons, which would be more sensitive to the religious needs of prisoners and their ministering pastors, priests, rabbis, clerics, etc.

Father Durante then noted that other religious traditions would also have to be accommodated, noting the Muslim and Jewish faiths in particular, but suggesting a wide array of religious practices by inmates would have to be taken into account and sorted out in a sensitive, careful manner. Chairman Hardesty commented that state and local governments should look at removing barriers that prevent inmates and the people who want to support them from exercising their religious freedoms, but at the same time public safety must be protected.

Father Durante then asked what was being done about the mental health problems inside the prisons of Nevada. Howard Skolnik responded that an MOU had been signed between NDOC and the Dept. of Health and Human Services to provide mental health services within the prisons, and work was proceeding to implement it.

Justice Hardesty noted that the specialty courts in Nevada, including the courts for mentally ill offenders, can open up opportunities for persons who have mental problems and are treatable. However, the number of slots available for people who need these services is very small—75 in Clark county and 285 in Washoe County.

- j. Rev. Wayne Brown, a Methodist member of the RAIN Board, felt that an examination of the nature of faith-based organizations and the training of the people who represent these organizations should be looked at before sending them into prisons to minister to inmates. He hinted that standards may be necessary to assure that these organizations are sincere about helping inmates restore their dignity and will nurture in inmates the values that will make them successful members of society upon release.
1. Pastor Spearman asked that juvenile justice be included in the recommendations developed by the Commission for the Legislature. She was concerned about recidivism of youth offenders, and the development of a "prison ethos" when juveniles spend time incarcerated. She also noted the connection between dysfunctional families and community environments that enhance the prospects that young people will enter the criminal justice system. How will these peripheral issues be addressed? She suggested the possibility of the Commission collaborating with Nevada Dept. of Education to develop comprehensive plans for juvenile deterrent programs. Pastor Spearman also noted the linkage between post traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) and other emotional/psychological traumas that members of the U.S. Armed Forces must deal with upon their return from duty. She urged a collaborative effort with the Veterans' Administration in dealing with prisoners who must cope with these conditions.

**D. Next Steps and Concluding Thoughts**

1. Chairman Hardesty asked RAIN Advocate Larry Struve to catalogue the programs that churches are currently undertaking to help prisoners prepare for reentry. He also asked him to gather suggestions from the attendees at the meeting of how parishioners could be trained to participate in reentry ministries. In this regard, he indicated that his Commission would welcome suggestions on how government might help in this process. He also asked that a list of impediments, disincentives, and other obstacles created by local governments or other public agencies be assembled, which have the effect of preventing effective reentry efforts from being completed when prisoners are released and sent back to their communities.
2. Chairman Hardesty wanted a presentation before his Commission by RAIN in either May or June of 2008.
3. RAIN Advocate Larry Struve asked the bishops and head of judicatories present if they wanted RAIN to go forward and make a public presentation on the issues and matters discussed in this meeting, pledging to work with the Commission in developing recommendations for action by the Governor and the Legislature in better utilizing faith based and community organizations in the reentry efforts to reintegrate ex inmates into their home communities. Bishops Carcaño, Edwards, Shamana (through Rob Jennings-Teats), Talmage, Mullen, and Biddle answered in the affirmative. Representatives of Bishops Calvo and Pepe had no objection to proceeding with preparations for a presentation before the Commission, with the understanding that specific proposals for legislation would have to be reviewed in the light of the doctrines and beliefs of their church. However, Fr. Durante noted that it is important for all judicatories in RAIN to be careful about committing resources without further discussion and evaluation of what will be sought from the RAIN coalition. In that regard, he hoped the dialogue begun in this meeting would continue as more concrete proposals are developed to deal with the difficult issues now confronting Nevada's Department of Corrections.
4. Justice Hardesty reported that the PEW Institute had provided his Commission with a significant grant and other resources to develop data and a reporting format that could be used in tracking developments within the Nevada Department of Corrections in current and future years. He felt this was a good sign that the work being done by the Commission is significant for the State of Nevada. The current crises in Nevada's prisons cannot be solved by spending our way out of the mess.
5. NDOC Director Howard Skolnik announced that he is committed to changing the culture in Nevada prisons from a "dogs and guns" mentality to a more rehabilitative culture, committed to preparing the 90% who will eventually be released from prison to successfully reenter society by staying clean, becoming self-sufficient, and obtaining treatment for the condition(s) that led to their criminal behavior. He pledged his cooperation and whatever resources he could make available to bring the community into the Nevada prisons to help in this effort. However, he cautioned that a safe and secure environment would be an essential requirement in making this new paradigm work. In that regard, he noted that he would ask all visitors to respect NDOC rules for safety.

The meeting adjourned at 5:10 PM after a spirited discussion of approximately 1 hour and 35 minutes.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Larry Struve, RAIN Secretary and Advocate



## MEMBERS OF THE RELIGIOUS ALLIANCE IN NEVADA



Roman Catholic  
Church



Episcopal  
Church



Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in America



Presbyterian Church  
(USA)



United Methodist  
Church

Corporate Office: Faith Lutheran Church, 2075 W. 7th St., Reno, NV 89503 (775) 747-3246

*Advocates for social justice in Nevada*

July 25, 2007

Hon. James Hardesty  
Chairman, Advisory Commission on the  
Administration of Justice  
c/o Legislative Council Bureau  
Attn: Angela Clark [aclark@lcb.state.nv.us](mailto:aclark@lcb.state.nv.us)

Re: Submission of Letter in Lieu of Public Comment under Item IX, Revised Agenda of July  
25, 2007 Initial Meeting

Dear Chairman Hardesty:

I am submitting this letter on behalf of the Religious Alliance in Nevada (RAIN), a coalition of 5 denominations that have many congregations and parishes in communities throughout the State of Nevada where over 500,000 Nevadans live, work, worship, and witness. RAIN is keenly interested in the work of the Advisory Commission because of our support of AB 508 in the 2007 Nevada Legislative session. RAIN believes that no lasting solution to the current overcrowding and fiscal crisis of our State's prison system can be achieved without a serious look at the programs provided inmates while in prison and the preparation of the 95% of the inmates who will eventually be released back into the communities of Nevada.

In that regard, it is noteworthy that the mission statement of the Nevada Department of Corrections (DOC) circulated at the Commission's July 25, 2007 meeting does not mention correctional programs or preparation of inmates for reentry back into society as an integral part of the Department's operations. Notwithstanding this omission, there are several provisions in Nevada Revised Statutes that contemplate the need for such correctional programs. NRS 209.131 requires the Director of DOC to "be responsible for the supervision, custody, *treatment, care*, security, and discipline of all offenders under his jurisdiction." NRS 209.341 requires the Director to assign every person sentenced to imprisonment to an appropriate institution or facility, and the assignment "must be based on an evaluation of the offender's records, *particular needs* and requirements for custody." NRS 209.351 requires the Director to establish a system of ongoing classification and evaluation "to ensure the individualized custody, care and training of offenders under DOC's jurisdiction." NRS 209.389 and 209.391 requires either the State Prison Board or the Director to establish "programs of general education, vocational education and training and other rehabilitation for offenders" and "programs to provide the medical, psychological, psychiatric and other appropriate forms of counseling to offenders under the jurisdiction of the department in accordance with classification requirements." NRS 209.4236 et seq. requires the director, in conjunction with the health division, to establish one or more therapeutic communities to provide treatment to certain offenders who are substance abusers. Finally, NRS 209.4887 permits the director to establish a correctional program for reentry of offenders and parolees into the community.

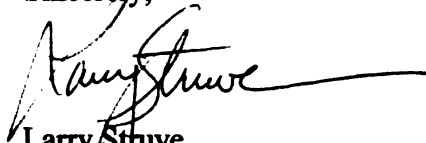
In light of these statutory provisions, RAIN is concerned that the current mission statement of the Department of Corrections, which is focused on "confining convicted felons according to the law," will result in giving

lower priority to the role of correctional and reentry programs that are critical in preparing newly released inmates to successfully transition back into society. RAIN is also concerned that the wording of the current mission statement may send a message to potential community support organizations for released offenders that their efforts are not regarded as an important part of the DOC's efforts to reform the current system.

The RAIN Board has asked me to request on their behalf that the Advisory Commission examine the current DOC mission statement in light of all the statutory mandates applicable to the Department and determine if this mission statement can be used to supercede or give lower priority to any of these statutory mandates. The RAIN Board would also respectfully request that in the final report of the Commission to the 2009 Nevada Legislature, a recommendation be made on the priority to be given to correctional programs in the overall administration of the Department, including those used to prepare inmates to make the transition back to society.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Larry Struve  
RAIN Advocate

Cc RAIN Board