

BISHOP'S MESSAGE: FEBRUARY 2018, E-CHRONICLE

Na ke aloha o ke Akua ma loko o Iesu Kristo, e aloha iā 'oukou ā pau!

Many have seen the letter below that was published in the *Honolulu Star Advertiser*. I hope you will read it again. It was prepared with the direct involvement of several people working on prison reform in our community (Anna Courie, David Gierlach, Robert Merce, Dawn Morais Webster, Mike Town and others). The letter, however, presents my concern for Hawai'i.

After being actively engaged with the Church's houseless and feeding ministries for over thirty years, I am increasingly convinced that we must also engage the underlying brokenness of our world. How we address the care of those who are incarcerated, those living on the margins with mental illness, those living with substance abuse and those being trafficked will do much to change lives. While ministries of basic care (food banks, soup kitchen, etc.) are needed, we are called by the Gospel to help transform lives.

What does the Lord require?

- ⁶ With what should I approach the Lord
and bow down before God on high?
Should I come before him with entirely burned offerings,
with year-old calves?
- ⁷ Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with many torrents of oil?
Should I give my oldest child for my crime;
the fruit of my body for the sin of my spirit?
- ⁸ **He has told you, human one, what is good and
what the Lord requires from you:
to do justice, embrace faithful love,
and walk humbly with your God.**

Micah 6:6-8 (Common English Bible)

As Christians, we know that prisons are too often about punishment and the warehousing of human beings. We know the gift of restoration and have the promise of transformation.

“Brothers and sisters, if a person is caught doing something wrong, you who are spiritual should restore someone like this with a spirit of gentleness.”

Galatians 6:1a (Common English Bible)

It is with this in mind that I hope you read the letter.

Aloha ma o Iesu Kristo, ko makou Haku,

+Bob

Bishop's letter published on January 25, 2018 in the Honolulu Star Advertiser:

On behalf of the Episcopal Church in Hawai‘i, I am writing to affirm our belief in the humanity of all of the people of Hawaii, including those who are incarcerated, and to support the recommendations of the House Concurrent Resolution 85 Task Force on Prison Reform that was created by the 2016 legislature and is chaired by Hawaii Supreme Court Associate Justice Michael D. Wilson. The Task Force has recommended, among other things, that Hawaii transition from a punitive to a rehabilitative and restorative correctional system. We strongly support that recommendation because We Are All ‘Ohana.

I call on the legislature to work with stakeholders from our communities to develop a smaller, more efficient, more humane, and more sustainable approach to the rehabilitation of our family and friends who are incarcerated. Regardless of past wrongdoing, the men and women in prison are our brothers and sisters. We affirm the belief that all individuals are capable of redemption and rehabilitation when given the leadership, mentorship, and resources they need to improve their lives. And we believe that everyone deserves another chance.

We acknowledge that transitioning from a punitive to a rehabilitative system will take time, human and financial capital, and a re-imagining of the existing system.

However, the evidence supports an evolution of our current incarceration practices to embrace rehabilitation rather than retribution, and thereby reduce recidivism and break the multi-generational cycle of crime that the current system perpetuates.

The current penal system is failing the people of Hawaii. Treating prisoners as human beings rather than numbers needs to be at the core of our criminal justice system, and we need to provide those in prison with the addiction and mental health treatment they need. Too many of our current practices feed the cycle of violence in our communities rather than implementing evidence-based strategies that empower people to become participating members of our community. Our broken system is evidenced by the fact that Native Hawaiians are disproportionately represented in our prison system, and it is estimated that upwards of 90% of our prisoners suffer from mental health and/or addiction problems. We should not criminalize our social problems.

We do not need a huge new jail on Oahu. We need a community-based approach to corrections that integrates law enforcement, social services, housing, behavioral health, faith-based organizations, and others to deal with social problems that need intervention, not incarceration.

I ask the Legislature to order the Department of Public Safety to work collaboratively with community stakeholders and begin the jail planning process over again, and this time focus on implementing evidence-based practices that

rehabilitate our inmate population. Some of our sister states and many other countries are doing exactly that with astounding results.

The leadership in our correctional system can boldly move from a system of punishment to a system of rehabilitation and restoration. We need to allocate significant portions of the projected jail building funds toward addressing the mental health/drug epidemic that plagues our felon population. And we need independent monitoring and oversight of our correctional system to ensure that the investment in training of our correctional officers in principles of rehabilitation and restoration occurs. Every life is valuable, including those in prison.

'Ohana and aloha are not reserved for the best among us. On behalf of the Episcopal diocese, we call on the great state of Hawai'i to live out our commitment to Aloha and implement prison practices that acknowledge and respect the humanity in all of us.