

A CATHOLIC VISION FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN ILLINOIS

February 2023



In this document, we seek to lay foundational principles for restorative justice, discuss the role of the Catholic Church in Illinois in this area, and set out policy priorities relating to the criminal justice system, especially as it impacts those who are incarcerated, victims of crime, families, and communities. In the heavily politicized environment of public dialogue today, it becomes difficult to navigate which policies to support or oppose. We often find ourselves forced into a false dualism, where we must be either for or against. With the foundations and recommendations that follow, we contend that our Catholic faith provides a pathway that can allow us to transcend opposing ideologies and lend a truly prophetic voice to the conversation.

We draw our initial guidance from USCCB's 2000 comprehensive statement *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, which urges us to reduce reliance on the punitive carceral system and instead address wrongdoing with restorative measures. Yet, as this statement is now over 20 years old, we wish to expand on what is set out in the statement based on our current context and reality and add in wisdom from our local ministries with men, women, families, and communities affected by incarceration. We outline a vision grounded in principles of Catholic Social Teaching for a justice system not motivated by punishment but rather by the restorative goals of accountability, rehabilitation, healing, and reconciliation.

Catholic Foundations for Restorative Justice

INSIDE:

We outline a vision grounded in principles of Catholic Social Teaching for a justice system not motivated by punishment but rather by the restorative goals of accountability, rehabilitation, healing, and reconciliation.

1. Human Dignity:

Every person has an inherent dignity that must be protected and respected.

We find that the dominant cultural attitude towards incarceration underscores the “throwaway” culture cited often by Pope Francis. The incarceration experience is often characterized by isolation, exclusion, and less-than-human treatment. Every individual’s human dignity and capacity for integral development, as proclaimed by Christ and developed in Catholic ethics, calls for conversion from this approach. Rather than isolating incarcerated individuals, we should draw close to them, for it is written, “Be mindful of prisoners as if sharing their imprisonment, and of the ill-treated as of yourselves, for you also are in the body” (Hebrews 13:3).

Central also to the Catholic faith is the conviction that no human person lies outside the embrace of our forgiving, merciful God. All human persons fall into sin, but no human person is beyond redemption. In fact, “The Gospel is the revelation in Jesus Christ of God’s mercy to sinners” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1846). Given that this mercy knows no bounds for the repentant sinner, as St. Paul writes, “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Romans 5:20), we as Catholics are compelled to lift our voices on behalf of those who have committed even the most grievous of sins.

2. Option for the poor and vulnerable:

A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable are faring.

Our commitment to victims and offenders requires accompaniment inside and outside the criminal justice system with those most vulnerable to crime, usually low-income communities. Youth in low-income communities present a particular priority. Too frequently, juveniles charged with crimes receive the same treatment as adults. This exacerbates their vulnerability and likelihood of falling into a lifelong cycle of involvement with the criminal justice system.



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3. Rights and Responsibilities:

Promotion of the common good and the protection of human dignity can only be achieved if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met.

The common good necessitates rules that contribute to public safety and for people to live in community as brothers and sisters, without fear of violence or violation of individual rights. At the same time, our responsibilities call us to uphold the human dignity of those who violate the rights of others and to contribute to their ongoing integral development, inside or outside the criminal justice system.

4. Family, Community, and Participation:

The family is the basic cell of society. The human person is social. People have the right and duty to participate in society, seeking the common good and well-being of all.

The current criminal justice system in its design makes family and community participation difficult and often causes further traumatization. Most of the prisons in Illinois are far-removed from the home communities of those in custody. This, coupled with burdensome fees and restrictive visiting and phone policies, create unnecessary and harmful barriers to family relationships. Individuals in families and communities impacted by the justice system--disproportionately Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color--have the right to participate in justice processes and shape the laws that affect them. Restorative justice offers all who are impacted by a crime, including those directly harmed, those who have caused harm, families and communities, an opportunity to participate in healing processes of accountability. In addition, we must widen our scope to recognize the intersection of racism and the criminal justice system and that creating the conditions for justice begins with individuals, families and communities being able to thrive. The Earth and its societal structures share in the corruption brought about by sin; St. Paul states that the Earth and its societies will share future glory that will characterize the ultimate liberation of God's people (Romans 8:19-22). After patient endurance and struggle in steadfast expectation, we will be freed from sin.

5. Solidarity:

We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be.

Catholic ministries in prison and jail express solidarity of our common humanity with those enduring incarceration. This includes the family members of the incarcerated and victims. Further, reintegration services help the formerly incarcerated avoid recidivism and reorient to life outside of the carceral system. Too often, reentry efforts are met with a "not-in-my-backyard" mentality instead of recognizing that all of us benefit in caring for these most marginalized members of our communities.

6. Subsidiarity:

Decisions should be made at the lowest levels possible.

While criminal charges are administered by the state towards individuals, acts of harm and outcomes of the justice process have profound and lasting impacts on individuals, families, and local communities. As such, decisions on how to address these issues should be made at the most local level possible. Restorative justice prioritizes opportunities for those closest to a situation to participate in the decisions that will affect them.

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Photo: Kolbe House - Archdiocese of Chicago

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Role of the Church in Illinois in Restorative Justice

“The challenge of curbing crime and reshaping the criminal justice system is not just a matter of public policy but is also a test of Catholic commitment. In the face of so much violence and crime, our faith calls the Church to responsibility and action.” - *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration*, USCCB.

The Church is called to protect and promote the human dignity of those incarcerated and recently released in several ways, including:

- Provide pastoral care for incarcerated individuals;
- Provide reentry support for individuals released from incarceration; and
- Foster parish communities who welcome and serve the needs of formerly incarcerated individuals and families directly impacted by incarceration.
 - Educate pastors and parishioners on their responsibility to care for the incarcerated
 - Formation in seminary
 - Catholic Prison Ministry Coalition’s “Pathways of Formation” to train candidates for prison ministry
 - Catholic Mobilizing Network’s “Paths of Renewed Encounter” to educate parishes on restorative justice
 - Advocate through legislative support for policies that support Catholic Social Teaching for incarcerated and returning citizens

Under Canon 516 of the Code of Canon Law, the local parish within whose jurisdiction a correction facility is located, with solid support from the diocese, has the primary responsibility to provide pastoral care to those communities of Catholics within that facility.

“Ordinarily, pastoral care for these unique communities will be rendered by the territorial parish within whose boundaries the institution is located. However, if this is not feasible, a chaplain or rector can be appointed by the diocesan bishop. Also, in accord with Canon 517, §2 the community could be entrusted to a person or community of persons who are not priests where there is a shortage of priests. In such an instance a priest is designated to supervise the parish’s pastoral care. It is important that the Christian faithful who belong to these kinds of communities be made increasingly aware of the fact that they are members of the diocese and, in turn, of the universal Church.” – Commentary on Canon 516 from *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary*, The Canon Law Society of America.

These individuals are considered members of their local parish, and the local parish and diocese must reach out to them. One of the primary ways we see this is through our Illinois Prison and Jail Ministry Network, which includes clergy, religious, and lay volunteers from parishes in each of our dioceses committed to minister to those in prisons and jails across the state, as well as to assist those who reenter our communities. Parishes minister in numerous ways, including sending their pastors and lay members into correctional facilities to provide this pastoral care. However, the nature of this ministry also necessitates strong diocesan support for, or central coordination of parish efforts, especially in providing reentry programs to provide job assistance, housing, referrals to social services, and other forms of assistance, as well as greater education of and awareness among Catholics of existing ministries and how they can participate. Further information on our Catholic ministry in each of our dioceses in Illinois is provided in the attached Appendix A.

Furthermore, our faith leads us to participate in ways to create a more restorative form of justice. Pope Francis has stated:

“And we must head, certainly, towards restorative criminal justice. ... Our societies are called to advance towards a model of justice based on dialogue, on encounter, so that wherever possible, the bonds damaged by the crime may be restored and the damage repaired.” - Pope Francis’ Audience with participants in the 20th World Congress of the International Association of Penal Law, November 2019.

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Policy Priorities

As we work to fulfill this mission to build a system of restorative justice, we have encountered several barriers, including:

- Lack of funding for restorative programs;
- Lack of quality, affordable housing in our communities;
- Restrictive housing and employment laws for returning citizens;
- Bureaucratic challenges in ministering inside detention facilities;
- COVID restrictions on access to detention facilities;
- Budget constraints that limit growth of our ministries;
- Difficulty in recruiting volunteers to visit detention facilities; and
- Lack of mentors, counselors, and social workers to accompany returning citizens.

In consideration of these barriers, as well as other systemic challenges we have witnessed, we seek to support governmental policy changes in four areas:

1. Reorient housing facilities to become instruments of rehabilitation and healing.

All too often, our jails and prisons prioritize control, emphasize isolation, fail to provide ready access to basic human necessities, and limit opportunities to heal from trauma, engage in meaningful personal development, or gain new skills. We urge support for policy which reorients the core purpose of these housing facilities so that the various aspects of integral human development--physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and relational--are not relegated to peripheral programs but are prioritized for all those in custody. Decisions about appropriate treatments must prioritize individual needs, in particular regarding mental health. Also, decisions about where to incarcerate an individual should take into account the distance from his or her support system, especially family. Furthermore, this reorientation must also include facility employees and host communities, promoting a collaborative mentality that values each parties' contributions to safety and the common good. In that regard, ministry and mental health support should be readily available to employees in correctional facilities.

We encourage those correctional facilities and county jails in Illinois that do currently have programming for individuals to continue building on those programs, and we call on all correctional facilities in our state to place more focus on being rehabilitative and healing.



Photo: Diocese of Joliet

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2. Strengthen community support for individuals released from incarceration.

Reentry and reintegration programs for individuals released from incarceration significantly lower recidivism rates. Policy support for faith-based organizations and other private entities to make connections with inmates before leaving prisons and jails would better hasten reintegration and thus decrease the likelihood of formerly incarcerated persons falling into paths that lead back to incarceration. Also, laws limiting movement, housing, and employment for individuals with criminal records create significant barriers to integration and fail to increase public safety. These laws must be amended in favor of reentry strategies that contribute to continued rehabilitation and stability for those formerly incarcerated.

3. Promote policies that move our systems of justice to be restorative.

Processes that respond to instances of harm must center the experiences of victims, seek to hold accountable those responsible for causing harm, and open doors to healing. A commitment toward a criminal justice system of restoration and rehabilitation, not retribution, necessitates both specific incremental changes and system-wide transformation. Instituting opportunities for parole and probation is a key way to encourage and acknowledge the personal development that men and women undertake while they are incarcerated and must be a priority for a just system. Likewise, sentencing decisions and ongoing opportunities for treatment and growth must be appropriate to the level of development of each individual, including their age. In addition, public policy should encourage ways to address accountability, prevention, and intervention that allow parties to avoid formal contact with the criminal justice system in favor of community-guided resolution processes.

4. Focus investment strategies on local, community-centered initiatives to increase public safety.

Conversations to address crime and increase public safety must expand beyond law enforcement and focus on the root causes of wrongdoing. The voices of communities most affected by crime and incarceration should be prioritized in the development of solutions, in particular Black, Indigenous and other People of Color. Initiatives that serve the most vulnerable populations are particularly important --those that serve youth, individuals with mental health disorders including those suffering from a traumatic experience, and individuals with drug addictions. In addition, public investments must assist in creating equal access to affordable housing, economic opportunity, and quality education for all.

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APPENDIX A

Who is the Illinois Catholic Prison and Jail Ministry Network?

The Illinois Catholic Prison and Jail Ministry Network represents a collaboration of the diocesan ministries of pastoral care and sacramental ministry to persons incarcerated in state prisons and county jails across the state. Convened by the Catholic Conference of Illinois, they advise and support the Catholic Church's legislative efforts in relation to the justice system. In addition to their commitment to care for those who are incarcerated, they also assist with reentry services, provide education on the importance of this ministry, and work in partnership with parishes. The Network is composed of clergy, religious, and lay volunteers in each of Illinois' six dioceses.

For more information, including how you/your parish can assist in this ministry, please contact the prison and jail ministry coordinator for your diocese (contact list is at the end of this Appendix).

How is the Catholic Church in Illinois ministering to incarcerated and returning citizens?

Our Illinois dioceses provide **pastoral care** for incarcerated persons through in-person chaplaincy and faith development programs at federal and state prisons (and associated state work camps), state adult transition centers, state youth centers, county jails, and county juvenile detention centers across the state. See Appendix B for more information on correctional facilities in each diocese. Some of the specific ministries include:

- Bible and Catechetical Studies (Dioceses of Belleville, Joliet, and Springfield, Archdiocese of Chicago Kolbe House)
- Chaplaincy (including Mass, Communion services, and confessions) by priests, deacons, religious, and lay people (Dioceses of Belleville, Joliet, Rockford, and Springfield, Archdiocese of Chicago Kolbe House)
- Cursillo (Diocese of Peoria)
- Christmas and/or Easter Masses with the Cardinal or bishop (Dioceses of Belleville, Joliet, Peoria, Rockford, and Springfield, Archdiocese of Chicago Kolbe House)
- Companions Journeying Together program to enable parishes to support incarcerated women and men (Diocese of Joliet)
- Pen Pal Ministry (Archdiocese of Chicago Kolbe House, Diocese of Belleville)
- Spiritual and personal development programs such as Alpha, Centering Prayer, Life After Loss, Art Therapy and *The Chosen* video series (Archdiocese of Chicago Kolbe House)
- Sunday Mass (Archdiocese of Chicago Kolbe House)

Our dioceses also provide **reentry support** for individuals released from incarceration, including:

- Kolbe House Jail Ministry, Chicago
Immediate material needs upon release, on-going accompaniment, referrals to partner organizations for housing, education, employment
- Our Brothers' Keepers of Southern Illinois, East St. Louis
On-going accompaniment, trauma-life skills, job skills, literacy, and referral to our network for substance abuse, mental health, housing, & employment

Finally, our dioceses are active in **fostering parish communities** who welcome and serve the needs of the incarcerated, recently released, and their families. Some specific initiatives include:

- Collections of material items for incarcerated and recently released individuals (Archdiocese of Chicago Kolbe House, Diocese of Belleville)
- Education and advocacy through the Catholic Conference of Illinois
- One Parish, One Prisoner, creating parish teams of support for individuals preparing for re-entry (Archdiocese of Chicago Kolbe House)
- Parish and school education about incarceration & restorative justice (Archdiocese of Chicago Kolbe House)
- Pastoral care for families with loved ones incarcerated, St. Leonard's Parish in Berwyn (Archdiocese of Chicago Kolbe House)

In addition, there are a number of non-diocesan ministries connected to the Catholic Church that are serving the needs of the incarcerated, recently released, and their families, including:

- Pope Francis Center, Chicago (St. Vincent de Paul Society)
- Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation, Chicago
- St. Sabina Employment Resource Center, Chicago
- JUST of DuPage County

APPENDIX A

(continued)

Illinois Diocesan Coordinators for Prison & Jail Ministry

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Illinois Diocesan Coordinators for Prison & Jail Ministry

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APPENDIX B

Our Illinois Prison & Jail Ministry Network ministers to individuals in county jails across the state (contact information for county jails can be found at www.ilsheriff.org/sheriffs-directory/), county juvenile detention centers (www.ipcsa.org/resource-directory) as well as the state youth centers (www.idjj.illinois.gov/facilities.html) and state (www.idoc.illinois.gov/facilities/allfacilities.html) and federal (www.bop.gov/locations/list.jsp) correctional facilities as listed below.

Diocese of Rockford

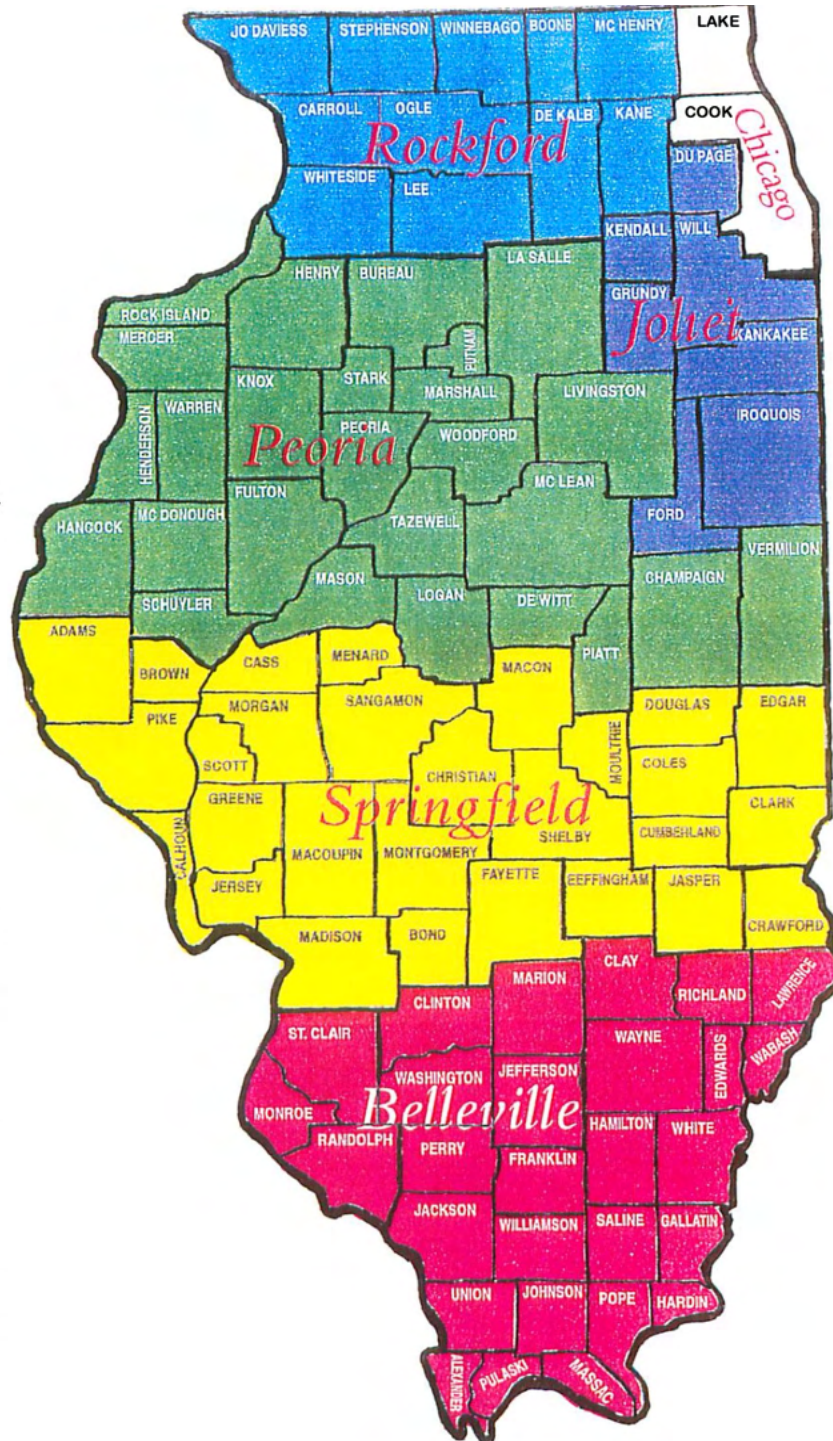
IYC St. Charles
Dixon CC
Fox Valley ATC (Women)
Thomson USP (federal)

Diocese of Peoria

Danville CC
East Moline CC
Hill CC
Illinois River CC
Kewanee Life Skills Reentry Center
Lincoln CC
Logan CC (Women)
Pontiac CC
Sheridan CC
Peoria ATC
Pekin FCI (federal)

Diocese of Belleville

IYC Harrisburg
Big Muddy River CC
Centralia CC
Lawrence CC
Menard CC
Murphysboro Life Skills Reentry Center
Pinckneyville CC
Shawnee CC
Southwestern IL CC
Vienna CC
Marion USP (federal)



Archdiocese of Chicago

Cook County Jail
Lake County Jail
IYC Chicago
Crossroads ATC
North Lawndale ATC
Chicago MCC (federal)

Diocese of Joliet

IYC Warrenville
Joliet Treatment Center
Stateville CC

Diocese of Springfield-in-Illinois

IYC Pere Marquette
Decatur CC (Women)
Graham CC
Jacksonville CC
Robinson CC
Taylorville CC
Vandalia CC
Western IL CC
Greenville FCI (federal)