An Introduction to the Nebraska Criminal Justice Review
By Mel Beckman, Editor

Holy Family Catholic Church, on Omaha’s near north side, has had a long history of service to the poor. The congregation is now extending its concern for the poor to include both offenders and those who are victimized by crime. Each are “poor” in their own way. This publication will be an advocate for a rational and humane criminal justice system in the state, a system that cares deeply about the future good of both offenders and their victims, while also providing for public security.

Holy Family’s intent is not to be “preachy” about criminal justice, but rather, to provide a communications vehicle which has been lacking. No state-wide publication exists to link those who plan, work in and administer the “system” of criminal justice with those who are directly affected by it (e.g. offenders and victims and their families and friends), with those who pay for it (tax-payers), with those who study, teach and write about it (academics) and with civic and religious groups which could help make the system work better.

One can legitimately ask whether a church publication can provide an adequate “review” of the very complex criminal justice system in Nebraska. Conscious of limitations in this area, Holy Family has assembled an advisory committee of persons who have first hand experience of the system and/or work in the system. They will not be a “letterhead” committee. They will be actively involved and have direct influence on the publication. Committee members will meet four times a year to guide the choice of content for each issue, and they will read the draft of each issue before publication. The names of our initial advisory committee members are printed elsewhere in this issue. Additional advisors will be recruited.

Readers might also ask whether Holy Family has certain “axes” to grind, i.e., are we biased? The question deserves a straightforward answer. We are not biased against the state’s criminal justice system, which delivers much good service under trying circumstances. On the other hand, we see it as needing change in many areas. It is especially in need of being less isolated from the larger community. Our bias, if we have one, is that citizens must be more involved with offenders and victims if the tax-supported system is to meet their needs. Another bias we have is about individual worth. We believe there are no “throw away” citizens in the state of Nebraska. While the freedom of those who commit serious crimes needs to be restricted for the sake of public security, their right to live and to develop their human potential should not be taken away. We all grow by helping those who are more needy than we ourselves are. It is possible that we who live in the free world will reach our full human stature by helping those who are incarcerated to reach theirs.

The Nebraska Criminal Justice Review is beginning as a free publication, supported by Holy Family Church and by donors. It is being sent throughout the state to legislators, judges, probation and parole workers, corrections personnel, attorneys, criminal justice educators and students, offenders and victims and their families, churches, civic organizations and law enforcement personnel. Suggestions for the mailing list are invited, and also information about potential financial supporters. We also invite your letters to the editor and other expressions of opinion, news items, and any announcements which might be of interest to our readers. May 1 will be the deadline for submission of material for the second issue, which will be especially concerned with opportunities for rehabilitation which are available or not available within the Nebraska prison system. Thank you for your support of this publication.

Holy Family is happy to offer this new publication as a public service and as an extension of our ministry to those in need. We hope the discussion which will be carried on in future issues will work toward the good of both offenders and their victims. We invite the wider community to help support this publication.

- Ralph Hueser, Holy Family Pastoral Administrator
What Statistics* Can Tell Us About The Criminal Justice System

By John Krejci,
Sociology/Social Work Department, Nebr. Wesleyan University

Many Nebraskans feel strongly about crime, corrections, offenders and victims. These emotions come from both fact and fable, from education and emotion. The Nebraska Criminal Justice Review will help us to sort the myth from the reality so that we can understand what is happening in criminal justice in Nebraska and act to help Nebraskans to come to grips with these serious problems and seek new and creative ways to solve them.

So what can crime and corrections statistics (some included in this issue) tell us?

- The prison population in Nebraska is large (3600) and growing. (At $20,000 per inmate, that amounts to $72 million a year, not including new construction.)
- Nebraska prisons are overcrowded, leading to early release and inadequate programming and preparation for release. (What does this imply for public safety? Do we need better education and rehab programs?)
- Although minorities comprise only about 6% of Nebraska's population, they comprise 43% of our prison population. (Is the system color blind or are profiling and selective enforcement/sentencing prevalent?)
- The average stay in prison is slightly more than two years: 84% will be in the community in less than three years. (Are inmates prepared for release? And is there adequate aftercare in the community?)
- More than one in five inmates who are released will return to prison in less than three years. These recidivists** will be those who have previously been in prison more often and for longer periods of time. They also will have had less education and will have had juvenile commitments. (If longer and more frequent prison stays lead to recidivism, shouldn't we try alternatives to imprisonment like community-based corrections, early intervention, and prevention?)

As long as an uninformed public insists on "get tough" policies, mandatory long sentences, punishment rather than rehabilitation, control rather than reform, our legislators and public officials will build more prisons, hire more guards, and not look at the long term effects of these policies on our society. **Is this in the long term best interests of the citizens of Nebraska?**

If we have the facts, understand the research, read the studies, we can change the way we think about corrections. We can turn back from supporting prisons as the fastest growing industry in our nation. We don't have to be the country that puts more citizens in jail than any other! Rather than paying for putting non-violent offenders in prison, we can spend more money on our schools, pay our teachers better, and create programs to lessen child poverty.

We need a grassroots citizens' movement to lead our State officials to do what they know is right. We need a new paradigm, a new way of thinking about criminal justice!

* Nebraska Dept. of Correctional Services monthly data sheet, January 18, 2000.
** Nebraska Dept. of Correctional Services Study of Recidivism Among FY 96 Adult Releases.

Criminal Disenfranchisement

By Virginia Walsh, Nebraskans for Peace
(Reprinted, with permission of the author, from Peace Matters, newsletter of the Omaha Chapter of N.F.P.)

During every election in Omaha since 1992, Nebraskans for Peace members have served as deputy voter registrars in north Omaha grocery stores. And every election these same members have said to one another something like, "So many Afro-Americans are unable to register to vote because they have had criminal convictions. Isn't there something wrong about this?" The answer is yes.

Criminal disenfranchisement laws, we now learn, were first enacted in the U.S. nearly 100 years ago in states across the south. These laws were parts of packages of restrictions like poll tax and literacy tests candidly designed "with a view to the elimination of every Negro voter," as one delegate in Virginia is recorded as saying. Over the decades since then most of these restrictions have been challenged and dropped, but not criminal disenfranchisement. Nebraska is one of the states which strips the right to vote from people who have been convicted of felonies, and does nothing to facilitate restitution of this civil right.

Rachel King has written an article entitled "Restoring Voting Fairness," which appears in the League of Women Voters publication The National Voter of June/July 1999. She states that, "Criminal disenfranchisement laws were passed with racially discriminatory intent, and they continue to have racially discriminatory results." Paraphrasing the U.S. Supreme Court, she says, "If ex-offenders are indeed expected to become productive, law-abiding members of society, they must not be disconnected from our key democratic institution - voting."

Representative John Conyers (D-MI) has proposed federal legislation, the Civic Participation and Rehabilitation Act (H.R. 906), which would restore the right to vote in federal elections to individuals who have been released from prison. How desirable it would be to have Nebraska enact state legislation which would remove this lingering form of discrimination from our state statutes. I look forward to the time when no Afro-American adult will have to shake her or his head "no" and whisper "felon" to a voter registrar.

If you are interested in working on this issue, contact me at 553-5686.

Let Us Know What You Think!

If you have a conviction about some part of the criminal justice system in Nebraska, why not put it into words in the form of a letter to the editor or an opinion article? Have you had a good or bad experience with the system? Noticed something that ought to be changed or improved? Concise, constructive pieces are best. Attack the problem, not the person associated with it.

May, 2000 Issue

The May issue will contain a focus on the kind of opportunities for rehabilitation which are available within the Nebraska prisons. Are they sufficient? If not, why not? Both factual information and opinion are invited. Submission deadline, May 1, 2000.
The Office of Community Justice

By Cathy Waller-Borovac, Director

The Office of Community Justice was established within the Department of Correctional Services in 1997. Community Justice is a total philosophy of community corrections. Community Justice is specifically aimed at promoting community involvement, increasing inmate accountability, repairing harm done to victims, and ensuring public safety. Its principles and strategies combine community-based corrections and restorative justice to create multifaceted programs that enlist collaboration and cooperation with law enforcement, the courts, probation, diversion, community service providers and neighborhood associations and citizenry. This network builds on existing resources and traditional offender supervision models while organizing community planning and integrating new programs.

The approach that is unique to the Nebraska Community Justice initiative is that the communities have a voice in the types of programs in their neighborhoods and are not controlled by any given agency. The community leaders and stakeholders assess the needs of their community and determine the type of programs that will most alleviate overcrowding and criminal behavior where they live. These communities then apply for grant funds through the Office of Community Justice, detailing in a comprehensive community plan how the plans will be implemented and how the funds will be expended. The Office of Community Justice becomes the pass-through agency that monitors the use of the funds. The communities become accountable for the comprehensive plans for positively affecting the criminal behavior that they have identified as a priority where they live. In turn, offenders become accountable not only to themselves but to their communities.

Since the development of the Office of Community Justice, eight communities across Nebraska have been awarded grant funding. Some of these communities’ comprehensive plans include a youth mentoring program, day reporting centers, transitional programs for women, pretrial diversion programs, and drug courts.

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The Office of Community Justice
P.O. Box 94661, Lincoln NE 68509
Phone 402-479-5890
Fax 402-479-5848
E-Mail: cathywb@mail.state.ne.us

Mission Statement
The mission of the (Nebraska) Dept of Correctional Services is to serve and protect the public by providing humane control, care, and program opportunities for those individuals placed in its custody and supervision, thereby facilitating their return to society as responsible persons.

Quick Tour - Nebraska Prison Facilities


Information from the Jan. 18, 2000 monthly data sheet of the Nebraska Dept of Correctional Services. N.D.C.S. is located at Folsom & West Prospector Place, Building 15, Lincoln NE 68522.
Ph. 402-471-2654. Fax: 402-479-5119. www.corrections.state.ne.us
An Overview of the Nebraska State Probation System

By Mychael Friedman, Senior Probation Officer
Dist. #4 Probation Office, Omaha

The mission of the Nebraska State Probation System is to provide investigations to the court, enhance community safety, promote accountability, and provide services through risk-reducing supervision strategies. At the present time, the State of Nebraska is divided into 17 separate probation districts which service the Juvenile, County, and District Courts throughout. Personnel includes approximately 215 probation officers and 120 support staff workers.

Probation officers have two main functions: to conduct presentence/predispositional investigations for the court, and supervision of individuals placed on probation by the court.

The presentence investigation for adult offenders, and the predispositional investigation for juvenile offenders are factually based background reports prepared on offenders who have been convicted or adjudicated of a crime. Through the information gathered in such a report, the court is better able to decide the most appropriate sentencing alternative. If probation is indeed considered, the investigation provides the backbone for specific intervention conditions to utilize for the offender. In addition to the court’s use of these investigations, they can also be utilized for residential treatment plans in the state penitentiary, and at the time of determining parole.

In supervising clients, the probation officer is designated to monitor the individual’s compliance with the conditions set forth by the sentencing judge. Probation officers work “hands on” with the sentenced individual to get them down the path towards rehabilitation; and hopefully, a complete exit from the criminal justice system. Included in this supervision process, a client will be provided referral information for any ordered treatment for chemical dependency or mental health issues, and may be required to participate in drug testing and electronic monitoring. Probation officers are further required to work closely with the sentencing judges to keep them abreast of non-compliance by the offender.

Overall, the Nebraska State Probation System is strongly involved with community agencies and private providers to help individuals make positive changes.

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Adult Parole Administration Offices

Central Office  Folsom & W Prospector Place, Bldg 15, P.O. Box 94661, Lincoln NE 68509. Phone: 402-479-5771
Lincoln District Office  13th and Stockwell Streets, P.O. Box 94661, Lincoln NE 68509. Phone: 402-471-1280. Serving southeast, central and western Nebraska.
Omaha District Office  1313 Farnam Street, Omaha NE 68102. Phone: 402-595-2050. Serving east-central and northeast Nebraska.

Regional Offices
- Grand Island, 1811 West 2nd St. Phone: 308-385-6215.
- North Platte, 200 South Silber St. Phone: 308-535-8115.
- Norfolk, Benjamin Ave & Victory Rd. Phone: 402-370-3539.
- Scottsbluff, 4500 Avenue “T”. Phone: 308-632-1283.

Religious and Civic Groups

For a less prison-oriented, more community-based system of justice, the involvement of your members in the lives of offenders and victims of crime is needed. Some possibilities: crime prevention efforts, early intervention with youthful offenders, initiating court diversion programs, services to persons who are incarcerated or their families, assistance to victims, and transitional assistance to offenders after release. Thank you for exposing your members to this publication. Editor
Nebraska’s Largest County Corrections Department

Douglas County Dept of Corrections
By Ann O’Connor, Chief Deputy for Corrections

The Douglas County Dept of Corrections was established by Nebraska State Statute to serve the people of Douglas County. The initial jail has been expanded to include several sites throughout the city of Omaha, providing extensive housing of inmates, community-based work programming, community residential programming, pre-trial release programming, and other community-conscious programs. Additionally, Douglas County Corrections has been given the responsibility of oversight of the Douglas County Drug Court, which has been a successful treatment program for drug offenders.

In September of 1997, the Douglas County Board of Commissioners voted to temporarily place the direction of the Department under the Douglas County Sheriff’s office. It was at this time that Sheriff Timothy F. Dunning began oversight of the Department. Since 1997, the great strides have been made to improve working conditions for county employees and housing/programming opportunities for the inmate population. Additionally, in October of 1999, the medical contractor, Wexford, and Douglas County Corrections have been awarded the National Commission on Correctional Health Care, which is a recognized national accreditation.

Sheriff Dunning assigned me to oversee the day-to-day operation of the Douglas County Correctional Center and associated programs. I provide a direct link between corrections and the Sheriff’s office.

Original construction on the current correctional center site was completed in July of 1979. An annex was completed in April of 1989. Currently, the department is in the initial stages of another expansion to bring the city and county centralized booking and housing, as well as programming opportunities, in line with the number of inmates that are processed through the department each year. Expansion is needed as Douglas County and the City of Omaha law enforcement agencies join forces and resources to address the issues of rising numbers of arrests and incarceration within the metropolitan area.

The department attempts to house inmates in a secure environment, while attempting to provide positive programming. The mission statement supports this philosophy:

The mission of the Douglas County Department of Corrections is to provide a safe and humane environment for the staff and inmates while offering programming opportunities for inmates to facilitate their positive return to the community.

Supporting values to the Mission Statement:

- To provide levels of supervision that will allow for an institutional environment that is consistent with human dignity and assures maximum protection of staff, inmates, and the community.
- To improve management resources, technology and skills necessary to meet the demands of development and future expansion.
- To provide staff with the necessary tools to allow them to be highly trained, ethical and part of a dynamic work force that strives for excellence.
- To forge working partnerships with local communities, and with legal and public safety agencies, to reduce the growth of the inmate population.

The department will continue to work toward goals which will meet the identified supporting values. Additionally, the management at corrections will pursue ongoing meetings with criminal justice agency heads, judges and elected officials to discuss system issues, including agency issues that affect systems operations, in order to meet the identified goals and mission statement.

The Douglas County Dept of Corrections is located at 710 South 17 St., Omaha NE 68102. Phone: 444-7400.

Nebraska’s Crime Victims Reparations Fund
Application forms are available by writing or calling:
Nebraska Crime Commission
301 Centennial Mall South
P.O. Box 94946
Lincoln NE 68509-4946
402-471-2828

The State of Nebraska has a program to assist innocent victims of crime who suffer bodily harm and have incurred a financial loss (exceeding ten percent of his or her net financial resources) as a direct result of a criminal act. Maximum award is $10,000 per incident. Medical expenses, loss of wages, funeral expenses, loss of earning power and counseling expenses can be covered. Loss of property cannot be covered, nor payment for pain and suffering. A parent, dependent or guardian may also be eligible in certain circumstances. The crime must be reported to a law enforcement agency within three days of the incident.

(Information excerpted from Crime Commission brochure)
V.N.A. Correctional Outreach
By Cathy Bruggeman

The Visiting Nurse Association has been providing outreach services to incarcerated women and their families since January of 1997. The program serves women (and their families) who are at the Douglas County Corrections Center, the Nebraska Correctional Center for Women at York, the Douglas County Youth Center, and the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center in Geneva. There is collaboration with community agencies, probation and parole, and correctional staff.

Public health nurses visit pregnant inmates at Douglas County Corrections, providing prenatal teaching, childbirth classes, and pre-release planning (including connecting women to medical care upon release, referrals for housing, employment, chemical dependency treatment, child care, and financial assistance). The public health nurses follow the women upon their release and/or provide home visitation to their families who may be caring for their children. Home visitation provides a unique opportunity to provide individual teaching about parenting, prenatal care, health maintenance, etc.

A public health nurse and social worker make monthly visits to the Nebraska Correctional Center for Women in York and provide parenting classes and similar services to women involved in the nursery and in the M.O.I.D. program (maternal offspring life development). Home visitation is made to women who return to the Omaha area and to their families if they need assistance or teaching.

The Visiting Nurse Association has expanded this program to include young women who are juvenile offenders and similar services have begun at the Douglas County Youth Center and the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center in Geneva.

Contact me at 342-5566 or 250-4224 for further information or to make a referral.

Omaha Con-nections
By Louis Napoleon, Transition Facilitator/Trainer

We are the only non-governmental agency in Omaha, perhaps in the State of Nebraska, dedicated solely to the successful transition of adult offenders returning from institutional placement. Among the services we provide are pre-release planning and aftercare, including personal and career assessments, housing and transportation assistance, family and parental counseling. We receive referrals from the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services, State Parole and Probation, Douglas County Corrections, Douglas County Drug Court, Adams County Probation, Job Training of Greater Nebraska, the City of Omaha’s Offender Work Program, Urban League Resource Center, Goodwill Industries, and other service providers throughout Omaha.

Our job search workshops, tailored to address any of the unique problems, concerns and issues specific to offender re-entry and employment, continue to show great promise. Over the last year, we have assisted 56 ex-offenders in obtaining full time employment; the job retention rate among our placements hovers around 65%, meaning that 36 tax users have become taxpayers and are re-employed at the time of their arrest.

Gainful employment not only provides money to accommodate one’s bills, but also is a direct link to the community, an investment in legitimacy, a self-esteem builder and vital component to successful transitions. Nevertheless, the Nebraska State Legislature has not made funding for pre-release and aftercare services an item of much discussion. There seems to be a perception that new prison construction is the solution. The only funding streams available, where resources might be diverted for offender use, are tied to welfare to work reform, and fraught with countless federal and state restrictions that screen out the majority of the intended population.

As an ex-offender who, from personal experiences, is an expert on parole and probation failure, I am convinced that without an effective transitional vehicle in place, particularly pre-release planning, employment training, and aftercare, we continue to do the taxpayers of this state a disservice. The mechanisms for success are currently not in place for the majority of men and women being released with $100 and a ticket back to their home-towns. The State of Nebraska is simply asking too much of a system that is designed to penalize and not rehabilitate.

Omaha Con-nections can be reached at 4140 N. 42 Street, Omaha NE 68111. Phone: 402-451-1100

C.U.R.E.
By Joan Ogren, Nebraska contact person.

CURE stands for Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants. NE CURE is the Nebraska Chapter within a national organization. CURE’s national headquarters are located in Washington D.C. Our leaders are a husband/wife team who are devoted to peaceable prison reform. The Washington people work relentlessly with the U.S. Congress on prison issues. National goals of CURE are that prisons be used only for those who absolutely must be incarcerated and that prisoners have all the resources they need to turn their lives around. These two issues cover an awful lot of territory. Actually, the issues cover more territory than is totally possible to completely cover, so we are trying to focus in on just a few issues.

At this time, our energies are focused on the overcharging of phone calls that inmates make on phone systems mandated within prisons and county jails. Only collet calls are allowed from prison, and despite the high volume and monopoly contracts, they are saddled with surcharges and high-per-minute costs that benefit the phone companies and states. CURE has targeted this phone fees practice by launching an ETC campaign. ETC stands for equitable telephone charges. This campaign is geared toward deregulation of the telephone companies by the FCC and state public service commissions, along with demands by departments of corrections for large commissions (premise fees), which have combined to drive up surcharges and have discouraged the offer of choices such as debit system calling and/or use of 800 numbers.

NE CURE is basically a “contact” chapter. I truly believe the best way for Nebraskans to make issues known is by letter-writing and phone contacts to people of authority. NE CURE does not have a member list nor does it have the resources to take on individual concerns, but it exists as a Nebraska representative for both federal and state prison reform issues.

NE CURE can be reached at P.O. Box 6624, Lincoln NE 68506.
National CURE: P.O. Box 2310, Wash DC 20013.
(www.curenational.org)
Nebraskans For Justice

While Nebraskans for Justice is newly-organized it is the successor organization to earlier committees which have worked for the release of Ed Poindexter and Mondo Wopashitwe Eyen we Langa (formerly David Rice), who have been incarcerated for nearly thirty years after their conviction for the booby trap killing of a police officer, Larry Minard, in 1970. Both have denied their involvement in the murder from the beginning and continue to do so. David Rice is incarcerated at the Nebraska State Penitentiary and Ed Poindexter is in a Minnesota facility.

The organization believes the two men were victims of FBI efforts to disrupt the Black Panther Party in the sixties and seventies, and that much evidence exists which casts doubt on their guilt. Many consider Ed and Mondo to be political prisoners, i.e., incarcerated for actions taken in support of legitimate struggles for self-determination or for opposing illegal policies of the government.

While working for justice for these two prisoners, the organization also publishes Buffalo Chip, to support the rights of prisoners and to educate the public about the status of the justice system in the United States. The publication is free but donations are appreciated. Nebraskans for Justice can be reached at 1314 S. 9th Street, Omaha NE 68108.

More help is needed to do grass roots education about the situation of the two men, to do fund-raising, speaking, and other tasks. To become involved, call Gloria Bartek at 422-1763.

The above material was compiled from information supplied by Gabriel Herbers

Real Life Connections

By Michelle Lechner, Therapist

Starting in 1997, Real Life Connections has been providing counseling services to women incarcerated in the Douglas County Correctional Center. Real Life Connections started with funding by the Nebraska Crime Commission. Now our funding is through the Douglas County Commissioners, supplemented with grants from the Omaha Community Foundation.

Real Life Connections is the work of four agencies: Catholic Charities, Family Service, Child Savings Institute and the Salvation Army, in collaboration with the Douglas County Correctional Center and the Visiting Nurses Association.

Real Life Connections provides: assessments, individual therapy, chemical dependency groups, a parenting group, a conflict resolution group, a basic life skills group, a relationship group and an after care specialist. Our services are provided to women who have expressed a desire to create changes in their lives. Our aftercare specialist helps the women make connections to services before they are discharged and to follow up and assist women as needed after they leave the Douglas County Correctional Center.

The vast majority of women we serve are incarcerated due to behaviors that stem from chemical dependency. These behaviors would include: forgery, shoplifting, theft, prostitution, possession, and DUI’s. These are often women who have been emotionally, physically and/or sexually abused at some time in their lives. Through the groups and individual sessions, we offer the women an opportunity to express their feelings and a chance to learn new ways of living and coping.

To contact Real Connections, call Ed Licht, Director, at 554-0520.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving

By Ruth Kruse, MAAD Metro

Mothers Against Drunk Driving makes victim assistance and advocacy our highest priority work. MADD Nebraska operates an 800 number (1-800-444-6233) for victims, which is answered within 24 hours (mandated by MADD National). MADD Metro has a phone line available for victims daytime and evening (342-5658). MADD Metro has six trained victim advocates who listen to victims’ pain, recommend immediate steps, assist in understanding court procedures, provide attorney recommendations (for DWI civil cases), and assist in other questions. Victim advocates accompany victims in court as requested.

Victim Rights, A Guide Through Nebraska’s Criminal Justice System is a packet sent to those victims who need to understand the system and to have names and phone numbers for contacts. Other specialized help is offered in pamphlets to various family members, for general audience, and for assistance in emergency and long-term financial concerns. A support group or referral is made for those with special needs.

MADD chapters in Nebraska receive accident reports on crashes, and send “We care” cards to injured persons or family members of fatalities; this is often the way in which victims come to contact MADD for listening, court procedures, or other questions.

Victim impact panels are held each month in eastern Nebraska. Court-ordered offenders (usually first-time offenders) attend a session where the results of DWI crashes are evident: a crash video, two or three victims’ stories and/or video and talk by Emergency Nurses (a DWI crash prevention program by emergency room nurses). MADD Metro victims also speak every month to at least four groups: DWI offenders, MIP offenders, driver’s training classes and substance abusers (at Offutt Air Base), as well as to other groups as requested.

The packet described above may be requested, for a donation to MADD Metro. Write to MADD Metro, 5404 N. 50th Avenue, Omaha NE 68104.

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Nebraskans Against the Death Penalty

By Marylyn Felion, Co-Chair - Omaha Board

Nebraskans Against the Death Penalty has initiated a special project to form a coalition of peace and justice groups, religious congregations, human service agencies and other interested groups, for the purpose of abolishing the death penalty. Within a two year time frame, this "Coalition for Abolition in Nebraska (CAN) will work within designated legislative districts to gather signatures of from 15 to 25 percent of registered voters on petitions for abolition, thereby giving state legislators the support they need to vote for repeal of the death penalty.

The faith committee of Nebraskans Against the Death Penalty has begun a pilot project in Lincoln (Leg. Dist. 28, Senator Chris Beutler) and in Omaha (Leg. Dist. 6, Senator Pam Brown). We will need the efforts of churches and other groups within these districts to gather signatures. In Omaha, interested persons can contact me at 551-5834 (mewfelion@juno.com) or Mike Poulin, 554-0520 (socminder@aol.com). NADP invites your group to consider joining the coalition.

(Excerpted, with permission of the author, from an article in Peace Matters. NADP can be reached at 941 "O" Street, Suite 75, Lincoln NE 68508. Ph. 402-477-7787. E-Mail: nadp@inetnebr.com)
Nebraska Criminal Justice Review
Published by the Community Needs Committee
Holy Family Church
1715 IZARD STREET
OMAHA NE 68102

Editor: Mel Beckman, 402-558-2085.
E-mail: mgbeckman@mailexcite.com


Published Quarterly, in February, May, August, and November, to facilitate better public understanding of the criminal justice system in Nebraska and the needs of offenders and victims. The Review also provides a forum for communication between those who administer and staff the criminal justice system, those who make plans and laws for it, those who are personally affected by it, and the community which pays for it and should be involved with it.

Deadline for Submission of Material: The first day of the month of publication.

Subscription Fee: None. Donations to Holy Family for the publication are encouraged.

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___ Please include me on the mailing list for the N.C.J.R. (no charge)

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Doing Time: A Path to Spirituality?
By Anne Marie Kenny Bull, Holy Family Church

When a person of faith is sentenced to one of Nebraska's prisons, does s/he lose hope due to lack of spiritual community, a lapse in religious tradition, and severed contact with a spiritual leader? According to Chaplain Bob Carlberg, Religious Coordinator at OCC (Omaha Correctional Center), not only do inmates have the opportunity to develop their current faith tradition, they are exposed to a myriad of other spiritual journeys. Eight of Nebraska's ten correctional institutions offer extensive and regular spiritual programs. The two exceptions are the Community Correction Centers in Lincoln and Omaha, which do not retain religious coordinators on staff, however inmates are allowed to attend worship services on the outside, under supervised conditions.

A wide variety of outside faith groups minister to prisons through worship liturgies and religious education. Depending on prisoners' requests, services available are: Protestant (various denominations), Catholic, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Jehovah's Witness, House of Yahweh, Mormon, and in some facilities, there is an outdoor Sweat Lodge for the Native American tradition. Even lesser-known faith practices are obtainable such as: Wicca, Maat, Asatru, and the Church of Satan. Treatment for substance abuse for prisoners in the grips of addiction is an integral part of some facilities. Members of Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous often consider the 12-step program to be a spiritual path unto itself.

Carlberg notes that national recidivism rates (repeated offenses) are much lower among inmates who demonstrate outward signs of regular faith practice. Last December, a typical month, there were 427 spiritual leaders and lay religious volunteers who devoted 1,382 hours to our state's prisoners. Carlberg estimates that about 35% of Nebraska's 3,500+ prisoners take advantage of these services on a regular basis. Not included in the numbers above are the hours of individual spiritual counseling. For the asking, inmates are granted one-on-one meetings with a spiritual leader. The visits do not affect the restricted number of weekly visits allowed from family and friends.

It is hard to measure spiritual depth. It is beyond statistics, rates, and demographics; it will not develop out of an institution within an institution. Does Nebraska's prison ministry foster an atmosphere where convicted criminals (whatever their crime or their perception of the system's betrayal) feel God's unconditional love and forgiveness, out of which, prisoners can open their hearts toward reconciliation of their past, hope for their future, and a sense of justice and peace in their present situation? The prisoners themselves can tell us this. Let's hear what they have to say — along with spiritual leaders and religious coordinators from around the state - in a subsequent issue of N.C.J.R.

To volunteer, or know more about prison ministry, here are some contacts: