OVERCROWDING: CAN WE BUILD OUR WAY OUT?
By John Krejci, Emeritus Professor of Sociology and Social Work

If you want to see what kind of housing $75 million can buy, take a drive South on Highway 50 and visit Tecumseh, the site of Nebraska’s new maximum security prison. You might have seen the billboards advertising for the 400 new employees needed to staff it. (See picture opposite) It will cost an additional 15 million dollars annually to operate it. Building and operating prisons absorbs a lot of tax dollars. Some Nebraskans are asking if there is another way to solve the problem.

No doubt there is severe overcrowding in Nebraska prisons. Our prison population runs about 160% of design capacity. With the 960 beds in Tecumseh, the overcrowding rate will drop to about 105%. If this level could be maintained, we could breathe a sigh of relief. Unfortunately, Nebraska Department of Corrections research paints a less rosy picture. (The data cited in this article is from "Core trends in Nebraska, 1990-Present, and Other Data," October, 2001.)

Whereas prison populations in most of the country are beginning to level off, Nebraska's population continues to grow at an alarming rate. Since 1990 the prison population has grown by 62% (from 2413 to 3900 inmates). During this same period, Nebraska population grew by only 8%. Prison population is projected to be more than 5000 by 2006.

The causes of this overcrowding are multiple. We have more police (a 19% increase). More individuals are being arrested (a 31% increase). We are sending more to prison for longer periods (27.3 months in 2001 compared to 24.9 in 1990). We are paroleing only 10% more in 2001 than we were in 1990, despite a 59% increase in parolees in the first half of the decade. (This data coincides with the passage of legislation deferring parole eligibility in 1996.) A full 62% of inmates "jam" out, i.e., complete their full minimum sentence minus good time. (Data shows that inmates without parole supervision are slightly more likely to return to prison within 3 years.) In short we are "reaping the fruits" of the get tough on crime policies of the past decade.

It is not difficult to find inadequacies in the corrections system and even easier to criticize. There is always plenty of blame to go around. But it might be more beneficial to look at the various agencies, governmental bodies, and individuals who can do something to change the system for the better. In researching this article, I spoke with state legislators, administrators of the Department of Corrections, members of the parole board and others involved in parole, friends and family of inmates, and interested members of the community. I was impressed with the knowledge, commitment and cooperation of all involved.

So what needs to be done? First, the legislature should take a hard look at the Governor’s Crime Bill of 1995, particularly Statute 83-1,110 (3) which states "A committed offender who has been found guilty of a violation of the rules and regulations of the department for drug or alcohol use...shall not be eligible for parole for 12 months following the imposition of the disciplinary action." According to the 2000-2001 report of the Nebraska Board of Parole, 363 inmates were deferred from coming before the Parole Board in the past year. The Parole Board, which has been criticized for not granting parole to more inmates, is prohibited from using their discretion in individual cases, because, under this legislation, parole is prohibited from using their discretion in individual cases, because, under this legislation, parole is

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Overcrowding (Continued from page one)

automatically delayed for at least one year. Under the same law, another 75 inmates' parole dates were set back because "the offender refuse(d) to comply with the department-approved personalized program plan." Inmates and family state that sometimes the programs to fulfill these plans are simply not available or prison regulations deny them access to them. Insensitive guards also come in for criticism because arbitrary writeups, and other prison policy often delays parole in many complex ways. One part of the solution seems to be changing rules that delay parole for offenders who would be better off in the community than in prison. Parole costs about $3100 a year, incarceration costs over $22,000.

Senator Brashear has answered the question, "Can we build our way out?" in the negative. California tried that and now spends more on corrections than it does on education! Senator Brashear recently expressed his concerns about the cost of incarceration and the need for major policy changes at the most recent special session of the Unicameral. The specific occasion was a confirmation hearing for the reappointment of a member of the Parole Board.

"I would like the body to know...that parole costs less than incarceration, and so does probation...I think you would want to know that a point in time when your Department of Corrections is recommending some changes for parole, your Parole Board is holding back, and therein there may be an opportunity for different points of view, but you ought to know why they're holding back. They are holding back because there is no money to establish programs and there are no programs which they believe to be essential for these people in order to complete their course of rehabilitation and return to society.

So, once again, we have 25% of our offenders incarcerated for substance abuse and don't have enough treatment programs for them. We have people who have completed their course for corrections, in the opinion of your Department of Corrections, who have been recommended for parole, which is a way to step people back into society. It's an established, approved of procedure and no programs to fully (implement them are available). You're going to hear more and more about that...because it affects how we spend money and how much money we spend. It affects lives and it affects people that we're responsible for seeing are appropriately treated in the therapeutic sense of the word..."

The Department of Corrections budget has increased from about $50 million in 1990 to $114 million for 2002. At present parole is budgeted for about $1.5 million.

Senator Brashear sees the dangers in the direction that Corrections is headed, as do many within the system. Everyone agrees that changes are necessary. There is some hope on the horizon. The Vera Institute of Justice, a private foundation based in New York, works with states to solve problems like prison overcrowding and to promote community corrections alternatives. Vera has selected Nebraska as a site that can profit from its expertise. Governor Johanns has appointed a Community Corrections Work Group, headed by Senator Brashear, to work with the Vera Institute and seek community based alternatives to incarceration. The group is in its beginning stages; it has met but twice. But it promises a serious look at Nebraska's problems and a search for solutions.

Since the Vera Institute has carried out successful programs in other states, we look forward to hearing more about their Nebraska project. Perhaps it will give us a less costly and more humane alternative to building our way out of the problem.

In the meantime, the Department of Correctional Services is seeking men and women who want to "Start a career and Make a Difference."

INTERIM LEGISLATURE STUDY OF NEBRASKA CORRECTIONAL ISSUES

This article contains information supplied by Barbara Brunkow, Legislative Assistant to Nebraska Senator Dwite Pedersen.

At the end of the first session of the current Legislative session, Nebraska Senators passed Legislative Resolution 190, which called for creation of a committee to study and make recommendations for improvement of various parts of the state's correctional system. The areas of study had been outlined previously in LB 611 which was not adopted by Legislature in the last session but is still pending on general file.

Bi-monthly meetings of the new committee have been held during the past months, with extraordinary involvement by staff from thirty-five senators' offices participating in the study. Additional personnel have been provided by the Legislative Fiscal Office, the Legislative Research Division, and the Office of Public Counsel (Ombudsman). The study is under the Judiciary Committee.

The past few months have been devoted to organization of the study and determination of its scope. Eight study areas have been outlined and each area is being considered by five to ten staff members from the various senators' offices. The eight study areas are:

1 Population Management (Disciplinary rules and procedures, classification issues, parole recommendations, long term institutional segregation)
2 Staffing Issues (Recruitment of qualified staff, staff training, staff retention, staffing patterns)
3 Institutional Planning (DCS long range planning, community-based alternatives, new facility programming, review findings of State Auditor on DCS and Cornhusker State Industries)
4 Inmate Health Care (Medical, dental, vision, psychiatric care)
5 Mental Health Programs (General mental health programming, specialized programs in Dept. of Correctional Services, sex offender programs, assessing serious mental health issues)
6 Substance Abuse Treatment/ Facilities (Institutional substance abuse programs, AA groups, in-patient treatment, community programs and resources)
7 Inmate Access to the Courts (Law libraries, role of inmate legal aids, access of inmates to lawyers, institutional response to court actions)
8 Inmate Work and Activities (Inmate work opportunities and compensation, educational opportunities, religious and interest groups, visitation, telephones, and mail issues)
NEBRASKA PAROLE AND CORRECTIONS: POLITICS AND AUTHORITY RULE (Edited)

In the state of Nebraska, a prisoner who is doing a life sentence on a first degree murder conviction cannot be paroled until and unless the Board of Pardons commutes his or her sentence to a specific term of years. In March of 1993, the Nebraska Parole Board, under the chairmanship of Ethel Landrum, recommended to the Board of Pardons that my sentence be commuted. This recommendation resulted in big-time controversy.

Months later, two attorneys representing me, Lennox Hinds of New York and John Stevens Berry of Lincoln, appeared before the Board of Pardons to speak on behalf of my application for a commutation hearing. After about two hours of often heated exchanges between my counsel and the members of the Board of Pardons - primarily Attorney General Don Stenberg and Governor Ben Nelson - Lennox Hinds stated to the Board members that they were making a game out of the process by which a prisoner seeks a commutation hearing and walked out of the meeting room. The Parole Board continued to recommend me for commutation of sentence for five more consecutive years.

One of the major points of contention at the hearing before the Board of Pardons was the Parole Board policy that it would only recommend that a prisoner’s life sentence be commuted if he or she had gone five years straight without a disciplinary report. But while the Parole Board interpreted its own policy to only include major reports (involving loss of “good time” and/or time in solitary confinement), Stenberg and Nelson, in particular, insisted that even the most inconsequential and petty disciplinary reports were sufficient to disqualify a prisoner from being considered for sentence commutation.

The fact is that, at no time when I had my yearly appearances before the Parole Board, had I gone five straight years without some kind of minor disciplinary report. At the same time, in the thirty years I’ve been locked up I haven’t been in a fight, have never threatened or assaulted anyone, have no escape attempts on my record and have neither done anything nor been accused of doing anything that would give the Parole Board cause to deny me a recommendation for sentence commutation.

But in March of 1999, at my hearing before the Parole Board, I was confronted with a new policy. All of a sudden, “five years clean of disciplinary reports” meant “any such reports at all.” I was notified in writing that I had been denied a recommendation due to my not being five years free of misconduct reports.

The members of the Parole Board are well aware of the fact that there are so many rules in here and that so many of these are unnecessary, unjustly restrictive, petty, and so forth, that a prisoner can have no reasonable expectation of not being in violation of some rule or other.

Many prisoners are having to rely on the Parole Board and/or Board of Pardons insofar as getting out of here is concerned. The games being played by these political bodies, as well as the Dept. of Corrections, are rooted in pretense and deception.

Editor’s Note: Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa is an inmate at the Nebraska State Penitentiary. An unedited version of the above article is available on request from N.C.J.R., c/o Holy Family Church, 1715 Izard St., Omaha, NE 68102. Send a stamped, addressed return envelope.

WHAT OF US

what of these—
Sioux Arapaho
Cherokee Seminole
and these other nations of people
whose ancestors gave respect
to the land
and to the green things upon it
and to the walking crawling
slithering and flying
creatures upon it
who gave homage to their grandfather
who smiled upon them with these gifts
and blessed them with prosperity
who touched their skin
with the redness of clay

and what of these
Mexicanos
of Olmec Toltec
Aztec Mayan
blood
great ones who drew favor from their Gods
to know of medicine and numbers
to fear not abstractions
and walked with dignity
their beige faces turned to the sun

and what of these —
who carry yet the rhythms
of forgotten songs
from a Motherland far away
where Fulani Songo
Mandingo Hausa
and other offspring of Africa’s fertility
explored the uncharted mysteries
of the heavens
to chart the planetary paths
and studied earth to learn
of herbs and roots
and the healing power they contained
and danced with feet as brown
as the bountiful ground

what of these
of all these now of us —
prisoners of the new reservations
barrios
ghettos of an america
whose heart does not beat
whose face is pale
and our colors
do not blush its cheeks.

HELP PLAN THE NEXT ISSUE. Every 3rd month an advisory committee (see back cover) meets to critique the previous issue of the Nebraska Criminal Justice Review and to offer suggestions for the issue to be published next. The committee welcomes attendance from others in the community who would like to give input. (e.g. former offenders, family or friends of inmates, victims of crime or family members, persons actively working in some part of the criminal justice system, etc.). The next meeting will be on Febr. 13, 1715 Izard St. in Omaha, at 11 a.m. (Snow day, Febr. 20) Lunch is served at noon. RSVP to 558-2085.
MEDICAL RECORDS NOW AVAILABLE TO INMATES
The following excerpts are from LB 15, passed during the first session of the Ninety Seventh Legislature this year.

"An inmate may obtain access to his or her medical records by request to the provider pursuant to sections 71-8401 to 71-8407 notwithstanding the fact that such medical records may be a part of his or her individual department file. The department retains the authority to withhold mental health and psychological records of the inmate when appropriate."

"Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit in any manner the authority of the Public Counsel to inspect and examine the records and documents of the department pursuant to sections 81-8, 240 to 81-8, 254, except that the Public Counsel's access to an inmate's medical or mental health records shall be subject to the inmate's consent. The office of Public Counsel shall not disclose an inmate's medical or mental health records to anyone else, including any person committed to the department, except as authorized by law."

EX-OFFENDERS AND THE SEARCH FOR HOUSING
By Gary Fischer, Attorney and Director of the Fair Housing Center of Nebraska

Your conviction of a crime could damage your chances to find housing you can afford. If you are renting you should know that many landlords screen potential tenants for a variety of circumstances including for any history of being evicted, credit problems and criminal background.

Landlords may ask for you to self-report criminal conviction background information. Some landlords use a service to conduct these screening checks and rely on the reports they receive. Services in Nebraska such as Tenant Data Services, Inc. are examples of such services. These searches are not all the same and landlords pay more or less per search depending on the amount of information requested. It should be noted that most of these checks are local or statewide in nature and will not necessarily pick up a criminal conviction or eviction from another state. These reporting services do not have lawful access to the National Crime Information Computer (NCIC). They may however report on arrests instead of (or in addition to) convictions. Credit information is reported differently and is generally available regardless of which state you were in when problems with credit began.

The use of such screening tools is lawful so long as it is not a cover for illegal discrimination based on race, national origin, handicap, familial status, presence of children under age 18 in the household, color, religion and sex (gender). For instance, it would be illegal for a landlord to only screen blacks for criminal background information or to rent to whites with felony convictions and not Hispanics etc. Treating people differently based on any consideration of these factors is a violation of the Federal and State of Nebraska Fair Housing Law and the City Ordinances of Omaha and Lincoln. If you feel that you have been discriminated against on these grounds, even if you are not sure, call the Fair Housing Center of Nebraska 1 (800) NOW-FAIR or the Nebraska Equal Opportunity Commission 1 (800) 642-6112.

Public Housing Authorities have some special rules about screening for criminal background. Your conviction does not justify illegal discrimination... Usually a felony or drug related conviction will result in a denial of housing as a matter of these policies. However these policies often allow the Housing Authority to take into consideration mitigating circumstances and also limit the types of convictions that may affect whether persons can be accepted as tenants. You shouldn't just take a rejection with exploring the possibility that you may be able to persuade a landlord that you would be a good tenant.

Some agencies help people find housing that they can afford. These agencies employ housing counselors that often are familiar with rental practices in the community you are trying to locate in. They often are able to steer you to landlords that may not require extensive checks for criminal background. In Omaha, NE, Family Housing Advisory Services, Inc. has such a service (402) 934-7921. Another suggestion is to not answer application questions that involve criminal background inquiries. Try to get an interview and disclose this kind of information in person to increase the chance you will be judged on your merits and not just one issue. Providing false information may result in loss of your deposit or later your lease. It is better just to not answer.

Another suggestion is that, since most screening for criminal background is based on statewide information, you may want to locate your search for housing in a state other than that in which you have a conviction. Another logical approach is to have your partner, spouse or roommate apply for the housing with you listed as a household member if the landlord's screening process will allow this. Usually if one tenant's credit and income is sufficient that will be enough to gain an acceptance.

Remember also that a criminal conviction will not have an effect on your ability to buy a home. If you have not purchased a home previously and have good or salvageable credit you may be able to buy a home. Check into the availability of first-time homebuyer education programs that will assist you in assessing your credit, designing a plan to solve problems identified, and getting qualified for any down payment assistance or other subsidy that might help you afford a home. They may also help you identify faith-based or other organizations that may offer rent options or other alternatives to traditional rental and buying that will help you acquire housing you can afford regardless of your conviction status.

In short, a criminal conviction may complicate your search for housing. More planning, enlisting the help of a housing counselor, and following some of the suggestions in this article will help overcome this barrier. Also, your conviction does not justify illegal discrimination. when in doubt about whether your rights to fair housing have been violated, call the Fair Housing Center of Nebraska, a program of Family Housing Advisory Services, Inc. (1-800-3247 or 402-934-6675)
NEBRASKA STATE CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES TO BECOME TOBACCO FREE

By John J. Dahm, Warden, Nebraska Correctional Treatment Facility, Lincoln.

Nebraska State Corrections Director Harold W. Clarke has agreed with the recommendation of an internal study group that all the facilities operated by the department become tobacco free by February 4, 2002. Two of the facilities operated by the Department already have limits on the possession or use of tobacco by staff and inmates. The Work Ethic Camp in McCook opened tobacco free earlier this year. The new state prison in Tecumseh also opened tobacco free last month. Two other of the Department’s institutions currently ban tobacco possession or use by inmates. The Nebraska Correctional Youth Facility in Omaha has inmates who, for the most part, are too young to buy tobacco products so there is no inmate possession or use of tobacco at that facility. The Diagnostic Center in Lincoln has not allowed smoking by inmates for a number of years due to the difficulty of enforcing the current rule which bans indoor tobacco use (inmates there are indoors for 23 of every 24 hours.)

The new ban would apply to all facilities and would prohibit the possession or use of tobacco products by staff, visitors or inmates on property controlled by the department. The sole exception will be to allow employees or visitors to keep tobacco products in their vehicles. Institutions, the central office, parole offices and the Department’s Training Academy are all covered by the new policy.

The costs of treating inmates for smoking related illnesses coupled with the continuing prospect of inmate lawsuits concerning exposure to second hand smoke were the main factors that led to the new policy. In doing this, Nebraska is following the lead of a number of state that have already implemented such a ban. Within the last two years the state Department of Corrections in Colorado successfully implemented a tobacco free policy like the one proposed for Nebraska’s correctional facilities.

Inmates needing assistance in making a break from tobacco use will be able, with medical approval, to place special orders for nicotine patches. Inmates themselves will be responsible for the cost of the patches. There is a considerable amount of free literature available which is designed to help individuals quit smoking. This literature will be made available to both staff and inmates.

COUNTY DRUG COURT FOR YOUTH

This article contains excerpts from information supplied by Erin Clark, Douglas County Juvenile Drug Treatment Court Coordinator. (Ph. 402-444-7193)

It has been found through a data collection conducted in Douglas County by Dr. Denise Herz in the year 2000, that 35% to 39% of the juvenile offenders are borderline to problem substance abusers. It has also been found that 65% to 80% of the juvenile offenders in the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers at Geneva and Kearney need substance abuse treatment compared to only 5% of the general population according to the Substance Abuse Treatment Task Force Final Report.

Judge Crnkovich and other agencies within Douglas County noted the need for a drug court in Douglas County. The inception of this court was February 26, 2001. The program serves serious, adjudicated offenders who would otherwise be placed in an out of state placement or be committed to the Youth Rehabilitation Treatment Centers in Geneva or Kearney.

The components of DTC include frequent court appearances, intense supervision, and random and frequent chemical testing and chemical dependency treatment. Supervision consists of monitoring the youth’s behavior at home, school and treatment. Treatment is conducted at Uta Halee. The youth receives individual, family, and group counseling, behavior modification, drug education resistance training, character building, gang prevention/intervention education and multicultural education.

Throughout the duration of DTC, the youth receives incentives and graduated sanctions for the choices that they make. Incentives include but are not limited to phase advancement, tokens, gift certificates and/or dropping days of treatment. Sanctions include but are not limited to a decrease in curfew, increase in drug testing, electronic monitoring, tracking and/or detention.

Incentives, pro-social activities and speakers for scheduled topics at treatment (topics include gangs, substance abuse, social skills, multicultural issues, etc.) are needed for the youth. If there are any questions or if there is more interest in the DTC please contact Erin Clark, Drug Treatment Court Coordinator, at 402-444-7193.

LET VETERANS VOTE!

The following are excerpts from a Dec. 11th e-mail message sent by Congresswoman Julia Carson, under the above heading, to her colleagues in the House of Representatives.

“The House will soon vote on H.R. 3295, the Help America Vote Act. When it does, I intend to offer an amendment strengthening U.S. Veterans’ Right to Vote.”

“Numerous studies have concluded that a disproportionate number of veterans returning from war have been incarcerated as compared to veterans who served in times of peace. In 1998, over 225,000 veterans were being held in the nation’s jails or prisons.”

“U.S. Army Veteran Ed Hart captures the sentiment of this amendment”

“We took these men from their homes at an early age, subjected them to training designed to overcome reluctance to do violence to their fellow men, introduced them to experiences that impaired their ability to cope with stress, tempted them with alcohol and drugs in their service clubs and the strange streets we sent them to, and then wondered why so many cracked, became homeless, and were incarcerated.

Even after we had punished them for their errors and they had paid their debt to society, we didn’t let up. In too many states, we deny them the vote, refuse to recognize them as members of the society they offered their lives to, and erect additional hurdles to prevent their recovery.

Now society owes them a debt, and I appreciate the efforts of Congress to make a payment on it. We’ll need them again, or their sons or brothers - I hope we won’t be too embarrassed to ask them again, when the time comes.”
AN UPDATE ON “OASIS” - A PILOT PROGRAM IN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE
By James Jones, founder and Director, P.O. Box 30856, Lincoln NE 68503. Phone: 402-483-4245.

OASIS is a program growing from the philosophy of Restorative Justice, which holds that crime is not an act only against the State, but also against human relationships, specifically the relationships between the key stakeholders: victims of crime, offenders and the community. OASIS is designed to benefit all three by providing a safe information/communication exchange resource. OASIS provides an Internet vehicle for crime victims to share their victim’s impact statement on a secure website, and, if they are open to Victim/Offender Dialogue (V/OD), an opportunity to communicate to their offenders the true harm they were caused. OASIS also provides offenders a similar opportunity to post their self-betterment efforts on the website, in letters of apology, and, if they are willing, to engage in Victim/Offender Dialogue (V/OD) for the purpose of healing and closure for both parties.

Since November 2000, I have successfully presented four OASIS workshops at the Nebraska State Penitentiary and have been approved to continue this work at the Nebraska Correctional Youth Facility in Omaha (January 2002) and the Nebraska Correctional Center for Women in York (February 2002). The workshops are separate from participation in the website, which is optional.

A very positive response has been received to the "Self-betterment Awareness" workshops, preparing offenders to use the Oasis communication system. Ninety-one percent (91%) rated the OASIS workshops as excellent. Eighty-three percent (83%) said they understood their obligation to their victims and community. And a full 87% agreed to have their names and information added to the OASIS database (website) for the sole purpose of being accountable to their victims and community.

Some comments from the workshop participants are: "It helped me look at my actions through victim's eyes," "It helped me realize what effect the crime I committed had on my victims as well as the community. It also helps me to understand that I am worth something & not just a nobody." "I learned a lot about myself as well as the victims and the community and how they are adversely affected by people's crimes. I also have found a way of making amends so as not too hurt or harm the victims, community, my loved one's, or myself again."

I presented OASIS at the 18th Annual International Training Institute and Conference, sponsored by The Victim/Offender Mediation Association in Portland, October 23-24, 2001. The program was received very well, with other communities interested in replicating it.

While the workshops have been successful, it is difficult to communicate the existence and benefits of the program to inmates. Many inmates have limited writing skills so the application process is a barrier. Add to this the fear factor, and it is an uphill battle.

Inmates at the Penitentiary can write to me for an application, at the address above. The youth at NYCF must contact Deborah Hogan-Dowis to apply.

NEWS FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS OF INMATES - LINCOLN SUPPORT GROUP
By Jill Arias, support group member.

Family and Friends of Inmates now meets twice a month, on the 2nd and 4th Mondays, from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., at Trinity United Methodist Church, 16th and A streets in Lincoln. FFI offers encouragement, support and orientation to families of friends who have a loved one incarcerated. One goal is to emphasize the importance of inmate-family relationships by working closely with United Methodist Ministries Restorative Justice Program, with senators, corrections officials, prison ministries, and other agencies.

Currently, we are busy planning the “Prison and Family Ministry Fair - Making a Positive Difference.” It will be held on Saturday, January 26, 2002, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. the Fair, in partnership with the United Methodist Restorative Justice Program and Christ’s Place Church, will be at Christ’s Place Church in Lincoln, 1111 Old Cheney Road. The Fair will serve to create a greater awareness of the spiritual and physical issues affecting inmates and their families. We also hope to encourage networking between prison ministries so that the right hand knows what the left hand is doing.

If you are involved in a prison ministry or service to inmates, call us to reserve a booth and space for free, allowing you to display information about your ministry. We have scheduled two panels and several speakers. Speakers include Al Riskowski, Marvin Watson, Bud Christiansen, Carl Eskridge, Teela Mickles, and others actively involved in “making a positive difference” in the lives of inmates and families.

For more information, contact Tamara Holtz (402-471-6010) days, or call Jill Arias (402-476-3184) evenings - or send us an e-mail at ja11534@excite.com. If you would like to make a donation to help offset costs of the Fair you can send it to FFI, P.O. Box 84424, Lincoln NE 68501. Check the nebraskapen.org website for further updates.

Sex Offenders Restored Through Treatment (S.O.R.T.)
S.O.R.T. is an issue chapter of C.U.R.E., a national organization which seeks to reduce crime through reform of the criminal justice system. CURE-SORT, P.O. Box 1191, Okemos, MI 48805, provided the following information:

CURE-SORT advocates:
• Developing effective community based sex offender restoration programs.
• Developing a mechanism whereby sex offenders may voluntarily seek restoration programs.
• Reviewing all incarcerated sex offenders to determine which are amenable to restoration in a community setting.
• Restoring incarcerated sex offenders and opposing class discrimination of sex offenders in the criminal justice system.
• Publishing the cost benefits to the community and individuals of restoration vs. incarceration.
• Challenging the media to provide constructive coverage of sex offender issues.
DOUGLAS COUNTY DRUG COURT  The court continues to divert non-violent, substance-abusing felony offenders from a prison term. Small rewards to offenders who are doing well encourage them to “stay with the program.” One can help the Court provide such incentives as food certificates, movie passes, bus tokens, etc. by sending a check made out to “Drug Court” and mailing it to: Drug Court Office, 1909 Douglas Street, Omaha, NE 68102. Drug Court recently had its 14th graduation ceremony. For more information, contact Judy Barnes, Drug Court Coordinator, at 444-6655.

GOOD NEWS JAIL AND PRISON MINISTRY is a tax-exempt non-denominational, evangelical organization, based in Virginia and founded in 1961. The ministry recruits, trains, certifies, and places chaplains in correctional facilities throughout the United States. The chaplains are employees of Good News Jail and Prison Ministry and correctional facilities are not required to pay a salary to their chaplains. Three of their chaplains minister at the Douglas County Jail and one in the Sarpy and Pottawatamie County jails. Senior Chaplain Bob Potter, at the Douglas County Jail, also coordinates the participation of other religious groups which minister to inmates in the jail. He can be reached at 444-7400, Ext. 117.

NEBRASKA INMATES, DRUGS/ TREATMENT  According to a September 24, 2001 news item in the Lincoln Journal Star, 25% of the nearly 2300 people sent to state prisons last year were doing time for drug offenses, and 80 to 85% of the nearly 3900 men and women in the prison system have serious substance abuse problems. Of the more than 3000 people serving time who could benefit from comprehensive treatment in the prisons, only 600 to 700 per year are involved in any level of the prisons’ chemical dependency treatment programs. The Journal Star was quoting Steve King, Dept. of Corrections spokesperson, and Bill Schnackenberg, administrator for prison chemical dependency programs.

PRISON ART NEWSLETTER  A new publication which proposes “to extend artistic and political expression to all.” Can be seen on its companion website at www.prisonart.org or by writing to P.O. Box 31574, San Francisco CA 94131-0574. The website was created “to provide an online outlet for the sale of crafts and artwork created by both progressive political prisoners and social prisoners.”

NEW OFFICERS, NEBRASKA COALITION FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME  In April, the organization’s Board elected new officers. Mary Tyner, Director of the Sarpy Co. Victim/Witness Unit was elected President. JoAnna Svoboda is the new Vice-President, Sara Nelson, Secretary, and Lisa Cauble, Treasurer. Write to N.C.V.C. at P.O. Box 83412, Lincoln NE 68501 or call 1-800-944-NCVC.

COURT WATCH PROGRAM  According to an article in the Dec. 3, 2001 World Herald, the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council of Greater Omaha has initiated a court monitoring and research program. An attorney, Tracy Grinstead-Everly, will head the program. Her goal is to have trained observers in 16 Douglas County district courtrooms by the end of March. Other courtrooms may be included later. The hoped for result is that the criminal justice system (judges, juries and attorneys) will pay more attention to domestic-violence cases when trained observers are in the courtroom. The Domestic Violence Coordinating Council can be reached at 8990 W. Dodge Rd., Suite 205, Omaha NE 68114. Ph. 402-398-9928. E-mail: dvcc@mitec.net.

PILOT DAY REPORTING PROGRAM TO BEGIN IN JANUARY  The Douglas County Corrections Dept. will open a small adult day-reporting center at the Keeline Bldg in January of 2002. Eight to twelve inmates who would otherwise be incarcerated will participate in a variety of programs to be located at the Center. The Department hopes to open a much larger program when a suitable facility is available.

WOLF RECOVERY SERVICES is asking for financial support and also for items like food, paper goods, pillows, sheets, blankets and clothing. The non-profit corporation helps men who come from the streets, from detox, from prison or from treatment centers to transition back into the communities of Omaha and Lincoln. Men are provided with a safe place to live, food, treatment, spiritual guidance and counseling. Contact David Staenberg at Wolf House, 3423 Cuming St., Omaha NE 68131.

MALE INMATES MAY PROCREATE  This information is from “National News Briefs” in the December, 2001 issue of Corrections Today, the official publication of the American Correctional Association. A panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit stated that 41 year old William Gerber, serving a 111 year sentence in California, has a “fundamental right to procreate” that is not “temporarily extinguished” while he is serving time. Gerber had filed suit against the California Dept. of Corrections for not allowing him to mail a semen sample to a Chicago medical firm, with the intention of impregnating his wife by artificial insemination. The ruling also rejected the warden’s concerns that female inmates will seek to be artificially inseminated as well. “Gerber does not seek to be artificially inseminated as well,” the Judge wrote. “The two sexes are not similarly situated here.”

PERSONNEL STATISTICS, D.C.S  The Dec. 18, 2001 Monthly Data Sheet published by the Nebraska Dept. of Correctional Services lists the following personnel statistics as of March 31st of 2001:

- 1716 D.C.S. staff, of which 784 are uniformed.
- Staff turnover rate for 1-1-01 to 1-31-01 was 17.3%.
- Male staff - 1120 or 65/3% Female staff - 596 or 34.7%.
- 97 African American (5.7%)
- 3 Asian (0.17%)
- 64 Hispanic (3.7%)
- 9 Native American (.52%)
- 1539 White (89.68%)
- 4 Other (0.23%)
- Ratio of uniformed staff to inmates: 1: 4.89. (The inmate population at all facilities totalled 3,897 as of 12-11-01.)
A PRISON MINISTER’S PERSPECTIVE

The following excerpts are from “Change needed in criminal justice system must begin with analysis of current failures,” an article by Deacon Doots Dufour in the Nov./Dec. issue of Deacon Digest. Reprinted with permission. Dufour is a prison minister from the Austin, Texas diocese. N.C.J.R. invites comments from ministers in Nebraska prisons and jails.

Prison sentences do not change the destructive life-styles of the inmates. Deacons who are chaplains and volunteers in the prison system can have a significant, salutary effect on this system if they comprehend that:

- In general, there are no first-time offenders in jails and prisons. Most have a long series of brushes with the law, reflecting a dysfunctional unstable lifestyle, from early youth.
- The children who are troubled are recognizable in as early as pre-K and kindergarten. Schools and school districts must be lead to recognize that they are incubating future criminals when they are not successful in reaching troubled children.
- Punishment in jail or prison, no matter what the sentence length, does not affect sufficient change in the offender’s lifestyle to permit him/her to live a stable life.
- Currently, most of those in prisons will be released into the community without undergoing any lifestyle change and will inevitably go back to prison.
- When you tour the county jails you find they are inhabited overwhelmingly by the poor.
- You do not find many people who go to church every week in prison.
- Those who overcome permanently the dissolute lifestyle that got them incarcerated, begin with a spiritual awakening of the type long promulgated by alcoholics anonymous.
- This spiritual awakening happens across the spectrum of criminal offenders, the violent and the non-violent. Those deemed irretrievable are deemed so by prison authorities, not spiritual ministers. This spiritual awakening effects a change of heart by the individual. Punishment does not have any impact that changes hearts.
- The state parole systems are heavily weighted toward enforcement rather than rehabilitation, resulting in a large percentage of parolees being revoked and returned to prison for reasons other than committing another crime.
- Some 80% to 90% of prison inmates have dropped out of school before finishing high school.
- In prison, particularly, the inmate is dehumanized, often mistreated and stripped of all dignity as a human being when exactly the opposite is needed to make the individual feel good enough about himself to want to change his ways.
- The turnover in guards for the prison system is high, the pay is low, and they are inadequately trained to affect change in the inmates’ lives.

Deacons who are chaplains or who work in the criminal justice system in any capacity have an opportunity to affect changes in the prison system. It is not enough to minister to the incarcerated. There is a critical need to let the public understand the degrading conditions of prisons and to press the state systems and the legislatures for needed change. These bodies continue to put good money after bad and they need to know it.

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