

Focus on Kentucky: Criminal Justice

From 1996 to 2002 spending for Kentucky's criminal justice system increased by 74%, while spending on education grew only 29%.

From 1970 to 2000, there was a 434% increase in the rate of incarceration. The number of inmates per 100,000 population rose from 88 in 1970 to 382 in 2000.

Those imprisoned on drug charges bolstered the prison population that expanded by 64% in 10 years, but public policy also contributed to the rise with:

- mandatory minimum sentencing;
- retribution replacing rehabilitation;
- more restrictive use of parole;
- three-strike laws; and
- the war on drugs.

With Kentucky facing steadily increasing budget deficits, public officials are searching for alternative solutions.

Private Prisons

Some favor private prisons arguing the marketplace through competition will lower costs. Critics counter that to maximize their profits private prisons:

- encourage prison crowding;
- cut services to inmates; and
- employ correctional officers with less training and pay.

Catholic teaching warns against turning prisoners into commodities and stresses rehabilitation, not vengeance, in pursuing criminal justice.

Public Policy

While society must protect itself from violent people, public policies that promote restorative justice can help reform non-habitual, non-violent offenders, plus save money. These include:

- emphasizing higher education through community colleges;
- expanding facilities for the mentally ill;
- introducing drug courts and offering drug treatment more widely; and
- creating programs for community service, home incarceration and day reporting centers.

For More Information:

Visit the website of the Catholic Charities USA:
www.catholiccharitiesusa.org.

For Discussion and Reflection

1. What social and cultural forces are hurting my family life? What forces are strengthening my family life?
2. Besides voting, in what ways am I strengthening the larger community?
3. What can Catholics do to ensure that poor and marginalized people have a voice in matters affecting them and their communities?
4. Evaluate the level of polarization in your community and society in general. What can Catholics do to reduce polarization and promote dialogue?
5. Should convicted felons, upon release, be denied the right to vote?
6. Are there any functions, or responsibilities, of society that should never be outsourced for profit?
7. Evaluate the trend toward privatization. For prisons. For healthcare. For social security. For a municipal water supply.

Scripture Meditations

Leviticus 19:9-18

1 Peter 4:7-11

Luke 6:27-35

John 13:1-15



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Call to Family,

Community



**and
Participation**

Economic Justice
in 21st Century Kentucky:
Holding Ourselves Accountable
3—Who Pays the Bills

Call to Family, Community & Participation

Every Person Belongs

In the Hebrew Scriptures four categories of people enjoyed the special protection of loving God:

- the orphan;
- the widow;
- the stranger; and
- the poor.

These represented the most vulnerable in society. God commanded the community of Israel to care for them because they were children of God and people of God.

The human person formed in the image of God appears, not only sacred, but inherently social. God intends each person to find love and guidance as a member of the most fundamental unit of society, the family. In contrast to society's promoting a rugged individual or someone "self-made," Catholic teaching views each person as a person-in-community rooted in a family and belonging to the greater society.

Right to Participate

Every person belongs to a variety of political, social and economic institutions that must stand accountable concerning:

- what they do *to* people;
- what they do *for* people; and
- how people *participate* in them.

As a child of God, each person lives a **call to family, community and participation** for the advancement of the common good and the well-being of all.



Scripture Speaks

And he gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ....



(Eph 4:11–12)

Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it. (1 Cor. 12:27)

There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need.

(Acts 4:34–35)



People in Kentucky

While the family remains the basic unit of society, many families struggle to enable their children to reach their full potential in spite of disruptive forces.

- From 1980 till 2000 the number of single parent families rose from 16% to 26% of Kentucky families.
- Over 42% of single-mother households in Kentucky with children under 18 live below the poverty line.
- The Kentucky prison population has risen to over 24,000 with a near equal number on probation.

Family life also suffers from the scourge of alcoholism and drug abuse, unemployment and family violence. All these factors impact the children and influence their future behavior.

THE CHURCH TEACHES



Certain societies, such as the family and the state, correspond more directly to the nature of man.... To promote the participation of the greatest number in the life of a society, the creation of voluntary associations and institutions must be encouraged... "which relate to economic and social goals, to cultural and recreational activities, to sport, to various professions, and to political affairs." John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, 60. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1882.

It is the duty of the laity...by their free planning and initiative to permeate not only (people's) customs and mentality, but also the laws and structures of the civil community with a Christian sense of life. Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, n. 81.



It is a strict duty of justice and truth not to allow fundamental human needs to remain unsatisfied, and not to allow those burdened by such needs to perish. It is also necessary to help these needy people to acquire expertise, to enter the circle of exchange, and to develop their skills in order to make the best use of their capacities and resources. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, n. 34.