

Some Background

Why is Juvenile Justice Week of Faith & healing Necessary?

Each child entering the juvenile justice system is not an isolated individual, but a member of our community.

In Iowa 47 men and women who were arrested before they were 18 years old in Iowa are serving life without parole sentences. At least 7 other youth under the age of 18 are also currently incarcerated in our Iowa prisons. Our state also staffs daily for 198 beds in our juvenile detention centers. Most of these youth are victims of abuse; have suffered neglected childhoods; have not benefitted from educational opportunities; and have most likely witnessed violence inflicted on a family member or someone in their community. Every support system has failed them and they are wounded psychologically and emotionally. Many turn to substance abuse and replicate the violence they have experienced and observed in their fragile lives. Their actions and the community response has an economic, moral, social and human cost that the **Juvenile Justice Week of Faith and Healing attempts to address.**

Moral impact: To allow youth to be incarcerated for decades of their lives denies their human dignity. Medical and psychological neuroscience research affirms that youth do not have the same emotional level of maturity as adults. Punitive, long term sentences fail to acknowledge their ability to mature, to mold positive character traits, to become repentant and ask for forgiveness, and to move beyond selfish behavior to see the interconnectedness of working for society's common good. The ethnic and racially diverse coalition supporting Juvenile Justice Week of Faith and Healing represents the affirmation of the human dignity of each member of society.

Juvenile Justice Week of Faith and Healing seeks to raise awareness of the plight of victims of crime and juvenile offenders, to support their families and acknowledge that they are children of God. Through education, advocacy, and direct service projects, participating religious congregations will take leadership roles to stop the cycle of pain and hurt in our communities with a restorative model of justice. However, we all have a stake in this restorative justice model which allows forgiveness and the healing of broken relationships. Only then can the pain of offender, victim and community be transformed into a collective spirit of hope.

Social & Economic Impact: The social cost of juvenile crime impacts all members of the community. The funds needed to incarcerate youth reduces the funding for education, mental health services and housing which further reduces the social network that supports youth. Juvenile crime creates a culture of brokenness in communities. **Offenders** may live in hopelessness, with sentences lasting decades or even life without parole. Youth sentenced to life in prison have limited educational

opportunities and may not have access to mental health or substance abuse services. **Victims** live with a sense of violation and betrayal that cultivates fear. The **community** becomes divided taking sides on racial or economic demographics. **Juvenile Justice Week of Faith and Healing** attempts to interconnect the offender, the victim and the community.