

Titus House Newsletter

Titus House Ministries, PO Box 2376, Tijeras, NM 87059

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A Message to Brighten your Holidays

Thoughts by Don Johnston

Spending the holidays in prison can be downright miserable, and Christmas can be the worst of all. Most of us, if granted one wish on Christmas Day, would simply want to be with our loved ones enjoying a meal, giving and receiving gifts, and having a fun time together. I can picture you on Christmas Day locked up for most of the day in your tiny cell with a stranger, facing your un-screened toilet and your TV, I will again refrain from wishing you a happy Christmas. As many know if they have been following this newsletter I was in prison for 14 years. I hope the prisons where you are incarcerated will feed you a decent meal. But the true message is not with what we fill our bellies with but our spiritual man being filled with the Holy Spirit.

I was reading from Prison Fellowship the following on how to brighten the holidays behind bars.

WHY ARE WE CELEBRATING?

First, we can remember "the reason for the season." The time of Advent (the four weeks before Christmas) is a time to think about what Christmas truly means and what we are actually celebrating.

Although many people associate Christmas with Santa Claus, turkey dinners, and expensive gifts, Christmas is really about celebrating the birth of Jesus, the Son of God who came to earth and lived among us. And we are also celebrating the expectation that this Jesus who was born in Bethlehem will someday come again. He is the greatest gift we could ever receive!

The Gospel of John says that "the light (Jesus) came into the darkness of the world, and the darkness will never put the light out" (1:5). Prisons can be dark places, not because the lights are bad, but because so much misery, loneliness, and sin has been gathered into one place.

But prison life, as dark as it can sometimes be, can never put out God's light that comes in Jesus Christ. This light shines wherever you are, even in the darkest prison. Now that is really something to celebrate!

WHY DO WE GIVE GIFTS?

We give gifts at Christmas as tokens of God's great gift of Jesus Christ to us. If you think that Christmas gifts are about how big something is, or how much something cost, you might have it all wrong. A gift is only as valuable as the amount of love with which it has been given. A hand-drawn Christmas card from my child might be better than a Rolex watch. The baby Jesus in a manger in Bethlehem was a tiny gift, completely unnoticed by some, but it came with more love than the world has ever known. And what an impact that gift has had! Jesus' coming has influenced the entire course of history and brought hope into millions of lives.

It's pretty hard to give Christmas gifts to our loved ones while we're in prison. But there is a gift you can give that requires no money and doesn't have to make its way through the mail room. It doesn't cost anything to mail and it's faster than FedEx. It is the gift of prayer.

You can give a wonderful and precious gift to your children, or your family, or those around you simply by remembering them by name each day during Advent as you say your prayers to God.

THE GIFT OF PRAYER

To give the gift of prayer this Christmas start on Thanksgiving Day, thanking God for the important people in your life. Continue to pray for some other person (your children, nieces, nephews) each day until Christmas Day. In doing so, you will have given a gift to someone else that no amount of money could ever buy. Remember, there is no prison wall so high or so thick that prayer cannot pass right through it. Your prayers can go everywhere.

For those who haven't been praying very much, you could use this prayer by Jesus as a model:

Our Father, who is in heaven, holy is your name. May your Kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Please hear my prayer this day as I pray for (name). Please (say here what you wish to say), in Jesus' name. Amen.

We all can rest assured that the God who made the heavens and the earth will hear our prayers and will make sure that your gift of prayer gets to the right place this Christmas.



Sex Offender Registration Doesn't Help Victims, Hurts Young Offenders

By Malik Pickett and Emily Satifka

Jason was 14 years old when he met his first girlfriend, a 13-year-old neighbor of the foster family with whom he lived. After a few months of dating, his girlfriend's mother walked in on the teenagers engaging in consensual oral sex and called the police. Jason was arrested and charged with child molestation. He was adjudicated delinquent in juvenile court and placed on the California Sex Offender Registry. Before he was old enough to drive, Jason was branded a sex offender on a public, searchable website.

Now in his 30s, Jason suffers from depression and has experienced homelessness. Despite earning a college degree, he cannot find steady employment. An internet search shows he is a registered sex offender.

Jason is like many others who struggle to lead a healthy adult life because of a juvenile adjudication based on unsurprising adolescent behavior. States across the country place children as young as 8 years old on sex offender registries for conduct that is otherwise developmentally normal.

Required by federal law, this label imposes barriers on young people's access to education, employment and safe housing. It can devastate them psychologically with little benefit to the community.

Youth sex offender registration costs the public over \$3 billion a year. Rather than investing in preventive programming and victims' services, resources are routinely allocated to a carceral and punitive response. Meanwhile, research-

backed social programming and community needs remain largely underfunded.

State rules hard to understand

A recent report by Juvenile Law Center shows that 39 states place children on sex offender registries. The registration procedure and consequences vary widely from state to state. Youth can be required to register for their entire lifetime in some states, which dooms them to a life on the margins.

Indeed, once labeled a sex offender, the stigma remains regardless of how long the registration period lasts; web-based information and databases often remain online and accessible even if the period of registration has long since ended. These registration laws completely disregard the rehabilitative purpose of the juvenile justice system.

Today, approximately 200,000 individuals are on sex offender registries for offenses committed prior to age 18. Registered youth face harsh restrictions that regulate where they can live, work or attend school. Some states prohibit such youth from residing with other children in the home, which can preclude youth from living with siblings or their own children or partner's children. Registration can also prohibit youth from living within a church or school zone, effectively prohibiting them from practicing their religion or receiving an education.

State registration laws are complex and difficult even for most adults to understand. Yet youth are expected to understand and comply with the numerous restrictions and reporting

requirements, despite the many practical challenges of doing so. States require youth to update and verify their information regularly, including when any information has changed.

If a youth is traveling between states or even within counties in their own state, they may have to report or register. When they are unable to comply with the complex and untenable registration and reporting requirements, they can face fines, incarceration and extended registration.

Additionally, many states require information about registered sex offenders to be posted on a public website, made available at local police stations or disseminated to the youth's communities. This community notification often results in humiliation and social ostracism — even vigilante violence in some cases — and imposes a negative self-image upon the youth.

Children on sex offender registries are four times more likely to report a recent suicide attempt compared to nonregistered children who have engaged in harmful or illegal sexual behavior. Stigmatization from sex offender labeling frequently deprives youth of vital sources of psychological support at the precise time they most need community acceptance. And, in many cases, that support is not publicly funded or accessible to those who need it.

The draconian practice of youth sex offender registration imposes an unending loop of barriers and obstacles on youth without improving public safety. It also needlessly shifts resources away from important services such as sexual violence prevention and victim assistance. That is why the time is now to abolish the harmful practice of placing youth on sex offender registries.

Covid Update needed

Here at Titus House Ministries we have been getting a lot of returned mail. We have also been notified by a number of inmates that they had moved due to the Covid. Please help us help you by you providing us with any new address change. We want to be good stewards by not sending letters to a bogus address. Therefore, your help in this matter would be greatly appreciated. Also any financial help is greatly appreciated. Thanks for the stamps and prayers.



Community supervision, once intended to help offenders, contributes more to mass incarceration

Justice officials are recognizing that community supervision can be a tripwire that perpetuates incarceration based on crimeless technical violations

Miriam Aroni Krinsky and Vincent Schiraldi *Opinion contributors*

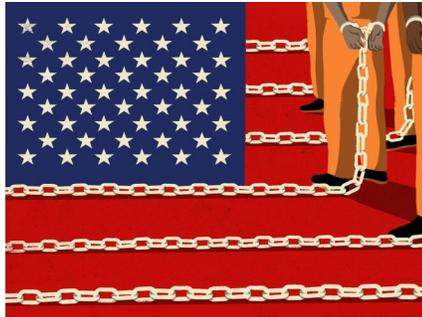
One of the first people to die of COVID-19 in New York City's notorious Rikers Island jail system was Raymond Rivera — a 55-year-old father and husband who lost his life in April. The “offense” that ultimately resulted in a death sentence for Rivera? Leaving a drug program without permission — a minor technical violation of the parole he was on for stealing a motorcycle cover and some bicycles.

There's a common misconception that probation and parole — sometimes called community supervision — are more lenient alternatives to incarceration. But justice officials are recognizing that community supervision can be a tripwire that perpetuates incarceration based on crimeless technical violations like the one that resulted in Rivera's incarceration and, ultimately, death.

That's why more than 50 reform-minded elected prosecutors have joined 90 current and former probation and parole leaders this week in issuing a statement calling for eliminating incarceration for technical parole and probation violations, reducing reincarceration for low-level new offenses by those under supervision, downsizing probation and parole, and making supervision remains “less punitive and more hopeful, equitable and restorative.”

A New York City Department of Corrections bus passes the sign near the gate at the Rikers Island jail complex in New York.

These system actors have seen firsthand that governments often put too many onerous conditions on people under supervision: Stay away from family members with records; don't change your address; come in for drug testing; check in frequently while holding down a job and caring for your family. Individ-



uals under community supervision are one missed appointment, one curfew violation or one late-fee payment away from a technical violation and possible imprisonment. We've created a system that too often sets people up for failure by requiring individuals who are trying to get back on their feet to be superhuman and error free.

Rivera was hardly alone. Almost 25% of people entering prison in 2017 were incarcerated for a technical supervision violation, rather than a new offense.

Kerry Lathan, who was a bystander shot alongside Grammy award-winning musician and philanthropist Nipsey Hussle, was then incarcerated for a technical violation for associating with Hussle, a known gang member.

It turns out, probation and parole too often don't serve as solutions to mass incarceration. They can be, as the joint statement recognizes, “overly burdensome, punitive and a driver of mass incarceration, especially for people of color.”

Over the past four decades, community supervision has ballooned. About 4.4 million people were under supervision in the USA in 2018. That is nearly twice the number of people who are incarcerated in our nation's jails and prisons.

In some jurisdictions, prison populations are falling, but admissions for supervision violations are rising. Reforms have largely overlooked the system of probation and parole that fuels incarceration through technical violations, without promoting public safety.

In 2017 alone, U.S. taxpayers spent \$2.8 billion on the people who entered prison for a technical violation. It would clearly be a much greater boon to wellness and safety if scarce resources were used to address the housing, education, health and employment needs of those under supervision, rather than disrupting people's lives, families and communities through unnecessary incarceration.

As a former prosecutor and former probation commissioner, we've seen firsthand how probation and parole contribute to incarceration of Black and Latinx communities, with technical violations exacerbating underlying issues like structural racism, substance use, housing insecurity and mental health, to name a few. Black people are more likely to be charged with parole violations than whites.

Rivera's death wasn't just a tragedy. It was a grave injustice that is far too common — something those of us working in the system see too often.

Our nation is at a watershed moment, with communities across the country demanding that we reimagine public safety and our criminal legal system to better serve all members of our community. Seizing that moment is going to require tackling and fundamentally transforming probation and parole systems that are fueling the very prisons and jails they were originally designed to decarcerate.



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Hebrew 13:3 - Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Remember if you change your address you need to let us know if you want to continue to receive this newsletter

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Thanks to Andrew S.

12-21-2007

ETERNAL LIFE, MY FAVORITE ... THANKS JESUS!

FIVE WEEKS TO CHRISTMAS AS I WRITE

by Alice Benson Johnston

I believe this Christmas will be like no other. Hiding out at home we are encouraged to keep it simple. If we have been used to having all the relatives over, it won't happen. If we buy a big evergreen tree down on the tree lot, drag it home on the roof of the car and cut a foot off the bottom like we've always done, we may be wondering what it would be like not to do that this year. If we have been ready to serve a stuffed turkey and the fixings to a house full of relatives, it may not happen. Limited to five people including yourselves what does that leave you? Just maybe we should look at the original Christmas... A young couple sets out to pay their yearly taxes. The journey by donkey was long and difficult especially since the young wife was due any minute. They were forced to travel to Bethlehem to pay their taxes. Arriving in town they sought shelter but all the inns were already taken. In despair they found a simple shelter and Mary gave birth to Jesus surrounded by curious people, various animals. The wise men were still on their way and never arrived to see the baby until he was a year or more old. (Yes, this is true – check your Bible), only a few local shepherds and a sky full of angels showed up for the great event. The angels announced: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." (Luke 2:1—14. We don't know that this event happened on December 25th or exactly when it did happen. I really liked what one person said of this event: "The son of God was born in the dirty stable of my heart." Will Christmas be different for you this year? Maybe it should be!

Christmas from a kid to now that I'm 91.

Maybe it wasn't perfect for everyone during the Great Depression but it pretty much was for me. I was the first child of a pastor and wife during the end of the Great Depression in Norwich, NY State. I was spoiled by parents with their first child. Summer was swimming and learning to roller skate on the sidewalk in front of our home. Television was years away and all there was to do was sliding down our hill in snow time or skating on the sidewalk in summer. My mother was a great cook and spent lots of time in her kitchen and my Dad invented all kinds of outdoor skills for the two of us. I usually had bandages on my knees in the summer and heavy boots and coat in the winter. Winter was a lot of fun as my Dad attached a long toboggan to the rear of his car and took kids for scary rides through our small town. My Dad was the pastor of a medium sized Baptist Church and I was sure of my personal salvation and baptized at the age of 9. Dad was asked by our mission board to build a church in the Philippines and we sailed by ship ending up with a trip around the world. Life was good for me and my brothers who followed after me. Some time I will entertain you with the chunk of time in between. What happened in between? World War II of course, high school friends going to fight in Japan and Europe.

See how challenging life can be if you just live long enough???



Circle of Concern has gone ZOOM

Our last meeting of the Circle of Concern was canceled face to face due to the Covid -19. Therefore, in a last minute we decided to hold our meeting by ZOOM. It seemed to work out well for us and we had people from West Virginia to San Diego, come join us! If you have been reading this newsletter you know the Circle of Concern is aimed at breaking down isolation and fear by providing a safe place for registrants and their loved ones to get together, build community, and learn ways

to step out and take charge of their lives and overcome the stigma they face.

The Circle of Concern is a group of concerned registered citizens, family and friends that meet together on the 3rd Sunday of each month. We are meeting this month on December 20, 2020 at 3 pm—5 pm. Mountain Standard Time. We will be on ZOOM for upcoming meetings. You can join us by video or dial in by phone.

We encourage and try to help each other. It is a safe



place to share our strengths and struggles. We hope you will join us. If you are planning to attend call Don at (505) 315-7940 so he can send you the information on how to join ZOOM.

