



# The Bible and Mass Incarceration

In the United States, mass incarceration is a cause of hunger and poverty.

## Introduction

People in prison are more likely to come from poor families. Prison populations are disproportionately African-American and Latino. Mass incarceration reflects the centuries-long history of racism in our country and is a manifestation of today’s entrenched racism. The number of incarcerated poor women—often those with children—has also been growing.

Reforming our country’s mass incarceration policies and practices is a crucial part of ending hunger and poverty. Bread for the World is urging Congress to adopt common sense reforms, including the end of prison terms for minor offenses and increased investment in rehabilitation programs. We also advocate for policies that allow people leaving prison (“returning citizens”) to re-enter their communities and to become employed.

## Scriptural Reflection

The creation stories in Genesis 1 and 5 affirm that God created women and men in God’s likeness. In Luke 10:27, Jesus says, “You shall love the Lord your God...and your neighbor as yourself.” Together, these texts affirm the inestimable worth of humans and call us to share God’s love with one another—even when the likeness of God is marred in a person’s life and distracts others from seeing the image of the divine.



Joseph Molieri/Bread for the World

**Dominic Duren, a returning citizen, with his son Dominic Jr. Duren not only landed a job after his release from prison, but the work he found is helping other returning citizens as the assistant director of a re-entry program at St. Francis de Sales Parish in Cincinnati, Ohio.**

When we understand the value and worth of our neighbors and ourselves, we long for a world that emulates the justice of God’s kingdom. Earlier in Luke (4:18), Jesus announces that the release of the captives is a sign of God’s kingdom. In Matthew 4:23, Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. Churches are called to be agents of Jesus’ healing by reaching out to prisoners, returning citizens, and their families. We also seek to change

the policies that impede healing.

Isaiah 60 and 61 present a vision of rebuilding, restoring, and renewing all that is broken in society. Today, we are called to work to end the brokenness of hunger and poverty in our communities. Those involved in the justice system deserve



our respect (Romans 13:1-5). But those authorities are also part of God's work of care and compassion. Thus, attention should be given to the healing and restoration of people who have been broken by crime and the criminal justice system.

### What You Can Do

1. Pray for people who are incarcerated and their families.
2. Communicate with your members of Congress and urge them to address the injustices of mass incarceration and to adopt measure to help return citizens re-enter society.
3. Find out how your church or denomination can collaborate with other churches and denominations to be a stronger voice on issues of mass incarceration at the local, state, and national levels.

### Prayer

O God, as Christ lives in us, we are welcomed into your reign of mercy and forgiveness. Grant hope and strength to those who are in prison, those who have been released from prison, and the families that miss them and wel-

come them. We pray also for our elected officials, that they might seek a more just and humane approach to imprisonment and rehabilitation. And grant us courage and compassion as we seek to end the injustice that keep people from living full and productive lives. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.



Rick Reinhard

**Prison often separates family members and removes breadwinners from a household. When families are together, they are more likely to avoid hunger.**

## WHAT IS BREAD FOR THE WORLD?

Bread for the World is a collective Christian voice urging our nation's decision makers to end hunger and poverty at home and abroad. God's grace in Jesus Christ moves us to reach out to our neighbors, whether they live next door, in another state, or on another continent. With letters, emails, phone calls, and visits, we urge Congress and the administration to change the policies and conditions that allow hunger to persist.

The individuals and churches involved in Bread for the World represent a broad range of Christian traditions. We embrace and reflect the growing diversity of culture, ethnicity, and religious practices. The empowerment of women and those most affected by hunger give depth and breadth to our witness to God's love and care for all.

In our efforts to create hope and opportunity for people who are hungry, we find insight and inspiration from the Scriptures. For many Bread members, the sacraments, the ancient creeds, and the liturgy are sources of strength and joy as we seek to share God's abundance with those who struggle with hunger and poverty.

### JOIN US

Bread's work is made possible by contributions from tens of thousands of individuals and thousands of churches across the country. We invite you to join us by visiting [www.bread.org/join](http://www.bread.org/join) or calling 800/822-7323.

Also, join us in praying for an end to hunger—and receive suggested prayers every other week—by visiting [www.bread.org/prayer](http://www.bread.org/prayer).