

Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry of New Jersey
Weekly Witness | April 11, 2017

It is easy to be cynical in our world today. Can anything really change for the better? Can humanity ever truly be redeemed? Can any human institution be reformed?

Hear the answer to this skepticism in the joyous refrain of Easter: Christ has risen!

Jesus has defeated the devil; new life is possible for us because of Jesus's sacrifice. Through the power of the resurrection, God's power for reform is encountered in the world.

So what of our incredulity and the evil around us? Some lovely Easter flowers, an arousing hymn, and a basket full of sweet treats--does this make all of the cruelty of our world vanquish? No, but these Easter expressions of new life point to the truth that God is at work in our world, and not just in token ways. God's power at work in us and in our institutions renews the world.

One of the human institutions that God knows something about from personal experience is the criminal justice system. And God has done great things for this sinful human institution in the USA. While the United States represents about 4.4 percent of the world's population, it houses around 22 percent of the world's prisoners. Here in New Jersey we have the biggest gap between black and white incarceration rates of any state, according to a [new report](#) from the [Sentencing Project](#). The Garden State puts black residents behind bars at 12 times the rate of white residents.

But this gap is expected to shrink due to recent changes to New Jersey's sentencing laws and bail process, thanks to God's work through advocates in our state. LEAMNJ along with other advocacy groups helped to usher in bail reform on January 1, 2017. Prosecutors have new tools to protect the public. Those accused of a crime do not go to jail based on their ability to pay monetary bail. In the new system, judges utilize an evidence-based risk assessment tool to help them make decisions about release, instead of basing decisions on an individual's ability to pay bail. Judges are able to detain high risk individuals who pose a risk to public safety, and are able to release lower risk individuals with conditions and supervision.

Richard Smith, president of the New Jersey State Conference of the NAACP has been encouraged by the reform: "Bail reform is a racial justice victory for New Jersey. At every point of the criminal justice system, people of color fare worse than their white counterparts, and the pretrial stage is no exception. Bail reform is helping to address these disparities."

Knowing that God can work to change the criminal justice system in a state with such disparities proclaims that God can surely help to alter any system of injustice. God is working through us, as advocates. Easter announces again God's activity in the world, and the power of new life in the midst of a sinful world. Praise the Lord, Christ is Risen!

Help to proclaim this power: share your hope and join the advocacy effort. Please share this Weekly Witness with your friends and family ([click here to subscribe](#)), invite your friends to "like" [Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry](#) on Facebook, and check out our webpage www.leadnj.org. The ministry of advocacy seeks to bear witness to God's activity in the world, helping to reform human institutions supporting justice for all of God's children.