

Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry of New Jersey
Weekly Witness | June 6, 2017

New Jersey incarcerates persons of color twelve times more frequently than white persons, even though persons of color are no more likely to commit a crime. The issues driving this injustice are many, including policing strategies, mandatory sentencing guidelines, workload of attorneys, and implicit racial bias in our culture. And the [consequences](#) are devastating. Persons with criminal convictions cannot receive public assistance, have limited job and educational opportunities, and have constrained housing options once their incarceration is part of the public record.

This reality costs too much. It costs too much wasted human potential and dignity. It costs too much to manage and run the twenty-two county and state facilities. (The [current budget](#) of the NJ Department of Corrections is over one billion dollars, approximately \$50,000 per inmate.) And the criminal injustices further fracture our society with spiralling effects.

So where is God in the midst of these tragic statistics and wrecked human lives? On Holy Trinity Sunday we are reminded that God is already at work in the world, in many various ways: through the redeeming acts of Jesus, through the power of the Spirit, and through the mighty creative power of God the Almighty. In today's Gospel we hear again Jesus's promise to his disciples: "I am with you always." Yes, even in the broken criminal justice system and inside prisons.

We can remember and celebrate God's constant presence through hearing and sharing the Word, through liturgy, in the Eucharist, in baptismal affirmation, and in service to our neighbors. At this moment, we have a clear opportunity to bear witness to God at work through the coordinated efforts of advocates who have been working for years to move legislation that will help to address the injustice of racial bias in the criminal justice system in New Jersey.

Right now legislation known as Racial and Ethnic Impact Legislation is sitting on our governor's desk. [This bill](#) puts in place a racial screen that would test all future legislation for racial and ethnic bias in matters pertaining to criminal justice in New Jersey.

Please contact Governor Christie and urge him to sign this legislation. [Follow this link](#) to send a quick email to the governor urging him to sign the legislation or give his office a call at (609) 292-6000.

God is at work through advocates, the legislature, and you as we all work to end this practice of discrimination.