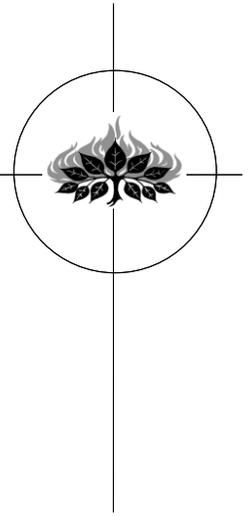


The Presbyterian Church in Canada L'Église presbytérienne au Canada



MODERATOR OF THE 137TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
The Rev. Dr. H.D. Rick Horst, B.A., M.Div., D.Min.

Wednesday, February 8, 2012

The Hon. Robert Nicholson, P.C.
Minister of Justice & Attorney-General of Canada,
House of Commons,
Parliament Buildings,
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Nicholson,

I am writing to you on behalf of the 137th General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada which met in London, Ontario, June 5 to 10, 2011.

A motion was considered and approved by General Assembly concerning the criminal justice system and the decision of the federal government to bring in changes to legislation regarding sentencing and prison construction.

The General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada affirms the federal government's responsibility to ensure public safety. This responsibility is shared with other levels of government.

An individual who commits an offence does so against the victim and also against the community and society at large. Any person convicted of a crime should face the appropriate consequence for his or her actions.

The General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada is concerned that building more prisons will not adequately address some major underlying issues in our justice and correctional system. As you are aware, 13% of male inmates and 29% of female inmates in federal prisons currently suffer from some form of mental illness. What programs and measurable objectives does the federal government have to treat these inmates?

The Presbyterian Church in Canada acknowledges the pain that is brought against a victim of a crime. The Presbyterian Church in Canada holds to its faith in the biblical values of restorative justice. These values include the possibility of the rehabilitation and transformation of offenders that make every effort to not reoffend upon the completion of their sentence and their return to the community.

If the resources to treat mental illness and substance abuse in our prisons are inadequate, what impact will this have when the individual has completed his or her sentence and has returned to the community? Will the offender be equipped to reintegrate into the community?

The General Assembly is also concerned that there are inadequate resources for training programs, so that inmates have opportunities to develop life skills and vocational skills.

Clerks of Assembly: The Rev. Stephen Kendall, The Rev. Donald Muir, The Rev. Dr. Tony Plomp

A disproportionate number of inmates in our prisons are poor. Many of them are Aboriginal men and women. If the high levels of poverty and inequality are not adequately addressed, the poor will continue to be disproportionately represented in prisons. What policies and programs does the Government of Canada have for crime prevention?

Finally, General Assembly would appreciate receiving information about the costs of building the new prisons.

I look forward to hearing from you. Rest assured of our continuing prayers.

Yours sincerely,



The Rev. Dr. H.D. Rick Horst,
Moderator,
137th General Assembly,
The Presbyterian Church in Canada

CC: Jack Harris, New Democratic Party Justice Critic
Maria Mourani, Bloc Québécois Justice Critic
Hon. Irwin Cotler, Liberal Party Justice Critic
Elizabeth May, Green Party
Sen. John D. Wallace, Chair, Senate Standing Committee – Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Sen. Joan Fraser, Deputy Chair, Senate Standing Committee – Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Sen. W. David Angus, Member, Senate Standing Committee – Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Sen. George Baker, Member, Senate Standing Committee – Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Sen. Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu, Member, Senate Standing Committee – Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Sen. Maria Chaput, Member, Senate Standing Committee – Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Sen. Jean-Guy Dagenais, Member, Senate Standing Committee – Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Sen. Linda Frum, Member, Senate Standing Committee – Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Sen. Mobina S.B. Jaffer, Member, Senate Standing Committee – Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Sen. Serge Joyal, Member, Senate Standing Committee – Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Sen. Daniel Lang, Member, Senate Standing Committee – Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Sen. Bob Runciman, Member, Senate Standing Committee – Legal and Constitutional Affairs