

# SAGE



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### E-bulletin

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## Welcome to SAGE no. 7

Welcome to SAGE no. 7– this issue of SAGE focuses on the **Children and Family of the Incarcerated**.

The reality of the justice system in Canada is that too often the children and family of the incarcerated become hidden victims. The justice system`s focus on punishment leave little time and resources for victims. Often family members are left to deal with not only the emotional consequences of crime but also the financial consequences. Research conducted in the United States suggests that parental incarceration can have direct consequences for children that include:

- Feelings of shame, grief, guilt, abandonment, and anger;
- Social stigma;
- Disconnection from parent;
- Poor school performance;
- Impaired ability to cope with future stress and trauma<sup>1</sup>

With Canadian prison populations increasing, the families of the incarcerated represent increasingly significant collateral damage of our penal system. Through this issue of SAGE you will explore a few of perspectives on this issue. We start with an editorial by CCJC`s former Executive Director Janet Handy that points to some recent media attention that has brought these issues to light. We also look at work being done within the Quaker community in conjunction with the United Nations Rights of the Child. We offer a contribution from the Canadian families and Corrections Network (CFCN) who work assisting families affected by criminal behaviour, incarceration and reintegration. We also offer a review of a book co-edited by CCJC Board Member Rebecca Jaremeko Bromwich entitled “Incarcerated Mothers.”

We hope this issue of SAGE will provide you with an opportunity to reflect on some important questions about the unique needs of these invisible victims.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Bliss

*Research and Communications Co-ordinator*

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<sup>1</sup> Vigne, N., Davies, E., Brazzell, D, Feb. 2008, **Broken Bonds, Understanding and Addressing the Needs of Children with Incarcerated Parents**, Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center, [http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411616\\_incarcerated\\_parents.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411616_incarcerated_parents.pdf)

## Editorial

*But Jesus said, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*

– Matthew 19:14

Our focus in this edition SAGE is on the children and families of incarcerated people as well as the children of victims. Often still unseen and unheard, children and family members become secondary victims to the impacts of crime and violence. If left unattended, the capacity for resentment in these family members remains high. Instead of a system which encourages repair and healing, we develop instead a society where these children and other family members are isolated and ostracised by their parents' /spouses' mistakes.

A small example of the attack on family reintegration was the arbitrary cancelling of pizza dinners in many institutions across Canada this past year ([Click here for an overview of the issue](#)). Until last year incarcerated parents could provide a pizza dinner on family visiting day out of their own earnings for their children and spouses. The cancelling of this privilege, made a direct statement to these children that their incarcerated parents are not worthy to provide for them

under these circumstances. Not only did it strip the parent of the capacity to have some sense of pride and accomplishment, it stripped the family of the opportunity to have some autonomy or separation within the prison context itself, from the crimes already committed. It makes punishment continual and punishes children by extension.

A second example of the impact of our prison system on families was revealed in great depth through the Ashley Smith inquiry. Not only was the treatment of Ashley deeply flawed, but the limited and thwarted capacity for her mother to

be engaged in dialogue with the system as her daughter deteriorated, was also deeply flawed. ([Click here for an overview of the Ashley Smith Inquest](#))

Unfortunately unless these practices become public it is difficult for the general public to signal its concern. Because, as people who work with and therefore know about incarcerated persons, what we see and what the

***“Each year, at least 25 000 children across Canada have a mother in prison”***

Source: Canadian Associations of Elizabeth Fry Societies « Mothers in Prison » at <http://www.caefs.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Mothers-in-Prison.pdf>

general public cannot see, is the capacity for reform and reintegration. Without this exposure the public cannot believe that incarcerated people can somehow still provide substance, comfort and support in some small way to the idea of family and keeping that family intact. Unfortunately when someone goes to prison in our

country, one might say that the whole family goes to prison. Indeed the kind of changes taking place in our prison system to dismantle reintegration infrastructure capacity is continually undermining the family ability to stay either intact or at least acknowledged.

*Janet Handy M. Div., M.Ed. is the Former Executive Director of the Church Council on Justice and Corrections. She holds a Masters of Divinity focusing on Pastoral Care and Social Justice Ministry and a Masters of Education focusing on Applied Developmental Psychology of Adolescents and Children. Jan is currently working as Executive Director at the Child Advocacy Centre in Niagara.*

## My Family Member Just Went to Prison and...

By Louise Leonardi

**Can I visit? ...Do you have money to help me travel?  
...I am in a wheelchair, are the institutions  
accessible? ...Why can't I hug my son?**

These are just some of the questions Canadian Families and Corrections Network get asked from women whose partners, sons, fathers, mothers and other family members are in prison through our toll-free line, emails, etc. Some parts of the questions are straightforward, for example “the forms to visit are located on the Government of Canada Corrections website”, but some are much more complicated. How do you explain to someone the impact it will have on them after they take a bus or drive for hours, face metal detectors, drug dogs, ion scanners, guards and a long wait each time they want to visit? And help them consider where they may find funding in their social network to make the trip and added expenses of meal and incidentals? And what if their loved one is not incarcerated in the same province and they have to organize travel to get to the institution, determine where to stay, what the security procedures are and hope that when all this is ready, something doesn't go wrong inside the prison that forces Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) to lock-down the institution and cancel all visits.

**What should I say to our children? ...My husband is not the custodial parent of my daughter, can she still visit? ...I miss Mom, why did she leave me?**

Visiting is only one of the challenges for a family member of an incarcerated individual. What about the children? One call CFCN received revealed that the children thought Daddy was ‘away working’. Since Dad’s sentence was only about 2 years the parents thought this answer was the best one for them. But the children found out from a neighbour and Mom was now struggling with the frustration and agony of the children’s comments of “You lied to us!”, “Can we see him?”, “Is he okay?” and “What did he do?”.

It is not easy to have a parent inside. Children of offenders are ignored, teased and often bullied at school because they have a parent in jail which may affect their self-esteem, scholastic marks and interpersonal skills. They are at a higher level of risk factors that affect their social, emotional, financial, and educational well being as they grow. But children don't realize that. Most just want Mom or Dad to come back and take them to the school bus in the morning and make Saturday pancakes like they

used to. Children love the parent who is incarcerated and this is the only 'crime' they've committed!

Children and women left behind are 'victims of the consequences of crime' and are the ones who have to deal with feelings of loneliness, shame, anger and grief; effects of the loss of family income; and are filled with questions and concerns for their loved one who is incarcerated.

Women may experience an extreme sadness that their partners are not there to watch and participate as the children grow up and feel a great loneliness without their partner. The weight of responsibility is heavy. Navigating the security procedures and protocols of Canadian institutions are not easy and they often feel 'guilty by association', as if they were an accomplice in the crime, even if it happened years before they met their partner.

Families are often ostracized and isolated in their community at a time when the woman is thrust into single parenting, children are stigmatized, financial resources are low and as a family they may need the help and resources in the community the most. One of the noticeable gaps across Canada is the lack of support groups and programming for families of offenders.

### **How do I get enough money? ...Can I send pictures of the children?**

And how do you support someone who is incarcerated? Many women find it a challenge to meet their mortgage and monthly bills when financial means are cut with the loss of their partner's income. They do not have enough to live on themselves let alone assist their partner inside with money for long distance phone calls, clothing, legal fees, etc. This affects women currently in the work force and older women, dependent on their partner's Old Age Security benefits to make ends meet, which are suspended when someone is incarcerated as per recent Bill C-31.

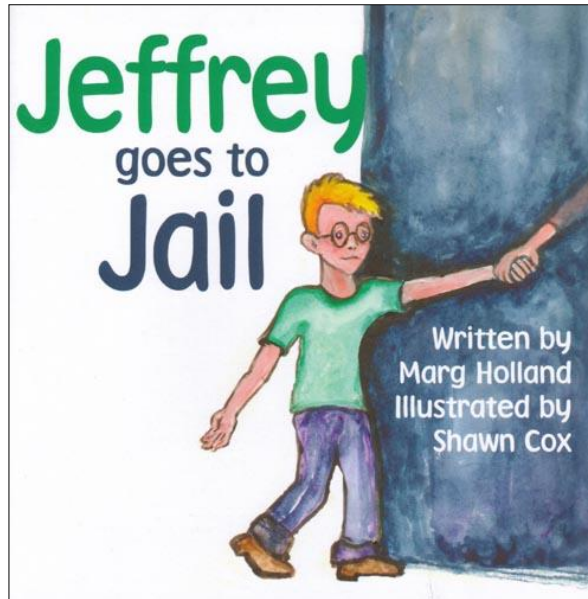
Women with incarcerated husbands often have the responsibility of keeping the family unit together with phone calls, traveling to the prison, writing letters, etc., so relationships can be maintained between the incarcerated person, the children and the extended family.

Sometimes incarceration causes conflict within the family unit. It is hard to hear about families who are struggling with the fact that a sister may chose to end her relationship with an incarcerated brother and is feeling pressured by other family members to accept his calls. Or the wife who still sees good in her husband and wants to support him but is being pressured by her family members to not visit. It is not an easy road.

**How can I find out which institution my husband is in? ....How can I find out if she's okay? ...My son has mental health issues, how can I make sure he is getting proper treatment?**

There are no words to describe the worry. It is tremendously difficult to function, day by day, not knowing if your loved one is okay. You can hear the pain in the voice of a wife who cannot find out where her husband has been transferred. And you feel the tears of the mother who calls and says she has not heard from her daughter for several weeks and is imagining the worst.

**How does Canadian Families and Corrections Network help? ...How can you help?**



Canadian Families and Corrections Network focuses on families and children who are affected by crime. Our mission is “to build stronger and safer communities by assisting families affected by criminal behavior, incarceration and family/community reintegration” and we gratefully accept all donations to help us accomplish this mandate. CFCN runs a toll-free line for support and referrals, produces a periodic newsletter and sends information packages to families that include our United Nations recognized storybook “Jeffrey Goes to Jail” to prepare children planning to visit an institution. CFCN works to create innovative material, solid research, unique programs and valued policy development to strengthen the family unit and the lives of everyone in it.

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## BC Mother-Child Program Re-Instituted

By Rebecca Bromwich, CCJC Board Member

It is a fact poorly understood by the general public that many women in prison, and in some jurisdictions the *majority* of woman prisons, are mothers. Often, they are mothers of babies and young children. While having a parent in prison is always disruptive to families, this is particularly the case when the incarcerated parent is the mother. Especially because most of these incarcerated mothers are the primary caregivers for their children and many of them are single parents, the incarceration of a mother often results in the removal of a baby or child to state care and ultimately crown wardship. Losing contact with her children can be profoundly devastating a woman and it can have serious detrimental effects on children as well. Mother-child programs in prisons help to foster ongoing connections between women in prison and their children that are of long-term benefit to the children, the mothers and to society. They have demonstrated positive results in facilitating the rehabilitation of incarcerated mothers and help in their reintegration upon release. Also demonstrable is their benefit to children.

Despite the clear benefits of contact between incarcerated mothers and their children, a longstanding program that allowed BC inmates at Alouette Institution to spend time with their babies was nonetheless recently canceled. However, in December of 2013, the British Columbia Supreme Court overturned this cancellation and reinstated the province's mother-child program. Even better, the Court affirmed that having access to their babies was an important Constitutional right of incarcerated mothers as a principle of fundamental justice. This is good news indeed!

***“Two-thirds of the women in Canadian Prisons are mothers and the majority of them are the sole providers for their children”***

Source: Sarra, Samantha (2013) “Bonding Through Bars: The health and human rights of incarcerated women” accessed May 2, 2014 at: <http://rabble.ca/news/2013/05/bonding-through-bars-health-and-human-rights-incarcerated-women>

To learn more about the case, see:

*Inglis v. British Columbia (Minister of Public Safety)* 2013 BCSC 2309  
<http://www.courts.gov.bc.ca/jdb-txt/SC/13/23/2013BCSC2309.htm>



## Quakers Fostering Justice:

By Glenn Morison, CCJC Board Member

Canadian Friends Service Committee's (CFSC) Quakers Fostering Justice (QFJ) program works toward discerning, developing and encouraging responses that actively prevent harm, repair harm and move beyond harm in relation to the justice system through means that are healing for all concerned and for society as a whole. The fostering of justice as healing is the ground from which QFJ's methods, processes and partnerships emerge. QFJ achieves its goals through: Discerning, understanding, researching and monitoring the root causes of injustice in a manner that informs our work; providing relevant information, education and dialogue opportunities; engaging with policy processes; providing concrete assistance through small community grants, workshops and support for participation at conferences and events; and working in partnership with a range of stakeholders.

When the Canadian Friends Service Committee's Quakers Fostering Justice program consulted with people working on restorative justice and youth justice issues, there were repeated references to the need for more and better data and information about youth and justice issues. As so much work is carried out in segmented manner people and organizations are only accessing fragments of the bigger picture, there is no systematic linkage of research and bodies of practice that informs the bigger picture. This indicated the need for some form of "knowledge brokering". In October 2013, CFSC hosted a two-day

*“Children of  
incarcerated parents  
are four times more  
likely to be in conflict  
with the law.”*

Source: <http://www.featforchildren.org/>

workshop in Toronto with a wide range of representatives working on youth issues from across Canada (youth workers, corrections, social workers, agencies, justice system, etc.) to explore in detail what this "knowledge brokering" would look like.

The workshop commenced with participants sharing what they knew and discussing information needs that would enhance their work. They then explored how they gathered information, "connected-the-dots" and translated the connected-dots into successful action. There were many insights and the following key themes, crucial to any systemic change and success, emerged: "engaging the

voices of youth” in all aspects of the work; clarity of focus; persistence; working collaboratively; and feedback loops.

Participants described how they needed more opportunities to network and dialogue, particularly at the national level, and came with incredible energy and momentum to get some kind of knowledge brokering off-the-ground as soon as possible. There was agreement that the knowledge brokering be anchored in a child’s rights framework. There was also agreement among participants to learn more about the UN Convention on the Rights of

the Child (UNCRC) and incorporate it into their work and for sharing resources on youth justice issues with the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC). Increased sharing of information will assist the work of CCRC, and many others, in ensuring compliance to the UNCRC’s recommendations for Canada. As a result, CFSC was tasked with developing a “pilot ‘knowledge brokering project” for the winter of 2014 and an evaluation of it by workshop participants.

## Book Review: Incarcerate Mothers

### **Incarcerated Mothers: Oppression and Resistance**

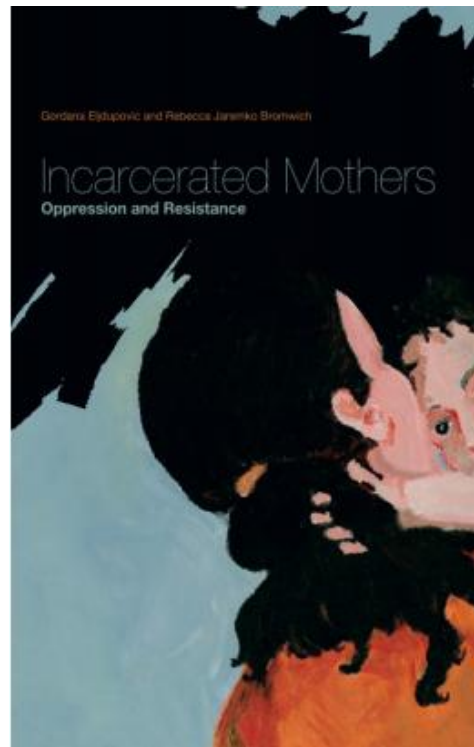
By Gordana Eljdupovic and Rebecca Bromwich. Bradford, Ontario: Demeter Press, 2013. 230 pages

Review by Shelly Chawla, M.Ed,

Motherhood is one of the most rewarding experiences for women and there are no words that can describe the bond between a mother and her infant. Unfortunately, not all women get to experience the true joy of motherhood because of circumstances that appear to be beyond their control. For example, how can a single mother, who does not have the emotional support or financial resources, embrace the journey of motherhood when there are a number of other stress related factors she is trying to cope with? How can she develop a healthy rapport with her child(ren), if she is working more than 40 hours per week in order to try to make a decent living, so she is able to provide her family with the basic necessities of life, such as food, shelter, clothing? Well, some might say that at least the children are in the care of their mother, which is better

than not having their mother present within their immediate environment. However, what about women who become incarcerated while pregnant or what about single mothers with children who become incarcerated? What factors should be considered for these women when they are entering motherhood or are already in motherhood?

For those who are interested in learning about the topic of motherhood and incarceration, this book is composed of a series of research papers presented by a number of professionals, who explore different circumstances, that impact mothers before and during incarceration, by assessing different qualitative variables including race, age, and socioeconomic factors. Other key points presented in this work describe factors such as the potential long term psychological and emotional impacts on the children and the family unit as a whole, which includes, but is not limited to how far the institution is from where the mother is being held, in comparison to where her child(ren) and/or extended family reside, as well legal implications, which may



include, but is not limited to, having to fight for custody while incarcerated.

One of the main themes that appear throughout this work is that of the factors that may impact women from different cultural backgrounds before, during and after incarceration. For example, researchers focus on the preceding socio-economic factors surrounding the incarceration of Aboriginal mothers, within Canadian institutions, which includes providing the reader with certain quantitative and qualitative variables, such as the rates and reasons of poverty that might impact Aboriginal women. Another chapter focuses on the incarceration of Indigenous Australian mothers, where the researchers cite

how Indigenous women suffer from a high amount of family violence as well as abuse, which consequently leads to incarceration. The researchers also present a chapter on mothers in French prisons, and indicate how mother's incarcerated in France, can stay with their infant, until the child is approximately 18-months old.

Overall, this work is certainly valuable for students and professionals studying and working in the fields of Criminology, Women's Studies, Aboriginal Studies and Psychology, who are interested in learning about the factors leading up to the incarceration of mother's as well as the factors that mothers may have to face during incarceration.

***“In addition to the separation from their parents, children of incarcerated mothers are more likely to experience extreme poverty, as well as being more likely to witness or be victims of violence.”***

Source: Canadian Associations of Elizabeth Fry Societies « Mothers in Prison » at <http://www.caefs.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Mothers-in-Prison.pdf>

Interested in learning more about incarcerated mothers? This 2013 Canadian book *Incarcerated Mothers: Oppression and Resistance* is a collection of papers authored by mothers in prison, lawyers, psychologists, women's studies scholars and corrections officials:

<http://brunswickbooks.ca/Incarcerated-Mothers/>

## Additional Reading and Resources

“**Mothers in Prison**” by Canadian Associations of Elizabeth Fry Societies

To access this report online: <http://www.caefs.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Mothers-in-Prison.pdf>

**Mothers offering Mutual Support (MOMS)** Ottawa, Ontario:

MOMS' (Mothers Offering Mutual Support) objective is to offer a welcoming environment where mothers, with a son or daughter involved in the justice and/or corrections process, can support each other and share information through monthly support meetings, meditation sessions and guest speakers. They also create opportunities for advocacy in the greater community regarding concerns with the justice and corrections systems and the impact it has on families of those who have offended or are in remand custody. For information: <http://www.momsottawa.com/>

**Canadian Families and Corrections Network (CFCN)**

CFCN works to build stronger and safer communities by assisting families affected by criminal behaviour, incarceration and community reintegration. Their website offers a wealth of information and resources.

For more information: <http://www.cfcn-rcafd.org/>

**Vanier Institute of the Family**

*Families and Incarceration*, Transition magazine, Summer 2011, Vol. 41, No. 2.

To access online: <http://www.vanierinstitute.ca/include/get.php?nodeid=1636>

“**Invisible Victims**” by Sarah Chandler

An article written by CCJC Board Member Sarah Chandler which raises some important questions about the impact of the penal system on children. *Quaker Concern*, Vol. 39, No.2, Spring 2013, p. 1.

To access online: <http://quakerservice.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Spring-2013-QC.pdf>

## Join the Discussion

With each edition of SAGE CCJC offers a reflection question on our website ([www.ccjc.ca](http://www.ccjc.ca)), in an effort to enhance dialogue with our members. [Click here to join the conversation](#). This month's question, submitted by Greg Dunwoody, CCJC Board Member and Chaplain, 14 years, at Headingley Correctional Centre, Province of Manitoba.

### **Children at the Centre: A new shape for justice and corrections?**

*"...and a little child shall lead them." (Isaiah 11:8)*

Maybe the voices – and the silences – of the little children need to be more widely heard by the adults currently working in justice and corrections, by our elected representatives and society as a whole. Radical, hope-filled and life-giving changes might then happen for children and their families as they encounter the justice system and the incarceration of a parent.

As a prison chaplain of some 14 years now I am very much aware of how often the children are not at the centre of justice and corrections. Jesus talked about welcoming a little child. Indeed, becoming like a child is a quality for living or entering into the kingdom of heaven. When it comes to children and the justice system two of Jesus' sayings strike me particularly as a chaplain in the prison context:

*"Occasions for stumbling bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes."*

*"Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven." (Mathew 18:7, 10)*

These are strong sayings and they call us to engage justice and corrections as these impact the children. Maybe, if we all knew the children then we would take a different approach to restoring justice and living justice at the first and most basic level: the family and its neighbourhood. The care and the needs of children are often neglected, if not forgotten altogether, in the process of justice and the management of corrections. Could today become the time when the care and the needs of the children are given a central place in justice and corrections?

*“I thank you Father, Lord of Heaven and earth because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.” (Luke 10:21)*

Often enough, for example, the children are present when an arrest is made. How is this done with care for the children? What would the children ask for? Later, when a parent goes for bail, greater attention is given to previous charges and convictions and the present charge than to the care and needs of the children. This, even though the time for previous convictions has been served. I remember a case where a working father was denied bail on a domestic charge. This meant that his wife and two teenage children eventually had their house foreclosed, went on welfare for the first time, and moved to a poorer part of the city. As a consequence, the teenage children changed schools and lost their peer support. When the father was released later the same year and went back to work, the teenagers moved to a third school and a third residence as home. More alternatives to incarceration are needed for a restorative justice that keeps children and families at the centre, at the heart of our care.

*“if any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones...it would be better if a great millstone...” (Matthew 18:6)*  
*[author’s comment: this is a rather harsh Biblical saying only raised to show the importance of tending to the children and who is responsible for putting a stumbling block in place.]*

By their very structure, systems of both Justice and Corrections carry imbalances of power, authority and presumed wisdom over those they claim to serve. We know that the poor are incarcerated at disproportionate rates. We also know that the children of the incarcerated and the spouses experience hardships in many different aspects of their lives and these come with a tremendous social cost to all of us, their neighbours. When someone has done harm there is a critical need to focus on healing of everyone affected, especially the children.

*“People were bringing infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it.” (Luke 18:15)*

What is the experience of children when they follow their parent to court, which often takes place in large, unfamiliar and cold buildings? They see people wearing strange robes, speaking a strange language, talking to each other and not their parent. I remember a wife-mother with a new born baby being asked to leave the courtroom during the husband-father’s case because the baby was crying.

In contrast, *“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them!” (Mark 10:14)*

In the courtroom children come hoping to see their incarcerated mom or dad; maybe receive a hug and a kiss. Instead children see dad or mom led to the prisoner box. At the end of the hearing children may see their parent led away in handcuffs. No hugs or kisses here! In some situations a parent is not brought to the court house. The children and spouse attend only to discover that the incarcerated parent is on an internal video monitor that transmits from the prison to the court room. In some situations, only the judge actually sees the picture. How would placing children at the centre with tender care call for new practices in justice and corrections?

In a number of correctional facilities across the country ALL visiting is done with a glass partition between the family and the incarcerated parent. I experienced a young girl visiting her father with the mother. She saw her father on the other side and she began sobbing and wailing “Daddy, Daddy, Daddy” as her little hand was scratching and sliding down the glass trying to touch her father.

*“In the very place where it was said to them: You are not my people, there they shall be called children of the living God!” (Romans 9:26)*

A sentence to federal time is simply a sentence of two years or more. In many cases this means a sentenced parent will be in custody quite a distance away from the children, often out of province. Frequently the children and family is too poor and with few resources to move and live closer to the incarcerated parent. Again, the needs and care of the children should be at the centre.





If you enjoyed reading this edition of SAGE and value the work of **The Church Council on Justice and Correction**, please consider making a donation!

Donations can be made through our website at [www.ccjc.ca](http://www.ccjc.ca) or mailed to our office at:

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