

77-GS-75 VOTED: The Eleventh General Synod adopts the Overture on "A Moratorium on the Construction of New Prisons and Jails" as amended.

OVERTURE: ON A MORATORIUM ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEW PRISONS AND JAILS

This overture requests that the 11th General Synod declare itself in favor of a moratorium on the construction of new prisons and jails other than replacement without expansion until alternatives to incarceration have been fully implemented.

BIBLICAL/THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE:

'Woe to the legislators of infamous laws to those who issue tyrannical decrees, who refuse justice to the un- fortunate and cheat the poor among my people of their rights". (Isaiah 10:1-2)

"Keep in mind those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; and those who are being badly treated, since you too are in the one body." (Hebrews 13: 3)

The American criminal justice system has its roots in religious history. In late 18th-Century Philadelphia and New York religious persons, concerned about injustices they perceived, proposed the concepts inherent in today's jails and prisons. Two key words used in their efforts reflect their religious orientation: cell and penitentiary. The cell, from the monastic, is a place for solitary confinement, and a penitentiary, a place to become penitent.

Today's prisons and jails resemble those originally pro- posed by religious reformers, however there is little consensus as to their purpose and *l* or function. The inequities of the criminal justice system have been continuously portrayed in the media over the past two years. As religious people we fail to see how the construction of new prisons, jails and juvenile facilities to continue and expand the use of incarceration addresses these in- equities. We affirm our commitment to strive for justice for all-rich and poor alike.

IMPLEMENTATION

The 11th General Synod calls upon the Commission for Racial Justice (CRJ) and the Joint Strategy and Action Commission (JSAC) of the National Council of Churches (NCC) to continue to provide leadership in moratorium efforts.

The 11th General Synod encourages conferences, associations, local churches and individuals to be active in their own communities to the purposes of this position.