



Detention Centers and Prisons are Centers of Slavery

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This is the third year i'm invited to write for this publication and what i'm passionate about remains the same: curiosity, storytelling, and the impacts of our carceral systems and what our faith communities' roles are in preventing more incarceration.

Two years ago, i invited us to ask why our churches aren't addressing the carceral system's impact on our communities and last year, i asked how different our churches could look if we engaged in the practice of deep listening through storytelling? i want to resurface these questions, especially now that this current Administration's policies around immigration are deeply entrenched with the wealth and price of stock for the private prison industrial complex (see, <https://www.marketplace.org/story/2025/08/18/who-profits-from-detaining-immigrants>).

Delving deeply into the first invitation, why aren't our churches addressing the carceral system's impact on our communities. i don't want us to take this question lightly, because if you click the article quoted above, you will read how the prison industrial complex is expanding at a rapid pace and who benefits. What is it that our churches should be looking for and then how are we to respond?

Luckily, i get to host the Nurture the Soul series where we'll be delving into these questions. First though, i recommend looking into where prisons and/or detention centers are geographically located in your state, what are the



inside those facilities (think access to healthy foods, medical care, etc.), and then look into which ones have been closed and re-opened/sold to a private prison company such as the GEO Group or CoreCivic? Finally, if you lean towards the value of property vs. human life, ask what this prison/detention center does for your property values or even the image of your community?

For example, where i am geographically located, the state's first private prison built in the 1990s was closed due to horrid conditions that impacted the rights of the humans incarcerated there, as well as being a tax burden on the hard-working people who live in the state. In early 2025, this closed prison was sold to a private prison company, Utah-based Management and Training Corporation, without local officials or community members being informed. This company has explicitly stated they are reopening it to house a minimum of 500 humans who have been detained by ICE/DHS and/or BP. Additionally, an airport nearby began construction on two wide-body hangers, and the community is wary of the timeline of the construction as they are surmising it is for flights that contain detainees in the soon-to-be-opened detention facility. While many officials in charge of opening or building these types of facilities talk about job growth, what about the people who are incarcerated/detained, their families and loved ones? Where does justice, forgiveness, and transformation come in? How does job growth relate to your understanding of Jesus' teachings or the Spirit's guidance in our understanding of Christianity?

So, what does storytelling have to do with the above increase of money around detention facilities and private prisons? If we aren't open to hearing the stories of those impacted, how is it we live into what our scriptures ask us to do and how to be in the world? Storytelling is vital because it helps hold us accountable to how we see people for people and not as numbers to attribute to job growth or worse, dehumanization. Without stories, we're susceptible to allowing slavery masked as "safety" to continue to grip this great nation and i don't know about you but that isn't the type of Christianity i practice.

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