

# PRISONERS, PRISONS AND RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

## SECTION A

### Introduction and Social Justice Statements

On Social Justice Sunday September 2011, two key Statements were issued:

1. **I was in Prison and you visited me** - published by the National Council of Churches in Australia. <http://www.ncca.org.au/files/sjs-2011-screenfile1.pdf>
2. **Building Bridges, Not Walls – Prisons and the justice system** - published by Australian Catholic Bishops Conference  
<http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/CONTENT/PDF/Social%20Justice%20Statement%202011-2012.pdf>

Following the release of these two Statements, more than twenty people began gathering through the South Australian Council of Churches. The group became known as **Circles of Healing**. It reflected on the two statements and liaised with a range of people across the prisons and justice sector.

In particular, Circles of Healing noted that the two Statements described how:

- the **most disadvantaged** are highly represented in the prison population, with references to **Postcodes of Disadvantage**.
- the increase in prisoners being incarcerated is **at a rate faster than population growth**.
- there is a role for the churches in advocating for convicted prisoners to be given greater access to **rehabilitative services**.

Circles of Healing expressed a desire to alert people across the churches to the **many existing channels** on prisons and justice and also to **develop new responses** in the hope that the church community in particular would:

- Become more aware of and better respond to the needs of people who are in prison.
- Advocate for reducing conditions of inequality and disadvantage.
- Contribute to the restoration of right relationships for all.

One result has been an ecumenical resource **Prisoners, Prisons and Respectful Relationships**. It is designed to encourage action and advocacy across the churches. The resource is an ongoing work. New sections will be added over time.

Its effectiveness in encouraging action and advocacy, and in shaping direction will depend on the will of people to engage more deeply with the issues as a response to the Gospel call for justice and peace across all people.