



ELCIC

*In Mission  
for Others*

## Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

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The Honourable Vic Toews  
Minister of Public Safety  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Canada K1A 0A6

December 15, 2010

Dear Hon. Vic Toews,

I am writing to express my concern that the government of Canada is planning to significantly increase investment in the building of new prisons.

The need for new prisons seems rooted in proposed new federal laws which will lead to more Canadians being sent to prison for longer periods. Do you have any evidence that such a strategy will reduce crime or assist victims?

Canada seems headed toward policies that apply a costly prison response to people involved in the courts who are non-violent offenders, or to repeat offenders who are mentally ill and/or addicted. There is a large risk that these policies will be applied disproportionately to people from the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Many people who are convicted of crime require treatment, health services, educational, employment and housing interventions; all less expensive and more humane than incarceration. Will the government of Canada be making a significant investment in interventions that offer opportunity for reform and healing?

Our church supports a vision and strategy of restorative justice. When a crime happens, victims, offenders, families and the public are all in need of healing. Incarceration alone does not meet victims' needs for healing or a sense of safety. For both moral and practical reasons, society ought to be concerned not only with the length of terms for prisoners, but also with the character of the person as they leave prison. Programming needs to promote accountability, respect and reparation. For example, well supervised probation on release, bail options, reporting centres, practical assistance, and supportive housing are all models of consequences for crime that also help offenders to change behaviour and reintegrate into community. Will your government be investing in programs that help prisoners to become productive citizens?

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Every person is made in the image of God and is blessed with dignity. We all need a place to belong. Public safety is enhanced through healthy communities that support individuals and families. In what ways is your government planning to support preventive programming that helps people find a place in community through education, recreation, culture, counselling and mutual support?

I thank you for considering my questions and I look forward to your response.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan C. Johnson", with a small cross symbol to the left of the first name.

The Rev. Susan C. Johnson  
National Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

Cc: National Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada  
Mark Holland, Liberal Critic for Public Safety  
Maria Mourani, Porte-parole en matière de sécurité publique du Bloc Québécois  
Don Davies, NDP Critic for Public Safety