

MEDIA RELEASE

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Uniting Church calls for prison-system overhaul

The Uniting Church SA believes that our prison system is flawed.

It believes higher incarceration rates aren't making our community safer and is calling on our next government to offer a more humane prison system.

"Our current government seems to think that high incarceration rates are a sign of strength. In fact, they are a reflection of the fundamental failure of our community," says Uniting Church Moderator, Rev Rod Dyson.

"The more people we have in prison the more broken our society is."

"Tough sentencing with little or no emphasis on rehabilitation can create people who re-offend often doing worse crimes. That actually means more victims not less. So how does that make our community safer?"

The church has five key concerns:

- **Our incarceration rates are too high and growing**

In the last 10 years the prison population in SA has increased by 40%

(1960 prisoners in 2009 up from 1396 in 1999)¹

- **Our indigenous incarceration rates are also climbing**

In that same period, the number of Indigenous prisoners in SA is up from 18.3% to 22.9%.²

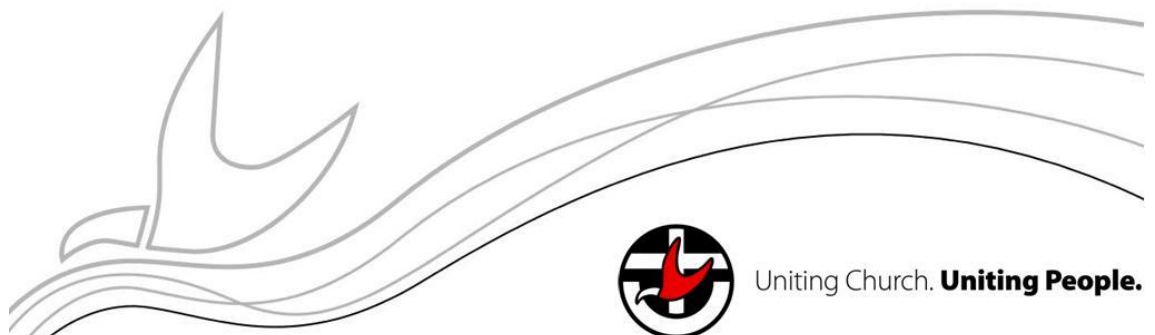
While 2% of the Australian population are Indigenous, a staggering 25% of the national prison population are.³

- **Our prison infrastructure is outdated**

Despite the growing prisoner population, little has been done to improve prison facilities.

The government's Prison 2010 plan (devised in the 90s) with a proposed expansion of Mobilong Prison by 140 beds and the construction of a new women's prison has been cancelled.

We understand that the Liberal's have now backed down on their election promise to build new facilities by 2018.



We believe that the Adelaide Women's Prison is in need of replacement, James Nash House is inadequate for housing mentally ill prisoners, and B Division at Yatala is archaic.

- **Those on remand are sharing cells with prisoners**

South Australia has the highest proportion (35.5%) of unsentenced prisoners in the country.⁴

Overcrowding together with long waits for sentencing means those on remand may be forced to share cells with prisoners.

“Presumption of innocence until found guilty” is a difficult standard to live up to when we put remandees and prisoners in together.

- **People who need mental health care are ending up in prison because we've failed them**

The prison population is three to five times more likely than the general population to have a major mental illness.⁵

The Uniting Church believes that not enough is being done to resource and support prison staff and others working in correctional services to address mental health issues faced by prisoners.

“All the signs point to a flawed system that is failing our community.” says Rev Dyson.

The church has become increasingly concerned about this issue as prison chaplains and church members report growing despair with the prison system.

For more information contact:

Shannon Short, Communications and Public Relations Manager

0408 838 265

1 ABS 2009 Prisoners in Australia Report 4517.0, page 35

2 ABS 2009 Prisoners in Australia Report 4517.0, page 35

3 ABS 2009 Prisoners in Australia Report 4517.0, page 47

4 ABS 2009 Prisoners in Australia Report 4517.0, page 30

5 Australian Institute of Criminology, Trends and Issues, No 334, March 2007.

