

## We're Failing!



HFP director Marla Mitchell-Cichon:

"We're going to have to get rid of the prison system (as we know it)! It doesn't work! It has never worked!"

Echoes Troy Chapman:

"...For all their effort they have accomplished exactly NOTHING in the way of fundamentally changing the system. It is exactly as it was in the early '80s when I came in."

Example #1: Troy, convicted of second-degree murder 40 years ago, received an obscene sentence of 60-90 years... meaning he would be 80 years of age before he could be considered for parole!

He says, "I don't think there's any argument to be made on my behalf within our current paradigm. In this paradigm I deserve what I got and the fact that I've lived my life as I have is irrelevant. My remorse, rehabilitation and reparations/atonement do not mitigate the retribution I deserve and in this paradigm I deserve whatever society says I deserve. And 'society,' my Michigan countrymen and women, say I deserve to suffer here until I am crippled or dead. This is built into who we are, into our religion, our culture, our politics and our mythology. We believe in hurting people who hurt us. We are much more committed to and enthusiastic about this than we are about helping people or about healing."

Example #2: James has been in prison 51 years on a first degree murder charge:

"I have given up on the Parole Board doing anything for me. The general failure of the PB to comprehensively review prisoners serving life without

## From the Desk of Doug Black History: RICH History!



I love Black History Month, and it makes me proud to honor the contributions and sacrifices of African Americans who have helped shape this nation.

As an American citizen, I'm saddened by the fact that public officials in some 23 different states have either taken steps to water down or ban Black history in our educational processes. My dear friend Rev. Cy Young used to insist that we were never completely fair, to begin with, in giving African Americans due credit in our history, literature and political science studies. Shame on those who would rob students of vital history and knowledge of how our country got to be what it is today.

As an advocate for prisoners, I'm saddened by disparities in our judicial system. It begins already with the unequal treatment of Black kids in juvenile justice and/or the routine traffic stops for alleged violations. It extends to arrests and criminal charges. It's evident in the sentences. Our staff sees the imbalance in the prison system right here in our state, for all men and women of color, of all ages.

Please join me in a positive approach in Black History Month. Let's celebrate the rich cultural heritage, triumphs and adversities that are an indelible part of our country's history. Join me in a prayer for improvement in 2024. We can and must do better!

*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

*Galatians 3:28*

— Doug Tjapkes, Founder

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parole is no secret. Thanks to the politicians' 'tough on crime' and 'lock 'em up and throw away the key' approach of the 80s, along with the PB's 'life means life' policy of the 90s, death by incarceration on Michigan's secret death row has become the ensconced order of the day for individuals like me."

Example #3: Ms. R had a daughter in Michigan's only prison for women

"Our daughter was in WHV for almost 7 years. She couldn't get the medical care she needed. Her last few months she couldn't get help to the mess hall, food wasn't allowed to be brought back, and medical care was bad. She had SCAD (spontaneous coronary artery dissection). I got that awful call at 10:30 PM."

### Michigan can and must do better!

Writes one of HFP's client commentators:

"Michigan politicians are currently lower than whale feces to all state convicts. Soooo many promises of what they wanted to do in 2023, including lots of prison reform to bring this draconian state in line with the rest of the midwest. A year later, with nothing out of committee, and some bills not even receiving hearings, our illustrious leaders have voted themselves an early end to their business year. This means all the bills are as dead as the dodo. Will they be reintroduced next year, during an election year? Who can say? For now, their decision to play politics as usual despite decades of assurances to reverse the 'lock 'em up and throw away the key' mentality has left all of us disbelieving anything even our supposedly most ardent supporters say."

### Cages

"Prisons do not disappear social problems, they disappear human beings. Homelessness, unemployment, drug addiction, mental illness, and illiteracy are only a few of the problems that disappear from public view when the human beings contending with them are relegated to cages."

— Angela Davis

For more on cages, read Doug's post on the HFP blog: Cages: no place for man nor beast, at [humanityforprisoners.blogspot.com](http://humanityforprisoners.blogspot.com).

## Meet Carmen!



As we begin the new year, we welcome new Client Services Specialist Carmen Fluit. Carmen arrived with a background in customer service and a compassionate nature. "I am passionate about the work that we're doing at Humanity for Prisoners, and I am making it my mission to address and solve our clients' needs as quickly and efficiently as I can."

## 2023: A Busy Year for HFP!

Volunteers donated nearly 600 hours (approximately 10 hours per week)! Our number of active volunteers ranges from 10-15, according to Coordinator Sarah Ebidon.

New clients in Michigan's 38 corrections facilities: Approximately 1,000 (more than 20/week)!

Our staff numbers five full-time employees, plus one part-timer, according to Executive Director Mark Hartman.



## Behind Our Walls



Upcoming dates for public screenings of this popular Nate Roels documentary:

- March 5: Monroe Community Church (CRC), Grand Rapids
- March 17: Celebration Fellowship Church (CRC), Grand Rapids
- March 22: St. Patrick-St. Anthony Catholic Parish, Grand Haven
- March 25: Kingdom Life Church, Muskegon

Specific times and details to be announced later.

