

The Faith (and Justice) Behind Prison Reform

While funding for a new study of the federal prison system has yet to be approved, Craig DeRoche, president of the Washington, Justice Fellowship and former speaker of the Michigan House of Representatives, is encouraged to see a broad coalition of organizations lined up behind the proposal.

Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., has proposed a \$1 million appropriation to establish a nine-member task force to review challenges facing the federal corrections system, which houses more than 200,000 inmates.

“God has blessed Justice Fellowship with the ability to convene an extraordinarily diverse group of interests representing the full political spectrum,” DeRoche says. “Who would have thought Heritage Forum, the NAACP and the ACLU would all welcome a Christian perspective on prison reform?”

If approved, the task force will be named after Charles Colson, a one-time White House aide who served time for his role in the 1970s Watergate scandal. After accepting Christ in confinement, Colson organized Prison Fellowship in 1976. He set up Justice Fellowship—the reform arm of the organization that addresses injustices in the criminal justice system—in 1983. Justice Fellowship advocates for reform on such issues as sentencing, capital punishment, religious freedom and prison violence.

DeRoche says his agency has maintained a fairly low profile until recently. In the past, he says government leaders and others weren’t ready for the organization’s message of using biblically based principles to change the system.

“Colson was a kind of prophet,” DeRoche says. “[He said] that administering criminal justice outside of values and

principles rooted in Scripture would lead to failure.”

Today, DeRoche says atheists, academics and other experts recognize that purely secular methods fail to change inmates’ behavior—and DeRoche cites his own experience as evidence. Once the youngest statewide Republican leader ever elected in the nation, a pair of arrests over a four-month period in 2010 exposed his secret battle with alcoholism.

Born again while awaiting a court appearance, DeRoche confessed his guilt and avoided jail time.

“That’s how I got out of jail—by being honest,” DeRoche says. “God gave me new life in Him.” —*Ken Walker*