

“When prison gates slam behind an inmate he does not lose his human quality; his mind does not close to ideas; his intellect does not cease to feed on a free and open interchange of opinions; his yearning for self-respect does not end; nor his quest for self-realization conclude. If anything, the need for identity and self-respect are more compelling in the dehumanizing prison environment.”

- Thurgood Marshall
U.S. Supreme Court Justice

What is CURE?

Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE) is an international organization that seeks to reduce crime through the reform of the Criminal Justice System, especially prison reform.

When and where did CURE begin?

CURE began in San Antonio, Texas in 1972 when citizens (families of prisoners and concerned individuals) went to the legislature in Austin to work against the death penalty. CURE was formally organized in Texas in 1975. CURE formally started with an annual convention and became a national organization in 1985. Louisiana CURE began as an inmate chapter at Angola State Penitentiary. In 1987 a support group for families with members in prison, sponsored by Catholic Community Services, met with the organizer of National CURE, Charlie Sullivan. Thus began the Louisiana State Chapter of CURE. State officers were elected and By-Laws written and approved.

How is CURE organized?

Members of the Louisiana CURE's State Executive Committee meet as needed and set policy. The President and/or Executive Director run daily matters. General meetings of all members, in which speakers are presented or special issues are discussed, are held monthly.

International CURE

The International CURE Board meets once a year and every other year, CURE's International Executive Committee is elected from among and by the International Board members. The international convention is held biannually in Washington, D. C.

Is CURE soft on crime?

No, CURE supports its issues with both sound reasoning and research. Common sense arguments show overwhelmingly that CURE's issues will reduce crime. Also anti-crime issues will save money for the taxpayer.

Where is CURE active?

CURE has an organized presence in forty eight chapters, including eight in Africa. There are also international chapters called Issue Chapters concerned specifically with:

- CURE SORT (Sex Offenders Restored through Treatment)
- FedCURE

- FIND-CURE
- LIFE-LONG CURE
- NDRAN (Nat. Death Row Asst. Network of CURE)

CAMPAIGNS

- eTc Campaign (Equitable Telephone Charges)
- For Whom The Bells Toll (An initiative to have religious organization toll their bells whenever there is an execution)

Check out National CURE's website for additional information www.curenational.org

If you are interested in forming a local chapter of CURE outside of Baton Rouge, contact the Louisiana chapter at www.louisianacure.org

What do members receive?

- The Louisiana CURE newsletter
- A quarterly newsletter from National CURE
- An invitation to national conventions held bi-annually in Washington, D.C. and state activities held in Baton Rouge
- Opportunities to network with other prison reform groups
- Opportunities to improve prison life
- Access to self-help pamphlets for inmates and their family members:
 - *Keeping Love Alive While in Prison*
 - *Thoughts on Getting Out*
 - *Health Care While in Prison*
 - *Getting Through the Parole Process*

CURE memberships are annually from January to December.

Louisiana CURE supports:

- Change in the attitude of the public towards prisoners
- A moratorium on prison construction except to replace outdated facilities
- Abolishment of prisons for profit
- Reform of Louisiana sentencing laws
- Parole eligibility for lifers
- eTc Telephone campaign, working to reduce the high cost of prison phone calls for families and love ones
- Use of alternative sentencing options in the community whenever possible
- Enhancement of prisoner-family relationships
- Mobilizing families of prisoners to give support and care to their imprisoned member
- Encouraging prisoners to be positive, contributing members of the community in which they are located
- Better access in prison to treatment for medical and psychological problems
- Better access to drug and alcohol treatment in and out of the prison system

- Training in conflict resolution and anger control
- Increase in meaningful job training and education for prisoners
- Restorative Justice as a way to address hurts and needs of victims, offenders and community so they may be healed
- Compensation for crime victims and victims of the criminal justice system, also, provide support to victims of crime
- Abolishment of the death penalty
- The right to vote nationally for ex-prisoners and probationers

“Fairness is what justice really is.”

- Justice Potter Stewart

“We are still a long way from the time when our conscience can be certain of having done everything possible to prevent crime and to control it effectively so that it no longer does harm and, at the same time, to offer to those who commit crimes a way of redeeming themselves and making a positive return to society.”

- Pope John Paul II, July 9, 2000

If all those in some way involved in the problem tried to ...develop this line of thought, perhaps humanity as a whole could take a great step forward in creating a more serene and peaceful society.

Although the FBI reports that the crime rate is falling, crime and fear of crime still touch many lives and polarize many communities. Putting more people in prison, and sadly, more people to death has not given Americans the security we seek. It is time for a new national dialogue on crime and corrections, justice and mercy, responsibility and treatment. As citizens of Louisiana, we need to ask the following: How can we restore our respect for law and life? How can we protect and rebuild communities, confront crime without vengeance, and defend life without taking life?

Louisiana CURE’s task is to help restore a sense of civility and responsibility to everyday life, and promote crime prevention and genuine rehabilitation. The common good is undermined by criminal behavior that threatens the lives and dignity of others and by policies that seem to give up on those who have broken the law (offering too little treatment and too few alternatives to either years in prison or the execution of those who have been convicted of terrible crimes.)

New solutions must move beyond the slogans of the moment (such as “three strikes and you’re out”) and the excuses of the past (such as “criminals are simply trapped by their background”). Crime, corrections, and the search for safe community require more than the policy clichés of conservatives, liberals, politicians and lobbyists.

Louisiana CURE believes that the recognition that the dignity of the human person applies to both victim and offender. Louisiana CURE believes that the current trend of more prisons and more executions, with too little emphasis on education and drug treatment, does not truly reflect societal values and will not leave our communities safer. We are convinced that human dignity requires that we offer better alternatives to long-term incarceration that can hold offenders accountable and challenge

them to change their lives; reach out to victims and reject vengeance; restore a sense of community and resist the violence that has engulfed so much of our culture.

Many of our communities dramatically reflect the human and other costs of so much crime. Tragically, young and innocent people caught in gang violence lose their lives every day; the drug trade has enveloped our communities; and children who feel a sense of hopelessness are taking their own lives. Louisiana CURE reaches out to prisoners and their families, offering help and hope to those caught up in crime and the criminal justice system. Louisiana CURE also struggles to respond to the needs of crime victims.

Crime and the destruction it brings raise fundamental questions about the nature of personal responsibility, community (rehabilitation) and redemption (restoration). The causes of crime are complex. The ways to overcome violence are not simple. The chances of being misunderstood are many. Louisiana CURE strongly supports those who devote their lives and talents to the tasks of protection and restoration: chaplains and prison ministry volunteers, police and corrections officers, prosecutors and defense attorneys, and counselors. We call on others to join in a new commitment to prevent crime and to rebuild lives and communities. We stand in solidarity with crime victims in their pain and loss, insisting that all our institutions reach out to them with understanding, compassion, and healing.

The status quo is not working—victims are often ignored, offenders are often not rehabilitated, and communities have lost their sense of safety. Clearly, the system is deficient in many ways. Louisiana CURE believes that it does not live up to the best of Louisiana’s values and falls far short of Louisiana’s principles.

A fundamental moral measure of the criminal justice system is how it responds to those harmed by crime. Too often, the criminal justice system neglects the hurt and needs of victims or seeks to exploit their anger and pain to support punitive policies. A strong and growing movement has emerged that advocates on behalf of crime victims and seeks to make the justice system more responsive to their concerns. To be excluded from the proceedings against their offenders, to be ignored by friends and family, or to be neglected by the community because their deep pain is unsettling only serves to further isolate victims and denies their dignity. All of us are to stand with victims in their hurt and in their search for healing and genuine justice. This includes, of course, the children of the incarcerated, who themselves are seriously harmed by their parents’ misdeeds. Louisiana CURE believes that these efforts deserve support. Louisiana CURE encourages and stands with victims and those who assist them.

Although, not victims in the usual sense but certainly personally affected by crime are peace officers and those who work in correctional facilities. This is difficult work. They too are often in need of healing and compassion. Louisiana CURE supports efforts to educate, train, evaluate, and counsel peace officers.

People in positions of power and responsibility have particular obligations to live within the law and not enrich themselves at the expense of others. These crimes often go unacknowledged and

unpunished, but they can have a devastating impact on our society. Our communities lose when industries fail to obey the laws that ensure that the land, water, and air are not harmed.

The many forms of punishment for those who are convicted of crime in the United States vary, ranging from fines and probation to boot camps and chain gangs, to incarceration in jails and prisons, and finally to the death penalty. Mandatory minimum sentences are much more common as is the willingness to use isolation units. These policies reflect legislative action at the federal and state levels that is adopted by legislators seeking to appear “tough on crime” in response to often sensational media coverage of crime.

Sadly, in many states, education, health and human services, and public transportation budgets remain stagnant or decline while more and more prisons are being built and filled to capacity. Another casualty from the diversion of public dollars for prison construction are the very critical programs of probation and parole, halfway houses, community treatment options, and other post-release programs. However, public debate rarely encourages serious dialogue about the costs of incarceration versus less costly alternatives, such as prevention, education, community efforts, and drug treatment.

Louisiana CURE supports the rights of immigrants. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) uses a variety of methods to detain immigrants, some of them clearly inappropriate, such as placing detainees in prisons with convicted felons or in local jails where conditions may be deplorable. Migrants who cannot be deported because their country of origin will not accept them should not be imprisoned indefinitely. Legal immigrants who have served sentences for their crimes should not be re-penalized and deported, often leaving family members behind. Lengthy stays for detainees place considerable hardship on other family members living in the United States or in their country of origin, many of whom have grown to depend on the income of the person being detained.

Although, the debate rages on as to whether treatment programs work and to what extent, a careful review of literature on rehabilitation has concluded that treatment does reduce recidivism. However, Louisiana CURE believes that no single type of treatment or rehabilitation program works for every offender. The effectiveness of programs depends on many things, including type of offense, quality of the program, and family/community support. Studies suggest that drug treatment is a very cost-effective method to reduce substance abuse and crime. The savings to taxpayers from quality substance abuse treatment versus imprisonment is significant. Additionally, community-based substance abuse programs and programs that address behaviors that lead people to crime are far less expensive than similar programs in prison and produce effective and encouraging results.

Louisiana CURE wants to move away from the so-called “soft” or “tough” approaches to crime and punishment offered by those at opposite ends of the political spectrum. Theology tells us to, “...test everything; retain what is good.” History tells us that the prison system was, in some ways, built on a moral vision of the human person and society—one that combined a spiritual rekindling with punishment and correction. Clearly, this vision has too often been lost.

The evidence surrounds us; sexual and physical abuse among inmates and sometimes by corrections officers, gang violence, racial division, the absence of educational opportunities and

treatment programs, the increasing use of isolation units, and society's willingness to sentence children to adult prisons-all contributing to a high rate of recidivism. Society seems to prefer punishment to rehabilitation and retribution to restoration, failing to recognize prisoners as human beings.

Louisiana CURE cannot and will not tolerate behavior that threatens lives and violates the rights of others. Louisiana CURE believes in responsibility, accountability, and legitimate punishment. The community has a right to establish and enforce laws to protect people and to advance the common good. However, Louisiana CURE does not give up on those who violate these laws.

Louisiana CURE believes that both victims and offenders are entitled to be treated as human beings. Despite their different claims on society, their lives and dignity should be protected and respected. Louisiana CURE believes that punishment must have a clear purpose; protecting society and rehabilitating those who violate the law. To that end, Louisiana CURE encourages models of restorative justice that seeks to address crime in terms of the harm done to victims and communities, not simply as a violation of law. Punishment of wrongdoers is clearly justified, but is never justified for its own sake. A compassionate community seeks accountability and correction but not suffering for its own sake. Punishment must have a constructive and redemptive purpose.

Our Constitution insists that every person has both rights and responsibilities. Crime and corrections are at the intersection of rights and responsibilities. Those who commit crimes violate the rights of others and disregard their responsibilities. The test for the rest of us is whether we will exercise our responsibility to hold the offender accountable without violating his or her basic rights. Louisiana CURE believes that even offenders should be treated with respect.

Louisiana CURE believes that punishment by civil authorities for criminal activity should serve three principal purposes: (1) the preservation and protection of the common good of society, (2) the restoration of public order, and (3) the restoration of the offender.

"Redress" or repair of the harm done to the victims and to society by the criminal activity, is important to restoring the common good. This neglected dimension of punishment allows victims to move from a place of pain and anger to one of healing and resolution. Restoring the balance of rights through restitution is an important element of justice.

Often people who lack adequate resources from early in life turn to lives of crime in desperation or out of anger or confusion. Unaddressed needs-including proper nutrition, shelter, health care, and protection from abuse and neglect- can be steppingstones on a path towards crime. LA CURE is continually working to address these needs through advocacy.

Subsidiarity and Solidarity recognize that human dignity and human rights are fostered in the community. Subsidiarity calls for problem-solving at the community level: family, neighborhood, city, and state. It is only when problems become too large or the common good is clearly threatened that larger institutions are required to help. This principle encourages communities to be more involved. Criminal activity is largely a local issue and, to the extent possible, should have local solutions. Neighborhood-watch groups, community-oriented policing, school liaison officers, neighborhood

treatment center, and local support for ex-offenders all can be part of confronting crime and fear of crime in local communities.

Solidarity recognizes that “we are all really responsible for all.” Solidarity demands that we work for justice beyond our boundaries. Through the lens of solidarity, those who commit crimes and are hurt by crime are members of one human family. Solidarity calls us to insist on responsibility and seek alternatives that do not simply punish, but rehabilitate, heal and restore.

LA CURE seeks approaches that understand crime as a threat to community, not just a violation of law; that demand new efforts to rebuild lives, not just build more prisons; and that demonstrate a commitment to re-weave a broader social fabric of respect for life, civility, responsibility, and reconciliation.

LA CURE supports efforts to protect society from those who threaten life, inflict harm, take property, and destroy the bonds of community. Protection of society and its members from violence and crime is an essential moral value. Crime endangers individuals and robs communities of a sense of well-being and security, and of the ability to protect their members. All people should be able to live in safety. Removing dangerous people from society is essential to ensure public safety. And the threat of incarceration does, in fact, deter some crime. However, punishment for its own sake is not a response to crime. LA CURE strongly urges that punishment have a purpose and be coupled with treatment and, when possible, restitution.

LA CURE rejects simplistic solutions such as “three strikes and you’re out” and rigid mandatory sentencing. As stated previously, the causes of crime are complex and efforts to fight crime are complicated. The one-size-fits-all approaches are often inadequate. Studies and experience show that the combination of accountability and flexibility works best with those who are trying to change their lives. To the extent possible, we should support community-based solutions, especially for non-violent offenders, because a greater emphasis is placed on treatment and restoration for the criminal, and restitution and healing for the victim. Therefore, we do not support mandatory sentencing that replaces judges’ assessments with rigid formulations.

LA CURE cannot support policies that treat young offenders as though they are adults. Actions of the most violent youth leave us shocked and frightened and therefore they should be removed from society until they are no longer dangerous. Society must never respond to children who have committed crimes as though they are somehow equal to adults-fully formed in conscience and fully aware of their actions. Placing children in adult jails is a sign of failure, not a solution. Such terrible behavior points to our own negligence in raising children with a respect for life, providing a nurturing and loving environment, or addressing serious mental or emotional illnesses.

LA CURE promotes serious efforts toward crime prevention and poverty reduction. Socio-economic factors such as extreme poverty, discrimination, and racism are serious contributors to crime. Unfortunately, racism often shapes American attitudes and policies toward crime and criminal justice. While it is true that many poor children who are products of dysfunctional families never commit crimes, poverty and family disintegration are significant risk factors for criminal activity. Quality

education must be available for all children to prepare them for gainful employment, further education, and responsible citizenship. The failure of our education system in many communities contributes to crime. LA CURE believes fighting poverty, educating children, and supporting families are essential anti-crime strategies.

LA CURE must do more to end violence in the home and to find ways to help victims break out of the pattern of abuse. To that end, we support measures that control the sale and use of firearms and make them safer, and we call for sensible regulation of handguns. Louisiana CURE acknowledges the underlying cultural values that help create a violent environment: a denial of right and wrong, education that ignores fundamental values, an abandonment of personal responsibility, an excessive and selfish focus on our individual desires, a diminishing sense of obligation to our children and neighbors, and a misplaced emphasis on acquiring wealth and possessions. The media must be challenged to stop glorifying violence and exploiting sexuality. Media images and information can communicate fear and a distorted perception of crime. We encourage the media to present a more balanced picture, which does not minimize the human dignity of the victim or that of the offender.

Increasing reliance on the death penalty diminishes us and is a sign of growing disrespect for human life. We cannot overcome crime by simply executing criminals, nor can we restore the lives of the innocent by ending the lives of those convicted of their murders. The death penalty offers the tragic illusion that we can defend life by taking life. Pope John Paul II.

Victims and their families must have a more central place in a reformed criminal justice system. Besides the physical wounds some victims suffer, all victims experience emotional scars that may never fully heal. And since a majority of offenders are not apprehended for their crimes, these victims do not even have the satisfaction of knowing that the offender has been held accountable. This lack of closure can increase victims' fears and make healing more difficult. This vital concern for victims can be misused. Some tactics can fuel hatred, not healing. Victims of crime have the right to be kept informed throughout the criminal justice process. They should be able to share their pain and the impact of the crime on their lives after conviction has taken place and in appropriate way during the sentencing process. They should be able to confront the offender and ask for reparation for their losses. LA CURE offer general support for legislation to respond to the needs and the rights of victims, and urge Louisiana to strengthen victims' advocacy programs.

Louisiana CURE encourages innovative programs of restorative justice that provide the opportunity for mediation between victims and offenders and offer restitution for crimes committed. Restorative justice focuses first on the victim and the community harmed by the crime, rather than on the dominant state-against-the-perpetrator model. This shift in focus affirms the hurt and loss of the victim as well as the harm and fear of the community, and insists that offenders come to grips with the consequences of their actions. This experience offers victims a much greater sense of peace and accountability. Offenders who are willing to face the human consequences of their actions are more ready to accept responsibility, make reparations, and rebuild their lives. Focusing primarily on the legal infraction without recognition of the human damage does not advance our community values. "Impact panels", led by professional counselors, bring together victims and offenders who have been involved in

similar crimes and can assist the victim's healing, the community's understanding of the crime, and the offender's sense of responsibility.

LA CURE insists that punishment has a constructive and rehabilitative purpose. The criminal justice system should punish offenders and, when necessary, imprison them to protect society. Since nearly all inmates will return to society, prisons must be places where offenders are challenged, encouraged, and rewarded for efforts to change their behaviors and attitudes, and where they learn the skills needed for employment and life in community. CURE calls upon government to redirect the vast amount of public resources away from building more and more prisons and toward better and more effective programs aimed at crime prevention, rehabilitation, education efforts, substance abuse treatment, and programs of probation, parole, and reintegration. Freeing up prison construction money to bolster these systems should be a top priority. Abandoning the parole system, as some states have done, combined with the absence of a clear commitment to rehabilitation programs within prisons, turns prisons into warehouses where inmates grow old, without hope, their lives wasted. Not all offenders are open to treatment, but all deserve to be challenged and encouraged to turn their lives around.

Louisiana CURE questions whether private, for-profit corporations can effectively run prisons. The profit motive may lead to reduced efforts to change behaviors, treat substance abuse and offer skills necessary for reintegration into the community. Regardless of who runs prisons, we oppose the increasing use of isolation units, especially in the absence of due process, and the monitoring and professional assessment of the effects of such confinement on the mental health of inmates.

Louisiana CURE supports making a serious commitment to confront the pervasive role of addiction and mental illness in crime. Far too many people are in prison primarily because of addiction. Locking up addicts without proper treatment and then returning them to the streets perpetuates a cycle of behavior that benefits neither the offender nor society. Persons suffering from chemical dependency should have access to the treatment that could free them and their families from the slavery of addiction, and free the rest of us from the crime they commit to support this addiction. Not providing these resources now will cost far more in the long run. Substance abusers should not have to be behind bars in order to receive treatment for their addictive behavior. The sale and use of drugs-whether to make money or to seek an escape-are unacceptable.

Crimes are sometimes committed by individuals suffering from serious mental illness. While the government has an obligation to protect the community from those who become aggressive or violent because of mental illness, it also has a responsibility to see that the offender receives the proper treatment for his or her illness. Too often mental illness goes undiagnosed, and many in our prison system would do better in other settings more equipped to handle their particular needs.

Louisiana CURE supports just and equitable treatment of immigrants. LA CURE welcomes newcomers and sees them as adding to the richness of our cultural environment. CURE acknowledges that the law treats immigrants and citizens differently, but no one should be denied the right to fair judicial proceedings.

Community is not only a place to live; the word also describes the web of relationships and resources that bring us together and help us cope with our everyday challenges. Fear of crime and violence tears at this web. Louisiana CURE supports community initiatives to place crime in a community context and build on promising alternatives that empower neighborhoods and towns to restore a sense of security. Community groups are partnering with local police to identify drug markets, develop specific strategies to deal with current and potential crime problems, and target-at-risk youth for early intervention. Community policing and neighborhood-watch groups have proven to be effective models of crime control and community building, empowering local leaders to solve their own problems. These efforts reflect principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, and the search for the common good.