The Need to Pay Attention! Ending Mass Incarceration in Louisiana

By Sue Weishar, Ph.D.

Have you ever wondered how throughout human history unjust and inhumane institutions and practices became established and were perpetuated, such as slavery, the genocide of entire groups of people, or the coverture of women? How could so many people have been so blind, especially purported followers of Jesus Christ—a poor, itinerant laborer who clearly lived and preached the opposite of moral, charity, and justice and who was always on the side of the poor and powerless? How could they not have known better?

This line of thought often leads me to the following question—what evils are we blind to in today’s world? To what injustices are we so indifferent that future generations will look back, shaking their heads that such shameful practices were widely tolerated? I think the widespread acceptance of mass incarceration in the U.S., and in Louisiana, in particular, will be seen in retrospect as shocking injustices, atrocities that future people of conscience will have a hard time comprehending.

It is important that members of the Loyola Community acknowledge that we live in a state that incarcerates more of its residents per capita than any other in the country. In fact, last year, the U.S. Justice Department found that Louisiana, in one of the worst states in the country, had brought the world’s largest prison population back from the brink of a “globalized indifference” that dismisses the suffering of others, resulting in a “culture of comfort” which makes us insensitive to the cries of others, resulting in a “death penalty in disguise” where others’ suffering can be dismissed because “it doesn’t concern me; it’s none of my business!”

To end mass incarceration in Louisiana everyday citizens and voters, you and me, have to start paying attention. We can no longer be “indifferent,” as Pope Francis said in his 2013 Homily at Lampedusa, by a “culture of comfort” which makes an incentive to the cries of others, existing in a “globalized indifference” where others’ suffering can be dismissed because “it doesn’t concern me; it’s none of my business!”

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We can end mass incarceration in Louisiana by making it “our business!”

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