

1 **Document 700.07**

2 **Name: Encouraging Leadership with Integrity**

3 **Authors: NIC Church and Society, Elisa Gatz, chair; NIC MFSA Luis F. Reyes and Elisa**
4 **Gatz, co-chairs; NIC RMN Alka Lyall, Luis F. Reyes, and Elisa Gatz, co-facilitators, NIC**
5 **General/Jurisdictional Delegation, Alka Lyall, chair**

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7 Action:

8 The Northern Illinois Annual Conference expresses both respect and gratitude to those who
9 have voluntarily stepped away from positions of leadership as they journey away from
10 membership in The United Methodist Church.

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12 As we continue this period of transition, the Northern Illinois Annual Conference calls upon
13 every United Methodist, as a disciple of Jesus the Christ, to move forward in fairness and with
14 integrity.

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16 The NIC asks all lay and clergy members who intend to disaffiliate from The United Methodist
17 Church to recuse themselves from leadership roles in all areas of the church, including the local
18 church, district, conference, jurisdictional, and general church level committees, boards,
19 agencies, delegations, and episcopal leaders.

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21 The NIC encourages the Conference Board of Trustees to develop codes of conduct to manage
22 conflicts of interest that may arise around discussions of disaffiliation agreements.

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24 Rationale:

25 The vibrant future of The United Methodist Church requires deep commitment and loyal
26 leadership at every level. Grounded in a sense of duty and loyalty to the mission of the church,
27 leaders are counted on and expected to make decisions about the future of The United
28 Methodist Church with the absolute best interest of Christ's church at heart.

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30 The selection, election, and appointment of clergy and lay leaders throughout The United
31 Methodist Church includes the implicit understanding that leaders will ethically serve in each
32 of their leadership roles with the utmost integrity. Leaders who do not intend to remain in The
33 United Methodist Church entangle themselves in a significant conflict of interest. The service of
34 a leader whose call to discipleship is aligned with The United Methodist Church is prevented
35 by the continued leadership of an individual who has made a private decision and/or public
36 declaration to leave The United Methodist Church. In November of 2022, and in historic
37 fashion, a resolution in support of leading with integrity was adopted at all five Jurisdictional
38 Conferences.

1 **Document 700.08**

2 **Name: Support of a Parole Pathway for Illinois**

3 **Authors:** Rachel Birkhahn-Rommelfanger; NIC Church and Society, Elisa Gatz, chair; NIC
4 MFSA, Luis F. Reyes and Elisa Gatz, co-chairs; NIC RMN, Alka Lyall, Luis F. Reyes, and Elisa
5 Gatz, co-facilitators; Rockford Urban Ministries, Violet Johnicker, Associate Director; John Bell;
6 Charles Straight; Lucas Pepper

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8 **Action**

9 The Northern Illinois Annual Conference of the UMC:

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- condemns the lack of a parole system for all people in Illinois prisons, the absence of which is an outdated act of cruelty that has an unforgivably disparate impact on low-income people and families of color;
- supports Illinois HB3373 as an essential step forward to address this racist injustice by ensuring that every person who has served 20 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections would be eligible for a parole hearing and the possibility of earned re-entry;
- urges our Bishop to publicly support parole by speaking to the media, at public events, signing letters or petitions, authoring op-eds or editorials, and advocating in other ways for a just parole system in Illinois;
- implores our Bishop to speak out in support of passing Illinois HB3373 if it has not become law before June 2023 by sending to the Illinois General Assembly and Governor Pritzker a letter stating our Conference’s support for HB3373;
- encourages our Cabinet, Conference Leadership, and all congregations and clergy to publicly share the Conference’s support for a just parole system in Illinois;
- encourages our congregations to educate their members and the community about the need for a parole system for all people in Illinois prisons;
- encourages our congregations to join the efforts of advocates across our state to create a parole option for Illinois; and
- encourages our congregations to pray for all those imprisoned without the possibility of parole in Illinois and all those incarcerated in our state, nation, and world.

39 **Rationale**

40 Prior to 1978, every person in the Illinois Department of Corrections was reviewed for the
41 potential of release after serving a maximum of 11 years and 3 months. In 1978, at the beginning
42 of the “tough-on-crime” era and the war on drugs, Illinois eliminated its parole system,
43 meaning that our state no longer allows incarcerated people a periodic review of their capacity
44 to re-enter their community.

1 Over the last few decades, Illinois has increased sentences, multiplied them through Truth-In-
2 Sentencing, implemented three strikes laws, mandatory minimums, and sentencing
3 enhancements, and otherwise found ways to pile on more prison time for people in the system.

4 The prison system in Illinois directly and disproportionately targets people of color - Black
5 people in particular - and this is especially true for people serving longer sentences. While 14%
6 of Illinois' population is Black, 43% of people serving 5 years or less in Illinois prisons are Black.
7 Illinois' total prison population is 54% Black, but fully 63% of those serving extreme sentences
8 in our prisons - sentences longer than 20 years - are Black people.

9 Without a new parole system, there are 5,000 people in Illinois prisons today who will die
10 behind bars rather than ever receive consideration of their rehabilitation and readiness to re-
11 enter society. Over 80% of those 5,000 individuals are people of color.

12 Between Cook County's recognized position as the exoneration capital of the world, Illinois'
13 numerous documented accounts of systemic police torture of civilians, and our remarkable
14 history of violently expressed racial tensions between the police and gangs - including massive
15 dragnet operations which peaked well after 1978 - it is inexcusable that Illinois does not have an
16 established system for reviewing all incarcerated folks at some point during their incarceration.

17 As people of faith, we acknowledge the belovedness of each person, and that God's grace and
18 forgiveness is offered and available to all of us. No person, no matter what violation or harm
19 they may have caused, can be essentialized down to the worst thing they have ever done. Any
20 person can be redeemed. It is from our deep belief in the power and possibility of redemption
21 that we call for a system of parole to be established for all people in Illinois prisons.

22 HB 3373 was written by a group of 14 men who are all serving sentences of death by
23 incarceration in Illinois prisons right now. The bill says that, after any person has served 20
24 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections, they should be eligible for a parole hearing. This
25 bill will not release anybody from prison, but would provide a pathway to eligibility for parole.

26 At the inauguration of his ministry, Jesus quoted Isaiah and stated that he had come to set the
27 captives free (Luke 4:18). The call to free people from oppression comes clearly from the Old
28 and New Testament of our Holy Scripture. This bill is a chance to establish a pathway to release
29 the captives in our time.

1 **Document 700.09**

2 **Name: In Support of the Pretrial Fairness Act**

3 **Authors:** Rachel Birkhahn-Rommelfanger; NIC Church and Society, Elisa Gatz, chair; NIC
4 MFSA, Luis F. Reyes and Elisa Gatz, co-chairs; NIC RMN, Alka Lyall, Luis F. Reyes, and Elisa
5 Gatz, co-facilitators; Rockford Urban Ministries, Violet Johnicker, Associate Director; John Bell;
6 Charles Straight; Lucas Pepper

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8 **Action**

9 The Northern Illinois Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church:

- 10 ● supports the full implementation of the Pretrial Fairness Act (a part of IL Public Act 101-
11 0652, the SAFE-T Act) and supports the bill’s goal of ending money bond and reducing
12 pretrial jailing; and recognizes the leadership of our local congregations and clergy who
13 worked for passage of this historic legislation;
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15 ● urges our Bishop to publicly support the full implementation of the Pretrial Fairness Act
16 in the media, at public events, sign letters or petitions, author op-eds or editorials, and
17 advocate in other ways;
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19 ● urges our Cabinet, Conference Leadership, and all congregations and clergy to publicly
20 share the conference’s support with the media and generally speak out, sign letters or
21 petitions, author op-eds or editorials, and advocate in a variety of ways for the Pretrial
22 Fairness Act’s full implementation;
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24 ● encourages our local congregations to educate their congregation members and the
25 community at large about money bond’s impact on the poor and people of color in our
26 state, Pretrial Fairness Act implementation, pretrial jailing, and criminal justice reform
27 through sermons, newsletters, social media, Bible study, education sessions, public
28 meetings, speaking to the press, and other outlets available to the congregation;
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30 ● asks all of our members and community allies to write letters or speak to Judges,
31 Prosecutors, Public Defenders, and States Attorneys across Illinois to share our
32 conference support for the full implementation of the Pretrial Fairness Act; and
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34 ● encourages members of our congregations and partner bodies to join in watching bond
35 court with the Illinois Network for Pretrial Justice to help ensure the full implementation
36 of the Pretrial Fairness Act.

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38 **Rationale**

39 Illinois is ending the unjust practice of money bond, a system that criminalizes poverty and
40 denies our constitutional right to be considered innocent until proven guilty. This is a huge step
41 toward decreasing mass incarceration and creating the beloved community God desires for
42 us. Illinois will be the first state in the country to end the use of money bond and will set a
43 precedent for the nation.

44
45 In January 2021, the Illinois legislature passed the Pretrial Fairness Act. This historic legislation
46 restores the presumption of innocence and makes Illinois safer by ending money bond and the

1 unconstitutional practice of caging people pretrial simply because they cannot afford to buy
2 their freedom.

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4 There has been extreme, well-funded misinformation from opponents around the country; and
5 our church has an opportunity to voice our care for captives and the imprisoned by speaking
6 out on this issue.

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8 Currently, the primary factor determining whether someone is free pretrial is the amount of
9 money in their wallet—not public safety. People are punished for being poor. A person accused
10 of a crime in Illinois can be held in jail under certain circumstances before their case has even
11 gone to trial (pretrial incarceration). When a judge determines there is any amount of money a
12 person could pay to get out (money bond) the judge has made the assessment that the person is
13 safe to return to the community, but some people don't have the money to buy their freedom.

14
15 Over a quarter of a million people are incarcerated in Illinois' jails every year. Most people
16 incarcerated in Illinois jails are presumed innocent and are still awaiting trial. In 2019, 89% of
17 people in Illinois jails were being held pretrial, demonstrating that people are held because they
18 cannot afford to pay to be released.

19
20 Money bonds disproportionately impact Black and Brown people. In the three largest county
21 jails in the state—Cook, Winnebago and Will—50% or more of those in jail are Black.¹ If we're
22 serious about ending racial injustice, we must do away with money bond.

23
24 The Pretrial Fairness Act takes money out of the picture and replaces it with a fair and robust
25 hearing process. By considering the specific circumstances of every case, the Pretrial Fairness
26 Act makes communities safer.

27
28 As Christians, numerous scripture passages call us to care for those imprisoned and
29 demonstrate God's action to free the captives, including Luke 4:14-21, Acts 5:17-20, Acts 16:25-
30 26, and Matthew 25:34-40.

31
32 Additionally, our Wesleyan heritage has a strong tradition of supporting those who are
33 oppressed and marginalized because of their poverty. John Wesley campaigned tirelessly for
34 improved conditions for prisoners. Once, in a period of nine months, he preached at least 67
35 times in various jails. Claiming this heritage, we affirm the rule of law, the guarantee of civil
36 liberties and rights, and equal access to justice for all people.

¹ "Individuals Held in Pretrial Detention and Under Pretrial Supervision in the Community." *Loyola University of Chicago Center for Criminal Justice*, 19 June 2022, <https://loyolaccj.org/pfa/blog/pfa-jail>.