

## Prison Ministry Facts and Stats

For Use in 2021-2022

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### The Big Picture

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- Estimated 2.3 million people are incarcerated in the United States.
- 698 per 100,000 residents per capita are incarcerated, more than any other nation in the world.
  - State Prisons — 1,291,000 inmates
  - Federal Prisons & Jails — 226,000 inmates
  - Local Jails — 631,000 inmates
  - When accounting for probation and parole, the U.S. Justice System controls almost 7 million people.
    - Probation — 3.6 million people
    - Parole — 840,000 people<sup>1</sup>

### Demographics

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- Men account for 92% of the total prison population.<sup>2</sup>
- An estimated 47% of sentenced prisoners are aged 25 - 39
  - Almost 22% of all sentenced males prisoners were age 50 or older. Over 15% of all sentenced females were age 50 or older.<sup>3</sup>
- In 2019 about 1% of adult males living in the US were serving a prison sentence of more than a year.
- Together, state and federal correctional authorities held more than 1% of black male U.S. residents ages 20 to 64 at year-end 2019, and more than 1% of Hispanic male U.S. residents ages 20 to 54.
- The imprisonment rate of males in 2019 was 789 prisoners per 100,000 male U.S. residents. For females, it is 61 per 100,000 female U.S. residents.

### Religion in Prison

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- Do prisons and jails offer religious services?
  - In order to protect the right to exercise one's religion for institutionalized people, chaplains and trained volunteers are contracted through each facility to provide ministerial aid to the incarcerated. People who are incarcerated may also be reached through the mail.

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<sup>1</sup> Sawyer, Wendy, and Peter Wagner. "Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2020." Prison Policy Initiative, 24 Mar. 2020, [www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2020.html](http://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2020.html).

<sup>2</sup> Carson, Ann E., U.S. "Prisoners in 2019" United States Department of Justice, pg. 3, [www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p19.pdf](http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p19.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Carson, Ann E., U.S. "Prisoners in 2019" United States Department of Justice, pg.15, [www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p19.pdf](http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p19.pdf).

- Whether in-person or through the mail, there are stringent rules, unique to each facility, that must be followed in order to gain and maintain access to those who are incarcerated.
- There is no standardized system across the penitentiary system.
- “Little is known about the religious make-up of the state prison population. Government agencies routinely report on the gender, racial and ethnic composition of inmates in state and federal prisons but not on their religious affiliation.”
- A 2012 Pew Forum survey among prison chaplains in all U.S. states estimates .4% of inmates identify as Orthodox Christian.
- About two-thirds of the inmate population are affiliated with a Christian group.<sup>4</sup>
- A 2013 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the Federal Bureau of Prisons estimates the number of people who identify as Eastern Orthodox in federal prisons were .2%.<sup>5</sup>

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## General Knowledge

What’s the difference between prison and jails?

- Generally, jails house pretrial detainees and those sentenced to less than one year of incarceration. These short-term facilities are operated by local government municipalities, cities, and counties.
- Prisons are used to house inmates with long-term sentences. They are operated by state and federal governments. State and federal governments also contract incarceration to privately operated prisons.
- Private facilities house between 8% and 11% of inmates.<sup>6</sup>

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## Trends

- The U.S. Department of Justice reports the 2019 state and federal imprisonment rate for 2019 (419 per 100,000 U.S. residents) was the lowest imprisonment rate in 24 years, dating back to 1995.
- Since 2009, the imprisonment rate (portion of U.S. residents who are in prison) has dropped 17% overall.
- In 2019, the imprisonment rate of black residents was the lowest rate in 30 years, since 1989.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “Chaplains’ Perspectives on the Religious Lives of Inmates.” Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, 22 Mar. 2012, [www.pewforum.org/2012/03/22/prison-chaplains-perspectives/](http://www.pewforum.org/2012/03/22/prison-chaplains-perspectives/).

<sup>5</sup> Chalabi, Mona. “Are Prisoners Less Likely To Be Atheists?” *FiveThirtyEight*, 12 Mar. 2015, [fivethirtyeight.com/features/are-prisoners-less-likely-to-be-atheists/](http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/are-prisoners-less-likely-to-be-atheists/).

<sup>6</sup> McClain, Kat. “What Are the Differences Between Jail and Prison?” [www.criminaldefenselawyer.com](http://www.criminaldefenselawyer.com), Nolo, 29 Dec. 2020, [www.criminaldefenselawyer.com/resources/what-are-the-differences-between-jail-and-prison.html](http://www.criminaldefenselawyer.com/resources/what-are-the-differences-between-jail-and-prison.html).

<sup>7</sup> Carson, Ann E., U.S. “Prisoners in 2019” United States Department of Justice, pg.1, [www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p19.pdf](http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p19.pdf).