

## Black History Month

Especially black in Michigan prisons!

**Fact: More than half the Michigan prison population is black!**

**Fact: Michigan prison population: 53% black; State of Michigan population, 14% black!**

**Fact: One in 21 Black adult males in Michigan is behind bars!**

**Fact: African Americans are incarcerated in state prisons across the country at more than five times the rate of whites!**

**“...racial and ethnic disparities are...a substantial feature of our prison system.” Ashley Nellis, Ph.D.**

**Incarceration means more problems for all families, of all races:**

- Restricted employment prospects
- Housing instability
- Family disruption
- Stigma

**Says Dr. Nellis:**

**“Evidence suggests that some individuals are incarcerated not solely because of their crime, but because of racially disparate policies, beliefs, and practices, rendering these collateral consequences all the more troubling. An unwarranted level of incarceration that worsens racial disparities is problematic not only for the impacted group, but for society as whole, weakening the justice system’s potential and undermining perceptions of justice.”**

**Can this be changed? Can there be reform?**

**“Truly meaningful reforms to the criminal justice system cannot be accomplished without acknowledgement of racial and ethnic disparities in the prison system, and focused attention on reduction of disparities.”**

**Ashley Nellis, Ph.D.**

## Record-Breaking totals in 2017

HFP staffers responded to more than 5,000 calls in 2017! The 5,000 mark was hit on December 26, according to Executive Director Matt Tjapkes. This far exceeds the 2,278 total of 2016. It breaks down to nearly 15 contacts a day, 7 days a week, by prisoners or their friends or family members. In addition, HFP’s commutations team assisted some 150 Michigan inmates with commutation applications in 2017.

## From the desk of Doug: Black and in prison - Not Nice!

Famous radio commentator Paul Harvey used to reveal unknown facts about a major news event, saying, “Now you know...the rest of the story.”

You’ll read factual data about African

Americans in Michigan prisons here on the front page, next to our column.

I’d like to share some observations that, as far

as I know, have no actual statistical proof. But, as the bald-headed guy says on TV, “We know a thing or two because we’ve seen a thing or two!”

Here goes.

**-I have seen some black people treated differently in the prison waiting room by some white officers at the desk.**

**-I have seen some black inmates treated differently in the prison visiting room by some white officers in charge.**

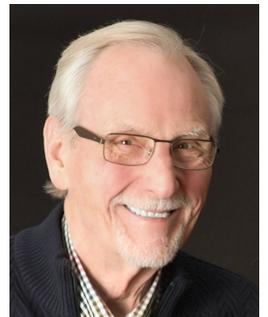
**-I have seen some black inmates who, I felt, received much heavier sentences for crimes than their white counterparts who faced similar charges.**

**-I know of black inmates with low income, represented by disinterested court-appointed attorneys, who were pressured to plead guilty to something they didn’t do, rather than go to trial.**

**-Many black prisoners transferred to prisons in the U.P. will get few if any visitors. Family and friends are often located in southeast Michigan, many struggling with such issues as finances, transportation, or aging.**

The rest of the story is: It’s not easy being black in prison.

I end this piece with a challenge to all of us from Dr. Martin Luther King: “...we have a task, and let us go out with a divine dissatisfaction.”



## HFP President & Michigan's Legislative Corrections Ombudsman meet

Keith Barber and Doug Tjapkes confer on a wide range of subjects including sentencing reform, parole reform, medical care, mentally challenged inmates, mail policy, commutations, bedside visits for the terminally ill, palliative care, and more. Collaboration with other prisoner advocacy offices and agencies is a vital part of HFP's operation.



## HFP appreciation

"I talk with many people who tell me that you have gone out of your way to assist them in some way. I think that is great what you are doing for these guys, many who would have nowhere else to turn. God is most certainly working through your selfless service to others. I have an opportunity for parole in 2018 and you are an inspiration to me regarding service work and ways I can serve once released. Being useful to others, especially the less fortunate, can be a way of life, as you so aptly demonstrate. It is truly inspiring to witness you in action. I just wanted to say this and wish you and yours a Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year!! God Bless."

- Jeff

## Grand Haven Lighthouse



This model of the iconic Grand Haven Lighthouse, standing over two feet tall, was designed and created by Michigan inmate Jack Crumpler, to be sold in some future fundraiser for HFP!



Jack Crumpler

## Bad management?

A parent writes:  
*My daughter got a letter on December 19 that was mailed November 18! Supper was at 8 PM last night. Tonight, it came at 4:30 PM. One day lunch and supper were two hours apart. Terrible management! What kind of person is running this prison?*

**More on the mail policy:**  
*I was just now given a package rejection for a letter that a jail-house preacher in Ohio wrote to me on a yellow legal pad. No letters on colored paper allowed. Now I cannot even read an uplifting letter from an ordained preacher! Where is this insanity going to end?*

*A guy in our facility received a letter from his daughter after 26 years of no contact. He has no way to respond now because there is no return address. Under the new policy we do not receive the envelope.*

***"On behalf of all incarcerated citizens, we thank your entire organization for your encouraging words and efforts this year. My prayer is this New Year will provide a renewed sense of hope and freedom for all levels of incarcerated citizens. My hope is that organizations like yours receive the recognition you deserve."***