

STARTER KIT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOUT MASS INCARCERATION

Joseph V. Crockett, editor



National Council of Churches
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE USA

Starter Kit for Teaching and Learning on Mass Incarceration

Joseph V. Crockett, editor

Contributors

Chuck K. Robertson, The Episcopal Church

Nicole D. Porter, The Sentencing Project

Marilyn B. Kendrix, United Church of Christ

Eric M. Cain, Alliance of Baptists

Cristian De La Rosa, Boston University School of Theology

Joseph V. Crockett, National Council of Churches

Michael Reid Trice, Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry

Correy Passions, Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry

Janet L. Wolf, Children's Defense Fund

Sing Sing Inmates of the New York Theological Seminary Masters of Professional Studies Program

All rights reserved. No part of this resource may be reproduced, or transmitted, in any form or by any means print, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except electronic, without prior written permission of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 110 Maryland Avenue NE, Suite 108, Washington DC 20002.

Bible quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright ©1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Special acknowledgements are extended to the following for use of their programs and services in the development of the “Starter Kit for Teaching and Learning on Mass Incarceration:

The Sentencing Project, 1705 DeSales Street, NW, 8th Floor, Washington, DC 20036, for use of materials in Part 1, “The Sentencing Project: Some Facts about Mass Incarceration.” Used by permission. All rights reserved.

PBS Religion and Ethics Newsweekly, Public Broadcasting Service, 2100 Crystal Drive, Arlington, VA 22202. Video presentations in Part 2, “A Small-Group Resource Guide for Study: Reading, Seeing and Doing,” is for non-commercial educational use only. Users are not permitted to download content.

Copyright© 1995-2015 Public Broadcasting Service. All rights reserved.

Children’s Defense Fund, 24 E Street, N.W. Washington, DC 20001, for presentation of the “Freedom Schools Program®.” Copyright© 2015 Children's Defense Fund. All Rights Reserved.

CONTENTS

Preface – Welcome and Invitation from Convening Table Co-Convenor
Rev. Dr. C. K. Robertson, Canon to the Presiding Bishop

Overview of Starter Kit
Rev. Dr. Joseph V. Crockett

PART 1: Why?

- A. Why a Focus on Mass Incarceration?
National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA
- B. The Sentencing Project: Some Facts about Mass Incarceration
Nicole D. Porter
 - [Facts about Prisons and Prisoners](#)
 - [Incarcerated Women](#)
 - [The Science of Downsizing Prisons -- What Works?](#)
 - [Trends in U.S. Corrections](#)
 - [U.S. Prison Population Trends](#)

PART 2: Learning Across Ministry Settings

- 1. Liturgical Seasons of Worship and Mass Incarceration
Rev. Marilyn B. Kendrix
- 2. A Small-Group Resource Guide for Study: Reading, Seeing, and Doing
Rev. Eric M. Cain
- 3. Resources for Seminaries and Higher Education Contexts
 - A. Syllabus from Boston School of Theology, Rev. Dr. Cristian De La Rosa
 - B. Framing: An Educational Strategy, Rev. Dr. Joseph V. Crockett
 - C. Bibliography, Dr. Michael Reid Trice and Corey Passons
- 4. Beyond Church Walls
 - A. Freedom Schools Program
Children's Defense Fund, Rev. Janet L. Wolf, contributor
 - B. The Sing Sing Project: NYTS and Voices from Sing Sing
Student Class Project and Rev. Dr. Joseph V. Crockett

Welcome

For over six decades, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA has not only provided an opportunity for ecumenical cooperation among Christian communions, but also has effectively promoted peace and justice in Christ's name. In more recent times, as the NCC has reconfigured itself to better address the needs of the twenty-first-century world, two key priorities of focus have been named, mass incarceration and interfaith relations with peacemaking. To address these priorities, Convening Tables have been established, allowing smaller groups of representatives to utilize their time and expertise for the benefit of the whole.

To this end, the NCC Convening Table on Christian Education, Ecumenical Faith Formation, and Leadership Development offers the following Starter Kit for Teaching and Learning on Mass Incarceration. This resource, developed over the past several months, is a toolbox replete with various offerings intended to inform and engage individuals, small groups, congregations, and classrooms alike.

As chair of the Convening Table, I commend to you this Starter Kit and am deeply grateful to my wise and gifted colleagues for their impressive work. All who take seriously the call of Christ to reach forth a hand in love to those in need and transform society in Jesus' name will find the materials shared herein to be very helpful tools indeed.

In Christ,

The Rev. Dr. C. K. Robertson
Canon to the Presiding Bishop
The Episcopal Church

Introduction

Rev. Dr. Chuck K. Robertson, of The Episcopal Church serves as co-convenor of the Christian Education, Ecumenical Faith Formation, and Leadership Development Convening Table (Education CT). He has led Education Convening Table members and staff in the development of this resource. We are grateful for his leadership and for the witness and gifts, tangible and intangible, that he offers the Church, and through the Church, the world. We are also thankful for the leadership contributions of Dr. Mary A. Love of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. Her spirit of cooperation and willingness to help when possible supported and encouraged us forward.

The “Starter Kit for Teaching and Learning on Mass Incarceration” (Starter Kit) is designed to be an educational resource toolbox for teaching and learning. The objective is to place in conversation facts about incarceration in the United States and values and teachings of Christian communities for teaching and learning. The Christian life involves making visible God’s continuing action in the world. Materials and exercises in this resource aim to nurture and encourage reflection and action on mass incarceration and the Church’s mission to become salt, light, and leaven in the world.

The Starter Kit is organized in two parts. Part 1 presents a background paper on mass incarceration prepared for the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC). The purpose of the document was to assist the NCC in its discernment of priorities for the organization. It is offered to teachers and learners to share with them some of the rationale for the NCC Governing Board’s choice of mass incarceration as one of the NCC’s foci.

Accompanying the rationale are facts about mass incarceration in the United States today. We are thankful to Nicole D. Porter and The Sentencing Project of Washington, D.C who provided facts and substantiating evidence regarding the operations and implications of prisons and prisoners in the U.S. Presented across five articles, learners are introduced to trends, decisive factors, informed and misguided practices that become the prescription for mass incarceration. Together, these two units provide a platform of insights for a moral response and common witness.

Part 2 of the “Starter Kit for Teaching and Learning on Mass Incarceration” is a range of resources for educating across ministry settings, including worship, study groups, in seminaries and other forums of higher education, and beyond the walls, but not the boundaries, of the Church.

Rev. Marilyn B. Kendrix of the United Church of Christ provides a series of outlines for bringing the concern of mass incarceration before God in the context of worshiping communities. Prayer and praise form as well as inform worshipers into a particular and peculiar community, a people of God. From Advent to Ordinary Times, leaders and learners have opportunity to use materials in the Starter Kit to inform the communal, spiritual practice of worship. Resources for special occasions, the celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and Black History Month are also included for bringing the daily concerns of life – concerns for justice and equality, redemption and hope – into the worship of God. Rev. Kendrix is also a contributor to the book, *The Justice Imperative: How Hyper-Incarceration Has Hijacked the American Dream* by Brian E. Moran (2014); website: www.thejusticeimperative.org.

Rev. Eric M. Cain of Alliance of Baptists packs a lot of information and ideas for teaching and learning in small-group contexts into a very small space—two pages. Organized around a three-pronged teaching-learning approach of “read, see, and do,” the tools are an excellent set of resources to engage learners visually and viscerally in small-group settings. We are appreciative of the work Public Broadcasting Services and Religion and Ethics Newsweekly have done as we draw on seven videos they produced to connect learners to various issues of mass incarceration. Again, both reflections on reading the texts and watching the videos are offered in hopes of motivating learners to become participants in God’s mission in society today.

Three documents are presented for use in seminaries or other contexts of higher education. Rev. Dr. Cristian De La Rosa presents a syllabus for a course entitled “Contextual Interfaith Advocacy Work on Mass Incarceration.” De La Rosa, on the faculty of Boston University School of Theology, developed the course as a travel seminar. The curriculum is shaped around students’ attendance and participation at the NCC’s Christian Unity Gathering. They learn from and interview religious and public leaders and community organizers about their interfaith advocacy work on mass incarceration. Learners attend plenary sessions and working groups to both learn from and participate with church educators in discovery and exploration, understanding, and analysis of alternative ministry initiatives geared toward altering the present trends and practices that maintain mass incarceration in the U.S.

Rev. Dr. Joseph V. Crockett, Associate General Secretary of NCC for Education CT, presents a reflection for teachers on “Framing: An Educational Strategy.” Crockett lists several assumptions embedded in the work of framing as an educational strategy. He asserts that the importance of framing, how an experience is typified or a situation is defined, cannot be understated or overemphasized. Biblical references and questions are also provided in hopes that the framing of

mass incarceration in terms of “difference” may provide a pathway for learners to connect with and engage in reflection and action on the injustices and inequities related to Blacks’ and Latinos’ disproportionate imprisonment in the U.S.

Dr. Michael Reid Trice of Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry and graduate student Corey Passons have developed and share a bibliographic resource on incarceration in the United States. While not an exhaustive list, it is more than a sufficient start to initiate deeper reading and exploration of mass incarceration in the U.S. An important dimension of this work is its capture and presentation of ecclesial work and resources on the topic of mass incarceration. While Christian adherents may differ in naming the causes and consequences of mass incarceration, the sheer breadth of representatives—from the Orthodox Church in America to the National Association of Evangelicals—demonstrates that attention of the NCC on the topic is warranted. The bibliography is not offered so learners become satisfied because they have read about mass incarceration, but to inform, encourage, and equip a critical consciousness for individual and collective moral and ethical action.

Two programs of teaching and learning about mass incarceration take the religious learning beyond church settings into society. Rev. Janet L. Wolf and the CDF Freedom Schools® program is an evidence-based educational work developed and implemented by the Children’s Defense Fund, based in Washington, D.C. Through a five-component teaching-learning curriculum, the CDF Freedom Schools® program documents the making of a difference in the lives of learners both in terms of prevention, as a factor in the deterrence to imprisonment, and as an intervention, through their work with people who are part of the prison population. We are thankful to the Children’s Defense Fund for permission to share their work with teachers and learners and with members and friends of the NCC faith communities.

The final unit of our “Starter Kit for Teaching and Learning on Mass Incarceration” provides a rare occasion for inmates to engage faith community members as learners. As documented by Columbia University independent researchers, The New York Theological Seminary’s Masters of Professional Studies Program at Sing Sing Correctional Facility is an educational model of transformative education. Here, we who enjoy various degrees of freedom outside of prison walls are called to consider and to more fully embody the freedom Jesus Christ makes possible: We are challenged to employ our freedom in Christ for the work of reconciliation with the “other.” A clear outcome of this educational exchange is that inmates become teachers and those who live beyond the bars and chains of correctional facilities become learners. The experience reminds the Church that any and every humanly devised and manufactured division the Church accepts results in the Church’s failure to be the Church of Jesus Christ. Stated differently, as the

Church seeks unity in Christ, divisions imposed by systems of justice and injustice are scandalous if and when they permit Christian adherents to separate God's creation into isolated camps of "us" and "them." As students translate their lived experience into content for the Church's curriculum on mass incarceration, they challenge members of the religious educational enterprise to reread the classic writings of John Dewey's *Experience and Education* and Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Together the CDF Freedom Schools® program and the New York Theological Seminary's ministry at Sing Sing prompt teachers, learners, and educational leaders to learn the values and teach the beliefs of faith communities far beyond sanctuaries and church classrooms.

Materials presented in the "Starter Kit for Teaching and Learning on Mass Incarceration" can be used like a carpenter makes use of a toolbox. Depending on the information and skill levels of teachers and learners, the intent and context for teaching and learning, information and ideas from one part or section of the resource can easily be combined with resources from another part of the Starter Kit for building tailor-made curricular experiences. For example, information from The Sentencing Project fact sheets can be incorporated in a presentation, lecture, or sermon in a rather straightforward manner. Perhaps, in the design of a short-course on the topic of mass incarceration as either part of the classroom experience or as homework (preparation) learners might be assigned to view a video segment and note their reflections for discussion. Maybe the video on Freedom Schools, from Eric Cain's section on "read, see, and do" for small-group settings can be paired with discussion of Freedom Schools in the section on teaching and learning "Beyond Church Walls." Or, learners might use questions asked in one of the videos to investigate the topic in their community and to use the findings for planning either a special worship experience or service project. The possibilities are numerous.

The contributors to this resource hope that a "Starter Kit for Teaching and Learning on Mass Incarceration," equips, encourages, and inspires you to reflection and action related to mass incarceration and the ministries of religious education, as together we join in the mission of God.

Eastertide 2015,

Rev. Dr. Joseph V. Crockett,
Associate General Secretary
Christian Education, Ecumenical Faith Formation and Leadership Development
National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA

Why a Focus on Mass Incarceration?

*With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high? . . .
He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6: 6, 8 NRSV)*

Micah's message calls to mind the stories of God's redemptive acts in history. Expressed through the prophet's voice, God's concern is for Israel to identify with, internalize, and embody genuine acts of fairness and equality, grace and compassion toward all.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; . . . So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us (2 Corinthians 5:16-19 NRSV).

Paul heralds the death and resurrection of Christ as the central event in history. God's forgiving love changes us from enemies into friends of God. Because of Christ, cosmic transformations are possible, the potential for new creations – human and spiritual, personal and social – are attainable. Followers of Christ live as ambassadors to invite, encourage, and engage everyone to become friends of God.

In the presence of mass incarceration in America, what is the mission of God? God's mission is more than a temporal project. It is more than renderings of social justice. The religious ethic of love aims at leavening the idea of justice with the ideal of love (Niebuhr, 1960:57, 60, 80f). Mass incarceration moves the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) to consider that, in part, the mission of God in Christ involves the Church manifesting God's love toward those who are black and brown, poor, disenfranchised, and marginalized. God's mission also encompasses promoting God's justice through institutions and systems for Christ's reconciliation with the world.

Past and Present Perspectives

In 1979, the Governing Board of the NCC issued a statement, “Challenges to the Injustices of the Criminal Justice System: A Christian Call to Responsibility.” Here, the NCC declared, “the source and meaning of justice is in the Being and activity of God and the relationship established with the human community through creation and redemptive covenant” (1979:1). The NCC statement on the criminal justice system stated also that:

Inequitable laws and arbitrary applications of law produce gross violations of human rights. Social injustice may be continued or increased by the policy and administration of criminal justice. The demands of justice, therefore, call Christians to seek greater justice where the criminal justice system affects persons accused or convicted of unlawful conduct and to promote and protect a state of justice in society.

The work of Michelle Alexander (2010, 2012), provides a sobering reminder to the Church that biblical understandings of justice may be at odds with cries for “punishment for criminals” and that the task of calling the criminal justice enterprise to justice remains unfinished. Alexander investigates key elements of the criminal justice system that results in mass incarceration of people of color and the poor in America. The NCC priority on mass incarceration takes up the mission of God to establish a more just and equitable society, to make visible God’s redemptive community, and to restore the dignity, justice, and freedom of both victims and offenders of the law.

Some Agents and Key Terms

There are many parts to the United States system of criminal justice. In addition to perpetrators, victims and defendants, the police, prosecutors, and judges, prison guards and parole officers represent a sampling of the agents who participate in or fulfill various responsibilities that coordinate activities and transform individual activities into a “system.” Based on Alexander’s work (2010, 2012), we identify four terms that are important for understanding the experiences and concept of mass incarceration.

Mass incarceration “refers not only to the criminal justice system, but also to the larger web of laws, rules, policies and customs that control those labeled criminals both in and out of prison” (Alexander, 2012:13).

Jim Crow. “Redemption marked a turning point in the quest by dominant whites for a new racial equilibrium, a racial order that would protect their economic, political, and social interests in a world without slavery. . . . The new racial order, know as Jim Crow—a term apparently derived

from a minstrel show character—was regarded as the ‘final settlement,’ the ‘return to sanity,’ and ‘the permanent system’ (2012:32, 35).

Racial profiling refers to law enforcer’s discretionary authority and practice to target, stop, interrogate, frisk, search, and detain primarily black and brown males in ways that produce patterns of enforcement that are not race-neutral (2012: 123-126).

Stigma of criminality refers to the power, social, political, and economic structures that are associated with labeling deviant behavior. The stigma of criminality recognizes the critical distance between a deviant act and the symbolic reorganization of self, roles, and opportunities that may or may not ensue due to branding persons as felons and the consequent badge of inferiority that accompanies such naming (2012: 94f).

The Challenge

Alexander believes that overcoming indifference and the resulting failure to care is the fundamental challenge in addressing mass incarceration. She writes:

[A] flawed public consensus lies at the core of the prevailing caste system. When people think about crime, especially drug crime, they do not think about suburban housewives violating laws regulating prescription drugs or white frat boys using ecstasy. Drug crime in this country is understood to be black and brown, and it is *because* drug crime is racially defined in the public consciousness that the electorate has not cared much what happens to drug criminals. . . . It is this failure to care, really care across color lines, that lies at the core of this system of control and every racial caste system that has existed in the United States or anywhere else in the world” (2012:234).

Some Guiding Beliefs

From its beginnings, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA has advocated for justice and equality for all persons, including those who are victims of crime and those who perpetrate crimes. Involvement is and has been informed by beliefs and affirmations that are rooted in the Judeo-Christian scriptures and traditions. A sample of those claims that lead us as a community of Christian communions beyond indifference to engagement are below.

- Awareness of our communion in Christ impels Christians to express a common, visible witness together.

- Mutual coordination for a unified response to unjust conditions is not optional, but inextricably connected to the cosmic rule of Christ.
- Unity in mission to unjust conditions and circumstances does not presuppose uniformity. God's gift of unity lures Christians toward a common witness in reconciled diversity.
- People who are poor, politically disenfranchised, or socially marginalized are essential interlocutors in the mission of God. The Church's common witness is done *with* those who suffer.
- "Christians believe justice is achieved through restitution and not retribution" (1979:2).
- "The laws of any society – the requirements it defines for the behavior of its members – must reflect its commitment to justice among and for all its members" (1979:2).
- Dialogue and reflection are necessary, but alone they are insufficient to fulfill the Church's obligation to human suffering. Inasmuch as the cries of victims give expression to the heart of God, unity in Christ compels life-giving manifestations of a common witness to Christ's love for humanity.

Sampling of Issues, Themes, Norms, and Values Associated with Mass Incarceration

There are many, many ways in which concerns related to the topic of mass incarceration are presented. Examples would include the following:

- Law and order: social control, its merits, limits, and liabilities
- Privatization of prisons and the prison industrial complex in the U.S.
- Institutional racism and its consequences
- Retribution and the quest for justice: The responsibility of community in restoration
- From a fragmented society to a call to care
- Exiled, unwanted, and longing for acceptance and love

- Forgiveness and reconciliation as paths to personal and communal restoration

Our Aims and Hopes

From the NCC's attention on and responses to mass incarceration, we hope to achieve four modest outcomes to which this "starter kit" aims to support.

By reflecting on the habits of mind that result in racially biased and discriminatory beliefs and actions, we hope to change some ways of thinking and acting and to enhance our capacities for creative problem-solving.

By identifying, making problematic, and re-framing issues, we hope to encourage Christians and others who share our values to question the status quo; to educate participants to detect ambiguities, inequities, anomalies, and unjust patterns and practices for responding more justly in future actions.

By facilitating learning and interactions that enhance viewing situations from multiple perspectives, we hope to transcend mass incarceration as an issue of "me" versus "them," and move toward understandings of "us" and a shared existence.

By advocating for reduced dependency on incarceration as the primary means toward restorative justice for victims and perpetrators, we hope to work toward reconciliation of broken lives and communities and the repair of God's world.

The Sentencing Project

Established in 1986, The Sentencing Project works for a fair and effective U.S. criminal justice system by promoting reforms in sentencing policy, addressing unjust racial disparities and practices, and advocating for alternatives to incarceration. The Sentencing Project is dedicated to changing the way Americans think about crime and punishment. The Sentencing Project engages in research, public education, and technical assistance to enhance fairness in the justice system and to reduce racial disparities. It conducts research and training and produces analyses for policymakers and practitioners on strategies to meet the goals of both public safety and racial justice. The organization is a leader in national efforts to educate the public on the need to reform policies and practices that prohibit or limit voting by people with felony convictions.

The Sentencing Project presents five fact-sheets to introduce learners to several issues related to mass incarceration. They are listed and may be accessed by clicking on the links below.

1. [Facts About Prisons and Prisoners](http://sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/inc_Facts_About_Prisons.pdf); http://sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/inc_Facts_About_Prisons.pdf
2. [Incarcerated Women](http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/cc_Incarcerated_Women_Factsheet_Dec2012final.pdf); http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/cc_Incarcerated_Women_Factsheet_Dec2012final.pdf
3. [The Science of Downsizing Prisons -- What Works?](http://sentencingproject.org/doc/The_Science_of_Downsizing_Prisons_-_What_Works_.pdf); [http://sentencingproject.org/doc/The_Science_of_Downsizing_Prisons -- What Works .pdf](http://sentencingproject.org/doc/The_Science_of_Downsizing_Prisons_-_What_Works_.pdf)
4. [Trends in U.S. Corrections](http://sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/inc_Trends_in_Corrections_Fact_sheet.pdf); [http://sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/inc_Trends in Corrections Fact sheet.pdf](http://sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/inc_Trends_in_Corrections_Fact_sheet.pdf)
5. [U.S. Prison Population Trends](http://sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/inc_Prison_Population_Trends_fs.pdf); [http://sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/inc_Prison_Population_Trends fs.pdf](http://sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/inc_Prison_Population_Trends_fs.pdf)

The Sentencing Project is based in Washington, D.C. For more information contact, The Sentencing Project at 202.628.0871 (p); 202.628.1091 (fax); or by e-mail at: staff@sentencingproject.org.

MASS INCARCERATION AWARENESS WORSHIP RESOURCES & SERMON THEMES

Reverend Marilyn B. Kendrix

Here is a resource for planning worship and creating sermons to raise awareness about mass incarceration in America.

MASS INCARCERATION FACTS:

- The United States holds in prisons and jails, federal and state, a combined total of 2.3 million people—that's one in every 99 adults, behind bars.
- The number of people who are on probation or parole, those still under correctional control, or suffering the impact of a criminal record is 65 million.
- The rate of young black men, between the ages of 20 and 34 is 1 in 9.
- America today incarcerates more of her black citizens than South Africa imprisoned during the height of apartheid.
- More black people are imprisoned today than were enslaved in 1850, a decade prior to the Civil War.
- The cause of the steep rise in levels of incarceration since 1980: the War on Drugs, overwhelmingly targeted enforcement in poor communities.
- The U.S. has taken what is essentially a public health issue—drug addiction—and criminalized it.
- Punishment continues after the actual period of incarceration.
 - Ex-felons are prohibited from living in public housing and most private landlords will not rent to them.
 - Ex-felons are barred from federal assistance, even food stamps.
 - Employment discrimination against ex-felons is widespread and commonplace.
 - These barriers to successful integration result in a high rate of recidivism.
- Over half of all Federal prisoners are nonviolent drug offenders.
- Most people recidivate or return to prison as a result of technical violations of probation or parole such as missing a curfew, missing a scheduled meeting with a probation or parole officer, or failure to gain employment.

WORSHIP RESOURCES BY SEASON

ADVENT

Call to Worship:

Leader: You who are poor, why have you come?

People: To hear good news.

Leader: You who are brokenhearted, why have you come?

People: To have our hearts healed.

Leader: You who are captive, why have you come?

People: To hear words of freedom.

Leader: You who are prisoners, why have you come?

People: To be released from what binds us.

Leader: You who mourn, why have you come?

People: To receive comfort.

Leader: Then you are welcome here in this place, await a Lord who offers blessing for all.

Processional Hymn: “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” various hymnals

Collect:

O God, whose incarnation we await: We humbly pray that you guide us as we seek ways to participate in your anointing. Help us to pour out our love on the poor, the imprisoned, the comfortless, just as you pour out your unconditional love upon us. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Leader: God is love; the omnipotent and compassionate parent that holds the world tenderly in a warm embrace. God desires that we love each other as a mother loves her child, as a father embraces his own.

People: All too often we fail in our efforts to live as God would have us live. We push away, turning cold shoulders to God and to each other. We express anger and resentment instead of compassion and grace. We seek revenge instead of reconciliation. In these moments we ask God to forgive us and set us upon the right path.

Sermon Hymn: “Through All the World, a Hungry Christ,” #587 *The New Century Hymnal*, alternate tune: MARYTON

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1–2a; Luke 4:16–21

Sermon Theme:

The Savior that we are waiting for is one who declared himself the fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, when the captive would go free. Can we do any less?

Recessional Hymn: "Go Forth for God," #708 *Worship & Rejoice*

+ + +

EPIPHANY

Call to Worship:

Leader: Star of Wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light.

People: Surely God is in this place! Let us worship God.

Processional Hymn: “We Three Kings,” #254 *The United Methodist Hymnal*

Collect:

O God, by the leading of a star you manifested your only Son to the people of the earth:
Lead us, who know you now by faith, into sudden insight, that we may reflect your
boundless love for us with boundless love for one another. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Faithful God, you call us to be saints, but we are more comfortable with the role of sinner;
you call us to be your servants, but we worry that we lack the skills to do your work; you put
a new song of praise in our mouths, but we stumble on unfamiliar words; you show us the
work to be tackled, but we turn away defiant, insisting we have more important things to do.

Put your song on our lips and in our hearts, and remind us of the joy that awaits us when we
put our trust in you. Guide us into the light of your unwavering, never-ending, and grace-
filled love. Amen. (From *Ministry Matters*: January 12, 2014)

Sermon Hymn: “Arise, Your Light Is Come,” #744 *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal*

Scripture: Mathew 2:1-12; Luke 2: 25-38

Sermon Theme:

Sudden Insight – Truths that we have been blind to can be revealed to us, whether is it the
insight of the wise men who, at the sighting of a star in the East, realize they must search for
a baby who would become “king of the Jews,” OR Anna and Simeon’s insight that the baby
being dedicated in the synagogue would be the salvation of all people OR our insight about
the truths of the system of mass incarceration in America.

Recessional Hymn: “Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service” #461 *Chalice Hymnal*

+ + +

LENT

Call to Worship:

Leader: God of Life,

All: you are as near to us as our breath.

Leader: Touch our eyes,

All: that we may see you in one another.

Leader: Open our ears,

All: that we may hear your voice in the cries of the oppressed.

Leader: Enter our hearts,

All: that we may be filled with your love toward all people.

Leader: Come, O God of life and breath and wholeness.

All: Be with us now. Show us the way to new life and grant us the courage to be people of your Way.

Processional Hymn: "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy," #587 *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ST. HELENA)

Collect:

Be gracious to us, your people, we entreat you, O Lord, that we, repenting day by day of the things that displease you, may be more and more filled with love of you and of your commandments; and, help us through the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, to drop our stones of condemnation and reflect your forgiveness upon a broken world. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

One: You speak, Lord, but we are not always listening.

All: Sometimes other voices are louder or more persuasive.

One: You show us your way, Lord, but we are not always looking.

All: Sometimes other ways seduce us with their ease or power.

One: You give us choices, now help us to learn your will.

All: Lead us, Lord, to walk your way on any road we travel.

Sermon Hymn: "O God, How We Have Wandered," #202, *The New Century Hymnal*

Scripture: Romans 2:17-24; John 8:1-11

Sermon Theme:

Are we stone throwers? How can we, who follow a Savior who forgave the woman caught in adultery, show no forgiveness for those coming out of prisons in our nation?

We are a people who throw rocks at the poorest, darkest Americans and have a system that has very little forgiveness in it.

Recessional Hymn: “Send Forth by God’s Blessing,” #664 *The United Methodist Hymnal*

+ + +

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. SUNDAY

Call to Worship:

Leader: God of the prophets, call to us today.

People: Call us into Your ways of love, justice, and righteousness.

Leader: God of the poets, remind us again how much You love us.

People: Sing to us Your ways of love, justice, and righteousness.

Leader: God of the disciples, teach us how to follow You.

People: Teach us Your ways of love, justice, and righteousness.

Leader: God of all creation, help us to know Your ways.

All: We gather to hear Your call, to sing Your praise, to teach each other, to pray and worship as the body of Christ.

Processional Hymn: "God, with Joy We Look Around Us," #58 *Songs of Grace*

Collect:

God our creator, who in the beginning commanded the light to shine out of darkness: we pray that the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ may dispel the darkness of ignorance, shining into the hearts of all your people to reveal the knowledge of your hope of fellowship and love for all God's people. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Leader: O God, You created us in divine likeness, diverse and beautiful: In every person, every race is your image.

All: But too often we fail to recognize your image in all: Forgive us.

Leader: You created us in divine freedom, to be free: In every decision, every choice is your possibility of justice.

All: But too often we fail to choose to advocate for your justice for all: Forgive us.

Open our eyes to distinguish good from evil. Open our hearts to desire good over evil.

Strengthen our wills to choose good over evil, so that we may create among us your beloved community.

(Adapted from United Church of Christ Prayer for Racial Justice)

Sermon Hymn: "Let Justice Flow like Streams," #689 *Celebrating Grace Hymnal*

Scripture: Amos 5:14-17, 21-24

Sermon Theme:

Amos called Judah to task for the lack of justice in their time. What would Amos say today

about the lack of justice in our criminal justice system? Martin said we would only be satisfied when justice flows down like water and righteous like a mighty stream.

Recessional Hymn: “We Shall Overcome,” #542 *African American Heritage Hymnal*

+ + +

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Call to Worship:

Leader: Have you not known the God of the downtrodden.

All: Yes, we know this God and surely this God knows us.

Leader: Have you not heard the gospel of the oppressed: the story of liberation, freedom, and salvation?

All: Yes, we have heard this story and surely this story lives in us.

Leader: We know and we have heard that God is good,

All: all the time!

Leader: And all the time,

All: God is good. Amen!

Processional Hymn: "Let Streams of Living Justice Flow Down upon the Earth,"

#710 Evangelical Lutheran Worship

Collect:

Holy God of history, help us to remember those who have gone before, blazing a trail of justice for all God's people. Help us to remember that we are the people of Hagar and Ruth, of Paul and Martin, and of Jesus, whose ministry declared release to the captives and liberty to the prisoners. Grant us the courage to join their number in ushering in your kingdom on earth.

Prayer of Confession:

Leader: The gospel is for all people.

All: Yet sometimes we hide the gospel, keeping the good news to ourselves.

Leader: Sometimes we proclaim our own version of the story; a version that excludes those who challenge our comfortable understandings; a version that does not remind us of our complicity with forms of human oppression.

All: Forgive us, God, when we change history to feed our egos.

Leader: Forgive us, when we celebrate an end result, without remembering the long and difficult journey.

All: Forgive us, God. Amen.

Sermon Hymn: "Let Justice Flow like Streams," #689 *Celebrating Grace Hymnal*

Scripture: Amos 5:14-17, 21-24

Sermon Theme:

Amos called the people of Judah to task for the lack of justice in their time. What would

Amos say today about the lack of justice in our criminal justice system? Does justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream in America today?

Recessional Hymn: “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” #339 *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal*

+ + +

EASTER SEASON

Call to Worship

Leader: The disciples, Jesus' first followers, had doubts arise in their hearts.

ALL: Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

Leader: Jesus, our teacher, cried out for justice for all God's people.

ALL: Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

Leader: Jesus, our brother, pointed out injustice in our midst.

ALL: Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

Leader: Christ, our Risen Lord, shows us the way of abundant life for all God's people.

ALL: Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

Leader: Come, let us worship our Risen Christ, who opens our eyes and fills our hearts.

Processional Hymn: "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing," #96 *Worship & Rejoice*

Collect:

God of new life, move through the locked doors of our hearts. Open us to your love moving in the world. Instruct us as you taught the disciples. Make a new church of us, a blessed place where we live in unity. Help us to learn from those first believers who prayed as we do.

Prayer of Confession:

Wondrous God, we confess that at times our doubts and fears override our hope and faith. Forgive us when we lose sight of the joy of Your love and instead fall into despair and gloom. Lift up our spirits, Lord, and help us to remember the promise of new life here and now, not just the hope of resurrection for the future. We give thanks for Your Son, Jesus the Christ, who continues to offer us new life, who continues to turn us around and upside down, who continues to break down the walls of death in our own life. Forgive us, restore us, and renew us. In the name of our risen Savior, Jesus the Christ, we pray. Amen.

Sermon Hymn: "We Walk by Faith, and Not by Sight," #256 *The New Century Hymnal*

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1-2; John 20:24-29

Sermon theme:

Doubting Thomas could not believe that Jesus had arisen from the dead without seeing him in person and putting his hand into Jesus' wounds. And while Jesus does not rebuke him for his disbelief, he does proclaim, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." There

are many good folks who have not been personally touched by the criminal justice system and yet, they have come to believe that it is broken and must be changed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe!

Recessional Hymn: “For Everyone Born,” #769 *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal*

+ + +

ORDINARY TIME I

Call to Worship:

Leader: Micah said that the Lord requires us to do justice.

All: Fill us, O Lord, with a yearning for justice.

Leader: Micah said that the Lord requires us to love kindness.

All: Help us, Holy One, to look with kindness upon our world.

Leader: Micah said that the Lord requires us to walk humbly with God.

All: Come, let us humbly worship our Lord.

Processional Hymn: “Community of Christ,” #314 *The New Century Hymnal*

Collect:

Oh God, our teacher, example, companion—

You have shown us what is good, and call us to remember that what you require is not repayment of debt or settling the score, but obedience. Show us, God, when to do justice, how to love kindness, and where to walk, humbly, with You. Amen.

- Dana Cassell

Prayer of Confession:

Good and gracious God,

We confess that we are not always as aware of your presence as we should be. Too frequently we live our lives as if we are the judge and jury of the world. Too frequently, we miss out on the opportunity to tap into your always present love and share it with others (even those we think of as enemies). Too frequently we have only anger and judgment for others.

Remind us of your omnipresence. Make us ever aware of our call to be a reflection of you, our Creator. Teach us to walk softly in our lives. Guide us to places of love and humility. Create in us a peace that passes understanding. And inspire us to seek out justice for those who find far too little of it in this world that we have created.

(From a Facebook prayer)

Sermon Hymn: “O God, You Call for Justice,” (AURELIA) available at

<http://www.carolynshymns.com/>

Scripture: Micah 6:1-8; Romans 13:8

Sermon Theme:

How well are we doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God when we as a society have set up a system of mass incarceration from which there is no forgiveness once the period of incarceration is at an end?

Recessional Hymn: “Lord, Whose Love through Humble Service,” #416 *Chalice Hymnal*

+ + +

ORDINARY TIME II

Call to Worship:

Leader: Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

All: Loving God, inspire us to show our love for you and our neighbor.

Leader: Let us be thankful that God's love is more faithful than ours.

All: And let us be restored again to dwell with God, for God is always ready to receive us.

Leader: With thankful hearts, come, let us worship our loving God.

Processional Hymn: "Community of Christ," #314 *The New Century Hymnal*

Collect:

Eternal God, Rescuer of the weak: given every reason to judge us, you seek justice for us. You stand with the poor in the ditches where we have discarded them. You plant your Word of truth in the One who gives us unexpected answers. Holy God, do not pass us by, but stoop to lift us up and carry us out of our pain. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

O Lord, we love you and we know that we can best show our love for you by loving others in your name. But too often we fall short. Forgive us, Lord, when we fail to be loving to those who are closest to us, our families and friends.

Forgive us too, Lord, when we fail to love those we find hard to love. You know who they are. It is all too easy for us to ignore them, to dismiss them, to judge them, to do anything but love them. Forgive us for failing to act toward them with Christlike love. Amen.

Sermon Hymn: "Called as Partners in Christ's Service," #495 *The New Century Hymnal*

Scripture: Luke 10:25-37; Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18

Sermon Theme:

God calls us to love our neighbors, even unlikely ones who don't live close by. Those who languish in our nation's prisons and jails are our neighbors as well, whom Jesus would have us love. We can show that love by working to end our nation's system of mass incarceration.

Recessional Hymn: "Sent Forth by God's Blessing," #76 *The New Century Hymnal*

+ + +

ORDINARY TIME II SERMON: “Unlikely Neighbors” by Reverend Marilyn B. Kendrix

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18; Luke 10:25-37

UNLIKELY NEIGHBORS

Our Gospel reading today is one that is so very familiar to us all, I think. So familiar is it that we use the phrase, Good Samaritan, as a common English expression to mean someone who helps another, simply out of the goodness of their heart. We even have laws in most states and many countries round the world referred to as “Good Samaritan Laws” to protect ordinary citizens who stop to help someone who is hurt from being sued for their helping in our very litigious society.

Yet, I think that many of us don’t usually take the time to look under the surface of this parable in Luke, to see what Jesus is really saying here, because, with Jesus, parables are rarely straightforward and Jesus rarely says the expected, commonly understood truth. Jesus’ teachings are always more complicated to our understanding of conventional wisdom than that. So, let’s look at this parable a little more closely.

I think it’s important to start with the first few verses, where Jesus is asked about eternal life by a lawyer.

“Teacher,” he says, “ what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

And Jesus essentially tells him that any good Jew would know the answer, by quoting from the Torah, the Law that all Jews were bound to keep, from Deuteronomy 6:4 which says:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”

And then from Leviticus 19:18:

“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”

In true lawyer fashion, the young man seeks to complicate the issue by asking Jesus to clearly explain exactly who his neighbor is. And this is where we get to the crux of the matter. In this parable, Jesus has four main characters . . . a priest, a Levite, a Samaritan, and an injured man. And by the end of the parable, we find that it is the Samaritan who has truly acted as the

neighbor. The neighbor who loves and whom we are supposed to love according to the Old Testament Law—AND according to Jesus. So what does this tell us?

Let's start with the Samaritan. Who exactly were the Samaritans? Well, the Samaritans were the folks descended from the Northern Kingdom of Israel, about a thousand years before Jesus. The Samaritans were looked down on by the Jews of Jesus' time as sellouts; but in truth, they were Jews of another sort themselves. So, this Samaritan in Jesus' parable is not really some completely foreign person. No, this man is a descendant of the same group of people as both the priest and the Levite. Their connection may have been a thousand years old by the time of Jesus, but connected they were. So what we have in the Samaritan is an enemy, a person whom the Jews of Jesus' time would have understood as being someone that they would never have dreamed of talking to, let alone helping.

But in the clever way that Jesus always has in his parables, just by using a Samaritan as one of his characters, Jesus points out both this man's complete "otherness" **and** his connection to them—a connection that goes back so far that it seems obvious that the point is that the whole human family is indeed connected. We are all connected. Jesus' choice of a Samaritan in this story underscores the universality of his understanding of the word "neighbor."

Okay, in this parable, before the Samaritan helps the person in need, we are told about two others, a priest and a Levite, who both cross to the other side of the street to stay REALLY, REALLY far away from the injured man. It is important to understand that both the priest and the Levite are men who served the Jewish community in the Temple. These men were the religious leaders of their time, the good religious folk. Now, we can understand that it was important for them both to stay really far away from any blood. It was believed that if they came into contact with any blood they would be defiled and thus unable to carry out their duties at the Temple. So before we get too judgmental about their behavior, we need to understand that they believed that they were serving a higher purpose as they crossed to the other side and ignored the bleeding man on the street. Good religious folk. So, it is the Samaritan who helps, who dips into his own funds to provide for the care and feeding for this stranger, assuring that he will be able to recover from the wounds that he has suffered at the hands of evil forces in their society.

The man lying bleeding in the gutter IS the neighbor. And the Samaritan acts **as** a neighbor, showing love to this person with whom he has no relationship but with whom he is ultimately connected, WAY back, as a member of the human race—the people of God. Turns out that the Samaritan is a very unlikely neighbor, yet he chose to show love by helping this stranger.

So, what does this story say to us today? Well, I believe it says lots of things about our choices as individuals and our choices as a society. We could talk about how we good religious folk treat or even think about the strangers in our midst—the undocumented immigrants among us. Or how we look upon the person who looks different, or acts different or smells different. Or how we experience that homeless person, begging on the street that we frequently have to walk past. There are lots of people whom we would like to cross off our list of neighbors. BUT, there are real consequences when we fail to love our neighbors.

I have an example of one particular group of people, folks who are almost universally **not** thought of as the neighbors whom Jesus would have us love. I am thinking of people in prison. I am thinking of the people who, when they **come out** of lockup at the end of their sentence, find themselves still **locked out** of American society. The consequence of not loving these people has resulted in a system of mass incarceration of more of our citizens than any other nation on the planet. The United States holds in prisons and jails, federal and state, a combined total of 2.3 million people—that's one in every 99 adults behind bars. And if we count the number of people who are on probation or parole, those still under correctional control, still lying in America's metaphorical gutters like the bleeding man in our parable, the number climbs to a staggering 65 million people. We have more people in prison per 100,000 people than does Russia or China . . . China!

As we hear these numbers, we have to ask, well, aren't these folks just more criminal than everyone else in America? And the answer is, No. Many are not. What many are . . . is subject to the targeted enforcement of our nation's mostly failed policy called the War on Drugs. Enforcement targeted primarily poor communities. The fact is that prisons are mostly packed with our nation's poor people. Two-thirds of those in prison lived below the poverty line prior to their imprisonment. Upwards of 90 percent of those incarcerated in our nation's prisons suffer from some sort of addictive disorder, behavioral disorder, and / OR mental health conditions, many needing treatment rather than imprisonment. While many of those imprisoned are young men of color, the largest increase in rates of incarceration over the last few years has been poor, white men.

We live in a nation that imprisons its poor citizens at alarming rates. We live in a nation that imprisons its mentally ill citizens at alarming rates. We as a society have let this happen, I believe, partly because we do not view these folks as our **neighbors**. Neighbors whom we are **called** to care about. Neighbors whom we are **told** by Jesus to love. And so we are left with a system that has taken what is essentially a public health issue—drug addiction—and criminalized it. Unlike our response to alcohol abuse, which we usually respond to with treatment, we have

made the abuse of drugs a criminal offense.

As good Christians, we have to believe in forgiveness. Earlier we prayed a prayer, asking for and being granted forgiveness for our various transgressions. And yet our criminal justice system has penalties and prohibitions that go well beyond the actual period of incarceration. There is not much forgiveness to be found in the way our society deals with those coming out of prison, allegedly having paid their debt to society. No, when folks from poor communities are released after having served their time, they cannot go home to live in public housing, often where their families live. It is not allowed. So they are homeless. They cannot get any public assistance. It is not allowed. So they are hungry. Employment discrimination is legal and many if not most employers will not hire them. So they have no prospects. The system is structured such that the only thing for them to do is re-offend and go back to prison and then we are dismayed at the high rate of recidivism, even though the system, as it stands, offers them little other choice.

But, if we think about these folks, who, like the Samaritan, are very different from us, unemployed, homeless, living at the margins of society, as our neighbors, whom Jesus would have us love, what should we do? What is our responsibility as Christians to the person with whom we have no relationship but with whom we are ultimately connected, WAY back, as a member of the human family—the people of God?

Should we be like the good religious folks in the parable, the priest and the Levite who don't want to get involved lest they become defiled themselves? Or should we look for ways to love unlikely neighbors? In the fourth chapter of Luke, we are told that Jesus went into his hometown of Nazareth and announced in the synagogue,

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

I believe that imprisoning our poorest Americans, in massive numbers and then setting up a system that locks them in a poverty from which there is no escape and blaming them for their misfortune is not what Jesus had in mind as he proclaimed the year of the Lord's favor, when the captive would go free. It's not what **Jesus** had in mind and it is not what the prophet Micah tells

us the Lord requires of us. Imprisoning our poorest Americans and then creating a system where their punishment never ends, does not square in any way with doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God.

So, what is it that we can do? Well, we can advocate for an end to policies that create and support mass incarceration . . . policies like Stop and Frisk, policies like zero-tolerance in schools, which has done more to fill the pre-kindergarten-to-prison pipeline than anything else. We can advocate for universal early childhood education, since over 70 percent of all offenders and ex-offenders are high school dropouts. We can think about hiring ex-offenders, offering them the chance to start over with a clean slate.

There are so many ways to live into the call to Christian discipleship; and loving our neighbors, as unlikely as they may be, is one of them. And the most wonderful thing about loving God's people is that each person who loves gets so much more out of it than they put in. It's all a part of the economy of God, an economy where as you pour out your love onto others, you always discover that you have more love left than when you started.

Jesus is calling all of us to **be** a neighbor by finding an unlikely neighbor to love.

Amen.

Option

If, like me, you are surprised by the cause of our nation's system of mass incarceration and want to learn more about it, I encourage you stay after church today and attend an Adult Forum on the subject where I will go into much more detail.

Mass Incarceration
A Small-Group Resource Guide for Study: Reading, Seeing, and Doing
By Eric M. Cain

READ

Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York, NY: The New Press, 2012.

Moran, Brian E. & Malta Justice Initiative. *The Justice Imperative: How Hyper-Incarceration Has Hijacked the American Dream*. New York, NY: Significance Press, 2014.

(Note: Please visit the book website at <http://thejusticeimperative.org/> for additional information. There is also a video of the Malta Justice Initiative Legislative Breakfast Forum at the [Connecticut] State Capitol from March 2015 online at <http://ctn.com/ctnplayer.asp?odID=11352>.)

Simon, Jonathan. *Mass Incarceration on Trial: A Remarkable Court Decision and the Future of Prisons in America*. New York, NY: The New Press, 2014.

White, David F., ed. *Insights: The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary* 130, no. 1 (2014).
http://issuu.com/austinseminary/docs/fall_2014_insights/3?e=2809396/9720315
(Note: The topic of this issue is “The Crisis of Incarceration.”)

SEE

Broken on All Sides: Race, Mass Incarceration & New Visions for Criminal Justice in the U.S. Directed by Matthew Pillischer. 2012. Independent Film.
(Note: The film website is <http://brokenonallsides.com>.)

“Freedom School Program Liberates Kids in Probation Camp.”
<http://www.vimeo.com/71288015>
(Note: This clip is about the Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools.)

“Mass Incarceration.” *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly* (PBS). 2012.
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2013/06/07/january-13-2012-mass-incarceration/10091/>

Other relevant and informative videos from PBS.org and *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly* are listed below:

- “Dr. Brenda Williams” (2011): <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/?p=9955>
- “Prisoner Reentry” (2011): <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/?p=8181>
- “Jailhouse Chaplain” (2010): <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/?p=6484>
- “Ministering to Sex Offenders” (2010): <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/?p=5591>
- “Juvenile Sentencing” (2009): <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/?p=4948>
- “Communities in Prison” (2009): <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/?p=3018>
- “Pat Nolan” (2007): <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/?p=4039>

DO

Activity One

Speak with two or three people from different racial or ethnic backgrounds who have been caught up in the criminal justice system at some point in their lives. Simply listen to their stories, without making judgments. Ask questions during the conversations that might help you better understand their experience(s) and how they view the U.S. criminal justice system today.

Activity Two

Write a letter to your state or U.S. Congressional representative expressing a need for reform in the state and U.S. prison systems. Make it clear that you are part of a faith community and your faith has called you to seek out reform on this justice issue of our time. Before writing your letter, try to educate yourself on the basics of the issues of mass incarceration (you can use some of the resources we’ve listed above).

Activity Three

Start a book reading, film screening, or other conversation point on mass incarceration at your church or in your community. Consider inviting a prison chaplain, or someone involved in prison ministry, to speak with your group. Try to focus in on two particular subtopics: (1) racial injustices in the U.S. criminal justice system and (2) prisons being used simply as a system of punishment rather than a process and space for reform and healing of those in prison.

Contextual Interfaith Advocacy Work on Mass Incarceration (2 Credit Course)

Boston University School of Theology -Travel Seminar to:
The 2015 Christian Unity Gathering of the National Council of Churches
(Washington, D.C) May 7-9, 2015

FACULTY:

Rev. Dr. Cristian De La Rosa

Office: (617) 353-3058 Cell: (214) 478-4643 Email: cdlrosa@bu.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will consider the history and ministry of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA and its interfaith advocacy work related to mass incarceration. It will explore denominational advocacy practices by learning about what religious leaders, community organizers, and other public leaders are doing in the urban settings to prevent mass incarceration, to strengthen interfaith networks, and to facilitate community organizing through alternative and transformative ministries/initiatives. It will involve participation in the annual convocation of the National Council of Churches, intentional conversations with denominational leadership, participation in working groups during the convocation, and attentive listening to lectures and dialogues of church and community leaders. The course will include reading, research, and contextual learning from transformative community and church leaders tackling difficult problems in creative and relevant ways.

METHOD

This course will be a seminar during the national convocation of religious leadership by the National Council of Churches (May 7-9). The instructor will facilitate critical engagement of readings, participation in the convocation and dialogue with scholars, pastors from diverse faith traditions, and community organizers. Selected readings before and after travel to the national convocation are designed to assist students in framings and gleaning from contextual inter-religious urban ministerial practices. Workshops, dialogues, and lectures during the convocation will assist students in considering theories, official historical understandings, and urban practices relating to the specific issue of mass incarceration in the U.S. Students will integrate readings and immersion experiences by reflecting upon the implications for engaging urban ministry in the diverse contexts of the U.S.

GOALS OF THIS COURSE

This course will provide students with the opportunity to:

1. Consider the different historical processes that ground the emergence of the National Council of Churches as a coordinating body for ecumenical and interfaith advocacy ministry.
2. Explore contextual models of transformative ministries and initiatives addressing the issues related to mass incarceration.
3. Engage key religious leadership at the national convocation of religious leadership (May 2015) and explore the diversity and multiplicity of religious beliefs, traditions, experiences, and practices included in the membership of the National Council of Churches.
4. Identify practical applications of the course content for transformative ministry and community organizing in the particular urban contexts of the U.S.
5. Read a selected bibliography.
6. Research a specific issue or concern identified in the integrating of content facilitated by faculty, readings, and the gleaning from experiencing the National Council of Churches' convocation of religious leadership.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

As a result of these opportunities, students will:

1. Describe general historical background and contemporary issues related to the National Council of Churches as a coordinating body for interfaith advocacy ministry in the context of the U.S.
2. Demonstrate the ability to identify contextual models of transformative ministries and initiatives and analyze practices relating to preventing mass incarceration.
3. Establish and/or strengthen an interfaith network.
4. List possible practical applications of the course for contextual transformative ministerial practices and community organizing in the context of the U.S.
5. Articulate a basic framing for interfaith advocacy work against mass incarceration.

CLASS SESSIONS

There will be an orientation session and two post-travel sessions. The orientation session will serve to reflect on the aims of the course, preparation for participation in the National Council of Churches gathering, consideration of historical background, and contemporary framing. The post-travel sessions will focus on gleanings from readings and the travel experience, integration of travel experience and readings as well as practical application for pastoral and community organizing practices in the urban settings.

REQUIRED READINGS

Kessler, Diane C. and Kinnamon, Michael (2000). *Councils of Churches and the Ecumenical Vision*. Geneva: World Council of Churches.

Findlay, Jr., James F. (1993). *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950 - 1970*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York, NY: The New Press, 2012.

Simon, Jonathan. *Mass Incarceration on Trial: A Remarkable Court Decision and the Future of Prisons in America*. New York, NY: The New Press, 2014.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Barr, William R. and Yocom, Rena M. (Eds.) (1994). *The Church in the Movement of the Spirit*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

White, David F., ed. *Insights: The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary* 130, no. 1 (2014).
http://issuu.com/austinseminary/docs/fall_2014_insights/3?e=2809396/9720315
(Note: The topic of this issue is “The Crisis of Incarceration.”)

Broken on All Sides: Race, Mass Incarceration & New Visions for Criminal Justice in the U.S. Directed by Matthew Pillischer. 2012. Independent Film.
(Note: The film website is <http://brokenonallsides.com>.)

“Mass Incarceration.” *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly* (PBS). 2012.
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2013/06/07/january-13-2012-mass-incarceration/10091/>

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Critical Reflection Papers (3) on required readings (30 percent of grade)

Critical reflection papers of 2 to 3 pages each in which the assigned readings are engaged prior to class discussion. In these papers you need to (1) identify a topic, concept, or issue in the readings; (2) develop a personal and analytical argument; and (3) conclude the paper by relating

the argument to the reality/situation of a particular community in the U.S. today.

NOTE: This should not be a summary of the text, a “book report,” or a commentary on the text. Note that *your own voice* is expected on a topic, concept, or issue from the readings. Make a critical argument, and apply it to contextual realities today.

DUE: May 15, at the first and second post-travel class sessions

Research Paper (25 percent of grade)

Students are expected to write a 12 to 15-page research paper on a specific practice, concept, or issue in relation to any of the course readings or content of the National Council of Churches’ convocation (any of the lectures or panel presentations).

Students will submit a **1-page paper proposal with annotated outline and possible**

bibliography for approval. *The purpose of this paper is to research a specific practice or issue within a particular context, exploring: (1) the meaning and function of the practice/issue, (2) analysis of historical and contextual dynamics of power in this practice/issue, (3) embodiment and impact of that practice/issue on individual lives/communities, (4) how that practice/issue is contextually deployed, and (5) how it contributes to or limits the transformation processes of individuals/particular communities.*

DUE: December 1, 2015

Creative class presentation (15 percent of grade)

Integration of experiences at the National Council of Churches in relation to course readings and research paper will be demonstrated with a 15-minute presentation for the last class meeting. This presentation is meant to facilitate integration of learning experiences. An outline of the presentation and at least one question for discussion is due in writing (no more than 2 pages) two days before class presentation.

DUE: last post-travel class session

DOCTORAL STUDENTS

Students taking this course for doctoral credits are required to do all work at a doctoral level (800- level). In addition to the requirements of this class, doctoral students are required to (1) read one additional text from the suggested reading list or other text with approval from the instructor—a text that might complement their research projects and relate to this course, (2) add 10 pages to the research paper, and (3) offer a 10 to 15-minute class presentation integrating the additional text and experience in this course with their area of research interest/research project (this presentation will be for the last after-travel class session and will be part of the grading for the discussion question presentation during the travel seminar).

GRADING CRITERIA:

Grading Scoring

Informed participation and attendance	30%
Critical reflection papers on assigned readings	30%
Creative class presentation	15%
Research paper	25%

The following criteria for evaluation will apply to all assigned requirements:

- Engagement with required texts
- Assignments turned in by due date
- Fulfillment of assignment as described in the syllabus
- Accuracy of scholarship and format on written assignments
- Depth of reflection and critical analysis
- Elements of insight, creativity, and imagination

COURSE POLICIES

Absences

Students are expected to attend all scheduled sessions and to arrive promptly.

Paper Formatting

1. Entire document
 - a. Double spaced
 - b. 12 point serif font (e.g. Palatino or Times New Roman)
 - c. Formatted for 8½ by 11-inch paper in black ink
 - d. 1 inch margins on all sides of the page
2. On the first page (need not be a separate title page)
 - a. Your name, date, and course title
 - b. Title of the assignment, centered
3. References
 - a. Use the footnote or endnote reference system according to the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition.
 - b. Include a full bibliographic reference list at the end of the paper.
 - c. For style models, see Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*.
 - d. For online help, see: www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

Late Assignments

Students are expected to hand in work on time. Assignments turned in after the deadline noted on this syllabus will be subject to a penalty equivalent to half a letter grade for every twenty-four hours the work is late. Students in extraordinary circumstances (illness with doctor's note or death in the family, etc.) may request extensions. Communication about extensions for potentially late assignments should be made in advance via e-mail to Dr. De La Rosa (cdlrosa@bu.edu) prior to any due date.

Plagiarism

All written work in this course *must* be original to you. If you consult outside texts, please cite these sources in the proper format using quotation marks where appropriate. This pertains to all external sources (books, journals, lectures, sermons, or websites). In many cases, students do not *intend* to plagiarize; however, the penalty still applies. For a fuller understanding of what constitutes plagiarism, read the following as taken from a statement at the University of Albany:

EXAMPLES OF PLAGIARISM INCLUDE: failure to acknowledge the source(s) of even a few phrases, sentences, or paragraphs; failure to acknowledge a quotation or paraphrase of paragraph-length sections of a paper; failure to acknowledge the source(s) of a major idea or the source(s) for an ordering principle central to the paper's or project's structure; failure to acknowledge the source (quoted, paraphrased, or summarized) of major sections or passages in the paper or project; the unacknowledged use of several major ideas or extensive reliance on another person's data, evidence, or critical method; submitting as one's own work, work borrowed, stolen, or purchased from someone else.

ACADEMIC CONDUCT

The STH Academic Code of Conduct may be found on the STH website at: www.bu.edu/sth/academic/academic-conduct. All students are required to familiarize themselves with this code, its definitions of misconduct, and its sanctions.

DISABILITIES

Any students who believe they have a disability should meet with BU Disability Services as soon as possible at the beginning of the semester to initiate disability verification and discuss accommodations that may be necessary to ensure your successful completion of course requirements. That office is at 19 Deerfield Street and can be contacted at 617-353-3658. Request for accommodations are then sent by that office to the Academic Dean who forwards them to the Instructor.

Mass Incarceration and Difference: An Educational Exercise in Framing

The Rev. Joseph V. Crockett, Ed. D.

David Bernstein and Noah Isackson reported the following four incidents that took place in Chicago, IL in 2013, in a “Special Report: Part 1 of 2, The Truth About Chicago’s Crime Rates,” April 7, 2014.

On March 17, the body of Michelle Manalansan, a 29-year-old college student, was found stuffed into an air mattress in a Pilsen apartment.

Her death certificate says she died by homicide, citing blunt head and neck trauma.

Police suspended the investigation until a suspect could be “located and interviewed.” A year later, they had still not classified the case as a homicide.

+++++

On July 23, the decomposed body of Tiara Groves, 20, was found naked and gagged in an empty West Side warehouse.

The medical examiner ruled her death a homicide by “unspecified means.”

A lieutenant reclassified the homicide investigation as a noncriminal death investigation on December 18, citing the medical examiner’s “inability to determine a cause of death.”

+++++

On September 21, a suspicious fire broke out in a Roseland apartment building. Third-floor residents Millicent Brown-Johnson, 28, and her son, Jovan Perkins, 8, died of smoke inhalation.

The medical examiner ruled their deaths homicides.

At press time the cases were classified as noncriminal death investigations, not homicide investigations.

+++++

On November 29, 22-year-old Patrick Walker was fatally shot in the head while driving in the Far South Side.

His death certificate says he died by homicide. The medical examiner deferred a finding of the cause and manner of death “pending police investigation.”

“The case is still classified by police as a noncriminal death investigation, not a homicide investigation.”

How experience is labeled, typified, or framed is important. In the instances above, how experiences are labeled is important to families that mourn and tarry with tear-stained eyes in search of answers. It is important to communities who long for safety and security. How experiences are framed and named is important to all who value truth.

Framing

Framing is important. For matters associated with mass incarceration and criminal justice, how we label, typify, and frame experiences and people has serious consequences. How a situation or condition is labeled or typified influences how a topic is understood and how people respond. Framing can contribute to the difference between despair or hope, between reconciliation or recidivism, and in the severest of incidents, between life or death.

Every educational strategy is embedded in assumptions. Five assumptions about framing as an educational strategy are identified below:

1. The definition of a problem sets the boundaries for applicable responses.
2. Many problems have more than a few contributing factors.
3. Subjectivity is involved in any claim that a reality is a “problem.”
4. Framing a problem is a form of analysis that takes longer than either labeling or searching for a solution.
5. Understanding how any social problem is framed, typified, or labeled has educational value and social implications. (Best, 1995; Krile, et. al., 2006)

Framing is an important generative activity that can give rise to opportunities or obstacles for teaching, learning, and becoming. Paulo Freire (1970) wrote about how frames of analysis and interpretation, or in his words, “generative themes,” can function to aid the development of critical consciousness. The tacit structures of assumptions by which individuals, communities, and cultures perceive, reflect on, and make sense of experiences is a frame or set of frames for

subsequent knowing, comprehension, analysis, synthesis, application, and evaluation. Our awareness, characterizations, valuing, and responding to individuals and situations are, in part, shaped by how stories are communicated, how ideas are presented, and how situations are described and casted.

Framing issues of mass incarceration in terms of the concept of *difference* is one of many ways teaching and learning about the topic can be carried out. *Difference*, the state of being unlike others is a forceful emotive tool in the perpetuation of bias, inequalities, injustices, and the spiraling growth of mass incarceration. *Difference* by definition and function separates and isolates, either to advance, restrict, or undermine persons' or a community's life trajectories. Mass incarceration, a systemic phenomenon developed through the social processes of the criminal justice system, is advanced through networks of power and privilege or the lack of access to power and privilege. Networks of power, such as the legal system, public policy, the economy, mass media, and popular culture work inevitably to produce *systems of difference*—race, ethnicity, and social class as well as deviants, thugs, criminals, convicts, inmates, and “ex-cons.”

Systems of difference, advanced by networks of power, contribute to the mass incarceration of people of color in the United States by manufacturing particular frames of reality (Frye, 1983). “It’s only natural that perpetrators should be punished. Doesn’t the Bible says, ‘An eye for an eye?’” and the most recent, “Stand your ground.” Law, public policy, the economy, mass media, and popular culture become interpretive linkages for framing understandings of “right and wrong,” the determination of deviance, and appropriate uses of force for social control. These networks of power aggregate to identify, classify and codify, separate, segregate, and isolate individuals and groups of persons in a manner that cannot be explained or justified as random; “by chance alone.”

Processes of society need not be deterministic to be inevitable. The systems built, the institutions invented, the structures maintained to support and perpetuate the business of mass incarceration—an enterprise built by networks of power for controlling social differences—may possibly be reformed as we learn ways and means difference can be bridged (Rosenblum and Travis, eds. 2012). Hear the wisdom from African traditions: “I am because we are, and because we are, I am.” When difference is understood as adaptive behavior to distinct situations and environments, the term can be conceptualized within the framework of similarity, a shared origin or future (Shipman, 1994:22).

Typifying and studying mass incarceration through a framework of difference can assist teachers

and learners in their educational endeavors. Examining labels commonly used for individuals we know too little about can help dismantle barriers of difference. Exploring biases about a family's social status may foster learners' awareness of the similarities people share. Comprehending how prejudices are shaped may help deconstruct preconceived views people associate with a zip code or neighborhood. Analyzing the composition of injustices may lead to advocacy for persons and groups who are disproportionately entangled in the webs of the criminal justice system. Use of frames as an educational strategy, and the frame of difference related to the topic of mass incarceration, may result in learners investing time and effort in reconciliation of relationships, restoration of communities, and repair of their lot in God's world.

Anchoring Frames in Biblical Witness

From the discipline of Christian religious education, the Judeo-Christian scriptures are an essential source for informing perceptions, discerning realities, and framing issues and alternative possibilities. The scriptures can be described as a rich and varied conversation on religious experiences (Marino, 1983:8-11). Religious experiences can be arranged in a variety of ways for understanding and for making and remaking meaning. Organizing scripture content by biblical themes, teaching-learning taxonomies, the liturgical life of churches and communions, and spiritual disciplines are examples of ways the biblical discourse helps frame the meanings adherents carry with them and the meanings they pass on to others.

Education involves both socialization (faith formation), by which the basic cultural patterns of a people are appropriated, and faith transformation, where, through dialogue and reflection, our meaning-perspectives are reshaped. (Seymour, Crain, and Crockett, 1993:53)

The biblical witness is populated with religious experiences of difference, "otherness," and encounters with "the stranger" and "the other." From the conflict of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-16) to the writer of Deuteronomy's command to "love the stranger" (Deuteronomy 10:12-19), to Jesus' engagement with the Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-42), to Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40) to Paul's confrontation with Christian Jewish leaders who insisted that Gentiles had to bear the marks of Jewish identity in order to gain acceptance in the Church at Galatia (Galatians 1:6-7; 3:28-29).

The use of themes to frame teaching-learning activities can assist learners in overcoming barriers of difference; particularly the obstacle of indifference that silences the voices of Christians and paralyzes the action of churches' common witness. Orienting our life by the seasons of the Christian year can nurture motivations to Christian communities in their move toward right and reconciled relationships with victims, offenders, inmates, and parolees. Routinely enacting

spiritual disciplines can provide the sustenance for addressing systemic issues surrounding mass incarceration and empower the Church's advocacy for justice before principalities and powers. Anchoring our frames of teaching and learning in the biblical witness may encourage teachers and learners to not only have faith in Jesus Christ, but to inspire them to share, embrace, and embody the faith of Jesus Christ to confront, challenge, and work to dismantle the injustices and to alleviate the inequities that bind together the current system referred to as mass incarceration.

Questions to ponder

It can be argued that "good" questions generate reflection on and reconsideration of old ideas as well as stimulate a search of alternatives. Effective teaching requires insightful questions. What kinds of questions might be effectual for a framework of difference?

- What are your experiences of difference?
- Who do you consider as "other," "stranger," or "foreigner"? Why?
- How does your identity, or sense of self, define you as either belonging to or "outside" of particular groups or categories?
- Have you experienced being part of a stigmatized group?
- Have you ever, thoughtlessly or intentionally, perpetuated a stigma or negative stereotype?
- What do you need to do, to know, or to experience about an "other" to see them differently than "other?"
- What perpetuates your indifference to the plight of others?
- Who benefits and who loses from classifications of difference and "other"?
- Who in your community and social networks is working to bridge barriers of difference?

Questions can lead to a change in a person's consciousness by interrupting their perspective of meaning (Mezirow, 1991; Freire, 1972). Questions may lead learners to attend to new ideas and search for other possibilities. Questions are an effective tool in the enterprise of educating for

change.

Conclusion

Framing of a topic for exploration, investigation, and action is a valuable educational strategy. It sets the contours in which the teaching-learning enterprise takes place. It provides a path for vigorous analysis of important, complex issues. Applied to the topic of mass incarceration, the frame of difference can move the Church from pews of indifference, where little knowledge and thinly veiled understandings are seated to avenues of empathy and action on behalf of the stranger. In spite of the myriad mountain of obstacles that currently riddle the criminal justice system, frameworks of difference—of otherness—can make a difference. With faith in Christ and the faith of Christ, frameworks of difference can move us from indifference to engagement in teaching-learning activities that result in a faithful, common witness.

References

- Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York, NY: The New Press, 2010, 2012.
- Best, Joel, editor. *Images of Issues: Typifying Contemporary Social Problems, Second Edition*. Hawthorne, NY: Walter de Gruyter, Inc., 1995.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 1970.
- Krile, James F., et al. *The Community Leadership Handbook: Framing Ideas, Building Relationships, and Mobilizing Resources*. Saint Paul, MN: Fieldstone Alliance, 2006.
- Mezirow, Jack. *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1991.
- Rae, Douglas. *Equalities*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981.
- Rosenblum, Karen E. and Travis, Toni-Michelle C., editors. *The Meaning of Difference: American Constructions of Race, Sex and Gender, Social Class, Sexual Orientation, and Disability, Sixth Edition*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2012.
- Seymour, Jack L., Crain, Margaret Ann, Crockett, and Joseph V. *Educating Christians: The Intersection of Meaning, Learning, and Vocation*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993.
- Wilmore, Gayraud, editor. *Black Men in Prison: The Response of the African American Church. Black Church Scholars Series: Volume II*. Atlanta, GA: The ITC Press, 1990.

Bibliographic Resources on Incarceration in the United States

Compiled by:

Michael Reid Trice, Ph.D.
Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry

Corey Passons, Graduate Student
Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry

Bibliography:

Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press, 2010. Print.

Burridge, Andrew. "Differential Criminalization Under Operation Streamline: Challenges to Freedom of Movement and Humanitarian Aid Provision in the Mexico-US Borderlands." *Refuge* 26, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 78–91.

Chomsky, Aviva. *Undocumented: How Immigration Became Illegal*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2014.

Costas, Orlando E. *Christ Outside the Gate: Mission Beyond Christendom*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1982.

Crüsemann, Frank. "'You Know the Heart of a Stranger' (Exodus 23.9): A Recollection of the Torah in the Face of New Nationalism and Xenophobia." In *Migrants and Refugees*. Edited by Dietmar Mieth and Lisa Sowle Cahill. London: SCM Press, 1993.

D. Becerra, D. Androff, C. Ayón, J. Castillo, "Fear vs. Facts: Examining the Economic Impact of Undocumented Immigrants in the U.S.," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 39 (December 2012): 111-35, at 112, 115.

De Genova, Nicholas and Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas. *Latino Crossings: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and the Politics of Race and Citizenship*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

De Genova, Nicholas and Natalie Mae Peutz, editors. *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

De la Torre, Miguel. *Trails of Hope and Terror: Testimonies on Immigration*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009.

Diaz, Miguel H. *On Being Human: U.S. Hispanic and Rahnerian Perspectives*. Maryknoll, NY:

Orbis Books, 2001. Print.

Emerson, Michael O., Christian Smith. *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1995. Print.

Garcia-Mina, Ana and José Carrasco. *Cuestiones de Género en el Fenómeno de las Migraciones*. Madrid: Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2002.

Groody, Daniel G. *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice: Navigating the Path to Peace*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007.

Harrison, Verna. "Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers." *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35, no 1 (1991): 53- 65.

LaCugna, Catherine Mowry. *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. NY: HarperCollins, 1991.

Law, Eric H. F. *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community*. St, Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1993. Print.

Motivans, Mark. *Immigration Offenders in the Federal Justice System, 2010* (Bureau of Justice Statistics, Revised 22 October 2013) consulted at <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/iofjs10.pdf> on 8 February 2015, p. 6.

Machado, Daisy L. "The Unnamed Woman: Justice, Feminists, and the Undocumented Woman." In *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology: Religion and Justice*, eds. María Pilar Aquino, Daisy L. Machado, and Jeanette Rodríguez, 160-176. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.

Martell-Otero, Loida I. "Creating a Sacred Space: An *Iglesia Evangélica* Response to Global Homelessness." *Dialog* 49, no. 1 (March 2010): 9–18.

Martell-Otero, Loida I., Zaida Maldonado Pérez, and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier. *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013.

Rieger, Joerg. *No Rising Tide: Theology, Economics, and the Future*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009. Print.

Rodríguez-Trías, Helen. *Women and the Health Care System: Sterilization Abuse*. New York: Barnard College, 1978.

Russell, Letty M. *Just Hospitality: God's Welcome in a World of Difference*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

Smith, Caleb, *The Prison and the American Imagination*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009.

Vargas-Vargas, Geiza. "Investment Opportunity in Mass Incarceration: A Black (Corrections) or Brown (Immigration) Play?" *California Western Law Review* 48, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 351–368.

Washington, James Melvin, editor. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986. Print.

Zizioulas, John. "Communion and Otherness." *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1994): 347-61.

More Linked Resources:

Religion in Prisons—A 50-State Survey of Prison Chaplains.
<http://www.pewforum.org/2012/03/22/prison-chaplains-exec/>

Bureau of Justice Statistics.
<http://www.bjs.gov/>

Michelle Alexander, TEDx Talk "The Future of Race in America."
<http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/The-future-of-race-in-America-M>

Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility. 2010. The PEW Charitable Trusts. Web. May 2011. http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2010/CollateralCosts1pdf.pdf

"A Criminal Injustice System" by Nathan Schneider in *America* magazine.
<http://americamagazine.org/issue/culture/criminal-injustice-system>

Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse trac.syr.edu. <http://trac.syr.edu>
U.S. Population in 1925. Web. May 2011.
<http://www.infoplease.com/year/1925.html#us>

One in 31: The Long Reach of American Corrections. March 2009. The PEW Center on the States. Web. May 2011. <http://www.convictcriminology.org/pdf/pew/onein31.pdf>

"One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008." February 2008. The PEW Center on the States. Web. May 2011.
<http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2008/02/28/one-in-100-behind-bars-in-america-2008>

Prison Count 2010: State Populations Declines for the First Time in 38 Years. April 2010. The PEW Center on the States. Web. May 2011. <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/>

[reports/2010/03/16/prison-count-2010-state-population- declines-for-the-first-time-in-38-years](#)

The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences - National Resource Council – 2014. http://www.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=18613

Why Are So Many Americans in Prison, Leon Neyfakh in “Slate” magazine, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/crime/2015/02/mass_incarceration_a_provocative_new_theory_for_why_so_many_americans_are.single.html

Prison Policy Initiative, <http://www.prisonpolicy.org/>

2014 report: “A 10-Step Blueprint to End Mass Incarceration,” by law professor at U of Minnesota, Michael Tonry. <http://www.thecrimereport.org/news/inside-criminal-justice/2015-01-a-10-step-blueprint-to-end-mass- incarceration>

Ecclesial Resources:

Orthodox Church in America 2006 Report “Reaching Out: Prison Ministry in the Parish.” <http://oca.org/parish-ministry/commsservice/reaching-out-prison-ministry-in-the-parish>

A Prophetic Call to: Dismantle Mass Incarceration & the Criminalization of Race—Alliance of Baptists—Annual Meeting • May 3, 2014. http://allianceofbaptists.org/documents/2014-Statement-on-Mass-Incarceration_mar_2014.pdf

National Baptist Convention - Envisioning the Future Exceptionally - Training Paradigm. <http://www.nationalbaptist.com/departments/prison-ministry/training-paradigm.html>

National Council of Churches - Common Witness - A Statement on the Disavowal of Torture. <http://www.nationalcouncilofchurches.us/common-witness/2005/torture.php>

National Council of Churches - Common Witness - A Social Creed for the 21st Century. <http://www.nationalcouncilofchurches.us/common-witness/2007/social-creed.php>

National Council of Churches - Common Witness - Abolition of the Death Penalty. <http://www.nationalcouncilofchurches.us/common-witness/1968/death-penalty.php>

Disciples of Christ - Prison Ministry webpage. <http://prisonministry.net/doc>

National Council of Churches - Common Witness - Challenges to the Injustices of the Criminal Justice System (*lists relevant scriptures in footnotes). <http://www.nationalcouncilofchurches.us/common-witness/1979/criminal-justice.php>

Reformed Church in America General Synod 2014 Report of the Commission on Christian Action.

<http://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/docs/RCAMassIncarcerationReport.pdf>

Conference of Catholic Bishops Statement on Criminal and Restorative Justice.
<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/criminal-justice-restorative-justice/>

Christian Churches Together - 2014 Mass Incarceration Press Release.
<http://christianchurchestogether.org/2014-mass-incarceration-press-release/>

Christian Churches Together - Response to Dr. Martin L. King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" Biblical Study Guide for Small Groups. <http://christianchurchestogether.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/CCT-Dr.-Kings-Response-Study-Guide.pdf>

Conference of Catholic Bishops Statement on Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice. <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/criminal-justice-restorative-justice/crime-and-criminal-justice.cfm>

NCC Mass Incarceration Priority Resource Page.
<http://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/about/massincarcerationpriority.php>

United Church of Christ - Criminal Justice home page.
http://www.ucc.org/justice_criminal-justice_index

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America - Hearing the Cries: Faith and Criminal Justice. Web. May 2011. http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Criminal_JusticeSS.pdf

African Methodist Episcopal Church, Social Action Commission - Testimony before the United States Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights, February 25th, 2014. http://www.nrcat.org/storage/documents/reassessing-solitary-testimony-feb-2014/ame_social_action_testimony_feb25_2014.pdf

African Methodist Episcopal Board of Bishops – 2014 Open Letter condemning racism. and linking race with mass incarceration. <http://www.westnamezion.org/>

Assemblies of God Chaplaincy Program for Incarceration.
<http://chaplaincy.ag.org/correctional/>

National Association of Evangelicals Statement on Prison Reform.
<http://www.nae.net/government-relations/for-the-health-of-the-nation/human-rights/prison-reform>

National Association of Evangelicals – “An Evangelical Perspective on Criminal Justice Reform.”

<http://www.nae.net/government-relations/for-the-health-of-the-nation/human-rights/843-an-evangelical-perspective-on-criminal-justice-reform>

Unitarian Universalist webpage dedicated to Incarceration/Racial/Criminal Justice Reform.
<http://www.uua.org/multiculturalism/208702.shtml>

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization that includes people of various faiths who are committed to social justice, peace, and humanitarian service. AFSC has carried the concern for prisoners, as well as victims for many years, believing that even if a person is convicted of a crime, incarceration should not take away their inherent dignity or humanity.

Grassroots Leadership is a multi-racial team of organizers who help community, labor, faith, and campus organizations think critically, work strategically, and take direct action to end social and economic oppression, gain power, and achieve justice and equity. Grassroots Leadership believes that no one should profit from the incarceration of human beings and they work with communities across the country to abolish for-profit prisons, jails, and detention centers.

American Baptist Prisoner Re-Entry and Aftercare Ministry.

http://www.nationalministries.org/justice_ministries/prisoner_re-entry/

The Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference (SDPC) represents a cross section of progressive African American faith leaders and their congregations in the United States. SDPC has partnered with Dr. Michelle Alexander and other advocates to launch a public awareness campaign—a freedom movement—to address the New Jim Crow: mass incarceration in this nation.

United Methodist - Statement on the hearing of prison litigation reform.

http://www.savecoalition.org/newdev/United_Methodist_Church_Statement.pdf

United Methodist - Article on divestment from companies that profit from prison.

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/16/us/methodist-church-group-links-divestment-move-to-israel-and-a-firms-prison-role.html?_r=0

United Methodist General Board of Church & Society partnering with “Healing Communities” program.

<http://umc-gbcs.org/faith-in-action/social-justice-agency-forms-partnership-with-healing-communities>

CDF Freedom Schools® Program

Rev. Janet L. Wolf

The CDF Freedom Schools® program seeks to build strong, literate, and empowered children prepared to make a difference in themselves, their families, communities, nation, and world today. By providing summer and after-school reading enrichment for children who might otherwise not have access to books, the CDF Freedom Schools® program plays a much-needed role in helping curb summer learning loss and close achievement gaps—and is a key part of CDF’s work to ensure a level playing field for all children.

The CDF Freedom Schools® program provides summer and after-school enrichment to help children become engaged with reading, increase their self-esteem and have a more positive attitude toward school and learning. In the summer of 2014, 202 Freedom Schools in 107 communities in 28 states and the District of Columbia served more than 12,745 kindergarteners through twelfth graders, in partnership with local congregations, schools, colleges and universities, community organizations, and secure juvenile justice facilities. Fourteen of these sites were Freedom Schools operated in juvenile justice settings in California, Maryland, Minnesota, Ohio and Texas. Since 2010, CDF has expanded the number of CDF Freedom Schools® programs in juvenile justice facilities to give more students access to quality enrichment programs and a chance for positive rehabilitation.

Since 1995, more than 125,000 pre-K-12 children have had a CDF Freedom Schools® experience and more than 15,000 college students and recent graduates have been trained by CDF to deliver this empowering model. [Read more about the impact the program has had in California](http://articles.latimes.com/2013/jul/29/local/la-me-juvies-school-20130730) at <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/jul/29/local/la-me-juvies-school-20130730> and learn more about the CDF Freedom Schools® program. Watch this video to learn more about a Freedom School held inside a youth correction facility in California: <https://vimeo.com/71288015>.

The CDF Freedom Schools® model incorporates the totality of the [Children's Defense Fund's mission](#) by fostering environments that support children and young adults to excel and believe in their ability to make a difference. Site coordinators and project directors are also trained by CDF to provide supervision and administrative oversight.

The program provides an exciting Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC) including carefully chosen developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant books. The model curriculum supports children and families around [five essential components](#):

- High-quality academic enrichment
- Parent and family involvement

- Social action and civic engagement
- Intergenerational servant leadership development
- Nutrition, health, and mental health

Core Beliefs

The core beliefs and educational philosophy that guide CDF Freedom Schools® and all CDF youth development programs are:

- All children are capable of learning and achieving at high standards. Culture and community conditions influence child learning.
- Appreciation and knowledge of one's culture engenders self-worth and the ability to live in community with others. Education, teachers, and mentors are transformative agents.
- Literacy is essential to personal empowerment and civic responsibility.
- Effective teaching requires planning, creativity, and implementation, with reflection and processing.
- Learning communities that offer a sense of safety, love, caring, and personal power are needed for transformative education. Classroom discipline and management are integral parts of instructional practice.
- Parents are crucial partners in children's learning and need supports to become better parents.
- As citizens, children and adults have the power to make a difference in their communities and be advocates for themselves.

Program Impact

Last summer, CDF Freedom Schools® sponsor partners served over 12,700 children in 107 cities and 28 states and Washington, DC. Since 1995, over 125,000 children and families have been touched by the CDF Freedom Schools® program experience. More than 15,000 college students have been trained to deliver this empowering model.

An evaluation conducted following the 2005-2006 CDF Freedom Schools® Emergency Katrina Projects in Mississippi and Louisiana verifies that a majority of children regarded as "unreachable" or "unteachable" with difficult attitudes and low self-esteem made great improvements. After participation in the CDF Freedom Schools® program, over 80 percent of the children reported having a "good time" and three-quarters felt happy or "like something good is going to happen," despite great loss and trauma. Seventy percent of the children reported they were "just as good as other children," an increase of 13 percent.

The E. M. Kauffman-funded Philliber Research Associates evaluation of the CDF Freedom Schools® program in Kansas City conducted between 2005 and 2007 indicates children who attend CDF Freedom Schools® programs score significantly higher on standardized reading achievement tests than children who attend other summer enrichment programs; African American middle school boys made the greatest gains of all. Some of the findings from the evaluation are:

Continued participation in the CDF Freedom Schools® program increases the impact on reading achievement. Scholars who participated for at least three years increased their reading skills (by 2.2 grade equivalents, compared to 1.4) for those who participated two years and (0.2) for those who participated only one year. The average student in the comparison group increased less than a grade equivalent each year. Scholars who attended Kansas City CDF Freedom Schools® programs for three years demonstrated gains almost twice the size of those in the comparison group.

The sites that best implement the CDF Freedom Schools® model have the best results. The more closely a site adhered to the model, the greater the average reading gains among scholars. Particularly important was how well staff prepare for their scholars, stay involved in activities and consistently use active learning to engage their scholars.

Students enrolled in the CDF Freedom Schools® program improved their reading skills more than students not enrolled in the CDF Freedom Schools® program. Both boys and girls improved, but boys showed more improvement. Middle school students showed the largest gain in reading skills.

Parents of CDF Freedom Schools® students reported their children had a greater love of learning, better conflict resolution skills, and more involvement in the community after participating in the program.

Servant leader interns provided children with positive role models. Half of the servant leader interns had previously held a position of leadership in a community organization. Over 80 percent had been involved in extra-curricular activities at school, church, or other community organizations.

CDF Freedom Schools® Lessons Learned

Lesson 1: Children's reading abilities benefit directly from participation.

Lesson 2: Children demonstrated positive character development from participation.

Lesson 3: CDF Freedom Schools® programs increase the effectiveness of parental involvement in their children's education.

Lesson 4: Servant leader interns are chosen because they will be positive role models for children.

Lesson 5: CDF Freedom Schools® programs are valuable assets to sponsor partners.

For information about CDF Freedom Schools® program, please contact:
FreedomSchools@ChildrensDefense.org

“Voices Behind the Wall”
**Excerpts from New York Theological Seminary’s Master’s of Professional
Studies Program at Sing Sing Correctional Facility**

The Class of 2014

I am indebted to the New York Theological Seminary for their commitment of resources—time, faculty and staff, and financial—to the work and practice of redemptive justice. Through implementation of the Master’s of Professional Studies Program at Sing Sing Correctional Facility, the seminary has engaged the soul of transformative education. My deep and affectionate appreciation is also extended to the men in the course “Strategies and Designs in Education for Just Reconciliation.” Their willingness to be open, receptive, vulnerable, and trusting in a setting where such virtues can quickly be exploited is commendable. I pray that they continue to experience the truth of the psalmist’s words:

**The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.**
(Psalm 46:7, 11 NRSV)

Introduction and Course Description

One of many unique features of New York Theological Seminary is that it is the only seminary in the State of New York licensed to operate an accredited Master of Professional Studies Program (MPSP) in a State-operated correctional facility. During the Spring Term of 2014, in conjunction with his responsibilities and the National Council of Churches’ Priority on Mass Incarceration, Professor Joseph V. Crockett taught a course in the MPSP at New York Theological Seminary’s North Campus–Sing Sing Correctional Facility. The course description and, more importantly, a series of excerpts from the students’ class project is below.

What can we anticipate from a course titled, “Strategies and Designs of Education for Just Reconciliation”? We will begin by exploring three core concepts—*justice*, *transformation*, and *reconciliation*—that are embedded in understandings of “just reconciliation,” through the lens of the Christian scriptures. For learners rooted in other spiritual traditions, you are encouraged to use the sacred text and wisdom teachings from your religious heritage. Students will be exposed to and apply three specific strategies and designs of education presented through lectures, class discussions, and learner assignments. Opportunities will be offered for students to reflect on and to make personal connections with the weekly topics. Together we will discern, plan, and develop an educational strategy and design for use by the National Council of Churches for its work

on mass incarceration. My hope and prayer is that, together, we will learn, develop, and be challenged to embody the unconditional love God extends to all for collective acts of just reconciliation.

+ + +

Class Mission Statement as Developed by Students

The New York Theological Seminary's alumni reject institutional discrimination and felony disenfranchisement. We seek the help of the National Council of Churches (hereafter NCC) to change the beliefs, practices, and institutions that perpetuate social discrimination. We are striving to achieve greater equality in society.

+ + +

An Appeal from an Incarcerated Christian

I greet you in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Let me say at the outset, it is my intention to call upon your understanding of who Jesus is and what he calls us to do, in the hopes that you will be convicted of the Spirit to move and act on my behalf, and the behalf of those who find themselves in similar positions. As it states in Galatians 6:10, we have a particular obligation to do good to those of the household of faith.

So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith (NRSV).

First of all, I must say: I have wronged you. I have stolen from you, destroyed your property, raped and murdered you. I have made you afraid, made your streets and hallways unsafe. I have deceived and misled your children. I have preyed upon your good intentions. I have done this because I was addicted. I have done this because I was misled; I was hurt and confused and did not know what I was doing. I have done this because I enjoyed it.

There are circumstances and environments that have contributed to my actions, made them easier in ways; but my choices were my own, and there is no excuse for my sin.

Forgive me, for I have sinned against heaven, and against you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son; your father; your brother or sister or friend.

If it is difficult to find such forgiveness, I pray God helps you—for your health as well as mine. Our God can restore what has been lost—in us and through us. After all that I have taken and broken, I now ask you for something more.

In the name of Jesus, I ask you to heal with me.

Anonymous

+ + +

The False and Uninformed Plea

When I was sixteen and walking along a familiar path, a friend of mine rounded a corner covered in scrapes and scratches. Full of emotion, he told me that a group of people had just attacked him. Two of my friends and I then went to the area where the fight took place. We noticed that one of the culprits had remained at the scene. Of course, another fight ensued, during which one of my friends took the culprit's jacket and gave it to his sister.

A few days later, I was arrested, as I should have been. But I did not and still do not agree with what I was arrested for. I was charged with armed robbery. Apparently, the victim, his parents, or the police came up with a story that I brandished a silver pistol and robbed the victim for his coat.

After approximately seven months of court appearances, I was given the ultimatum that I either plead guilty or go to trial and face eight years of imprisonment. I was shocked that I was up against so much time in prison, especially for something I did not do. I told my lawyer the truth concerning what happened, especially the fact that I did not have a gun. He told me the truth did not matter, for it was my word against that of the accuser and he had the edge, because he pressed charges against me.

I knew many kids my age that had gotten five years' probation and I thought it certainly must be better than prison, so I agreed to plead guilty. I'll never forget the day I went to court to do what my lawyer advised. My lawyer told me exactly what to say. He said to make it clear that I pulled out the pistol, pointed it, then proceeded to rob the victim. That is what I told the judge. I felt horrible saying it and I believe the judge could sense it, because she said, "You could go to trial if you want to." However, what kind of future was that for me to contemplate, as a sixteen-year-old kid from a working class family that lives from paycheck to paycheck? In fact, my parents could not afford to miss a day of work to be with me in court, to support me or help me make an informed decision. I understood some of what was said to me, but I did not understand it all. What I did understand was the body language of the adults who wanted me to take the deal. If I did not follow the suggestion of the adults around me, others would have looked at me as if I was crazy. Besides, the alternative seemed much worse. When I got older, I realized I should have had a private investigator go to the pizza shop where the incident occurred to find witnesses that could have verified my story. Yet, I did not have the money or

knowledge to have that privilege.

When I was sentenced I was never told that I would be precluded from voting, obtaining certain professional licenses, or may face resistance concerning employment because of my conviction. I was not able to comprehend these hindrances at the age of sixteen. I have come to know that my situation is not unique. That I am just one of many who are pushed to plead guilty for something I did not do. Many peers in my present community share this experience.

Sincerely,

L. B.

+ + +

Costly Consequences of a Juvenile

Nearly one year ago someone handed me a July 10, 2013, *Daily News* article entitled, “*That teenage perp is still just a kid.*” I was deeply touched by said article because I was once a 17-year-old teenager that committed a stupid crime and was sentenced to 27-and-1/3-years-to-life. That was nearly 23 years ago and now I am still incarcerated waiting my parole board appearance in approximately 3½ years. Despite the antagonistic and sometimes warlike environment, over the course of my incarceration I have matured immensely. My thinking, and subsequently my character, has done a 180-degree turn, which is consistent with recent brain development research. In fact, the aforementioned article mentioned that “the brain development of adolescents shows that their ability to control impulsive behavior and focus on . . . consequences . . . are not fully formed until the age of 25.” This is especially true for many of my peers and me, who have been locked away in prison for decades due to crimes we committed as children. Because of such, I offer my experiences to your cause in hopes that you can use them to help change our current child sentencing laws to some that more appropriately fit individuals with the potential for change.

The power of perceived pressure

The most compelling evidence of my immaturity can be illustrated by my adolescent mind-set. In my youth, I took risks without giving the proper gravity to consequences. At the forefront of my thoughts was how important it was to do the things my peers thought were appropriate and exciting. It barely registered to me that adults might not have viewed my behavior in the same way that I did, although, at times, they cautioned me about it. Nevertheless, I merely shrugged them off as being too old to understand, for I did not believe I was a bad kid. I just wanted to act in step with what was popular, even if

it meant doing some things I knew were wrong.

For example, when I was sixteen years old, I was shot a total of five times. Once as a victim of a robbery attempt and four times as the result of a drive-by shooting. Afterward, I began to carry guns with me. In addition, I began to hang out with other minors that carried guns. I did not have intentions of hurting or killing anyone, and besides, just wanting to be like my friends, I believed it was necessary for my *protection* since my community was saturated with violence. Looking back at those times now, I realize that, although I probably could not verbalize my rationale at the time, the basis of my protection was not so much the actual use of a weapon, but rather the mere *threat* of such that was important. That was where the power lay, for it brought me a kind of status, which acted as a force field that prevented me from being victimized. This was not only true for me, but for my peers as well. The key, however, was that we had to make others believe that the threat was plausible.

To do this we had to first convince ourselves. This was very tricky because we did not openly admit to one another that we were all scared and used guns to gain protection, popularity, or respect. To do that would have exposed us as being the clueless children we were, which was what, *individually*, we were trying to avoid. Therefore, there was no practical plan or one based on intelligence that we agreed to operate under. Instead we just went with the flow and, sort of, listed our pretentious desires in conversation, which, if went unchallenged, served as a tacit agreement as to how we would behave with our newfound tools.

An example of this fractured process began with us broaching the subject of going outdoors with the weapons. (Although I failed to recognize it at the time, this alone would bring the same fear I was seeing in the eyes of my peers.) We made comments like, “if someone disses (*disrespects*) me, or tries to get (*rob*) me, I will pull my gat (*gun*) out and back him down (*make him retreat in fear*).” Someone else would say, “Yeah I’ll clap (*shoot*) anybody who comes at (*attacks*) me.” I knew I was acting, but unfortunately, I did not know at the time that they were acting as well. It would have saved me the charade and all of us a lot of trouble, for that fear was evidence that we were not hardcore criminals. Speaking for myself, inside I knew I had empathy, home training, and respect for others; yet, what stood out to me the most was the pressure I perceived. For that reason, I believed if I were accosted in any way, I was obliged to back my words up, despite secretly hoping I would never have to.

Linking perceptions of pressure and crime

Eventually it all caught up to me when we decided to go the movies one night. The show was entertaining and normal for the first twenty minutes or so, before an influx of noise interrupted it. Shortly after, an argument erupted between a large amount of moviegoers and another group of teens that apparently entered the theater, disturbing everyone. Before long, we joined the moviegoers in an attempt to regain silence in the theater. However, our attempt only served to escalate matters, for the group apparently perceived us as the real threat and instead of retreating, they began to threaten and challenge us (*Point A*). They crowded closer and closer to the section of seats where we sat as they continued their threats. At this moment, it seemed to me that no other patrons outside our two groups spoke a word. The tension in the room rose and it was as if we were the only ones present. Suddenly I saw a flash and heard a loud bang coming from the group that bore down upon us (*Point B*) . . .

Now imagine for a moment what fear would have done to the average adult in my position, with a fully developed brain, over the duration of Points A to B. Using a modern view of emotion, the fear stimuli would have naturally altered the adult's consciousness and thus impeded normal thought. At the same time, the fear would have lead to reflexive (involuntary) behavior, produced for survival, and influenced by prior mental constructs of appropriate behavior. Now transfer that fear back into a 17-year-old with an undeveloped brain who does not have the, muscle memory like, construct to give direction to his reflexes. The fear the 17-year-old endured would have markedly impeded his already inferior ability to think rationally more than that of his adult counterpart. Leaving him only his instinctual desire for self-preservation (fight or flight) that was reinforced by, in my case, the most recent option ingrained in me through peer conversation. The resulting response was a spontaneous returning of fire, with me firing one bullet amongst the many that came from other equally panicked teens. Sadly enough, when the smoke cleared, four people suffered injuries with one of them being fatal.

Sentencing

Two years later, I stood trial for murder in the second degree and other lesser charges. Scientific testing showed that there was no link to the gun attributed to me and the injuries or death of anyone. However, the fact that I fired a weapon in a dark, crowded theater was enough to conclude that I assisted others in creating a dangerous environment that resulted in harm to others. Consequently, I was convicted of almost all of the charges I was accused of. In spite of being the youngest member of the group, I received the aforementioned 27-and-1/3-years-to-life. This was the most severe penalty given to those convicted. Soon after, I was sent to a maximum-security prison for adults where I began

to serve my sentence.

Victim Awareness

The fact that someone lost his life, and others were hurt during the commission of my crime, is not lost to me. I honestly wish I could change the past and erase what occurred, for the direct and indirect victims (the families) did not deserve what befell them. I know they may still be enduring painful feelings due to the terrible events of that night nearly 24 years ago. Because of that, approximately midway through my sentence, I wrote each victim and family member of the deceased a letter expressing my deepest apologies. I sent these letters to my adjudicating judge with a request to forward them to the appropriate parties. Unfortunately, this did not occur. I hope to be able to do this in the future, if the parties in question are open to it.

Mature Life

My thinking changed when I reached my mid- to late-twenties. It was then that I was able to look back at my life and feel an extreme sense of shame. I was embarrassed then and now that I was involved with such a crime. My interests are not even the same; for instead of hanging out with the fellas, I began involving myself in positive programming. I earned my bachelor's degree in behavioral science and graduated with highest honors (*summa cum laude*) in the year 2013. In June 2014, I will be a graduate of the only master's degree program offered to those incarcerated in New York State prisons. In my spare time, I co-founded and serve on the board of directors of a unique, prison-based, committee called ***Forgotten Voices***. Our mission is to *redefine what it means for us to pay our debt to society*. Working with this group, I helped raise a substantial amount of money to begin a **gun buy-back** program in each of the five NYC boroughs. Our aim is to do more than take guns off the street, for we will also offer various services (e.g., health, drug counseling, employment search, etc.) that we believe people in our communities need. To this end, we work alongside both state senators and community clergy and we also create youth initiative ideas that we pass along to other grassroots organizations.

Ultimately, I am just one of many men that were incarcerated at a young age and remain imprisoned due to a crime that I committed when I was of a different mind. Punishment is necessary when a law is broken. Yet laws must be appropriately applied. It will be helpful if adult decision-makers would envision his or her own thoughts at 16 or 17 years old, or even ask themselves are their teenage children always responsible? If the answer to the latter is no, then why treat others as if they are as responsible as adults when they commit a crime? Should not the punishment fit both the gravity of the offense and the

age of the offender? We must ponder that question, for some kids just need a chance to be positively exposed to make the necessary turnaround. There is *no excuse for crime*. Neither is there an excuse for *over-incarceration*.

Respectfully yours,

L. B.

+ + +

Concerning Restorative Justice and Community Reentry

Two perplexing questions remain unresolved:

(1) Should we (offenders) who have been convicted of a crime, having completed our prison sentences, be permitted to vote and otherwise participate as United States citizens?

(2) Should the purpose of the so-called criminal justice system be solely about punishment, rendering to each of us what is deserved as a consequence of antisocial behavior, or should society focus upon restoration of the injured community and those of us who have violated the law?

A. Restorative/Reentry

What does restoration and reentry involve? Restoration requires acknowledgment of the offense that caused the harm—and understanding of the harm itself. In any way that the injury or loss can be healed or replaced, the offender must work to do so—with the community’s mediation and facilitation. We must examine the behavior that was hurtful and begin building a platform of trust based on recognition of harm, admission of regret, expression of remorse and regret, explanation of past actions, accountability for the harm caused, and future intentions, amending for the hurt caused. Restored relationship requires a rigorous process of deepening one’s understanding and accountability for one’s actions toward another.

As individuals returning home, we prepare to enter a parallel universe, “one that promises a form of punishment that is often more difficult to bear than prison time: a lifetime of shame, contempt, scorn, and exclusion.” Commentators have likened the prison label to the “Mark of Cain” and characterize the perpetual nature of the sanction as “internal exile.” There are a myriad of laws, rules, and regulations that operate to discriminate against formerly incarcerated individuals and effectively prevent their reintegration into the mainstream society and economy. Therefore, the NCC will feature several different types of training programs that will focus on society’s moral and theological obligation to the restoration of individuals’ rights upon release from

incarceration. Using a model from the Riverside Church, the members of the NCC can eventually develop a reentry program to assist individuals in several different types of training initiatives that will be essential to helping them find employment upon release.

We will quickly find that there are concepts in the system of restorative justice that are consistent with biblical thought. The seminal idea of restoring God's people is equally important as restoring the love between two human beings or reconciliation between the victim and the individual who caused the harm. The heart of restorative justice is to compensate the individual who has been harmed back to a state of wholeness. According to the story, Joseph is restored to his family after years of brokenness.

B. Justice for Whom?

As the NCC examines the gross violations of human rights across New York and this country, it has observed how a majority of social, religious, and legal institutions have been ineffective in mounting a defense against the injustices perpetrated against people of color and other minorities regarding mass incarceration, disenfranchisement, and discriminatory laws. In essence, these laws are designed in order to incarcerate individuals continually through the institution of mass incarceration. Felony disenfranchisement laws are designed to stigmatize formerly incarcerated individuals and prevent them from entering society with full citizenship.

C. Legalized Discrimination: Social, Political, and Economic Effects

(1) The NCC is cognizant that social, political, and economic factors continue the perpetuation of discriminatory practices that exclude minorities, specifically African American and Latino Americans, from engaging equally and fully in many sectors of society. The NCC, therefore, must recognize that due to disenfranchisement and discrimination against minorities and formerly incarcerated individuals, the possibility of increasing crime and the probability of higher rates of recidivism continue unabated. Stigmatization, social isolation, and lack of access to essential resources—food, shelter, work, medical assistance—are reasons why property and violent crimes are likely to persist and lead to unsafe communities and recidivism. For instance, if the individual is unable to find employment, their family members decide they are going to be supportive, and the individual becomes perplexed by believing they are outsiders in society. This often results in continuance of criminal activity.

(2) Formerly incarcerated individuals are placed in a category as the “other.” By the very connotation of the “other,” the formerly incarcerated individual walks into society stigmatized and demonized as the worst of creation. Thus, being viewed in a similar context as scriptural characters, such as Sarah, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Jesus, the Samaritan Woman, Paul, and many

others not mentioned. Like these ancient religious men and women, if given a chance, as have been proven, formerly incarcerated individuals will succeed like other law-abiding citizens.

(3) The current practice of criminal justice in our society emphasizes retribution; where vengeance is justice. It is a system wherein the measure of success is based on the number of arrests and convictions made. The assignment of blame and punishment dominates the discourse. In truth, when one commits a crime it is a broken relationship between two parties. This broken relationship is at the heart of what needs to be repaired. The state's original assumption may have included helping in the process of repair, but now it is a commercialized employment mill where even the victim is oftentimes ignored. Victims are sidelined. The state intervenes to remedy the harm victims have suffered, but victims are often worse off years down the road after the state has taken over the process. The unremedied situation between the two parties—the individual who suffered harm and the one who has caused the harm—must be reconciled. Therefore, mechanisms that allow for reconciliation between the two parties have to be put in place. We hope the NCC, as a community of Christian churches, will aid in this process.

D. Educational Development through Workshops: A Modest Proposal

From inside our walls looking out, we believe the NCC can assist in eradicating the systemic ideas and practices that contribute to mass incarceration. A first step may be to wage a campaign of educating its members, their congregations, as well as include community organizations, local business owners, youth centers, law enforcement agencies, community leaders, and so on, about the historical effects of disenfranchisement and discrimination. By utilizing the information provided in Michelle Alexander's book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, the NCC can develop a working curriculum of education and sensitivity training. Topics of the workshops recommended by the incarcerated men of the NYTS 2014 graduating class include addressing the social, political, economic, and educational causes and consequences associated with mass incarceration.

E. Connecting the Bible and Other Sacred Texts

By interpreting biblical texts, we have developed strategies that would support the NCC's mission for social justice. Through our readings of biblical stories, we have gained an appreciation for and applicability of texts to the goals of the Church's relevancy in the twenty-first century. The question that is often raised is how one can get involved? A majority of churches have lost their voice on matters of civil rights. It is our aim to join with the NCC regarding prison reform issues. Like the blood of the martyrs that led to explosive growth in the Church, perhaps our efforts will cause their voices to grow more loudly and prominently on these issues.

Clearly, the NCC notices similarities between the Israelites' life in Egypt and the plight of the prisoner. The story of Exodus has direct relevance to the cause for which it has been engaged. For example, our struggle entails embarking upon a new Exodus that involves advocating against the Pharaoh-like tyranny of this American criminal punishment system. The Exodus story instills hope that the same God that brought Israel out of bondage is the same God that will bring justice, restoration, and reconciliation to those who continue to be treated as lepers of society.

The First Testament's story of Abraham and his descendants shows similarities in its application to retribution and restorative justice in the context of New York Theological Seminary students who are incarcerated in Sing Sing Correctional Facility. The Bible is loaded with stories of individuals who suffered imprisonment and experienced release from shackles, the breaking of chains of oppression, deliverance from house arrest, and more. For example, Genesis 39:20-22, which reads:

And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; he remained there in prison. But, the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. The chief jailer committed to Joseph's care all the prisoners who were in the prison, and whatever was done there; he was the one who did it.

Joseph is imprisoned; but as a devout man of God, he was shown steadfast love and the deliverance and freedom God's love affords.

Biblical justice involves a call to action. The meaning of justice, for instance, "is arrived at not by contemplating some abstract norm of justice, but by remembering how God delivered his people from oppression, and then acting in a manner consistent with this (Mic. 6:3-5, 8; Exod. 20:1-17). For Christian ethics, the imitation of God centers on the imitation of Christ (1 Pet. 2:21), whose concrete manner of living and acting is known to us only through the biblical record."

F. Interfaith Religious Advocacy

We believe that religious institutions are not doing enough in the area of prison reform. In addition, the NCC can foster and support collaborative networks with other religious traditions in their communities, such as with Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and so on. With the role of the prisoner so prominent in biblical theology and the need so pronounced socially for their uplift, religious communities have an obligation to promote their fair integration into society. Furthermore, if religious institutions donated just 1 to 5 percent of their resources, it would make a significant difference in providing advocacy and research and would contribute to policymaking for the fair

treatment of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. If more churches weighed in on the issues of parole reform, reentry for the formerly incarcerated, and removing the stigma attached to formerly incarcerated people, the world would be a better place.

G. Victim Identification

The students of the New York Theological Seminary program along with many individuals here at Sing Sing Correctional Facility are making significant strides in atoning for their crimes. In short, an objective of these workshops might be to establish a bridge for those who have the will and desire to begin the process of restoring victims and offenders back to spiritual, psychological, social, and emotional well-being. The need for restoration is perfectly embodied in scripture, which says one must reconcile with their brothers and sisters. We desire to create a climate where individuals can repair the harm caused to their victims, if possible.

Paul writes to Christians at Rome,

For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. (Romans 5:10 NRSV)

Here Paul is addressing directly concern for reconciliation. Such reconciliation is initiated by the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

Finally, in Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians he writes:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (5:18-20 NRSV)

Christians you are charged to be mediators in the work of reconciliation.

The focus here is on the healing of people affected by the crime, victim(s), the individual(s) who have committed the crime, and the families and communities of both. The goal is to allow both communities to express how they feel about what has happened with an aim toward acceptance and forgiveness. Participants will not face their victors or victims; however, they will have an opportunity to speak to the action itself in order to understand what led up to the criminal activities and how the crime has affected and continues to affect the families and the communities.

H. Religious Advocacy and Community Outreach

A final aim of the workshop(s) is raising awareness about the importance of unifying the communities that surround each church. The call is to go out and talk to the youth in the community centers (use young members), nonprofit organizations, business owners, law enforcement agencies, and so forth. Express to them the importance of community, educate them about incarceration, the effects it has on families, the lifelong impact it has on individuals upon their release, such as legalized discrimination in employment, housing, education, voting, and so forth.

In addition, the discussion should also include the historical precursors that led to the condition of black and brown people being incarcerated in America (Alexander, 191-200; 202-204). Similarly, when dealing with young people, a discussion about *structural racism* should be addressed. This should be explored in terms of the criminalization of our youth when they wear pants that sag below their behinds. The individuals in this workshop should be instructed on how to approach and discuss these community issues with other religious groups in the community, such as the Jewish and Muslim community leaders. An interfaith awareness program should be introduced through this workshop.

+ + +

A Commitment Continuum

To some extent, in order to address the many facets of mass incarceration and inmate reentry there are many opportunities for involvement. Individual interests and concerns will lead people to participate at various levels. Where along the range of opportunities people decide to participate is not as critical as is a commitment to get involved. We must act. We are called to be not just hearers of the word, but doers (James 1:22-25). The continuum represents the range of possible entry points for individuals and churches to get involved. Your calling or comfort level may be in prevention, intervention, or restoration and reentry services (including transition and/or stabilization supports). “Boots on the ground” efforts, such as prison outreach, The Sentencing Project, volunteer chaplaincy, reentry ministries, Freedom Schools Program, Prison Fellowship, and other programs to address and alleviate the causes and consequences of prison would be welcomed. This a starter list of programs that address a range of issues related to mass incarceration and restorative justice.

There is a phrase often heard while incarcerated. Prisoners, guards, volunteers, and visitors alike speak the phrase. When referring to the time after an offender’s sentence has been served, we say, “When you return to society.” This statement itself is based in a fallacy. We are still a part of society. Although we may be isolated, ignored, or forgotten,

we never left.

Just because we are not readily visible, or are unable to initiate or easily participate in the birthdays and graduations, funerals and celebrations, trials and tribulations of family members and friends, it does not mean that we are not here. We understand that we have hurt you and ourselves. Doing time is part of our becoming accountable. We ask for forgiveness. We hope you give it. We accept the possibility that you may not. You do not *owe* us forgiveness. But we believe that we all owe each other something. We owe each other love, the kind of love that keeps us connected to the unconditional love of the God who died for all. We remember that this love is still a verb.

Respectfully yours,

A Fellow Learner

+ + +