

Criminal Justice Sabbath

WINTER 2017

THERE IS GOOD NEWS EVEN IN A BROKEN SYSTEM

An Interfaith Resource Guide for Worship, Education, and Action

Why talk about criminal justice with your congregation?

As people of faith, we listen for the cries of the hurting. We seek to nurture space for healing after brokenness. We build community across the lines in society that usually divide us. We work and pray for shalom—salaam—pax—true and lasting peace.

People impacted by our criminal justice system are among these who are hurting and need peace.

With this guide, we invite you to make space for these people, in your hearts and in your schedule. Dedicate a day of your community's life together to think about, pray about, learn about, and act for the people with lived experience of our justice system: offenders, victims of crime, legal and corrections staff, law enforcement, and the families of all these people.

Then go further. Think about ways *you* are impacted by the legal system, as part of the community it serves. (And consider how well that system is serving you.)

Criminal justice issues are increasingly popular in our country, across partisan

lines, as news headlines remind us. But news and views only tell us so much. They don't always lift up the places of hope and healing amidst a broken legal system. That's where people of faith step in.

This worship guide invites you to consider criminal justice issues as faith issues. As places where our beliefs meet the world and have a chance to make change. As calls to action in a society that needs change.

Whether you spend a minute or a day or a year weaving these themes into your faith life, we thank you for joining us in this work of helping bring criminal justice *issues* – and the *people* who live them out – into the wider life of our *whole* community.

This year, we invite you to hold a Criminal Justice Sabbath on any day in January. Let us know when you do, so we can celebrate all the congregations statewide who are joining together!

This resource guide is available through an ecumenical partnership for peace and justice:

- *Episcopal Diocese of Oregon—Prison Ministry Commission*
- *Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon—Criminal Justice Ministries*

Inside:

Prayers	2
Book Discussion	4
Sermon Starter	6
Action Steps	9
Hymns	9
Contact Info	10
Speakers Bureau	10

This Guide is for You

Please read and use this guide in your community, to learn and act for justice:

Faith Leaders, guiding liturgy to honor the experiences of persons touched by the justice system

Spiritual Directors, seeking to explore forgiveness and healing

Outreach or Mission committees, wanting to help heal society and find ways to serve

Teachers and adult education groups, seeking timely, relevant topics

Individuals with a heart for mercy, for personal spiritual reflection

Words for a Service Inside Prison

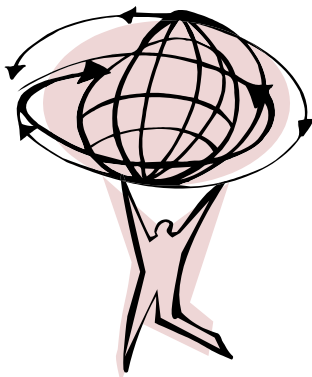
by Barbara Stevens

Gathering Words

Come into this circle of love
and acceptance.
Come into this place of peace
and hope.
Come into this community,
where we honor the wholeness
that lies within our brokenness,
and where we believe
in a force some call God,
a force that is mystery,
that is creator,
that is scared,
that is beauty,
that is love.

And we believe
that no matter who we are,
this force longs for us
to turn toward It
so It can hold us,
and no matter what we've done,
this force is waiting, in the end,
to take us home.

Welcome and come into this place
where we strive to reflect
the love, peace, and
wholeness of such a God.



These words come from the Unitarian Universalist tradition. This tradition's most widely used symbol is the flaming chalice, which is lit at the start of gatherings and extinguished at closing.

The Rev. Barbara Stevens is the minister of the Universalist Recovery Church (URC). One of the church's ministries is URC Inside, taking our heart-centered and healing experiences of the sacred into prison through Unitarian Universalist worship and sharing circles.

Chalice Extinguishing (Closing) Words

We extinguish the flame of our chalice.

The smoke rises and fades away,
and though the light
appears to be gone,
it's not.

The flame lives within us,
coming back to us
in odd moments:
when we wake
in the middle of the night,
listen to a train trundle past,
smell the damp earth
that stirs between our toes,
and when our heart breaks.

We open our circle
and go our separate ways,
and that, too, is an illusion.
The circle embraces all things,
lives for all time.
We are held in the love of this place
and the peace of this moment,
forever and ever, amen.

Congregational Prayer of (All) the People

by Alison Embler-Brown

Creating God, you make all of us into new creations, wherever we find ourselves in life—in prison or outside of prison. Help us see the new beauty in everyone. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving God, you love every human being, whether in prison or not. Help us to love our neighbors inside and outside of prison, each and every one of them. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Guiding God, you show us how to live a life that is abundant. Lead all in prison and those outside to an effective life following your will. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Forgiving God, you accept us as we are and forgive us all our sins. Help us to remember to forgive others in the same way. Let everyone feel and accept your forgiveness, whether in prison or outside. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Welcoming God, you sat and ate with outsiders to society. Help us welcome today's outsiders. Let everyone be welcome here at [name of church]. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Alison Embler-Brown studied criminal justice as part of a recent management degree (MSM) and has volunteered as a chaplain in Portland's downtown jail for eight years.

A Good Mood Prayer

by Patti and Rich Robertson

Father, we thank you for the opportunity to bring before you the men and women who are currently or have been incarcerated.

We pray that heaven will invade their hearts with a supernatural revelation of their authentic identity.

We agree with and declare Isaiah 1:5 over each offender: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew and approved of you, and before you were born I separated, set you apart, and consecrated you."

We pray for more volunteers who will bring your revelation that leads to transformed minds and hearts.

We pray for relationships to be restored and families to be reconciled. We thank you for blessing the families at home with your grace and provision.

We release your kindness over each offender, whatever that would look like, because we believe Your Word: "It's the kindness of the Lord that leads to repentance."

We pray and declare that each man and woman will come to know you and experience your love in such a way that they can confidently say with us, "God is in a Good Mood!"

Rich and Patti Robertson have been ministering in prisons in Nevada, Washington, and Oregon for the past fourteen years. They pastor City of Refuge Community which meets in the Portland Rescue Mission and 'Prison Break,' a re-entry support group.

Resources for Adult and Youth Education

Reviewed by Amy Busiek

To Kill a Mockingbird

By Harper Lee (Fiction)

Book Review/Summary

Considered the best novel of the 20th century, *To Kill a Mockingbird* tells the tale of Atticus Finch's defense of an innocent young black man, Tom Robinson. Issues of race, class, and justice are explored through the young eyes of Scout and Jem in their town in Alabama. This small community of Maycomb is close-knit and one's social standing is based upon who your parents are, where you live, and how long you have lived in Maycomb. Innocence, deferred redemption, and punishment are major themes of the story.

Thoughts/Reflections

The fictitious community of Maycomb has deep-seated prejudice. What was once shocking and unfathomable in reading this novel, is now believable, considering the lack of social progress in the areas of race and criminal justice. Privilege is directly related to one's social standing and one's trajectory in the criminal justice system. Convictions and prison sentences are a direct result of the current prejudices that exist in our society. There are a disproportionate number of people of color in prison. Reading the novel in light of current events, maybe the issues of race and socio-economic status of Maycomb are not so fictitious after all.

Questions/Points to Ponder

1. Who are the current "mockingbirds" of our criminal justice system?
2. How do we see issues of race and prejudice impacting our criminal justice system?
3. Who are the "Atticus Finches" of our modern day system fighting for justice for the marginalized?

Tattoos on the Heart

By Gregory Boyle (Non-fiction)

Book Review/Summary

Jesuit priest Gregory Boyle founded Homeboy Industries, a gang intervention program, over 20 years ago. This program is located in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles, considered the gang capital of the world. This book tells powerful stories of these young people and his experiences working with them. "G-Dog," as they affectionately call him, talks about "the slow work of God" and how many of these gang members are not quite ready to leave the gang culture. Homeboy Industries exists as an alternative community, waiting for them with open arms and without judgment.

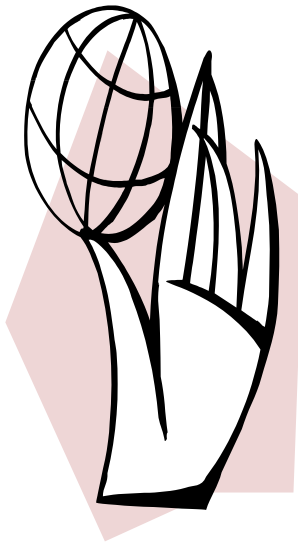
Thoughts/Reflections

There were many points of this book, as well as the general premise of how Homeboy Industries operates, that I appreciated. One striking feature was the value of faithfulness over being "successful:" if the organization were only interested in improving client outcomes on the basis of research, there would be many in the gang life they would never even try to help. They would not make an effort because the likelihood of them leaving that life and turning their lives around would be slim to none. Instead, their concern is being faithful. Giving people a chance is more important than being successful. I wonder what life would look like for so many others in our criminal justice system if the goal was faithfulness rather than success.

Questions/Points to Ponder

1. How do we see "the slow work of God" at work today in our society? In the lives of individuals who are in the criminal justice system? What about our own lives?
2. In what ways is success valued over faithfulness in our criminal justice system?
3. What would happen if faithfulness was the goal in working with those with a criminal history, rather than outcome-oriented success?

Resources for Adult and Youth Education



Need an idea for book discussion with an adult education or youth group? These are recommended resources that tie criminal justice themes with other important issues of justice and community for people of faith.

Other Good Reads

Here are a few more suggestions for book discussions:

Grace Goes to Prison

Melanie G. Snyder

Marie Hamilton volunteered for decades in Pennsylvania prisons, embodying her convictions in nonviolence and restorative justice.

The New Jim Crow

Michelle Alexander

Alexander argues that mass incarceration functions to divide our society by race, on the level that slavery and Jim Crow did in earlier eras.

Just Mercy

Bryan Stevenson

The director of Equal Justice Initiative speaks about redemption as a lawyer - and as a compassionate human being.

Video Resource: 13th

Ava Duvernay's documentary, *13th*, explores the modern-day incarnation of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, passed in 1865 as part of the abolition of slavery after the US civil war. In particular, it explores the clause in the amendment that makes an exception for slavery in prison: slavery and involuntary servitude "shall not exist" - "except as a punishment for crime."

As context for how this clause has been put into practice, the film analyzes historical and contemporary intersections of race and criminal justice over the past decades, including Nixon's Southern Strategy, "law and order" and other coded language of racism, the militarization of the police, mandatory minimum sentencing, and the crime bill of the 1990s. It describes how a real fear of the drug epidemic - including among communities of color being impacted by substance abuse - helped seed the initial criminalization of drug possession, as an effort to contain drug abuse; this understandable initial impulse has been since contorted into a tool to disproportionately incarcerate people of color, while doing little to address the dangers of substance abuse and addictions.

Weaving in many historical and contemporary examples of where race and justice intersect, this film will serve as a rich starting point for conversations about the US criminal justice system, racial disparities, privilege, and where we can take action. Screen the film in segments to provide time for processing and conversation.

Rev. Amy Busiek (book reviewer) is an MSW student at George Fox University, who was an intern with Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. She is interested in working with those who live in poverty, which includes the homeless, previously incarcerated, and the mentally ill.

A Reflection on Good News in a Broken System by Tom English

The Parable of the Good Samaritan brings the issue of community soul into focus when the lawyer, in seeking to narrow his duty, asks Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" The word "neighbor" in the Greek means "someone who is near," and in the Hebrew it means "someone that you have an association with." This interprets the word in a limited sense, referring to a fellow Jew and would have excluded Samaritans, Romans, and other foreigners.

Jesus then tells the parable of the Good Samaritan to correct the understanding the lawyer had of who his neighbor is, and what his duty is to his neighbor. The Parable tells the story of a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. While on his way, he is robbed of everything he has, including his clothing, and is beaten to within an inch of his life. The Jericho road was treacherously winding and was a favorite hideout of robbers and thieves. Next a priest passes by showing no love or compassion for the man by failing to help him and passing on the other side of the road so as not to get involved. The next person to pass by is a Levite, and he does exactly what the priest did: he passes by without showing any compassion. Neither of these community leaders could see the injured man as their neighbor. We do not know if the injured man was a Jew or Gentile, but it made no difference to the Samaritan; he did not consider the man's race or religion. The Good Samaritan saw only a person in dire need of assistance, and assist him he did, above and beyond the minimum required. The Samaritan saw his neighbor as anyone who was in need.

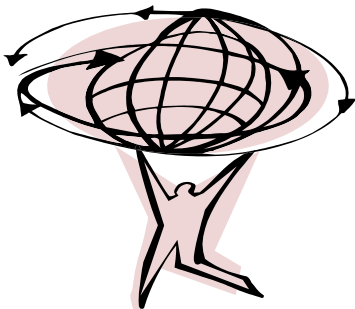
The Rev. Deacon Tom English is Co-Chair of the Episcopal Diocese of Oregon Prison Ministry Commission and serves in Eugene area jails and prisons as well as in the community.

On April 4, 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., delivered a speech to a gathering of Clergy and Laity Concerned about Vietnam, at Riverside Church in New York City. "A true revolution of values," he said, "will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies. On the one hand, we are called to be the Good Samaritan of life's roadside, but that will be only the initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make life's journey on life's highway."

That day is here. Charity and mercy are not enough. We are called to make structural and systemic changes.

So it is with our criminal justice and public safety systems. They are so broken that we are shocked by gun violence, unwarranted police shootings, shooting of police, and profiling of African-Americans and Muslims. We are confused by charges of racism and protests that *Black*

Lives Matter. Surprisingly, both Democrats and Republicans, when they can agree on almost nothing else, recognize this brokenness. This is truly good news! And even in this campaign season where politicians wallow in what David Brooks calls the "pornography of pessimism," we have not only this good news but a growing willingness on the part of Americans; I can feel it, to do the hard work to make wise choices based on our hopes



Visit our website for the full text of this and other sample sermons for a Criminal Justice Sabbath: www.CoSAOregon.org

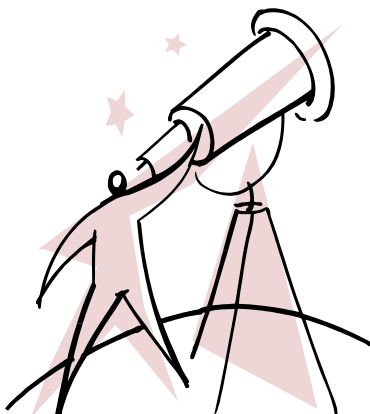
Reflection (cont.)

rather than our fears. Yes, we have problems, but none of them are reason for cynicism, hatred and despair. **With hope and optimism we are motivated to seek sound solutions to even the thorniest problems---to transform the Jericho Road.**

Will we be the generation that allows fear for our families, anger at our loss of property and resentment of the other to shatter the vision that 200 years of Americans have built toward?

This question is at the very root at our efforts to make the structural and systemic changes that will transform our Jericho Road. What has been called the "school to prison pipeline" starts at illiteracy. If a student can't read at a standard level by 5th grade, that student's risk of drop out is 85%. Three out of five people in Americans prisoners can't read; 85% of juvenile offenders have problems reading.

It is in resolving the value and emotional issues surrounding social justice that constitute both the danger and the crucial point in moving ahead with effective and humanitarian reform. It will require the courage of our convictions both as people of faith and as citizens to assure that the brokenness is truly transformed. **These convictions are rooted in our understanding of God's peace which is not possible without God's justice**, and our baptismal covenant to "strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being."



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Worship & Sermon Themes for Criminal Justice Sabbath

Not sure how to preach or speak about criminal justice?

Trying to find where stories from inside intersect with life outside?

Leading worship with persons in prison, or family members impacted by their loved ones' incarceration?

Many spiritual themes important in life outside of prison are just as valuable on the inside—if not more so!

- **Grace**, *restorative justice, and true forgiveness*—after honest appraisal and accountability for the harm we have caused. People who have committed crimes are not the only ones who have harmed others or need forgiveness. Survivors of crime can be empowered to claim their own stories and their own power for healing.
- **Gratitude** *for the time we have*. Incarceration is called 'doing time,' and while it is more obvious how time is limited in jail or prison, we all have limited time. Who do we choose to be within the time we have? How can we be present wherever we may be?
- **Reconciliation** *and restored relationship across society*. Mass incarceration heightens racial and socioeconomic disparities across society. How can we as a people own up to this injustice? How can we learn from individuals in the justice system about how to seek rehabilitation as a society?

Justice Takes A Village

by Audrey DeCoursey

It may seem that the criminal justice system impacts only a portion of our society. But our legal system touches all our lives. It operates **on our behalf and in our name**, so the community has an integral role to play. It is our responsibility to ensure these systems support our values and goals for our society.

On a practical level, **every taxpayer and every voter** in a community pays the financial costs of our criminal justice system, and has a responsibility to ensure these resources are used efficiently, effectively, and humanely. Where do we want to invest in people – in education and treatment or in imprisonment?

As one example, we can look at our state budget this year. We face a choice: open a second women's prison, to the cost of many millions of dollars, to house the few dozen female inmates over the current prison's capacity—or spend those millions on alternatives to incarceration, such as treatment, enhanced supervision, and recovery services. Which is a better choice for those women? For their children? For the rest of society? To allow the default trend of prison expansion to continue *is* a choice. What will our community choose? What do we value?

But money is not the most valuable resource at risk. The human lives impacted by involvement in a broken system are far more valuable. People of faith have a special responsibility in affirming the humanity and dignity of every person in the system.

The **community as a whole** is impacted by our justice system:

- Children bear the impact of their families' trauma especially. Parental incarceration is now recognized as one of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) with long-term consequences on a person's health and development.
- The racial disparity of incarceration both reveals and reinforces systems of racial oppression in the US.
- Prisons are sub-communities unto themselves, creating their own (often violent and hierarchical) cultural norms, not contained by prison walls: lack of trust and fear of vulnerability spill over into the rest of society.

Victims have an especially important voice for the community to hear. And crime victims are calling for alternatives to mass incarceration. As reported from a recent survey (*Crime Survivors Speak*, by Alliance for Safety and Justice), 60% of crime victims prefer rehabilitating offenders to punishing them. They prefer investing in education versus incarceration by a 15 to 1 margin; mental health treatment by a 7 to 1 margin; job creation by a 10 to 1 margin.

People of faith have a role in leading community conversations about our priorities and values, including the voices of victims and offenders. If we believe in healing, we have a 'mission field,' as close as our own neighborhoods. As representatives of the community, we help aid **restorative justice** alternatives to the default cycles of punishment and violence.

We can start by hearing the stories of every individual whose life is touched by the legal system and incorporating them into our own, larger, narrative of faith. Their stories are our story - and they are God's story in our world. Find a way to befriend someone in the criminal justice system and bring their story into your action for a more just world.

Through service alongside those impacted by crime and violence, lives will be changed—starting with our own.

Rev. Audrey deCoursey manages criminal justice ministries for Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO).

Hymn Suggestions from the Christian and Unitarian Universalist traditions

Amazing Grace is especially appropriate for a worship theme of forgiveness, in part because of its history. John Newton, who wrote the words in 1779, was captain of a slave ship. But one day he saw his sin and repented. The hymn overflows with joy and gratitude for God's acceptance and forgiveness.

There's a wideness in God's mercy (Faber, 1863) The first verse speaks to God's unbounded Mercy as "like the wideness of the Sea." "There's a kindness in his justice which is more than liberty," describes the justice which is the hallmark of God's kingdom we are all called to bring about.

From the Crush of Wealth and Power (Kendyl L R Gibbons, 1993) addresses the stresses of modern life.

**AMAZING
GRACE,
HOW SWEET
THE SOUND
THAT SAVED A
WRETCH LIKE
ME....**

Next Steps: Get Involved

Pray and Learn

You're already helping by holding a Criminal Justice Sabbath with your faith community. Thank you! We welcome submissions for next year's Sabbath guide any time.

Speak for Justice

Interfaith Advocacy Day is February 7, 2017: "Raising Diverse Voices of Faith to Strengthen Oregon Communities," a day of prayer, dialogue, and advocacy. We bring together people from many faiths across Oregon to be a voice for the voiceless, addressing housing, hunger, health care, gun safety, and climate justice. Activities include presentations from faith leaders on the religious roots of concern for people in poverty, advocacy skill training, issue briefings, and visits to legislators. Individuals and groups are encouraged to participate. Register at www.EMOregan.org

Help a Family

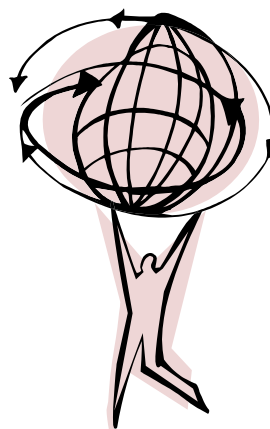
EMO is piloting a visitation support program to help families of people in prison to visit their loved ones. Visits from caring community outside have been shown to help adults in custody avoid reoffending and reintegrate more successfully after release. Children with incarcerated parents need particular support, to maintain an important bond. Supporting families lets them know the community has not forgotten them.

We are **recruiting volunteers now** from congregations and groups in the Willamette Valley and Pendleton to help pioneer a project supporting families on a family-oriented visit over one weekend in the spring or summer of 2017. We welcome small groups from any religious tradition.

Befriend

EMO's CoSA program coordinates volunteers serving as mentors to adults in custody and through reentry. Through individual visits, letter-writing, and circle mentorship, we look for the humanity in the long-term incarcerated. You can change a life and make society safer by modeling pro-social, healthy relationship skills.

Contact us to volunteer, at CoSA@EMOregan.org.



Visit our website for more ways to get involved beyond this Criminal Justice Sabbath:
www.CoSAOregon.org

An Interfaith Resource Guide for Worship, Education, and Action

Rev. Tom English—Eugene Area Contact

Episcopal Diocese of Oregon

Commission on Jail &
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Diocese of Oregon

Proclaiming God's reign while living Gospel lives

The Episcopal Church in Western Oregon

ECUMENICAL
MINISTRIES
of OREGON

Rev. Audrey DeCoursey—Portland/Salem Area Contact

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO)

Communities of Support & Accountability project

www.CoSAOregon.org

CoSA@EMOOregon.org

503-221-1054

Speakers Bureau Available

Faith leaders active in criminal justice ministries are available to come to your faith community and share a message of hope and good news even within our broken justice system. This message is open to communities of all faith traditions. Invite us out! From adult education classes to sermons, witness commissions to men's and women's groups, our speakers want to help your community learn about the role you have to play in working for justice and mercy toward those in need.

In every county in Oregon, a **Local Public Safety Coordinating Council** meets regularly. Council members include elected officials, government staff, and community representatives who may be available to speak to your congregation. Find out what your county is doing at safetyandjustice.org. Go to *Our Work*, click on Justice Reinvestment, and then click your county on the map.

Contact us (info above) if we can visit or support your Criminal Justice Sabbath in other ways.

Dates to Remember

Interfaith Advocacy Day

February 7, 2017

Join hundreds of other people of faith to speak out for peace and justice to our elected officials in Salem. See www.EMOOregon.org to register.

Family Prison Visitation

Spring-Summer 2017

Volunteer to help family members visit loved ones incarcerated across the state. Contact CoSA to learn more: CoSA@EMOOregon.org.