

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon presents

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SABBATH WORSHIP GUIDE 2019

What is a Criminal Justice Sabbath?

Criminal Justice Sabbath is a time to hear the cries: to center the stories at the heart of our justice system, from our neighbors impacted by it. Specifically, it is a day to remember people who:

- Have survived crime and violence
- Are or have been in prison
- Work in corrections, courts, law enforcement and parole
- Volunteer in jails and prisons and during reentry
- Work in domestic violence shelters and foster care
- Have experienced our inhospitable immigration system
- Know what it's like to be a child impacted by crime, violence, mass incarceration, or the foster care system.

Criminal Justice Sabbath is a time for faith communities to lift up ways the justice system impacts us all. It is a day to make connections between our faith traditions and the legal system we are part of, and see our shared responsibility to help healing.

There's no single way to hold a Criminal Justice Sabbath, because what this day looks like will depend on your tradition and the stories of people in your community. You can include a special prayer in your worship service, screen an educational film, use your sermon or message to speak about violence or mass incarceration, host a table to sign letters to agency officials, hold a drive for toys or other items needed by people in prisons and their families, offer a blessing to members of your congregation who volunteer or work in correctional facilities, host a restorative justice training with your youth group, or receive a special offering for victim service agencies or groups like ours working for justice.

When is Criminal Justice Sabbath?

Join people of faith across Oregon - and beyond - in holding your Criminal Justice Sabbath on **July 12-14, 2019**. If you can't join in on that weekend, host a Criminal Justice Sabbath any day - and let us know when you do!

Who should read this guide?

Faith leaders, spiritual directors, outreach or mission committees, teachers, education groups, and individuals: please read and use this guide in your community, to learn and act for justice.

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**Ecumenical
Ministries
of Oregon**

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon has a long-standing commitment to criminal justice reform. We know that while there are many important individual reforms needed to transform our broken legal system, these single steps alone will not create a just society. Until we change the hearts and minds of our neighbors, our society will continue to reinforce inequity and violence within our justice system. Educating our communities about the criminal justice system, its challenges, and opportunities for change, is the most important work we can do for long-term, lasting reform.

REFLECTIONS

WHY RELIGIOUS VOICES MATTER IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

Why Hear the Cries for Justice?

Religious communities and people of faith have a special role to play in transforming the institutions that make up our criminal justice system - and in transforming the lives of their neighbors who are impacted by that system. Alongside professionals in treatment and law and corrections, alongside people who are incarcerated, alongside survivors of violence and crime, alongside family members of those behind bars, people of faith have a role to play.

Our motivation is rooted in the values of Restorative Justice, which recognizes that the community has a role to play, as well as victims and offenders, when harm has occurred. Community has a role to play in preventing harm, and in transforming systems to reduce oppression and violence. The community - the public - has a role to play in public safety, and public safety is incomplete when it is left to paid professionals to manage and mitigate harm. We all have a responsibility to help reduce oppression, crime, and violence.

As taxpayers, voters, neighbors, and members of society, we are already playing a role in the justice system as it is. Whether we recognize that fact or ignore it, we are part of that system, and unless we are actively working to change that system for the better, then we are keeping that system in place as it is. Restorative Justice values, which complement our faith values, together call on us to become informed, thoughtful, and active participants in our communities - including being active in calling to change broken systems and encourage healing instead of furthering harm.

Religious people have a special role to play as community members, because we are inspired and distinguished by our acknowledgement of the spiritual dimension to our lives. **And the brokenness within our criminal justice system is, at its heart, a spiritual brokenness.** Our justice system enacts our society's values, even though most of us would not want to claim that these ARE our values (values such as a culture of violence, and a society with stark racial disparities). This disconnect speaks to a deep spiritual brokenness, not only in our justice system, but in our society at large. And so, it is incumbent on religious people to become aware of and active in our legal system - and help lead a society-wide transformation toward true justice and toward values we WANT to uphold.

Hearing the Cries for Justice: Regional Gatherings to Connect Congregations

Since 2018, EMO has worked with partners at the Episcopal Diocese of Oregon, the United Methodist Church, and other friends, to host regional gatherings for people of faith working for justice in Oregon's legal system.

Through statewide and regional gatherings, we hope to help connect and encourage our members who are doing work for service and reform.

Oregon's justice system impacts every corner of our state. And everywhere that religious communities gather, we have a calling to help improve the lives of people impacted by that system.

ACTION

WAYS FAITH COMMUNITIES CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE NOW

GET INVOLVED

Your community can become a welcoming space for those impacted by the criminal justice system. Here are a few ideas:

- Dedicate a day each year as a Criminal Justice Sabbath, to learn and take action.
- Welcome persons with criminal records into the community, through a mission statement, lobby display, or otherwise demonstrating your commitment to visitors and members.
- Host an exhibit of visual artworks by incarcerated artists.
- Educate your group about challenges people face reintegrating into society after being in prison.
- Host a book club to read “The New Jim Crow” by Michelle Alexander or “Just Mercy” by Bryan Stephenson.
- Educate your group about mass incarceration and racism, such as screening the documentary “Thirteenth.”
- Host a small group for crime survivors, for people with loved ones in prison, or for people on parole.
- Attend Restorative Justice trainings, and implement restorative disciplinary practices in classes for children and youth.
- Support programs for children of the incarcerated, such as toy drives or camps.
- Join EMO’s lobby days and advocacy action teams to advocate for reform in Salem.
- Write letters to local leaders and newspapers to encourage specific reform legislation, such as Justice Reinvestment.
- Join an action listserv, like the Spirit-led Justice Alliance, for weekly action invitations.
- Take part in - or start - a collaborative meeting with your local law enforcement, to connect them to the communities they serve and protect. Portland’s Interfaith Peace and Action Collaborative brings faith leaders into conversation with police leaders about issues such as officer training.
- Attend a meeting of your county’s Local Public Safety Coordinating Council, to learn about local issues and to have a say in how local public safety funds are spent.
- Change the lives of students by mentoring, tutoring, or volunteering, to interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline. Host a tutoring group at your congregation.
- Bring a speaker or guest preacher to your congregation to talk about these issues. Speakers could be from local law enforcement, people with lived experience of the justice system, or staff from a local non-profit addressing justice issues. EMO provides a speakers’ bureau for a variety of educational and worship leadership needs.



St. John the Baptist Episcopal Church of Portland hosts Deacon Tom English, as a guest preacher for their Criminal Justice Sabbath in 2018.

LITURGY

WORSHIP RESOURCES FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE SABBATH

A Prayer at the Prison Fence

God of Justice and Mercy;
Inside this prison are some of your children.
Some live here. Some work here.
Some are here to visit. Some are here to volunteer.
Some are saved here. Some die here.

We lift up every soul who passes through this space.
May we who leave through these gates
Remember those members of our community who
cannot leave,
and act on our responsibilities to them.
May we who live here remember
that we have people who love us.
May we all remember
that walls do not divide community.
Relationship can transcend all distances.
Spirits can commune in love across fences.

Love connects us and holds us accountable
to be the best human beings we can be,
wherever we may be, inside or outside,

Love connects us and calls us to work for justice,
an end to violence, transforming systems of oppression,
whoever we may be, starting with ourselves
and on our daily walk.

Love connects us and fills us with innate value
that no one can take away,
because the Source of that love
is the Creator, and we are God's beloved children.

In the world you made,
every space is blessed, every breath is sacred.
Even when we humans draw lines
and build walls,
trying to make some spaces profane
or beyond society's concern,
even here, Your Loving Spirit flows through
and connects us.

We are sisters and brothers.
We are one human family.
We all have a role to play to make the world
more peaceful,
more just, more compassionate,
more humane, more divine.
Empowered by the Holy Spirit
of life and love,
let us start today.

Source: Rev. Audrey Zunkel-deCoursey,
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

LITURGY

WORSHIP RESOURCES FOR A CRIMINAL JUSTICE SABBATH

Supporting Immigrants and Refugees

Leader: Come, come whoever you are: The lawyers and teachers, theologians and activists, dental hygienists and students, acupuncturists and occupational therapists, chaplains and administrative assistants, clergy who commit civil disobedience to free asylum seekers, the housed and the houseless people who commit civil disobedience by occupying ICE. All of us wanderers, worshipers, lovers of leaving, we will not let your caravan despair.

Response: We will not let your caravan despair! We welcome you to cross our borders. We have enough. We are enriched by your coming.

Leader: Our faith obligates us to share our abundance with you. Thirty six times the Hebrew scriptures demand that we are to welcome and love the immigrant.

Response: We will not let your caravan despair! We welcome you to cross our borders. We have enough. We are enriched by your coming.

Leader: Our own history obligates us to welcome you. If immigrant descendant we are obligated to return the hospitality shown to us. If slave or indigenous descendent, we are obligated to break the cycle of abuse that met us.

Response: We will not let your caravan despair! We welcome you to cross our borders. We have enough. We are enriched by your coming.

Leader: We are sorry. We must do better. We will atone and repair. There is no way but the way of welcoming.

Response: We will not let your caravan despair! We welcome you to cross our borders. We have enough. We are enriched by your coming.

Liturgy by Rabbi Debra Kolodny

Portland's UnShul and Spirit-Led Justice Alliance
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LITURGY

WORSHIP RESOURCES FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE SABBATH

A Prayer of Confession for Restored Justice

Holy One;
You gave us the law of love -
a new law to make the whole world renewed.

We are called to imitate you in mercy, not judgment.
We are called to live as examples, not enforcers.
We are called to trust there is enough, and to share.

Restoring justice takes hard work
from the whole community.
And so often, we fail
to live up to the dreams you have for us.

We confess that too often we resort to judgment,
instead of looking at our own errors.
We confess that too often we content ourselves
with our privilege,
instead of seeking out acts of solidarity.
We confess that too often we scapegoat others,
instead of looking at the complexity,
and our own complicity
in systems of oppression and violence.
We confess that too often we justify our own actions,
by putting others down.

We know that you have seen our errors
and have equipped us to make amends.
Help us face ourselves and our human frailty
with humility and not fear.
Help us become healers, though wounded,
and restorers of justice where it has been breached.

Source: Rev. Audrey Zunkel-deCoursey,
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

LITURGY

WORSHIP RESOURCES FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE SABBATH

A Prayer with Our Sisters and Brothers

Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer;

We are one human family, though separated at times.

The men and women inside prisons and jails and detention centers are our brothers and sisters. We are connected in ways both seen and unseen, ways that are life-giving and ways that threaten us all.

No one is free when any one of us is oppressed, or caged, or violated, or forgotten. Today, we remember these connections and our mutual responsibilities to one another.

On this Criminal Justice Sabbath, we remember every person whose life has been touched by crime, violence, and incarceration. We affirm that they are beloved members of our community.

We lift up people who have survived crime or lost their lives to it, that they might know their stories are heard and matter.

We lift up people who work and volunteer in prisons and jails, that they might remember the wider community they represent and its pro-social values of compassion and collaboration.

We lift up people living in prisons and jails, that they might know they are still part of our community and that they are never walled off from you.

We lift up people re-entering society after prison, that they might find a welcome amidst disorientation and courage to start on a new path.

We lift up people with records, long after their sentences are served, that they might overcome barriers and biases to find restored places in community.

We lift up people working with survivors of crime, that they might find balm to heal broken hearts.

We lift up foster families and case managers and social workers, that they might provide a safety net where families cannot.

We lift up people working in the court systems and law enforcement, that they might be renewed and recommitted to their work as public service and its opportunities to offer healing in places of hurt.

We lift up activists, advocates, and elected leaders working to transform broken systems and make real our dreams of a better future.

We lift up people migrating across borders, leaving traumas and hardship in their homelands only to find themselves thrust into an inhospitable legal system.

We lift up medical staff, recovery supports, and mental healthcare providers, healing the harms of trauma in mind, body, and soul.

We lift up restorative justice practitioners, guiding conflicts to deeper healing in collaborative resolution.

We lift up communities weakened by the absence of too many moms and dads, daughters and sons.

We lift up every child whose parent is incarcerated, that they might know they are loved and valuable beyond measure.

We pray that until crime and violence and oppression no longer touch so many lives, we will continue to remember these people. We will continue to listen to the hard stories. We will continue to work for healing. We will continue to help restore justice.

Empowered by Your Spirit, we commit ourselves to this work.

Source: Rev. Audrey Zunkel-deCoursey, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

SAMPLE WORSHIP

CONNECTING TO THE LECTIONARY ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE SABBATH

The Good Samaritan at the Prison Wall

For those from Christian traditions who use the Revised Common Lectionary in their worship and preaching, the dates chosen for Criminal Justice Sabbath this year offer us a familiar story - and the chance to look at this text with new eyes.

Dialogue from Luke 10:

A lawyer stands up to test Jesus.

Lawyer: Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Jesus: What is written in the law? What do you read there?

Lawyer: 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 neighbour as yourself.

Jesus: You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.

But a big question follows that exchange. Who is my neighbor?

The answer likely surprised that lawyer, and should continue to surprise us, if we're giving due weight to how challenging that commandment is.

Jesus answered the question by telling the Parable of the Good Samaritan, and it's one that has resonance when we consider ministries with people impacted by the criminal justice system - especially crime survivors.

It also challenges us to think about whose perspective we are sharing: the lawyer? The Samaritan? The man beaten up?

Are there people being neighbors to us, who we might not expect?

HYMN IDEAS

■ **There's a wideness to God's mercy**

This hymn provides a pointed reference to God's justice and welcome for sinners: "...there's a kindness in his justice, which is more than liberty, there's a welcome for the sinner, and more graces for the good..."

■ **Amazing Grace**

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.

■ **Just as I am**

We all are acceptable in God's sight - and most of us can use that reminder more often.

■ **The Voice of God is Calling**

■ **Let There Be Light**

■ **O Day of Peace**

■ **Jesu, Jesu, verses 2,3, & 5**

REFLECTIONS ON GOOD NEWS

LECTIONARY-BASED SERMON SAMPLES FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE SABBATH

Who is Our Neighbor?

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.

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.

How did our criminal justice become so broken? Who is to blame? The answer for me is: **I am.** We all are responsible.

Christianity, itself, also bears significant responsibility for the use of incarceration. Seen as reform from torture and capital punishment, prisons were built throughout the United States in the mid-1800s with the intention not only of incarcerating but also improving prisoners through a mixture of work, discipline and personal reflection. But when the reform movement died, prisons became out of sight and out of mind for most Americans. We were glad they were there because they made us feel safe. But we paid scant attention on what went on inside the walls. Underfunded, understaffed and increasingly over-crowded, our prisons became warehouses or worse where inmates are punished.

The church has the tools to first to acknowledge responsibility and call for reforms necessary to create a truly restorative criminal justice system. As a Church we meet, we teach and we preach. We have sent our people into prisons and jails to work with both inmates and staff. We have helped offenders return safely and successfully to our communities. We have provided care and comfort to victims. But is not enough. Repentance offers us the opportunity to right the wrong and to forgive ourselves for waiting too long to act.

Rev. Deacon Tom English
Episcopal Diocese of Oregon
Prison Ministry Commission

CONTACT US

AND CONNECT WITH YOUR SISTERS AND BROTHERS STATEWIDE - AND BEYOND

ABOUT THE NETWORK

EMO is building a statewide network of congregations engaging criminal justice issues: through prison ministries, support for reentry after prison sentences, education and advocacy for reform, support to crime survivors, and through worship and preaching to raise awareness.

Our statewide network provides peer support, from congregation to congregation, in encouragement to continue work of justice and mercy. See what congregations are already doing in the Spotlights section of our website, attending our Hearing the Cries for Justice annual gathering, or by reading our annual Criminal Justice Sabbath guide.

EMO's Criminal Justice Ministries seek to strengthen the role of community and faith-based voices in restoring justice. We work through reforms of the legal system, raising awareness, engaging tough conversations, and walking with people impacted by crime, violence, and incarceration. We operate from a trauma-informed lens, through a restorative justice framework.

CONTACT US

for support to your ministry:

- Ideas and inspiration
- Speakers Bureau - available for educational events and worship leadership
- Upcoming events for networking, training, and advocacy
- Connections to local congregations
- To share your stories, pictures, and successes
- To submit your own resources for our next Criminal Justice Sabbath guide!



Criminal Justice Sabbath

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ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES OF OREGON

is a statewide association of Christian denominations, congregations, ecumenical organizations and interfaith partners working together to improve the lives of Oregonians through community ministry programs, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, creation justice and public policy advocacy.