

Criminal Justice Sabbath Resource Guide



Portions of this resource guide were created and printed with permission
from Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

Ecumenical
Ministries
of Oregon

emoregon.org



What is a Criminal Justice Sabbath?

Criminal Justice Sabbath is a time to listen to the stories at the heart of our justice system, from our neighbors impacted by the criminal justice system. Specifically, it is a day to remember:

- Survivors of crime and violence
- People currently or previously imprisoned
- Employees of prisons or jail, court officials, law enforcement, and social workers for re-entry
- Volunteers inside jails and prisons, and those offering guidance with re-entry
- Children impacted by crime, violence, and/or mass incarceration

What does a Criminal Justice Sabbath look like?

There's no single way to hold a Criminal Justice Sabbath. What this day looks like will depend on your tradition and the stories of people in your community. People have participated in a number of different ways, all contributing to the collective Sabbath. This has included:

- A special prayer in the worship service
- Screening an educational film
- Incorporating present-day criminal justice topics into the sermon or message (such as mass incarceration, violence, returning citizens, reconciliation)
- Hosting a table to sign letters to officials
- Holding a drive for toys or other items needed by people in prisons and their families
- Offering a blessing to and prayer for members of the congregation who volunteer or work in correctional facilities
- Hosting a restorative justice training
- Receiving a special offering for We Raise Foundation, to help equip organizations focused on criminal justice

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.

We Raise Foundation Focus

At We Raise, our theological grounding statement speaks to why lifting up these issues are important:

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Galatians 5:1a

For more than 100 years, we have heeded the call to love thy neighbor as a deep response and manifestation of God's love and grace for us shown in Jesus Christ. As we have been released from our bondage to sin, we work in Christ's name to loosen the bonds of systemic social sin that prevent people from hearing and responding to God's call to new life.

We support, encourage, and collaborate with ministries that advance freedom in Christ and hope for the future. We Raise is committed to supporting and equipping organizations that offer solutions within the areas of education, workforce development, and criminal justice. To this end, we are proud to be partnered with bold and innovative leaders in this work, including Cabrini Green Legal Aid, The SoulFisher Ministries, St. Leonard's Ministries, and many others.



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 as well as a place for further discussion on faithful Christian response to the problems and challenges in the criminal justice system.

Here are a few ideas:

- Dedicate a day each year as a Criminal Justice Sabbath, to learn, reflect, 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.
- Explore: Host or attend an art exhibition or theatrical production that are related to criminal justice topics or produced by incarcerated artists.
 - ⊗ Still Point Theatre Collective's [Persephone Project](#)
 - ⊗ [Storycatchers Theatre](#)
 - ⊗ Find an art exhibit or theatrical production near you
- Educate your group about challenges people face reintegrating into society after involvement with the criminal justice system by inviting in a speaker or volunteering with one of these organizations:
 - ⊗ [St. Leonard's Ministries](#) – Chicago, Ill.
 - ⊗ [Lawndale Christian Legal Center](#) – Chicago, Ill.
 - ⊗ [Cabrini Green Legal Aid](#) – Chicago, Ill.
 - ⊗ [Inside Out Network](#) – Chicago, Ill.
 - ⊗ [Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation](#) – Chicago, Ill.
 - ⊗ [Lutheran Child and Family Services](#) – Chicago, Ill.
 - ⊗ [Lutheran Social Services of Illinois](#) – Statewide
 - ⊗ [SoulFisher Ministries](#) – St. Louis, Mo.
 - ⊗ [St. Louis University Prison Education Program](#) – St. Louis, Mo.
 - ⊗ [Criminal Justice Ministry](#) – St. Louis, Mo.
 - ⊗ Community Warehouse's [Partners in Hope Program](#) – Milwaukee, Wis.
 - ⊗ [God Touch Milwaukee](#) – Milwaukee, Wis.
 - ⊗ [Project RETURN](#) – Milwaukee, Wis.
 - ⊗ [Old Skool Café](#) – San Francisco, Calif.
 - ⊗ [Restoring Justice](#) – Houston, Texas
 - ⊗ [Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota](#) – Statewide (Find one near you)



Inside Out Network, Chicago, Ill.



SoulFisher Ministries, St. Louis, Mo.

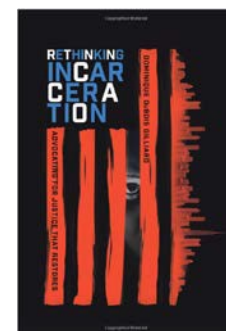
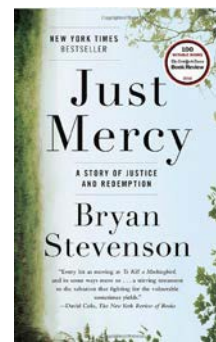


- Read: Host a book club to read “Just Mercy” by Bryan Stevenson or “Re-Thinking Incarceration” by Dominique Gilliard.
- Watch: Educate your group about mass incarceration and racism, by screening the documentaries “[Thirteenth](#)” or “[Milwaukee 53206.](#)”
- Learn: Attend Restorative Justice trainings, and implement restorative disciplinary practices in classes for children and youth.

⊗ [Illinois Balanced and Restorative Justice](#)

- Equip: Support programs for children of the incarcerated, such as books, toy drives, scholarships or camps.

- ⊗ [Lutheran Social Service of Illinois’ Storybook program](#) – Illinois
- ⊗ [Prison Fellowship’s Angel Tree Christmas Program](#) – Nationwide
- ⊗ [Prison Fellowship’s Angel Tree Camping](#) – Nationwide
- ⊗ [Our Children’s Place H.A.T.S. Program](#) – North Carolina
- ⊗ [Scholarships](#) – Washington, D.C.



Community Warehouse, Milwaukee, Wis.



St. Leonard’s Ministries, Chicago, Ill.



Lawndale Christian Legal Center, Chicago, Ill.



Cabrini Green Legal Aid, Chicago, Ill.



Worship Resources for a Criminal Justice Sabbath

APRAYER 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.



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



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



One Pierce Place, Suite 250E

Itasca, Ill. 60143

weraise.org

800.762.6748