

Today is
Second Chances Sabbath

We are celebrating Second Chances Sabbath today with people around Oregon and across the United States. April is Second Chances Month, as a time to remember the members of our community returning from prison.

When someone comes home from prison, wider society expects them to make better choices than before they were incarcerated. But as a society, we don't make that easy. Even after serving time, a criminal record creates barriers, making it hard to find safe housing, jobs, treatment, and social connection. Stereotypes and stigmas label people.

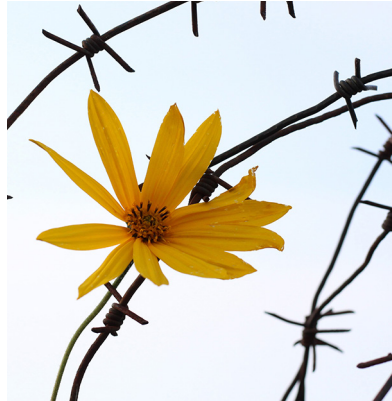
People of faith have an important role to play in rejecting stereotypes that keep people in a "second prison" after release. Start by checking your own assumptions about people with criminal histories, then start reaching out to help.

Who needs Second Chances?

We all do!

We are celebrating Second Chances today because we know that we all need a new start some time in our lives.

We all have the power to change. It takes hard work to rebuild the trust we might have broken. It requires grief work to let go of old selves and embrace healthier roads. But we all are on a journey and we all need companions along the way.



YOU CAN GIVE SOMEONE A SECOND CHANCE:

- HIRE someone for a job, even if they have a criminal record.
- RENT to someone who has a record.
- MENTOR someone coming home from prison.
- HOST a recovery group at your house of worship.
- HOLD a special meditation, prayer, or study group for people coming home from prison.

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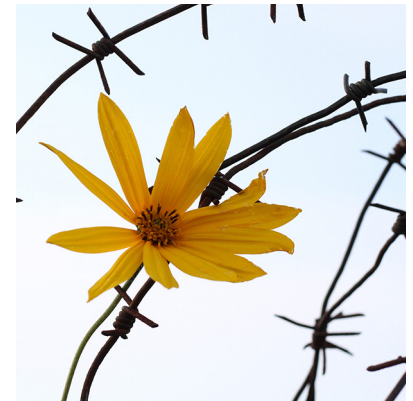
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WHY IT MATTERS to people of faith

Justice is a value shared by many faiths: religions understand that the law of the land is not the ultimate arbiter of right and wrong.

In the Christian Gospel of Matthew (Ch. 25), Jesus encourages believers to “visit the prisoners.” This command is about more than providing charity to the vulnerable: it invites the faithful to radically shift how they define who is in their community. It delineates a community that is united in spirit, even when bodies are apart.

Prisons put up walls that divide families and communities. We are called not only to cross those prison walls to visit, but to resist the pressures to think those walls can separate us as one community. We are called to enact policies that treat all members with compassion and dignity.

ACCOUNTABILITY for us, too

Criminal Justice Reform is about equity: injustice in our legal system cements racial disparities into our social fabric. Incarceration removes members of our community from their active roles as parents, workers, and civic leaders.

Since people of color are incarcerated at disproportionate rates, all these impacts fall on communities that are already marginalized, and exacerbate existing disparities.

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PRAYER for restoring justice

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

Just and Merciful Creator;

You gave us the law of love - a 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. We are called to visit the prisoners and hear their cries.

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

We confess that too often we judge others, to justify our own actions. We confess that too often we content ourselves with privilege, instead of seeking solidarity. We confess that too often we scapegoat others, instead of looking at complexity, and our own complicity in systems of oppression and violence. 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.

Learn more and connect at EMOregon.org or (503) 221-1054

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