SET THE PRISONERS FREE:
TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICES FOR DISCIPLING
CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES
TO END MASS INCARCERATION

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By
SHAWN CASSELBERRY

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Mass incarceration is a troubling trend that is inconsistent with Christian belief and practice, yet many Christians do not see ending mass incarceration as an urgent discipleship issue. This article explores how theological and ideological leanings shape the way Christians view prisoners and approach prison reform, creating unique blind spots for conservative and liberal Christians. Pursuing holistic liberation for prisoners will require addressing individual, community, and systemic change and healing the misguided bifurcation between prison ministries and social justice advocacy. Focusing on biblical themes of liberation, mercy, prophetic confrontation of injustice, and solidarity, churches and organizations can move their communities toward a restorative vision for creation rather than a punitive one. By incorporating transformative practices within our discipleship efforts we will be able to see Christians grow in greater awareness of mass incarceration and commitment to setting prisoners free in Jesus’ name.
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This paper is dedicated to the 2.3 million men and women who are currently incarcerated in America, their families, and those whose records still impede their full inclusion and participation in society.

I want to specifically thank the men at the Illinois maximum security prison I got to know during this project and the many faith and justice leaders I interviewed who are working to disciple Christians to greater awareness and action around ending mass incarceration. I would also like to thank Mission Year and the Christian Community Development Association for providing a context for me to learn and participate in solidarity-rooted advocacy and for being committed to holistic liberation of prisoners and communities. Lastly, I want to thank my wife Jen, the community of North Lawndale, and our friends who provided encouragement and support throughout this project.
Introduction

“This isn’t the Department of Corrections. They aren’t interested in corrections,” said one of the inmates at a maximum security prison in Illinois that I have been visiting over the last year. “They do everything they can to stand in the way of corrections. This isn’t the Department of Corrections. It’s a Men’s Warehouse.”

The prison system has expanded at an alarming and historically unprecedented rate in America. According to the National Research Council, during the past four decades, the rate of incarceration in the U.S. more than quadrupled even while crime rates stayed relatively the same. The United States makes up 5% of the world’s population, but 25% of the world’s prison population. America “warehouses” 2.3 million prisoners, more than any other nation. Attorney Bryan Stevenson, founder of The Equal Justice Initiative, argues that “mass incarceration defines us as a society the way slavery once did.” Michelle Alexander, in her groundbreaking book The New Jim Crow, decries mass incarceration as not only a criminal justice issue, but one of the key civil rights issues of our time.

Mass incarceration is much more than an oversized prison population. Mass incarceration, according to Alexander, refers to a larger “web of laws, rules, policies, and

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1 In accordance with prison policy, I am not authorized to share inmate names or the specific prison. For full transcript see Appendix A: Dialogue and feedback with men in maximum security prison.
4 “Presently, America’s incarceration rate is roughly 12 times the rate of Sweden, eight times the rate of Italy, seven times the rate of Canada, five times the rate of Australia, and four times the rate in Poland. America’s closest-to-scale competitor is Russia—and with an autocratic Vladimir Putin locking up about 450 people per 100,000, compared with our 700 or so, it isn’t much competition. China has about four times America’s population, but American jails and prisons hold half a million more people.” Coates, Ta-Nehisi. The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration. The Atlantic. October 2015.
customs that control those labeled criminals both in and out of prison.”

7 Like the old Jim Crow, the New Jim Crow of mass incarceration locks “people of color into a permanent second-class citizenship.” Todd Clear in *Imprisoning Communities*, attests that prison populations have grown mostly through society’s locking up ever-increasing numbers of young men, especially black men, largely from impoverished places.8 The National Research Council reports that mass incarceration has damaging effects on prisoners, families, communities, and society.9

For Christians, mass incarceration represents a disturbing trend that is inconsistent with Christian beliefs, values, and practices. Yet, as faith-based prison advocates attest, many churches do not consider ending mass incarceration as an urgent discipleship issue. Even among churches that are active around the prison system, a bifurcation exists between prison ministry and prison advocacy making mobilizing churches around ending mass incarceration across theological and political lines much more difficult. While awareness of mass incarceration is growing in popular culture and more academic work around the sociological realities of the prison system have emerged in recent years, less attention has been devoted to how churches can disciple their communities around mass incarceration and address the many factors keeping Christians from greater awareness and action around ending mass incarceration. This article will explore the necessity for theological discipleship resources around holistic liberation of prisoners that will bring mutual transformation to Christians and those incarcerated while providing an urgency for mobilizing Christians around ending mass incarceration.

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7 Alexander, 13.
8 Clear, Todd R. *Imprisoning Communities*, Oxford University Press, 2009. 3. While Clear and Alexander highlight the racial disparities of incarcerated black men, it is important to note that women are also being incarcerated at ever-increasing rates. See Richie, Beth E. *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America’s Prison Nation*. New York: NYU Press, 2012.
Theoretical Framework

Chicago Activist Kathy Kelley said, “Where we stand determines what we see.”

Where we stand theologically and ideologically, often determines what we see when it comes to the prison system and mass incarceration. Our theological frameworks color, and in some cases, hinder our ability to see the prison system as a discipleship issue as well as dramatically shape our response to addressing mass incarceration. In Sacred Assemblies and Civic Engagement, Kniss and Numrich use a heuristic map of the religious or moral order in the United States. The heuristic map includes two dimensions representing two central issues in any moral order: moral authority and moral project. Kniss writes, “the former is the basis for a group’s central values, while the latter shapes religious and social action.”

Using this framework, Kniss is able to plot Evangelicalism (American Right) and Mainline Protestantism (American Left) and shows how they might find common ground and/or face opposition or conflict in the public square. Based on this map, one can predict how these religious traditions will likely view and respond to mass incarceration. Where the denomination falls on the religious map has implications for what people see (individual prisoners or systems) and how people tailor their efforts toward prison reform (ie., reforming prisoners vs. reforming systems). It also creates unique blind spots for each quadrant.

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12 The map traces religious orientation along an X and Y-axis. The X-axis is the locus of moral authority (who or what determines our standard for goodness, truth, and beauty) and the Y-axis is referred to as “the moral project” (where moral action or influence should be targeted).
13 Ibid.
14 The map also plots Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Charismatics, and Orthodox Judaism, but this paper will focus on the ideological divide between conservative and liberal Christianity.
15 Two examples will illustrate this. The National Baptist Convention and the United Church of Christ have both expressed public commitment to addressing the prison crisis yet their analysis and approach are very different based on their moral authority and moral project. The vision of the National Baptist Convention Justice Commission as stated on their website is to: “effectively influence and change sinful behavior wholly and holistically by ministering
In *Influencer: The New Science of Leading Change*, Greeny, Patterson, Maxfield, McMillan, and Switzler, provide a methodology of change that accounts for personal, social, and structural spheres that leaders must address to bring social change. This threefold approach provides a holistic way to approach social injustices such as mass incarceration and prevents the ideological blind spots Kniss identified.\(^{16}\) I will also incorporate insights from faith and justice leaders from across the country who are engaged in prison ministry and/or prison advocacy on what has been most challenging and most effective (transformative) in their efforts to disciple and mobilize Christian communities.\(^{17}\)

In developing transformative practices for Christian communities to raise awareness and action around ending mass incarceration, I will focus on four common types of transformation: dialectical, developmental, archetypal, and kenotic.\(^{18}\) The dialectical type brings transformation through conflict of ideas and engagement. Hegel’s model of thesis, antithesis, synthesis is an example of the dialectical type. This theory holds that transformation happens by encountering different perspectives that triggers conflict and then growth. Second, the developmental type includes developmental theories like Erik Erikson’s psychosocial stages, Kohlberg’s moral...
stages, Piaget’s cognitive stages and James Fowler’s faith stages. Because our interest is in discipling Christian communities, Fowler’s faith stages will be of prime focus in this thesis to move people toward “conjunctive” and “universalizing faith.”

Third, the archetypal type of transformation relies on metaphor to create new stories and interpretations that enable individuals and communities to live differently. Biblical metaphors and themes will be highlighted that can potentially shift the way people of faith think about and engage the prison system. Lastly, the kenotic type which brings transformation by requiring an emptying of self or giving up of something. Kenotic practices would challenge Christians to give up comfort for greater solidarity and justice.

Lastly, in developing a theological framework that takes liberty for prisoners seriously, it is imperative to include the voices and participation of those who are themselves imprisoned. Without the participation of those imprisoned, advocacy can become a form of savior complex.

My methodology will incorporate Paulo Freire’s concept of ‘conscientization,’ “adult education strategies of dialogue and group analysis of oppressive candidates coupled with learning the

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19 Fowler’s faith stages are helpful in providing a roadmap for our discipleship around holistic liberation for prisoners and the prison system. Fowler developed six stages or discipleship benchmarks along the path to religious maturity. These stages were evident among all faith and religious groups, both inside and outside the Christian faith. These stages support the development of a holistic theological framework that incorporates personal transformation along with social justice. One of the necessary steps in discipleship is moving beyond the “ethnocentrism” of our particular religious tribe. As we conflict and clash with other viewpoints, it moves us to deeper understanding of our faith. The final two stages involve a transformation by love marked by a social concern for humanity. Our discipleship can keep people stuck in certain stages or it can continue to challenge it to advance in maturity. Stage 6 is where we all should be pointing our members to and our discipleship should provide dynamic opportunities for transformation to happen. If our discipleship practices are not leading to transformative changes in our members’ lives and moving them toward maturity, then it may be time to change what we are doing. If we want to disciple our members toward holistic liberation for prisoners then being aware of the faith stages will be useful in developing tools and practices that can shift thinking, create awareness, and move people to action. See description of all 6 faith stages in Appendix E.

20 Giving up comfort includes, but not limited to, giving up theological, physical, and emotional security as well as material comforts, in order to increase proximity and identification with those who are marginalized.

21 Community organizer Troy Jackson referred to “evangelical arrogance” as a potential hazard in organizing efforts. Jackson, Troy. Email to Author. Cincinnati, OH. October 3, 2015 (Appendix D-8). The savior complex can befall conservative and liberal advocates and can impede the work of liberation for prisoners. Prison advocates need to listen to, learn from, and do advocacy with prisoners rather than dictating the agenda.
power of changing ideas and words to reveal rather than to hide oppression.” 22 By including those most directly impacted, incarcerated and formerly incarcerated men and women move “from passive to active voice, from a sense of powerlessness and worthlessness to an understanding that is designed to lead to confronting power through re-describing society as it is experienced by the downtrodden rather than it is said to be by the beneficiaries of their suffering.” 23 In addition to academic and theological research, I became a regular volunteer in a maximum security prison talking with prisoners about the project and soliciting their feedback and ideas. The men at the prison were eager to share. They had creative ideas reflecting complex thinking, theological depth, and insider knowledge of the prison system. My time interacting with these incarcerated men reinforced the conviction of Freire’s “pedagogy of the oppressed” that advocacy, rooted in solidarity, brings mutual liberation and transformation.

**Background**

My awareness of mass incarceration and commitment to seeing it end are influenced by five different areas: 1) living in a neighborhood of “concentrated incarceration” in the North Lawndale community of Chicago for the last 12 years, 24 2) working for Mission Year, a national urban ministry program for young adults (ages 18-30) focused on radical discipleship, intentional community, and social justice in Chicago, Houston, and Philadelphia, 3) being part of the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) Mass Incarceration Taskforce, a

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22 Greenwood, Davydd and Levin, Morten. *Introduction to Action Research*. SAGE Publications, Inc; 2nd edition, 2006. 31. The assumption behind this approach is that the most ideal learning environment for social change is to “bring people together so that they can be organized and an action resource process of self-reflection, social critique, and design of agendas can take place.” This approach puts a strong emphasis on “building community and solidarity among the stakeholders to prepare them to confront the powerful and oppressive” with an aim to “equalize power relations and to redistribute resources from the rich and poor. The goal of learning in solidarity leads to research with people instead of on people. This approach was utilized in the development of this thesis.

23 Ibid.

24 Todd Clear coined the phrase “communities of concentrated incarceration” to describe neighborhoods with high rates of population involved in the prison system. According to one report, 57% of residents in the North Lawndale community are involved in the prison system in some way, either in prison, on probation or parole.
national initiative to organize and mobilize Christian community development-oriented churches around prison advocacy,\textsuperscript{25} 4) being a mentor for children and youth for the last 8 years with Celestial Ministries, a neighborhood ministry of support for families with incarcerated loved ones, and 5) becoming a regular prison volunteer at a maximum security prison in Illinois. While all of these contexts inform my understanding of mass incarceration, this article will primarily focus on my work with Mission Year and CCDA and how organizations and churches can disciple and mobilize Christians from across the theological and political spectrum to be a force for ending mass incarceration.

Mission Year and CCDA are both national Christian community development organizations working in historically marginalized communities in U.S. urban cities. Both organizations are nondenominational working with diverse Christians from various theological traditions and political affiliations. While Mission Year and CCDA have been involved in community level ministry work in the city, both organizations have recently expressed commitment to addressing the injustice of mass incarceration as it directly affects the communities they are serving. Part of this commitment involves developing an advocacy component to their ministries to bring awareness and action to their communities. This advocacy focus is relatively new for both organizations and presents unique challenges to their respective bases.

One of the biggest challenges for Mission Year and CCDA is the ideological differences between conservatives and liberals within their ranks that creates different blind spots and hinder unified efforts. Will Andrews, a prison volunteer with Kairos ministry, shared this observation of

\textsuperscript{25} The Christian Community Development Association was started in 1989 by John Perkins who developed a philosophy of Christian community development summed up by three R’s: relocation, reconciliation, and redistribution. CCD Practitioners live in under-resourced neighborhoods long-term to strengthen and support the spiritual and physical well-being of communities. CCDA hosts an annual conference for 3,000+ practitioners and ministers engaged in Christian community development as well as regional and local events.
people with conservative and liberal ideologies involved in prison reform, “Conservatives love to visit the prison and volunteer to run programs but they aren’t aware or involved in addressing systemic injustice. And liberals are involved in addressing systemic change but don’t visit the prison.”

Conservative groups tend to emphasize personalized ministry forms such as one-on-one visitation, Angel Tree Christmas gifts, and conducting evangelistic worship services. Not surprisingly, prison chaplains tend to be overwhelmingly conservative.

Conservative focus on individuals in the context of prison ministry can potentially prevent people from seeing the systemic issues within the prison and the need for advocacy.

Michael Emerson and Christian Smith highlight this systemic blind spot in their book *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*. They show how conservative Protestants have a hard time seeing racial structures of inequality or systems of injustice. Their research found that white conservative Protestants are more than twice as likely as other whites to blame lack of equality (e.g., income) between blacks and whites on a lack of black motivation rather than discrimination. Conservative Protestants are six times more likely to cite lack of motivation than unequal access to education.

Emerson and Smith conclude, “white evangelicalism likely does more to perpetuate the racialized society than to reduce it.”

One of the impediments for conservatives truly understanding the inequality and injustice of the prison system and developing deep empathy for the incarcerated is racial segregation and

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27 According to a 50 State survey of prison chaplains by Pew Research Center, “most chaplains describe themselves as holding theologically conservative views” and “the majority of chaplains consider themselves politically and socially conservative or very conservative.” Additionally, the survey found that “most chaplains are upbeat about the prisons where they work.” About six in ten (61%) say their state’s correctional system “works pretty well” and “needs only minor changes,” while a third (34%) say “the system needs major changes” and 5% say it “needs to be completely rebuilt.” *Religions in Prison: A 50 State Survey of Prison Chaplains*. Pew Research Center. March 22, 2015.


29 Ibid, 170.
racial (color)blindness. In *Places of Redemption*, Fulkerson gives humbling statistics about the state of race in the US and the church. It has been reported that 90 percent of white US citizens have never been in an African American home. The percentage of significantly interracial Protestant churches is amazingly low. In *Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, Ron Sider shares the results of a Gallup and Barna poll that reveal that Baptists and evangelicals are the most likely group to object to neighbors of another race. While evangelicals and conservative Christians may be the most likely to object to having neighbors of another race, Fulkerson reports that the more highly educated and progressive-sounding US whites are, the less likely they are to be in racially mixed churches or neighborhoods. The liberal focus on systemic change can prevent activists from building actual relationships with prisoners and/or the formerly incarcerated. This is a solidarity blind spot. In *The Irresistible Revolution*, progressive evangelical author and activist Shane Claiborne sums up the liberal blind spot: “It’s not that we don’t care about the poor, it’s that we don’t know them.”

Prisons are often located in low-income minority neighborhoods or in small rural towns in the middle of nowhere. This makes seeing and remembering the prisoner difficult (not to mention the difficulty this produces on families who may want to visit incarcerated loved ones). As the maxim goes, out of sight, out of mind. Michael McBride and Lisa Sharon Harper, two faith-based organizers for PICO Network and Sojourners respectively, both identified

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30 Evangelicals are largely white (90%) and live in separate geographical and ideological worlds as many of those affected by the prison system.
32 Ibid, 16. Only 6 per cent of evangelical churches and 2.5 per cent of mainline churches are communities in which no more than 80 per cent of the membership identifies as the same race.
34 Fulkerson, 16.
“proximity” as a crucial barrier in bringing awareness and action. This runs across ideological lines as McBride primarily organizes mainline Protestant congregations (predominantly liberal) and Harper organizes evangelical churches and faith leaders (primarily conservative). This distance creates assumptions and stereotypes about prisoners that are largely uninformed. “The majority of people out there are ignorant about us,” expressed one inmate I visited. Whether geographically or socio-economically speaking, prisoners live in another world from many middle-class American Christians which perpetuates ignorance and makes it harder to foster compassion for prisoners.

If someone is involved in the prison system their guilt is often assumed (even though an approximate 28,500 prisoners are innocent) and their punishment justified regardless of its length or cost (to the prisoner or the taxpayer). Kilgore argues “we have become a punishment-based society.” Jen Soering, a German theologian serving a life sentence in Virginia, concurs, “in the judicial systems, criminals are shown no mercy at all.” He traces this back to the theology of penal substitution which in the American context takes the form of an angry God, who demands punishment and not rehabilitation, public safety, or mercy. One inmate expressed disbelief at American Christians’ lack of grace and mercy toward prisoners, “isn’t the Christian God supposed to be a God of mercy?” But as many have pointed out, the criminal justice system in the United States is based on retribution not restoration, making it difficult to illicit compassion for prisoners.

36 Appendix D-3, D-9.
37 Appendix A.
38 According to a 2004 study conducted by Professor Stephen A. Drizin of Northwestern University and Professor Richard A. Leo of the University of California, Berkely. At the time of the study, the population of U.S. corrections was 2.2 million, so this would suggest that 1.3 percent of all inmates are not guilty of their crimes. Soering, Jens. One Day in the Life of Inmate 179212. New York: Lantern, 2012. 88.
40 Soering, 107.
41 Ibid. See his whole argument: 105-109
Todd Clear explains how “the criminalization of color,” the increased and disproportionate rates of incarceration among black men, makes garnering support for prison reform difficult. “Partly because there is so much social stigma for young black men, it is hard to use their plight to generate much enthusiasm for penal reform.” He also credits “tough on crime” rhetoric and political meandering for the lack of support for more wide-scale organizing around prisoners. To be sure, ending mass incarceration will take more than simply raising awareness about the issue, it will take political will and action.

In fact, awareness appears to be at an all-time high. University of Illinois professor James Kilgore quipped, “mass incarceration is trending.” Artist John Legend connected the civil rights struggle with mass incarceration in his Oscar acceptance speech for his work in the film Selma: “We live in the most incarcerated country in the world. There are more black men under correctional control today than were under slavery in 1850.” Bryan Stevenson’s Ted Talk on mass incarceration, “We Need To Talk About Injustice,” had over 2.5 million views and his book Just Mercy was recently featured in Starbucks Coffee chains as the book of the month. President Obama and Pope Francis became the first U.S. president and Pope respectively, to visit a U.S. prison. Ferguson protests along with the Black Lives Matter movement have utilized technology to bring racialized policing, one of the entry points of mass incarceration, into sharp focus and in the process galvanized the young generation.

42 Clear, 13.
43 Ibid. He gives three main reasons prison reform will not go far in our current political climate. First, “most of the legislative action toward increasing punishment for crime offers free political capital.” One of the most poignant examples of this was George H.W. Bush’s use of Willie Horton political ads in the 1980s to capitalize on white fears of black crime and exploit his opponent’s support of prisoner reform. Second, “there is almost no political capital to be gained from an elected official taking on [prison reform].” Even, politically progressive President Barack Obama did not take on any significant prison reform until the last year of his second term in office. Third, “the most common suggested reforms in today’s penal landscape are…rehabilitation programs which even if they become wildly successful, will reduce prison return rates only at the margin.” While, “alternatives to incarceration” are important programs and worthy of investment, studies show they are unlikely to have much effect in slowing the growth of mass incarceration.
44 James Kilgore at a recent book signing event for Understanding Mass Incarceration at 57th Street Books.
Prison reform is gaining bipartisan support. Even the Koch brothers, known for funding ultra-conservative campaigns, have committed to giving money toward prison reform. Yet even with all this heightened awareness, mass incarceration rates remain high.

One reason for this is the size and scope of the issue. Even those who care about the plight of the prisoner and recognize how injustice is deeply embedded in the system, are uncertain about how to tackle such a large challenge. The “prison industrial complex” as Angela Davis calls it, is a massive system with strong cultural, religious, political, and economic drivers that are not easily changed. “It’s like turning the titanic” says juvenile justice advocate and Mission Year alum Angie Hess, describing the challenge of bringing change to such a complex system. It’s definitely not a quick fix which means it will require long-term commitment and sustained efforts. It’s also larger than one church, organization, denomination, or even religion. Equipping people to organize collaboratively for systemic change will be key. If we are to end mass incarceration we need to disciple communities of faith to see the injustice and then give them opportunities to act. Organizer Michael McBride contends, “Many people say they want to do something but don’t know what.” Any discipleship approach to mass incarceration will ultimately need to address these challenges with theological analysis and practical application.

**Research and Literature**

The focus of this section will be on developing theological and biblical resources to undergird our efforts to disciple and mobilize Christian communities around advocacy to end

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47 See Appendix F for diagram of Prison Industrial Complex.
49 While the scope of this paper is limited to discipling Christian communities around ending mass incarceration, I would love to see Christian churches moving toward inter-faith work as well. For an inter-faith paradigm to the prison system see: Magnani, Laura, and Harmon L. Wray. *Beyond Prisons: A New Interfaith Paradigm for Our Failed Prison System.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006.
mass incarceration. Four dominant themes related to prisoners and prisons can be found throughout Scripture: 1) the promise of God’s liberation 2) prophetic confrontation of unjust systems 3) the restorative and merciful nature of God’s justice and 4) the solidarity of Christ and the early church with prisoners.

*The Promise of God’s liberation*

The liberative promise of God made to prisoners is seen in Isaiah 42, also referred to as the Servant Song. Second Isaiah reveals God’s posture toward prisoners is not of neutrality but of liberation. “I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness (*tsedeka*)…to open eyes of that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.” In *The Fall of the Prison: Biblical Perspectives on Prison Abolition*, Lee Griffith, cites the Servant Song as “one of the earliest indications that the biblical word regarding prisoners is at once both simple and scandalous: liberty for the captives.”

The theme of liberation for prisoners has its roots in the Jubilee and Sabbath Year proclamations which declared that land should be redistributed and slaves should be set free. Regardless whether or not debts were actually forgiven and slaves freed, the proclamation reemerged throughout biblical history. The jubilee proclamation was “God’s encouragement for people to say to each other: ‘Let us start anew, because all of our deciding about who should have ownership and who should not—who should have freedom and who should not—is sinful

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51 In addition to biblical commentary and analysis, theological resources of faith and justice organizers and men serving time in prison will also be integrated.
52 Isaiah 42:6-7 (NIV).
54 Ibid, 97-98. Lev 25:1-10; Deut. 15. There are echoes of the Sabbath and Jubilee Years in the ‘favorable year of the Lord’ proclaimed in Isaiah 61:1-2: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me…to bring good news to the afflicted; …to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.”
and divisive. Let us return to the equality we share in standing before God, who owns all and frees us all.”

It is during the period of exile that “prisoners” became important symbols for Israel. In Lamentations, the prophet Jeremiah warns that the crushing of “all the prisoners of the land” is one of the things of which “the Lord does not approve,” because the Lord “executes justice for the oppressed…and sets the prisoner free.” “It was from the experience of exile that Israel learned of the fundamental kinship between enslavement and imprisonment.” During this time, Israel discovered that “the same God who frees the slaves frees the prisoners too.” Griffith points out it is also in exile that the community proclaimed the possibility that a freed prisoner would lead them: “For he has come out of prison to become king, even though he was born poor in his kingdom,” and the messianic expectation that one would come and declare, “I have set your prisoners free.”

It is of significance then that Jesus revives the promise of God’s liberation for prisoners in announcing his public ministry in Luke 4. In reading Isaiah 61 in the synagogue, Jesus adds Isaiah 58:6, “to set the oppressed free,” onto the prophetic promises. “When understood literally, the passage says the Christ is God’s servant who will bring to reality the longing and the

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56 Griffith, 98. The Sabbath and Jubilee years had roots in God’s liberating activity in the exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt. “A covenant was established with Israel on the basis of God’s liberation of the slaves, and it was also on the basis of that history of liberation that Israel was to observe the Sabbath and Jubilee” In this light, “the freeing of captives was not to be seen as an act of charity, nor was it based on any illusions that all of the poor and all of the captives were basically ‘good’ people; rather, the proclamation of liberty to the captives were concrete social responses to God’s liberating activity in the exodus of Israel from Egypt.”

57 Lamentations 3:34-36; Psalm 146:7.

58 Griffith, 102. This connection between slavery and imprisonment in the Hebrew Bible is significant for the contemporary conversation due to the parallels being made between American slavery and mass incarceration in books like Another form of Slavery and Worse than Slavery.

59 Ibid.

60 Ecclesiastes 4:14.


62 The Old Testament promise of liberation of prisoners in Isaiah 61 is applied to the socio-political context in the New Testament. It is not a stretch then, to see how the liberative promise of God for prisoners might extend to contemporary prisoners under the American carceral state.

63 This shows there was a link between Isaiah 58 and Isaiah 61.
hope of the poor, the oppressed, and the imprisoned. The Christ will also usher in the amnesty, the liberation, and the restoration associated with the proclamation of the year of Jubilee."\textsuperscript{64}

\textit{Prophetic Confrontation of Injustice}

The second stream is prophetic confrontation of unjust systems. The prophets did not speak about injustice in vague generalities; prophets confront specific social realities that take advantage of economically and socially marginalized people. “Micah speaks out for the widows who are victims of unfair land seizure. Isaiah confronts widows and orphans whose rights are being stripped. Amos confronts judicial injustice as well as economic wrongdoing and exploitation of poor.”\textsuperscript{65}

In \textit{Eighth Century Prophets: A Social Analysis}, D. N. Premnath describes the social context of the prophets as 1) a period of unprecedented political and economic growth. 2) The ruling elite who were beneficiaries of this growth dominated the state bureaucracy and through various means, extracted great wealth. 3) The vast amounts of economic surplus supported the leisured and luxurious living of the ruling class and provided for means of extending and maintaining their political control. The cumulative effect of all of the above mentioned was deterioration of the plight of peasantry who constituted the majority of the population.\textsuperscript{66} Peasants

\textsuperscript{64} Craddock, Fred. \textit{Interpretation: Luke}. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990. 62. Jesus’ statement that this Scripture is fulfilled today suggests that Jesus is the embodiment of the liberative promise of God for those who are poor, oppressed, and imprisoned. Luke seems to be using this passage not only as confirmation of Jesus’ divine and prophetic credentials, but also to apply the liberative promise of God intended for prisoners in exile to the early church members experiencing oppression and imprisonment in Rome. In this context, setting the prisoner free is not simply a one-time promise of comfort for individual prisoners or a spiritualized liberation, it is an ongoing promise and critique of political and economic systems of oppression. To free the prisoner, then, means ending systems of oppression.


\textsuperscript{66} Premnath, D.N. \textit{Eighth Century Prophets: A Social Analysis}. St. Louis: Chalice, 2003. 43. Premnath’s social analysis describes the dynamic connection between political and economic power and how the lifestyles of the wealthy were maintained at the expense of the poor evident in passages like Amos 5:11-12. “Therefore, because you make tenants out of the poor and take exactions of wheat from them, you have built houses of fine stone, but you shall not dwell in them.”
lost access to land with the growth of the market economy. Peasants had to pay rent for the land and became landless day laborers or tenants in the large estates belonging to the rich. These unjust social arrangements and systems are the backdrop of the prophetic critique.

Amos confronted the dishonest practice of using false weights and measures in the marketplace to cheat the poor and rebuked the wealthy for “laying themselves down beside every altar upon garments taken in pledge.” Amos exposed judicial injustice and called the leaders of Israel to “establish justice in the gate (courts).” The book of Amos shows how biblical faith includes a prophetic confrontation of structural injustice.

Prophetic confrontation of injustice focuses our attention on the oppressed individuals and groups bearing the unfair burden of society’s sins and the systemic apparatuses maintaining the suffering.

**The Restorative Nature of God’s Justice**

The third stream is the restorative and merciful nature of God’s justice. To speak of biblical justice is to speak of the Hebrew concept of “tsedeka,” a word that has connotations of both “justice and righteousness.” Originally, this “tsedeka” is established between God and the

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67 Ibid, 132.
68 Ibid.
69 Amos 8:5. Israelite law clearly prohibited the fraudulent practice of falsifying weights and measures. “You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, a large and a small. You shall not have in your house two kinds of measures, a large and a small. A full and just weight you shall have, a full and just measure you shall have.”
70 Amos 2:8. An Israelite could give their garment to secure a debt and expect the garment returned by nightfall since the pledged garment also served as a covering against the cold of the night. The covenant code specifically states, “If ever you take your neighbor’s garment in pledge, restore it to him before the sun goes down; for that is his only covering, it is his mantle for his body; in what else shall he sleep? In 1960, archeologists found the Yavne-Yam letter, a fourteen-line Hebrew ostracon (broken piece of pottery) with a formal request from a farm worker asking the governor for the return of his outer garment which was taken unjustly by an official. The Yayne-Yam letter dates before 600 B.C.E. and serves as non-biblical evidence to the social injustice Amos decries. Griffin, 98-99.
71 Amos 5:10-15.
72 Jesus continues this prophetic tradition when he confronts the exploitation of the money changers in the temple, disrupting a religion-sanctioned economic arrangement prioritizing profit over the inclusion of the poor. In *Parables as Subversive Speech*, William R. Herzog II presents Jesus as “pedagogue of the oppressed,” simultaneously exposing a corrupt judicial system and empowering the poor to creatively subvert it in his parable of the widow and the unjust judge. Herzog II, William R. *Parables as Subversive Speech* St. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994. For Herzog’s full treatment of the parable see 215-232
Hebrew people, and it implies covenanted commitment.\textsuperscript{73} “When the covenant is broken, justice demands that the wrong must be righted, that the covenant be restored.”\textsuperscript{74} Moses Maimonides summarized the spirit of tsedeka when he said that to accuse someone of a crime was to “enter into a commitment with that person, to take responsibility for that person, to become that person’s sister or brother.”\textsuperscript{75} This understanding of justice points back to the first crime, when God judged Cain and marked him, becoming his keeper.\textsuperscript{76} An inmate serving life in prison for murder reiterated this important theological point, “Cain, Moses, and Paul all committed murder, but how did God respond? God restored them…But unfortunately, there’s no room for mercy in the U.S. prison system.”\textsuperscript{77} To put it succinctly, retribution is at the heart of human justice while restoration is at the heart of biblical justice.\textsuperscript{78}

\textit{The Solidarity of Christ and the Church with the Prisoner}

The last stream is the solidarity of Christ and the early church with the prisoner. When surveying faith and justice advocates about what Scriptural texts undergird their prison ministry and/or advocacy work, Matthew 25 was by far the most frequently cited. In Matthew 25, Jesus instructed his disciples on how to be ready for the coming of the Son of Man and the judgment of

\begin{itemize}
  \item Griffith, 95.
  \item Ibid. In the biblical context, “since God has always been faithful but the people have not been, the covenant was maintained only because of God’s commitment to the accused, a commitment that entailed God’s taking responsibility for the accused, nurturing them and protecting them, and ultimately acquitting them – not because the facts demanded acquittal (on the contrary, the facts demanded a finding of guilt) but because of God’s own loving will to set the accused free to enter into covenant again.”
  \item Ibid.
  \item Genesis 4:9-15.
  \item In the American context, when justice is done, someone is prosecuted and locked up. In the Old Testament context, when the “Just” are present, lives are spared. Note Abraham’s intervention on behalf of the accused, his pleading and bargaining with God that the city be spared if fifty of the Just are present, or forty, or ten (Gen 18). Griffith, 95-96.
  \item The justice of God restores because God’s justice is merciful. The mercy of God’s justice confused and disappointed the prophet Jonah when the punishment expected on the wicked nation of Ninevah was lifted. The justice the Lord requires, according to the prophet Micah, is justice that loves mercy (Micah 6:8). The gospel Christ announced blessed the merciful (Matthew 5:7). It’s not surprising that the final word on judgment for the Christian community, according to Apostle James, is liberty-inducing mercy, “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law of freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:12).”
\end{itemize}
the nations. The marks of faithful discipleship revolve around six responses to human need repeated four times in various forms throughout the text.\(^7^9\) This is the last instruction in the gospel of Matthew that Jesus gives to his disciples so it carries extra weight.\(^8^0\)

Prison minister and advocate Will Andrews expounds on the significance of Matthew 25:34-40 as a basis for his own vocational call to “visiting prisoners.” “If this depiction of judgment is read in the context of the larger eschatological discourse that begins in first verse of the preceding chapter, it is clear that it is not mere symbolic language. The acts of compassion identified in this litany of ‘least of these’ are nothing less than marks of Christian discipleship. These are the things Jesus' disciples must be found doing when he returns. In other words, they are not optional but rather obligations placed on anyone who would follow Jesus.”\(^8^1\) Part of this call is to see Christ in the prisoner and respond to the prisoner as if they were Christ.\(^8^2\)

But Christ not only identifies with the prisoner ontologically, Christ was a prisoner. Mumia Abu-Jamal, an American activist serving a life sentence, raises the question, “Isn’t it odd that Christendom—that huge body of humankind that claims spiritual descent from the Jewish carpenter of Nazareth—claims to pray to and adore a being who was a prisoner of Roman power, an inmate of the empire’s death row?”\(^8^3\) In *The Convict Christ*, Soering reflects on how Christ was a convict in a literal sense: “When God chose to take on human flesh, he did not become a priest or a monk, a king or a general, a poet or a philosopher. Instead, he became a death row

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\(^7^9\) Hagner contends repetition could have been for artistic effect or possibly as a memorization technique. Hagner, Donald A. *Word Biblical Commentary*. Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1995. 740.


\(^8^1\) Andrews, Will. Email to Author. Chicago, IL. May 1, 2015 (Appendix D-4).

\(^8^2\) Commentators are divided on whether Christ’s identification with the “least of these” is a universal identification with the poor or if Christ was expressing his identification with the disciples and telling them the world will be judged based on how they treat his disciples. This seems to be the prevailing interpretation based on the context of the specific passage but commentators concede that a universal interpretation is not inconsistent with larger themes from the gospel.

prisoner, a condemned criminal executed alongside two thieves.”

Soering contends that Christians are used to reflecting on the cross of Christ in a spiritual way, but rarely the execution and the procedure that led to it. Reflecting theologically on the execution of Christ equips us to critique the systems of our own day. In the Executed God, Mark Lewis Taylor, contends that the execution of Jesus on the cross provides a model for effective theological and political witness in the face of mass incarceration.

In Deliverance to the Captives, a collection of sermons delivered by theologian Karl Barth at a prison in Basel, Barth explores the significance of Jesus’ dying alongside two criminals. “It is the solidarity of the executed Jesus with the other imprisoned and other executed ones that makes up the ‘first certain Christian community.’” Barth goes on to say, the

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84 For those who might say Christ was not a ‘real’ convict because he did not commit any crime Soering adds, “Since the mid-1990s, more than 140 prisoners in this country have been exonerated through DNA tests, and every one of them was a ‘real’ convict before being proven innocent. A convict is merely a person who has been tried, sentenced, and (in capital cases) executed, regardless of his or her actual guilt. Thus Joseph the Israelite was a ‘real’ convict, even though he did not actually rape Potiphar’s wife—and so was our Messiah,” Soering, Jens. The Convict Christ. New York: Orbis Books, 2006. 1. See Appendix G for Soering’s list of biblical references to the prison.

85 When we look at the execution of Jesus we start to see the similarities in the process of justice between then and now. Soering compares a few parallels: “In our own, supposedly more civilized age, authorities still hire undercover informants—just like Judas. Tactical squads still go out at night to make arrests—just like the soldiers at Gethsemane. And under certain circumstances, interrogators still slap suspects around to obtain confession—just like the Sanhedrin. All of us still enjoy a nice, spectacular, high-profile trial—just like the crowd outside Pilate’s palace. Judges are still sometimes swayed by public opinion to find defendants guilty despite their own doubts—just like Pilate. Appeals courts still tend to uphold a trial court’s verdict even when there are procedural errors—just like Herod, who refused to overturn Pilate’s decision. Unfortunately, some prison guards still humiliate and abuse convicts—just like the soldiers who had charge of Jesus. And in some cases, we still cheer when the death penalty is imposed on an especially heinous criminal—just like the rabble at Golgotha. Are we supposed to believe it was wrong to do all this to Jesus, but right to do it to the two thieves? Or is it possible that our Father wants to teach us, through the cross, that we should not do such things to any of his children?” 3-4.

86 “Remembering the executed Jesus and enacting his way of the cross, are crucial for mobilizing effective resistance to lockdown American today and to the Christendoms that are complicit with it.” Taylor highlights three dynamics that were crucial to Jesus’ way of the cross: “1) being politically adversarial to religiously backed imperial power, 2) performing creative and dramatic instances of resistance to imperial power, and 3) organizing movements that can continue resistance and flourish even after imperial executioners do their worst.” To Taylor, the executed God and way of the cross provide a “force of life that is greater than all imperial powers and thus can foment the resistance and hope that all suffering people need.” Taylor, Mark Lewis. The Executed God. MN: Fortress Press, 2001. Xiii.

87 Karl Barth preached to the prisoners at the Basel prison at the end of his life until his health no longer allowed it. It was often said that many considered committing crimes so that they would be privileged to hear Barth preach. Houtz, Wyatt. Karl Barth’s Sermons to the Basel Prisoners: How to Preach the Church Dogmatics. Postbarthian.com. April 25, 2015.

88 Taylor, xiii.
disciples were not present at the time of execution, so they can only “get in line behind the two criminals who were already first, and up there in front, with Jesus on Golgotha.” But, the early church witness indicates that the disciples indeed got in line.

In Hebrews 13:3, the writer urges the early church community to “remember those in prison as if you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured as if you yourselves were being tortured.” The translation expresses the iterative force of the present imperative so the emphasis is clearly on “continued remembrance.” Continuing to remember the prisoner is how the early church can “let brotherly love continue” in 13:1. The ordinary usage here refers to the love reserved for actual brothers and sisters. The early church was directed to see each other as a family who shares in suffering. Paul, a prisoner himself, urged the community in Colossae to “remember my chains,” and instructed the church in Corinth to see themselves as part of a body of solidarity where the suffering of one member is felt by all the other members. The extent to which Christians would seek solidarity with their brothers and sisters in prison is attested by the skeptic Lucian during the arrest and imprisonment of Peregrinus Proteus in Palestine in the second century. First, Christians did everything in their power to have Proteus released (advocacy). When that proved impossible certain leaders bribed the guards and slept inside Peregrinus’ cell with him (solidarity). This is evidence how the early church took seriously the charge to remember those in prison as if they were fellow prisoners.

In summary, the Bible offers rich resources for liberating prisoners holistically, shifting to a more restorative and merciful approach to crime and punishment, prophetically engaging

89 Ibid.
91 (Philo, Josephus Ant 4.26; 4 Macc 13:21, 23, 26; 14:1; 15:10). “In the second half of the second century the satirist Lucian of Samosata explained to a correspondent, Cronius, that the relationship among Christians in unusual; they are to regard one another as “brothers.” Ibid, 510.
92 Colossians 4:18; 1 Cor. 12:12-26.
93 Peregrinus 12-13. Lane, 514.
systems of injustice and oppression, and remembering those in prison as a communal act of solidarity and a faithful expression of Christian love and discipleship.

The early church approach to prisoners provides a theological and practical link between evangelical/conservative and progressive/liberal divisions and possibilities for unified efforts around ending mass incarceration (see figure below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evangelical/Conservative</th>
<th>Early Church/Biblical</th>
<th>Progressive/Liberal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Communal</td>
<td>Systemic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelism/Formation</td>
<td>Solidarity</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saved/Unsaved</td>
<td>Brother/Sister</td>
<td>Oppressed/Oppressor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reforming Individuals</td>
<td>Building Communities</td>
<td>Transforming Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing hearts</td>
<td>Changing Neighborhoods</td>
<td>Changing laws</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prison Ministry (ex.</td>
<td>Solidarity-rooted Prison</td>
<td>Prison Advocacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prison Fellowship)</td>
<td>Ministry and Advocacy</td>
<td>(ex. PICO Network)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instead of seeing these as three competing agendas, when taken together they provide a comprehensive approach to discipling and mobilizing Christian communities to action. An interpersonal, community, or systemic approach alone will simply not be enough to care for prisoners and dismantle the injustice within the incarceration system. According to Influencer, all three components are necessary for effective social change.94

Sociologist William Julius Wilson in More Than Just Race concurs that a hybrid method holds the most promise for addressing our deepest social problems and breaking the conservative/liberal ideological deadlock. Conservatives and liberals tend to see different things when it comes to addressing social inequity and the reasons why they persist which hinders policy reform. “Whereas liberals tend to focus on structural conditions, especially racialist

94 Michael McBride of the PICO Network LIVE FREE campaign offers a 3-part approach of Proclamation, Programs, and Policy that brings these three strands together (Appendix D-9).
structural factors such as segregation and discrimination, conservatives tend to emphasize cultural factors such as individual attitudes and behavior.”95 Wilson argues that “more weight should be given to structural causes of inequality, despite the dynamic interrelationships of structure and culture, because they continue to play a far greater role in the subjugation of Black Americans and other people of color.96 “But,” Wilson adds, “in addressing the problem of structural inequities, it would not be wise to leave the impression in public discussions that cultural problems do not matter. Indeed, proposals to address racial inequality should reflect awareness of the inextricable link between aspects of structure and culture.”97 If mass incarceration is to end it will take addressing the structural and cultural, systemic and individual factors.98

Walter Wink, in The Powers that Be, provides a theological way for Christians to see our task of engaging the structures and powers in our world.99

“The Powers were created, they are fallen, and they shall be redeemed. This can be asserted as belief in the final triumph of God over the forces of evil. But this schema is also simultaneous: 1) God at once and the same time upholds a given political and economic system, since some such system is required to support human life; 2) condemns that system insofar as it is destructive of fully human life; and 3) presses for its transformation into a more humane order. Conservatives stress the first, revolutionaries the second, reformers the third. The Christian is expected to hold together all three.”100

96 Ibid, 135.
97 Ibid, 136.
99 Walter Wink’s Engaging the Powers was suggested to me by one of the men in prison as a way to help Christians see the need to address systems.
A holistic discipleship approach to engaging mass incarceration will uphold law and order, condemn the abuses and injustice, and fight for a more humane, restorative means of corrections.  

**Objectives, Strategies, and Implementation**

The following are intervention strategies implemented by Mission Year, CCDA, and other prison activists over the last year and a half to disciple and mobilize Christians to work to end mass incarceration. These strategies are developed around the four transformation types and incorporate individual, communal, and structural components.

1. Make ending mass incarceration a church/organizational priority and commitment.

CCDA and Mission Year began by making ending mass incarceration an urgent discipleship issue. The Christian Community Development Association identified three justice advocacy priorities for its association of practitioners: Education, Immigration, and Mass Incarceration. This sent a message to their association members that advocacy was going to be a priority. In addition, CCDA created a Biblical Justice Committee to deepen and develop their theological justice resources as well as a Mass Incarceration taskforce to integrate advocacy around mass incarceration into their local and national efforts. Part of this process included writing a white paper to inform the CCDA board of the scope of the problem of mass incarceration and developing theological imperatives around biblical justice to allievate fears of conservative board members about advocacy.  

Writing an organizational statement and/or position paper and naming individual, communal, and systemic realities within the prison system can be an

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101 For Alternatives to the current prison system and direction Christians can be advocating toward see Appendix I.
102 See the CCDA Mass Incarceration Taskforce White paper and biblical justice resources in Appendix J. Conservative board members needed to see how advocacy was rooted in Scripture rather than something associated with a liberal agenda.
103 The National Evangelical Association made an organizational statement on “Churches Responsibility to the Prisoners,” but makes no mention of the “prison system” or the need to address unjust structural issues, therefore, it is incomplete and less likely to making an impact on mass incarceration.
important first step in educating and directing members toward advocacy around mass incarceration. The creation of the CCDA Mass Incarceration taskforce has provided space for critical dialectical dialogue between differing perspectives within the staff and board and an internal accountability system for leadership to ensure the incorporation of justice into all aspects of organizational programming and planning.

2. Disciple members (staff, board, and supporters) around mass incarceration by incorporating Bible studies, trainings, and advocacy resources into your organizational curriculum and materials (dialectical/developmental). Mission Year has included concern for prisoners and critique of the prison system into its internal program discipleship resources (curriculum, trainings, forums, Bible studies, etc.), incorporating multiple entry points for our yearlong participants to engage the prison system. Mission Year alum and Philadelphia community organizer Craig Umland explains how an ecumenical Bible study helped open his eyes to the connection between mass incarceration and discipleship. “I remember we did a mini-Bible study that blew my mind – looking at the story of Paul and Silas from Acts [16:16-40], particularly how they ended up in prison. Discussing systems that Paul and Silas ran

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104 The Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference has also made mass incarceration one of its main priorities for the years. The U.S Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) published a document in 2000 titled Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice, which advocated for rehabilitative and restorative reforms for the criminal justice system in U.S. The bishops built upon Pope John Paul II’s message earlier that year on “Jubilee in Prisons.” Levad, Amy. "I was in prison and you visited me": a sacramental approach to rehabilitative and restorative criminal justice." Journal Of The Society Of Christian Ethics 31, no. 2 (September 2011): 93-112. The pope has recently come out with other public statements regarding the prison system which is likely to influence Catholics around prison reform. In a meeting with representatives of the International Association of Penal Law in Oct 2015, Pope Francis elaborates on the Catholic position: ”It is impossible to imagine that states today cannot make use of another means than capital punishment to defend peoples' lives from an unjust aggressor.” He went on to say, “All Christians and people of good will are thus called today to struggle not only for abolition of the death penalty, whether it be legal or illegal and in all its forms, but also to improve prison conditions, out of respect for the human dignity of persons deprived of their liberty. And this, I connect with life imprisonment…life imprisonment is a hidden death penalty." Rocca, Francis X. Pope Francis Calls for Abolishing Death Penalty and Life Imprisonment. Catholic News Service. October 23, 2014.

105 A group of national church leaders who oppose mass incarceration stated: “The church in the United States has a moral and ethical imperative to protect human dignity and must address the problem of mass incarceration in our nation.” Churches and organizations need to make ending mass incarceration a discipleship requirement not just a social justice issue. Or to put it another way, organizations need to integrate discipleship with social justice.

106 See list of Mission Year initiatives around mass incarceration in Appendix K.
into/disrupted in the Bible helped to awaken me and connect my faith with injustice [and a] desire to seek justice around mass incarceration.” He concludes, “Christians need to be involved because dismantling mass incarceration is blatantly obviously in line with Jesus and our faith. It's hard to look at Jesus's life and teachings and make a believable case that one who strives to follow him shouldn't act against mass incarceration.”\textsuperscript{107}

Along with this, Mission Year started sharing resources related to prison advocacy into its blogs, social media and monthly newsletters to disciple supporters in the cause.\textsuperscript{108} We were unsure how our supporters would respond to this change but our “Newsletter from Prison,” where we highlighted the issue of mass incarceration, received some of the most positive responses we have gotten from our mailing list. Here’s one email response I received, “Hey Shawn, Just wanted to say that I really appreciated this email. I have been trying to learn more about mass incarceration, and recently visited a friend in prison, which pressed this issue back into my heart. I'd love to know more about anything you are doing in response to these issues.”\textsuperscript{109} By viewing mass incarceration as a discipleship issue we have been able to create dialectical dialogue among our members and move people developmentally to see prisoners as fellow human beings worthy of concern and love.

3. Form an advisory group of local partners and those most affected by the prison system to speak into strategies and goals for advocacy approaches (dialectical/participatory).

CCDA Mass Incarceration Taskforce member Miea Walker, who served 9 years in prison before becoming a trainer for Jobs for Life, agrees that “those who are directly impacted by incarceration should have a seat at the table, not just the expert who has done 10 years of

\textsuperscript{108} See sample Mission Year blogs, newsletters on mass incarceration in Appendix L.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
research.”110 She now leads presentations to help church members see the brokenness in the system and reach out to “brothers and sisters” impacted by the prison system.

By starting a dialogue with men at a maximum security prison in Illinois I was able to see the power of this principle. The men had no shortage of ideas on best practices for bringing transformation to prisoners and the system. One man in particular stands out. During a discussion of this thesis, one inmate presented a well-thought out four-point proposal for addressing mass incarceration.111 Another inmate told me he has almost a hundred pages in proposals and ideas for addressing the prison crisis and asked if he could send it to me. Including the inmates into a dialogue around prison reform had an empowering effect on them and was eye-opening for me. Mutual transformation is possible when we bring together those on the inside with those on the outside.

4. Highlight stories and emphasize building relationships. Jail chaplain and Mission Year alum, Chris Hoke talks about the importance of putting a human face on mass incarceration for those unaware or unengaged: “Help them hear stories. People burn out on causes and injustices. People fall in love with people. Names. Faces. Narratives. Voices.” Rather than introducing mass incarceration as “a political injustice to counter,” Hoke focuses on relationships and God’s love, inclusion, and redemption. Hoke says “conservative evangelicals who would not yet be able to swallow ‘ending mass incarceration’ as a cause or value…have rallied around the clear work of God” in the lives of the young men in Chris’ ministry. “The work happens with action, relationships,” insists Hoke, “it has touched their hearts, their lives, first. Only then can their minds incline to be renewed, opened.”112 Miea Walker testifies that relationships hold the promise and power to change lives in prison too. “Relationships are crucial in transforming

111 See Appendix A.
individual’s lives. I know it happened for me and I know it can happen for other brothers and sisters in prison.”

Michelle Warren finds story-sharing the most effective strategy for her legislative advocacy work as well. “Putting a human face and shared experience on a legislative mandate is extremely powerful.” During a CCDA “Locked in Solidarity” prayer event cosponsored by Mission Year and Lawndale Christian Legal Clinic, one of the most powerful moments happened when the audience was invited to say the name out loud of a loved one or friend who was incarcerated. In that moment, the issue of mass incarceration became personal and prayer became a powerful tool for remembering those in prison and rallying Christians for change.

5. Use multi-media (books, films, stats) to open minds and educate others on the reality of injustice in the criminal justice system. Mission Year and CCDA have both facilitated a series of conversations, book clubs, and/or documentary discussions on prison with diverse groups (dialectical) in order to educate Christian communities around mass incarceration. Mission Year included the book *The New Jim Crow* and documentaries *The House I Live In* and *Broken On All Sides* into its curriculum. These are cited by Mission Year staff and alums as being some of the most influential resources in their process of coming to awareness and conviction around ending mass incarceration. Mission Year also facilitates books discussions and Docs and Dialogues in our communities. A powerful moment during a book discussion I was facilitating in the North Lawndale community on the *The New Jim Crow*, came at the end when, after having thoroughly discussed the racial injustice in the prison system, attendees were invited

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113 Walker, Appendix D-7.
114 Warren, Michelle. Email survey. Denver, CO. April 1, 2015 (Appendix D-1).
115 See Locked in Solidarity Packet in Appendix M.
116 Books such as *Just Mercy, The New Jim Crow, The Convict Christ, Imprisoning Communities,* and *Wanted* are great for small groups, book clubs, or curriculum. For more resources see CCDA Source List in Appendix J.
117 See Appendix N for a discussion questions for *The New Jim Crow*. 
to read Scripture passages on God’s justice and compare them to America’s criminal justice system. The contrast could not have been more dramatic and a tangible shift in people’s attitudes toward justice could be sensed in the room. The combination of Scripture, Alexander’s stats, and the stories of formerly incarcerated men who were part of the book discussion was transformative for everyone in attendance. The CCDA Mass Incarceration Taskforce developed a Film Festival curriculum for churches to create conversations around mass incarceration which has been an effective tool. CCDA film festival organizer Amy Williams said one of the most impactful things about the event was it brought people from different racial and theological backgrounds together to learn about the reality of the prison system and to discuss it together. This created opportunities for relationship building and mutual transformation.

6. Provide immersive experiences to bring people into closer proximity with prisoners and the prison system. To address the proximity gap between Christian communities and prisoners, Mission Year created opportunities to take people on immersive experiences like pilgrimages, protests, and prison visits where participants can see the realities of the prison system, gain historical and theological perspective, and engage with those most affected (kenosis/archetypal/developmental transformation). I invited a group of 5 Mission Year participants to visit a maximum security prison an hour outside Chicago to see how this experience would impact their perceptions of prisoners and the prison system. Being “subjected to pat downs,” hearing a chaplain negatively referring to inmates as their “worst nightmares,” and seeing the conditions the men lived in were some things that stood out to

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118 Education around race and structural injustice is particularly important for church congregations coming from an individual moral framework. Books and documentaries can help illuminate the structural realities of race and injustice.

119 See Appendix O for CCDA Film Festival Toolkit for churches and organizations to adapt to their context.

120 See Prison Visit Reflections in Appendix P.
participants. One participant wrote in her reflection: “The hard parts—that no one warned me about—was how I saw people being treated. I saw men, literally in what seemed as cages. Subject to violence at any time. Having to follow the rules of someone at all times. Men that were denied the freedom to roam freely. Going the length of their sentences without adequate sunlight, food, lack of visitors, and almost no connection to the outside world.”

This kenotic experience took participants out of their comfort zone which allowed them to develop greater awareness of the reality of the prison system.

But, interacting with men behind bars had the biggest impact on all the visitors. “Talking with the inmates was such an unexplainably incredible experience for me,” said one young woman. Another shared how “two prisoners on separate occasions turned their fans toward us so that we wouldn’t be too hot.” These acts of kindness challenged their perceptions of prisoners and contradicted the chaplain’s earlier generalization about prisoners. One Mission Year participant was moved to tears from her experience with a fellow Christian inmate and had the realization that this was not just a prisoner but a brother in Christ. “My faith was radically encouraged through meeting a beautiful brother in the faith at the prison, hearing him preach the truth of God’s word through the prison bars, standing hand in hand in prayer and crying as we were unified by the love of God and the assurance of hope. This love transcends all color lines, boundaries, differences, prison walls, storylines, and divisive systems.”

Another participant reflected, “my heart was broken because I realized that there are so many people who are unjustly behind bars.” She said she left with a “mixture of emotions and a lot of questions.”

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122 One of the security officers warned us to drink water because another volunteer had passed out during their visit because of how hot it was in the prison.
Immersive experiences like this cause what Michael McBride calls a “moral crisis” or what Fowler called a “crisis of faith,” leading to deeper reflection and commitment.

A Mission Year Philly team participated in a pilgrimage to prison during the Pope’s recent visit to Curran Fromhold Correctional Facility. A collaborative effort between Mission Year, The Simple Way, Sojourners, and Red Letter Christians, the purpose was “to call attention to the evil and injustice of the U.S. prison system.” Philly City Director Ra Mendoza reflected on the role of the physical body in bringing about spiritual transformation, “There is a powerful connection that happens within someone when they actively use their body in the work of justice. There is a human element that is unlocked…I realized that as we walked, as we prayed, as we listened to a previously incarcerated brother’s experience, as we sang songs of freedom – that this small act of solidarity was transforming us.” Michael McBride calls this theo-praxis, reflection and theology of justice coupled with action and practice.

In addition to short-term immersions and trips, Mission Year and CCDA are calling people to solidarity as a lifestyle involving living as neighbors in communities impacted by social injustice. Mission Year provides a yearlong entry point for young adults to immerse themselves in neighborhoods directly impacted by mass incarceration. For Angie Hess, her work at the public defender’s office, began with small steps. “It started with some city experiences. Then spent semester in D.C. Then, I did Mission Year right after college. Experiences like that, especially Mission Year, relationships were so key. Stories so key.” CCDA pastor Jonathan Brooks describes how being immersed in the community led to his involvement with the prison system and his passion for wanting to see an end to mass incarceration. “The greatest motivation has been firsthand experience. As an inner-city Pastor and school teacher, so many of the young

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men I work with in both settings seemed to be ending up incarcerated. I was literally spending more time visiting prison than going to sporting events, prom sendoffs, and graduations.”

It is often individual and community level experiences that open people’s eyes to the realities of systemic injustice and provides the catalyst for engaging in legislative and policy change. This does seem to be the case with the faith and justice leaders I interviewed, CCDA members, and Mission Year participants who visited prisons and engaged in prison pilgrimages.

7. Organize members to advocate for legislative changes that are more restorative, transformative, and liberative than our current prison system. Part of the discipleship process is equipping members for engaging in legislative change. The CCDA Taskforce and Mission Year sends out communication and notifications on different legislative initiatives that our members can sign onto. Some initiatives in the last year were Ban the Box, police accountability around police brutality, signing petition to stay the execution of Kelly Gissendaner in Georgia. At a youth mission conference where Mission Year participants were asked to speak, they highlighted issues of homelessness, education, and mass incarceration. In addition to using Scripture and stats to raise awareness, they invited youth to write letters to government officials advocating for the release of prisoners who had served excessively long sentences. Incorporating legislative action into awareness and education is a powerful way to disciple people to action.

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127 “We have seen the greatest catalyst creating awareness is bringing people into proximity,” says Michael McBride. Indeed, the closer people get to those who are most affected, the greater the transformation seems to be. Lisa Sharon Harper of Sojourners says immersive experiences have been most effective for moving evangelicals to greater action. “Taking evangelicals in particular to the place where it happens. To Ferguson. To talk to leaders. To stand on ground where it happens. I’ve seen Evangelicals changed through that experience. Helping evangelicals to understand the history of how it all came to be. What are theological implications now. That combination has been more transformational by far than anything else. Will Andrews says it’s when people realize the human effects of the prison industrial complex that mass incarceration begins to “become real and not merely an abstraction. This is even more impelling if they somehow reach out and meet the affected people.” Appendix D-9, D-3, D-4.
128 One justice activist told me they see letter writing as a spiritual discipline.
Mission Year hosted another public event called “Set the Captives Free” where we brought together prison ministry organizations working with individual prisoners, community-based organizations who work on the ground in communities impacted by incarceration, and prison advocacy groups working on legislative action. We also invited local justice-minded seminaries and churches. Three different speakers shared on the biblical theme of God’s promise of liberation for the prisoner (dialectical, archetypal) and shared stats on the prison system. We highlighted the case of Marissa Alexander, a woman in Florida sentenced to three consecutive 20-year sentences for firing two warning shots in self-defense to get away from her abusive husband. This was new territory for us as an organization to be involved in this kind of advocacy event but we saw the power of bringing different groups together who share a common heart for justice and it has helped our staff and participants continue to grow in our development as advocates of justice.

Legislative action is challenging because it takes time to stay informed on policy issues. It also requires a political and systemic framework that many Christians do not have. When talking with inmates in prison about reform, politics was one of the first things to come up. “It’s about politics. Don’t vote for candidates that are ‘tough on crime.’ We need different politicians in office,” said one inmate. Another inmate said Christians need to get involved in politics by starting locally. “Organize locally, then move to State level, then federal level.” The political organizing piece might be the most difficult in the current partisan climate.

Through CCDA’s advocacy work, Michelle Warren hopes to “see federal legislation like mandatory minimums, private prisons, financial incentives for law enforcement be

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129 Appendix A.
130 Ibid.
eliminated.” Dominique Gillard would like to see “people who are addicted get counseling and therapy versus being behind bars.” A bill currently on the Senate floor is “Justice is Not for Sale,” which removes any profiteering from mass incarceration. Chris Hoke favors this bill as it “would take the knees and insane lobbying muscle out of the mass prison growth.” Michael McBride is organizing congregations to call elected officials to end suspensions at schools to break the school-to-prison pipeline, remove the box on employment applications, and change the sentencing disparity. His hope is to see an “army of radicalized clergy who fight for justice.” Angie Hess hopes to see “who is arrested” and “what we’re focused on arresting people for” change. Addressing racial disparities within the system and ending the “War on Drugs” policies are central to this. Will Andrews wants to see greater access to quality education programs to aid in reintegration of prisoners. If we want to see these changes happen, we will need more churches involved in advocating for legislative change and becoming politically engaged.

**Evaluation**

After introducing many of the above practices with Mission Year participants (ages 18-30) in Chicago, Houston, and Philadelphia, we conducted an end of year evaluation. First, I wanted to see if participating in these practices increased awareness about mass incarceration and/or increased commitment to taking action related to ending mass incarceration. Participants were asked: “How would you describe your awareness of mass incarceration and commitment to

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131 Warren, Appendix D-1.
133 Hoke, Appendix D-10.
134 Hess, Appendix D-5.
135 Other important legislative changes include: abolishing the death penalty, abolishing life without parole, addressing racial policing and racial profiling, not charging juveniles as adults or sending juveniles to adult prisons, providing treatment for mental illness, eliminating cash bail, expunging records so returning citizens are not permanently economically disadvantaged, allowing voting rights for ex-offenders, addressing poverty and joblessness in low-income communities, etc.
136 See full evaluation results in Appendix Q.
taking action about it now compared to when you first started Mission Year?” Then they were given a combination of choices related to growth in awareness (same, somewhat, much greater) and commitment (same, don’t know what to do, more committed).

The findings show 21 out of 25 respondents (84%) reported they grew in awareness about mass incarceration at the end of the year compared to 16% who “stayed the same.” Out of those who grew in awareness, 57% said they “grew much greater awareness” versus 43% who “grew somewhat.” Among those who stayed the same in awareness, 75% “grew more committed to taking action.” Out of all participants, 56% “grew more committed to taking action,” while forty percent of participants didn’t know how to take action. Overall, 96% either grew in awareness or grew more committed to taking action as a result of participating in these practices.

The responses attest that the practices were highly effective in raising awareness and commitment among young adults. However, there was a significant number (40%) who still were unsure how to take action. I did not expect this number to be so high among our participants. This may help understand why people are not as engaged in advocacy around mass incarceration. It may not be that they lack awareness or concern, but that they do not know what to do. If young adults who have immersed themselves in a marginalized community for a year, spent over a thousand hours in service in the community, and went through a rigorous discipleship curriculum do not know what to do in regards to mass incarceration, think of the average person sitting in the pews! This confirms Michael McBride’s point that people “need concrete things to do” and “easy on-ramps.”

While raising awareness is important and needed, providing “easy on-ramps” and “small steps” are equally important.

The next portion of the evaluation asked for the highest factors in raising their awareness and commitment to ending mass incarceration. They were asked to check all that apply.

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137 Mcbride, Appendix D-9.
What has contributed most to growing your awareness and commitment to taking action around ending mass incarceration?

This graph reveals that reading Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow* as part of their curriculum contributed most to growing their awareness and commitment. “Hearing speakers and trainings” on the subject was next highest followed by “building relationships with ex-offenders” in third. One reason why building relationships might not have been higher is because participants may or may not have had opportunity to build relationships with ex-offenders, while reading the book and attending trainings was required. But even so, 60% were able to meet and build a relationship with an ex-offender in their neighborhood during the natural course of their year which speaks to the types of work they are involved and also to the high incarceration rates within the neighborhoods where they are placed. Small group discussion was relatively high which shows over half of participants found it beneficial to not only read the book, but talk about it with others.

139 This underscores the point, that if people do not intentionally place themselves in neighborhoods, churches, or other venues around people impacted by mass incarceration, they may not have opportunity to build relationships and have their viewpoints challenged in this way.
The next cluster involves “studying bible passages,” “building relationships with families,” “personal relationships with prison advocates,” and “documentaries.” I was surprised to see “studying bible passages” being such a strong influence in people’s awareness and commitment to mass incarceration. Since, many young adults involved in our program are coming from evangelical backgrounds it could explain the higher numbers. It also underscores the powerful role Scripture can play in advocacy efforts among Christians. I imagined “documentaries” would come in higher. Many of the faith and justice leaders I interviewed referenced documentaries as being influential in their journey of awakening. Given the high numbers for “small group discussion,” “Scripture,” and “relationships,” perhaps incorporating these elements into a documentary viewing may help increase its effectiveness.

The next cluster of “sermon/talk,” “praying for prisoners,” “march/rally,” and “family in prison,” are a bit deceiving. Only one city, Chicago, attended the “Locked in Solidarity” which specifically involved prayer for prisoners. When looking at Chicago participants alone, 4 out of 7 who participated in Locked in Solidarity marked it as influential in their awareness and commitment. Locked in Solidarity involved Scripture, testimonies, small groups, and prayer. All of our cities were asked to participate in “Black Lives Matter” marches. Since those marches were focused on racial policing and specific responses to police brutality, participants may not have made a connection between this and mass incarceration. I did not expect to see that 20% of our participants had a loved one incarcerated. With the high numbers in incarceration rates, it should not surprise us to find people in our communities, churches, and organizations directly affected by mass incarceration. “Sermon/talk” being in the lower end of contributing factors is noteworthy. Could it be that sermons are not as effective a tool in discipling and mobilizing people around mass incarceration than other practices or is it that pastors are not speaking out on
this topic or helping congregants make the connection between mass incarceration and their faith? While it could be a little of both, based on interviews with justice leaders like Michelle Warren, I tend to think it is the latter. She is hoping through her work to see more “Christian church leaders lead from their pulpits on the need for prophetic voice against injustice.”

The last cluster of “visit a prison,” “writing letters,” and “social media campaign” were not mandatory for Mission Year participants so not everyone had opportunity for them. Also, I took five participants to visit a maximum security prison in Chicago after the evaluations were submitted. Based on their written reflections and responses during the visit, I know this practice had a greater impact than the numbers suggest. In an age of hashtag advocacy and online petitions, it is notable that “social media campaign” did so poorly. While it is more widespread, it could be least effective in raising awareness and moving people to action. Does this mean taking legislative action such as emailing and calling elected officials would also show up low on the list? Could it be the actions that might make the biggest difference in changing the system are not as exciting or influential on participants? Incorporating relationship building and educational opportunities along with legislative action might be more effective.

Looking at the numbers, it appears that the combination of education and experience is the biggest influence. In each cluster, the pairing of education (head) with relationships (heart) is evident. Urban Entry’s formula of “scripture, stories, and stats,” rings true. For conservative/evangelicals who base their authority in tradition and the sacred text, Scripture will be an important motivation for the work of justice, but appealing to their blind spots (stats exposing systemic injustice) may be the place where they experience the most awareness and

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140 Warren, Appendix D-1.
141 To be fair, social media is a more invisible medium so people may not see what role it plays in their awareness and/or how it connects them to other areas of learning such as articles, videos, and events. It would be interesting to look more into social media movements (ex. #Blacklivesmatter) to see how they contribute to awareness and action around social injustice.
growth. And likewise, stats and systemic analysis may be the source of truth for the liberal/progressive, but building relationships with individual prisoners may ignite the heart in unexpected ways. Stories are universal and appear important for both prison ministry and advocacy.

Another finding from the evaluation is that each participant had an average of 5.6 experiences in relation to mass incarceration. I think this is significant. Creating awareness and commitment to ending mass incarceration will take more than a once a year “prison Sunday” or one and done action. It will take many experiences involving multiple mediums that engage hearts, minds, and bodies. While stories are powerful entry points, education around the size and scope of mass incarceration is vital. Additionally, building relationships with people directly affected may be what keeps people fighting long-term for justice despite the setbacks.

The last question to respondents was an optional one, but provides insight into how participants’ view of mass incarceration has been developed theologically through their experience: “Why should Christians care about mass incarceration?” Most of the answers reflect one or more of the biblical themes. Several respondents said Christians should care because “it’s an injustice” reflecting the archetype of prophetic confrontation of unjust systems. Others highlighted the Old Testament theme of God’s special concern for prisoners (God’s promise of liberation). Another appealed to Christ’s mercy for us (restorative nature of God’s justice), “How much more should we, being redeemed sinners, look on others with compassion and stand in the gap for those who may be wrongfully accused.” And others echoed the solidarity of the Matt 25 imperative, “When we turn our backs on people that are incarcerated we are not fulfilling God's will and therefore are turning our backs on God's word.” A couple people had a theological

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142 Seeing how participants internalized the biblical themes and express their views of mass incarceration shows a qualitative change. While many came in with little awareness around mass incarceration they now have deep theological convictions around it. New language is one indicator that change has happened.
perspective informed by several biblical themes. One respondent said, “It affects our brothers and sisters in Christ (solidarity), contributes to poverty and racism (prophetic confrontation), and won't get fixed on its own.” And one person hit all four themes in their response showing they had internalized these four themes in their discipleship process:

“Heavenly justice doesn't look like earthly justice. Earthly justice is a punitive response to undesirable behavior, and the justice system exemplifies this in its racial inequality (prophetic confrontation), making the message clear: it is undesirable to be a black man, an undocumented immigrant, etc. But heavenly justice is restoration of what was lost (restorative nature of God’s mercy), which in this case is freedom (God’s promise of liberation), dignity and unity of the church body (solidarity). If the church is serious about seeking restoration over punishment, dignity over humiliation, and unity over division, she will stand up against mass incarceration.”

In future study, I would like to explore alternatives to prison and inter-faith justice advocacy.

**Conclusion**

Ending mass incarceration will take mind and heart change, addressing cultural and structural realities, and organizing communities for comprehensive, sustained action. For Christians, it will mean healing the “misguided bifurcation of ‘prison ministries’ and ‘social justice advocacy.’”\(^\text{143}\) It will mean opening eyes, awakening hearts, and providing “easy on-ramps” for people to get involved.\(^\text{144}\) We will need to identify the ideological, theological, and political blind spots of our own religious tradition as well as move toward a holistic liberation that includes concern for prisoners and critique of systems. We will need to focus on the deep biblical themes of God’s promise of liberation, prophetic confrontation of unjust systems, the restorative nature of God’s justice, and the solidarity of Christ and the church with prisoners. By examining biblical and theological material related to prisoners, we see that Scripture supports a liberative and restorative vision for creation rather than a punitive one, and we are invited into a

\(^{143}\) Andrews, Appendix D-4.  
\(^{144}\) McBride, Appendix D-9.
radical solidarity with the prisoner where we see them as brothers and sisters, redeemable and loved by God, and ones that Christ closely identifies. We see that visiting and remembering the prisoner are not optional for Christ followers, but part of authentic Christian witness.

A comprehensive understanding of prisoners and the prison system involves addressing individuals, communities, and systems. Transformative practices are needed to create a cultural shift and move people to greater awareness and commitment to taking action to ending mass incarceration. To be most effective, these practices need to integrate Scriptures, stories, and stats. And most importantly, incarcerated and formerly incarcerated brothers and sisters need to be included in the planning and leading if there is to be any hope of ending mass incarceration and setting the prisoners free.

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**Appendix A**

Dialogue and Feedback from Incarcerated Men at Maximum Security Prison

I shared my thesis project with a group of prisoners at an Illinois maximum security prison. I told them I was working on a project called: Set the Prisoners Free: a resource guide for churches to mobilize Christians to end mass incarceration. I was looking at theological themes regarding prisoners and prisons and wanting to move Christians to greater awareness and action. I was eager to hear their feedback and ideas about ways we could mobilize Christians to end mass incarceration.

C: It’s about politics. Don’t vote for candidates that are “tough on crime.” Need different politicians in office.

L: The Department of Corrections is not about correction. They aren’t interested in corrections. They do everything they can to stand in the way of corrections. This isn’t a Department of Corrections, It’s a Men’s Warehouse. I’m rehabilitated, but it wasn’t because of the Department of Corrections. We need religious groups running the prison instead of police. If police managed the security but religious groups ran the prison and programs then it could be about corrections.

W: There are four things I think need to be done. First, political. Starts locally. Organize locally, then move to State level, then federal level. Second, reforms. We need education programs, job skills transferable to the free world. We need psychological evaluation specific to the crimes, drug rehab, gang rehab, mental health treatment. We need religious/spiritual/ethical reforms that help people build their ethical muscles. Third, re-entry. How are people released from prison.
Need to create a seamless transition from prison to freedom. Re-entry includes housing, job (that they are trained for), professional and peer support (social/ethical/psychological). Fourth, rebuild local communities: create community participation based project for: job skill training and retraining, community gardens and park/public spaces, housing for homeless and those struggling with food, local energy production, community safety programs, and local restorative justice programs. To end mass incarceration, the people must be seen as still a member of the community. Close the loop. From local to local, all politics is local. (Later in class W. handed me a half sheet of paper with a chart entitled “Full Circle Transformation Project” with these four points written out. He said he thinks about this stuff a lot. I ask him after class what his background is and he tells me political science.)

F: The majority of people out there are ignorant about us. They don’t know us. They don’t see how we’ve changed. I spent 17 years in solitary. I am a different person now than when I first got here. I harbored a lot of hate but I’m not the same person I was.

E: The church needs to invest in prisoners from the time they go in all the way until the time they get out. It’s about investing in people. Not giving up on people. People think the prison system is about rehabilitation, it’s not. You can’t rehabilitate a person. Only they can choose to be rehabilitated. What is needed is not rehabilitation but transformation. Rehabilitated means making something over. Transformation is making something new. I’m not rehabilitated, I’m transformed. It’s by investing in people.

J: I don’t think the answer is “setting all the prisoners free.” There are some people in here that need to be here. We need to be taught how to fish. We need to know how to start our own business when we get out because no one is going to hire us. Give us the tools to help us help ourselves. We need to address the gang problem. A lot of guys in here are gang affiliated. Even 60 year old men still have gang affiliation. A lot of guys get into gangs for protection. Being in gangs keep people from thinking straight. Get rid of the gangs and you’ll fix a lot of the problem.

D: I have a question. Are you trying to do something nationally, about the 2.3 million people incarcerated? Are you talking about getting rid of the prison system?

Shawn: I am not advocating for total prison abolition in this paper. Although I support prison abolition, I can’t argue for that in the paper otherwise people will automatically be turned off. I am trying to get churches to first admit that there is a problem in our justice system. If we can start there then we can agree that we need to make changes in the system. I am not talking about just getting rid of prison, but transforming the system to be more restorative versus retributive. I think the majority of people can get around that.

D: I don’t think we can bring changes to mass incarceration because of corruption. There are always people running governments and prisons and people are corrupt.

(After class D gave me a note with this message written in cursive: “I wasn’t trying to be melodramatic, there are solutions to mass incarceration in the U.S.A. The point I was trying to make is that man made institutions that are governed by any men without SERIOUS oversight is
subject to corruption. Illinois, e.g., is the third politically corrupt state in the U.S.A., there’s trillions of dollars in the “criminal justice system,” and greedy politicians, corporations, etc. definitely want their cut of that pie. And if no real threat exists to usurp such traditions, certainly one would be foolish to not put their hands into that cookie jar. Faith based communities and institutions should be more watchful of governmental, administrative and commercial enterprises.

A: I don’t have a lot of hope for the older generation to change their minds about the prison system but if we can get to the young people. The young people are the future. It may not happen right away but it can become a movement that grows over time.

Shawn: I work with young adults and I see how young people are more open on this and willing to change their mind.

J: I disagree. You can’t teach the young without the old. Old people influence what young people believe.

E: My mom told me when I was young that I would end up in prison. When that’s planted in your mind it’s hard not to play it out. I was doing really good in school but then I started sabotaging myself. And eventually ended up in prison.

J: I wonder how many of us where told that. If you were told you were going to end up in prison raise your hand. (90% of hands go up).

Shawn: I think both young and old need to be involved, I think we need an inter-generational, multi-cultural, ecumenical movement. The more people we have across the spectrum the more powerful the movement will be.

E: People need to see we are human. When people look at us as animals incapable of change then of course they want to lock us up and throw away the key. They want to be safe. But we are people. If you can get people to change the way they look at prisoners then that’s a start.

Shawn: Yes, I think that’s key. One of the things I talk about in the project is bringing people closer to the prison so they can meet actual prisoners. Many of you know I brought a group of young people to visit the prison. We came by some of your cells. That experience opened their eyes and changed them. Meeting you and talking to you helped them see that prisoners are their brothers and sisters not unredeemable people deserving of punishment.

Will: I’m excited about the project because I see a divide between people involved in prison ministry and those involved in prison advocacy. I go to prison conferences and there’s a stark divide. A lot of those on the prison ministry side are involved in prayer and worship but not aware of the systemic barriers. And then those involved in prison advocacy never step foot in a prison. Thanks Shawn for sharing about the project. I look forward to reading it.

(Another inmate S. came up to me afterwards and asked if I practice the “What if approach.” I asked him to tell me more about it. He said, “the What if approach is where you ask yourself,”
What if it was you? What if it was your child in prison? Your best friend? Your mom? Your dad? Wouldn’t you want someone looking after them? Wouldn’t you want people looking at them as humans and not labels? I ask myself that question all the time in here and it helps me react differently to people in here. I told him I think that is a good question because it helps people practice empathy and put themselves in another’s shoes.

(L. came up to me afterwards with an idea for religious groups to run private prisons. “If religious groups that really did care about rehabilitation ran the prisons then they could do it differently.” He told me he had over 100 pages of ideas around a business model for this. He asked if he could mail them to me.)

Appendix B

Heuristic Moral Order Map

Appendix C

Appendix D
This is a short survey/interview for faith and justice leaders involved in prison ministry and advocacy around mass incarceration. Your feedback/insights may be included in a doctoral thesis paper on mobilizing Christians around mass incarceration so please take your time reflecting and answering the following questions. Thank you!

1. What is your current involvement in prison ministry and advocacy around mass incarceration?

2. In your own journey, what have been the greatest influences (moments, experiences, people, educational resources) in awakening your conscience and mobilizing you to action around mass incarceration?

3. In your advocacy efforts, what has proven most effective in awakening the conscience of evangelicals/Christians and mobilizing them to action around mass incarceration? What has been most challenging?

4. What biblical and/or theological resources undergird your advocacy work around mass incarceration? Why should Christians get involved?

5. What specific things are you hoping to see changed in the prison system and through your advocacy work?
1. **What is your currently involvement in prison ministry and advocacy around mass incarceration?**

I am working with CCDA and their national partners and practitioners to create an awareness of the issue, better articulate how it affects local communities and then mobilize that awareness and education into engagement at varying levels of change - federal and state mostly.

2. **In your own journey, what have been the greatest influences (moments, experiences, people, educational resources) in awakening your conscience and mobilizing you to action around mass incarceration?**

Biblical Justice in general; it is a foundation of God’s throne so it’s a pretty important issue to Him and then to me. Racism is at the heart of issues like mass incarceration and as a Christian who believes the gospel at its heart is to be reconciled first to God and then to each other, racism has no place in the church. That has been formational in how I approach many issues where race is at its core. In addition to general conviction about justice, I know too many people impacted by racial profiling, mandatory minimums of drug sentencing, labeled a “felon” years before a successful trial, the list goes on and on. I am fully convinced that loving your neighbor does not stop at the law but at justice and I believe the law in unjust so we need to move to create just systems. Knowing my neighbors and their circumstances keeps me engaged.

3. **In your advocacy efforts, what has proven most effective in awakening the conscience of evangelicals/Christians and mobilizing them to action around mass incarceration? What has been most challenging?**

Story sharing is by far the most effective strategy. Putting a human face and shared experience attached to a legislative mandate that reveals what we in the policy world call, unintended consequences is extremely powerful. Who can argue with a story?

The most challenging of all things in advocacy is the politics and mass incarceration is no exception. If articulating a problem and then figuring out a solution was all it took to get good laws in place, we would have a lot of time on our hands.

People both in the church and community as well as politicians have tiers of what they believe is important enough to engage at a level that might distract from their overall goal. In the church, who can compete with getting souls saved? In politics, who can compete with things like Iran’s nuclear talks. There is only so much political capitol people in and out of politics are willing to expend. Because policy change requires a lot of shared values at so many levels, getting us all on the same page, at the exact time for the same solution, is really challenging.
4. **What biblical and/or theological resources undergird your advocacy work around mass incarceration? Why should Christians get involved?**

The Bible and its stories of redemption are at the core. The need to expose the heart of mankind toward racism and hate is pretty key and it’s a source that Christians are all familiar with…you know, “start with what they know…”


I think my answer in 2 speaks to why Christians should get involved. The question I want to answer is why should they stay complacent in the status quo when people’s lives are being ruined? Christians really need to care about society and its ills. Indifference and complacency just because the system “works for you” is ignorant and uncompassionate.

5. **What specific things are you hoping to see changed in the prison system and through your advocacy work?**

I do want to see federal legislation like mandatory minimums, drug scheduling and private prison, financial incentives for law enforcement be eliminated. At the state level, I want to work on voter rights, ban the box elimination campaigns, expungement of records to be easier, cost to families who want to stay in touch with their loved once reduced. Actually don’t get me started…a lot!

My work is not limited to legislative change. It doesn’t start there and even with legislative wins, won’t end there. A greater sense of awareness and conviction to the injustice of our system and the racist hearts that have worked so hard to loop-hole their way around even just legislation is my hope. Christians cannot sum up the greatest commandment so easily by doing nothing and continuing to allow arrogance and hate to dictate our lack of response. My hope is that Christian church leaders will no longer contract out justice conversation to people like me but instead lead from their pulpits on the need for prophetic voice against injustice. That is my hope. No more wimpy leaders!
1. **What is your currently involvement in prison ministry and advocacy around mass incarceration?**

On CCDA Board and Mass Incarceration taskforce. I write on the issue of mass incarceration and present papers at different conferences on mass incarceration.

2. **In your own journey, what have been the greatest influences (moments, experiences, people, educational resources) in awakening your conscience and mobilizing you to action around mass incarceration?**

A case in 2002 in Atlanta. Grandmother Kathryn Johnson, 90 year old grandma had house staked out by drug taskforce. At 3 a.m. in the morning, they kicked in the door, shot up the house, and killed her. They searched her house and found out there was no drugs in the house. The cops said they received a faulty tip. That was near my college and raised my awareness of unjust legislation. I learned about “no knock warrants” in neighborhoods “notorious” for having drug activity so police didn’t have to operate with warrants. That got me started in activism and collecting petition. We ended up holding police department accountable for the murder.

3. **In your advocacy efforts, what has proven most effective in awakening the conscience of evangelicals/Christians and mobilizing them to action around mass incarceration? What has been most challenging?**

What’s proven most effective is having people watch movies like PBS film *Tulia, Texas, Slavery by Another Name, The House I live in*. The most effective method has been films. For the average person, film is accessible way to start the conversation. Also, seeing the disparity through charts and graphs helps people see the increase in incarceration. Stats, the number of incarcerated with mental illness. Visuals help people see disparity.

Most challenging thing from pastoral perspective (or social), it’s not as simple that these are bad people who need to be locked up or that they deserve the punishment they are receiving. It’s not as simple. There are institutional impediments that increase punishment they are getting. People don’t understand mass incarceration is what happens when we take a retribution approach. Help people understand how recent mass incarceration is so they don’t think this is the way it is and always has been.

4. **What biblical and/or theological resources undergird your advocacy work around mass incarceration? Why should Christians get involved?**

Matthew 25, Hebrews 13:3. When you look at the life of Jesus and how he was unfairly incarcerated and put to death. The life of the disciples and how they were wrongly imprisoned.
See how the state shows bias to a certain position. The life of Paul and number of prison epistles in Bible. I have no choice but to include that there is some kind of divine presence for the people of God when they are incarcerated for kingdom related things. Some kind of divine revelation. Unique revelation. We miss out when we don’t take time read Scripture or connect with those in prison.

No one is beyond redemption there’s nothing that will separate us from the love of God. We treat them like there is something that separates them from the love of God. That’s a direct contrast between what God is calling us to. I feel like this is one of the most overlooked biblical commandments and feel a strong conviction that others need to be mobilized around it.

5. **What specific things are you hoping to see changed in the prison system and through your advocacy work?**

I hope to see the unjust system ended. The shoveling of whole demographics of people into a system that has no interest in rehabilitation but to financially exploit and capitalize off peoples isolation and labor. I’d like to see an end to that. Id like to see people who are addicted get counseling and therapy vs being locked behind bars. Id like to see the church be the church and step up and be in authentic communion with people who are incarcerated. Show the love of God to people. See church be a kind of voice for the least of these and those marginalized, politically, institutionally, those who don’t have resources to defend themselves against systems and structures and policies.

Like to see church deeply and thoroughly involved in preventive measures to break the cycle. Doing prison ministry and walking alongside family members. Deeply engaged in reentry process.
1. **What is your currently involvement in prison ministry and advocacy around mass incarceration?**

I work with Sojourners in D.C. advocating around various social justice issues through our online constituents, people in the pews, churches and conferences around country. This is our indirect advocacy. Then, we’re also involved in direct advocacy on the hill. Additionally, we are organizing faith leaders to understand, to influence top level national faith leaders around issues of justice.

2. **In your own journey, what have been the greatest influences (moments, experiences, people, educational resources) in awakening your conscience and mobilizing you to action around mass incarceration?**

Policing reform – I was catalyzed around Trayvon Martin. Trayvon Martin helped me become aware of stand your ground laws and how African Americans by far are less apt to be given leeway that stand your ground laws gives white people. Gives white people leeway to kill black people. Our civil rights have been whittled away by stand your ground, open carry laws. That was a galvanizing moment.

3. **In your advocacy efforts, what has proven most effective in awakening the conscience of evangelicals/Christians and mobilizing them to action around mass incarceration? What has been most challenging?**

The most effective thing has been immersive experiences. Taking evangelicals in particular to the place where it happens. To Ferguson. To talk to leaders. To stand on ground where it happens. I’ve seen Evangelicals changed through that experience. Helping evangelicals to understand the history of how it all came to be. What are the theological implications now. That combination has been more transformational by far than anything else.

The challenge is, getting to them to the place where they care enough to go. A lot of challenge there. The disparity in distance, proximity to ethnic groups. White evangelicals can live their life and never interact with a black person. They can live in a completely white world and cloister themselves from the reality of the system. They need to realize the system that they vote for and support is oppressing people.

4. **What biblical and/or theological resources undergird your advocacy work around mass incarceration? Why should Christians get involved?**
Number one biblical framework I focus on is the image of God. Understand every person in America was created and called to exercise dominion. The power systems, structures, and laws in America, from 1600s on, explicitly limited dominion to white men. The theological implication is only white men are human, only white men can exercise dominion, everybody else are not human. So for me, the linchpin is the doctrine of the image of God in Gen 1: 26-27. The biblical concept of Shalom, the implication of governance, God governs in Exodus through the 10 commandments, sabbatical year, jubilee. There was never someone on the bottom for ever and ever. God created laws where the least were cared for. They were pulled up eventually. People make bad mistakes or poor decisions, the sabbatical year/jubilee would not allow it to go on in perpetuity. In our work we contrast the image of God with racial implicit bias, unconscious bias against particular people in our society.

5. What specific things are you hoping to see changed in the prison system and through your advocacy work?

I’m more convinced than ever, we need a culture shift, a culture change from retributive system to restorative system. If we made that shift it would be one side. The other is theological and psychological, shift from people being less or more superiority or capable of ruling. Romney’s 47% comment. There’s a real baseline understanding in America that was planted in very beginning, some people are better than others, more capable, of ruling and some are not. We need mind, belief shift, see each other differently. Not just mass incarceration but spirit that mass incarceration has perpetuated. Mass incarceration new iteration of old spirit of slavery, peonage, Jim Crow. We need new eyes to see each other.

Generationally, recently there’s no difference everyone on line. Expectations of protests are different. Younger people pushing older people to be more creative and provocative. Young people disillusioned by level of back lash from freedoms they enjoyed. They are ones on other side of gun. This is a life and death thing. GenX grew up waiting. Boomers enjoyed their moment. GenX enjoyed the fruit without having to push. Millennials are ones with guns pointed at them. They are pushing back with more force. They are teaching us and reminding us. They are creating new rules, leading themselves in a decentralized way. It’s more challenging and more beautiful. They provoke. They are making people listen. Not going to be nice anymore. They are done with the Politics of respectability. Not trying to be respectable, we need to get things done. It’s a matter of life and death.
1. **What is your currently involvement in prison ministry and advocacy around mass incarceration?**

In addition to serving as a leader with Kairos Prison Ministry at Stateville Correctional Center, I teach two regular classes at Stateville. One class is a weekly academic religious studies class and the other is a monthly Bible study conducted in Spanish.

I also write and speak to churches and other organizations about these prison ministries. My advocacy concerns are educating congregations about mass incarceration, the effectiveness of higher education programs in prison, and the Christian responsibility to respond.

2. **In your own journey, what have been the greatest influences (moments, experiences, people, educational resources) in awakening your conscience and mobilizing you to action around mass incarceration?**

My mother has been the greatest influence. When I was very young, she became involved in a ministry of letter writing and visitation with men in a Virginia prison. At the age of eight I was allowed to accompany her on those visits and by the time I was in high school I had visited Virginia's death row with her. These were formative experiences in my own faith development; so, it was only natural that I was later drawn to prisons as I discerned a vocation of ministry and service.

3. **In your advocacy efforts, what has proven most effective in awakening the conscience of evangelicals/Christians and mobilizing them to action around mass incarceration? What has been most challenging?**

Establishing human connections is the most effective vehicle for changing hearts and minds around mass incarceration. If people realize the human effects of the prison industrial complex—on families, children, prison staff, communities, etc.—and recognize the ways in which incarceration affects them directly, mass incarceration begins to “become real” and not merely an abstraction. This is even more impelling if they somehow reach out and meet the affected people.

Besides the pervasive apathy in our churches, one great challenge is the unfortunate and misguided bifurcation of “prison ministries” and “social justice advocacy.” Christians are certainly called to advocate for justice but that work must emerge from authentic human relationships if the justice we seek is indeed “social.”
4. **What biblical and/or theological resources undergird your advocacy work around mass incarceration? Why should Christians get involved?**

My own work is motivated by the Great Commandment (Mt 25:35-40; Mk 12:28-31; Lk 10:25:28) Scripture also impels us to “speak for the voiceless” (Prov 31:8-10) and Matthew 25:34-40 is a well-known basis for “visiting prisoners.” Over the years as I have studied the latter, I am convinced that most Christians miss the force of Jesus' words regarding “the least of these.” If this depiction of judgment is read in the context of the larger eschatological discourse that begins in first verse of the preceding chapter, it is clear that it is not mere symbolic language. The acts of compassion identified in this litany of “least of these” are nothing less than marks of Christian discipleship. These are the things Jesus' disciples must be found doing when he returns. In other words, they are not optional but rather obligations placed on anyone who would follow Jesus. Prison ministry is not a special ministry as most churches regard it. Just as any good church visits the sick as a matter of course with or without a formal “visitation” or “hospital ministry,” so any good church should visit prisoners as a matter of course with or without a formal “prison ministry.”

5. **What specific things are you hoping to see changed in the prison system and through your advocacy work?**

I hope and pray that the prison system will move toward a restorative model of justice in which the goal of prison is facilitate reintegration of prisoners and the healing of everyone affected by crime. This will require, among other things, greater access to quality educational programs in prison and more concerted efforts by the church to stand in solidarity with prisoners and their families through ministries of presence.
1. **What is your currently involvement in prison ministry and advocacy around mass incarceration?**

Clinical social worker for the Office of the Public Defender Prince George’s County Maryland. Parts are urban, virtually DC metro area. We only work with people who can’t afford representation. Of the clientele, a small percentage are the “right type of people” to refer to social services because of mental health problems, diagnosed or undiagnosed, difficult or traumatic history. For juveniles, it could be involved in foster care and that creates certain set of issues like youth charged as adults. We try to present case why this particular child should not be charged as an adult. Probably more are adults with serious charges or mental health. One of the last gasp efforts. My job is to portray this person as a human.

2. **In your own journey, what have been the greatest influences (moments, experiences, people, educational resources) in awakening your conscience and mobilizing you to action around mass incarceration?**

Started with some city experiences. Spent semester in DC. Did Mission Year right after college. Experiences like that, especially Mission Year, relationships were so key. Stories so key. There’s a reason, not what I was told, reason for the struggle. There’s something going on here. Why communities (are the way they are). Seeing the way people react to seeing a police car was not how I grew up reacting. At the beginning of the year I remember thinking, “these people think the police are against them.” Then at end of year, starting to wonder with the community why the police are here. I grew up thinking police were here to protect and serve, that they’re on our side but getting a glimpse…plenty of people are assumed guilty by virtue of where they were. Remember being in stores in underground Atlanta, I was a young white woman, I came in with a backpack and other young women were told they had to check their backpacks. That year I really started to understand privilege and the difficulties and obstacles and walls that were in front of people for no good reason. I think of how I can take my work and bring it into my church.

3. **In your advocacy efforts, what has proven most effective in awakening the conscience of evangelicals/Christians and mobilizing them to action around mass incarceration? What has been most challenging?**

I have a luxury of a really wonderful church. Washington Community Fellowship, affiliated with the Mennonite Church. It’s a place where the Bible’s taught and people are really trying to learn broadly, learn the world around them, what’s really going on, people are involved in good work. A lot of city people, people who have made a lot effort to be aware and engaged in learning about why race works the way it does and other forms of oppression are the way they are. In that
setting I don’t feel like I have to explain myself. It’s an affirming audience. They get it and are behind you. If I were to go a little more public with it, some family members people from other parts of my life, I’d have to explain myself. It’s something I don’t have to think about a lot. Many people at church I’ve known a long time. Had one of my former youth group kids intern with me and now she’s going into similar work. The relationships I have are people who think about things similarly. Part of why I don’t have to explain is because they know me and I know them and know what I care about and they know I wouldn’t rush into any cause for the sake of the cause. I have friends who are teachers in city schools and they’re aware of the school to prison pipeline. Friends who work in school are painfully aware of how the juvenile justice system particularly is overlaid on the school system. When we were kids, you got into a fight at school that’s where it ended. Kids here are arrested. I was talking to client, 12 years old, who got in a fight and someone was provoked and here he is.

In certain offenses, minors can be charged as adults in Maryland. Have to be over 15. I have a kid who has a handgun charge at 15 and was in juvenile, another one soon after 16 and is being tried as adults. He’s been jumped twice so needed protection. I could see him being tired of it. He’s not a big dude.

What’s ironic, the way the systems are so deeply entrenched. If you can go through all the registration you can have a gun and are assumed to be safe. Say you just have one because you live in a bad neighborhood, sorry you didn’t get down to the place to register it, you’re out of luck. That idea that the system is setting themselves up so certain people get in trouble.

4. What biblical and/or theological resources undergird your advocacy work around mass incarceration? Why should Christians get involved?

Some of the people you’re talking to are actually applying the bible and theology directly. I wish my job did somehow. We are called to love people. We are clearly told “love is the thing we’re supposed to do, not judging.” My understanding of faith and who Jesus was is get out there and know people and know their stories. If you can, do something to make their situation better. Even if I can’t do something to minimize their sentence maybe I can hear their story and that can make a difference. I’ve learned in variety of ways, how unjust the systems are. Not just criminal justice system, the way people are treated differently, I’m a beneficiary of the ways other people are treated. It’s random. I didn’t do anything to get that. I didn’t earn it. It’s my responsibility to do good. I don’t think I can pay back the injustices other people have suffered. The idea “to much has been given much is expected.” If I’ve been only given one ounce and other people are bearing insurmountable load, I can’t take on injustice or make a difference if I tried, but what can I do to move their load a little.

More justice – knowing that what we call a justice system is riddled with injustice. Justice system probably one of the better ones, the system turns. In South Africa, the system doesn’t turn. There are infrastructure pieces we can be proud of but...What would justice look like? In my mind justice expands. In their family, community, city. For justice to be achieved, there are layers and layers of places that need to change.
5. **What specific things are you hoping to see changed in the prison system and through your advocacy work?**

Who is arrested. What we’re focused on arresting people for. The War on Drugs. It’s a troubled idea. Ultimately, those things…for justice to be achieved society needs to say why there are huge percentages of people in system from low-income communities. It’s not that they’re the only ones doing things. Its not that rich communities aren’t committing crimes. My work is so focused on the individual, I’m not sure if my work can impact the macro level system. But it can make a noise. Any voices that are saying “less time, more treatment, more community based resources, less money spent on this.” The better. It’s likely turning the titanic. We should use our voices anyway, even though I’m not shifting the dialogue; But it’s worthwhile work because each person I work with are worthwhile and deserve to be heard. For our family members, we want them to have a voice. Sometimes it’s striking how willing society is for people who have gotten into trouble to not have a voice. I think about Jesus saying “go visit people in prison.” Makes me think what were people in prison back then. Was it just like Paul and Silas people in prison for their faith. I think not. It probably meant people visit people who did something wrong and engage that. I’d be interested to go back and see the theology in that. Was there something subversive in turn the other cheek and go the extra mile. It’s interesting those people are mentioned in the same phrase as orphans and widows, seems like Jesus is bringing them back thematically, people who have lost something. I don’t know.

It’s good to talk about it, when you’re in the midst of the work you just do it.
The greatest motivation has been firsthand experience. As an inner city Pastor and school teacher, so many of the young men I work with in both settings seemed to be ending up incarcerated. I was literally spending more time visiting prison than going to sporting events, prom send offs and graduations. Knowing these kids and having been a part of many of their lives for nearly a decade it just didn't make sense to me! I began asking questions of law enforcement officials and many of them were also frustrated that they were being told to lock people up at alarming rates. Then I heard Michelle Alexander speak and her words eloquently expresses what I had been experiencing but unable to communicate. After reading "The New Jim Crow" I became convinced that I was not holistically caring for these young men unless I addressed the biggest issue facing us all. The issue of the overwhelming incarceration of men of color. The more I read, listened, and visited the incarcerated the more I realized God truly cared about this huge injustice and it was the responsibility of the church and all kingdom people to stand in the gap and fight for justice for all.

I answer much of this in a documentary called "Land of Canaan" that was done on our response to Mass Incarceration and the War on Drugs. Find a link here:www.canaancommunitychurch.org/how.htm click on MOVE Juvenile detention Program
Also I will send you my PowerPoint it lists a lot of my theological insight. Obviously I'm typing this on my phone cause I'm out but I didn't want to forget to respond!

Pastah J
1. What is your current involvement in prison ministry and advocacy around mass incarceration?

I have been home for three years. Since March 2012. Four months after release found Jobs for Life. First time working with Christian organization, leveraging churches role. I support staff at sites, explaining the impact of joblessness. Building capacity. How to walk alongside people who are homeless or jobless. When I started doing the work I noticed a lot of organizations, PF, working strategically with men or women with addiction, employment, stigma shame, etc. In 2013 I wondered how can I expand this role and how can I be apart of that conversation. This is a global issue, something I have prayed for, that I’d be an advocate and leader, to create awareness in our church and support those who are returning home. Not just providing services, but building relationships. Space and voice. Initially, developing training on mental illness and addiction, creating awareness, branched out to advocacy work locally in Raleigh, NC.. It’s a community problem. We don’t like talking about race. I wanted to add the church people to conversation. I sat down with people in the community, how do I create awareness? I have a strong support system who loved on me when I was incarcerated. Pushed me in my vision where I saw myself in the future. Space and created a platform to do presentations at local churches and speaking at conferences. It wasn’t something that came easy. It was a process for someone coming home. People are going to look at you. But it was something I prayed for while incarcerated, what do you want to do with your experience. Its more than getting a job or having necessities, they should have equal footing and listen to their voices. Those who are directly impacted by incarcerated should have a seat at the table. Not just the expert who has 10 yrs of research. That’s how I came to this platform. Jobs for Life to CCDA. First conference Michelle Alexander was keynote speaker. Attending that conference blew the door off. That space made me feel safe and belonging. Then I joined the mass incarceration task force

2. In your own journey, what have been the greatest influences (moments, experiences, people, educational resources) in awakening your conscience and mobilizing you to action around mass incarceration?

I don’t think I would be doing this work unless I had this experience. I rededicated my life when going through the criminal justice process. My relationship with God was solidified in the 9 years I was in the criminal justice system. I was living in a lot of shame, brokenness and anger. I was able to heal, understand who I was made to be. There was no other way. I needed to go to prison to understand my role as woman, wife. What is my journey and purpose. The only thing that I kept hearing was to “trust him.” I never thought it would be like it is. I was only child, shy. Didn’t like to be in front of people. It was a matter of trust in God and trust other people. Taking advantage of resources that were available to me that are no longer available for brothers and
sisters incarcerated. Got a four year degree. Started asking what I can do to be a blessing to family and others?

How are we incarcerating people with mental illness, addiction, and nonviolent offenses? Enrolled in substance abuse counseling program. Met licensed social workers and more engaged in seeing the prison system. Applying to grad school to social work. Graduated in May. Social justice advocate is so me. They didn’t care about my past. They said, “You are the expert. You can teach us so much. We are about justice and advocating for peoples whose voice needs to be heard and your voice needs to be heard.” It was hard to feel comfortable coming out of prison. I carried a lot of shame about carrying the stigma of being a felon. So many of my brothers and sisters still struggle with shame. Are you going to see that on me? Its part of my life but doesn’t define me. Took me awhile to walk with my head held high and not worry what people think.

Friend-90 days before release, the church I attended told her she couldn’t join because she was an ex-offender. She refused to make a plea deal so she ended up getting 20 years for crime she didn’t commit. Doesn’t matter what crime you commit, church should accept you. We gotta do something different. If you don’t accept me, is there any church that’s going to accept me? I’m worried about my brothers and sisters. No matter how high we climb its still going to be there. Will I always have to fight to be accepted as an individual who made a mistake?

I don’t want to beg and plead with the church. People in churches don’t know. They don’t know not to ask what are you in for? People look at those incarcerated as projects. Churches have prison ministries but its more than feeding someone with the word, feed me with love. Relationships are crucial in transforming that individuals life. I know it’s happened for me and I know it for other brothers and sisters in prison.

I don’t want churches to see us as side project. If there’s over 700 churches, 408 people to be released, there should be no reason why there should be lack of services, equipping people, lack of teaching how to be father, mother, reunification of family. But we do. The numbers of largest county, wake county and Raleigh, there’s a lack of resources there. There’s not enough resources. There’s plenty of churches in the county. Where are they? How do we change the perception?

There are certain churches that get it and there’s some that just want to give them a service and check off box.

3. In your advocacy efforts, what has proven most effective in awakening the conscience of evangelicals/Christians and mobilizing them to action around mass incarceration? What has been most challenging?

Most effective: me being transparent. Whether training mentors or giving overview. I love giving the historical perspective on mass incarceration. People in prison are not just drug dealers. People don’t look at primary drivers. They definitely don’t want to look at race factor. They don’t want to address that. I give them the high level. What’s going on.
Really giving them the information. What happens behind those walls. People think if they have work release job they should be fine when they get out. They don’t know there are fees attached to their sentence, child support. Charged for sick call. They don’t hear the hard stories, back stories. Don’t want to address sexual trauma. No one looks at those psychosocial factors. I tie in my own personal story. Here’s what happens to me. I fought for my life and for my brothers and sisters. Then people are like oh wow, now I get it. When I’m doing presentations to rightwing conservative, they hear me but patronizing. Why did they relapse? Why did you do ok and they didn’t. The most frustrating thing people are like you were successful so why not everyone else? That’s not the case. The emotional, psychology, biological, my brothers and sisters happened to them. The environment they are living in. People hear me but don’t really get it. I shouldn’t care they can’t pay medical bills, treatment for addiction, it’s not my problem. You did it why can’t they do it.

4. **What biblical and/or theological resources undergird your advocacy work around mass incarceration? Why should Christians get involved?**

A lot came from CCDA. I sit down with my mentors. Can you lead me to the word to support the message I’m trying to say. The word. CCDA and the materials we have. Mentor. Just been doing it three years. Advocacy and community engagement just took off in last twelve months. We talk about John Perkins books, community engagement, sharing resources.

5. **What specific things are you hoping to see changed in the prison system and through your advocacy work?**

In terms of the area I’m in, the area I live in. My dream has always been, started on inside, love to see God transform our local prison into a safe space facility. Everyone who walks through the building feel the spirit of God. Transforming inside prison, the hearts of men and women who work there. Bringing in the programs there to comprehensively serve. Local community to surround it with love and support. Take the church. Not saying it can’t happen but it would take a lot of work. There is lack of funding to hire additional people. Biggest problem is the structure of the prison. Broken people can’t serve broken people. There’s a lot of broken people from the top down. I got to work with people at two facilities. Because of my skill set I got to see things most people don’t have access to. Working along people who I’d hate to work with because they’re miserable. I’m not going to play a game. I love being real even if it’s uncomfortable. I need to be transparent. I can’t be in position I can’t be myself. I couldn’t work there. But what bothers me is the mind games the guards and staff play with the residents. There’s a power struggle. Hiring people that have GED, highest level, looking for employment with benefits, but babysitting for 8 hour shift. Developing intimate relationships with men and women. Personalities are just as broken as those in there. They get to feel good looking down on others. Get to lord it over. Feel good when I can yell at church volunteer. Deny them access because volunteer was 5 minutes late. When you bring in food are you going to feed us too because we babysit them.

My role being on outside, prayerful, God will move them in upcoming season to change. People in power will be moved to be more humanist in justice. They are people who made mistakes.
There is a divide. There are those who I want to do church service, feed them, sponsor them, I feel more comfortable in policy reform and advocacy. I’m not sure how we bridge the gap to do both. In terms of advocacy. I was at mass incarceration symposium. It was good to hear judges, probation officers, I don’t like what I’m seeing, we need change. But I didn’t see link. That 180 people were willing to take same passion into the community to support brothers and sisters. They were changing perspectives in the people they serve. Instead of seeing staff as pencil pushers. Public defender. Judges. We need to create a diversion program. We need to raise age of juvenile. I would love to see that enthusiasm changing policy to community perspective. How do I use my voice to change what’s going on behind those walls? I’m not sure what the answer is. Creating space those that have been directly impacted do presentations. Out of presentations there was one formerly incarcerated person. Talked from own experience. Awesome. Would love to see formerly incarcerated perspective. The speaker had a swarm of people. We need to extend the invitation to those of us who have been impacted and the criminal justice advocates to a table. Here’s what happened on inside, outside, fears, etc. Come to agreement where we can listen to each other. We are about public safety, how do we be compassionate to be supportive to integrate you in the community. We have a very conservative, different governor. We cut unemployment in half, most restrictive voting rights. The most powerful moment to bring those together. Don’t think it will happen
1. In your own journey, what have been the greatest influences (moments, experiences, people, educational resources) in awakening your conscience and mobilizing you to action around mass incarceration?

Being in solidarity and struggle with returning citizens, hearing their stories, and knowing their hearts.

2. In your advocacy efforts, what has proven most effective in awakening the conscience of evangelicals/Christians and mobilizing them to action around mass incarceration? What has been most challenging?

I’m continually amazed by Evangelical Arrogance. Once I got over my belief that we were God’s gift to the struggle, I began learning how to actually organize and build power. When you start really doing this in ways that move beyond sign on letters and a few small actions, and move it to achieve major legislative victories, evangelicals want to join the party! And most challenging is Evangelical Arrogance.

3. What biblical and/or theological resources undergird your advocacy work around mass incarceration? Why should Christians get involved?

The bible is full of returning citizens changing the world. New Jim Crow is great.
1. **What ways are you currently involved in prison advocacy?**

We have national campaign, The LIVE Free campaign, we organize and mobilize faith based congregations to address these issues. I pastor a congregation that has done a lot of local and state advocacy around school to prison pipeline. We’re involved in changing policies around exclusive housing, employment discrimination.

2. **In your own journey, what have been the greatest influences (moments, experiences, people, educational resources) in awakening your conscience and mobilizing you to action around mass incarceration?**

My own experience has deeply impacted me. Criminalization of people of color. Two years ago reading Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*. Dorothy Nune. A formerly incarcerated person. Pastoral concerns seeing the many barriers to people trying to come home and do the right thing.

3. **In your advocacy efforts, what has proven most effective in awakening the conscience of American Christians and mobilizing them to action around mass incarceration? What has been most challenging?**

We have seen the greatest catalyst to creating awareness is bringing people into proximity. We do lots of sharing of stories, testimonial sections, panel conversations, film series that has been very powerful. Helping create shared experiences between audiences of different racial backgrounds. We have shown movies and documentaries like *Fruitvale Station, 3 and ½ minutes, The House I live in*, that create a moral crisis for folks. Giving people concrete things to do. Many people say they want to do something but don’t know what. We talk about proclamation, how can they use voice to shift and change narrative and shift and change hearts and minds. Policy giving policies in local, state, level. Ending suspensions for any kind of behavior. Removing the box on employment applications. Changing the sentencing disparity. We give people numbers to call to elected officials. Give people easy on ramps. Programs: Concrete things clergy can do to end criminalization. Re-entry programs. Intervening in conflicts in neighborhoods. Tech training programs.

4. **What biblical and/or theological resources undergird your advocacy work around mass incarceration? Why should Christians get involved?**


Use a lot of Scripture. How we’re called to respond to systemic injustice, principalities and powers. I help my congregation and clergy understand a theology of resistance to take seriously the prophetic call to embrace justice, fight for widow orphan, marginalized, have a theology of justice that’s robust and grounded in scripture, theology of the body to help reclaim intrinsic worth dignity and value. To be seen in image of God. Theo-praxis- reflecting on theology of justice and body, we have to have action or practices. What does it mean to take models in Scriptures and tradition in Christian faith, last 2,000 years, not feel like we have to start from scratch, use stories and examples in denomination and Christian faith. Take seriously action. Put theology and faith into action.

5. What changes do you hope to see as a result of your advocacy efforts?

I hope that a big result is have an army of radicalized clergy who fight for justice, we are building movement congregations that are committed to freedom and justice for oppressed people at end of work be able to galvanize hundreds of churches that see this as a necessary and faithful response as Christians. Dismantle criminalization apparatus policy and system people don’t have laws on books that give people authority to incarcerate them. Change peoples minds through not over associated with crime. Shift policy apparatus. People are investing in people not prisons.
1. What is your current involvement in prison ministry and advocacy around mass incarceration?

For a decade I have been a volunteer chaplain in my local county jail, leading prayer, Bible studies, visiting violent offenders individually. My fulltime ministry role at Tierra Nueva, as gang pastor and Underground Coffee founder, came from accompanying the dozens and dozens of young men leaving jail and prison through the barrier-strewn terrain between their lockdown connection with God and the new life on the horizon. With my book and writing, I speak in churches and seminaries around sharing the stories of tattooed, violent offenders who come with me, hearing their voices, their hearts, how they lived with me and shared life in community, and we invite communities to support these men in prayer and finances as a new team of missionaries to the 'underground' of America.

2. In your own journey, what have been the greatest influences (moments, experiences, people, educational resources) in awakening your conscience and mobilizing you to action around mass incarceration?

It started with Mission Year, getting me into the painful places in America, equipped with a way of life that is all about mission and relationship, crossing societal barriers. Then after a progressive education at UC Berkeley, I came under the direct supervision and teaching of Bob Ekblad, author of Reading the Bible with the Damned, with Tierra Nueva Ministries and the Skagit County Jail, in far NW WA. My years in this jail, with these amazing young men reading the Bible with me and sharing life with me, have primarily shaped my involvedment around mass incarceration. Especially my best friend, and now colleague, José "Neaner" Garcia, who spent 7years in supermax prisons and 5 in solitary confinement. My years writing him, hearing his collect calls of pain, hope, joy, from the inside, driving his tiny daughters to meet their dad . . . all this inducted me into the world of mass incarceration, and what GOd led me to do with Neaners and others for years, I discovered, is a kind of relational, ecclesial "underground railroad," as Michelle Alexander calls for.

3. In your advocacy efforts, what has proven most effective in awakening the conscience of evangelicals/Christians and mobilizing them to action around mass incarceration? What has been most challenging?

Helping them hear stories. Hearing Neaners. People burn out on causes and injustices. People fall in love with people. Names. Faces. Narratives. Voices. Conservative Christians have rallied around the clear work of God in Neaners . . . conservative evangelicals who would not yet be able to swallow "ending mass incarceration" as a cause or value. Even local business leaders of
faith have been eager to get involved with jobs for men coming out of prison with me--yet I know if I brought up the larger reality of mass incarceration as a political injustice to counter, big-picture, they'd sour and get bogged down in abstract ideological differences. The work happens with action, relationships. That's how I've been able to cross the aisle, build bridges. Then, after they've employed a felon, prayed for Neaners on their fridge magnet reminder . . . maybe they hear something in the media about "mass incarceration" . . . and they listen more closely. It has touched their hearts, their lives, first. Only then can their minds incline to be renewed, opened.

4. What biblical and/or theological resources undergird your advocacy work around mass incarceration? Why should Christians get involved?
I use the trope of Lazarus. If Christians believe that Jesus could raise the dead (literally), then he can surely raise the spiritually and socially dead. When Jesus raises Lazarus, a holy and uncommon event, he invites normal people to help: by rolling away the stone. That is my invitation for communities to help roll away heavy, societal barriers placed between the realm of the dead, and the land of the living. That includes debt, fees, employment, housing, for the individuals we accompany. But also it can be seen in policy, systems of stones being rolled away . . . if our Lord, Jesus, is raising people from the dead. And He is. Conservative Christians want to be closer to Jesus, more than they are committed to abstract concepts like "justice," in the way that liberals can rally around topics.

5. What specific things are you hoping to see changed in the prison system and through your advocacy work?
That is always changing for me. Apart from my work, I love the bill Bernie Sanders put on the Senate floor, "Justice is Not for Sale": removing any profiteering from mass incarceration. I think this would take the knees and insane lobbying muscle out of the mass prison growth. My work is more about the human root of it all: how God handles sinners, vs how the world does. That's why my book is about, that's what my ministry work does: loves sinners, seeks their embrace and healing and full inclusion into my life and my community's . . . and I share these heartening stories for people to remember a more beautiful mission: resurrection and healing and redemption, not fear and building more hells on earth to throw away bad guys. Basically, connecting the center of the Christian story with this issue American Christians have so missed.
1. **What is your current involvement in prison ministry and advocacy around mass incarceration?**

I am currently involved in prison ministry and advocacy through my participation in the Diocese of Joliet Restorative Justice Committee. Additionally, I work to educate students on Lewis University’s campus about mass incarceration and prison ministry through social justice retreats, pilgrimages, and events. Some of the student leaders that I oversee are currently corresponding with men and women inside of the Menard prison in Southern Illinois to learn about what the daily realities of prison and create a relationship with individuals on the inside.

2. **In your own journey, what have been the greatest influences (moments, experiences, people, and educational resources) in awakening your conscience and mobilizing you to action around mass incarceration?**

In terms of experience, I think of one specific experience when I had a chance to listen to two men, who had been imprisoned for a combined 50+ years, speak about their time in prison. The two men both readily admitted to their involvement in gangs and to committing murder and other serious crimes. The experience profoundly impacted me because, at the end of the discussion, they spoke about their lives now that they’re out of prison. Because of some incredibly caring and compassionate people who helped them to reintegrate back into society, those two men are able to lead regular, civilized lives, stay away from gang involvement, and see that their lives matter. They are now positively contributing to the world. It was so moving. And it helped me to see that committing an evil act doesn’t make a person inherently evil.

In terms of educational resources, the two books that have most influenced me are “The New Jim Crow” by Michelle Alexander and “Just Mercy” by Bryan Stevenson. “The New Jim Crow” really educated me about the facts and all of the research that has been done to prove that the prison system is inherently racist and an overt form of systematic oppression. “Just Mercy” did that as well, but provided more stories and narratives about people’s lives and how they’ve been affected by the flawed prison system.

3. **In your advocacy efforts, what has proven most effective in awakening the conscience of evangelicals/Christians and mobilizing them to action around mass incarceration? What has been most challenging?**

When it comes to effective advocacy, the most successful strategy for me has been putting a human face on the issue of “mass incarceration.” Setting up opportunities for students to speak
with ex-convicts or to correspond with currently imprisoned men and woman has been the most
effective way to transform hearts and minds and organize people.
The most challenging part for me is entering into dialogue with individuals who have an
opposing viewpoint and are not willing to even consider another perspective.

4. What biblical and/or theological resources undergird your advocacy work around
mass incarceration? Why should Christians get involved?

Biblically, I draw from a number of different sources, but one in particular that I think really
speaks to this issue is 2 Corinthians 5:17-20. There are a number of stories from the bible that
demonstrate Jesus’ involvement and relationships with the poor, the sinners, the broken. Whether
it’s with lepers, tax collectors, or the woman at the well, Jesus is an example of our missionary
call to more fully love others and see the dignity in every human person, even those who have
committed the gravest of sins. As Christians, I believe we are all called to acknowledge the
worth and dignity of every living being and to protect and promote life at every stage. So when
we talk about protecting and promoting life at every stage, that doesn’t just mean advocating for
the abolition of abortion. In my personal interpretation of scripture and the Christian tradition, I
believe we should also be advocating for the abolition of the death penalty, for the end to wars
and other armed conflicts, for the end to monumental economic national and global economic
inequality, and for the reconstruction of a prison system that, currently, systematically oppresses
people and does nothing to restore and rehabilitate human beings.

In terms of more contemporary theological sources, as a Catholic, I tend to draw from
“Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal
Justice,” a statement released by the USCCB on November 15, 2000. More recently, I find it
rather difficult, as I think many people do, to not quote Pope Francis. One particular quote of his
comes from paragraph 65 of his most recent encyclical, “Laudato Si.” It says:

The Bible teaches that every man and woman is created out of love and made in God’s image
and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26). This shows us the immense dignity of each person, “who is not just
something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving
himself and entering into communion with other persons”.[37] Saint John Paul II stated that the
special love of the Creator for each human being “confers upon him or her an infinite
dignity”.[38] Those who are committed to defending human dignity can find in the Christian
faith the deepest reasons for this commitment. How wonderful is the certainty that each human
life is not adrift in the midst of hopeless chaos, in a world ruled by pure chance or endlessly
recurring cycles! The Creator can say to each one of us: “Before I formed you in the womb, I
knew you” (Jer 1:5). We were conceived in the heart of God, and for this reason “each of us is
the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is
necessary”.[39]

5. What specific things are you hoping to see changed in the prison system and
through your advocacy work?
I’m already very encouraged by the way I’ve seen things progress over the last two years.
Through my work, I hope to educate as many students as possible, to get them organized around
prison reform, and to enter into dialogue with as many people as I can on a daily basis. Ultimately, I hope that by the end of my lifetime, the United States has a prison system that acknowledges the human dignity of each person, effectively holds people accountable for their actions, but looks to restore and rehabilitate, not punish and isolate.
1. **What is your current involvement in prison ministry and advocacy around mass incarceration?**

Currently, I am the Chaplain for the Jackson County Family Court, and I also speak on legislation in Kansas that effects juvenile justice.

2. **In your own journey, what have been the greatest influences (moments, experiences, people, educational resources) in awakening your conscience and mobilizing you to action around mass incarceration?**

My mentor who is also a chaplain in Wyandotte County was my greatest personal influence but spiritually, it was Matthew 25:36, "...I was in prison, and you came to visit me."

3. **In your advocacy efforts, what has proven most effective in awakening the conscience of American Christians and mobilizing them to action around mass incarceration?**

My most effective effort has been my monthly ministry updates to supporters, and my annual banquet in which I share about strategic programs and partners to help expose and engage people about mass incarceration. What has been most challenging? The media especially Facebook and others polarizing posts that have divided people on the subject because of lack of empathy or false information.

4. **What biblical and/or theological resources undergird your advocacy work around mass incarceration?**

Jesus' heart for least of these especially as it relates to the Kingdom of God. Why should Christians get involved? Matthew 25:36 and Jesus' interaction with prisoners even on the Cross should awaken us to have a heart for our brothers and sisters who are incarcerated.

5. **What specific things are you hoping to see changed in the prison system and through your advocacy work?**

I really want to expose the profit/greed that individuals are making off of incarceration in the public and private sector. I want transparency on what educational and spiritual programs work and don't work and if they are only effective with the highest quality teams facilitating them. My
dream would be for prisons and juvenile detentions centers to have the highest quality of individuals that our country and church can offer to educate and spiritually direct our offenders. The highest quality network will always have the best chance of success with the highest risk individual in my experience. How amazing would it be for great educators, pastors, and priests to consider tenure in prison in order to truly have lifelong students or disciples!
Greatest influences...I think the biggest influence on me was the documentary "Broken On All Sides." This coupled with grad school and studying issues like gentrification, perceptions/stigmas/stereotypes around "urban" spaces, the ways media racially profiles crime, violence, drug trafficking, and systemic poverty really got me thinking about the power of systems of white supremacy and capitalism. It also continued to awaken me to the ways these systems dehumanize and actively oppress people of color.

I think Jesus is the ultimate challenge in mobilizing people to think critically about how they're approaching issues of injustice, mass incarceration included. Matthew 25 mobilizes me all the time. Those in prison are living manifestations of Christ. There is a direct connection between our love of Him and those in prison - why? That's the question I'm left asking. And the more I become educated and aware of the corruption and dehumanization I can't help but see answers to that question all over the place. Getting people to ask that question is critical. And then comparing those responses to the life and words of Christ. It brings up a whole bunch of stuff; how we view justice, what's governing use (nationalism/religious nationalism), our value of human life, etc. I've grown a little annoyed at how willing we are to read and talk about this issue, but we don't really do anything. I've been inspired by fellow classmates that used their thesis project to help grow re-entry opportunities for people here in Philly. People that use capitalism to create businesses that specifically hire people with felonies on their record. I was at a vigil last week and a woman there got ordained online just so she could visit people at a prison here in the city. That really got me thinking - there's so much we can do, and there's so much that we're not doing.
1. **In your own journey, what have been the greatest influences (moments, experiences, people, educational resources) in awakening your conscience and mobilizing you to action around mass incarceration?**

In June of 2010, I participated in a trip to Rwanda to learn more about reconciliation between victims and perpetrators post-genocide. The focus of the trip was on Rwanda, but our hosts continued to challenge us in thinking about where we came from and how our God is inviting us to see the injustices surrounding conflict where we come from. During this trip, we took a tour of many of the genocide memorial sites, many of them churches that have been kept as is in remembrance of the 1994 genocide. After walking through the church and seeing blood stains on walls and on the altar, we headed to one of the largest prisons in Rwanda that detained perpetrators of the genocide. I remember how conflicted I felt --- how quick I was to fear, to feel hate, to judge. Then looking to my left and right, I was surrounded by survivors of the genocide, who carried pain but continued to extend forgiveness and seek justice on behalf of those who were in prison. As foreigners, we were taken on a tour of the prison and it was highlighted as place where prisoners were given "the good life" within the walls.

In response to this trip, I continue to be challenged in the way I think about what it means to be an advocate for the prisoner here at home. There are tensions in my journey where I know I could care more and do more. I'm okay with that tension because it continues to help me to take more action. Right now, action means taking the time to learn and ask questions of myself, my faith community, and our justice system.

2. **In your advocacy efforts, what has proven most effective in awakening the conscience of evangelicals/Christians and mobilizing them to action around mass incarceration? What has been most challenging?**

Conversations around mass incarceration and the Christian response were more common after I graduated from college. Now that I am in circles where it's more common for conversations around injustice surrounding race and mass incarceration, what has been most effective in growth and awakening the conscience is inviting my faith community into conversations through education (documentaries, reading books, etc.). Personally, the most challenging part is how the conversation is fast and driven by media. I haven't thought about this enough, but what it seems like is that it easier for our faith communities to talk about race and racism, and just stop there. More faith communities need to take it to the next step to actively talk about challenging the systems of control that continue to perpetuate and drive injustices around mass incarceration.
3. What biblical and/or theological resources undergird your advocacy work around mass incarceration? Why should Christians get involved?

I think of Isaiah 58 as my call in my faith for justice for the poor and imprisoned. I think of Matthew 25:36 as my challenge to see prisoners as my brothers and sisters that I am called to advocate on behalf of, serve, and love. I think getting involved looks different for everyone, but it's important that we do as Christians. This is our invitation as believers to move from prayer to action and be a part of God's work "on earth as it is in heaven."
D-15
Ruth Nakai
Email Survey
October 6, 2015
Chicago, IL
Mission Year Staff and Alumni

1. **In your own journey, what have been the greatest influences (moments, experiences, people, educational resources) in awakening your conscience and mobilizing you to action around mass incarceration?**

Specifically-- The documentary, *The House I Live In.*
BUT, being made more aware of systemic racism (first)-- through years of reading, listening, and experience-- allowed me to watch that documentary with a believing (vs. skeptical) eye.
Your friend Larry/ his talk
Being a teacher-- and having my mentor teacher (when I was a student teacher) point out that any of our students could be potential criminals-- as a way of connecting the inner child/ human with the face of a criminal (they're not "just criminals")
Various quotes- like "no single action should define a person"
Being connected with people who are or who have family/friends in prison
*Tattoos on the Heart* by Gregory Boyle-- understanding more emotionally and spiritually God's compassion for gang members
*Shawshank Redemption*
Teaching and being exposed to "gang members" who were just kids...
Praying for/seeing "juvenile delinquents" as "our babies"
Watching a documentary on a kid in the juvenile delinquency system-- and seeing how her childhood impacted where she was in the system..

Basically anything that helped me connect what's familiar (ex: youth, children, childhood experiences, trauma) with something that's not as familiar or easy to relate to(being a prisoner, prison, criminal justice system, committing crimes)

2. **In your advocacy efforts, what has proven most effective in awakening the conscience of evangelicals/Christians and mobilizing them to action around mass incarceration? What has been most challenging?**

First convincing people of systemic racism.
Then sharing stories

Most challenging has been sharing stories-- but them not having a framework for seeing systemic injustice. (EX: Not believing first that racism exists in the way it does)

3. **What biblical and/or theological resources undergird your advocacy work around mass incarceration? Why should Christians get involved?**
Matthew 25
Realizing that prison is one of the most under-visited places…
Remembering that Paul was in prison
And Jesus died a criminal's death--
Basically biblical stories that connect me with criminals, prisoners, etc. with the compassion of God
1. **In your own journey, what have been the greatest influences (moments, experiences, people, educational resources) in awakening your conscience and mobilizing you to action around mass incarceration?**

   Reading *The New Jim Crow*, and FTE discussion surrounding *The New Jim Crow*. This was a group of ~15 year-long program participants that participated in a discussion facilitated by one of the FTE staff members. In this, I remember we did a mini Bible study that blew my mind--looking at the story of Paul and Silas from Acts, particularly how they ended up in prison. Discussing systems that Paul and Silas ran into/disrupted in the Bible helped to awaken me and connect my faith with injustice/a desire to seek justice around mass incarceration.

2. **In your advocacy efforts, what has proven most effective in awakening the conscience of evangelicals/Christians and mobilizing them to action around mass incarceration? What has been most challenging?**

   Good question. I found last year that not all people share my affinity for reading the New Jim Crow. Despite my enthusiasm, it proved to be a difficult curriculum book for our team to connect with last year. I think the density of the book and heaviness of the subject makes it a challenging read for Christians that haven't already become committed to dismantling mass incarceration through some other outlet. I think I've found that personal experiences and knowing friends who have been incarcerated has spurred me to action more--I think telling these stories and convincing evangelicals/Christians to befriend others who are adversely affected by mass incarceration.

3. **What biblical and/or theological resources undergird your advocacy work around mass incarceration? Why should Christians get involved?**

   Everything. The new way of looking at the story of Paul and Silas from #1. The way Jesus announced his ministry in Luke 4:18-19 declaring release for the prisoners. The more I read about liberation theology (recently, James Cone), the more I'm convinced that the central theme of the Gospel is liberation from oppression. My pastor speaks eloquently on the subject at church, and our denomination (UCC) in Philadelphia is organizing to end systems of mass incarceration starting Sunday. Christians need to be involved because dismantling mass incarceration is blatantly obviously in line with Jesus and our faith. It's hard to look at Jesus's life and teachings and make a believable case that one who strives to follow him shouldn't act against mass incarceration.
4. In your own journey, what have been the greatest influences (moments, experiences, people, educational resources) in awakening your conscience and mobilizing you to action around mass incarceration?

Reading about women being incarcerated after being forced to cover for abusive partners and laws prohibiting women from safely giving birth while incarcerated. *The New Jim Crow* (book), *The House I Live in* (documentary), Mia McKenzie, and Joey Mogel (authors) have been influential reading/watching material for me. I also worked with teen parents who had partners in prison and watching them try and navigate those experiences and fears has had a huge impact on my beliefs about the prison system.

5. In your advocacy efforts, what has proven most effective in awakening the conscience of evangelicals/Christians and mobilizing them to action around mass incarceration? What has been most challenging?

I haven't done any mobilizing specifically on this issue although I believe talking with people about race and poverty in America has been both awakening and challenging.

6. What biblical and/or theological resources undergird your advocacy work around mass incarceration? Why should Christians get involved?

I value the work of Traci C. West and James Cone when it comes to the criminalization of people of color and the history of the U.S. I think Christians should get involved for the same reason anybody should get involved - prisons are unjust structures that our society depends on for false safety and continuing racism.
Appendix E

James W. Fowler summary of developmental faith stages from *Stages of Faith*

Stage 0: Primal or undifferentiated (birth to 2 years) is characterized by an early learning of the safety of their environment (i.e. warm, safe and secure vs. hurt, neglect and abuse). If consistent nurture is experienced, one will develop a sense of trust and safety about the universe and the divine. Conversely, negative experiences will cause one to develop distrust with the universe and the divine. Transition to the next stage begins with integration of thought and languages which facilitates the use of symbols in speech and play.

Stage 1: Intuitive Projective (ages 3 to 7) is characterized by the psyche's unprotected exposure to the *Unconscious*, and marked by a relative fluidity of thought patterns. Religion is learned mainly through experiences, stories, images, and the people that one comes in contact with.

Stage 2: Mythic Literal (mostly in school children) stage two persons have a strong belief in the *justice* and reciprocity of the universe, and their *deities* are almost always *anthropomorphic*. During this time metaphors and symbolic language are often misunderstood and are taken literally.

Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional (arising in adolescence, aged 12-adulthood) characterized by *conformity* to religious authority and the development of a personal identity. Any conflicts with one's beliefs are ignored at this stage due to the fear of threat from inconsistencies.

Stage 4: Individuative-Reflective (mid-twenties to late thirties) a stage of *anxieties* and struggle. The individual takes personal responsibility for his or her *beliefs* and *feelings*. As one is able to reflect on one's own beliefs, there is an openness to a new complexity of faith, but this also increases the awareness of conflicts in one's belief.

Stage 5: Conjunctive Faith (mid-life crisis) acknowledges paradox and *transcendence* relating reality behind the symbols of inherited systems. The individual resolves conflicts from previous stages by a complex understanding of a multidimensional, interdependent "truth" that cannot be explained by any particular statement.

Stage 6: Universalizing Faith (rarely achieved) The individual would treat any person with compassion as he or she views people as from a universal community, and should be treated with universal principles of love and justice.
Appendix F

The Prison Industrial Complex Map

(Map taken from the Corrections Project).\(^{145}\)

Appendix G

Scriptural references on incarceration from *The Convict Christ*

At the very beginning of his public ministry, immediately after his temptation in the desert by the devil, Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth and laid out a detailed campaign platform for his mission: ‘to preach good news to the poor…to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovering of sight for the blind, and to release the oppressed.

When confronted with an ordinary criminal found guilty of a capital offense—the woman caught in adultery—God’s Son did not hesitate to intervene and released her from death row (John 8:1-11).

Despite the considerable risk of retaliation by King Herod, our Lord held a public speech of support for his cousin, John the Baptist, who had been thrown in jail for criticizing this corrupt ruler (Matthew 11:2-19).

Mark’s description of John the Baptist’s execution at King Herod’s banquet does not mention Christ directly, but this incident illustrates well the utter callousness with which prisoners’ lives are often treated (Mark 6:17-29).

In the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus reminds us that we need to listen to the cries of anonymous, possibly unsympathetic crime victims in the ditch even when we are busily rushing along the road of life on important business of our own (Luke 10:29-37).

The parable of the persistent widow features another powerless person crying for help—and, to us perhaps surprisingly, an ‘unjust judge’ who refuses her pleas (Luke 18:6).

In the parable of the sheep and the goats mentioned earlier, Christ explicitly threatens us with the ‘eternal fire prepared for the devil,’ if we fail to recognize his face in the faces of the ‘least of these brothers of mine…in prison’ (Matthew 25:40,41,36).

Perhaps most significantly, our Lord described the Holy Spirit as a defense lawyer (parakleitos in Greek, advocatus in Latin) who protects us in court from an accuser or adversary (satanos in Greek) (John 14:15ff, 15:26-16:16; Matthew 10:20).

Before Jesus’ execution, the young Roman soldiers in the Praetorium ‘stripped him’ and ‘mocked him’ and ‘struck him’ and ‘spit on him,’ much as the young American soldiers tormented Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib in our own age (Matthew 27:28, 31; Mark 15:19).

As the legionnaires led Christ toward Golgotha, the man they chose for the degrading task of carrying the cross just happened to be Simon of Cyrene—Cyrene being a town on the northern coast of Africa whose residents were probably darker in skin tone than ordinary Jerusalemites (Mark 15:21).
During his final moments on earth, knowing he was about to die, our Savior did not utter a few last words of wisdom to his disciples or cure one last leper, but instead ministered to the two common criminals on the crosses next to his—and succeeded in saving one (Luke 23:38-43).\textsuperscript{146}


\textsuperscript{146} Soering 4-5.
## Appendix H

### Causes of Poverty

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Sample Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Human and Social Capital in the Community</strong></td>
<td>Research on the resources available to individuals, communities, and businesses.</td>
<td>Intellectual capital, Social capital, Availability of jobs, Availability of well-paying jobs, Racism and discrimination, Availability and quality of education, Adequate skill sets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Exploitation</strong></td>
<td>Research on how people in poverty are exploited because they are in poverty.</td>
<td>Drug trade, Racism and discrimination, Cash-advance lenders, Sub-prime lenders, Lease-purchase outlets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Political/Economic Structures</strong></td>
<td>Research on the economic, political, and social policies at the international, national, state, and local levels.</td>
<td>Globalization, Corporate influence on legislators, Declining middle class, De-industrialization, Job loss, Decline of unions</td>
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Appendix I

Alternatives to Prison Based on Four Biblical Themes

The following are four alternatives to a punitive approach of mass incarceration that align with the four biblical themes.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual and Community Ministry</th>
<th>Solidarity of Jesus and Church</th>
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<td>Restorative Justice</td>
<td>Restorative Nature to God's justice</td>
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<td>Transformative Justice</td>
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<td>Prison Abolition</td>
<td>God's promise of liberation for prisoners</td>
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**Individual and Community Ministry**

Involvement of individuals and churches in prison ministry are crucial for providing support for prisoners. The need for caring and concerned Christian friends, visitors, volunteers, and mentors is an important element in a comprehensive approach. Miea Walker, a Jobs for Life trainer and advocate for prison reform, stresses the importance of relationships during incarceration and in reentry. “Relationships are the crux in transforming an individual’s life.” Inmate E. proposed every Church walk with prisoners from the time they go in until the time they go out of prison. Prison visitation and volunteering is a natural way for Christians to respond to the New Testament directives to “visit the prisoner” and “remember those in prison as if you were there yourself.” Churches have the opportunity to play a crucial role in breaking the isolation and despair prisoners feel in prison and assist in the re-entry of returning citizens through housing, addiction recovery, job skills, counseling, family support and pastoral care. This is an opportunity for “the church to be the church and step up by being in authentic communion with people who are incarcerated,” says writer and activist Dominque Gilliard.

Prison ministries focused on individual and church responses, though valuable to those already in the prison system, but have little impact on the system itself. They are in essence,
“pulling out bloody bodies from the river without going upstream to see who is throwing them in.”

Liberals, on the other hand, tend to downplay the vital importance of individual and church responses to the prison crisis. Walker wants to see those doing policy and advocacy work “take the same passion into the community to support [incarcerated and returning] brothers and sisters.” In sum, building relationships with incarcerated brothers and sisters and providing support for them and their families is a critical piece to any prison ministry or advocacy initiative, but must not stop there.

Restorative Justice

The restorative justice approach directly ties into the biblical theme of the restorative nature of God’s justice that runs throughout Scripture, providing a socially viable, theologically sound alternative to our current punishment-based model. Restorative justice has become popular among conservatives and liberals alike making it a great point of contact for Christian collaboration along the theological and political spectrum. “Restorative justice involves promoting a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation” which should make this approach a no-brainer for Christians! Although “restorative practices have been used for centuries by indigenous peoples in the Americas and elsewhere,” they have only become popularized in contemporary discourse in the last few decades. Restorative justice also includes reforms,

147 Credited to William Booth.
148 Even Charles Colson has promoted this approach in his 2001 book Justice That Restores: Why our Justice System Doesn’t work and the Only Method of True Reform.
149 Kilgore, 200.
150 Ibid. Restorative justice programs tends to take on two basic forms: victim-based restorative justice and community-based restorative justice. The first prioritizes providing restitution to crime victims and ensure those who commit crimes take responsibility for their actions after they go through criminal justice system. Programs in this school of thought tend to operate within the existing legal institutions unlike community-based programs that run largely outside the formal criminal justice system. Community-based programs seek to set up alternative processes and institutions enabling communities and individuals to resolve conflicts before the criminal prosecution takes place. For example, restorative justice programs have been successfully introduced in high schools to keep kids out of the school-to-prison pipeline.
rehabilitation programs, and legislative changes to bring about more humane conditions and fair policies.

**Transformative Justice**

A transformative justice approach recognizes that it’s impossible to address mass incarceration in isolation from other structural injustices like racial profiling, poverty, education, joblessness, gender violence, etc. Transformative justice embodies the spirit of Amos and the prophetic confrontation with unjust systems. Transformative justice aims to bring change on the individual, community, and structural level. Generation Five, a national women’s organization focusing on sexual abuse of children and leading voice in the transformative justice movement, released a document called *Toward Transformative Justice* where they outlined that “individual justice and collective liberation are equally important, mutually supportive, and fundamentally intertwined—the achievement of one is impossible without the achievement of the other.‖

Transformative justice relies on intersectionality, community organizing, and movement-building to effect broad social change. Whereas restorative justice focuses on individuals taking responsibility for making bad decisions to bring about reconciliation, transformative justice assigns more responsibility to “structural issues such as the unfairness of the criminal justice and economic systems.‖ Catholic theologian Amy Levad reflects the spirit of transformative justice when she says, “any responsible effort to reform criminal justice must also respond to the call to fight injustice in all of its forms.‖

**Prison Abolition**

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152 “While there are divisions between restorative and transformative approaches, there is also a complex overlap and often useful tension between the two perspectives. Many restorative justice practitioners also work in social justice movements, while supporters of transformative justice frequently use restorative techniques in their work.” Kilgore, 212.
153 Levad, Amy.
The last alternative to mass incarceration is prison abolition which falls in line with the biblical theme of God’s promise of liberation for prisoners. In her book *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Angela Davis argues that prisons do not need to be reformed, they need to be abolished. Proponents of prison abolition draw their inspiration from the abolitionist movement to end slavery.  

The Constitution of the United States only strengthens the morbid connection between slavery and imprisonment. The Thirteenth Amendment reads: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.” Laura Magnani and Harmon Wray, co-authors of *Beyond Prisons: A New Interfaith Paradigm for Our Failed Prison System*, believe the Thirteenth amendment should be amended to prohibit all forms of slavery. “Permitting slavery as an exception to the Thirteenth Amendment makes the prison system the direct heir to the chattel system. The fact that the United States incarcerates people of color at an alarmingly higher rate than whites makes this heritage all too clear.”  

In light of this, some religious traditions are calling for prison abolition.  

In addition to seeing less people put in prison, prison abolitionists want to see more people in prison released. Recently, thousands of inmates were released by the U.S. government, but it is only the tip of the iceberg. “To return to incarceration levels of the 1970s, which many

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154 Adam Jay Hirsch marks the parallels between slavery and imprisonment: One may perceive in the penitentiary many reflections of chattel slavery as it was practiced in the South. Both institutions subordinated their subjects to the will of others. Like Southern slaves, prison inmates followed a daily routine specified by their superiors. Both institutions reduced their subjects to dependence on others for the supply of basic human services such as food and shelter. Both isolated their subjects from the general population by confining them to a fixed habitat. And both frequently coerced their subjects to work, often for longer hours and for less compensation than free laborers.  


156 The American Friends Service Committee summarizes why prisons should be abolished: We submit that the basic evils of imprisonment are that it denies autonomy, degrades dignity, impairs or destroys self-reliance, inculcates authoritarian values, minimizes the likelihood of beneficial interaction with one’s peers, fractures family ties, destroys the family’s economic stability, and prejudices the prisoner’s future prospects for any improvement in his economic and social status. It does all these things whether or not the buildings are antiseptic or dirty, the aroma that of fresh bread or stale urine, the sleeping accommodation a plank or an inner-spring mattress.
prison reformers thought were excessive, would require a decrease in prison and jail populations of about 1.5 million.” Whether churches can get on board with full prison abolition or not, Mark Lewis Taylor urges some action be taken to reduce mass incarceration: “If not prison abolition, then prison reform, if not the removal of the prison system we almost take for granted, then a moratorium on the rapid expansion of mass incarceration.”

157 Kilgore, 222.
158 Taylor, xii.
Appendix J

CCDA White Paper

CCDA White Paper
Mass Incarceration
2015

Contributors:
Troy Jackson, Dominique Gilliard, Miea Walker
Shawn Casselberry, Cliff Nellis, Anthony Grimes
Michelle Warren, Amy Williams
Introduction
Since 1980, the United States has seen an unprecedented rise in incarceration rates. Our nation's prison population has quintupled over a 30-year period. The United States currently has the highest incarceration rate and the most prisoners of any country in the world. These incarceration rates, which have run independent of crime rates, are suggested to be the result of policy changes over the last 30 to 35 years. In addition, incarceration rates have been documented to be disproportionately affecting minority communities in the U.S.

Background
In the decades leading up to 1980, the United States had annual incarceration rates similar to rates in other developed countries. Since 1980, the United States has seen a dramatic rise in incarceration rates. In 1980, 220 out of every 100,000 people in the United States was incarcerated. That rate had increased more than threefold by 2010, with 731 out of every 100,000 people incarcerated that year. This number only shows the annual number of people in prison or jail, and does not show the millions of people who are under the corrective system that are on probation or parole. Approximately 6.9 million people were under the supervision of the adult correctional control system at the end of 2012 (prison or jail, probation or parole), while the correctional facility population (prison or jail) surpassed 2.4 million people in 2014.

Four Primary Drivers
Incarceration rates have been driven by what we believe to stem from four primary forces: the War on Drugs, the Private Prison Industrial Complex, Immigration Deportation Centers, and the School to Prison Pipeline

The War on Drugs
While sky-rocketing incarceration rates are often relegated to the Regan era's expansion of the War on Drugs, policies implemented during the Nixon years and carried out through Clinton's presidency shaped the way the United States and its citizenry would see drugs, enforcement and incarceration.

During the Nixon administration, the Controlled Substances Act of 1970 introduced drug scheduling and included marijuana as a Schedule I drug. President Nixon declared a War on Drugs in 1971 and worked to increase the size and presence of federal drug control agencies initiating policies like mandatory sentencing and no-knock warrants. In 1973, by Executive Order, President Nixon created the Drug Enforcement Administration in order to establish a single unified command to combat "an all-out global war on the drug menace." At its outset, the DEA had 1,470 Special Agents and a budget of less than $75 million. Today, the DEA has nearly 5,000 Special Agents and a budget of $2.02 billion.

In 1982, when the Reagan administration announced its “War on Drugs,” expansion, they officially launched an offensive on drug crime at a time when only 2% of Americans felt that drug crime was the most important issue facing the country. Policy changes under the Reagan administration after the announcement of the War on Drugs increased penalties for drug offenses while incentivizing drug arrests for law enforcement agencies.

During the Clinton era, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, an Omnibus bill was signed into law including a provision that required a life sentence in prison to any individual who was convicted of committing their third serious violent or drug crime. President Clinton's State of the Union address in 1994, where he clearly stated, “three strikes and you ARE out” to an applauding audience,
captured the zeitgeist of the moment that spawned the legislative momentum of attaching lifetime sentences to an individual’s number of offenses and not necessarily the severity of their crimes. This further led to “Three Strikes You’re Out” laws being enacted in 25 states between the years of 1993-1995, with the most punitive laws in California, dramatically increasing that state’s prison population. What these types of legislative solutions did was put many non-violent offenders away for life, yet the data has shown that the reduction of violent crime has not been an outcome. The amount of people incarcerated for drug offenses has increased 1,412% between 1980 and 2006.

Drug Offenses & Parole Violations:
Two offenses that have contributed to the rise in incarceration rates are drug offenses and parole violations. Drug offenses account for two-thirds of the rise in the federal inmate population and for more than half of the rise in state prisoners between 1985 and 2000. Approximately 500,000 people were in prison or jail at the time that The New Jim Crow was published, which is a 1,100 percent increase from the 41,100 people imprisoned for drug offenses in 1980.

Prison admissions due to parole violations have also risen. In 1980, only 1 percent of all prison admissions were for parole violations. This number rose to 35 percent in 2000. This means that about as many people were admitted to prison for parole violations in 2000 as were admitted to prison for all reasons in 1980. This rise in parole violations can be partially understood when we see how difficult it can be to meet parole requirements. Parolees are often required to obtain and maintain employment, which is difficult with a felony conviction on record. They can also be required to pay any number of fees for services, drug testing, and many other possible offenses. These rules vary from state to state, and many have been recently passed (Florida has passed more than 20 such regulations since 1996). Fees related to pre-trial booking, containment, and lawyer’s fees (even for a public defendant) can be levied against people being held in jails. With two thirds of people being held in jails reporting an annual income under $12,000, it is not a surprise that many fees cannot be paid and parolees will be re-admitted to jails and prisons.

The announcement of the War on Drugs was initially met by some push-back from law enforcement agencies. Agencies were unwilling to arrest more drug offenders because local law enforcement viewed the move by the federal government as an infringement on local jurisdiction. The Reagan administration’s response to this push-back was to financially incentivize drug arrests. State and local law enforcement agencies are also allowed to keep a large majority of the cash and assets they seize in drug raids and arrests.

In addition to financial incentives, many law enforcement agencies have also been able to obtain training, military style vehicles, and SWAT teams in order to fight the War on Drugs. Police departments often claim that they want SWAT teams in case of a Columbine-type incident or a terrorist incident; however, SWAT teams are most often used in drug raids, which sometimes yield very small amounts of drugs or are executed at incorrect addresses. Additional training has also been given in order to wage the War on Drugs. One example is Operation Pipeline, a program implemented by the DEA to train more than 300 police agencies to use large scale pre-textual traffic stops and consent searches to find drugs. (The use of traffic stops in this manner has been upheld as constitutional by several Supreme Court decisions, specifically Whren v. United States and Atwater v. City of Lago Vista ). This information suggests and demonstrates that drug arrests and incarceration rates have not increased because of an increase in drug use or crime, but rather because of incentives to increase drug arrests.
The Effects of Mandatory Minimums:
Another reason given for the increase in incarceration rates is the introduction of mandatory minimums for drug offenses. Prior to 1986, the longest sentence handed down for any drug offense in the United States was one year in prison. The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 changed drug sentencing, creating mandatory minimum sentences that are typically five to ten years in federal courts. This differs from the rest of the developed world, where a first time drug offense is typically only met with up to six months in jail. Mandatory minimums are often cited as an important way of keeping violent criminals or kingpins off of the streets, but these sentences are most often handed down against nonviolent drug offenders. The U.S. Sentencing Commission has also noted that the value of a mandatory minimum is not in the sentence itself, but in its use as a bargaining chip for plea bargains that lead to more information. It has also been suggested that mandatory minimums disproportionately affect minority offenders: a five year mandatory minimum is triggered for the sale of five hundred grams of powder cocaine, a drug more typically associated with white users, while the sale of five grams of crack, a drug more typically associated with black users, triggers the same sentence.

Another offense in the United States that has a mandatory minimum is a DUI/DWI offense. However, these penalties are much more lenient, with a two day jail sentence typical for a first offense and a ten day jail sentence typical for a second offense. With a recent report stating that alcohol is the most dangerous drug, it is interesting to see mandatory minimums so much lower for this offense than for other drug offenses.

In addition to the War and Drugs which has been shown to be the largest contributing factor to mass incarceration, the private prison industrial complex, immigration deportation centers and the school to prison pipeline are other factors that contribute to mass incarceration.

Private Prison Industrial Complex
In 1984 the Corrections Corporation of America revolutionized the way prisons in the United States operate. The company took over a prison facility in Hamilton County, Tennessee -- the first time a private operator was contracted to run a jail. Between 1990 and 2010 there was a 1600% increase in the number of privately operated prisons in the U.S. By 2013, ten percent of all prisons in the U.S. were privately operated. CCA operates 67 federal and local facilities and has about 40% market share while the GEO Group operates 95 prisons in the U.S. and abroad. Today, the increase in privately operated prisons has outpaced the growth of public prison facilities.

From the birth of privatized -- for profit -- prisons to people's ability to buy and trade Wall Street Stock in such prisons, money is indelibly connected to our inflated incarceration rates. In fact, the two largest private prison corporations, CCA & the GEO Group, collectively made $3.3 billion in revenue in 2011 and CCA acquired $1.7 billion in revenue in 2012, while the Geo group received $1.6 billion (these two companies alone constitute roughly 75% of the entire 'private prisons market'). These companies are not classified as correctional facilitators; they consider themselves real estate investment trusts, or REITs, to limit corporate tax liability. Corrections Corporation of America and The GEO Group derive about 40% of their revenue from the federal government -- and are exempt from paying federal taxes.

Corporations such as these have found ways to financially profit off discriminatory legislation which masquerades under the guise of "get tough on crime" rhetoric. The prison industry has also made money by contracting prison labor to private companies. Companies benefit from this cheap labor, because prison laborers cost between 93 cents and $4 a day and prisoners do not collect benefits nor can they join unions, thus making them cheap employees. Another way that private prisons financially
profit is through a common provision that is included in a majority of private prison contracts in the U.S., according to a public records analysis release by the advocacy group In the Public Interest. The group reviewed more than 60 contracts between private prison companies and state and local governments across the country, and found language mentioning quotas for prisoners in nearly two-thirds of those analyzed. The prison bed guarantees ranged between minimums of 70 percent occupancy in a California prison to 100 percent occupancy requirements at some Arizona prisons. Most of the contracts had language mandating that at least 90 percent of prison beds be filled.

**Immigration Deportation Centers**
Hispanics currently have a one in six chance of being confined in prison during their lifetimes. Arrests for immigration offenses increased 610% over ten years – from 1,728 in 1990 to 12,266 in 2000. The United States immigrant detention system has increased from 10,000 beds to 34,000 in the last 15 years. This number has been driven in part by the detention bed quota put into place by Congress, requiring that 34,000 immigrants be utilizing that number of beds at a given time.

In 2012 it was found that private prisons, with little oversight, detain 84 percent of all detained immigrants. Over half of the revenue that private prisons receive comes from holding facilities for undocumented immigrants. Private operations run between 50% to 55% of immigrant detainment facilities. In fact, the American Legislative Exchange Council, (also known as ALEC), who is a membership organization of CCA, helped to draft and pass Arizona’s Senate Bill 1070. Some estimate that this bill led to a crackdown on undocumented immigrants that led to more than 14,000 inmates being incarcerated annually, with 80% of that business going to private prisons. Share prices for CCA and GEO have spiked sharply since the influx of unaccompanied minors who were dropped off at the boarder was reported this summer. Since July 30, CCA’s stock has increased 8.5 percent, and GEO’s has increased 7 percent.

**The School to Prison Pipeline**
The “School to Prison Pipeline” is what many refer to as policies that are in place in schools today that push students, especially those who are considered at-risk, out of classrooms and into the criminal justice system. Students are suspended, expelled and arrested for minor offenses that at one time would be dealt with at the school administrator’s level. While there is no defined point of origin to these phenomena, one thing statistics do show is that the policies that are in place, disproportionately target minority students and those will a history of learning disabilities, poverty and abuse. Zero tolerance policies have shown increased rates of suspension from 1.7 million in 1974 to 3.1 million in 2000 the most dramatic impact for children of color. Additionally, 40% of students expelled from school each year are African American. 70% of students arrested in school or referred to law enforcement are African American or Latino. African Americans are 3.5 times as likely to be suspended as whites. 68% of all incarcerated males do not have a high school diploma.

**Disproportionately Affecting Minorities**
Current incarceration rates disproportionately affect minority communities in the United States. There are currently more black people under correctional control–either in prison or jail or on probation or parole–than were in slavery in 1850. In some states, 90 percent of drug offenders are black. Almost half of the state and federal prison population is black. Also, reports show that a black boy born in 2001 has a 32.2 percent chance of serving time behind bars. Overall, black men are six times as likely to be incarcerated as white men.

Women represent the fastest growing population in prison. Women prisoners are disproportionately women of color, with African American women comprising 46% of the population nationwide, White
women comprising 36%, and Hispanic Women comprising 14%. Incarcerated women are overwhelmingly poor. When women go to prison, it takes a devastating toll on the family. Sixty seven per cent of women incarcerated in state prisons are mothers of children under 18. Women prisoners report significant histories of domestic violence.

While medical care for all prisoners is poor, the situation is far worse for women prisoners. Because prison health care systems were created for men, routine gynecological care, such as pap smears, breast exams and mammograms, is extremely rare in prisons.

The impact of incarceration rates on minority communities can also be seen through the impact on children in the community. In 2007, 1.7 million children had a parent in prison or jail, an 80% increase from 1991. 1 in 15 black children, 1 in 42 Latino children, and 1 in 111 white children had a parent in jail or prison in 2007. This means that black children were 7.5 times more likely and Hispanic children were 2.6 times more likely than white children to have a parent in prison or jail in 2007.

Additionally mental health plays a role in the prison population and needs careful consideration. About 56% of state prisoners, 45% of federal prisoners, and 64% of inmates suffer from mental illness.

Solution
A simple solution will not be found for a problem that has been festering for more than 30 years and has a multi-layered, wide scope of policy implications. However the need to engage in policy advocacy to change policies around mandatory minimums, financial gains for drug arrest, convictions and prison bed minimums is imperative. Additionally, looking at some practical community solutions like restorative justice programs is both strategic and beneficial.

The restorative justice hubs concept in Chicago, IL is a collaborative, multi-sector endeavor to establish safe and healthy community spaces for the purpose of establishing an experience of belonging, opportunity and positive transformation. The RJ Hub works to build strong relationships with the organizations, schools, faith-based institutions, etc. that are a part of the overall needed resources. The RJ Hub links affected individuals with the various resources needed to be successful while still maintaining a strong presence in his or her life. In summary, the five pillars (or principles) of the RJ Hub Model include: 1) Hospitality, 2) Accompaniment, 3) Building Relationships with youth and families, 4) Relentless Engagement of organizations and resources, and 5) Collaboration and relationships with other RJ Hubs.

A commitment to building and maintaining strong restorative justice collaborative communities will help toward the success of the at-risk individual but also create communities of care that will be the catalysts to productive community conversations that can bring about both community and public policy change.

Conclusion
At the present time issues of police and citizen division, acerbated by racial tension has been national news in states like Missouri, New York and Ohio. While these circumstances are not necessarily direct results of mass incarceration, they have clearly shown the urgent need to address racism in the United States. The correctional system in the U.S. is one example of these racial issues. With growing incarceration rates, especially in minority communities, the American public must face the issue of mass incarceration and determine a course of action for the future.
CCDA Source List

**Books**


**Websites**


Just Leadership USA: https://www.justleadershipusa.org/

Nation Inside: http://nationinside.org/

Vera Institute of Justice: http://www.vera.org/

Articles


Videos

Democracy Now: Questlove on Police Racial Profiling, Stop & Frisk, the Message He Took From Trayvon Martin Verdict – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNWzGVvLPd0


TEDx Talks: The future of race in America: Michelle Alexander at TEDxColumbus – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQ6H-Mz6hg

TEDx Talks: We Need to Talk About an Injustice: Bryan Stevenson
http://www.ted.com/talks/bryan_stevenson_we_need_to_talk_about_an_injustice?language=en

https://www.ted.com/talks/gary_haugen_the_hidden_reason_for_poverty_the_world_needs_to_address_now?language=en

Sick, Tired and Behind Bars in Ohio (incarceration & mental illness)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiFl6GKqiC0&feature=youtu.be

Elevating the Issue – Mass Incarceration, From Prison to Pulpit:
http://summitforchange.com/portfolio-item/elevating-the-issues-mass-incarceration/

Resources for small groups:

Sojourner’s Summit for Change downloadable study guide for Mass Incarceration:
http://summitforchange.com/portfolio-item/elevating-the-issues-mass-incarceration/
Appendix K

Mission Year Interventions:

The dialectical methods will involve facilitated conversation spaces around the prison system that allow for hearing of different perspectives. These may include:

- Mission Year team book discussion around Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow* and/or Jen Soering’s *The Convict Christ*.
- Documentary and dialogue on *The House I Live In* with Mission Year participants and local partners and neighbors.
- Training with Mission Year team and neighbors on the prison system led by formerly incarcerated Christian community member and/or local prison activist.
- Mission Year create an advisory board made up of local partners to gain local knowledge and feedback that shapes organizational belief and practice.

Developmental methods will center on moving people along Fowler’s faith stages from individualized thinking to broader social conscience and solidarity, from Stage 3 to Stage 4, 5, and 6.

- Participants are given Scriptural journal to reflect on passages of poverty and justice.
- Orientation themes around solidarity, advocacy, and beloved community.
- Have Mission Year team members lead training on mass incarceration to others.
- Conduct survey of alumni to see how Mission Year transformed their view of faith and justice.

Introducing archetypal metaphors to rethink and reinterpret Christian faith.

- Host event using theme of “Setting the Captives Free” to have speakers talk about biblical perspectives on mass incarceration and Christ’s liberative agenda.
- Emphasize shalom which is holistic salvation, justice, and peace.
- Introduce four biblical themes around liberation, restorative justice, prophetic confrontation of injustice, and solidarity.
- Locked in Solidarity prayer event.
- Training on justice which makes distinction between human/American justice and God’s justice.
- Write an organizational statement on mass incarceration with stakeholders.

Invite team members into kenotic activities where they have to limit privileges and comforts.

- Take group of team members to visit a prison.
- Have team members participate in Black Lives Matter protest or rally.
- Have team member participate in pilgrimage to prison or protest of prison system.
- Have young adults live immersed in low-income community impacted by mass incarceration.
- Instead of traditional mission trip provide justice trips that redefine mission (serving with, learning from rather than doing for) and put solidarity as focus.
- Mission Year yearlong program calls young adults to live simply with limited budget and access to technology for the year.
Appendix L
Mission Year Newsletter February 2015:
NEWSLETTER FROM PRISON

“Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.” - Hebrews 13:3

God has been breaking my heart over our country’s prison system. It just doesn’t seem right that the “land of liberty” has more people locked up than any other nation. So when my friend Will invited me into a prison to join the class he teaches on prison literature I readily accepted.

We made our way to the classroom where 11 guys were eager to discuss the latest book they were reading - Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Letters and Papers from Prison. The men debated whether Bonhoeffer’s scheme to kill Hitler was morally justified. “Is violence ever justified? Could God forgive someone who committed murder? When a soldier kills is it murder? Is the man who conducts the lethal injection a murderer or the Governor who makes the order?”

Later we were talking about harsh sentencing and the lack of mercy within the current system. A man named Edgar, said, “Cain, Moses, and Paul all committed murder but how did God respond? God restored them.”

I was surprised by the depth of conversation among men cast away by society. Larry, who is serving life for a crime he insists he didn’t commit, looked at me and said, “People don’t expect us to be talking like this.” I told Larry I’d like to let people know by writing about them in my newsletter.

The guys I spent the morning with were incredibly insightful, genuine, and welcoming. They sang happy birthday for my friend when they found out it was his birthday and they told him they would have gotten him a card if they had known.

I felt a deep sorrow in my heart as I left and even now as I think about it. I want mercy for all these guys. Isn’t 20 years of someone’s life enough to take? I just can’t see how caging someone for the rest of their life could be part of God’s will for anyone.

The great civil rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer said, “Nobody’s free until everybody’s free.” We know Jesus came to set the prisoners free with a grace that restores. We hope you will partner with us in remembering those in prison and advocating for restorative justice so all of us can be free.

With grace and mercy,

Shawn

P.S. If you’re interested in taking action, read my blog 12 Things You Can Do To Remember Those in Prison.
Responses from Newsletter on Prison Visit:

I can't lie, I haven't read very many newsletters since I came back to Virginia because I've been angry, depressed, and have been so confused about life in general. I saw this title and knew I had to read it.

I just want to say thank you for sharing that experience because it's beyond beautiful and definitely something that I still find myself passionate about. I met a man named David experiencing homelessness out here when I was walking around looking for a job. It was super cold but I felt like I had to talk with him so I did. We talked for close to two hours in his spot under a tree and an intersection. He told me about horrible things he experienced when he was arrested after being accused of having prescription medicine that wasn't his, which ended up being a police officer's mistake in judgement, and then told me where he came from. David started crying because he knew God still had a plan for him regardless of all the things he was dealing with. He had had a stroke not so long ago so his speech was extremely slow because he only had about 22% of his speech ability bam since the stroke. He said, "if God wanted me dead I would be sitting up there with him, but I'm not, I'm here. I'm a witness". I don't know why I felt like I wanted to share this but I think it's probably because I wouldn't have ever stopped to talk to him especially not for that long if it weren't for the ways I was challenged and grown during Mission Year. Also, I think I have a heavy heart when it comes to people who are targeted, unfairly imprisoned and then taken away for so long to then come out and be expected to go about their lives as if nothing has changed... I desire so deeply to find a way to help people in this area. I'm still working on my paralegal certification program and that's hard to keep up with however, I know that I really want to be alongside people who God has already put in place to change things that are hurtful and hindering the growth of our country and world today. I hope all is well, Thanks for letting me share.

-S

Thank you for the timely note, Shawn! Found my heart breaking over the scale and hiddenness of mass incarceration yesterday morning, and this image came to mind, borrowing from John Legend's Oscars acceptance speech... thought I should share.

Peace, Laura T.

Hey Shawn,

Just wanted to say that I really appreciated this email. I have been trying to learn more about mass incarceration, and recently visited a friend in prison, which pressed this issue back into my heart. I'd love to know more about anything you are doing in response to these issues. Also, I'd love to meet you for coffee or lunch sometime if you are able. I don't know if you remember me, but I attended the "White Identity" training you did a year or two ago at River City. Anyways, keep up the great work. Look forward to future Kingdom partnership.

Nate
12 Ways to Remember Those in Prison

1. Write a letter to someone in prison or lobby congress on their behalf.

2. Visit the prison to build relationships of care and support with prisoners.

3. Look into teaching a class or skill in prison, or financially supporting one.

4. Read about the prison system to be more informed (We recommend The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander).

5. Pray for those in prison (prisoners and corrections officers).

6. Provide year-round support and resources for children and families of the incarcerated.

7. Welcome returning prisoners into your church and provide a network of support.

8. Practice and support restorative justice.

9. If you’re an employer, be willing to train and hire people with records.

10. Host events, bible studies, and prayer gatherings in your community.

11. Advocate for more just policies: (repeal minimum sentencing laws, oppose new prison construction, medical treatment for those with mental illness, etc.).

12. Connect with organizations online and in your community working for long-term change (The Innocence Project, The Georgia Justice Project, Lawndale Christian Legal Center).
Larry and I came to a stop at the red light on the South side of Chicago. Because of the extreme cold temperatures I did not expect to see anyone outside. The man standing by the car window with the sign asking for money had frost on his mustache and beard. Without hesitation, Larry dug out two dollars from his pocket. The man lit up, took the money, and immediately ran to the nearby gas station.

What surprised me about Larry’s action was that he had just told me he was struggling financially and how he is having a hard time finding a job. Despite his circumstances, his first instinct was to give to someone else in need.

The reason Larry is struggling to find a job is he has a record dating back to when he was 19. He served time in one of Illinois’ infamous maximum security prisons for non-violent drug charges. Larry is in his fifties now but his record remains a permanent barrier to employment.

Larry and I are in a “Culturally Attentive Leadership” class at McCormick Theological Seminary. Larry grew up in the neighborhood where I live, the neighborhood I relocated to 10 years ago to better understand the realities of poverty, race, and injustice in America. We are reading a book for the class called “The New Jim Crow” about mass incarceration in the United States. While he gives me a ride home, Larry gives me his firsthand accounts of the prison system.

He tells me about prison guards that were paid off by gang leaders to turn their heads when violence broke out. He talked about how he had to navigate gang lines and how his main thought day in and day out was surviving. He told me heartbreaking stories of men who were raped because they showed small signs of weakness.

He told me the prison is definitely not about rehabilitation. It’s about survival.

Now, Larry is trying to help others who are coming out of prison move from survival to abundant life. He is part of his church’s recovery ministry counseling guys so they avoid cycles of drugs and incarceration.

Larry tells me he tried to get his record expunged. He went before the committee to share what’s he’s done with his life over the last 30 years. He owned his own business before the economy turned. He has 25 years of on the ground social work experience. He has earned two seminary Masters degrees and currently working on his doctorate.

The prosecutor who initially had him locked up showed up for his expungement hearing and testified that Larry had not changed and that he was exactly the same person as he was before. Based on this testimony, Larry was denied.
Despite the blatant injustices Larry has experienced and continues to experience he does not show anger, bitterness, or hatred. He continues to believe deeply in God, give generously, and choose love. He doesn’t demand justice for himself, but fights unjust systems so others don’t have to experience what he has.

Scripture says, “love keeps no records of wrongs.” Many of us believe in a God of grace who has wiped away our sins. This means God has expunged our records. Our sins no longer count against us. If we are to show love as God has loved us we will need to do the same.

While Washington debates economic plans, minimum wages, and job training, we have many able-bodied people who want to work but can’t because of their records. Larry has paid for his crimes. Those who are in prison pay dearly and cruelly, beyond the level of decency we would ever accept for ourselves or loved ones.

I believe I am here in the city to testify to the work God is doing. I feel a responsibility to give testimony to the transformation I see in Larry. I feel a need to stand up and shout, “Larry is a changed person! He is not the same person he used to be! He has been changed. His record has been wiped clean.”

Now, it’s time for our society to recognize this and make it so.
Every Saturday morning, youth from the west side of Chicago are provided a safe place to reflect, create, and express themselves through drums. Started as a ministry of support for children and families with incarcerated loved ones, our community drumline has become a secondary family for many in the North Lawndale community.

In an attempt to get our drumline kids talking, Mrs. Cray, a retired public school teacher who volunteers as a tutor, went around the room asking students random questions. Terrell, a seven year old student in our drumline, was asked, “What was your best vacation, and what made it so good?” As he paused to speak, I became very curious as to what he might say. I thought back to family vacations I had experienced growing up. We would take family trips during the summer to places like the Smoky Mountains in North Carolina or to see the monuments in Washington D.C. I wondered if Terrell had ever been outside of the State of Illinois, or Chicago for that matter.

My quandary was interrupted when Terrell shouted out, “When I visited my dad in prison, because I have fun with my dad.”

After Terrell spoke, there was a brief moment of sacred silence in the room. For me, it was a reminder of why we do what we do. Amidst the sometimes frantic drum practices and tough teen facades, there is pain and loneliness. And regardless of the guilt or innocence of those incarcerated, it is the innocent children and families that are forced to pay the heaviest price. It is not right or just that Terrell’s best vacation is visiting a prison.

The truth is, the prison system is a destructive and violent force in the lives of children and families in our community. One study showed that over 57% of our neighborhood is involved in the prison system in some way - either in prison, on parole, or on probation. That means the majority of kids and youth in our community have loved ones who are incarcerated.

In *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander shines a light on the injustice in our prison system. The United States has more people incarcerated than any other nation (2.1 million), half of which are African American. She reports there are more black men incarcerated now than were enslaved in 1850. Blacks and Latinos are incarcerated at disproportionate rates even though research shows that whites, blacks, and Latinos commit crimes around the same rate. Alexander argues that the mass incarceration of low-income minorities is causing the same discriminatory effects in areas of housing, education, voting, and employment as Jim Crow laws did, and as a result is creating a permanent under-class. When you incarcerate that many fathers (and mothers) you aren’t just punishing the parents, you are hurting the children.
What do we do as Christians when confronted with these harsh realities? The Bible urges us to “remember those in prison, as if you were there yourself!” (Hebrews 13:3). Jesus knew what it was like to have a loved one incarcerated. His cousin, John the Baptist, was falsely accused and arrested (and eventually executed). Perhaps this is why Jesus, in Matthew 25, tells his disciples “when I was in prison, you visited me.” As a victim of false imprisonment and injustice, Jesus entered into solidarity with the incarcerated and exposed the flawed justice system of his day. Of all people, Christians should be the most skeptical of prisons. A simple survey of prisons in the Bible will reveal that prisons were mainly used to oppress minorities, exploit the poor, and silence the prophets. And the prison system today continues to do so.

I have hope though, because Jesus came “to set prisoners free.” That is how I know that Jesus is on Terrell’s side.

As many of us will enjoy a vacation with family this year, let us remember those in prison AND the children and families that are serving time without them. I hope you will think about volunteering and supporting organizations working year-round to support families of the incarcerated. And as you get to know those children and families, I also hope you will be compelled to advocate for just policies that will set prisoners like Terrell’s dad free. In Jesus’ name.
Appendix M
CCDA Locked in Solidarity Toolkit

2015
LOCKED IN SOLIDARITY
EVENT TOOLKIT

A national prayer vigil of lament, hope and stories as we seek the Lord regarding a Christian response to Mass Incarceration.

Event Date: February 12, 2015
2015 LOCKED IN SOLIDARITY

Thank you for your willingness to host a CCDA Locked in Solidarity prayer rally on Thursday, February 12th. We are eager to partner together with CCDA communities all across the country to hold prayer vigils of lament, hope, & stories as we seek the Lord regarding a Christian response to Mass Incarceration.

While there is an opportunity to make these events unique to your community, we at CCDA would encourage you to follow these general guidelines:

- Host your event in a church, public venue or community center some time on Thursday, February 12th.
- Pray for and share stories of how mass incarceration has affected the lives of people in your community.
- Register your event here: Locked in Solidarity Event
- Make it an open event so that people and even press will be able to attend.
- Use and encourage the use of #LockedInSolidarity for all your social media surrounding the event.
- Utilize the Locked in Solidarity graphic to promote your event.
- Collect names and contact information of individuals who are wanting to more deeply engage a movement to overcome mass incarceration (see attached card).
- Register an articulate community member/leader to be the media contact for your site.
- Share at least three names and contact information of local individuals who are willing to speak to press if asked.

While there is autonomy to each event, we have provided two suggested formats that you can use as well as a prayer guide that was created for our events in 2014 by Sojourners.

We hope you find the suggested formats along with the toolkit helpful as you host one of the CCDA’s 2015, Locked in Solidarity events. Items in toolkit:

- Two suggested event agendas
- Prayer guide
- Flier you can edit with your event info

Once you have registered for the event, we will mail you the event Sign Up Cards for you to keep track of participants who want to engage further with this movement.

If you have any questions either specific to your site, the event or CCDA’s work to engage mass incarceration, please contact: Michelle Warren, CCDA’s Advocacy & Policy Engagement Director, Michelle@ccda.org
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro, welcome, opening prayer</td>
<td>Rev. Mary Tellis</td>
<td>5:00 – 5:03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Songs (lament)</td>
<td>Jude</td>
<td>5:04 – 5:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Speaker</td>
<td>Pablo</td>
<td>5:13 – 5:16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Prayer Theme 1: Youth, Families, and Incarceration</td>
<td>Cam</td>
<td>5:17 – 5:18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Prayer</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>5:19 – 5:24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Song (Negro Spiritual)</td>
<td>Angie (and crew)</td>
<td>5:25 – 5:29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Speaker</td>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>5:29 – 5:34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Prayer Theme 2: Public Policy and Incarceration – Race</td>
<td>Cam</td>
<td>5:35 – 5:36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Prayer</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>5:37 – 5:42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Song</td>
<td>Jude</td>
<td>5:43 – 5:47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Speaker</td>
<td>Anthony Grimes</td>
<td>5:48 – 5:53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Prayer Theme: Hope for the incarcerated and those reentering</td>
<td>Cam</td>
<td>5:54 – 5:55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communion/Song &amp; Free Prayer</td>
<td>Jessica Wilson/Phil</td>
<td>5:55 – 6:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing Prayer</td>
<td>Mary Tellis</td>
<td>6:00 – 6:01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For prayer themes preceding free prayer (Cam): Start with a very short 1-2 verse Scripture reading relevant to the topic & share relevant stats. Encourage everyone to pray freely, but keep it tight at 5mins as a whole segment.
Locked In Solitary Prayer Gathering Agenda:

7:00  Gather
7:05  State why we’re here
7:15  A time of sharing stories and uplifting voices from the community
7:30  A time of reading passages of Scripture and praying for our nation
7:40  A period of highlight statistics and praying for particular aspects of the criminal justice system.
7:50  Pray for your community and local churches to mobilize around this issue
8:00  Pray for prisoners and their families by name, ask for God’s wisdom concerning how we as the Body can best support and walk alongside them
8:15  Concluding prayers and next steps

Gather - State why we’re here:

- To raise awareness about Mass Incarceration
- To acknowledge its effect on our community & the nation at large.
- To hear stories from families and community members affected by Mass Incarceration,
- To pray, read the word, and stand in solidarity with the incarcerated and their families, interceding on their behalf and learning how we can more faithfully respond to the epidemic as the Body of Christ.

Define Mass incarceration:

Mass Incarceration refers to the astronomical rise in incarceration rates in our nation. Since 1980, the year associated with the launch of “the War on Drugs,” the United States has seen an unprecedented rise in incarceration rates. Our nation's prison population has quintupled over a 30-year period. The United States currently has the highest incarceration rate and the most prisoners of any country in the world. These incarceration rates, which have run independent of crime rates, are suggested to be the result of policy changes over the last 30 to 35 years. In addition, incarceration rates have been documented to be disproportionately affecting minority communities in the U.S. Mass Incarceration also refers to the ability to financially profit from incarcerating people.
According to Michelle Alexander, author of The New Jim Crow, mass incarceration is defined by a form of racialized social control that creates an under caste—“a lower caste of individuals who are permanently barred by law and custom from mainstream society” (13).

Incarceration rates in our nation have been driven by four primary forces:

1) The War on Drugs
2) The Private Prison Industrial Complex
3) Immigration Deportation Centers
4) The School to Prison Pipeline

Provide some statistics highlighting the problem of Mass Incarceration:

Juveniles and incarceration:

- 7.3 million children have at least one incarcerated parent in our nation today.
- Approximately 70% of these children will end up in the criminal justice system in their lifetime.
- 14 states in the U.S. have no minimum age for trying children as adults.
- Children as young as 8 have been prosecuted as adults within our nation.
- Some states set the minimum age for trying youth as adults at 10, 12, or 13 years old.
- Some 10,000 children are housed in adult jails & prisons on any given day in the U.S.
- Incarcerating children with adults needlessly puts children at risk
- Children are 5 times more likely to be sexually assaulted in adult prisons than they are in juvenile facilities
- Children are more likely to commit suicide after being housing in adult facilities

Race and incarceration:

- Hispanics have a one in six chance of being confined in prison during their lifetimes.
- It is predicted that one in every three black males will serve time in jail or prison in their lifetime.
- “In at least fifteen states, blacks are admitted to prison on drug charges at a rate from twenty to fifty-seven times greater than that of white men.” (96). Michelle Alexander – The New Jim Crow. This is true even though research has shown time and time again that African Americans are no more likely to use or sell drugs than Caucasian Americans.
- “Today there are more African-American adults under correctional control, in prison or jail, on probation or parole, than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War.” (Michelle Alexander)
Addiction is not a cause for incarceration, people need help not incarceration:

- About 56% of state prisoners, 45% of federal prisoners, and 64% of inmates suffer from mental illness.
- Nearly 76% of inmates who have a mental health problem are dependent on or abuse alcohol or drugs.
- The amount of people incarcerated for drug offenses increased 1,412% between 1980 and 2006.
- There are approximately 3,278 people serving life without parole for nonviolent offenses.

Private for profit prisons:

- In 1984 the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) revolutionized the way prisons in the United States operate. The company took over a prison facility in Hamilton County, Tennessee -- the first time a private operator was contracted to run a jail.
- Between 1990 and 2010 there was a 1600% increase in the number of privately operated prisons in the U.S. By 2013, ten percent of all prisons in the U.S. were privately operated.
- Today, the increase in privately operated prisons has outpaced the growth of public prison facilities.
- From the birth of privatized -- for profit -- prisons to people's ability to buy and trade Wall Street Stock in such prisons, money is indelibly connected to our inflated incarceration rates.
- The two largest private prison corporations, CCA & the GEO Group, collectively made $3.3 billion in revenue in 2011. CCA acquired $1.7 billion in revenue in 2012, while the Geo group received $1.6 billion. These two companies alone constitute roughly 75% of the entire ‘private prisons market’.

Here’s a clip you can use of Michelle Alexander talking about the problem of Mass Incarceration at CCDA’s 2013 National Conference in New Orleans:  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cp7GimA-h3Q
Provide a theological framework: What should Christians do with prisoners & prisons?

The LORD’s response to prisoners:

- For the LORD hears the needy and does not despise his own people who are prisoners. (Psalm 69:33)
- The LORD viewed the earth to hear the groans of the prisoner. (Psalm 102:19-20)
- The LORD gives freedom to prisoners. (Psalm 146:7) Messiah/Jesus’ response to prisoners:
  - Set the prisoners free. (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18-19).
  - I was in prison and you visited me. (Matthew 25:36).

Old Testament people of faith in prison:

- Joseph (Genesis 39:20)
- Prophet Micaiah (1 Kings 22:26)
- Prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 32)

New Testament response:

- “Remember those in prison, as though in prison with them.” (Hebrews 13:3)
- Earnest prayer was made to God (for Peter in prison) by the church (Acts 12:5)

Biblical letters written in prison:

- Ephesians
- Colossians
- Philippians
- Philemon

Theological application to present day:

- Scripture says that the "love of money is the root of all kinds of evil," and upon closer examination it’s become apparent that both individuals’ and corporations’ love of money are inherently wed to our nation's mass incarceration epidemic. From the birth of privatized -- for profit -- prisons to people's ability to buy and trade Wall Street Stock in such prisons, money is indelibly connected to our inflated incarceration rates.
- Our current penal system counteracts God’s desire to see people made whole, restored, and reinstated into society.
• Richard Snyder in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Punishment* says “While Yahweh may have said, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay’...it would seem that our society...considers itself to be God...and nowhere is the spirit of punishment more visible and more virulent than in our prisons.” (Pg 2)

• Walter J. Burghardt, in his text *Justice: A Global Adventure*, helps the Church assess how we are called to respond to our broken criminal justice system saying that ultimately, the Church must seek “New approaches that understands crime as a threat to community, not just a violation of law; that demands new efforts to rebuild lives, not just build more prisons, and that demonstrate a commitment to reweave a broader social fabric of respect for life, civility, responsibility, and reconciliation.” Rather than supporting a system that merely punishes, the Church must pursue a justice system that builds community and seeks God’s shalom. (Burghardt, 54)

• Burghart says that this is the case because “biblical justice is making things right, not simply recognizing or defining individual rights. Its concern is the right relation of human beings to God and to one another.” This not the concern of our present system.

• While incarcerated, Paul wrote Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, and Philippians. These four books are commonly referred to as the “prison epistles” or “captive letters”

*How can we tangibly respond?*

• Christians can take action on every end of the prison pipeline-from schools, to prisons, to re-entry.

• Adopt a school; tutor children, build relationships with teachers & administrators-fundraise for underfunded schools, provide mentoring, help house summer feeding programs for students on free or reduced lunch throughout the school year.

• Pray for prisoners, visit them, write them, support their families during their incarceration, go the extra mile to include children of incarcerated parents as a way of breaking the cycle.

• Resist creating a system of shame and silence around incarceration in your congregation & neighborhoods. Inform people of the risk and potential pitfalls.

• Partner with recovery ministries, don’t try to recreate the wheel--let the experts be the experts, but provide spiritual, social-emotional support to existing programs. Embrace the formerly incarcerated as those made fully in the image of God, as people that God is at work in making all things new. When possible provide financial support as a way of empowering people to get back on their feet. Help them acquire at least their GED & secure work. (Recidivism among repeat offenders has dropped in some states by 33% among inmates who earned a GED while incarcerated).

• Reassure them of God’s love for them, through your words and actions.
Pray for the perseverance and discernment to do what the Lord has commanded the church to do.

"I, the Lord, have called you and given you power to see that justice is done on earth. Through you I will make a covenant with all peoples; through you I will bring light to the nations. You will open the eyes of the blind and set free those who sit in dark prisons."

Isaiah 42:6-7

Pray for racial equity in arrests and sentencing.

- More African Americans are in the criminal justice system than there were slaves in the 1850s.
- Two-thirds of inmates arrested for drug offenses are Hispanic or black, even though whites and minorities use drugs at the same rate.
- It is predicted that one in every three black males will serve time in jail or prison in their lifetime.

Pray for at-risk youth, that God brings adult mentors into their lives; that they recognize the importance of education and relationships; and that they always know their own value and dignity.

- 7.3 million children have at least one incarcerated parent.
- Approximately 70% of these children will end up in the criminal justice system in their lifetime.
- Children of incarcerated parents are five times more likely to commit crimes than their peers.

"Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’"

Matthew 19:14

Jesus said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Luke 4:18-19
The Lord says...

“When the time comes to save you, I will show you favor and answer your cries for help. I will guard and protect you and through you make a covenant with all peoples. I will let you settle once again in your land that is now laid waste. I will say to the prisoners, ‘Go free!’ and to those who are in darkness, ‘Come out to the light!’ They will be like sheep that graze on the hills; they will never be hungry or thirsty. Sun and desert heat will not hurt them, for they will be led by one who loves them...”

Isaiah 49:8-10

Pray that mandatory minimums and harsh drug sentencing laws may be changed. Pray for those who have been sentenced to life without parole for nonviolent drug offenses.

- The amount of people incarcerated for drug offenses increased 1,412% between 1980 and 2006.
- There are approximately 3,278 people serving life without parole for nonviolent offenses.

Pray that God may end private prison corporations and the business of making money off of inmates. Pray that God will use stockholders to protect the image of the Lord in each inmate.

- The average minimum wage for inmates working in private prisons is $0.93 per hour. Some inmates receive $0 per hour.
- In 2011, the Corrections Corporation of America reported $1.7 billion in revenue.
- In 2011, the Geo Group reported $1.6 billion in total revenue.

Pray for those suffering from mental illness or addiction, that they may receive medical treatment and rehabilitation, for they are worthy and deserving of medical care.

- About 56% of state prisoners, 45% of federal prisoners, and 64% of inmates suffer from mental illness.
- Nearly 76% of inmates who have a mental health problem are dependent on or abuse alcohol or drugs.

“News about [Jesus] spread as far as Syria, and people soon began bringing to him all who were sick. And whatever their sickness or disease...he healed them all.”

Matthew 4:24

Pray for our nation’s leaders and decision makers that they may govern in support of all people, including returning citizens.

“First of all, I encourage you to make petitions, prayers, intercessions, and prayers of thanks for all people, for rulers, and for everyone who has authority over us. Pray for these people so that we can have a quiet and peaceful life always lived in a godly and reverent way. This is good and pleases God...”

1 Timothy 2:1-3

Pray for the church that we may humble ourselves, show no judgment to those incarcerated, and treat all members of the body equally.

“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”

Romans 12:3-5
Many of us have a deep sense that the world is not as it should be. Broken relationships. Divided communities. Poverty and violence in our neighborhoods . . .

The good news is that God longs to work through us to help restore things to the way they were intended to be. In the language of the Old Testament, this wholeness is called shalom—a state where nothing is missing and nothing is broken.

The Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) is a network of Christians committed to seeing people and communities wholistically restored. We believe that God wants to restore us not only to right relationship with Himself but also with our own true selves, our families and our communities. Not just spiritually, but emotionally, physically, economically, and socially. Not by offering mercy alone, but by undergirding mercy with justice.

To this end, we follow Jesus’s example of reconciliation. We go where the brokenness is. We live among the people in some of America’s neediest neighborhoods. We become one with our neighbors until there is no longer an "us" and "them" but only a "we." And, in the words of the Prophet Jeremiah, "we work and pray for the well-being of our city [or neighborhood]," trusting that if the entire community does well and prospers, then we will prosper also.

Those of us who orient our lives around this practice we call Christian Community Development (CCD) Practitioners. As Practitioners, we often commit to living in an under-resourced neighborhood for a minimum of 10 years. This is obviously no easy task. But we believe that true and lasting change takes time and requires real relationships. We think this approach is pretty unique.

Our Vision
Wholistically restored communities with Christians fully engaged in the process of transformation.

Our Mission
To inspire, train, and connect Christians who seek to bear witness to the Kingdom of God by reclaiming and restoring under-resourced communities.

Our Statement of Faith
The Lord Jesus Christ, God’s son, redeems us through His death and resurrection and empowers us by the Holy Spirit. The Bible is God’s Word and through it we are called to live out justice, reconciliation, and redemption. The church nurtures God’s people gathered in a community to carry out God’s Word.

Our Inspiration
"Where there is no vision, the people perish . . . " (Prov 29:18)
The New Jim Crow Book Discussion Outline

Book Synopsis: In *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander, makes a case that the massive expansion of the prison system is disproportionately affecting African Americans and minorities, and causing the same discriminatory effects in areas of housing, education, voting, employment as Jim Crows laws did, creating a permanent under-class or undercaste. She writes to shine a light on the prison system to show how massive the problem is and challenges us to reexamine our assumption about the justice system.

I want to show a clip of Michelle Alexander talking in her own words about the New Jim Crow: (watch youtube video “Michelle Alexander On the Effects of Mass Incarceration” by VH1 (3:37 min).

To start the conversation I want to acknowledge that this is not just an academic discussion. With 2.3 million people incarcerated, over 7 million Americas in the correctional system, it is something that I will touch all of us at some point if it hasn’t already. I got emotional reading this book and I know others probably did too. I want to start by asking a personal/emotional question before getting into the academic questions.

1. How are you/have you been personally affected by the prison system? How did reading this book impact you personally or emotionally?

2. Alexander makes the case, mass incarceration is a new mutation of Jim Crow. How is mass incarceration similar and/or different than Jim Crow? Alexander argues in some ways mass incarceration is worse. Do you think it’s helpful or unhelpful to consider the prison system as a New Jim Crow? (Facilitator note: on page 17, Alexander argues that the shame and stigma of the prison label is worse than Jim Crow).

3. Alexander argues that the War on Drugs is largely responsible for the expansion of mass incarceration and it has largely played out by race. She states the prison system is not about punishment of crime but about social control. How is racism and white privilege maintained through laws in the justice system? How does the prison system treat white people compared to people of color? (pg 60, Convictions for drug offenses are the single most important cause of the explosion in incarceration rates in the U.S. Drug offenses account for two-thirds of the rise in the federal inmate population and more than half of the rise in state prisoners between 1985-2000.

Pg 98, majority of illegal drug users nationwide are white, three-fourths of all those imprisoned for drug offenses have been black or Latino

Black youth are 46 times more likely to be arrested for drug use than white youth.

4. Mass incarceration is a network. “Mass incarceration refers to the larger web of laws, rules, policies, and customs that control those labeled prisoners both in and out of prison (pgs. 12-13). What are some of the different parts of mass incarceration that are in need
of reform if we are to truly be a land of liberty with justice for all? (Policing, sentencing, juries, tough on crime, etc.)

5. How does the new jim crow impact families and communities?

6. What role have politicians played in the development of mass incarceration (Nixon, Reagan, Clinton).

7. What is the difference between America’s criminal justice system and other countries?

Have different people read the following Scripture passages:

Amos 5:24; Isaiah 61:1-2; Matthew 25:35-40; Hebrews 13:3; James 2:13

8. What’s the difference between American’s criminal justice system and God’s justice?

9. What are theological resources for addressing mass incarceration? Why should Christians care about interrupting the New Jim Crow?

Additional Reading:

*The Convict Christ* by Jens Soering

*The Executed God* by Mark Lewis Taylor

*Imprisoning Communities*, Todd Clear

*Are Prisons Obsolete?* by Angela Davis
The United States incarcerates more people than any other country in the world: 2.4 million inmates and 4.7 million on probation/parole making 6.9 million people under some form of criminal justice supervision.

Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body (Hebrews 13:3-5 ESV)

THANK YOU!

Thank you for your willingness to host a CCDA Reel Justice: Exploring Mass Incarceration Through Film event. We are thankful for your partnership and pray through our collective efforts with communities like yours, will be able to explore the following objectives:

- Learn about the systemic issues associated with mass incarceration
- Learn about a Christian theological perspective on redemption and restoration around incarceration
- Learn ways to engage your broader community through intentional advocacy
JOIN THE BROADER CONVERSATION:

We trust that this experience will not only further educate your local community on mass incarceration but with this new awareness, join others in the CCDA association who are working collectively to engage mass incarceration advocacy more deeply.

We encourage you to check out additional resources on our website:
www.CCDA.org/biblical-justice

Also, please “like” our advocacy Facebook page. We are always working to bring the most up-to-date information around our advocacy issues:
www.facebook.com/biblicalljustice

We at CCDA are always looking to share your perspectives through our blog and social media efforts, so please reach out and let us know what you are thinking! You can join the conversations by searching hashtags #lockedinsolidarity 
#advocacyccda and #amccda

If you have any questions either specific to your event or CCDA’s work to engage mass incarceration, contact: Michelle Warren, CCDA’s Advocacy & Policy Engagement Director
michelle@ccda.org or follow her on Twitter @michwarren
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**MASS INCARCERATION TASK FORCE:**
Dominique Gilliard  
Amy Williams  
Shawn Casselberry  
Meea Walker  
Leroy Barber  
Troy Jackson  
Cliff Nellis  
Michelle Warren, CCDA

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**The Christian Community Development Association (CCDA)** is a network of Christians committed to seeing people and communities wholistically restored. We believe that God wants to restore us not only to right relationship with Himself but also with our own true selves, our families and our communities. Not just spiritually, but emotionally, physically, economically, and socially. Not by offering mercy alone, but by undergirding mercy with justice.
HOW TO USE TOOLKIT:

This toolkit contains suggested event schedules to help you customize your event for your audience and community. We recognize that each event needs to have an agenda that is best geared toward the unique time structure for your group. There are three suggested agendas that provide space for one, two or multiple movie options. We can work with your team to further develop one of the suggested agendas or help craft one that is better suited to your needs.

In addition to the agendas, the toolkit provides a list of films to choose from for your event. We strongly encourage you show the film “The House I Live In” as one or the only film at your event. We believe this film does the best job of explaining the history and present condition of mass incarceration in the United States. If your group has already viewed or had exposure to this film, our alternative film suggestion is “Broken On All Sides.”

If you are choosing more than one film event agenda, there are several other choices with summaries and links to trailers contained in this resource. We have also provided Discussion Questions for interactive, small group time after viewing the films. These questions will help guide the audience to continue to explore this conversation with others.

A Fact Sheet about mass incarceration’s impact, along with steps for future advocacy engagement is also enclosed. This is provided so that your ability to go beyond this shared learning space and the call for change, is more informed.

Theology of redemption and restoration is central to the Bible and speaks to how the church can engage those who are impacted by mass incarceration. It is an important element that needs to be explored more deeply during the event. Our intended purpose and hope for these events are to provide the church, not only with facts and stories to help people understand mass incarceration, but to provide a theological foundation of God’s heart for people and His justice: to see people fully restored. It is from this theological understanding, coupled with a humanized perspective, that we will articulate our collective desire to seek systemic change.

ITEMS IN THE TOOLKIT:

- Suggested event agendas
- Selected Film list with summaries and links to film trailers
- Guided questions for discussion
- Scripture references
- National FACT sheet about Mass Incarceration
- Next steps for engaging systemic injustices
SUGGESTED AGENDAS:

2015 REEL JUSTICE FILM FESTIVAL

Choose from the following three (3) suggested agendas for your event:

AGENDA A (Evening and Half Day)

**Friday Evening** *(time set by church – estimated 2 hours)*

- Introduction of evening by Church Representative
-Greetings from CCDA Mass Incarceration Task Force Member
- Opening prayer
- Testimony/Story of returning citizen *(find someone locally to share story)*
- Show Film Trailer *(for main film to be shown the following day—either The House I Live In OR Broken on All Sides)*
- Special Event Speaker – Leroy Barber
- Brief Intro of Saturday’s events
- Remarks/Info from CCDA Mass Incarceration Task Force Member
- Closing by Church Representative
- Closing prayer

*After Event: Leroy Barber book signing*

**Saturday** *(time set by church – estimated 3 to 4 hours)*

- Introduction of evening by Church Representative
- Greetings from CCDA Mass Incarceration Task Force Member
- Testimony/Story of returning citizen *(optional: find someone locally to share story)*
- Show film *(either The House I Live In OR Broken on All Sides)*
- BREAK
- Briefing of Small Group Purpose/Small group discussion *(questions provided)*
- Collective group dialogue *(one rep from each group to share)*
- Briefing/Select action steps led by CCDA Mass Incarceration Task Force Member
- Remarks/Info from CCDA Mass Incarceration Task Force Member
- Closing by Church Representative
- Closing prayer
AGENDA B (Evening and Full Day)

FRIDAY EVENING (time set by church – estimated 2 hours)
- Introduction of evening by Church Representative
- Greetings from CCDA Mass Incarceration Task Force Member
- Opening prayer
- Testimony/Story of returning citizen (find someone locally to share story)
- Show Film Trailer (for main film to be shown the following day—either The House I Live In OR Broken on All Sides)
- Special Event Speaker – Leroy Barber
- Brief Intro of Saturday’s events
- Remarks/Info from CCDA Mass Incarceration Task Force Member
- Closing by Church Representative
- Closing prayer

*After Event: Leroy Barber book signing

SATURDAY (time set by church – estimated 6 to 7 hours)
Morning:
- Introduction of evening by Church Representative
- Greetings from CCDA Mass Incarceration Task Force Member
- Testimony/Story of returning citizen (optional: find someone locally to share story)
- Show film (either The House I Live In OR Broken on All Sides)
  BREAK
- Briefing of Small Group Purpose/Small group discussion (questions provided)
- Collective group dialogue (one rep from each group to share)

LUNCH BREAK

Afternoon:
- Show 1 film with specific focus on youth or women (make selection from suggested films 30 – 45 minutes or less)
- Small group discussion
- Collective group dialogue
  BREAK
- Briefing/Select action steps led by CCDA Mass Incarceration Task Force Member
- Remarks/Info from CCDA Mass Incarceration Task Force Member
- Closing by Church Representative
- Closing prayer
AGENDA C (Evening and Full Day)

FRIDAY EVENING *(time set by church – estimated 2 hours)*
- Introduction of evening by Church Representative
- Greetings from CCDA Mass Incarceration Task Force Member
- Opening prayer
- Testimony/Story of returning citizen *(find someone locally to share story)*
- Show Film Trailer *(for main film to be shown the following day—either The House I Live In OR Broken on All Sides)*
- Special Event Speaker – Leroy Barber
- Brief Intro of Saturday’s events
- Remarks/Info from CCDA Mass Incarceration Task Force Member
- Closing by Church Representative
- Closing prayer
  *After Event: Leroy Barber book signing*

SATURDAY *(time set by church – estimated 6 to 7 hours)*

Morning:
- Introduction of evening by Church Representative
- Greetings from CCDA Mass Incarceration Task Force Member
- Testimony/Story of returning citizen *(optional: find someone locally to share story)*
- Show film *(either The House I Live In OR Broken on All Sides)*
  BREAK
- Briefing of Small Group Purpose/Small group discussion *(questions provided)*
- Collective group dialogue *(one rep from each group to share)*
  LUNCH BREAK

Afternoon:
- BREAKOUT SESSION: Show various films at same time/different rooms based on interest (youth, women, etc.) These films range from 30 - 45 minutes. Participants will select which one they would like to view.
- While still in breakout session: Based on numbers, groups can break into small groups for discussion or the group can discuss as a whole
  BREAK
- Come back together in main session for collective dialogue/share about other films
- Briefing/Select action steps led by CCDA Mass Incarceration Task Force Member
- Remarks/Info from CCDA Mass Incarceration Task Force Member
- Closing by Church Representative
- Closing prayer
MAIN FILM CHOICES: Choose one of the following as your main film event.

The House I Live In
108 mins
www.thehouseilivein.org

Over forty years, the War on Drugs has accounted for more than 45 million arrests, made America the world’s largest jailer, and damaged poor communities at home and abroad. Yet for all that, drugs are cheaper, purer, and more available today than ever before. Filmed in more than twenty states, The House I Live In captures heart-wrenching stories from individuals at all levels of America’s War on Drugs. From the dealer to the grieving mother, the narcotics officer to the senator, the inmate to the federal judge, the film offers a penetrating look inside America’s longest war, offering a definitive portrait and revealing its profound human rights implications.

While recognizing the seriousness of drug abuse as a matter of public health, the film investigates the tragic errors and shortcomings that have meant it is more often treated as a matter for law enforcement, creating a vast machine that feeds largely on America’s poor, and especially on minority communities. Beyond simple misguided policy, The House I Live In examines how political and economic corruption have fueled the war for forty years, despite persistent evidence of its moral, economic, and practical failures.

Broken on All Sides: Race, Mass Incarceration and New Visions for Criminal Justice in the US
68 mins
http://brokenonallsides.com/

The project began as a way to explore, educate about, and advocate change around the overcrowding of the Philadelphia county jail system. The documentary has come to focus on mass incarceration across the nation and the intersection of race and poverty within criminal justice.

The documentary centers around the theory put forward by many, and most recently by Michelle Alexander (who appears in the movie), that mass incarceration has become “The New Jim Crow.” That is, since the rise of the drug war and the explosion of the prison population, and because discretion within the system allows for arrest and prosecution of people of color at alarmingly higher rates than whites, prisons and criminal penalties have become a new version of Jim Crow. Much of the discrimination that was legal in the Jim Crow era is today illegal when applied to black people but perfectly legal when applied to "criminals." The problem is that through subjective choices, people of color have been targeted at significantly higher rates for stops, searches, arrests, prosecution, and harsher sentences. So, where does this leave criminal justice?
FILMS WITH FOCUS:
Choose from the following for a more focused look at mass incarceration and its impact on youth and women.

YOUTH FOCUS:

“Young Kids, Hard Time” 45 mins
http://www.msnbc.com

Young Kids, Hard Time is an American MSNBC TV show which premiered November 20th 2011. The show is about children age 12 to 17 incarcerated as adults in the American prison system. These children have all been tried as an adult. The United States is among only a few countries in the world where children can be tried as adults. The show was shot at the Pendleton Juvenile Correctional Facility and the YIA (Youth Incarcerated As Adults) unit of the Wabash Valley Correctional Facility in Indiana. The crimes portrayed range from theft to parricide. Wabash is also unlike any other adult prison in the state of Indiana. It is home to a cell-block of 53 kids sentenced as adults, who aren’t even close to being ready for what lies behind the bars.

“Children Behind Bars: American Youth Violence” 46 mins
http://www.msnbc.com

Documentary meeting some of America’s most dangerous young offenders. The Wabash Valley Correctional Facility in Indiana is home to 40 teenagers serving terms of up to 65 years for a range of serious crimes. This programme follows those spending their first night in the maximum-security prison and others preparing to move up to adult jail. They include Blake Layman, 17, sentenced to 55 years for murder, and Ireland MacKean, 16, who says he wants to stay out of trouble behind bars as he starts a 10-year term for robbery.

“Children In Prison: Locked Up For Life” 55 mins
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tl6laivHUAQ

Eleven years ago Kenneth Young received four life sentences. He was 15 years old. The United States is the only country in the world that routinely condemns children to die in prison. This is the story of one of those children, now a young man, seeking a second chance in Florida - one of the most punitive states in the country. For over a decade Kenneth believed he would die behind bars, until in 2010 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled life without parole sentences for children who haven’t killed unconstitutional. In Tampa, Florida we follow Kenneth Young’s legal battle for release. Recruited by his mother’s crack dealer to rob hotels, Kenneth needs to prove that he is rehabilitated and that the judge who sentenced him to life was wrong to throw away the key. “15 to life” weaves the unfolding story of Kenneth’s resentencing with the story of his difficult childhood, and the circumstances that lead to a 30-day crime spree that changed his life forever. Of the more than 2,500 children sentenced to life in prison, Kenneth’s story is both exceptional and universal. Like most children who receive death-in-prison sentences, Kenneth is African American, indigent and neglected. What makes his case extreme is the brutality of his punishment - four life sentences for armed robberies in which no one was injured.

“Alone: Teens in Solitary Confinement” 22 mins

It’s an epidemic of what some call state-sanctioned torture in America: the solitary confinement of thousands of incarcerated teenagers, locked in cells the size of small bathrooms for up to 23 hours a day. ALONE tells this story by investigating New York City’s Rikers Island jail complex, where unconvicted teens often find themselves confined in ‘the box’ for months at a time and contrasted with a more progressive facility in California where officials use solitary confinement reluctantly and as a last resort. ALONE is a candid and critical look at one of the most controversial forms of incarceration affecting adolescents in the United States, a form of punishment shrouded in secrecy.
FILMS WITH FOCUS:
Choose from the following for a more focused look at mass incarceration and its impact on youth and women.

WOMEN FOCUS:

“A Nation of Women Behind Bars” (20/20) 30 mins

ABC News Anchor Diane Sawyer takes you on a journey into the world of women living behind bars in America’s prison system today. “A Nation of Women Behind Bars,” a Diane Sawyer “Hidden America” special is a one-hour primetime event. On both political sides, there is an agreement that the American prison system needs to be reexamined. The United States has larger populations and longer sentences than much of the world. Women are the fastest growing group of prisoners in the country compared to men. Diane Sawyer and team went into four prisons across the country for eight months to see what’s wrong and what’s next. The women and their crimes and sentences pose the tough questions.

Women Behind Bars and the Families They Left Behind; The Duel Between Inmates and Officers Over Prison Contraband; What Life Is Like For the Mentally Ill at Women’s Prisons

“Women Behind Bars” 30 mins.

Women are the fastest growing population in the criminal justice system. Low level drugs offences and crimes associated with poverty have swept in hundreds of thousands of women across the US. Many have spent years behind bars for non-violent offences. In California, after promises of prison reform, women continue to face some of the highest levels of overcrowding.

And while the state boasts of significantly reducing the female prison population, county jails have disproportionately filled up with women who are still being swept in for the lowest-level crimes. Allen Hooper, from the American Civil Liberties Union, explains: “The prison construction, sort of filled a void and a vacuum, both in terms of keeping the economy going just with the construction and the jobs and then also people who were unemployed because of the economy who get caught up in crimes of poverty ... You scoop them up you figure out excuses to put them in those cages.” Fault Lines travels to California to look inside the criminal justice system and asks why so many women are behind bars.

This documentary from The Center for Investigative Reporting captures the stories of youth who have been in solitary confinement, and includes perspectives from youth and correctional personnel. The film highlights Santa Cruz County Juvenile Hall, which is considered a national model for having effectively reduced the use of solitary confinement among youth.
Guided Discussion Questions
(Choose from the following questions to help guide your discussion)

- What are some new concepts you learned as a result of the film?

- Did you learn concepts that were contrary to what you initially thought? If so, in what ways?

- Do you think race ties into our criminal justice system? If so, how?

- Do you see any parallels between the racial divide today and the era of segregation?

- How do labels affect the transition of those returning home, i.e. felon, ex-con, criminal? (We suggest the term “Returning Citizens”)

- How do we, as a community, help reduce the shame and stigma of branding people who were formally incarcerated?

- How should the church be responding to mass incarceration?

- How can the Body of the Christ address systemic injustices associated with mass incarceration?

- What does rehabilitation look like?
MASS INCARCERATION

FACT SHEET

Introduction
Since 1980, the United States has seen an unprecedented rise in incarceration rates. Our nation’s prison population has quintupled over a 30-year period. The United States currently has the highest incarceration rate and the most prisoners of any country in the world. These incarceration rates, which have run independent of crime rates, are suggested to be the result of policy changes over the last 30 to 35 years. In addition, incarceration rates have been documented to be disproportionately affecting minority communities in the U.S.

Background
In the decades leading up to 1980, the United States had annual incarceration rates similar to rates in other developed countries. Since 1980, the United States has seen a dramatic rise in incarceration rates. In 1980, 220 out of every 100,000 people in the United States were incarcerated. That rate had increased more than threefold by 2010, with 731 out of every 100,000 people incarcerated that year. This number only shows the annual number of people in prison or jail, and does not show the millions of people who are under the corrective system that are on probation or parole. Approximately 6.9 million people were under the supervision of the adult correctional control system at the end of 2012 (prison or jail, probation or parole), while the correctional facility population (prison or jail) surpassed 2.4 million people in 2014.

Five Primary Drivers
Incarceration rates have been driven by what we believe to stem from five primary forces: the War on Drugs, the Private Prison Industrial Complex, Immigration Deportation Centers, the School to Prison Pipeline and Mental Illness. Below are some supportive statistics on each of the five drivers:

The War on Drugs
- The amount of people incarcerated for drug offenses increased 1,412% between 1980 & 2006.
- There are approximately 3,278 people serving life without parole for nonviolent offenses, primarily for drug related charges (ACLU: Living Death—Life without Parole for Nonviolent Offenses).

The Private Prison Industrial Complex
- Between 1990 & 2010 there was a 1600% increase in the number of privately operated prisons in the U.S.
- By 2013, 10% of all prisons in the U.S. were privately operated.
- Today, the increase in privately operated prisons has outpaced the growth of public prison facilities (ACLU: Banking on Bondage).

Immigration Deportation Centers
- Arrests for immigration offenses increased 610% over ten years – from 1,728 in 1990 to 12,266 in 2000 (Fox News Latino).
- Hispanics represented 16.3% of the U.S. population yet accounted for 50.2% of those incarcerated for felonies within the U.S. criminal justice system within the first nine months of 2011 (according to the U.S. Sentencing Commission).

The School to Prison Pipeline
- Zero tolerance policies have shown increased rates of suspension from 1.7 million in 1974 to 3.1 million in 2000—the most dramatic impact for children of color (http://bit.ly/1N6gZTL)
- 70% of students arrested in school or referred to law enforcement are African American or Latino. African Americans are 3.5 times as likely to be suspended as whites (http://1.usa.gov/1N6gG1H)
- 1 in every 4 male, African American high school drop outs is incarcerated or institutionalized compared to 1 in every 10 while males (http://bit.ly/1Nds4dG)
- 68 percent of state prison inmates don’t have a high school diploma (www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ecp.pdf)

Mental Health
- About 56% of state prisoners, 45% of federal prisoners, and 64% of all inmates suffer from mental illness.
- 1.25 million people who suffer from mental illness are currently behind bars, when you combine those in both our jails and prisons (Bureau of Justice Statistic: Mental Health Problems of Prison and Jail Inmates).
RESISTING INJUSTICE: A CALL TO CHRISTIANS

By Shawn Casselberry

America is referred to as the “Land of Liberty,” yet we have more people locked up than any other country in the world. There are over 2.3 million people in our prisons, the majority of whom are minority and low-income. Mass incarceration and the private prison industry has become an economic engine for profit at the expense of economically and socially at-risk individuals and communities. The prison industry has quadrupled in the last three decades even while the rates of crime have decreased.

- The American justice system has become focused on retributive justice instead of restoration and redemption. The God of the Bible is a God of justice and mercy.
  - “For I, the LORD, love justice.” Isaiah 61:8.
  - “The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.” Psalm 103:8

Ninevah was a wicked nation that committed many crimes against God and humanity. Jonah is reluctant to go because he knows their reputation as being unlawful but he also knows God’s reputation as being gracious and merciful. Jonah does not want to extend mercy to Ninevah but God does.

- God takes justice seriously and calls us to take it seriously too. As Christians, we are all called to do justly.
  - “Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.” Isaiah 1:17
  - “You know what the Lord requires of you, but to ‘Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with your God.’ Micah 6:8

Biblical justice involves protecting the vulnerable and confronting those in power. It calls for an end to exploitation, profiteering, and systems that steal, kill, and destroy.

- Part of the mission of the Messiah was to reveal God’s justice and set the prisoners free.
  - “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.” Isaiah 61:1-2, Luke 4:18.

As Christ’s body on earth, this is our mission too.

- Christ invites us to identify with the prisoner, to see Christ in the prisoner.
  - “I was in prison and you visited me.” Matthew 25:36

Jesus teaches his disciples that how they treat the prisoner is how they are treating Christ.

- As the Church, we are called to remember the prisoner and enter into solidarity with them.
  - “Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.” Hebrew 13:3
Solidarity involves remembrance, empathy, and commitment to end oppression. Biblical justice moves us toward restoration and freedom. The gospel announces God’s kingdom of righteousness and justice and denounces forces and systems that steal, kill, and destroy. Jesus represents God’s promise of restorative justice.

The cross restores broken and sinful humanity to God and to one another. We are not given what our crimes deserve, but instead we are shown mercy. Our records are wiped clean. The Church is called to be Christ’s body in the world and to live out God’s justice. We are urged to enter into solidarity with the prisoner, treat them as we would treat Christ, and seek to end their oppression.

As Christians, we have the power to call down strongholds and to confront principalities and powers. Like Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and Daniel who resisted the unfair and oppressive laws of Babylon, we have a responsibility to resist injustice. We have a duty to resist and change unjust laws. We are called to make this world look more like the kingdom of God.
JESUS WAS A PRISONER TOO

By Amy Williams

When we hear the word “prisoner,” certain images immediately come across our mind: violent, angry, mental issues, poor, throw-away, to name a few. Our understanding and experience with the criminal justice system (probation/parole, prisoners, returning citizens) and those involved in it is very limited unless we are directly involved or connected...or so one thinks. The Church is more closely connected to the experience of the prisoner because the One we worship was a prisoner himself.

The story of Jesus’s incarceration parallels the life of today’s inmates. He was seen by political leaders/powers that be as “less than,” a law breaker (Matt 9:3, Matt 12:2, Matt 12:10, Mark 2:16). He was arrested (John 18: 3 – 12) and given an unfair trial (John 18: 28-38). This is a prime example of a broken Criminal Justice System. Jesus was unjustly condemned — “framed” — and sentenced by the corrupt (“jury of peers”) (John 18: 38b – 40). Jesus was given the death penalty (Gal. 3:1).

Once convicted and locked up, he was allowed visitors and fondly remembers the impact that had on his time of incarceration: “I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. (Matthew 25:36)

Prisoners who have done their time eventually return back to the community. Could the resurrection of Jesus (Mark 16:5-6) be a parallel story for the returning citizen (Luke 24:6-7)? A story of second chances. A story of a rebirth of a new life and opportunities. A story of redemption. Even the Prodigal Son experienced the joy of returning home after paying his dues. When Jesus returned, He became fully recognized as the Savior and changed the world. Returning citizens, given the right resources, support and opportunities, can become community changers as well.

The parallels can be summarized as:

- must be delivered into the hands of sinful men – criminal justice system
  - be crucified – sentenced, serve their time, treated inhumanly
  - on the third day, be raised again – reentry back into society
  - FULLY recognized as Savior, changed the world - indigenous leaders, community changers

As we engage the issue of mass incarceration, one of the most effective ways to connect with the incarcerated and returning citizens is to see them the way God sees them: as His children too. We have to recognize and acknowledge their inherent worth as God’s creation.

- Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body (Hebrews 13:3-5 ESV)
- So God created humankind in (God’s) image.... God saw everything that (God) had made, and indeed, it was very good (Genesis 1:27, 31)
STOP MASS INCARCERATION

Next Steps for Engagement

While it is essential to look at the systemic injustices and work to ensure that there are just public policies in place at federal, state and local levels, people can also engage the issue with solutions beyond a legislative response.

Churches and community-based programs that work with prevention, intervention, support for families separated by incarceration and re-entry services are all essential to providing support to those impacted by this growing phenomenon. We, as faith communities, need to look for opportunities to serve those affected with support services.

For those who want to engage legislative change, this is best done in collaboration with area partners who are working on policies that will help reverse its impacts. While there are multiple levels of government in which to engage (federal, state, local), what you bring to public sector officials is of the utmost importance.

Evaluate your role with your broader community and within this conversation to make sure you represent that clearly and accurately. Do not apologize for not being a lawyer, judge or public policy scholar. Do not try to be something or someone you are not. What public sector officials need to hear most is why this issue is important and how it affects you. If you are a pastor or ministry leader whose church knows first-hand how current policies impact your community, you need to share those. Inviting family members of people who are incarcerated to share how they are affected, bringing pictures and stories of those who are incarcerated or having people who have been formerly incarcerated share of their experience are incredibly important and excellent advocating strategies. After you have shared your perspective, ask the public official how they would be willing to engage the issue to address your concerns. Offer to help support them if their efforts are in agreement with your desires.

Currently, there are many people from both sides of the aisle willing to talk about this issue and its need for change. The artist community and many celebrities are beginning to bring this conversation to their platforms, which go a long way to helping large groups of people become aware - but there is no substitute for the personal stories of those in your community being shared with public officials who are able to make change, so share them. Do it often and do it well.

Because legislation is always in constant motion and there are different layers of government, we have found that The Sentencing Project is the superior resource to stay engaged and connected with others who are working on these issues in your states. While their website is filled with resources, the best link to see what is happening at all levels of government is on their “Take Action” section (www.sentencingproject.org). On the right side of the screen, there is both an interactive map and a state contact section. The state contact section will display individuals and organizations who are working to support advocacy efforts on these issues. The interactive map section will show you incarceration facts and details about your particular state.

Collaborative partners are always looking to highlight local stories and add people who want to advocate for shared values. Reach out and give the contacts a call. Get to know them, ask questions on who to work with and how to begin to build the necessary bridges to make change.

You don’t have to wait to collaborate to set a meeting with a public official. As public servants, they will work to make sure that at least their staff will hear your positions. Sometimes you will not be able to meet directly with an elected official. Do not take this personally but continue to build relationships with office staff as they bring constituent concerns to the legislator.

In order to engage effectively, you need to know who it is you need to engage. Who is the person who holds the power or authority to make change in this area? You can engage public officials that do not represent you but those who do will care most as you are their constituent.

The best resource to look up who is your federal and state reps in the legislative branch is: www.capitolconnect.com/oklahoma/

The most complete resource to look up any level of government in a variety of branches is: www.usa.gov/Agencies.shtml

We ask you to please keep CCDA informed of your efforts! We are all in this important justice work together, and we want to learn from what you are doing so we can do it in communities all over the country. CCDA exists to train, inspire and connect each other. CCDA’s Advocacy Facebook page is a great platform to share what you are doing. Please let our Advocacy & Policy Engagement Director (Michelle Warren, michelle@ccda.org) know so she can post it for all to see! Let’s do this together!
Appendix P

Prison Visit Reflections
On July 25, 2015, I took five Mission Year participants with me to visit a maximum security prison outside Chicago. These are reflections written by participants after the experience.

P-1
Arlicia Etienne
Emailed Reflection
Seattle, WA
October 5, 2015

Before visiting the prison I had a lot of anxiety about what to expect. I had been to a jail before to visit a friend, but I knew that prison was much different. I was surprised that once we got through the security there wasn't a guard escorting us around the prison. At first, it made me nervous but eventually I got over it. Chatting with the Chaplain once we got there was helpful in easing some of my anxiety and getting a better context of what prison life is like. I didn't know what to think or feel when he told us about how inmates have to declare their religion and turn in a form to change religions and then wait for approval....when he explained that inmates have a tendency to be manipulative and sneaky by using religion to assemble as gangs and participate in religious activities it made sense, but it made me even more grateful for my freedom.

Before we left his office he said something that nearly brought tears to my eyes. He said, "some of your worst nightmares are in here right now." It caught me off guard because during my Mission Year I've been challenging myself and have been challenged by others not to label people based on the mistakes that they've made. As I talked to one of the inmates he explained to us that he was there because he had "one bad day." While my dad was in New Orleans he was involved in the street life and would always tell me growing up, "the only difference between the man behind bars and me is that he got caught." So in my mind, I didn't think of the inmates as my worst nightmare, I thought of them as men already targeted by a system, some who had bad days, some who were just in the wrong place at the wrong time, and others who made one bad decision like everyone else. I didn't expect that kind of comment from the Chaplain...but anyway.

Talking with the inmates was such an unexplainably incredible experience for me. I've always wanted to visit the prison but was not allowed to in my hometown with the church I go to because I'm not "ordained" and my dad just wouldn't allow it. The first man we spoke to apparently had been a pastor at one point in time and the entire time he talked with us I couldn't help but wonder, "what did he do?!" I later learned that you NEVER ask an inmate why they're there. The next guy we talked to seemed like he missed being the company of a woman and just wanted to have a normal conversation.

At one point he said, "I heard a tv preacher say that it's not our sacrifices that saves us, but it's His sacrifice that did, what do you think?" So we chatted about faith and what our sacrifices are versus Christ's sacrifice for us and I left the conversation feeling inspired. In the same conversation at one point he paused and asked, "so why are y'all here? It's a beautiful Saturday and you could be spending it doing a million other things, why are you here?" I told him that I was interested in seeing what life is really like in prison and engaging with inmates and to challenge my preconceived notions. His reply was, "so what were some of your preconceived notions?" I was taken a little back by his question because I wasn't really prepared
to go into detail...so I said, "well I didn't expect y'all to have flat screens, that's for sure." We all laughed and he started telling us how expensive the tv was and how it's just capitalism. He went on to share some of his preconceived notions about prison life and how before coming his only idea of prison was what he saw in the media and that was a lot of violence. For him, prison was home. Because he had been in there for so long that's where his structure, his friends and his identity was.

I left the prison with a mixture of emotions and a lot of questions. but the number one question I left with was, what now? My heart was broken because I realize that there are so many people who are unjustly behind bars. I left wondering, what does pursuing justice look like in an unjust situation?

P-2
Emily Burton
Emailed reflection
Chicago, IL
October 19, 2015

The conversation with Maurice prior to going was quite helpful in preparing to enter into the penitentiary. His descriptions were pretty spot on about how the inmates would react to 5 women rolling up in there as well as predicting how the 5 of us women would possibly feel: uncomfortable, dehumanized, offended, etc.

The feeling of dehumanization could be justified on either end, but I believe more so on the end of the inmates. From some comments made by the chaplain and the guards who seem to have an attitude of “expect the worse and never trust the inmates,” as if they were wild zoo animals that would turn on you at any point. There’s a reason the prison workers think that way.

So how does a Christian who is supposed to be “clothed with compassion” (Col 3:12) balance mercy, justice, naivety, and wisdom in light of America’s criminal justice system? I don’t have the answer; I’m still working on figuring it out myself. But it begs some attention seeing as how the prison/legal system seems to affect my new neighbors.

I’ve seen just a glimpse of how it all begins having lived in EGP and North Lawndale. Cops surround these areas, like a lion waiting to devour their prey. It’s quite frustrating seeing your neighbors as the obvious target. It’s quite humbling seeing yourself as the possible perpetrator of the very ones you are called to love. In the last year, I’ve had more run-ins with the police living in lower income areas than I have in the last 28 years of life. One particular encounter got my blood boiling when the officer, as she was preparing to write me a parking ticket, made the comment, “I don’t know why you would choose to live here (N Lawndale), but to each his own.” And without skipping a best proceeds to the next sentence. A scowl was about the only response I could muster. On top of that, of all the things happening in Chicago at 10 PM on a Friday night, why in the world are 3 officers walking up the street of S Lawndale writing parking tickets in an area where they know very well no one (myself included) can afford a $200 ticket. How is THAT a priority? It seems like obvious targeting to me.
So how does this play into anything? I’m making a lot of assumptions here but I’d assume that the majority of people do not have the funds to pay unnecessary parking tickets, and knowing this from first hand experience, circumstances such as job hours and other priorities make it virtually impossible to meet the demands of the city law. And when said tickets go unpaid, my understanding is that there is a warrant out for one’s arrest. This then leads to more money demanded for bond or whatever that family and friends of the accused may or may not be able to fund, which then leads to prolonged unnecessary time in county jail for a minor, non violent offense, such as a traffic violation/parking ticket.

I think some things that I learned throughout this semester through the events of Set the Captives Free, prison visit, reading The New Jim Crow, Locked in Solidarity prayer vigil was to listen to the cry of the oppressed. Stop for a bit and simply listen. Listen to their stories, hear the cries of their hearts, and learn the facts behind what is being said. I like law. I like structure and order that is in place to prevent pure chaos from dictating our nation. We serve a Just God of law and order, hence my innate love for it. However, as I’ve slowly and sadly come to realize, not all laws are in place for reasons of justice or protection. They are broken laws written and enforced by broken men and women in a broken world under a broken system. A picture of this brokenness lies in the law of unequal penalty for crack versus powder cocaine possession, which continues to target minority black and brown people. As I’ve noticed some laws seem to be enforced for the purpose of maintaining power and position over those who are subject to the law – a broken Kingdom.

At the end of the day the only peace and hope I seem to find is in knowing that God, who is the author of law and justice, who loves justice and mercy, has given me a heart of compassion for the widow, orphan, poor, and oppressed. I must listen to my heart as it is moved by the stories of those directly affected by the “justice” system. To Him who sees all and orders all things for the good of those who love Him who have been called according to His purpose, it’s in Him that I put my trust and hope and faith.

My faith was radically encouraged through meeting a beautiful brother in the faith at the Statesville Prison, hearing him preach the truth of God’s word through the prison bars, standing hand in hand in prayer and crying as we were unified by the Love of God and the assurance of hope. This love transcends all color lines, boundaries, differences, prison walls, storylines, and divisive systems. Who am I to withhold such love and devotion to one who is captive, for I myself was held captive to my sin. Had some one, namely Christ Jesus, not met me in my captivity, I wouldn’t know true freedom. God help me live so that others may know freedom in you alone, so they may know you are a God of justice and mercy who loves them and is willing to meet them exactly where they are. Go before me there and help me display your image in a tangible way.
I had never been to a prison before. Even when my dad was in jail I never had the chance to visit. All I had were the letters and the ideas of what it would be like. And for the first half of the visit...I saw (and experienced) all of the things that everybody said prison was about. Having to subject yourself to pat downs. Taking off all of your jewelry. But those were the easy parts. The hard parts--that no one warned me about--was how I saw people being treated. I saw men, literally in what seemed as cages. Subject to violence at any time. Having to follow the rules of someone else--some higher system, at all times. Men that were denied the freedom to roam freely. Going the length of their sentences without adequate sunlight, the food, lack of visitors, and if they didn't have enough money, almost no connection to the outside world. As we walked through the cell block (the very first one) I remember not knowing exactly how I felt. I felt safe...there are "walls" that separate visitors from prisoners. But I remember not knowing if we were being seen as fresh meat or beacons of hope...I'd like to believe in the latter. Or was I a tease? A tease of what every person in that prison longed for...the ability to walk out and not look back.

Later, when we finally were able to speak to the prisoners, I struggled with how the prisoners felt as people. Who were these outsiders coming in? As I walked past cells, I tried not to stare too hard. Actually, I tried not to stare at all. I felt as if it was rude to stare. The men, these people, these beautiful human beings weren't artifacts and items in a museum to be looked at. I felt that by staring I was invading the little privacy that they had. I couldn't stop to talk to each one of them, but if I could, I would have said something like: I'm not judging you. I'm sorry that you're in here. But even in that, they don't need my apology. My sorry may come off as pity...and I'm sure they don't need that either.

Two prisoners on separate occasions turned their fans toward us so that we wouldn't be too hot. I wanted to say no thank you, but caught myself. The few minutes I stood under that fan meant a lot to me. They didn't know me...and probably don't remember my name. But they sacrificed a couple moments of their own comfort for a complete stranger. What does that say about character and morale and values?

One thing that struck me the most was that even though they were able to take classes, they weren't able to get college credit. It was frustrating--knowing that by making a mistake or poor judgement could lead you to a place where you can't get an education. And even after that, I'm guessing it's hard to get admitted and to receive financial aid...depending on the crime. From my understanding, the prison system makes it hard for growth, even once you leave the bars and bunk beds behind. The title "prisoner" or "ex-con" may follow you for the rest of your life.

I thought about the costs in prison and how the system was set up so that you couldn't have much. The cost of cigarettes and the TV.
I thought of how some prisoners had more freedom and could walk around a bit more, but even then, it's not really freedom. I wondered of how many prisoners felt free...could you be mentally and spiritually free but still be imprisoned by the gates and walls?

I thought of the guard standing ready with his gun. To me, it came off as "one false move, and you're dead." With no chance to explain. It made me feel as though they were no longer in control of their lives.

P-4
Songine Clark
Emailed Reflection
Chicago, IL
October 7, 2015

I didn't go to the prison visit, so I don't have a first hand experience, but I do remember there was something that Emily told me that stuck out.

She told me about this man there that had this super passionate faith in the Lord and how it made her realize that we often forget our brothers and sisters in Christ behind bars. For me, it was more like, when I thought about people in prison, I thought they deserved to be there or just simply forget about them. I didn't think about the wrongly accused or the ones that are actually great guys that caught in bad situations. As of recent, getting to know some pretty great guys who have been in jail or prison before, I sometimes wonder, what I would have thought of them if I met them while they were locked up and I didn't know what I knew about them now. There is a divide I feel between people that are locked up against people that aren't and like groups of people that are different and have these pre-conceived notions about each other we go in with these ideas without even knowing the group of people for who they are.

In terms of faith, there are a lot of people who do come to faith while behind bars and it's great, but I also think about how there is such a need for people to walk with them through that process and how to live their faith while they are behind bars and once they get out. I think that is something that should definitely be tended to. I remember hearing some talk (I forgot from where) and the person mentioned how Paul wrote a lot of his letters behind bars and not only were they so deep and profound, but they were also of people that were praying for him and encouraging him in the faith, so why can't people or a church rally behind a person like that as well?


P-5
Ra Mendoza
Emailed Reflection
Philadelphia, PA
October 3, 2015

Last weekend, a group of us walked 10 miles to and from Curran Fromhold Correctional Facility in Philadelphia as the Pope was making his visit. It was a pilgrimage of sorts and our purpose was to call attention to evil and injustice of the US prison system. Names and faces of those who previously/currently were incarcerated came to my mind. The death penalty was on my mind. The label of "ex-offender" was on my mind. The numerous limitations, the stigma and oppression of people re-entering society after prison was on my mind. We weren't able to get to the prison because of security and road blocks, but we stood where others were gathered.

We had hoped to be on the same route the Pope would take, but was helicoptered in to CCFC instead. Some may say our presence was meaningless. But there is a powerful connection that happens within someone when they actively use their body in the work of justice. There is a human element that is unlocked. There is something sacred and holy in taking the word sacrifice seriously; no matter how big or small that sacrifice may be. And I realized that as we walked, as we prayed, as we listened to a previously incarcerated brother's experience, as we sang songs of freedom - that small act of solidarity was transforming us.

And I will not ignore that; I can't. I truly believe that following Jesus leads to freedom, transformation, internal and systemic change. Love transforms everything! To live in this love is an active, physical call to use everything we contain. My mind, my will, my emotional capacity, and my physical body. I want to be seen in my humanity, and this yearning for dignity demands that I seek this same dignity for my brother and sister. Participating in the prison pilgrimage was a small way I could exercise my privilege and humanity - my freedom - on behalf of those who's freedom, privilege, and humanity has been taken away.
Appendix Q

Mission Year Team Member End of Year Evaluation Results July 2015

- 21 out of 25 reported growing in their awareness:
  (4 Stayed the Same
  9 Grew somewhat in Awareness
  12 grew much greater awareness)
- 10 out of 25 (40%) didn’t know how to take action
- 4 out of 25 stayed the same in awareness, but 3 out of 4 grew more committed
- Overall, 21 out of 25 (84%) grew in awareness, 14 out of 25 (56%) grew more committed to taking action

What has contributed most to growing your awareness and commitment to taking action around ending mass incarceration (Check All That Apply)?

- The average number of experiences for those who grew in awareness, commitment? 5.6 practices.
- 5 out of 25 (20%), has someone they know who is incarcerated
Mission Year Participants:
Why should Christians care about mass incarceration?

- Because they are a people group that tend to get neglected. Yes, churches may come and minister to them, but they don't know the statistics about mass incarcerations and who the people are that are locked up.
- As Christians we have been shown much mercy. Christ stood in the gap to spare us from the wrath of the Righteous Judge. He was perfect and paid our penalty in full. How much more should we, being redeemed sinners, look on others with compassion and stand in the gap for those who may be wrongfully accused.
- Because it is an injustice in our country.
- I feel like it is an injustice that often is overlooked or unnoticed and that does not get much attention but that is really hurting many individuals and families.
- All people are children of God and created in the image of God. When we turn our backs on people that are incarcerated we are not fulfilling God's will and therefore are turning our backs on God's word.
- I truly believe it's because God has called us to and if he calls us to do something we should do it.
- Mass incarceration arguably affects everyone in some form or another. Christians are quick to quote "I was hungry and fed me, I was naked and you clothed me, and I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink" but seem to forget "I was in prison and you visited me" and "remember those in prison like you yourself were chained". Mass incarceration hurts individuals, families, and communities. It is an injustice and followers of Jesus should aspire to reflect God's heart towards injustice. Christians should be mobilized because God works through and around people.
- Christians should be mobilized around this issue because we are not the final justice. We should be concerned on try to follow Jesus Christ's teachings. Jesus Loved sinners, Jesus accepted a dying man on a cross next to him. Who are we to deny the love of God to people in prison or similar situations? The answer isn't Christians.
- It affects our brothers and sisters in Christ, contributes to poverty and racism, and won't get fixed on its own.
- Because God has a heart for his people. We are all his people.
- Because Jesus is concerned about those in prison. Jesus was mobilized to Calvary's cross for prisoners (and if he's our standard) that's a fairly obvious call to action.
- Because it is CRAZY (!!!!!!!) that this is happening on our watch but away from our eyes. The implications for being people of Grace and challenging the limits of what we really mean when we say that are HUGE. The implications for Christians understanding the
intersection of race and biblical justice are HUGE.

- Christians should be concerned and mobilized around mass incarceration because it is an injustice that has not been widely talked about in general American culture. Not only is it often stigmatized, but it is also something that affects every person, not just those being funneled into the prison system. Plus, much of the injustice of mass incarceration stems from our country's deep racism, which is strongly connected with mass incarceration.

- Heavenly justice doesn't look like earthly justice. Earthly justice is a punitive response to undesirable behavior, and the justice system exemplifies this in its racial inequality, making the message clear: it is undesirable to be a black man, an undocumented immigrant, etc. But heavenly justice is restoration of what was lost, which in this case is freedom, dignity and unity of the church body. If the church is serious about seeking restoration over punishment, dignity over humiliation, and unity over division, she will stand up against mass incarceration.