



The 2016 Presbyterian observance of Criminal Justice Sunday has been scheduled for January 24, the third Sunday after Epiphany. Educational and worship resources developed by members of the Presbyterian Criminal Justice Network (PCJN) of the Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association (PHEWA) are now available for download here and at <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/phewa/presbyterian-criminal-justice-network/>.

The Presbyterian volunteers who serve as leadership for PCJN are a diverse group of individuals with diverse approaches to the challenges facing our nation's criminal justice system. From developing support systems for returning citizens to guiding congregations through the process of developing a ministry with incarcerated persons and their loved ones to exposing the shortcomings of the private prison system, their work has resulted in the creation of a wealth of resources for congregations sensing a call to ministry in the arena of criminal justice.

This year they are highlighting programs and resources that lift up current Presbyterian criminal justice ministries as well as original material that can be used in worship and other venues. Our prayer is that your own ministries will be strengthened as the result of this material, or that you will be inspired to begin a transformative ministry in your own community.



**Meditation on Criminal Justice Sunday
January 24, 2016**

By the eighth grade, Kimo had stopped showing up for school. He preferred the beaches of west Oahu or the island bus system that took him away from the frustrations of the classroom. It wasn't long before alcohol and drugs replaced surfing and bus riding as distractions, followed by a career of petty theft and assault. When he was 20, Kimo was shipped off to a private prison in the Arizona desert, contracted by the State of Hawaii to house its prisoners.

Distance and prohibitive phone fees kept family contact to a minimum. Kimo's mother managed a trip there, only to be told after hours of waiting that visiting hours had been changed. She was forced to leave without their seeing each other.

By order of the State Supreme Court, Hawaii's contract with Kimo's prison required that native Hawaiians have access to their traditional spiritual practices, but the program was inconsistently implemented; distance made enforcement of contract details nearly impossible. As a result, Kimo had limited access to his community rituals of repentance and restoration. Despite this, his behavior was exemplary and he was optimistic about being paroled with time off for good behavior. However, the prison did not offer the anger management course included in his sentence and so his request for parole was denied. His reaction to the injustice of this denial landed him in solitary confinement.

Psalm 19 tells us that "the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." Even so, without Jesus Christ, it condemns us all. How much more difficult is it for someone to obey imperfect human law, especially when it is capriciously and unfairly administered? As people whose own lives are given back to them over and over again by God's grace, it is fitting that we not only proclaim Jesus' good news to the captive, but advocate for the fair treatment of our nation's incarcerated people.

Prayer: Gracious and forgiving God. Keep us mindful of our own great need for redemption as we seek to minister with people incarcerated by our country's criminal justice system. We pray in the name of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Presbyterian Criminal Justice Network is a grassroots network of the Presbyterian Health, Education, and Welfare Association (PHEWA). Visit pcusa.org/pcjn to find out how your congregation can get involved.



Worship Resources for Criminal Justice Sunday, January 24, 2016
By the Presbyterian Criminal Justice Network (PCJN)

Based on Year C Lectionary

Introduction: There are many good reasons to observe Criminal Justice Sunday in the context of worship and adult education: to raise awareness of the many issues surrounding our nation's criminal justice system; to identify ways that congregations and individual members can engage in meaningful ministry with persons directly impacted by this system; to examine the privilege so many of us take for granted that has shielded us from the worst aspects of law enforcement. The goal is not guilt but (where appropriate) repentance and a commitment to act in the spirit of Jesus' inaugural sermon.

Call to worship:

L: The heavens are telling the glory of God and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork
P: Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge
L: There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;
P: Yet their voices go out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the earth.
All: Let us worship God.

Opening prayer

God of creation, justice, love, and mercy, we thank you for calling us to be your beloved community. Open our minds and hearts to the presence of your Holy Spirit in our midst. Grant us courage to receive what you would have us learn, and to live as you would have us live. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Call to confession:

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. And yet we are far from perfect, we make foolish choices, and are painfully aware that all of us fall short of God's glory. Let us seek the comfort of confession to our loving creator.

Litany of Confession

L: Jesus tells us that he has come to bring good news to the poor
P: And we wonder if that means bad news for us, because we do not see our own poverty
L: He tells us that he has been sent to proclaim release to the captives
P: And we worry that this might increase the crime rate in our neighborhoods
L: He proclaims the recovery of vision to those without sight
P: But, citing prudence and safety, we close our eyes to the suffering that surrounds us
L: Jesus tells us that the oppressed are to be freed, the indebted to have their debts forgiven
P: And we respond, "Not here, not now; I have bills to pay and what about my property values."

L: Our responses tell us all that we need to know of our fallen condition

P: We are fearful and self-protective; we objectify others and we do not practice God's radical hospitality beyond our own small circle

All: Forgive us, O God. Remove our fear and heal our small-mindedness. Help us to truly follow in the footsteps of our Savior who came to set us free from all of our sins. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Beloved in Christ, Jesus did not come to condemn but to redeem. The past is over and done; everything is fresh and new. Believe the good news of the gospel: in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Year C Scripture for January 24, 2016:

Psalm 19

I Corinthians 12:12-31a

Luke 4:14-21



Theology of Justice

Bible Study/Discussion Guide for Churches and Faith Communities

By Rev. Caitlin Werth

A good place to begin in encouraging a church to serve the incarcerated population and ex-offenders is to explore together a theology of justice. This study could work as one two-hour session or two one hour sessions, and with any size group.

Materials:

- Grok cards or other nonviolent communication feelings and needs cards (available for purchase several places online, including <http://communicateforlife.com/our-products/grok-card-games.html>) You can also download feelings and needs cards for free from the following sites: <http://www.opencommunication.org/FeelingsCard.pdf> ; <http://www.opencommunication.org/NeedsCard.pdf>
- Chalkboard, marker board, or large sheets of paper
- Bibles

Introduction:

Begin by giving each participant 3-5 feelings cards. Have each person introduce themselves and then pick out one feeling card from their stack which best describes their current feelings towards those in jail or prison.

Part I

Write “Law” on the board and ask: “What is the purpose of the law?”

The group may interpret this different ways, so you can distinguish between civil law and God’s law if necessary, taking ideas for both. Write answers on the board.

(Ideas may include: to keep order; to keep people safe; to help us know what is right)

After ideas have been brainstormed, discuss John Calvin’s three purposes of the law: to uphold civil order, to instruct, and to condemn (show us our need for grace).

Write “Justice” on the board and ask, “What do people typically mean when they say ‘justice,’ as in, ‘we want to see justice?’”



(Ideas may include: revenge, retribution, righting a wrong, punishment)

Now ask the group, “What does justice mean to God?”

(Ideas may include judgment, forgiveness, righting wrongs, restoration, etc.)

Read one or two of the following passages, either with the whole group or in small groups: Deut 27:19, Psalm 140:12, Isaiah 1:17, Zech 7:9, Matt 23:23. After reading, see if anything else can be added to the above question.

Now ask the group how grace fits into this picture.

Read one or two of the following passages, again, either with the whole group or in small groups: John 1:15-17, Romans 3:20-24, Romans 5:12-21, Ephesians 2:4-9, Hebrews 10:11-12, 16-18

Discuss the following points:

- While God is concerned with justice, we are never told to act it out for God. We are called radically to love even our enemies, to turn our cheek, and to forgive 7 times 70 times.
- With Jesus, the law is always overwhelmed by Grace.

Part II

Ask, “So what does this have to do with serving incarcerated peoples and ex-offenders?”

Ideas to discuss:

Not only are we called to care for one another (read Genesis 1:24-28) and told that our neighbor is often our enemy or the poor or the last person we’d think (read Luke 10:25-37), we are specifically told to visit those in prison (read Matthew 25:31-46, Hebrews 13:1-3).

Ask “why don’t we visit those in prison?”

Break into small groups and have each discuss, “Is visiting someone in jail or prison (not a friend or relative) something you’ve ever considered? Why or why not?”

Come back to the large group and share answers. Write answers on the board



(Some of the answers may include: fear, caught up in other parts of life, not often a big part of what we see as ministry, belief that there are more ‘deserving’ populations to serve)

Ask, “What are the problems with each of these reasons?”

- God tells us not to fear and God calls us out to serve, not to be safe
- Caring for those who “deserve” it is more a theology of Santa Claus than a theology of Jesus Christ. Can we *deserve* the grace and love given to us by God?
- Could it also be that we are also too separated from those we are meant to serve? That we do not think of the problem often because it is not seen by society as a problem?

Discuss the situation of incarceration today by sharing some of the following issues/statistics:

- Mass incarceration of America (grown every year for past 36 years, now 4x historic average, more than 6 million today in “correctional system”, and yet-violent crime on decline)¹ 1 out of every 34 adults under some sort of correctional supervision at year end 2011²; Since 2002, US has consistently had world’s highest incarceration rate³
- Class injustice (those in jails are awaiting trial, not yet guilty or innocent - many can’t afford bail)
- Racial injustice (1/3 of all African American male high school drop-outs under 40 in jail, all African American men born since 60s- more than 20% will go to prison- 2x the number that will go to college, more black men in system than in slavery in 1850)⁴

¹ Gopnick, Adam, “The Caging of America,” *The New Yorker*, January 30, 2012

² Bureau of Justice Statistics, <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=4537>

³ Population Reference Bureau, <http://www.prb.org/Articles/2012/us-incarceration.aspx>

⁴ Gopnick, Adam, “The Caging of America,” *The New Yorker*, January 30, 2012



- Prison privatization (people becoming commodities, financial incentives to keep people incarcerated – CCA and GEO group)⁵
- Lack of rehabilitation

Ask, “How can we remember those in prison as if we were in prison with them and those who are mistreated as if we ourselves were suffering in light of this?”

Final Thoughts

Revisit feelings cards to indicate how people feel about the population now (if changed).

Distribute needs cards (3-5 per person) and have each person pick a need they think ex-offenders or incarcerated people might have.

Ask, “What can we do as a church to acknowledge these feelings and help meet these needs?”

Possible answers can include:

- Visit prisoners/inmates, volunteer with prison or jail ministries to get inside and connect with people in, or exiting the system
- Write letters to those who are incarcerated
- Care for their families (create or support mentoring programs for children with incarcerated parents; support groups for parents with incarcerated children)
- Support at-risk youth and teens
- Be a welcoming church to those who are coming out of the system: provide a church home
- Treat those with a criminal history as you would others (include them in your hiring pool, allow them to engage in community life/church life)
- Learn more! Watch movies, read books, join discussion groups
- Speak for their needs, their personhood

⁵ <http://grassrootsleadership.org/reports/payoff-how-congress-ensures-private-prison-profit-immigrant-detention-quota>; <http://www.motherjones.com/mojo/2014/04/investment-corporations-divest-60-million-private-prison-cca-geo-group>;



- Change the system! Advocate for rehabilitation and restoration over retribution; speak out against prison privatization

Prison/Reentry Ministry & Advocacy

Take a Next Step

Resources for Education and Action

January 2009

The "Take a Next Step" idea

TAKE A FIRST STEP: If your congregation has not yet engaged in education or action related to people in prison, people coming home from prison, the families of currently and formerly incarcerated people; or in relation to criminal justice policies - TAKE A FIRST STEP!

If your congregation is already studying, already engaged in ministry, already acting at the policy level ...**TAKE A NEXT STEP!** Do one thing more. Suggestions and resources are listed below. *See page 2 for the Table of Contents.*

Criminal Justice Sunday is a great time to launch or reinforce your congregation's Prison/Reentry engagement (though your engagement is needed year-round).
Criminal Justice Sunday is celebrated on the 2nd Sunday in February.

Join with others in your congregation

- Form a group, even just a few members, with others interested in this area
- Connect with the Presbytery's Prison/Reentry Working Group
Contact Annie Rawlings 1-212-870-2221, ext. 4249 socialwitness@presbynyc.org

Educate yourself and others

- Members of your congregation with special interest.
- Your whole congregation.
- Another congregation: draw on your own experience.

TAKE A NEXT STEP

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To invite a formerly incarcerated person to speak at your church, contact:

Rev. Liz Alexander, The Church of Gethsemane
1-718-499-6704, ext. 202 ealexander@mindspring.com

Julie Mormando, JusticeWorks Community
718.499.6704, ext. 208 julie_mormando@hotmail.com

Sean Pica, Hudson Link
1-914-941-0794 sean_pica@yahoo.com

To invite a policy expert to speak at your church, or to learn about ministry and advocacy volunteer opportunities, contact:

Annie Rawlings, Presbytery of New York City
1-212-870-2221, ext. 4249 socialwitness@presbynyc.org

Eric Waters, The Osborne Association
1-718-637-6585 wwaters@osborneny.org

Films:

A Hard Straight www.ahardstraight.com
Hard Road Home www.hardroadhome.org
Lighting the Way www.osborneny.org/osborne_today.htm
Life sentence www.citizensinc.org/Life%20Sentence%20-%20The%20Documentary.htm
Reentry National Media Outreach Campaign www.reentrymediaoutreach.org

Lecture Series:

Occasional Series on Reentry Research: John Jay Prisoner Reentry Institute (can include film)
www.jjay.cuny.edu/centersinstitutes/pri/events.asp

Online Resources:

Connections – a publication of the New York City Public Library, developed for people about to be released from incarceration, and those recently released. It lists a wide array of resources available in New York City, and covers a wide range of issues. Separate chapters can be downloaded.
www.nypl.org/branch/services/connections/

Transition Guide: How to get a good start on the outside – a publication of the New York State Department of Health. www.health.state.ny.us/diseases/aids/corrections/docs/transition_guide.pdf

Organizations:

The Osborne Association: www.osborneny.org

Operates a broad range of treatment, educational, and vocational services for people involved in the adult criminal and juvenile justice systems, including currently and formerly incarcerated people, their children, and other family members.

Osborne Hotline: A toll free information hotline (1-800-344-3314) providing answers to questions about visitation, transportation, packages, transfers, parole, and other issues related to a loved one's incarceration

New York ICARE (Interfaith Coalition of Advocates for Reentry and Employment): www.nyicare.org

Founded to organize a religious response to the crisis of recidivism in New York State. In the Restorative Justice tradition, people of faith affirm the intellectual and spiritual capacity of persons with criminal convictions, believing in the potential for rehabilitation and reconciliation.

JusticeWorks: www.justiceworks.org

Mission is to educate, organize and mobilize a partnership of concerned citizens, community residents and organizations to advocate for just, humane, and effective criminal justice policies, emphasizing alternatives to incarceration for women with children

Angel Tree: www.AngelTree.org

A ministry to children of people in prison that begins with buying and delivering Christmas presents to the children.

Kairos Prison Ministry: www.kairosprisonministry.org

A Christian, lay-led, ecumenical, volunteer international prison ministry, in which men and women volunteers bring Christ's love and forgiveness to incarcerated individuals and to their families. Kairos consists of three programs: the *Men's and Women's Ministry*, begun in 1976, *Kairos Outside*, begun in 1991, and *Kairos Torch*, begun in 1997.

Real Reform New York: www.realreform.org

(A coalition of organizations working to change the Rockefeller Drug Laws)

The Correctional Association of New York: www.correctionalassociation.org

An independent, non-profit organization founded by concerned citizens in 1844 and granted unique authority by the New York State Legislature to inspect prisons and to report its findings and recommendations to the legislature, the public and the press.

Family and Corrections Network: www.fcnetowrk.org

The mission of Family and Corrections Network (FCN) is to uphold families of people in prison as a valued resource to themselves and their communities in order that the criminal justice system, other institutions and society become supportive of family empowerment, integrity, and self-determination.

Reentry Resource Center: www.reentry.net/ny

A support network and information clearinghouse on reentry from jail and prison, and the civil consequences of criminal proceedings.

Hudson Link for Higher Education: www.hudsonlink.org

Helps people incarcerated at Sing Sing Correctional Facility prepare for more constructive and meaningful lives now, and upon reentering society, by giving them the opportunity to experience the positive effects of learning at the college level.

Take Action

Advocacy

**Priorities: Restoring higher education for people in prison
Parole reform**

Contact Annie Rawlings for more information: 1-212-870-2221, ext. 4249
socialwitness@presbynyc.org

The Prison/Reentry Working Group will also be alert for opportunities to support reform of the Rockefeller Drug Laws.

Ministry suggestions and contacts

Visit a prison

Visit a member of the Church of Gethsemane who is incarcerated in NY State
Rev. Liz Alexander: 1-718-499-6704 ealexander@mindspring.com

Attend a graduation ceremony of the Osborne Association's Fresh Start program on Riker's Island

Eric Waters: 1-718-637-6586 wwaters@osborneny.org

Volunteer at a prison with the Osborne Association

Eric Waters: 1-718-637-6586 wwaters@osborneny.org

Assist someone on the journey home from prison

Form a Circle of Care: three or four members of a congregation commit to encouraging an individual through letter writing, and by supporting him/her upon release from prison.

Annie Rawlings, Presbytery of New York City,
1-212-870-2221, ext. 4249 socialwitness@presbynyc.org

Mentor or tutor a member of the Church of Gethsemane

Rev. Liz Alexander: 1-718-499-6704 ealexander@mindspring.com

Attend a family support group run by the Osborne Association

Eric Waters: 1-718-637-6586 wwaters@osborneny.org

~ Reach out to people in prison

Write letters with the Church of Gethsemane

Make care packages with the Church of Gethsemane

Rev. Liz Alexander: 1-718-499-6704 ealexander@mindspring.com

~ Support children of people who are incarcerated

Tutor children whose parents are incarcerated through the Osborne Association.

Diana Ortiz: 1-718-637-6560 diana.ortiz@osborneny.org

Buy Christmas presents for children whose parents are incarcerated

www.angeltree.org

FACTS ABOUT PRISONS AND PRISONERS

The Growing Corrections System

- The number of inmates in state and federal prisons has increased more than six-fold from less than 200,000 in 1970 to 1,446,269 by 2005. An additional 747,529 are held in local jails, for a total of nearly 2.2 million.
- The state and federal prison population grew by nearly 29,000 persons (1.9%) during 2005, while the jail population increased by more than 33,500 inmates (4.7%).
- As of 2005, 1 of every 136 Americans was incarcerated in prison or jail.
- The number of persons on probation and parole has been growing dramatically along with institutional populations. There are now 7 million Americans incarcerated or on probation or parole, an increase of more than 280 percent since 1980.

- One in eight (12%) black males aged 25-29 was in prison or jail in 2005 as were 1 in 26 (3.9%) Hispanic males and 1 in 59 (1.7%) white males in the same age group.
- Nationally, 65 females per 100,000 women are serving a sentence in prison; 929 males per 100,000 men are in prison.
- The 2005 United States' rate of incarceration of 737 inmates per 100,000 population is the highest reported rate in the world, well ahead of the Russian rate of 611 per 100,000.

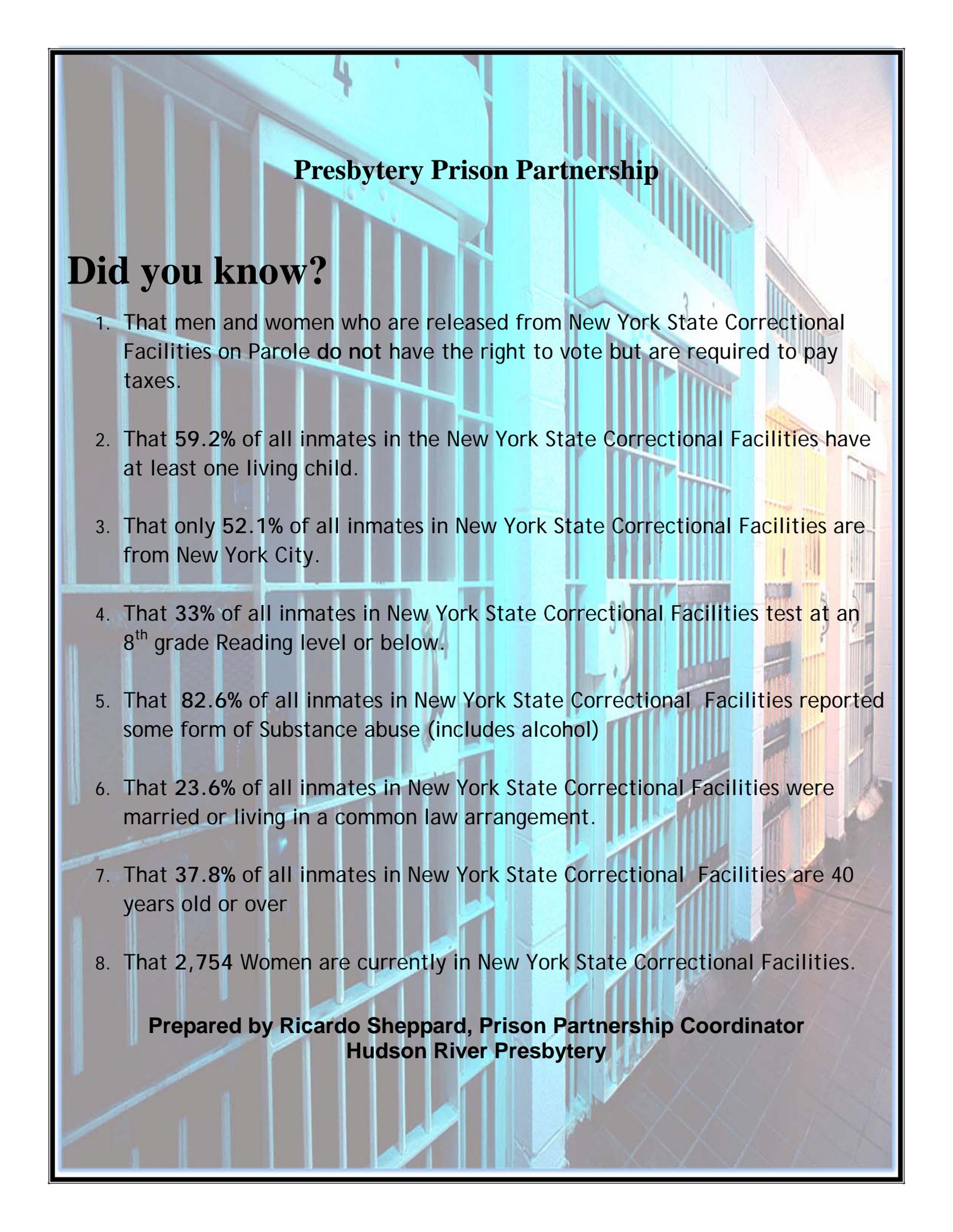
Who is in our Prisons and Jails?

- 93% of prison inmates are male, 7% female.
- As of 2005, there were 202,000 women in state and federal prison or local jail.
- 40% of prison inmates in 2005 were black and 20% were Hispanic.
- 62% of jail inmates in 2005 were unconvicted and awaiting trial, compared to 51% in 1990.
- 76% of those sentenced to state prisons in 2002 were convicted of non-violent crimes, including 31% for drug offenses, and 29% for property offenses.
- 1 in 4 jail inmates in 2002 was in jail for a drug offense, compared to 1 in 10 in 1983; drug offenders constituted 20% of state prison inmates and 55% of federal prison inmates in 2001.
- Black males have a 32% chance of serving time in prison at some point in their lives; Hispanic males have a 17% chance; white males have a 6% chance.

Facts copied from **The Sentencing Project**

www.sentencingproject.org/Admin/Documents/publications/inc_factsaboutprison.pdf

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics. 12/06



Presbytery Prison Partnership

Did you know?

1. That men and women who are released from New York State Correctional Facilities on Parole do not have the right to vote but are required to pay taxes.
2. That 59.2% of all inmates in the New York State Correctional Facilities have at least one living child.
3. That only 52.1% of all inmates in New York State Correctional Facilities are from New York City.
4. That 33% of all inmates in New York State Correctional Facilities test at an 8th grade Reading level or below.
5. That 82.6% of all inmates in New York State Correctional Facilities reported some form of Substance abuse (includes alcohol)
6. That 23.6% of all inmates in New York State Correctional Facilities were married or living in a common law arrangement.
7. That 37.8% of all inmates in New York State Correctional Facilities are 40 years old or over
8. That 2,754 Women are currently in New York State Correctional Facilities.

**Prepared by Ricardo Sheppard, Prison Partnership Coordinator
Hudson River Presbytery**

**Working with Formerly Incarcerated People
as they work to re-enter the community**
Draft outline

Prepared by the Rev. Henry Fury, Pastor, United Presbyterian Church of Ridgewood

(Another model of group-based mentorship is offered and supported by the
Interfaith Coalition of Advocates for Reentry and Employment - ICARE)

The first step in the process of working with congregations who are interested in working with individuals released from prison, is to establish a working group of 3 to 5 individuals who are willing to commit themselves to the task. Once that group is established an orientation of four to six weeks would follow. The orientation would consist of seminar type meetings lasting one hour to an hour and one half. The subject matter of these meetings would be as follows:

- 1. Elements of incarceration which will affect the individuals re-adjustment to his/her newly acquired freedom;**
 - a) Restricted movement
 - b) Profanity in normal conversation
 - c) Religiosity
 - d) Lack of trust of others
 - e) Self centered attitude
 - f) Rebellion against authority or supervision
 - g) Impatience

- 2. Adjustment to 'Freedom'**
 - a) Return to old friends and neighborhoods
 - b) Impatience and the desire to make up for lost time
 - c) Family issues and hostilities
 - d) Poor time management
 - e) Need for money
 - f) Compliance with supervision, ie Parole Officers
 - g) Need for support groups, ie: N.A., A.A.

- 3. Planning, Long term, Short term**
 - a) Employment, honesty about prior criminal convictions
 - b) Accepting minimum wage
 - c) Education or vocational training
 - d) Short term goals, employment, shelter
 - e) Long term goals, education/training, housing, personal relationships, meeting moral obligations, child support, etc.

4. Moral Support and Spiritual Assistance

- a) Weekly meeting with an individual to allow him/her the time to 'unload' burdens and emotion
- b) Directing the individual to needed support services
- c) Relationship to the congregation
- d) Clergy involvement
- e) Meeting family and significant others

5. Encouragement & Inventory-taking

- a) Recognizing 'small' accomplishments as being 'firsts'
- b) Dealing with set backs and 'slips'
- c) Not losing faith in or patience with the individual because of errors in judgment or behavior issues, 'fair but firm' attitudes

6. Commitment to the Long term

- a) Determining if the group is willing to commit to assist the person for a year or more
- b) Dividing responsibilities
- c) Recognizing that the 'committee' needs help in all of this, material and spiritual
- d) Determining how to go about selecting a candidate to work with. It is recommended that the group become acquainted with an individual a year to 6 months before release and this process will be the subject of a different orientation training.

Sermon Topics Relative to Criminal Justice

The following are suggested as themes one can 'jump off' from in preparing a sermon on the issues of working with ex-offenders or visiting inmates while incarcerated.

Prepared by Rev. Henry Fury, Pastor, United Presbyterian Church of Ridgewood

Forgiveness.....'7 x 70'Matt. 18:22

Loving others regardless of their past.....
'love thy neighbor as thyself'Mk.12:31

Not judging others, humility, not feeling superior.....'if anyone of you is without sin... 'Jn.8:7

When one has been personally injured or offended by an individual in a criminal manner.....'Turn the other cheek.....' Matt.5:39

Giving of yourself, when you have already given a lot to the criminal justice cause.....'give him your shirt & coat.....' Matt.5:40

Not judging a person by his past, being humble in approaching others.....
'Judge not less.....' Matt.7:1

If one could give a sermon on criminal justice and the means by which we fulfill Matthew 25:36, by becoming involved with the great 'unwashed of society', at least once every other month, it would bring to the forefront the need for churches to 'visit' the imprisoned not only when they are in prison, but when they seek to return to society and society rejects them. These themes relate to giving, to being humble, to turning the other cheek when the formerly incarcerated person lets you down, and continuing the work of the Gospel - to not judging others by their past misdeeds but working with them to turn the page to a new tomorrow, for none of us is without our own sin!

Criminal Justice Sunday Worship suggestions

Compiled by the Rev. Liz Alexander, Pastor, Church of Gethsemane

Call To Worship: (In Unison)

Whose world is it?

The world and all that is in it belong to the Lord;

The earth and all who live on it are God's.

Let us worship our God whose will is justice and peace, and who calls us to act with justice, to love mercy and kindness, and to walk without pretense, arrogance, or prejudice---humbly with our God.

(Jane Parker Huber, *Peacemaking through Worship II*, Presbyterian Women)

Hebrew Bible Reading: Isaiah 61:1-2a

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and to release the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

New Testament Reading: 2 Corinthians 3:17- 18

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

Notes: There are stories throughout the Bible of how God never gives up on individuals, and has great plans for each of us. We are also taught to consider those in prison as part of the community of faith and that God calls us to "remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them" (Hebrews 13:1-3.) We also know that God is present with us everywhere, and that "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39.)

Other Criminal Justice Sunday passages often used include: Matthew 5:21-37, Romans 12:15, Amos 5:24, Psalm 146, Isaiah 61:1-4, Luke 4:16-21, and Matthew 25:31-46.

Hymn Suggestions:

Amazing Grace, Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah, Great Is Thy Faithfulness, There is a Wideness in God's Mercy, Open My Eyes That I May See, I Want Jesus To Walk With Me, I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me, Jesus, Where Can We Find You?, Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us With Your Love, Called as Partners In Christ's Service

Prayer Suggestions:

Prayer of Confession

Minister: We stand accused by our scriptures, by the events of the world today, and by the disasters that our own attitudes have caused. So now let us confess to God.

Congregation: **As people of faith, we are always on a journey. On our pilgrimage there is no time when we can afford to stop growing in love, strength, and in the knowledge of God. So it is that when we gather to worship, we must confess those places in which we need to grow. Let us confess confess our need for growth, in silence before God.**
(Silent prayer of confession.)

Words of Assurance

Minster: God's promise to us is this. When we face ourselves, each other, and God with the awareness of our need, we are given the grace to grow and courage to continue the journey.

Congregation: **Amen.**

The Commandments of Jesus

Minister: Jesus summarized our Christian identity like this:

Congregation: **You shall love your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.**

Minister: This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it:

Congregation: **You shall love you neighbor as yourself.**

All: **May our lives reflect our acceptance and understanding of these words.**

(The Church of Gethsemane, PCUSA)

Pastoral Prayer

O God of love and mercy, we are grateful that you forgive our brokenness. Help us to forgive others as you have forgiven us. Lord, comfort people who are sick, hungry, lonely, addicted, or incarcerated. On this Criminal Justice Sunday we ask your blessing upon all individuals who have been victims of crimes and their families, and your blessing also upon those who are incarcerated and their families, especially their. Empower us all to find healing and reconciliation in our lives and in the world. We remember the 3,344 persons on Death Row in our country today. O God, we do not know their life's stories, nor do we know why they are on death row. Yet, you have taught us that all human beings have worth and that killing is unjust, betraying our deepest values about human life. Be with each person during their darkest hour, and grant that this society and this world will end these senseless and merciless executions. O God you ask us to choose between life and death, blessing and curse each day. Help us to choose life, as we seek peace and justice for our lives and for our world. Amen.

(Adapted from the Gethsemane Prayer for Those on Death Row by Rev. Liz Alexander)

Litany for the Criminal Justice System

Leader God, we pray for all the people in the criminal justice system.
Congregation **Forgive our self-righteousness and judgment of others.**

Leader We pray for all victims of crimes and their families, and for all who
are incarcerated and their families.

Congregation **Help us to change our priorities, so that instead of building more
and more prisons we will rebuild lives and communities.**

All **And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to
love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?** (Micah 6:8)
(Rev. Liz Alexander, The Church of Gethsemane)

Benediction

**As you leave here today,
remember that you are the church in the world,
and as you go, may you
---embrace the will of God
---obey the call of God
---receive the power of God,
---and reflect the love of God.**
(The Church of Gethsemane Benediction)

APPENDIX: PRISON/RE-ENTRY CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRIES

In the Presbytery of New York City

Compiled by Raymond Gillyard, Deacon, Church of Gethsemane

To make a correction/addition: contact Annie Rawlings, staff.

1-212-870-2221, ext. 4249 socialwitness@presbynyc.org

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ASTORIA

In support and prayer for formerly incarcerated people

BAY RIDGE UNITED CHURCH

Helps to support the Church of Gethsemane

Works with Prison Fellowship

THE BRICK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Sponsors re-entry program offered at Church of Gethsemane

BROADWAY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Homeless Shelter Legal and Health Services Broadway Community Inc.

Although there are no formal programs offered, many guests are formerly incarcerated

CHURCH BY THE SEA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Donates food to the food pantry at Church of Gethsemane

Christmas gifts

CHURCH OF GETHSEMANE

Criminal Justice Sunday Christmas Party

Justice Works Food Pantry

Project Connect Re-Entry Group

A.A. Meetings Social Activism

EASTCHESTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Prison Ministry Philemon Ministry

Angel Tree Kairos Ministry

FEATHERBED LANE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Gifts for children of mothers in prison.

FIFTH AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Sponsor Angel Tree for Church of Gethsemane

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE CITY OF NY

Circles of Care with ICARE Works with the Church of Gethsemane

FIRST SPANISH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Angel Tree

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF FLUSHING

Outreach to Asian prisoners at Otisville

FORT SCHUYLER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Angle Tree

FORT WASHINGTON HEIGHTS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Exodus Project Literacy Classes
A.A. Meetings on Saturday

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF JAMAICA

Angel Tree Rebuilding Manhood Support Group

JAN HUS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Homeless Outreach and Advocacy Program: many guests are formerly incarcerated

LAFAYETTE AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Works with Church of Gethsemane and JusticeWorks

MADISON AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Angel Tree

MEMORIAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Angel Tree Visits Prisons

ST. ALBANS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Visits prisons Letter-writing Angel Tree

SOUNDVIEW PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Angel Tree Letter-writing

UNION CHURCH OF BAY RIDGE

Supports Church of Gethsemane Criminal Justice Sunday
Supports Mothers in Prison/Children in Crisis program (JusticeWorks)

UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF RIDGEWOOD

New Beginnings Curriculum at Rikers Island and Westchester County Jail

UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Rehabilitation Ministry Angle Tree

WEST END PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Pastor Alice Rudden Prison Outreach (Rikers Island)
Angel Tree

WEST PARK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Supports Church of Gethsemane

WESTMINSTER CEDAR MANOR PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Angel Tree



Resources for Criminal Justice Sunday:

National Council of Churches:

http://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/images/CEEFFLD_2015_SKTL_MI.pdf

Department of Justice/Office of Justice Programs:

<https://www.ncjrs.gov/faithbased/publications.html>

General Commission of Religion and Race of the United Methodist Church:

<http://gcorr.org/resources/gospel-lessons-racial-criminal-and-socioeconomic-justice>

Justice Unbound: <http://justiceunbound.org/carousel/the-power-of-presence/>

Hudson River Presbytery Prison Partnership:

<http://www.hudrivpres.org/index.php?n=7&sn=29>

New York City Presbytery:

<http://www.nycpresbytery.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/Prison-Reentry-Take-A-Next-Step.pdf>

Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association (PHEWA):

<http://phewacommunity.org/pcjnpresbyteriancriminaljusticenetwork/pcjnresources.html>