

Together we will decide that once a person's sentence has been served, all roads will be paved for successful reintegration into the community. Under the guidance of the Spirit, we commit to dismantling the social norms and public structures whose byproducts are high rates of recidivism, and to establishing new social norms and civic infrastructure which align with an intention of 0% recidivism.

THE NEW JIM CROW

“The New Jim Crow” refers to mass incarceration and its staggering web of injustice. Throughout American history, a caste system has been in place to satisfy the drive of privilege. The caste system, previously institutionalized through the Jim Crow laws, is now perpetuated through mass incarceration.

To ensure a second class of citizens, we disproportionately convict people of color. We strip them of constitutional rights and impose heavy sentences. After serving their time, those convicted are denied housing, employment, voting and other rights. Not only are the convicted affected, but families and communities are devastated. Children pay the highest price. Meanwhile the industries which depend on mass incarceration receive billions in profit. The cycle of exploitation intensifies.

OUR RESPONSE

The New Jim Crow is ultimately a manifestation of our spiritual crisis. We have neglected love of God and neighbor. We have failed to care for the most vulnerable. We have valued profits over people. The Church is called to respond in the way of Jesus: The way of faith in God, the way of unity, creativity, non-anxious truth-telling, non-violent action, compassion for the most vulnerable, forgiveness of those who know not what they do, willingness to suffer for the cause, and love of and reconciliation with the “enemy.”

EMBODYING GOD'S DREAM

2013 marked the 50TH Anniversary of critical moments in the Civil Rights Movement. Throughout the year, we were rekindled by the spirit of those who have gone before us. From each quadrant of Washington, DC, we were united in study of the New Jim Crow, and worship and prayer across the dividing lines of denomination and race.

As we have deepened in Christian unity, God has been faithful to give us the next steps in our shared mission. As described in the table to the right, our work for 2014 is to analyze, strategize, and collaborate to dismantle the social norms and public structures that perpetuate the devastating cycle of mass incarceration. Our focus will be to reverse the unsustainably high

rates of recidivism—to stop the revolving door that returns people to prison. Under Jesus’ non-violent Spirit of Love, we will replace our broken criminal system with an expression of community where all of God’s people are restored.

OUR FIVE POINTS OF FOCUS:

1. Our churches will intentionally welcome those coming home from incarceration. We will be servant communities of societal and spiritual redemption and reconciliation. We will give up our communities’ church lives of individualism and embody a radical church-life for others.
2. The prison industrial complex will be dispossessed of its profit motives to fill beds, and the political platform will be dispossessed of its political motive to fill beds. We will implement creative models of justice which restore people, communities and relationships within an economy that serves the common good.
3. The legalized slavery of prisoners and the legalized discrimination of ex-offenders will be dismantled, and we will develop a sustainable wealth of living jobs.
4. The criminalization of drug use and mental illness will be replaced with community-based addictions recovery and mental health programs, respectively.
5. Undocumented residents will either be released to communities in the United States or to their native countries, but not held in incarceration.

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

The Christian response to injustice always invokes trial and trouble. For this reason Jesus tells us that very few will follow the narrow way.

Dismantling the New Jim Crow, we will be devastated by our countries systemic racism and our own part in its exploitation. As we are brought to our knees in despair, we will come to rejoice and be glad, encouraged that we stand in the company of the prophets of Jesus’ day and of our own.

Under the troubling conditions that Jesus promises his followers, we will be inwardly renewed—also according to his promise. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the city and nation, the rich and poor, the captor and captive will be tested, transcended and transformed.

Jesus beckons, “Take up your cross and follow me.” This is the pearl of great price. The cost of discipleship is its own reward.