



Sacred Conversation on Race The journey **continues**

O God, we pray for your presence and wisdom, as we begin to look carefully at the realities of RACE and Criminal Justice System. Amen.

The U.S. holds a quarter of the world's prisoners



The U.S. incarcerates more of its citizens than any other country in the world. It holds a quarter of the world's prisoners.

Incarceration rates

One in every 32 adults in the U.S. is under justice system control in prison, or probation or on parole.

Among the currently 2.3 million men, women and youth in prison, there are a disproportionate number of people of color.

If current rates continue, Black males have a 32% chance of serving time in prison at some point in their lives. Hispanic males have a 17% chance, while White males have a 6% chance.

What factors contribute to such large numbers of persons in our criminal justice

system? Why are people of color over-represented?

Some see in the overcrowded prisons a system working well. They say, "Well, only the guilty get arrested, convicted, and imprisoned."

But only a very few practitioners, experts, and affected communities with over-represented numbers of loved ones incarcerated question whether racial disparity exists within the criminal justice system itself.

Racial disparities

Statistics show that racial disparities exist at every point of the criminal justice system in: (a) encounter with police, (b) at time of arrest, (c) at arraignment, (d) access to legal representation, (e) length of sentencing, (f) incarceration and probation.

Illegitimate or unwarranted racial disparity in the criminal justice system results from the dissimilar treatment of similarly situated people based on race.

For example, Blacks (5.2%) and Hispanics (4.2%) that are stopped by police while driving is more likely than Whites (2.6%) to be arrested.

Minority youth are more likely than White youth to be detained, formally charged, transferred to criminal court and incarcerated.

Such disparity exists even after the young offenders' rates of arrest, detention and incarceration have been adjusted for criminal history and seriousness of offense.

The U.S. criminal justice system isn't there to fix racism. But racial disparity within such a system of "protection" challenges the very basic values of our society upon which it is built.

There is no safety for anyone where racial disparity in such an important social institution leads to unequal justice, and lack of fairness.

Racial disparities exist at every point of the criminal justice system

Sacred Conversation on Race



Prayerful Reflection

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts, and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit ... God has combined the members ... so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

- 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; 24-26

This Bible passage can help to ground our reflection on race and the criminal justice system.

The Apostle Paul insisted that we are ALL valued in God. The mainstream values of his times suggested some people have less worth and dignity than others.

Paul also emphasized that our belief and our actions, as part of the social body, affect the other parts closely.

For you, what does this spiritual insight mean for

our criminal justice system?

How does this spiritual insight make you feel when relating it to our criminal justice system?

How would you act out the belief in the inherent worth and dignity of each and every person created in God's image where justice issues are concerned?

Take some time to lift up your thoughts and feelings, whatever they may be, to God in quiet prayer.



Questions for Discussion

1. How is the issue of criminal justice relevant to you, your church and your community?
2. What are some ministries that you engage in through worship, mission, outreach, or fellowship that touch on the issue of race in the justice system?
3. What resources do you have in your community to assist your congregation in supporting the formerly incarcerated to re-enter society?

Additional Questions



1. How do recent laws and trends in U.S. criminal justice contribute to or deter racial disparity? For example, "three strikes" law, or private ownership and management of prisons?
2. A common idea suggests that the poor commit the greatest number of crimes. Do they?
 - Recent mortgage lending practices, Ponzi schemes, wage theft and the like cause us to ask whose criminality has done the greater damage. Are drug use crimes worse?
 - Do you think there is any indication of racism and classism in the way we define and prosecute crime?
3. What can your congregation do to defend prisoners' human rights?