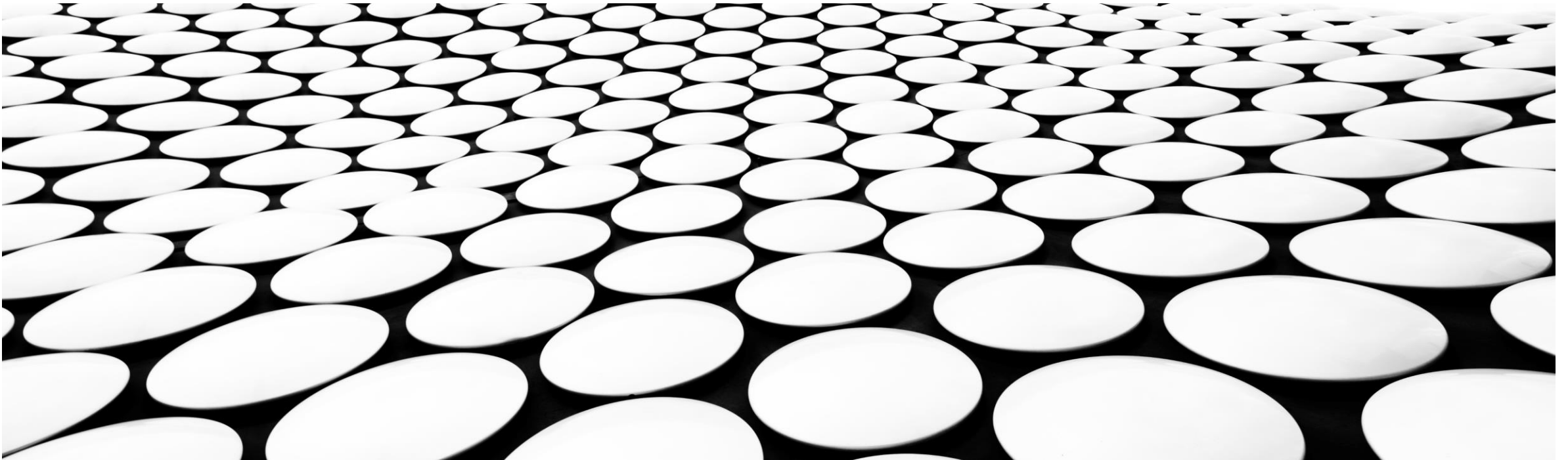

BRAVE CHURCH – HARD TOPICS

THE AMERICAN PRISON SYSTEM, WEEK 3 OF 3

BUT WHAT CAN WE DO?



BC/HT COVENANT

BRAVE CHURCH

TACKLING TOUGH TOPICS
TOGETHER

ELIZABETH HAGAN

We will...

accept conflict and commit to the way of kindness.

take responsibility for how our words are received.

ask permission before we challenge someone's views on a subject.

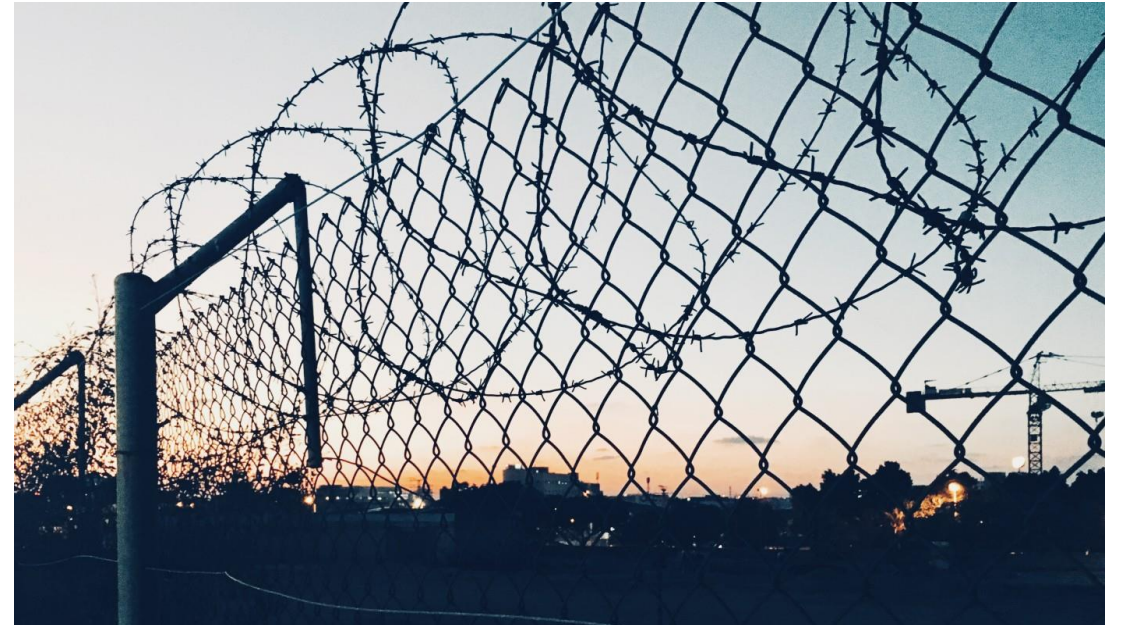
show respect for one another and graciously receive feedback if someone feels disrespected.

use 'I' instead of 'you' statements. We will not accuse or attack.

give everyone who wants to speak an opportunity to do so.

RECAP

- U.S. incarcerates a very large percentage of its population comparatively to other democracies
- The U.S. prison and justice system has been applied inequitably across race, class, and other demographics
- A complex set of histories and values has shaped where we are today
- Some modest reforms and reductions have been the way of the past decade, but where do we go now?





RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

What do you know about restorative justice?

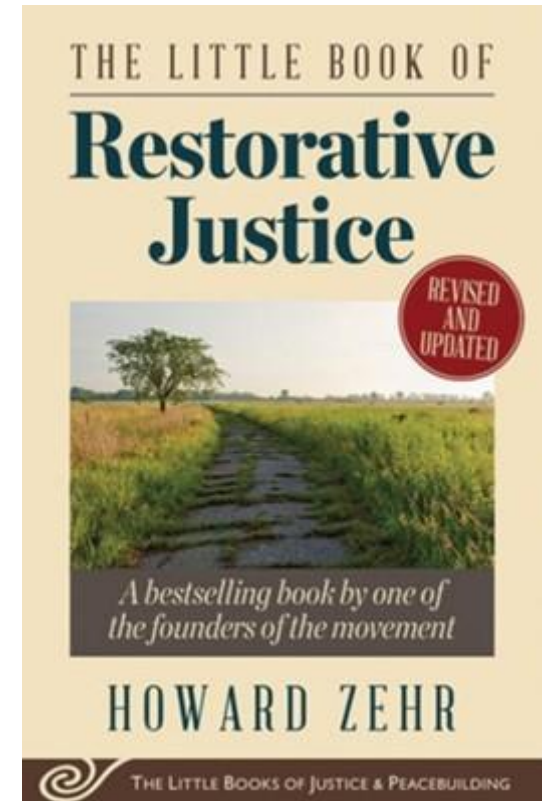
What are your impressions?

What are your concerns?

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative justice is not:

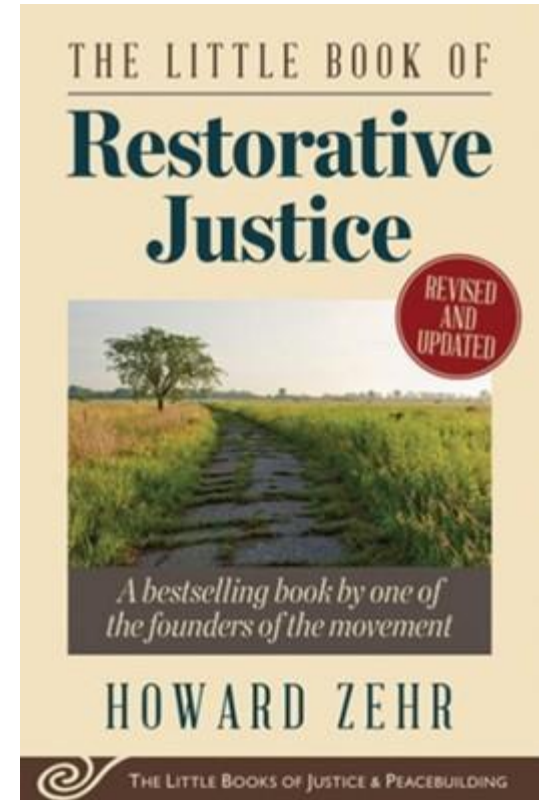
- Primarily about forgiveness/reconciliation
- In search of a return to past circumstances
- Mediation (which implies encounter and level playing field)
- Primarily designed to reduce recidivism
- A particular program or blueprint
- Limited to minor offenses or first-time offenders
- A new or North American development
- A panacea or a replacement for legal system



RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative justice is:

- A diverse set of approaches and principles practiced in many different variations
- Based in various indigenous justice processes
- Centered on the needs of victims, offenders AND the whole community
- Concerned about needs and roles
 - Victims or “harmed parties” need information, truth, empowerment, restitution
 - Offenders or “responsible parties” need accountability, encouragement to heal and transform, re-integration into community, temporary restraint
 - Community needs attention to their concerns, empowerment to mutual obligation



RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

- Most commonly used in schools or Juvenile court proceedings
- But it can have broader implications
- Longmont, CO and the Community Justice Partnership
- Local examples to look into:
 - FCPS uses some RP in discipline
 - Restorative Arlington/Arlington County “Heart of Safety” program



Discussion



What do you think...

What were your reactions to the video?

(How) does RJ reflect Christian values?

How might RJ be worth using in our nation?

What limits would you put on it?

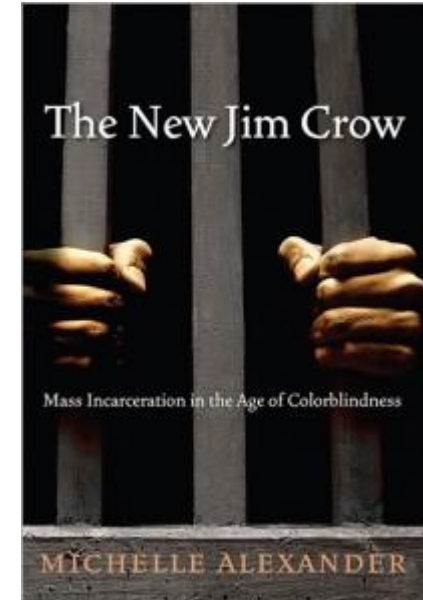
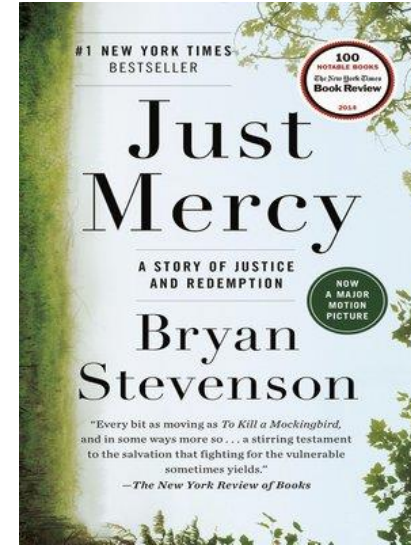
AWARENESS AND NEWS

There are SO many good books, documentaries, etc. on this topic.

Organizations/news outlets to follow on email/social media:

- Marshall Project
- Equal Justice Initiative
- Justice Forward VA

Others?



 The Marshall Project



 Equal Justice Initiative

RE-ENTRY AND OTHER FORMS OF RELATIONSHIP

Be in relationship with those in re-entry process:

- One Parish/One Prisoner idea
- Provide material and/or relational support
- Interrupt the cycle

Local opportunities

- Connect, mentor, or support through [Friends of Guest House](#)
- Mentor someone through [OAR](#)

ADVOCACY

Justice Forward VA

- There were a number of reforms in 2021
 - First probation violation can't send you to jail
 - Abolition of death penalty (1st southern state)
 - Decriminalization of marijuana and changes to pretextual traffic stops
 - Establishment of “degrees of robbery”
- Now working on:
 - Ending mandatory minimums (attempted 2021)
 - Establishing parole/compassionate release/appeals process
 - Pretrial reform (counsel at first appearance)
 - Ending the “trial penalty”
 - Reconsider police officers in schools
 - Lack of parole
 - Eliminate rollbacks of 2021 session

ADVOCACY

VOICE (Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement)

- Created a public defender office in Prince William County
- Increased VA's felony larceny level from \$250 to \$500 to \$1000
- Now working on:
 - Ending cash bail
 - Establishment/expansion of Crisis Receiving Centers (CRCs)

ADVOCACY

Prison Policy's suggestions of "Winnable reforms in 2023"

- Expand alternative criminal justice responses (invest in community orgs, alternative response systems)
- Reduce the number of people in the "revolving doors" of prison (use alternatives to arrest, decriminalize youth, avoid incarcerating parents, reduce pretrial detention, establish moratoriums on prison construction, fund indigent defense)
- Improve sentencing structures and release processes (make it easier to change excessive sentences, repeal mandatory minimums, revisit program requirements for parole, increase dollar threshold for felony theft)
- Reduce footprint of probation/parole system (end punitive conditions, eliminate probation fees,
- Protect incarcerated people and families from exploitation by private companies
- Promote physical and mental health among incarcerated/formerly incarcerated
- Restore voting and jury service rights
- Eliminate barriers to re-entry (job access, benefits, driving license restoration)

Discussion



WHERE ARE WE?

- What is one thing from our discussions you'd like to learn more about?
- Is there one step, as an individual or as a Grace community, you feel drawn to take to get more involved?

A FRANCISCAN BENEDICTION

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships so that you may live deep within the heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in the world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done, to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor. Amen.