

## BE BOLD CRIMINAL JUSTICE GROUP REPORT

May 17, 2020

The SCOR Be Bold Criminal Justice Group has met to discuss topics related to criminal justice reform. We are motivated by Scripture, noting that the Hebrew scripture Jesus reads for his first sermon in his home synagogue provides marching orders to Be Bold (see Luke 4:18-19). Isaiah 61:1-4 says:

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 release to the prisoners;

We are also motivated by the work of leaders such as Bryan Stevenson, and books, especially *The New Jim Crow*. We note the intersection of incarceration and race, and the degree to which laws and the way they are carried out by the criminal justice system discriminate and oppress while a person is incarcerated, and leave a stigma making it difficult for them to be productively employed once released.

We have created a list of various pieces of the system, including the following:

1. Policing – is it too intrusive? Are some arrested, others cited, others just warned? Is revenue generation a big reason for heavy policing?
2. Jail – is bond too high? Are people held too long awaiting trial?
3. Prosecution – which charges are pursued? Which ones are not? Which DA's are motivated by the desire to seem "tough on crime?"
4. Trial – do defendants have adequate legal representation?
5. Sentencing -- Are sentencing guidelines too strict? Do judges even follow them? Are judges in the same jurisdiction following the same guidelines? Could probation be used more often?
6. Incarceration – Are conditions in prisons healthy and safe? (COVID 19 and other conditions).
7. Parole – are conditions for parole reasonable? Are they fairly applied?
8. Commutation and early release – are elderly prisoners' sentences being commuted?
9. Re-entry – what is being done to help ex-offenders avoid re-offending and get a new start? (CRS work has been especially good on this issue).
10. Young offenders – are under-18 offenders being treated in developmentally appropriate ways re: sentencing, incarceration, re-entry?

Given our current membership and its connections, and given current public interest, we have decided to first focus on #2 and #6, cash money bonds and health service issues in the criminal system, although there are certainly other issues that urgently need to be addressed.

We have circulated petitions and letters of support on the topic and are considering organizing a formal Pilgrim church support of the same. The group is also considering sponsoring speakers to address the congregation on the topics and perhaps to hold adult ed sessions. For example, the Coalition to End Money Bond has a 3-lesson Bible Study called "Let Our People Go" that might work well at Pilgrim.

We would like to invite interested parties in the congregation to join future discussions or take action with us. Please contact Bruce Cox ([dadcox@aol.com](mailto:dadcox@aol.com)) for further details.

