Repairing the Breach: Faith-Based Community Organizing to Dismantle Mass Incarceration

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Abstract: Public awareness of the injustices of mass incarceration has grown significantly over the last decade. Many people have learned about mass incarceration in church contexts through book groups, study campaigns, and denominational statements. In recent years, faith-based community organizing (FBCO) networks have increasingly turned their attention to mass incarceration in light of the growing awareness of many Christian individuals, congregations, and denominations. Mass incarceration, however, presents three distinctive challenges to FBCO. First, dismantling mass incarceration requires overtly and conscientiously confronting white supremacy and advancing racial and ethnic equity; faith-based community organizers have avoided this work in the past for fear of dividing their base. Second, streams of Christian theology based in retributivism have provided justifications for increasingly punitive practices and policies, thus contributing to mass incarceration; FBCO networks must construct and uplift alternative theological streams to support alternative practices and policies. Finally, several practices and policies tied to mass incarceration deplete the political power of individuals, families, and communities most deeply impacted by it. Organizing against mass incarceration requires new strategies for building social capital and creating coalitions among groups who have been disenfranchised, marginalized, and undercounted by these practices and policies. Together, these challenges have required FBCO networks to adapt assumptions, strategies, and relationships that had previously been effective in addressing other issues, such as healthcare, employment, education, and transportation. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, this paper explores the insights, struggles, and innovations of ISAIAH, a network in Minnesota, as its members work to dismantle mass incarceration and confront its unique challenges.

Keywords: mass incarceration; faith-based community organizing; white supremacy; racial equity; retribution; social capital

1. Introduction

"A prison society" (Wacquant 2009). "A tenacious carceral state" (Gottschalk 2015). "The new Jim Crow" (Alexander 2010). "Mass incarceration" (Garland 2001).[1] Regardless of how we name the crisis of criminal justice in the United States, these terms point to a social condition marked by historically and comparatively *high rates* of incarceration and *large total populations* in prisons, jails, and other penal facilities. This condition involves what social theorist David Garland describes as "systematic imprisonment of whole groups of the population", especially affecting people of color and

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[1] David Garland coined "mass imprisonment", but "imprisonment" has typically shifted to "incarceration" in order to capture the expansion not only of prison populations, but also the expansion of jail populations, which include both people detained pre-trial, people with short-term sentences (usually less than one year), and people who have been placed in jails because of prison overpopulation. For an overview of the history of the term "mass incarceration", cf. (Simon 2015).

people lacking socio-economic resources (Garland 2001, pp. 1–3). We are facing now what the editors of *The New York Times* call a "moral, legal, social, and economic disaster" (Editorial Board 2014).[2]

Awareness of this disaster has grown significantly over the last decade, with many people learning about it in church settings. Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* and Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy* quickly became top picks for church book groups, adult education programs, and listening groups (Alexander 2010; Stevenson 2015; Garcia 2013).[3] Several mainline Protestant denominations chose these books for national awareness campaigns.[4] Some denominations have divested from private prisons, issued social statements and resolutions, and constructed their own curricula about mass incarceration.[5] The Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, a network of progressive black churches, designed a companion study guide for *The New Jim Crow* and conducted Justice Commission hearings, resulting in a report, "Bearing Witness: A Nation in Chains" (Birchett et al. 2014; Bearing Witness: A Nation in Chains 2013). The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops last wrote collectively about criminal justice in its 2000 statement, (Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration 2000), prior to widespread attention to mass incarceration. Nevertheless, the bishops signed a statement against mass incarceration at the annual meeting of Christian Churches Together, an ecumenical dialogue group that focused its work in 2014 on this issue (Principles on Mass Incarceration 2014). In 2017, Prison Fellowship, an evangelical Protestant organization, issued "The Justice Declaration", which states, "The Church has both the unique ability and unparalleled capacity to confront the staggering crisis of crime and incarceration in America and to respond with restorative solutions for communities, victims, and individuals responsible for crime" (The Justice Declaration 2017).[6] Across significant divisions, Christians in the United States increasingly recognize the injustices of mass incarceration, often sharing Alexander's recognition that, "This is not simply a legal problem, or a political problem, or a policy problem. [It] raises profound moral and spiritual questions about who we are, individually and collectively, who we aim to become, and what we are willing to do now" (Alexander 2016).[7]

It may seem that growing awareness of mass incarceration has contributed to meaningful criminal justice reform, especially with recent reductions of prison populations, which peaked nationally in 2009, dropping 6 percent by 2016 (Ghandnoosh 2018).[8] Budget cuts following the 2008 recession

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2　　Significantly, this disaster is not the result of unusually high crime rates in the United States compared to other countries or of historically high crime rates since the advent of mass incarceration in the 1970s. Rather, it has resulted from a confluence of political, economic, social, and cultural factors that led to harsher criminal justice policies and practices. For an overview of these factors, cf. (Levad 2014).

3　　In order to manage the scope of this paper, I will focus on Christian faith communities, particularly because of my professional identification as a Christian social ethicist and Catholic moral theologian. Many other religious and non-religious communities are also engaged in efforts to learn about and dismantle mass incarceration, and their efforts warrant study as well.

4　　The Unitarian Universalist Association, for example, selected *The New Jim Crow* for its 2012–2013 "Common Read" and *Just Mercy* for 2015–2016 (The UU Common Read 2018). Also, in 2015, the Episcopal Church recommended *The New Jim Crow* as a common text for congregations throughout the United States in its resolution to study mass incarceration as a denomination (Encourage Study of the Issue of Mass Incarceration 2015).

5　　The United Methodist Church, for example, divested from private prisons in 2012 (Mefford 2012). Examples of social statements and denominational resolutions include the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America's production of a Social Statement, (The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries 2013), at its 2013 Churchwide Assembly. Similarly, the United Church of Christ passed two relevant resolutions at its 2017 General Synod: "Dismantling Discriminary Systems of Mass Incarceration in the United States" and "Dismantling the New Jim Crow". Several denominations have constructed their own curricula. The United Methodist Women created a webinar on mass incarceration, in conjunction with a national seminar in 2015. The Mennonite Central Committee organized a week-long learning tour through correctional facilities in Pennsylvania in 2015, and in 2018, the MCC created "Pipeline", a mass incarceration learning tool used to help participants understand challenges and barriers in the "cradle-to-prison pipeline". The American Friends Service Committee (Quakers) identify mass incarceration as one of their "key issues" and provide many resources for understanding and responding to mass incarceration.

6　　The National Association of Evangelicals, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, and the Colson Center for Christian Worldview also composed the statement.

7　　This conclusion led Alexander to join the faculty of Union Theological Seminary in New York in 2016.

8　　Some states saw drops beginning as early as 1999, while some states continue to increase numbers of incarcerated people into the present. Between 2009 and 2016, prison populations in the United States decreased over 6 percent. Those states that most aggressively reduced prison populations—New Jersey, Alaska, and New York—also saw drops over 30 percent since

explain some of this decrease; many states could no longer pay for imprisoning large numbers of people. But criminal justice reform also has had an impact as states curbed the War on Drugs, increased use of diversion programs, reduced prison sentences, revised sentencing guidelines, and reduced or eliminated mandatory minimum sentences (Mauer and Ghandnoosh 2014).[9] Politicians now see avenues to election by being "smart on crime" instead of "tough on crime", and their elections bolster continued efforts to reduce reliance on prisons state by state, county by county (Harris 2009; The Attorney General's Smart on Crime Initiative 2017).[10] Notwithstanding these advances, the road to dismantling mass incarceration is still a long one, and the destination will not be reached through reform alone. At the current rate of decarceration, it will take seventy-five years—until the end of this century—to reduce U.S. prison populations by half (Ghandnoosh 2018).[11] We are still far from the final destination of dismantling mass incarceration.

　　　To continue down this road, some Christians have become politically active in opposition to mass incarceration, especially through the tactic of faith-based community organizing (FBCO). Rooted in Saul Alinsky's community-organizing model, FBCO grew out of efforts starting in the 1970s to concentrate more intentionally on communities of faith as loci for organizing (Alinsky 1969, 1971; Bretherton 2015; Warren 2001; Warren et al. 2011; Wood and Fulton 2015).[12] Currently, two of the most important national community organizing networks are faith-based: the Gamaliel Foundation and Faith in Action (renamed in 2018 from the People Improving Communities through Organizing National Network, or PICO). Along with concentrating on faith communities, these networks appeal to the wisdom of religious traditions in defining their transformational vision and draw on religious practices such as singing, prayer, liturgy, and preaching in their organizing (Wood and Fulton 2015). This model of political, social, and community engagement has empowered Christians to address numerous injustices: from inequitable educational systems to inadequate wages, from lack of healthcare access to unsustainable transportation grids. In the past few years, FBCO networks have turned their attention to mass incarceration.[13]

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their respective peak years; twenty-one states in total have reduced their prison populations by double-digit percentages. The size of the federal prison population has dropped 13 percent since 2011.

[9]　Those states that decreased their prison populations the most also saw drops in crime rates that outpaced national averages, reinforcing the recognition that policies and practices—not high crime rates—created mass incarceration, and changes in policies and practices will be necessary to dismantle mass incarceration.

[10]　Mayors across the country have joined Smart on Crime, a network created by the Center for American Progress with the support of the Safety and Justice Initiative of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. This network promotes moving away from "tough on crime" policies and practices toward "fair laws and enforcement of the laws", "just and proportional responses", "comprehensive investments", and "data- and evidence-driven solutions". See https://www.smartoncrime.us/ (accessed on 17 October 2018). While much of the driving force behind Smart on Crime has progressive roots, it is notable that Koch Industries and Right on Crime have significant presence on the steering committee of the network.

[11]　The nation would still have prison populations almost four times larger than those of the mid-1970s. Even with an end to the War on Drugs, large prison populations would remain, as "half of the state prison population is serving time for a violent crime, including assault and robbery, and one out of every seven people in prison is serving a life sentence" (Ghandnoosh 2018). John Pfaff argues for the need for criminal justice reform to go beyond opposition to the War on Drugs to address much more difficult questions about alternative responses to serious violent crime (Pfaff 2017).

[12]　Mark Warren et al. distinguish community organizing from political advocacy or service provision paradigms in terms of a shift from advocating *for* or providing services *to* individuals, groups, or communities. Rather community organizing emphasizes "building the capacity of community members to create institutional and policy change on their own behalf" (Warren et al. 2011, p. 7). Community organizing differs from activism as well in its insistence on training leaders who are grounded in community and relationship: "One of the hallmarks of contemporary organizing is the distinction made between a leader who is embedded in relationships and an individual activist who speaks out at a meeting but is not connected to the broader community" (Warren et al. 2011, p. 18). Given these differences from advocacy, service provision, and activism, community organizing aims at multifaceted individual, communal, institutional, and cultural transformation to "give voice to the voiceless, build the participation of local people, increase the power of historically marginalized communities, expand citizenship and democracy, address the profound inequalities of American society, and work to transform our public institutions to make them responsive and accountable to poor working families" (Warren et al. 2011, p. 19).

[13]　A detailed account of Faith in Action's national initiatives on mass incarceration can be found in (Wood and Fulton 2015), which describes the creation of the Lifelines to Healing campaign (later renamed the Live Free campaign).

ISAIAH, one of the largest of Faith in Action's forty-four affiliate federations and eight statewide networks, exemplifies how Christians have used FBCO as a tactic for dismantling mass incarceration (History 2018).[14] Based in Minnesota, this network began as an affiliate of the Gamaliel Foundation in 2000, then separated as an independent organization for several years, before joining Faith in Action (at the time, PICO) in 2012. ISAIAH draws membership from Christian congregations in Minneapolis and St. Paul, the surrounding suburbs, and throughout greater Minnesota. This network has organized against mass incarceration for several years, beginning in 2014 with a campaign for moratoria on suspensions and expulsions of elementary-aged students in four Minnesota school districts in order to disrupt the cradle(-to-school)-to-prison pipeline. This work led to advocacy to adopt and fund the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative throughout the state, opposition to re-opening a previously shuddered private prison in rural Minnesota, and then, support for revision of the Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines (Budd 2016; Cook 2016; Coolican 2016; Negstad 2016; Simons 2015). In 2016, ISAIAH received a grant from Live Free, a national campaign of Faith in Action concerned with criminal justice issues, to enhance its work related to mass incarceration. Since then, the Minnesota network has focused on county-level organizing, especially in Hennepin County, home of Minneapolis. ISAIAH has pressured county officials to eliminate cash bail for non-violent, low-level offenses; increase transparency and restraint in charging decisions and sentencing recommendations; strengthen diversion and restorative justice programs; stop collecting country of origin information from people who have been arrested; create legal defense funds for residents fighting deportation; and end cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) through the county jail.

Mass incarceration presents distinctive challenges compared to other issues on ISAIAH's agenda, and the journey of this network indicates how FBCO might address these challenges.[15] First, although housing, healthcare, and education policies and practices, for example, have been built upon the cultural legacy of white supremacy in the United States, criminal justice policies and practices do so in a particularly pernicious way. Mass incarceration not only stems from racial and ethnic disparities in our society; it also exacerbates them in a vicious cycle. Dismantling mass incarceration requires confronting white supremacy and advancing racial and ethnic equity, and ISAIAH has become more intentional about doing so than FBCO networks have typically been in the past. The second challenge is theological: streams of Christian theology based in retributivism provide justifications for punitive practices and policies. These streams have supported interpretations of justice that require ever harsher punishments against people convicted of crime. Moral and spiritual questions must be confronted alongside policy, political, and legal questions in dismantling mass incarceration, and ISAIAH provides an example of how FBCO can address these questions. Finally, several policies and practices tied to mass incarceration deplete the political power of the individuals, families, and communities most directly impacted it. Those people who know mass incarceration from personal experience are also the people who are shut out of systems and processes necessary to bring about change. Yet without attending to their experiences, any responses to mass incarceration will likely fall short. ISAIAH

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14 ISAIAH is not an acronym. It is also not a pseudonym. For some (but not all) people mentioned or quoted, I have used pseudonyms as per their request. Others are so readily identifiable that pseudonyms would not preserve their confidentiality. All people identified by their real names have given permission for this use.

15 In addition to the typical barriers of partisanship and divisiveness encountered when addressing any major issue at this time in the United States, several additional difficulties are particular to mass incarceration, but go beyond the scope of this paper. As law professor John Pfaff has argued, our criminal justice *systems* (note the plural) are fractured, with each county and each state having its own policies and practices in need of reform: "we are a nation of either 50 or 3144 distinct criminal justice systems" (Pfaff 2017, p. 13). In addition, every component of these systems—from legislation of criminal codes to policing, from courtroom practices to prison administration—requires attention. Another challenge is the comprehensive nature of social and economic change necessary to dismantle mass incarceration. The Children's Defense Fund indicates the ties of mass incarceration to other systems and structures with its phrase "cradle-to-prison pipeline", which suggests that criminal justice reform is necessary, but insufficient. Dismantling mass incarceration will also require, for example, providing access to prenatal care and resources for early childhood development, creating quality educational systems, investing in neglected communities, and improving comprehensive healthcare systems, among other initiatives.

demonstrates how FBCO can generate alternative forms of political power accountable to these people and their experiences. Together, these challenges indicate that dismantling mass incarceration will require confronting enduring legacies of white supremacy in U.S. culture, contesting retributivism in Christian theology, and building political power among and with some of the most marginalized, disenfranchised, and undercounted members of our society. In what follows, an ethnographic case study of ISAIAH demonstrates how Christians might employ FBCO to confront these challenges.

2. Address White Supremacy and Confront Racial and Ethnic Inequity

First, dismantling mass incarceration requires addressing white supremacy and advancing a broad-based agenda for racial and ethnic equity. Mass incarceration is concentrated on socio-economically disadvantaged individuals, families, and communities of color.[16] In 2016, a third of people in prisons and jails in the United States were black, while nearly a quarter were Latinx (Trends in U.S. Corrections 2016). The rate of incarceration of black men is over six times that of white men, and the rate of incarceration of Latino men is more than twice that of white men (Trends in U.S. Corrections 2016). Alexander made "mass incarceration" and the "new Jim Crow" household terms with her argument that our criminal justice systems create "a lower caste of individuals who are permanently barred by law and custom from mainstream society" (Alexander 2010, p. 13). The people within this caste are disproportionately black and brown, recreating the previous castes maintained by Jim Crow laws, ideologies, and practices. In addition to challenges faced by African-American individuals, families, and communities, Latinx people often encounter mass incarceration through the mechanisms of immigration enforcement, especially detainment and deportation. Even prior to President Donald Trump's "zero tolerance" policy (instituted in early 2018), which refers all people who cross the U.S. border without documentation for federal prosecution, increasing prosecution of immigration violations led to Latinx people comprising nearly half of all defendants sentenced in federal court by 2012 (Light et al. 2014). Marie Gottshalk notes, "These developments have fostered what some are calling a 'crimmigration' or 'immcarceration' crisis" (Gottschalk 2015, p. 215). Racial and ethnic inequity is a central characteristic of mass incarceration.

This inequity stems from the roots of white supremacy in our culture. Dehumanizing images and narratives, often with racialized tropes, have fueled the growth of our criminal justice systems by supporting retributive policies and practices against people deemed "criminal". A classic example of the deployment of such tropes is the Willie Horton campaign advertisement used by allies of the George H.W. Bush campaign during the 1988 presidential election against Michael Dukakis. Another example is the term "superpredators", coined by then-Princeton political science professor John DiIulio in 1995, and popularized in his 1996 book, *Body Count* (DiIulio et al. 1996).[17] This term, and others such as "wildings" and "wolfpacks", play upon the animalization and brutalization of young men of color and feed moral panic about crime, thus providing a cultural framework to justify mass incarceration (Welch et al. 2004). President Trump's demonization of Latinx immigrants as "drug dealers, criminals, and rapists" or as members of MS-13 or as terrorists evokes the cultural framework supporting crimmigration/immcarceration (Phillips 2018). Mass incarceration, particularly its disparate impacts

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[16] One critique of "mass incarceration" as a term is that it can erase the discrepancies in who is most affected by expanding criminal justice systems. Loïc Wacquant argues that "mass incarceration" tends to imply that this social condition is evenly distributed across the population, when it is clear that it affects non-white individuals, families, and communities much more deeply (Wacquant 2009). In contrast, Jonathan Simon notes, "However, the term 'mass imprisonment' need not be misleading, and it captures an important degree to which incarceration risk has been generalized. While African American and Latino males may be incarcerated at rates many times the level of their white peers, the latter face incarceration rates unprecedented historically or in other countries. Other institutions that have been described as 'mass', including the military or higher education, also have distinctive demographic patterns of stratification" (Simon 2015, p. 28).

[17] DiIulio and his co-authors claimed, "America is now home to thickening ranks of juvenile 'superpredators'—radically impulsive, brutally remorseless youngsters, including ever more preteenage boys, who murder, assault, rape, rob, burglarize, deal deadly drugs, join gun toting gangs, and create serious communal disorders" (p. 27).

on individuals, families, and communities of color, grows from white supremacy, further exacerbating racial and ethnic inequities.

Because mass incarceration grows from white supremacy and exacerbates racial and ethnic inequities, any efforts to dismantle mass incarceration without addressing these realities will prove inadequate. The field of community organizing, including FBCO, however, has historically avoided open discussions of race and ethnicity because of assumptions that they would be ideologically driven and divide the organizing base along racial and ethnic lines (Warren 2001; Wood 2002). Sociologists Richard Wood and Brad Fulton observe,

> . . . the structural makeup of [FBCO] was . . . an obstacle [to address racial and ethnic equity].
> The broader institutional base of the field (mostly Catholic and liberal Protestant in addition
> to historic black churches, but also synagogues and mosques, and a few evangelical churches)
> often resisted—and sometimes continues to contest—any explicit focus on race, preferring
> instead more "race neutral" and "color-blind" approaches to improving the quality of life in
> poor and middle-class communities (Wood and Fulton 2015, pp. 140–41).

ISAIAH shared this history with the field of FBCO as a whole. Paul Marincel, a founder of ISAIAH and its Director of Strategic Initiatives, explained,

> The roots of community organizing come out of a set of organizers, mostly men, and a
> set of decisions that they made that were, for a variety of reasons, explicitly anti-ideology
> and opposed to an open conversation about race as inherently divisive. I would argue that
> the roots of community organizing, including faith-based community organizing, were in
> opposition to an overt race conversation (Marincel 2016).

Notably, ISAIAH began to enter and facilitate "overt race conversations"—both in its internal operations and in its external engagement—*prior to* beginning its work against mass incarceration. As a result, this organization provides an example of how to build efforts to dismantle mass incarceration upon explicit opposition to white supremacy and ongoing commitment to racial and ethnic equity.

Around 2008, ISAIAH began to bring racial and ethnic equity to the core of its organizing. This shift came about for several reasons, including (but not limited to) growing awareness in the previous decade of dramatic racial disparities in Minnesota; increasing non-white populations in the state, especially with larger immigrant and refugee populations; concern that Latinx communities were becoming isolated from the rest of the organization; and unease about unintended consequences of policies that ISAIAH had advanced that purportedly benefited all Minnesotans, but in reality obscured diverse needs of communities and individuals of color (Schrantz 2016).[18] Participants in ISAIAH realized that policies, conversations, and practices often are "racially neutral on their face, but are not

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[18]　A focus group with ISAIAH organizers on 9 December 2016 in Minneapolis, MN confirmed Schrantz's conclusions. The final challenge reflects tension between "false universalism" and "targeted universalism", discussed in (powell 2012). As powell consulted with ISAIAH during this time period, recognition of this tension has become common within analysis among ISAIAH participants in understanding advocacy for racial and ethnic equity. Prior to 2010, ISAIAH operated out of a framework that its participants now recognize as false universalism rooted in post-racialism. powell writes, "Post-racialists . . . are reluctant to support ideas that cannot be framed in a universal manner, and an explicit consideration of race is largely off the table. This course of action has the apparent advantage of helping those who have been historically excluded without mentioning a topic seen as 'divisive'" (pp. 10–11). As a result, post-racialists appeal to seemingly universal norms and programs that actually have disparate effects on different groups precisely because the "universal" obscures those differences and the "universal" programs end up treating all groups of people as if they face the same barriers. In contrast, "A targeted universal strategy is inclusive of the needs of both dominant and marginalized groups, but pays attention to the situation of the marginalized group. For example, if the goal is to open up housing opportunities for low-income whites and non-whites, one would look at the different constraints for each group. Targeted universalism rejects a blanket approach that is likely to be indifferent to the reality that different groups are situated differently relative to the institutions and resources of society. It also rejects the claim of formal equality that would, as a way of denying difference, treat all people the same. Any proposal would be evaluated by the outcome as well as the intent. While the effort would be universal for the poor, it would be especially sensitive to the most marginalized groups" (p. 24). Wood and Fulton's *A Shared Future* demonstrates that this analysis of "targeted universalism" has become standard throughout Faith in Action federations.

racially neutral in effect" (Shining the Light: Revealing Our Choice 2012). A watershed moment came in 2010, when ISAIAH partnered with john powell, who at the time worked at the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University, to construct a curriculum, *Shining the Light: Revealing Our Choice*, to guide the organization in explicitly addressing white supremacy, which became the basis for evaluating all of its efforts.[19] As the curriculum states, "If race is not being considered in a plan, conversation, or action around equity, then the plan, conversation, or action is incomplete" (Shining the Light: Revealing Our Choice 2012, p. 3). At the same time, ISAIAH endeavored to foster relationships with congregations with more diverse racial and ethnic representation, as well as to support the leadership development of people of color in the organization, both as congregational leaders and as staff organizers. More black churches became members of ISAIAH, facilitated in part by shifting practices in the organization to become more welcoming to diverse groups. Reverend Paul Slack, the African-American pastor of New Creation Church in Minneapolis, became the President of ISAIAH's Board of Directors, followed by the current president, Reverend James Alberts of Higher Ground Church of God in Christ in St. Cloud, who is also African-American.

The engagement of ISAIAH with issues involving mass incarceration, such as sentencing guidelines and private prisons, was possible because of its *previous* work on racial and ethnic equity, supported by its *Shining the Light* curriculum. The sense among many of the people that I interviewed was that responding to mass incarceration was an obvious and necessary next step. Executive Director Doran Schrantz reflects on the sequence of developments: "I think that's when [2010] we consolidated the commitment across the organization that race was going to be at the center of what we did. Then, by 2011, we were working on school suspensions and stuff like that. That is how we got into the mass incarceration work" (Schrantz 2016). A sense of inevitability infuses her comments, which is echoed by Sarah Gleason, a leader in ISAIAH active since the early days of the organization:

> The mass incarceration work came in through specific organizing in African-American churches, but it came into ongoing explicit work on race and racial equity being at the center. [Work on mass incarceration came in] in such a way that I didn't even actually notice an actual ripple. People who had been part of ISAIAH previously, we were pretty easily able to go, "Oh, yeah, and that too. That totally fits everything else we've been doing and we've been saying, and yes, now we're on that" (Gleason 2016).

These reflections indicate that for many participants in ISAIAH, dismantling mass incarceration fits clearly with an overarching commitment to racial and ethnic equity, which precedes—historically, theologically, and philosophically—the work of ISAIAH on criminal justice reform.

ISAIAH thus engages the cultural work of confronting white supremacy by adapting previous practices, assumptions, strategies, and relationships. Its case, however, illuminates the difficulties of these adaptations, suggesting how others might follow ISAIAH's lead and what future steps for challenging white supremacy and dismantling mass incarceration might be necessary. Not everyone in ISAIAH, for instance, readily committed to racial and ethnic equity or to organizing around criminal justice issues. Resistance arose around two points. First, ISAIAH lost some of its base due to its rejection of "racial neutrality". Schrantz comments somewhat ruefully, "We have lost churches, two really painful ones . . . The other thing that happened [was] . . . that the growth of the base wasn't going to be in the white denominations, which led to some resentment" (Schrantz 2016). In many ways, the (mostly) men at the roots of FBCO were right: explicitly addressing white supremacy can be divisive. If organizers do so—even if they do it really well—they must be prepared to alienate some members of their base who are not ready for this challenge. Schrantz continues, "The organization had whiteness in it. We're going to look at our culture, and say, 'What about our culture is good organizing, and what about our culture is whiteness?'" (Schrantz 2016). Some longtime members of ISAIAH

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[19] john powell does not capitalize his name.

left because the organization reevaluated everything that it did in terms of whether it perpetuated whiteness and racial disparities, which "creates a lot of insecurity and fear" (Schrantz 2016). Although organizing in response to mass incarceration may have been an obvious next step of commitment to racial and ethnic equity, the first step of committing to racial and ethnic equity—and doing so over and over again through what Schrantz describes as "an iterative process"—was not obvious, easy, or painless (Schrantz 2016).

Another point of resistance concerns criminal justice and mass incarceration specifically. Many people, especially African Americans, were not as enthusiastic about these issues as the quotes from Schrantz and Gleason above suggest. Middle-class whites were enthusiastic. Schrantz quips, "White liberals are super on board. They have read Michelle Alexander, they gave her a standing ovation, they are game" (Schrantz 2016). African-American individuals and congregations in ISAIAH were often more reticent. When asked if she agreed with Gleason's sense of openness in ISAIAH to work on criminal justice reform, Evelyn Williams, an African-American leader, responded,

> Nope, I don't share that observation, and I think it all depends on the audience, quite frankly. I feel that, yes, ISAIAH as an organization had been on a journey around race for a very long time. As the result of that, there are certainly some communities inside of ISAIAH who would have said, "Yes, it makes perfect sense to talk about [mass incarceration]" . . . Within the black community . . . I don't know that it necessarily stuck. I think there are just fundamental challenges within the black community in general when it comes to organizing in this work that had to be overcome . . . There have been some black churches who were involved and remain involved, but for every one that there is, there are five that aren't or more (Williams 2016).

After noticing this contrast, I asked other participants in interviews what they made of these varying responses from Gleason and Williams. At least two observations came to the fore. Based on interviewees' reflections, on one hand, reticence may stem from a narrative that stresses respectability against the racist narratives that criminalize and dehumanize black (and brown) people in our culture—a narrative growing out of white supremacy. Sonja Flores, a Latina organizer, describes the dynamic she has encountered, which she then verified in conversation with black clergy. Flores observes,

> What happens . . . is internalized oppression . . . If you are told all your life that you are a bad person because of your skin or your color, and you see it play out in your community, in your family, you take two different routes. You . . . become this African-American person that tries to do everything right and puts their head down to not be targeted, and you live a very individualized life . . . trying to fight all these odds. Or you become the person that statistics say you're going to become, whatever. If you don't become that person, you eat it up, you eat this entire worldview and narrative about yourself, and about your people. You say, "I didn't go through that, so why did they? I was able to do this." . . . I see it with Latinos too, this is so true with people of color. *I* ate it up . . . That is the difference between organizing white people and people of color. That is the main difference, and that is why people don't jump on their own issues . . . It's actually one of the most difficult things we face as organizers. (Flores 2016).[20]

The "internalized oppression" described by Flores fits with what Alexander has identified as a "politics of respectability" within black communities that enables distancing from people caught up in criminal justice systems.[21]

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[20]　Other participants verified Flores's assessment, for example, in conversation with a focus group from ISAIAH on 9 December 2016 in Minneapolis, MN.

[21]　Drawing on Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's phrase, "politics of respectability", Alexander writes, "[In black communities], while some argue that [mass incarceration] is attributable primarily to racial bias and discrimination, others maintain that it

On the other hand, interviewees suggested that black communities may be particularly reticent to trust white individuals and traditionally white organizations in efforts to dismantle mass incarceration, even if these organizations and individuals have worked to diversify, advance racial equity, and change their culture. Paul Slack observes, "What happens is, there's a lot of distrust. There's a lot of distrust for random white people" (Slack 2016). He continues, describing the response of community members in north Minneapolis to some campaigns of ISAIAH in the past,

> A lot of people do not believe that there is any hope, that they have any voice about what's going to happen . . . We were running around telling people about the issues that we cared about, asking them what the issues were that they cared about. *Many* of them said regularly, "Why am I even bothering? Nothing is going to change" (Slack 2016).

In addition to hopelessness and distrust of white individuals and organizations, ISAIAH organizers and leaders also recognize that some of their practices, aspects of their organizing culture, have made it difficult to build relationships in black communities. Schrantz recalls reforming one practice that was more about "whiteness" than "good organizing" at a particular monthly gathering of clergy in which attendees were overwhelmingly white (Schrantz 2016).[22] The whiteness of the group demographically and the "whiteness" of its agendas practically made it difficult for new people in general to feel included, but it especially alienated participants who were not white and may not feel comfortable with the commitments, or "asks", required by the group.

Both of these points of resistance—the risks of alienating white communities and the reticence of black communities of partnering with whites around mass incarceration—suggest that ISAIAH's work is far from done. No one whom I spoke with expressed a sense that it was. The organization continues to promote racial and ethnic equity, while identifying the distinction between "whiteness" and "good organizing". This commitment may alienate members of the white base of ISAIAH, who will be forced to acknowledge their own complicity and advantage in a white supremacist culture and change their behaviors and practices accordingly. ISAIAH must also discern how to support and follow the leadership of people of color in an ongoing manner. One aspect of such support will require challenging politics of respectability as they fit within a culture of white supremacy, emphasizing the fundamental dignity of all persons regardless of race, ethnicity, class, or criminal record. While ISAIAH could retreat into a "race neutral" approach given these challenges, the organization instead remains committed to confronting white supremacy, both in our wider society and within its own practices, assumptions, strategies, and relationships. Such a commitment, and the adaptations it requires, will be necessary to dismantle mass incarceration.

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is due to poor education, unraveling morals, and a lack of thrift and perseverance among the urban poor . . . The fact that many African Americans endorse aspects of the current caste system and insist that the problems of the urban poor can be best explained by their behavior, culture, and attitude does not, in any meaningful way, distinguish mass incarceration from its predecessors [e.g., slavery or segregation]. To the contrary, these attitudes and arguments have their roots in the struggles to end slavery and Jim Crow. Many African Americans today believe that uplift ideology worked in the past and ought to work again—forgetting that ultimately it took a major movement to end the last caste system, not simply good behavior. Many black people are confused—and the black community itself is divided—about how best to understand and respond to mass incarceration" (Alexander 2010, pp. 212, 214–15). Several other interviewees, both black and white, echoed Flores's assessment.

[22]　ISAIAH stopped using these meetings (although they were often effective for organizing around "universal" platforms) and began creating alternative spaces for organizing around "targeted universals". One example is the "Just Race Table", which meets twice monthly to discuss racial equity issues over lunch. This gathering differs in part from the monthly clergy meetings because it has a looser agenda, with no "asks." From these meetings, several African-American clergy members have assumed greater leadership roles in ISAIAH, including Pastor Slack. Another shift from "whiteness" was increasing "relational warmth" in gatherings—making eye contact, greeting each other with hugs, saying "hello" to one another. Focus group participants reflected that an African-American organizer, originally from Georgia, who now works with PICO in another city especially emphasized these practices. Her southern ways of engaging perhaps thawed some of the coolness of "Minnesota nice" folks, often of Scandinavian descent.

3. Elevate Redemption in Christian Theology

Theological justifications for our current social condition present a second challenge to dismantling mass incarceration. The knots that bind Christianity to retributivism in U.S. culture need to be untangled, especially as they are tied to white supremacy as well as to support for punitive practices and policies (Douglas 2015; Gilliard 2018; Gorringe 1996; Hill 2017; Jennings 2010; Levad 2014; Logan 2008; Marshall 2001; Snyder 2000; Taylor 2015). Certain streams of Christian thought draw upon retributivism, an interpretation of justice that requires the state to mete out proportional punishment to guilty parties. While criminal justice systems in the United States prior to the 1970s nominally appealed to rehabilitation as justification for their policies and practices, after the 1970s, retribution became dominant.[23] Some Christians defend retributivism as consonant with their faith. Many cite scripture when describing their attitudes about criminal justice: "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."[24] Aspects of Christian tradition, such as Anselm of Canterbury's satisfaction theory and John Calvin's penal substitution theory of the atonement, depend on retributive interpretations of justice, where violent punishment is deemed necessary for redemption of sinners (Gilliard 2018; Gorringe 1996). Such theological concepts undergird mass incarceration, as can be seen now, for example, in Christian defenses of imprisonment as necessary for the redemption of the souls of people who have committed crime. Sociologist Tanya Erzen captures justifications of incarceration offered by Christians in her ethnography of evangelical faith-based prison ministries. She observes, "Many faith-based ministries support imprisonment itself because they operate under the assumption that grace and transformation are possible because punishment is ordained by God and manifested in incarceration. Punishment in prison makes sense . . . because God is there to forgive" (Erzen 2017, p. 18). Alternative interpretations of justice and atonement however are viable within Christian tradition; elevating them is an aspect of the moral and spiritual challenge presented by mass incarceration.

Participants in ISAIAH draw on these alternatives by emphasizing "redemption" over retribution, a shift that informs the ethical framing of their organizing work. Reverend Brian Herron, a leader in ISAIAH, for example, opened a meeting, titled "Pain, Power, Politics, and Prosecution," with Hennepin County officials in May 2018 with an opening "call to action" (Herron 2018). He contrasted endless punishment in criminal justice systems with his hope for "redemption" that could lead to transformation of both criminal justice systems and individuals in prison:

> [The criminal justice system has] to be transformed, made new, made different. Did you know that there is nothing redemptive about the criminal justice system? Redemption is not built anywhere into that system. There's nothing redemptive about prison. As a matter of fact, most of the folk in that place who watch over you, like the COs and the counselors and stuff, their whole mission is to tell you how you're going to be back.

> There's no redemption, and if there's no redemption, then what is the hope of change in me as a person . . . There's a continuum of punishment. And that continuum of punishment is heaped upon a person to keep them so broken that they end up going back. To keep them in such a state of flux that there is no hope that anything is going to be better and anything is going to change for me, so I might as well keep doing what I'm doing and just learn to do it better (Herron 2018).

23　For a brief history on the transition from rehabilitation to retribution in criminal justice policies and practices in the United States since the 1970s—and the transition back to rehabilitation in the last decade—see (Andrews and Bonta 2010).

24　This phrase is known as the *lex talionis* or law of retaliation (Leviticus 24:19–20; also, Exodus 21:23–25 and Deuteronomy 19:21). For critiques of retributive interpretations of the *lex talionis*, see (Davis 2005; Getek-Soltis 2011; Marshall 2001). These critiques indicate that the *lex talionis* neither requires nor gives permission for equivalent harm inflicted upon wrongdoers. Rather, this law places a limitation on retaliation: take *no more* than an eye, take *no more* than a tooth.

Herron does not seem to understand "redemption" here in a narrowly evangelical way that would equate it with conversion or personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as one's savior. Nor does redemption focus only on the individual convicted of a crime. Rather, Herron views redemption as a process of building up people broken by pain, chaos, and injustice so that they can return to community. This redemption will only be possible with the redemption, or transformation, or making new, of criminal justice systems as a whole. Herron's call to action evokes the prophetic imagination of ISAIAH that questions the existing order of retributivism and that summons a different vision of criminal justice in opposition to mass incarceration.

Interviews with ISAIAH's leaders and organizers indicate that this ethical and theological framing infuses the whole organization. Beyond prepared remarks for public gatherings, conversation with participants in ISAIAH reveals their similar opposition to retributivism and their construction of an alternative Christian worldview. In an interview, Evelyn Williams reflects along lines similar to Rev. Herron:

> I think locking people in boxes and treating them as though they're inhuman is against God's vision of all of us being a part of His divine creation. I think that [mass incarceration] is something we should care about because God is a God of redemption. He is a God of love; he is a God of forgiveness; he is a God of reconciliation. Those are not values in the criminal justice system. It's not about restoring people and their dignity. It's not about helping people be on a path of righteousness. It's not about love and support and encouragement. It's about punishment. On the other side of that punishment, you just get a lifetime of additional punishment. There's no pathway to peace and to wholeness after incarceration (Williams 2016).

Williams contrasts the inhumanity of punishing people through incarceration with God's redemption brought about through love. Mass incarceration, for Williams, is contrary to God's plan for humanity, both individually and communally, for ultimate peace, love, and wholeness. Paul Slack also draws on a theological commitment to redemption and the dignity of human persons to contest retributive narratives in our culture, especially as they focus on people of color:

> When it comes to this particular issue, what's key in our faith is the whole thought and value of redemption. Think about the gospel. Most of the gospel is about redemption, is about forgiveness, is about new starts. Mass incarceration is the exact opposite. Redemption talks about the sacred creation of all human beings. I think *God* talks about the sacred creation of all human beings. But when you look at mass incarceration and the people that it is impacting most, the people that it is impacting most are people of color, particularly African Americans, and African-American males (Slack 2016).

Together, Herron, Williams, and Slack offer a coherent theology about human dignity, forgiveness, community, and redemption that calls into question theological justifications for retributive approaches to justice. Their prophetic imagination challenges assumptions that punishment, pain, and imprisonment are ordained by God in order for God to extend forgiveness.

Critiquing retributivism in Christian theology, specifically, and in U.S. practices and ideologies of criminal justice, generally, is not tangential to ISAIAH's organizing efforts in the halls of the State Capitol or at County Board meetings; participants see this cultural work as imperative to dismantling mass incarceration. As organizer Sonja Flores argues,

> When it comes to mass incarceration issues, the biggest thing that we're fighting is actually a worldview and a narrative . . . So many people have eaten the narrative of, you're good or you're bad. This makes you good, and this makes you bad. With mass incarceration, punish this person because they did something bad, and that's it . . .

> We're fighting a worldview and a narrative of, they did something that was "illegal" [scare quotes], right? Now they should be punished. We are stripping the humanity away from

people, and it's this worldview and narrative that people have eaten up. That is the hardest thing to fight, because once people have this narrative, you have to work to understand, first, why they have this worldview or narrative, and then, you have to work to tell them it's false, and put in what the reality of the matter is (Flores 2016).

According to Flores, transforming narratives about "goodness" and "badness," as well as interpretations about the necessity of punishment, is crucial to her organizing. These narratives are fundamentally theological, drawing on assumptions about sin and redemption, divine and human justice, and division between the "criminal" and the "righteous." By questioning these assumptions, participants in ISAIAH challenge the centrality of retributivism in Christianity and break the link between increasingly punitive criminal justice systems and theological justifications for punishment.

An exchange between participants in ISAIAH and a legislator during an April 2017 hearing at the Minnesota State Capitol makes it apparent that these assumptions still need questioning. Several speakers from ISAIAH had testified against a proposal to re-open a private prison, citing their commitment to a theology of redemption based in their faith. Tony Cornish, then a representative from southern Minnesota and a member of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, responded, "I can probably two-to-one the Bible passages about throwing people in prison rather than letting them out" (Minnesota Omnibus Judiciary and Public Safety Committee 2017, 3:10:00).[25] His assumption that this biblical tit-for-tat would result in his victory points to the need to contest dominant theologies that uphold retributivism in public discourse about criminal justice. Without presenting an alternative narrative or worldview rooted in Christianity, retributivism—such as that supported by Cornish—would remain dominant and continue to feed increasingly punitive criminal justice policies and practices. Upholding redemption as instead central to Christian theology provides the ethical framework for participants in ISAIAH to continue their work to dismantle mass incarceration. With this framework, ISAIAH can present the possibility of criminal justice systems rooted, not in punishment, but in dignity, forgiveness, love, and reconciliation that can foster righteousness, peace, and wholeness—for the redemption of individuals and our society as a whole.

4. Build Power Among Disempowered Communities

A third challenge to dismantling mass incarceration is that this social condition depletes the political power of the individuals, families, and communities most directly impacted by it. One way in which this depletion occurs is through voter disenfranchisement of people with felony convictions. Policies vary by state (Manza and Uggen 2006; Uggen et al. 2016; Robles 2018; Uggen et al. 2006; Uggen and Manza 2002). In only Vermont and Maine can people in prison vote. Thirty-five states bar people in prison or jail and people on felony probation or parole from voting. Eleven states prohibit people with any felony conviction from voting even after completing their sentences—in some cases, for life. As a result, 6.1 million people in the United States are prevented from voting, 77 percent of whom are no longer incarcerated; one in thirteen African-Americans have lost their right to vote due to felony disenfranchisement, in comparison with one in fifty-six non-black voters. Prison-based gerrymandering exacerbates the effects of voter disenfranchisement (Ho 2011; Prison Gerrymandering Project 2018; Sakala 2011; Skocpol 2017; Suber 2014). To uphold the principle of "one person, one vote," districts are drawn by evenly dividing the population in geographical areas so that each voter has roughly similar access to political power as every other voter. In most states, the U.S. Census counts people in prison at the address of their cells. Districts with prisons may have approximately the same number of *residents* as neighboring districts, but they have significantly fewer *voters*. As a result, people who live in districts with prisons *and* who are *not* incarcerated have more political capital than people in districts without prisons. Prison-based gerrymandering particularly disadvantages

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[25] Notably, Tony Cornish is no longer a state representative, his tenure coming to an end after numerous sexual harassment complaints were leveled against him, resulting in his resignation (Coolican 2017).

communities *from which* large numbers of people in prison come, as people with home addresses in those communities are counted elsewhere, depleting their political representation even further. Together these policies and practices create significant hurdles to addressing mass incarceration in a way that includes the voices, concerns, and experiences of the people who know the realities of mass incarceration most intimately.

Community organizing in general, and FBCO in particular, can mitigate the impacts of these policies and practices. These fields maintain that adequately responding to any issue depends fundamentally upon cultivating "social capital"—"the resources inherent in the relationships between people that help them achieve collective aims"—among people on the underside of dominant institutional and cultural patterns (Warren et al. 2011, p. 24).[26] Progress in advancing living wages, healthcare access, or well-resourced schools—or in dismantling mass incarceration—can be achieved when community organizers build power by fostering relationships within and between communities affected by these issues. Wood and Fulton explain, "Dominant institutional and cultural patterns . . . benefit some societal sectors—and those sectors use their power to resist change . . . All intentional efforts to foster social reform . . . must therefore generate forms of counterhegemonic power" (Wood and Fulton 2015, p. 9).[27] Social capital among sectors that need and desire change is the base of power necessary to work against those sectors that prefer the status quo and that benefit from access to financial, political, and human capital. Relationships are the font of social capital. FBCO can help to generate and sustain power by building relationships amongst the people, family, and communities most directly impacted by mass incarceration.

Three public meetings capture ISAIAH's efforts to cultivate social capital among constituencies affected in different ways by mass incarceration. In August 2017, "Repairing the Breach," co-hosted by Greater Friendship Missionary Baptist Church and Ascension Catholic Church (respectively African-American and Latinx dominant congregations), brought together over one hundred community members from a variety of denominational, racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds. In this meeting with Hennepin County officials, leaders brought forward several proposals that united the interests of diverse communities: eliminate cash bail for non-violent, low-level offenses; increase transparency and restraint in charging decisions and sentencing recommendations; strengthen diversion and restorative justice programs; stop collecting country of origin information from people who have been arrested; and end cooperation with ICE through the county jail. ISAIAH participants reiterated these proposals at a second meeting, "Pain, Power, Politics, and Prosecution," in May 2018, which focused on charging decisions and sentencing recommendations of the Hennepin County Attorney's office. While this meeting built more exclusively on black leadership in ISAIAH and the effects of mass incarceration on African-American communities, participants also raised concerns about contact between ICE and county law enforcement agencies, thus reinforcing the coalition apparent at the "Repairing the Breach" meeting. Finally, in September 2018, ISAIAH hosted a forum, also titled "Pain, Power, Politics, and Prosecution," with county commissioner, attorney, and sheriff candidates for the upcoming election. This meeting again brought together Latinx, African-American, and white communities, demonstrating the continuation of the coalition built more than a year previously for the first meeting.

26　For an overview of the origins, development, and use of "social capital" in social sciences research, see (Schuller et al. 2000, pp. 1–39).

27　Community organizing employs several practices to build power through relationships. Organizers typically start with "one-to-ones" in which they listen to the personal stories of community members, learn about their pressing concerns, and trace connections between those narratives and the broader political context that informs and shapes them. These conversations may be expanded in house meetings and listening campaigns that surface the issues that matter most to communities. Participants learn about overlapping concerns, comparable experiences, and possibilities for mutual support, thus cultivating "bonding social capital"—"connections between people who are alike in significant ways"—that can be leveraged to advance common goals (Warren et al. 2011, p. 25). These gatherings also have the potential to bring together people from diverse communities who may still share some interests despite their differences.

Cultivating social capital through FBCO requires both *strengthening bonds* among people who are alike to advance common goals and *building bridges* across diverse communities that may still share common goals despite their differences. ISAIAH's meetings show the interplay of "bridging" and "bonding" social capital (Paxton 1999, 2002; Putnam 2000).[28] For example, the opening reflection of Reverend Billy G. Russell, the African-American pastor of Greater Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, at the "Repairing the Breach" meeting, helps to convey this interplay:

> Injustice of any kind disturbs us. It disturbs us when we hear of families that are being torn apart by a system of mass incarceration that is not transparent and accountable to those who live under its threat. It disturbs us when families are being terrorized by the constant threat of deportation under current policies of the federal government. It disturbs us to hear stories of our brothers and sisters who have been harmed by unjust immigration and incarceration policies, and we are going to engage our public officials in a conversation about how they will lead to address these injustices. It disturbs us when we hear that there is no consistency in bail and sentencing recommendations. It disturbs us when we hear of local officials colluding with ICE in separating families. It disturbs us when we hear of bail systems that hold people captive just for being poor. It disturbs us. And as we join together today, I want to tell you that it's together we stand and divided we fall. It's time for us to work together, right now. We need to look out for one another. We are responsible for helping each other, even when it's inconvenient (Russell 2017).

Russell's words reflect an effort to strengthen bonds based upon a common "disturbance" by injustice. He also invites listeners to recognize others as "brothers and sisters," encouraging loyalty and solidarity despite important differences. Russell's list of injustices highlights shared experiences of African-American and Latinx communities of being surveilled, arrested, and incarcerated, often by the same state authorities, although under differing, but overlapping, systems of criminal justice and immigration enforcement. As a result, he creates bridges between communities that may not initially see their experiences of injustice as related. The policy proposals of the meeting, along with Russell's invitation to "work together" and "look out for one another," indicate the effort in this meeting to build power through bonding and bridging social capital.

Following an opening reflection such as Russell's, ISAIAH typically employs storytelling at each meeting to strengthen bonds and build bridges among leaders and organizers.[29] The third meeting best demonstrates this use of storytelling for fostering relationships to build power. Three stories held together an agenda that addressed both immigration enforcement and criminal justice concerns. José first told his story as a Mexican immigrant who came to the United States without documentation, worked for eighteen years as a meat cutter, paid taxes for all of those years, and gained legal status four years ago. He emphasized the fear within his community as even people with legal status worry about deportation for themselves, their families, and their neighbors. Jay, an African immigrant without a prior criminal record, then relayed his challenges with the criminal justice system when he was arrested for Driving While Intoxicated even when repeated breathalyzer tests showed he had a blood alcohol level of only 0.001% (the legal limit in Minnesota is 0.08%; the officer insisted the breathalyzer was broken and refused to give Jay a blood or urine test; Jay wondered whether the officer interpreted his accent as slurred speech). After spending three nights in jail because he could not pay his bail,

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28 "Bonding social capital" involves the "connections between people who are alike in significant ways" that can be leveraged to advance common goals (Warren et al. 2011, p. 25). Connections among people who are meaningfully dissimilar, but who may still share some interests despite their differences—or, "bridging social capital"—can increase the power generated by bonding. In many circumstances, "Isolated and marginalized, low-income communities may lack the resources to be successful [for multifaceted transformation]" (Warren et al. 2011). Coalitions and partnerships that cross boundaries that frequently divide communities from each other can increase power, but depend upon fostering relationships that uphold connections without erasing important differences.

29 On the use of narrative and storytelling in FBCO, see (Oyakawa 2015).

Jay accepted a plea deal in order to get home and return to work but he now carries the mark of a criminal record. Patsy, a middle-aged white woman, shared the final story, in which she recounted her recovery from addiction brought about through access to treatment. Her story conveyed the need to respond to addiction as a medical, not a criminal, problem, and challenged candidates to divert people with addictions away from incarceration. It also highlighted Patsy's differing encounters with the criminal justice system as a white woman struggling with alcoholism, in contrast with Jay, who drank a single beer over the course of four-hour football game and drove home. Despite the differences of each of these storytellers, their narratives provide concrete encounters with the injustices by which the people gathered ought to be disturbed, to recall Russell's opening reflection at the first meeting. With white, Latino, and black storytellers, participants could see a reflection of themselves in at least one storyteller, while also being called to see a brother or sister in at least the other two storytellers despite important differences—thus, generating both bridging and bonding social capital. The stories invite participants to join in the demand for justice from the candidates at the forum, and based on the relationships strengthened through storytelling, the unified group has more political power than any one constituency would have alone.

While these meetings indicate ISAIAH's success in coalition building, they also reveal some difficulties. The second meeting especially highlights these issues. This gathering was the smallest of the three, with fewer than fifty participants. Most of the participants were black; a handful were white. Representation at this meeting may reflect an intentional choice to build power among African-American leaders in response to mass incarceration, a focus on bonding social capital. This emphasis came to the fore in the opening reflection delivered by Pastor Brian Herron, who stressed the need for African Americans to unite against mass incarceration and take the lead in a new movement following the path of "our ancestors" in the Civil Rights Movement. Doing so might involve partnering with ISAIAH but, in Herron's view, would also require moving beyond ISAIAH to partner with traditionally black organizations:

> I can speak for the black community . . . I love ISAIAH, and I appreciate the work of ISAIAH, but we need to be leading in this work. We need to be connected to the NAACP . . . I see my good sister here from the NAACP. We need to be working with you. We need to be supporting y'all's work. We need to use this vehicle called ISAIAH and everything that they have as a resource, but we need to lead it (Herron 2018).

These comments suggest enduring ambiguity about African-American leadership in ISAIAH, as well as the sense that ISAIAH is still a predominantly white organization, in contrast with the NAACP. Later in his call, Herron emphasized the need for shifting leadership roles in a movement for criminal justice reform:

> I don't like people who say that they're the voice for the people who don't have a voice, because everybody got a voice, everybody got a voice. It's just that some people's voices aren't listened to and others are, and so how do we not speak for folk, but raise people up to speak for themselves so that they're listened to? . . . And to my white brothers and sisters, you don't have to be an expert. All you do is go back to your groups, and you repeat everything that you hear us say, and you tell them that this is what you learned. I'm saying all this because the movement has to look different now. It has to look very different. And we have to be committed to it, as committed as our ancestors were, we have to be even more committed now (Herron 2018).

White participants in the meeting are instructed to listen and learn from the experiences of African-American participants, to share what they learn in their own communities, and to cede leadership roles to the black descendants of the Civil Rights Movement. But for Herron, these descendants need to step up to their call to action; his comments indicate some disappointment with the turnout for the meeting:

> I'm asking you all, talk to your people, talk to your friends. Man [sighs], this place ought to be packed, given the situation and what we're talking about. This place ought to be packed. And see, what folk don't understand is that political systems are moved by one's ability to organize people, because people represent votes. If this place was packed, you'd get a whole different response from Mr. Freeman. If you pack a city council meeting, if you pack a state house meeting, the conversation changes dramatically (Herron 2018).

Herron's conclusion points to the possibilities of FBCO generating social capital among groups often deprived of other forms of political power and of deploying it effectively to "change conversations." Any one community, however, may not be able to generate enough social capital to be effective; members of black communities must pack the meeting, but their strength could be multiplied in collaboration with other communities who share common goals. Herron indicates the need for strong bonds within black communities, as well as building bridges to white and Latinx communities.

This meeting—and moments in the other two—exhibits the effort of ISAIAH to promote diverse leadership in an inclusive coalition, while also revealing that these efforts remain incomplete. Some black participants in ISAIAH still seemed to view it as a white organization, with resources and partners that can further the work for racial equity and dismantling mass incarceration, but needing further transformation so that black (and brown) leaders can speak and organize for themselves. At the same time, these meetings indicate the great strides of ISAIAH in coalition building across race, ethnicity, class, and denomination. Significantly, at the meeting where Herron spoke, leaders raised concerns about contact between ICE and county law enforcement agencies even though this meeting had few Latinx participants. By bringing up immigration issues alongside criminal justice issues, participants exhibited their solidarity across racial and ethnic lines, their effort to "hang on to" the Latinx community, to echo Billy Russell's words. African-American and Latinx communities in ISAIAH therefore remained united in this meeting, although the main focus fell on black experiences of criminal justice systems. The unity of these groups contributed to one of the most important political victories of ISAIAH resulting from these three meetings: Hennepin County dedicated $250,000 to a legal defense fund for residents fighting deportation beginning in December 2018. Even with depleted political power of people with criminal records or immigrant status, FBCO effectively changed the status quo of "crimmigration" in this community. Thus, fostering relationships in diverse coalitions can build power to change hegemonic systems, even when individuals in those coalitions do not have ready access to the vote.

5. Conclusions

Mass incarceration is a disaster—ethically, legally, socially, and economically. Dismantling it will require imagination and perseverance to move beyond criminal justice reform and to effect cultural, moral, and spiritual transformation of our carceral state. Many Christians from across the theological spectrum have become aware of this disaster in recent years and are looking for tactics to oppose mass incarceration. The case study of ISAIAH reveals the possibilities of FBCO as one such tactic, particularly as participants in this network have confronted white supremacy and advocated for racial and ethnic equity; developed alternative Christian theological narratives and worldviews in contrast with retributivism; and built social capital among the people most directly impacted by mass incarceration, even in the face of policies and practices designed to deplete their political power.

The road to dismantling mass incarceration, however, is a long one, and participants in ISAIAH would readily admit that they have not yet overcome many of the barriers on this journey. They remain resolute in upholding a theology rooted in God's redemptive love that calls not only for individual transformation, but also for transformation of our prison society as a whole. Uplifting this theology in a culture that still promotes punitive interpretations of God's work in the world remains an ongoing task. While participants in ISAIAH have made progress in understanding their own complicity in white supremacy and advancing equity both within the organization and in our wider society, they also recognize, in the words of Doran Schrantz, that their work is "iterative," requiring

long-term, thoughtful commitment even when they make errors. ISAIAH provides a model for how to continue making progress in this direction in terms of being willing to draw on the insights from external experts on race and racism; to change practices, assumptions, relationships, and strategies according to whether they represent "good organizing" versus "whiteness"; and supporting black and brown membership and leadership, even if doing so may alienate some purported white "allies". The organization continues to strengthen bonds and build bridges, but at times must emphasize bonds over bridges or vice versa—focusing, at turns, on participation, leadership, and representation of particular communities or on connecting communities affected by mass incarceration in different ways. The example of ISAIAH illustrates the need to "raise people up to speak for themselves so that they're listened to," in Brian Herron's words, as well as the need to create coalitions of raised-up people that can speak more loudly and powerfully together than they can apart. The journey of dismantling mass incarceration is far from over. Yet ISAIAH's case indicates next steps that those who would repair the breach in the face of injustice might take together.

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