



UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST
ASSOCIATION

DISCUSSION GUIDE | 2015-2016

UUA Common Read: Just Mercy

Book by Bryan Stevenson

Discussion Guide by Gail Forsyth-Vail

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Introduction

Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption by Bryan Stevenson (Spiegel and Grau, 2014) has been selected as the 2015-16 Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) Common Read. Stevenson writes about his personal experiences representing poor people, people of color, women, and children incarcerated on death row or sentenced to die in prison. He makes a powerful case that the opposite of poverty is not wealth, but justice. In line with his grandmother's advice that you have to get close to understand, he reveals truths about the U.S. criminal justice system by sharing individual stories, taking the reader up close to see the results of unjust, life- and soul-destroying policies and practices.

This discussion guide invites participants to explore and examine some of the underlying themes in the book: justice, mercy, compassion, hope, and forgiveness. It invites participants to examine their own assumptions and biases, finding their way not just to a new intellectual understanding of the U.S. criminal punishment system, but also to a new spiritual stance regarding those who are incarcerated. Links to supplementary materials and specific guidance for how to take action to work against mass incarceration and/or the death penalty are included as well.

Using this Guide

The discussion guide is flexible. Adapt it to congregational, cluster, or district programming for adults of all ages and life stages, for campus groups or young adult groups, for youth groups, or for cross-generational groups of adults and youth. Two formats are offered:

- A single, 90-minute session
 - Can be expanded for a two-hour session
 - Can be offered in two parts to accommodate a 45-minute Sunday forum format
- Three, 90-minute sessions
 - Can each be extended to a two-hour session by lengthening the amount of time for conversation, discussion, and sharing

Single Session Version

Goals

- Provide a framework for responding to Just Mercy
- Invite readers to share their reactions and reflections in a safe and trusting community
- Explore Stevenson's call to bear witness to the ways in which the U.S. criminal justice system is neither just nor merciful to those on the margins of society
- Invite participants to gain new knowledge and insight about the U.S. criminal justice system
- Invite participants to act from their Unitarian Universalist values in response to what they learn from the book.

Materials

- Chalice, candle and lighter or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Optional: Copies of Singing the Living Tradition, the UUA hymnbook, for participants to share
- Optional: A pair of handcuffs or other tangible representation of those who are incarcerated

Preparation

- Set out the chalice. If you are using handcuffs or another object to remind you of the people who are incarcerated, set those items out as well.
- Write these covenant points on newsprint, but do not post:
 - We promise to speak from our own experiences and perspectives.
 - We promise to listen respectfully to the experiences and perspectives of other people.
 - We promise to pay attention to the group process, making sure that everyone has the opportunity to speak and to listen.
 - We promise to use this time as an opportunity for ethical, religious, and spiritual discernment.
 - We promise to listen to one another for understanding rather than to debate, even when the conversation touches on politics or public policy.
- Write on newsprint, and post:

- What surprised, troubled, or challenged you from the book, Just Mercy?
- What stories from the book stick with you?
- Write on newsprint, but do not post:
 - Bearing in mind Stevenson's assertion that each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done, what role should mercy play in the way we respond to those who have committed crimes?
 - What life experiences help you relate to the themes of the book- justice, mercy, and redemption?
- Write on newsprint, but do not post:
 - What spiritual lessons do you draw from those who find their way to hope even in seemingly hopeless circumstances?
 - What spiritual lessons do you draw from the author's tenacity in the face of what many might find overwhelming? From what sources did he draw hope?
- Optional: Recruit a song leader or accompanist for the opening.

Chalice Lighting/Opening Reading or Hymn (5 min)

Welcome participants. Light the chalice and share the words to verses 3 and 4 of "Wake Now My Senses," Hymn 298 in Singing the Living Tradition, or invite participants to sing with you:

Wake, now, compassion, give heed to the cry;

voices of suffering fill the wide sky;

take as your neighbor both stranger and friend,

praying and striving their hardship to end.

Wake, now, my conscience, with justice thy guide;

join with all people whose rights are denied;

take not for granted a privileged place;

God's love embraces the whole human race.

(Lyrics by Thomas Mikelson; used with permission)

Introductions and Creating a Covenant (10 minutes)

Invite each person to introduce themselves and to share what brought them into the room for this discussion. Post the covenant points you have written on newsprint. Propose them as guidelines. Ask if any points need to be clarified, added, or amended. Note changes on newsprint. When the covenant is complete, invite participants to voice or signal agreement.

First Impressions (20 minutes)

Invite participants to share an initial response to the book. Call attention to the questions you have posted and allow silence for two or three minutes for people to find their words. Then, ask them to share, one at a time, without interruption.

After the sharing, briefly ask participants to identify common threads or themes in their initial responses and record those on the posted newsprint.

Discussion (15 minutes)

Say, "Stevenson calls his book *Just Mercy* and invites us to consider both justice and mercy in regard to the U.S. criminal justice system." Lead a discussion using these questions:

- Has your idea about justice changed since reading the book?
- What does justice mean to you now?

(Optional break for 45 minute forums. If you are doing this in two sessions, begin the second session with a summary of the discussion from the first.)

Reflection and Sharing 1 (15 minutes)

Read this passage from page 267 of the book aloud:

In preparing litigation on behalf of the children we were representing, it was clear that these shocking and senseless crimes [they had committed] couldn't be evaluated honestly without understanding the lives these children had been forced to endure.

Post the second set of questions and read them aloud. Invite participants to reflect on Stevenson's belief in the need for mercy in our system for dealing with crime. After a minute, call attention to the posted questions. Invite participants to share their responses to one or more of the questions, speaking one at a time without interruption.

Reflection and Sharing 2 (15 minutes)

Read this quote from page 17 of the book:

I have discovered, deep in the hearts of many condemned and incarcerated people, the scattered traces of hope and humility- seeds of restoration that come to astonishing life when nurtured by simple interventions.

Post the third set of questions and read them aloud. Allow a minute or two of silence for people to find their words. Then, invite each person to share briefly, uninterrupted. Mention that for this conversation and any others, each person reserves the right to pass.

Conversation (10 minutes)

Invite the group to begin a conversation about how to engage your congregation or group in movements opposed to mass incarceration and/or the death penalty. Ask:

What religious or secular partners in your local community might you work with to bring these issues to public attention? What legislative action might you support? How might you support those who are incarcerated? Explain that this conversation is just the beginning, and that participants may want to arrange for further conversation in person and/or online to explore options. Here are some possible actions:

- Learn more about the [Church of the Larger Fellowship's prison ministry](#). Find out how you can take part in efforts to reach out to those who are incarcerated.
- Research local prison ministries and find out how you and/or your congregation can get involved.
- Learn about legislative initiatives that aim to dismantle the system of mass incarceration and/or work against the death penalty. Check with your [Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network](#), if there is one, to find out about their efforts. Organize support for those initiatives that are in line with Unitarian Universalist values.
- Learn about restorative justice, an alternative way to work with those who have engaged in criminal or antisocial activity. "[Restorative Justice: The Long Struggle](#)" and "[A Restorative Circle in the Wake of a Police Shooting](#)," both articles from *Tikkun* magazine, explore the theology and application of restorative justice. [Restorative Works Learning Network](#) provides information, news, and learning opportunities about restorative practices.
- Review the 2005 UUA Statement of Conscience, [Criminal Justice and Prison Reform](#) and follow some of the suggested congregational actions at the end of the statement.
- Invite others to read *Just Mercy* and organize more discussion groups, perhaps including those from other faith communities and civic or community organizations.

- Invite groups to watch [Stevenson's TED talk](#) and lead an online conversation about how to respond.
- Visit the website of the [Equal Justice Initiative](#) and explore the resources there, including relevant [reports](#) on such topics as lynching in America, incarceration of children, and racial discrimination in jury selection.
- Read [The New Jim Crow](#) by Michelle Alexander and/or watch her TED talk. Her book was the 2012-13 Common Read, and you may want to make use of the [discussion guide for Unitarian Universalists](#) and [extensive supplementary resources](#) highlighted on the UUA website.

Collect email addresses so you can share the list of possible actions. Ask individual participants to commit to specific actions and timelines for further discussion about how to respond to what Stevenson presents in the book.

Closing (5 minutes)

Share these words from pages 17-18 of the book:

Proximity has taught me some basic and humbling truths, including this vital lesson: Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done. My work with the poor and the incarcerated has persuaded me that the opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice. Finally, I've come to believe that the true measure of our commitment to the rule of law, fairness, and equality cannot be measured by how we treat the rich, the powerful, the privileged, and the respected among us. The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned.

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.

Three Session Version

Goals

- Provide a framework for responding to Just Mercy
- Invite readers to share their reactions and reflections in a safe and trusting community
- Explore Stevenson's call to bear witness to the ways in which the U.S. criminal justice system is neither just nor merciful to those on the margins of society
- Invite reflection how and why our faith calls us to make visible those people rendered invisible by the legal and prison systems visible, both to ourselves and in the public square
- Invite participants to gain new knowledge and insight about the U.S. criminal justice system
- Invite participants to act from their Unitarian Universalist values in response to what they learn from the book.

Session 1

Materials

- Chalice, candle and lighter or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- [The Death Penalty in the United States Fact Sheet](#) from the Equal Justice Initiative
- Optional: Copies of *Singing the Living Tradition*, the UUA hymnbook, for participants to share
- Optional: A pair of handcuffs or other tangible representation of those who are incarcerated
- Optional: Computer with Internet connection and digital projector/speakers
- Optional: [Slavery to Mass Incarceration](#) video from the Equal Justice Initiative (5:50)

Preparation

- Set out the chalice. If you are using handcuffs or another object to remind you of the people who are incarcerated, set those items out as well.
- Write these covenant points on newsprint, but do not post:
 - We promise to speak from our own experiences and perspectives.
 - We promise to listen respectfully to the experiences and perspectives of other people.
 - We promise to pay attention to the group process, making sure that everyone has the opportunity to speak and to listen.
 - We promise to use this time as an opportunity for ethical, religious, and spiritual discernment.
 - We promise to listen to one another for understanding rather than to debate, even when the conversation touches on politics or public policy.
- Write on newsprint, and post:
 - What surprised, troubled, or challenged you from the book, *Just Mercy*?
 - What stories from the book stick with you?
- Write on newsprint, but do not post:
 - Bearing in mind Stevenson's assertion that each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done, what role should mercy play in the way we respond to those who have committed crimes?
 - What life experiences help you relate to the themes of the book- justice, mercy, and redemption?

- Write on newsprint, but do not post:
 - What spiritual lessons do you draw from those who find their way to hope even in seemingly hopeless circumstances?
 - What spiritual lessons do you draw from the author's tenacity in the face of what many might find overwhelming? From what sources did he draw hope?
- Optional: Recruit a song leader or accompanist for the opening.

Chalice Lighting/Opening Reading or Hymn (5 minutes)

Welcome participants. Light the chalice and share the words to verses 3 and 4 of "Wake Now My Senses," Hymn 298 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, or invite participants to sing with you:

Wake, now, compassion, give heed to the cry;

voices of suffering fill the wide sky;

take as your neighbor both stranger and friend,

praying and striving their hardship to end.

Wake, now, my conscience, with justice thy guide;

join with all people whose rights are denied;

take not for granted a privileged place;

God's love embraces the whole human race.

(Lyrics by Thomas Mikelson; used with permission)

Introductions and Creating a Covenant (10 minutes)

Invite each person to introduce themselves and to share what brought them into the room for this discussion. Post the covenant points you have written on newsprint. Propose them as guidelines. Ask if any points need to be clarified, added, or amended. Note changes on newsprint. When the covenant is complete, invite participants to voice or signal agreement.

First Impressions (25 minutes)

Invite participants to share an initial response to the book. Call attention to the questions you have posted and allow silence for two or three minutes for people to find their words. Then, ask them to share, one at a time, without interruption.

After the sharing, briefly ask participants to identify common threads or themes in their initial responses and record those on the posted newsprint.

Sharing and Discussion (35-45 minutes)

Distribute the fact sheet, *The Death Penalty in the United States* from the website of the Equal Justice Initiative, Bryan Stevenson's organization. Invite participants to read it over. Say:

Bryan Stevenson's grandmother told him, "You can't understand most of the important things from a distance, Bryan. You have to get close." *Just Mercy* helps us to get close and to understand more deeply the information presented on the fact sheet.

Lead a discussion using these questions to guide you:

- What is it about stories of individual suffering that make it hard for us to turn away? Do you respond with more compassion to individual stories than you do to information about injustice in the entire system? Why is that?
- What are the forces that distance us from those we as a society incarcerate and those we as a society condemn and put to death?
- Is it morally right that those on the margins need those in the mainstream to champion their causes in order to be treated fairly?
- What in your Unitarian Universalist faith demands that you respond to what you now know?

Optional: Learning More (10 minutes)

Share the video, *From Slavery to Mass Incarceration*. Repeat the statement from the end, "Racial bias remains a serious problem and is a direct and lasting legacy of American slavery and our failure to deal with the history of racial injustice."

Invite participants to take a moment or two to breathe and sit with the content of the video.

Closing (5 minutes)

Extinguish the chalice and share these words from pages 17-18 of the book:

Proximity has taught me some basic and humbling truths, including this vital lesson: Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done. My work with the poor and the incarcerated has persuaded me that the opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice. Finally, I've come to believe that the true measure of our commitment to the rule of law, fairness, and equality cannot be measured by how we treat the rich, the powerful, the privileged, and the respected among us. The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned.

Invite participants to reflect on this question for the next session: What does hope look like for the author and for those whose stories he tells?

Session 2

Materials

- Chalice, candle and lighter or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Covenant from Session 1
- Optional: A pair of handcuffs or other tangible representation of those who are incarcerated
- Optional: [“They Couldn’t Take My Soul: Anthony Ray Hinton on his Exoneration After 30 Years on Death Row”](#) video (11:49 – 19:20) Note: On the Equal Justice Initiative website, the video begins at 11:49
- Optional: Computer with Internet connection and digital projector/speakers

Preparation

- Post the covenant from Session 1.
- Set out the chalice. If you are using handcuffs or another object to remind you of the people who are incarcerated, set those items out as well.
- Write on newsprint, and post:
 - Where in Stevenson’s book did you see the seeds of restoration come to astonishing life? What stories or events stay with you?
 - What spiritual lessons do you draw from those who find their way to hope even in horrific circumstances?
 - What spiritual lessons do you draw from the author’s tenacity in the face of what many might find overwhelming?
- Optional: Queue video and test equipment.

Opening Reading/Chalice Lighting (10 minutes)

Light the chalice. Remind participants that one of the stories told in the book is of Ian Manuel, who was sentenced at age 13 to life without parole, sent to solitary to “protect” him from sexual assault, and kept in solitary for 18 years because he demonstrated suicidal and self-mutilating behaviors. Share a portion of the letter he wrote to Attorney Stevenson after Stevenson arranged for a session with a photographer to illuminate the plight of children sentenced to die in prison:

I don’t know how to make you feel the emotion and importance of those photos, but to be real, I want to show the world I’m alive! I want to look at those photos and feel alive! It would really help with my pain. I felt joyful today during the photo shoot. I wanted it to never end. Every time you visit and leave, I feel saddened. But I capture and cherish those moments in time, replaying them in my mind’s eye, feeling grateful for human

interaction and contact. But today, just the simple handshakes we shared was a welcome addition to my sensory deprived life.

Please tell me how many photos I can get? I want those photos of myself, almost as bad as I want my freedom. (pg.163)

Review the covenant from Session 1.

Reflection and Sharing (25-35 minutes)

Read this quote from page 17 of the book:

I have discovered, deep in the hearts of many condemned and incarcerated people, the scattered traces of hope and humility- seeds of restoration that come to astonishing life when nurtured by simple interventions.

Call attention to the posted reflection questions. Allow a minute or two of silence for people to find their words. Then, invite each person to share briefly, uninterrupted. Mention that for this conversation and any others, each person reserves the right to pass. As time allows, invite participants to respond to what others have shared.

Discussion 1 (20 minutes)

Say, "Unitarian Universalist ethicist and theologian Sharon Welch states that people who are comfortable often turn away from the day-to-day issues of oppression because solutions to complex social problems are not within easy reach." Share this quote:

It is easier to give up on long-term social change when one is comfortable in the present—when it is possible to have challenging work, excellent health care and housing, and access to fine arts. When the good life is present or within reach, it is tempting to despair of its ever being in reach for others and resort merely to enjoying it for oneself and one's family.

Using some of the questions that follow, respond to Welch's assertion in light of the writing of Bryan Stevenson and the work of the Equal Justice Initiative. Remind participants of the covenant and their promise to speak from their own experiences:

- If you are forced by circumstances to confront injustice daily, what sustains you through times of hope and times of despair?
- If you are not forced by circumstances to confront injustice daily, what spiritual practices might keep you engaged and help you to do the work of justice-making?

- How does your Unitarian Universalist faith sustain you and strengthen your resolve, even when you see the problems of racism, mass incarceration, poverty, and other forms of injustice in their full magnitude?

Discussion 2 (15-25 minutes)

Invite participants to consider how incarcerated people, especially those on death row or those sentenced to die in prison, maintain a sense of hope and a sense of humanity. If you have chosen to do so, show the first section (11:49 – 19:20) of the Democracy Now video, “They Can’t Take My Soul.” Lead a discussion, asking:

- What are some stories you can recall from the book (or the newscast) that show how people maintain hope and humanity in a seemingly hopeless situation?
- Can you imagine finding hope if you were in this situation? What would you lean on in such circumstances?

Closing (5 minutes)

Say: “In one story from the book, Marsha Colby, a poor white woman living in difficult circumstances had been sentenced to die in prison for killing a baby that was, in fact, stillborn. After her exoneration due to a closer look at the forensic evidence, she began to work for the release of other women held in the infamous Tutwiler prison in Alabama. Equal Justice Initiative honored her story and her work, and she spoke to those gathered to honor her.” Read this passage from page 241 of the book aloud:

I want to thank all of you for recognizing me and what I’ve been through. Y’all are being very kind to me. I’m just happy to be free.” She spoke to the large audience calmly and with a great deal of composure. She was articulate and charming. She became emotional only when she talked about the women she’d left behind.

I am lucky. I got help that most women can’t get. It’s what bothers me the most now, knowing that they are still there and I’m home. I hope they can do more to help more people.” Her gown sparkled in the lights, and the audience rose to applaud Marsha as she wept for the women she left behind.

Following her, I couldn’t think of what to say. “We need more hope. We need more mercy. We need more justice.

Invite participants to reflect on the meaning and practice of offering mercy in preparation for the next session. Extinguish the chalice.

Session 3

Materials

- Chalice, candle and lighter or LED battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Covenant from Session 1
- Optional: A pair of handcuffs or other tangible representation of those who are incarcerated
- Optional: Computer with Internet access

Preparation

- Post covenant from Session 1.
- Set out the chalice. If you are using handcuffs or another object to remind you of the people who are incarcerated, set those items out as well.
- Write on newsprint, and post:
 - What do you take from the story of the prison guard's turn around? What role did empathy play in bringing him to a place of compassion and mercy for the imprisoned man?
 - Can you imagine yourself in similar circumstances? What in your experience connects you to the guard's change of heart?
- Write on newsprint, but do not post:
 - As you were reading, did you respond differently to those who were incarcerated and sentenced for a crime they did not commit and those who were incarcerated for a crime they did commit? If your responses were different, what values and experiences account for your different responses?
 - What experiences in your life connect you with those who have committed crimes and are in need of compassion and mercy?

Opening Reading/Chalice Lighting (5 minutes)

Introduce the reading, saying, "In one story from the book, Attorney Stevenson visits Avery Jenkins, a military veteran sentenced to death after killing someone during a severe psychotic episode. Stevenson had previously been subjected to an illegal strip search by a white prison guard when visiting his client. When he once again encountered that guard after the court hearing detailing Avery Jenkins' veteran status and mental illness, the guard's attitude was quite different." Read this passage from page 200-201 of the book aloud:

I was confused by his shift in attitude. I thanked him and walked to the visitation room door with the officer following behind me. He turned to unlock the padlock so that I could go inside. As I started to walk past him to enter, he placed his hand on my shoulder.

“Hey, um, I’d like to tell you something.”

I wasn’t sure where he was going with this.

“You know I took ole Avery to court for his hearing and was down there with y’all for those three days. And I, uh, well, I want you to know that I was listening.” He removed his hand from my shoulder and looked past me, as if staring at something behind me. “You know, I-uh, well, I appreciate what you’re doing. I really do. It was kind of difficult for me to be in that courtroom to hear what y’all was talking about. I came up in foster care, you know. I came up in foster care, too,” His face softened. “Man, I didn’t think anybody had it as bad as me. They moved me around like I wasn’t wanted nowhere. I had it pretty rough. But listening to what you was saying about Avery made me realize that there were other people who had it as bad as I did. I guess even worse. I mean, it brought back a lot of memories, sitting in that courtroom...”

You know, I guess what I’m trying to say is that I think it’s good what you’re doing, I got so angry coming up that there were plenty of times when I really wanted to hurt somebody, just because I was angry. I made it to eighteen, joined the military, and you know, I’ve been okay. But sitting in that courtroom brought back memories, and I think I realized how I’m still kind of angry.”

I smiled. He continued: “That expert doctor you put up said that some of the damage that’s done to kids in these abusive homes is permanent: that kind of made me worry. You think that’s true?”

“Oh, I think we can always do better,” I told him. “The bad things that happen to us don’t define us. It’s just important sometimes that people understand where we’re coming from.”

Light the chalice and review the covenant from Session 1.

Discussion and Sharing (25 minutes)

Say, “Stevenson calls his book *Just Mercy* and invites us to consider the place of justice, mercy, and compassion in regard to the U.S. criminal justice system.” Call attention to the posted questions and lead a discussion using the first pair of questions. Allow 15 minutes for the discussion.

Then, ask participants to reflect quietly on the second pair of questions on the posted newsprint. Invite participants to respond one at a time, without interruption, reminding them that they always have the right to pass.

Sharing 1 (20 minutes)

Read this passage from page 267 of the book aloud:

In preparing litigation on behalf of the children we were representing, it was clear that these shocking and senseless crimes [they had committed] couldn't be evaluated honestly without understanding the lives these children had been forced to endure.

Invite participants to reflect on Stevenson's belief in the need for mercy in our system for dealing with crime. After a minute, post the second set of questions. Invite participants to share their responses to one or more of the questions, speaking one at a time without interruption.

Sharing 2 (15 minutes)

Say:

Wisdom from the Christian faith tradition is particularly powerful to Stevenson, helping him to frame the work he is doing. He references the passage from the book of John where Jesus advocates for mercy for a condemned woman, saying "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

Ask, "Does this story from the Christian scriptures speak to you? What other texts, stories, songs, or experiences call you to compassion, mercy, and forgiveness?" Allow a minute or two of silence for people to find their words. Then, invite each person to share briefly, uninterrupted.

Discussion (20 minutes)

Invite the group to begin a conversation about how to engage your congregation or group in movements opposed to mass incarceration and/or the death penalty. Ask:

"What religious or secular partners in your local community might you work with to bring these issues to public attention? What legislative action might you support? How might you support those who are incarcerated?" Explain that this conversation is just the beginning, and that participants may want to arrange for further conversation in person and/or online to explore options. Here are some possible actions:

- Learn more about the [Church of the Larger Fellowship's prison ministry](#). Find out how you can take part in efforts to reach out to those who are incarcerated.
- Research local prison ministries and find out how you and/or your congregation can get involved.
- Learn about legislative initiatives that aim to dismantle the system of mass incarceration and/or work against the death penalty. Check with your [Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network](#), if there is one, to find out about their efforts. Organize support for those initiatives that are in line with Unitarian Universalist values.
- Learn about restorative justice, an alternative way to work with those who have engaged in criminal or antisocial activity. "[Restorative Justice: The Long Struggle](#)" and "[A Restorative Circle in the Wake of a Police Shooting](#)," both articles from *Tikkun* magazine, explore the theology and application of restorative justice. [Restorative Works Learning Network](#) provides information, news, and learning opportunities about restorative practices.
- Review the 2005 UUA Statement of Conscience, [Criminal Justice and Prison Reform](#) and follow some of the suggested congregational actions at the end of the statement.
- Invite others to read *Just Mercy* and organize more discussion groups, perhaps including those from other faith communities and civic or community organizations.
- Invite groups to watch [Stevenson's TED talk](#) and lead an online conversation about how to respond.
- Visit the website of the [Equal Justice Initiative](#) and explore the resources there, including relevant [reports](#) on such topics as lynching in America, incarceration of children, and racial discrimination in jury selection.
- Read [The New Jim Crow](#) by Michelle Alexander and/or watch her TED talk. Her book was the 2012-13 Common Read, and you may want to make use of the [discussion guide for Unitarian Universalists](#) and [extensive supplementary resources](#) highlighted on the UUA website.

Collect email addresses so you can share the list of possible actions. Ask individual participants to commit to specific actions and timelines for further discussion about your group's actions in response to *Just Mercy*.

Closing (5 minutes)

Share "Only Begun," by William Sinkford, from [Voices from the Margins](#), used with permission:

Spirit of Life and Love, dear God of all nations

There is so much work to do.

We have only begun to imagine justice and mercy.

Help us hold fast to our vision of what can be.

May we see the hope in our history,

And find the courage and the voice

To work for that constant rebirth

Of freedom and justice.

That is our dream.

Amen.

Extinguish the chalice and thank participants.