

# Freedom Circle Spiritual Support Groups

An Initiative of  
  
 BECOMING CHURCH

## By Products:

- ✓ A New Kind of Restorative Justice
- ✓ A New Kind of Church
- ✓ A New Kind of People
- ✓ A New Kind of Re-entry

## Mass incarceration is a by-product of our spiritual crisis.

We should not be surprised by the crippling injustices of mass incarceration. The social norms and public structures which sustain untenable rates of incarceration and recidivism are symptoms of our national spiritual dis-ease. We do not even know our neighbors, let alone love them. We do not love and trust God. We have made ourselves into idols of our own worship, protecting ourselves and "our people" at any cost. Our segregated communities lead to distorted beliefs about those who are not like us. Distorted beliefs sustain unjust laws and public structures. People suffer under the injustice, segregation deepens, and the cycle intensifies.

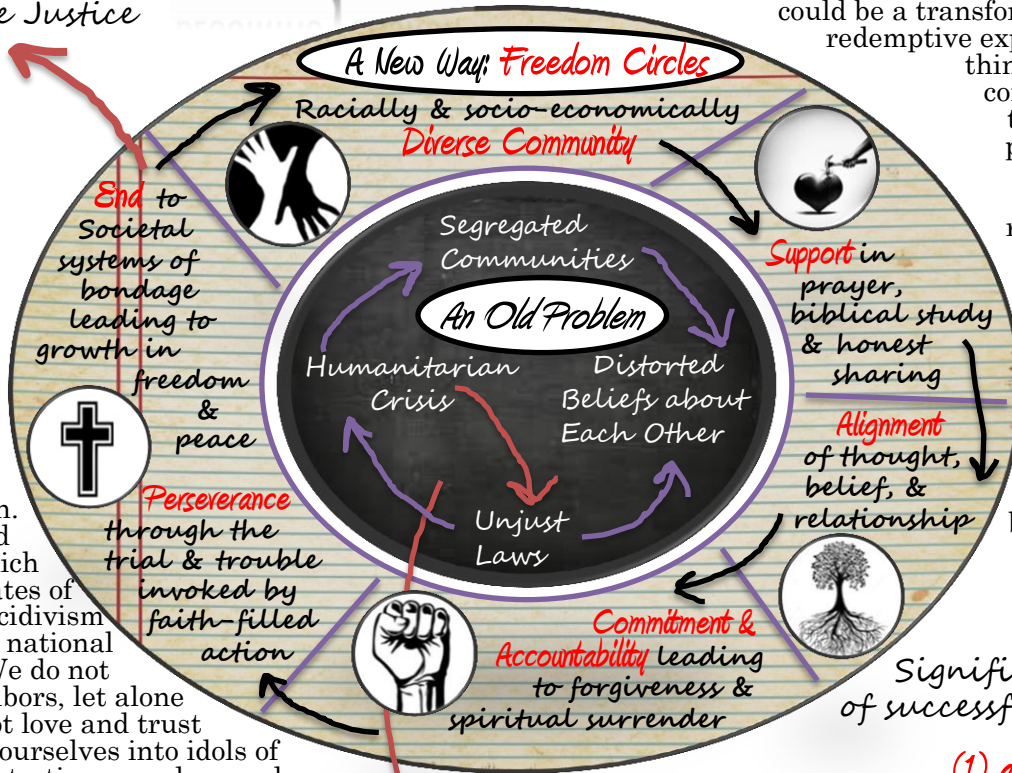
## New laws are not enough.

There is no question that we need new laws and policies to correct the injustices of mass incarceration. Passing the Civil Rights Act was a moral imperative, but the new laws of 1964 were not enough to overcome racism and injustice. Neither are new laws enough now. Justice and mercy require that we become **new people**—all of us. In order to build public life that reflects Jesus' Kingdom, we will transcend societal divisions of race and class and be transformed through a new fabric of relationship to God and one another.

## Freedom Circle Spiritual Support Groups generate new, holistic expressions of the Kingdom.

Freedom Circles are deceptively simple, yet revolutionary faith communities of socio-economic diversity and spiritual accountability. Embracing rich and poor, all hues of skin tone and culture, formally educated and street-educated, Freedom Circles are intentionally diverse expressions of God's universal family. Through stories, attitudes and experiences of those unlike us, we receive the conviction, grace and life-lessons God renders. We are emboldened by scripture and prayer to become disciples of Christ, working together for the sake of the most vulnerable. We function under the leadership of the poor and the oppressed, in collegial partnership with the privileged and influential. Freedom Circles are dismantling mass incarceration at its core while implementing new forms of spiritual accountability and societal correction. Freedom Circles are building blocks for a new kind of church, a new kind of restorative justice, and a new kind of society.

Ideally, **Church** could be a transformative, reconciling, redemptive community. Ideally too, incarceration could be a transformative, reconciling, redemptive experience. We tend to think that church is the context of redemption, through worship, for people who are good, and incarceration is the context of redemption, through punishment, for people who are bad. Under constructs like these, neither institution is living into its ideal. The Church and the Prison need each other to become what each is meant to be.



The two most significant indicators of successful re-entry are

- (1) a new way of thinking
- (2) a new set of friends

In Christ, these two things are what every congregation is most equipped to offer.

Efforts to solve systemic injustice by changing laws are inadequate.

## Immersion

Immersion is a ten-week experience of redeeming relationships through participation in a Freedom Circle and simultaneous participation in a series of ten intentional conversations. Immersion includes reading assignments and reflection papers, and will prepare you for leadership in a Freedom Circle. As Immersion explores the realities of mass incarceration, our conversations topics will include:

- ✓ Mass incarceration as framed by Jesus, Gandhi and King
- ✓ Faith-filled, non-violent response to evil
- ✓ Exploring relationship to power, wealth and status in Freedom Circles
- ✓ Freedom Circles at work in the community
- ✓ Linking a new kind of faith community with new practices of restorative justice

Immersion is offered in the fall (Sept/Oct/Nov), winter (Jan/Feb/March) and spring (April/May/June).

**Why We Can't Wait (WWCW)** is DC's Church-wide response to the injustices of mass incarceration.

**Freedom Circles, Immersion & WWCW** are initiatives of Becoming Church. For more information, visit us at [becomingchurch.org](http://becomingchurch.org) or [whywecantwait.org](http://whywecantwait.org).