

First and Center
Pastor's Blog
February 26, 2019

In a couple of hours, I am going over to the Legislative Office Building at the Capitol to attend a hearing concerning people who have been released from prison, yet are locked out of work and housing because they committed a crime.



I have always been stunned by the unfairness of this. Someone commits a crime, has a trial, is convicted or pleads guilty, is given a prison sentence, serves that time (we used to say “pays their debt to society”), and is released. But, if the crime was classed as a “felony” (sometime check out the huge variety of crimes, including many non-violent ones, which are classed as “felonies.”), their sentence will continue the rest of their lives.

They are locked out of receiving various kinds of public assistance, including Section 8 housing. They need a job in order to afford market rental housing, but they are locked out of many jobs; they can't even get a license to be a barber! They have trouble getting work to make money to have a place to live and food to eat, and then we are surprised at the high rate of recidivism in this country.

We need to stop giving these people effectively life sentences. I have a friend who is highly educated and trained, headed a nonprofit, but embezzled some money from the organization when she ran into trouble at home. When she was discovered, she pled guilty, went to prison, and paid a fine on her release. Now this highly skilled woman can't get a job using those skills because of a felony conviction. When most folk plead guilty to a felony, they don't understand that is a life sentence from one kind of prison to another.

Why does the US have a larger percentage of our population in prison than any other developed nation (and most less-developed nations as well)? Something is wrong in the system of “justice.”

Jesus and other prophets called us to pray for those in prison; to visit them. Let us continue our prayers for those who are released, and work to help them make new lives.

~ Rev. Shelly Stackhouse,
Transitional Pastor