Exploring Mass Incarceration
Understanding the Criminal Justice System from the Perspective of Racial Oppression

by Julia Chance

Miriam Aguila, a teacher in a high poverty section of Houston and a member of the Texas Conference of United Methodist Women, is astounded that many of the youth she works with believe that prison is their destiny. “That’s what they feel their future is,” she says. “To me, they’re incarcerated in their own way. They have a mentality that there’s no hope or change. I believe that there is and that they need to be aware of it.”

For Rochelle King, a member of the Great Plains Conference from Topeka, Kansas, the disparity of people of color in prisons—particularly black men—is something that she’s very concerned about. “I am a member Those Who Are in Prison,” United Methodist Women’s four-day seminar on mass incarceration that took place in New York City in August. They and 23 other women from conferences around the country gathered to gain a greater understanding of the laws, policies, and practices that have made the United States prison capital of the world.

The event also marked the first time that the Christian Social Action arm of United Methodist Women produced an original seminar. “To date our seminars have been custom-designed in that groups chose the topic and we put the seminar together for them,” says Jay Godfrey, one of the event’s coordinators. “It’s the first time we’ve done this type of open seminar where we invited folks to apply and come and learn about a specific issue that we selected.” He and his team decided that using one of United Methodist Women’s priority issues would be an ideal way to start.

Attendees arrived on the evening of day one for dinner and an opening circle where they introduced themselves and got to know one another. They also shared how mass incarceration has impacted their lives or the lives of someone they know.

The second day was dedicated to education starting with an exercise titled “The Fabric of Oppression and Mass Incarceration” where participants, working in groups, explored various forms of oppression that occur culturally, socially, and personally. “We approach social justice issues as being rooted in different forms of oppression,” explains Godfrey.

“So in order to break down... (Please turn to Page 2)

From the General Secretary

Exercise Our Hard-won Right

by Harriett Jane Olson

On a recent trip to Nashville, I visited Centennial Park to see the new Woman Suffrage Monument. The women featured in the sculpture are people whose dedicated work on behalf of voting rights helped to turn an 82-year effort from the time of the Seneca Falls Convention and the Declaration of Sentiments into a success.

The monument was erected to honor them and mark Tennessee’s role as the 36th state to ratify the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, expanding women’s right to vote from a few states to a national constitutional right. Without reminders like this, it might be hard to believe that the right of women to vote was ever controversial. It was, both in the general public and within our predecessor bodies.

The stories of these particular women remind us that they created opportunities to influence decisions that they were not a part of. Just because the Tennessee legislature was an all-male body at the time, did not mean that they counted themselves out. They staged rallies and marches and carried signs like those depicted in the monument.

The amendment passed by a one-vote margin in Tennessee and the story is that the last vote was secured, in part, by a mother’s telegram to her legislator son just before the final vote.

I take several lessons from this. First: Vote! Know the issues and vote in ways that represent your faith and your conviction that we are called to show God’s love by helping to build a system in which women, children and youth can survive and thrive.

Second: Create ways to influence people who can make positive change happen. Don’t count yourself out. Third: Change requires broad participation of many people for as long as it takes as well as the dogged commitment of leaders; with you, still turning faith, hope and love into action.

Harriett Jane Olson is general secretary and CEO of United Methodist Women.
Exploring Mass Incarceration

(Continued from Page 1) whatever’s happening in any social justice issue we need to understand how oppression is operating and functioning in society.” A second exercise examined various U.S. policies and laws throughout history that have resulted in systemic oppression. Both exercises sparked lots of conversation, with group members sharing anecdotes and impressions of how they’ve experienced or perceived the inequities that comprise various forms of oppression.

Another highlight of the day was the screening of “The House I Live In,” Eugene Jarecki’s eye-opening documentary about the justice system up close and from two different perspectives. Some visited the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office to observe the conventional way in which sentencing occurs. Others went to Midtown Community Court, an alternative sentencing program whose mission is administering humane justice. Both groups then came together to talk about their experiences. “There were lots of questions about how the system works from arrest to charge to prosecution, and they discussed the discrepancies [between the two sentencing structures],” says Godfrey.

On the final day, facilitators compiled many of the ideas that were shared over the course of the seminar to develop and post action items around the room. Members were then invited to gather at the action items that they were most passionate about and discuss ways to move forward in enacting them individually, in their United Methodist Women groups or as a conference. A true indication that the event was a success was the positive feedback from attendees that Godfrey received, some with requests for seminar materials to take back to their units.

Says Godfrey, “When people tell us that a seminar is valuable and they want other people to experience it, it’s really empowering.”

Julia Chance is co-editor for United Methodist Women News.

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Empowering Kenyan Women

by Carol Van Gorp

United Methodist Women is helping to improve the lives of African women by supporting Hope for African Women (HFAW), an NGO that works to empower poor, vulnerable, and marginalized women living in Kenya. Founded by Dr. Grace Mose Okong’o in 2011, HFAW engages with women on issues affecting their lives—reproductive health, gender-based violence, female genital mutilation, and economic empowerment—and teaches them to become advocates for themselves and other women.

HFAW has trained 30 health and human rights promoters from 4 of Kenya’s wards including Nyansiongo, Mekenene, Esise and Kiabonyoru. The organization has also promoted individual entrepreneurship primarily for women by offering interest-free loans. To date more than 140 loans have been granted with a successful rate of repayment.

In October HFAW sponsored “Self Driven Women Walk 2016,” a walkathon to raise funds for the group’s socio-economic activities as well as encourage people to help end corrupt government by electing leaders with integrity.

HFAW’s slogan is “Empowering women, transforming communities,” and United Methodist Women plays a role in empowering the many women that they serve.

Carol Van Gorp is the executive for International Ministries at United Methodist Women.
It Takes a Village
Volunteer teachers bring the classroom to needy students in the Philippines.

by Rev. Floyd Alcantara

The Kapatiran-Kaunlaran Foundation Inc. (KKF), a development organization providing education to underserved communities throughout the Philippines, is a longtime partner of United Methodist Women. Here, KKF chaplain Rev. Floyd Alcantara shares highlights from their summer literacy program.

A well-known African proverb says, “It takes a village to raise a child.” In the case of LikhAral, the Kapatiran-Kaunlaran Foundation Inc.’s banner summer program, it took a team of 50 volunteers to teach at least 700 children from 4–12 years old for several days.

Going to communities and teaching kids under the scorching heat of the summer sun is no easy task. Our volunteers do not teach in classrooms, churches, or air-conditioned spaces. They often teach outdoors, usually in makeshift classrooms in a cemetery or a basketball court.

Just imagine one full day of teaching (and commuting) from one community to another while enduring the summer heat during the onslaught of El Niño phenomenon. In return, the volunteers get to have lunch, transportation, and priceless memories.

This year’s volunteers were mostly first-timers who were eager to teach and learn. There were also second-, third- and fourth-timers who were just as eager and excited to serve as if it were their first time all over again.

From April to May, this solid group of volunteers spent two weeks teaching in six areas: three in Manila and three in Pampanga. There were two noticeable things about this year’s volunteers: their attitude toward ministry and the strong bond they formed as a group.

I personally saw everyone’s willingness to serve, to learn, and to step up their game to get things done. And I do not only mean the volunteer teachers but also the KKFI staff who were involved in the program.

I noticed that our Alternative Learning System students were more motivated, and our staff members were their usual committed selves.

This year’s entire journey—from the staff training to the teachers’ training and actual two-week implementation of the program—was inspired and encouraging since everyone was involved and each one played a part.

Surely the African proverb is true: It takes a village to raise a child. This saying, which values relationship sharing and the sense of community and family are all embodied in our LikhAral journey.

The theme of this year’s LikhAral, which was adopted from the Vacation Church School of the United Methodist Church, is very apt for this year’s group of volunteers: Together we can change the world. For KKFI volunteers we can tweak the theme a little bit: Together we can change the world—one child, one community at a time.

Rev. Floyd Alcantara is the chaplain for Kapatiran-Kaunlaran Foundation Inc., a development organization providing education to marginalized people in the Philippines.

Mark Your Calendars for Upcoming Leadership Development Days

Leadership Development Days (LDD) is a three-day weekend filled with practical, hands-on experiences, moving worship services, workshops, networking and more for United Methodist Women members newly elected to leadership positions in the organization and anyone who wants to participate.

Registration is now open for:
St. Louis, MO: November 11–13, 2016; register by October 7
Tempe, AZ: November 18–20, 2016; register by October 7
Charlotte, NC: January 27–29, 2017; register by December 2

For more information:
Click on http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/members-leaders/events/ldd
Call the LDD office at 212-870-8769
Email: LeadershipDevelopmentDays@unitedmethodistwomen.org
Fellowship and Leadership:

2016 Jurisdiction Conferences

Northeast, Southeast, North Central, South Central and Western Jurisdictions of United Methodist Women gathered from spring through summer for Quadrennial meetings in Syracuse, New York, Charleston, South Carolina, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and Salt Lake City, Utah respectively. Voting for new board members to represent their regions topped the list of priorities, but attendees also went to educational workshops, heard speakers including General Secretary Harriett Olson and United Methodist Women President Yvette K. Richards and became acquainted with other United Methodist Women members within their region. Here, some moments from each event:

**Southeast Jurisdiction** (June 3–5) Charleston, SC

![Southeast Jurisdiction](image)

**North Central Jurisdiction** (June 24–26) Grand Rapids, MI

![North Central Jurisdiction](image)
South Central Jurisdiction (April 15–17) Oklahoma City, OK

Northeast Jurisdiction (June 16–18) Syracuse, NY

Western Jurisdiction (April 22–24) Salt Lake City, UT
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