

# RED, BLACK, & BLUE POLICE

ACCOUNTABILITY

PART II: THEOLOGICAL PULPIT TOOLKIT

**Salvation  
and  
Social Justice**  
*Liberating Public Policy Theologically*

2023





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**Testimony to Truth**

Rooted in Black Faith and Liberation Theology, voice is given as testimony to the impact of systemic racism by those most impacted. This witness is not performative pain, but a truth-telling moving toward liberation.

**Equity and Transformation**

As organizing gathers force and the community begins to see evil structures crumble and changes begin to advance, we also bear witness to black joy, discipleship, and calling. In this context, individuals are healed (saved) by the power of community, by evolved community.

**Community As Wellness**

Those most impacted identify evil and injustice as communities help shape the prophetic demands for just public policy.

LAMENT

PROPHETIC  
OUTCRY

THEORY OF  
**CHANGE**

LIBERATION

SALVATION

RITUALS OF  
RESISTANCE

**Healing By Community**

While never complete, we bear witness to the signs of kin-dom as just policies are established and systems are transformed. We see the Prophetic Outcry now as visionary.

**Organize,  
Organize,  
Organize**

The Prophetic Outcry is given strategy and tactics to directly target the systems producing pain. Healing is the complete transformation of the system, as well as the realization of the prophethood or power of the people.



Sisters and Brothers,

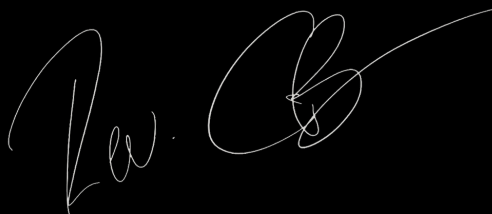
**Salvation and Social Justice** seeks to liberate public policy theologically by modeling the hope and resiliency of Black faith. Our advocacy is for people who are historically marginalized and want to apply their religious belief system to move from lament to liberation while envisioning and creating community-led solutions to redeem a structurally racist society. Our theory of change has five components: Lament (testimony to truth), Prophetic Cry (community as wellness), Rituals of Resistance (community organizing), Salvation (healing by community), and Liberation (equity and transformation). We apply this process to confront urgent issues plaguing our communities. One of the most pressing crises of the 21st century is State violence and the criminal system. Therefore *Red, Black and Blue: New Jersey's Black Faith Response to Police Violence* is a three-part series on policing responds to the problem of racialized police use of force in New Jersey by providing resources to help congregations and communities confront the issue.

Part I is a historical analysis of how the Black Church in New Jersey has responded to policing from the era of slave catchers to the current day. Part III is a policy activation toolkit which lays our policy gains so far and the policy work still yet to be done.

This part, Part II is a theological analysis and application of our theory of change. It is also a pulpit toolkit to help the Black church preach and teach on this issue. We are grateful for Abolitionist Sanctuary and the knowledge expertise of Founder and Executive Director, Rev. Nikia S. Robert, Ph.D. **Abolitionist Sanctuary** is a nonprofit organization leading a national coalition to train Black-serving churches, civic organizations, and non-profit organizations to organize against the moral crisis of mass incarceration and the criminalization of impoverished Black motherhood. We also are grateful for our partnership with Jonathan McKinney and the **Advocacy Factory** for once again providing the practical tools to inspire advocacy from the pulpit to the pews.

This series is a result of our strategic partnerships, proven strategies, political gains and longstanding commitment to New Jersey's Black communities through liberating theology and transformative public policy. But more than anything else it is the result of OUR FAITH, OUR BELIEF IN A LIBERATING GOD, and directly impacted people imagining something different than the oppressive punitive system handed to them.

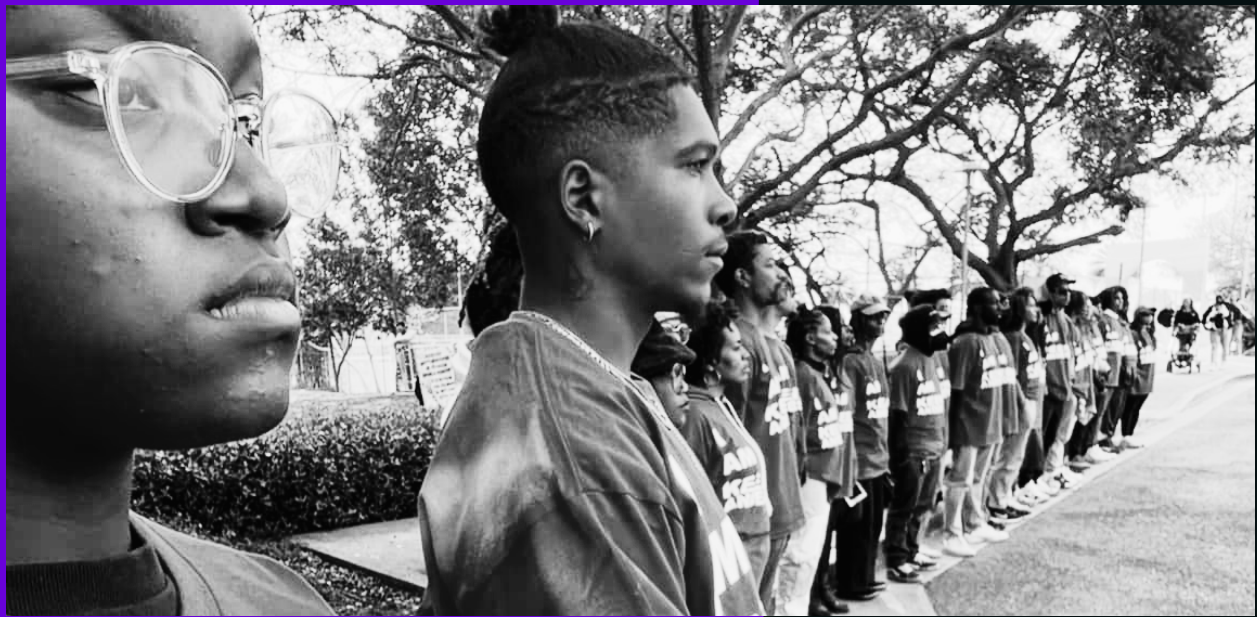
It's On 'Til Liberation,



**Rev. Dr. Charles F. Boyer**

Greater Mt. Zion AME Church, Senior Pastor  
Salvation and Social Justice, Executive Director





## A NATIONAL FAITH-BASED COALITION

Abolitionist Sanctuary is a national faith-based coalition united against the moral crisis of mass incarceration and the criminalization of impoverished Black motherhood.



**ABOLITIONIST SANCTUARY**  
Repair. Restore. Rebuild.

## MISSION



Abolitionist Sanctuary is a national coalition united against the moral crisis of mass incarceration and the criminalization of impoverished Black motherhood.

## VISION



We envision a national coalition trained in abolitionist principles and transformative justice strategies to repair, restore, and rebuild a more just and equitable society.

## Grace and peace...

I write this missive as the Founder and Executive Director of Abolitionist Sanctuary. We are a nonprofit organization leading a national faith-based coalition with the mission of training Black-serving churches, civic organizations, and educational institutions to unite against the moral crisis of mass incarceration and the criminalization of impoverished Black motherhood.

As abolitionists, we make a radical investment in liberation and communal flourishing achieved through education, consulting, and civic engagement. As educators, we train faith and civic leaders to apply abolitionist principles to repair, restore, and rebuild just and equitable communities. As consultants, we advise organizations to integrate solutions that strengthen diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in the workplace. As community organizers, we disrupt oppressive systems with transformative justice strategies that affirm the inherent worth of underrepresented groups, especially impoverished Black mothers.

Abolitionist Sanctuary is grateful to partner with Salvation and Social Justice to bring you this Police Accountability Toolkit. Our hope is that this resource effectively amplifies the voices of people closest to the problem and draws from their expertise to identify solutions. Therefore, we have conducted cutting-edge research rooted in liberative theology and transformative policies that are authentic to real-lived experiences and critically vital for building more just and equitable systems of accountability and community-led approaches to public safety.

At Abolitionist Sanctuary, we believe in a God who is on the side of the oppressed. This God cared so much about people who are justice-impacted, that God entered history through a criminalized brown Palestinian Jewish body, Jesus. The Black Messiah was arrested as a malefactor on trumped-up charges. As followers of Jesus, we cannot dismiss or escape this theological truth. Rather, our faith must call us to recognize Jesus' relationship to criminality and solidarity with those who were imprisoned. This radical claim should compel us to extend Jesus' ministry by forging community with those who are adversely impacted by the criminal system. As disciples, we are called to set the captives free and overthrow oppressive systems, including ending corruptive policing and abolishing prisons.

This toolkit on police accountability is one step closer to liberation. We invite you to apply this resource to imagine new alternatives that extends Jesus' revolutionary ministry to create economies of care for Black people to flourish in the State of New Jersey.

To learn from Abolitionist Sanctuary's certified trainings, benefit from DEI consulting, or host an Abolitionist Sanctuary service at your church you can inquire at [www.abolitionistsanctuary.org](http://www.abolitionistsanctuary.org). In addition, you can follow us on social media @abolitionistsanctuary. You can also download the Abolitionist Sanctuary podcast on all platforms. Let's repair, restore, and rebuild the society in which we deserve to flourish beyond policing and prisons. Together, we can build a faith-based abolitionist movement!

In the spirit of abolition,

*Rev. Nakia Robert*

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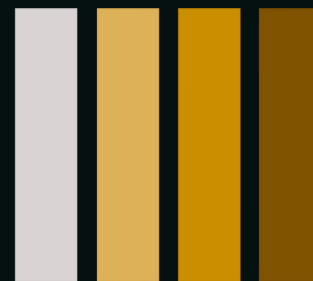
REV. NAKIA ROBERT, PhD  
ABOLITIONIST SANCTUARY





## THE ADVOCACY FACTORY

Our charge is to help power the new world. Our focus is to mobilize resources, enable innovative ideas, and affect change through focused grassroots and grasstops advocacy training. We curate, teach, and support independent advocacy ecosystems to proactively strategize, intentionally build relationships, and support legislation that directly effects Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities.

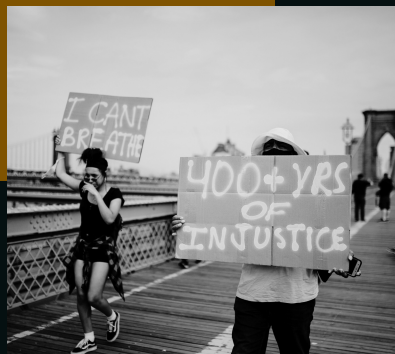


# TAF

THE ADVOCACY FACTORY



## TRAINING



## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



## RESOURCES

[theadvocacyfactory.org](http://theadvocacyfactory.org)  
443-917-1515

10346 Hickory Ridge Rd #445,  
Columbia, MD 21044



# FROM THE PULPIT TO THE PEWS...

**Injustice anywhere is a threat to  
justice everywhere.**

**-Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**

These words penned by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. from his Birmingham jail cell are eternally relevant and speak directly to the injustices communities of Color still suffer from today. The unfair treatment of human bodies, coupled with the consistent violation of rights has become such an accepted social normality that our communities have become desensitized, and even comfortable with discriminatory inequities. Public Safety then becomes the responsibility of the community. Issues regarding racial profiling, mass incarceration, restorative justice, juvenile justice, gun violence, and emergency management, must be either restored, updated, or completely reimagined so our communities can experience actual justice.

Justice is any act of reconciliation that restores any part of God's creation back to its original intent, purpose or image. When we think about justice that way, God's love for justice should be of no surprise. It includes both the acts of social justice and the restorative justice found on the cross.

This is freedom. It is the "promise land" that Dr. King witnessed from his "mountain top" experience. The path to freedom has never been easy, and this journey will not be comfortable or simple. Paradoxically, freedom requires the need to impose control on self. It requires more responsibility and recognizes the process and discipline that personal and political freedom will require. It will be a fight. This toolkit has been designed as a spiritual guide to justice reinvestment. It is intended to inform and inspire our communities to help themselves in the fight against injustice on our path to freedom. I hope that you use these tools to plot your community's path to freedom.

**In Peace and Service,**



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**JONATHAN MCKINNEY**  
The Advocacy Factory





# CLARION CALL

BLACK FAITH, BLACK POWER



# BACKGROUND



It started with the Use of Force report developed by NJ Advance Media in 2018. The most comprehensive database of police use of force in the country, the report details 486 municipal police departments and the State Police from 2012 to 2016. What the report details is even more drastic. The amount of **excessive force** used by law enforcement officers in New Jersey is staggering. The report found that 10% of all police officers accounted for 38% of all uses of force. Across the State the report found that Black people were more than three times more likely to face police force than white people. For example, in municipalities like Millville, South Orange, and Lakewood the report found that Black people were more likely to face police force at rates of 6, 10, and 22 times more than whites, respectively.

In response in 2019, Salvation and Social Justice held community hearings at six Black churches. These hearings were conducted during a four-month period and spanned local cities: Bethany Baptist in Newark, Mount Zion AME in New Brunswick, Mount Zion Baptist in Pleasantville, Mount Teman AME in Elizabeth, Bethel AME in Paterson, and Tabernacle Baptist in Burlington. These churches were selected because of both their high rates of force and their community connectedness.

The data and feedback from the community indicated that rather than the police's use of force, communities desired community-led alternatives rooted in compassion and care. They also wanted accountability. Thus, Salvation and Social Justice responded by launching a campaign to carry out the community's recommendations.

The strategy to identify solutions to the problem of policing required even deeper community engagement. This grassroots membership-base building is important to ensure that ideas emerge organically and subversively, rather than unilaterally from self-interested and manipulative power brokers from the outside or above those who are most impacted by the problems. Therefore, Salvation and Social Justice led visioning sessions as an organizing strategy for

the community to come together to lead the restorative efforts of imagining transformative approaches to public safety.

We conducted eight virtual visioning sessions organized by two groups. The first group represented the City of Elizabeth and the other group represented Gloucester County. The focus area targeted the City of Elizabeth because it was highly engaged with the Use of Force hearings. Gloucester County was selected because, many of the use of force violations happened to Black people in rural areas of the state. Both groups focused on the needs, challenges, and solutions confronting their respective communities. These sessions allowed participants to collaborate, connect, and create alternative models.

An integral outcome of the visioning sessions were asset maps to chart vital relationships amongst key stakeholders to encourage solidarity and resources that were important to secure community-led alternatives to policing. In the end, this process of organizing—from the hearings to the visioning sessions—allowed local residents to reclaim their power as agents leading change in their communities to become safe and self-sustaining without the vulnerabilities of police and State violence.

This context demonstrates the efficacy of faith-rooted community organizing and participatory research led by impacted groups in partnership with Salvation and Social Justice to lament problems and identify liberating solutions for communal action



## OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

Theory of Change is our approach to solving problems. We use Community-based and participatory visioning sessions to center the experiences of people most impacted by policing in the State of New Jersey. In agreement with one activist, Glenn E. Martin, who is also formerly incarcerated, we believe that “those closest to the problem are also closest to the solution, but furthest [sic.] from the power and resources.” Thus, as presented in the previous section, this organic study is directly informed by people in the community and their experiences with policing.



- **Lament** – testimony moving towards liberation
- **Prophetic Outcry** – those impacted, given space
- **Rituals of Resistance** – organizing, fight
- **Salvation** – by community healing, black joy, see in celebration
- **Liberation** – systematic change, creating systems

Let's break down each component of this methodology to demonstrate the theology that supports our organizing strategies and collective action.

## LAMENT

Lament expresses a grievance and sorrow through outcry, such as weeping and wailing. Lament is not always sadness but can sometimes result in praise. In this way, lament can lead to liberation. Biblically, the prophets—including Jesus—lamented the injustices and death-dealing circumstances of their times. Jesus expressed a cry of dereliction from the cross before dying a criminal's death and state-sanctioned execution by the Roman empire. According to the writer of

the Gospel of Mark (15:34), Jesus is recorded as wailing “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” This cry of abandonment is Jesus' address to God, in which he also expresses his desire to pass the cup of death so that he may live.

Likewise, Black people all around the country are crying out with feelings of abandonment and silence America that has emboldened anti-Black racism, which is at the root of State violence. We heard the cries of Eric Garner when he wailed, “I Can't Breathe.” We heard George Floyd cry for his mother as a police officer fatally pressed his knee on Floyd's neck. Most recently we heard the cries of Tyree Nichols calling for his mother. We hear the cries of Black communities in the State of New Jersey for police accountability. Like Jesus on the cross, our lament is one of forsakenness by the country's founders, constitutional writers, and enforcers of law. Every encounter of police violence and social inequities is a breach in the social contract promising the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and justice for all. Thus, the hearings allowed community members to lament these grievances and give testimony to their experiences with policing.

**Every time I wake up, I feel my blackness. I walk the streets not knowing if I'll make it home or not.** (Zellie Thomas, Paterson)

**“He just started macing all of us.”** (Marie Ligon, Paterson, discussing when she broke up a fight between teenagers and a police officer approached)

**“I haven't seen a lot of happy in my life.”** (Ashante Bynum recalling when police beat her stepfather so bad that his eye popped out of its socket)

**“It's police brutality, and it scars you.”** (Patience Roberts)

**“When he did that, in the back of my mind, I was thinking how can he do this? How can he do this? Where is his humanity?”** (Thomas “Afrika” Ibiang recounting his arrest and assault by a police officer when he was a teenager)

**“They just didn't just take my son. They took a part of me. Not just my heart, but a part of my life.”** (Tawanna Graham)

**“Even if he's black, if he's still fulfilling the racist policies that this police department does, then our city remains in danger.”** (Salaam Ismial, City of Elizabeth, referring to a hypothetical new chief of police for the city)

**“It is painful coming to these sessions because there is no end in sight.”** (Ingrid Hill, People's Organization for Progress)

## PROPHETIC OUTCRY

The prophetic outcry is a kind of complaint levied against individuals and institutions, both privately and publicly. In some cases, complaints are also brought against God. As a public outcry, communities call out the root causes of their suffering. Our complaint calls out anti-Black state violence that is perpetuated by oppressive power structures and white supremacy that weaponizes the policing system to harm Black communities. Our complaint is public and levied against political decision-makers and other actors who oppress our communities and have the influence to effect public policies and laws that will make our communities safer. For some of us, our complaint is also against God. Where is God amidst police brutality and misconduct? Where is God when we call for justice and police accountability? These complaints name a sense of abandonment and silence by rulers and principalities in the midst of communal suffering. Unequivocally, for real change to occur, the root causes of anti-Black racism, inequity, evil, and injustice must cease.

Prophetic outcry is important to create a platform to amplify the voices of those most vulnerable so that the subaltern do not only speak but are heard by the community. Salvation and Social Justice achieved this by holding space through the hearings and visioning sessions that resulted in documenting people's experience with police use of force around the country. This exposure to the issue led to policy changes and this call for further accountability. Communities can use prophetic outcry to call for uprisings and resistance that will bring about social change.

**"Because talking don't get you nowhere. We gotta have action. And when I say action, I mean action now."** (Sheila Reid, Bridgeton)

**"If we do not have control of the police, then we don't have democracy."** (Baba Zayid Muhammad of Newark Communities for Accountable Policing, discussing the importance of reinstating subpoena and investigatory powers of civilian review boards in Newark)

**"We need to rebuild a new system that serves us and not white supremacy." "They know the solution: Stop killing black people."**

## RITUAL OF RESISTANCE

A ritual of resistance is the way of Jesus. In his life and ministry, Jesus resisted oppressive power structures and practiced a radical reordering of hegemonic hierarchies. Jesus proclaimed radical messages stating the last would be first, the poor are blessed, and the fools shall shame the wise. Jesus crossed ethnic and gendered boundaries by touching and healing the socially defiled, and communing with women and outcasts. Jesus' first Christian community possessed a criminal element, and he announced his purpose to set the captives free. For people who wanted to follow him, Jesus required that they visit the imprisoned and serve the least of these. Jesus demonstrated an ethic of accountability when he called out the Sadducees and pharisees and made tax collectors give back what they extorted from the most vulnerable. This liberating message and ministry of Jesus led to his arrest. Jesus was labeled seditious, treasonous, and rebellious.

When Jesus says to "go and do likewise," this means that we must continue the liberating work and ministerial vision of Jesus. We too must participate in a ritual of resistance that mark us as revolutionaries in such a way that we make good trouble and cause the empire or the State to feel threaten by our collective action. The prophetic mandate of a ritual resistance is best captured by the biblical prophet Amos, who said "let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." The prophet Micah said, "And what does the Lord require, but to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly before our God." Finally, a prophet of the civil rights movement, Dr. Martin Luther King once said in quoting the biblical prophet Isaiah, that a ritual of resistance requires that "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: 40:5 And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." At the heart of a ritual of resistance is the prophetic call to dismantling oppressive power structures, especially carceral systems from the Roman empire to the State of New Jersey.

## SALVATION

Salvation is liberation achieved through love and justice. Salvation is not only spiritual but material; it is not otherworldly but required here and now. Salvation is not only surviving death, but it is thriving in abundant life. Salvation is ensuring that everyone has not only their basic needs met, but they flourish—individually and communally. Salvation prompts us to believe that a more just and equitable world beyond policing and prisons is possible. Salvation is more than confession; it is a call to action.

When Jesus read from the scrolls of Isaiah in Luke 4:18, he said, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” This reading of Jesus’s purpose marks the purpose of his coming: to give hope to the poor and vulnerable, to abolish prisons, to heal, and to free those who are in bondage. The expected fulfillment of this mission is in the year of the jubilee when debts are collected, harvest time comes, and the people experience abundance for communal flourishing. However, many believers have reduced salvation to a confession in Romans 10:9, “if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” Salvation requires more than a confession, but to carry out our belief in a God of the oppressed, who through Jesus, requires followers to liberate the least of these, heal structural harms, and create a more just world.

## LIBERATION

A goal of Liberation is systemic change. According to the Father of Black Liberation Theology, Rev. Dr. James Hal Cone, “human liberation is God’s work of salvation in Jesus Christ.”<sup>2</sup> Cone further explains that, “Liberation is not an object but the project of freedom wherein the oppressed realize that their fight for freedom is a divine right of creation.”<sup>3</sup> Unlike the broken promises of our country’s founders that have failed to deliver the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and justice for all, God’s promises of liberation do not return void—freedom is our divine right.

Importantly, salvation is not liberation. Womanist theologian Delores Williams examines the story of Hagar and highlights the ways in which God helped Hagar in the wilderness by providing a well of water so that her and her baby could survive. However, ultimately, God saved Hagar’s life but also commanded that she return to her oppressor. Hagar was the African maidservant of Abram and Sarai. To return to their house is to go back to sexual violence, servitude and harsh treatment. Williams concludes that God is not always a liberator. Williams uses the story of Hagar as a point of departure to describe Black women who struggle to make a way out of no way. This survival, however, is salvific but it is not liberative. Said another way, surviving is not thriving. At times, we

have to act as our own liberators to move from survival to thriving when it seems God is not intervening on our behalf or present with us in the wildernesses of death-dealing conditions. In this way, liberation is both divinely and humanly orchestrated, just as Jesus is fully man and wholly God. We can both wait for God and act on our own behalf for liberation.

As this section has shown, the methodology that describes how we approach the problem of policing is both a spiritual matter grounded in theology and a material project guided by lamentation, resistance, salvation, and liberation. Thus, while we are waiting for liberation, this toolkit provides proven strategies to theologically and practically approach public policies to reclaim the safety and flourishing of our communities. Churches are invited to consider using this approach to respond to problems in their own communities and contexts.

## DATA

In the State of New Jersey, during the period of 2012-2016 Black people comprised 14% percent of the state’s population yet Black people were more than twice as likely as white people to have force used against them, accounted for about 38 percent of arrests, and were 114% more likely to be shot. All of this even though, according to the data, Black people were less likely to threaten police verbally or physically during a [use-of-force](#) incident. Additionally, other social determinants like substance misuse and mental health challenges – which are directly connected to instances of higher police violence – play key roles that influence the lived experience of Black communities. As a result, Black communities are disproportionately at more risk for police violence.

In December 2020, then-State Attorney General Gurbir Grewal issued Directive No. 2020-14 establishing, or continuing, county working groups to “improve law enforcement interactions with special needs populations and those living with mental or behavioral health issues.” Recognizing that racial disparities exist in both mental health and criminal justice spaces, especially for Black communities (Pope, 2019), it is vital that public policies and interventions account for these inequities. Police accountability initiatives and policies include use of force directives, body cams, canines, no-knocks, and alternative policing models.

We know that when police are not adequately prepared to address substance use or mental health crises with the care and empathy required for peaceful resolutions, aggression and violence become the default response. Police are among the most consistent in displaying implicit and explicit racially biased or prejudicial behaviors

that often go unchecked (NJ.com, 2019). The system to address these detrimental community conditions is not sustainable. A new framework is needed and a new process to reimagine it is required, one that places those impacted at the center.

## LAMENT: PROBLEM

Data from the visioning sessions indicates that there are four urgent problems requiring urgent responses. Therefore, the highlighted issues prioritized in this study are:

1. Lack of Accountability
2. Hyper-policing
3. Excessive Force
4. Conflicts of Interest

### Lack of Accountability

In the New York Times Bestselling book, *The New Jim Crow*, legal scholar Michelle Alexander unearths racial disparities in the legal system. In a discussion about policing of drugs, Alexander states, “Drug use, once considered a private, public-health matter, was reframed through political rhetoric and media imager as a grave threat to the national order.” Instead of a public health problem requiring treatment interventions to help privileged whites, dominant society treated drug abuse as a public safety issue, mandating carceral responses to punish poor Black people. Consequently, an unjust war on drugs was waged against Black communities.

America is deeply vested in policing Black bodies. Tough on crime policies received nonpartisan support across political party lines. Both Democrats (i.e., Bill Clinton) and Republicans (i.e., Nixon) bolstered racially biased policies of Law-and-Order that sanctioned stop-and-frisk, broken-windows policing, and police militarization disproportionately targeting and terrorizing Black communities. Although antiblack racism is not listed as one of the four problems this toolkit addresses, it is unequivocally important to note that implicit and explicit racial biases remain at the core of discriminatory policing. Hence, the stakes are high for Black communities to identify alternatives—beginning with accountability.

We define police accountability as a system of checks and balances to ensure equal and just applications of police procedures, policies, and protocols. Accountability ensures that the police uphold safety and protect citizen’s civil and human rights regardless of racial, gender, or economic backgrounds and other nonconformist social





identifiers. A lack of police accountability ensues when there is an imbalance of power and oppressive systems that ignore or perpetuate harms. For example, the abuse of authority is evident when police officers engage in misconduct but are treated above reproach and entire communities suffer from State violence. This lack of police accountability results in the use of force directives, body cameras, canines, no-knock warrants, surveillance, stop-and-frisk, racial profiling, sexual violence, militarization, all of which terrorize vulnerable communities and are death-dealing.

Another concern regarding a lack of police accountability is inadequate training. To be clear, better training will not resolve the problem of policing. In fact, trained police hold racial and gender biases that result in discriminatory practices. Some police officers are selective in the use of their training. These officers may deescalate hostile situations for privileged whites, such as when the nation witnessed the police giving Dylan Roof a bullet proof vest and to Burger Kings in custody for killing innocent churchgoers at Emmanuel AME Church during bible study. In contrast, apprehended Black people are killed by the police for far less severe situations, such as reading a book in a car (Lamont Scott), sleeping (Breonna Taylor), or a traffic violation (Sandra Bland). According to one report, police consistently display racially implicit and explicit biases, as well as prejudicial behaviors that lead to harms, including Black death, without culpability (NJ.com, 2019). Thus, police accountability is not a call for more training. Rather, it is a petition for restorative alternatives rooted in community-led approaches to public safety that are aligned with a standard of care that is equitable and just.

A third consideration regarding police accountability is the issue of reporting and communication. Timeliness of information and its dissemination is helpful for families to stay aware of police misconduct that is vital for protecting their families. When families are not informed, it can break trust and send the message that Black communities are not worthy of protection and safety. Ignoring misconduct and corruption leaves communities grossly vulnerable to harms by the police—including rape, sex trafficking, extortion, false convictions, racial profiling, and other forms of State violence.

As a result of SandSJ's advocacy several [police accountability policies](#) were implemented. First in January 2019, the independent prosecutor law.

Second in December 2019 was the [Attorney General's police accountability measures](#). Third, in December 2020 was the Attorney General's Use of Force Directive. Finally, in July 2022, New Jersey became the 47th state to establish a police licensure program. Senate Bill 2742 requires that Police Training Commissions (PTC) establish a police licensure or certification program. This level of accountability provides PTC grounds to revoke the licenses of officers who engage in specified acts of misconduct. Officers who are decertified forfeit employment by another law enforcement agency in the state and law enforcement adjacent professions (i.e., school resource officer, court officers, parole/probation officers, etc.). Additionally, the PTC is required to report the decertification of officers to the National Decertification Index (NDI).

While these interventions will not end police violence (only replacing the current punitive system with one community led and restorative will ensure the safety of communities), they do formalize an interim system of accountability to ensure that police officers are aware of protocols, agree to follow standards to maintain their credentials, serve active duty justly and compassionately, and that communities are informed whenever and wherever police fall short of these standards.

### Hyper-Policing

Hyper-policing works to reinforce discriminatory practices that lead to excessive use of force and state violence. Hyper-policing is the overrepresentation and deployment of police. Hyper-policing is used to increase optics and military tactics that invoke fear and control vulnerable communities through surveillance and discipline. French Philosopher, Michel Foucault explained the ways in which police use technologies of surveillance such as the panopticon to create self-disciplining and docile bodies. The over-presence of police through watchtowers, patrol cars, and other occupation turns communities into war zones within a militarized state.

We have seen hyper-policing play out in the streets of Ferguson, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, New York, and everywhere protesters organize to correct our democracy. The police used tear gas and other militarized tactics to close-in on protestors to disrupt non-violent acts civil disobedience. Ironically, on January 6th when white supremacists colluded with a fascist President who refused to concede to his successor and planned a coupe at the nation's capital to overthrow democracy, the presence of police to stop this insurrection was grossly missing.

Studies and experience show that police do not make us safe. In fact, for Black people, policing makes this group even more

vulnerable to state violence. In addition, stop-and-frisk and broken-windows policing only leads to criminalizing Black bodies. The majority of Black people who are profiled, are not presented with any evidence or suspicions that would warrant their apprehension or detainment. Thus, hyper-policing is a racialized tool of the state weaponized against Black bodies and to treat Blacks as a perpetual criminalized underclass.

Instead of hyper-policing, communities need resources for survival. Access to housing, employment, healthcare, education, and other social services are proven to reduce crime. Thus, rather than spend exorbitant amounts of public and private funding to police communities and build prisons, these budgets can fund social safety nets that will ensure people can survive and thrive. Black Lives Matter made its rallying cry, “defund the police.” Though a controversial claim that forces us to face our fears and find alternatives to public safety that are community-led, the truth is that budgets reflect values. If municipalities rather allocate funds to increase policing without any regard for the sustainability of Black life through equitable access to resources and safety, than it is clear that a profitable prison industry is valued more highly than the people who the police take an oath to serve and protect.

### Excessive Force

In New Jersey, the problem of excessive force is perpetuated against Black women and men. According to the 16-month investigation by journalists with NJ Advance Media, The Force Report, revealed that New Jersey’s policing system is broken. Though the Attorney General’s office mandated police officers in New Jersey to document each instance of force almost two decades ago, there was no statewide collection or analysis of data until the Force Report and SandSJ’s advocacy. Thus, inadequate oversight and standards have persisted to leave communities vulnerable to state violence. In response, NJ Advance Media spent \$30k to create a centralized database to track and flag cops that require scrutiny and accountability. This data was mined using the state’s Open Public Records Act to request 506 use of force claims in every municipal police department across that state. The Force Report captured these results. The goal of the report was to ensure that police officers no longer abused their power and Black communities remained safe.

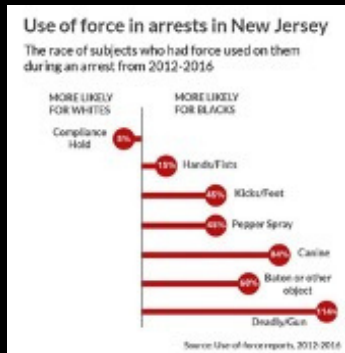
There are four types of police force. First, a *compliance hold* applies force to pressure points to gain control. According to The Force Report, “officers reported using compliance holds 56,928 times, or about 81 percent of the time when they used force, data shows.” The second type of force is a *takedown* which can consist of a leg sweep or a tackle to bring an individual down to the ground. The third type of force is using *hands and fists* where officers are permitted to use open hand strikes or closed punches on an individual who is resisting arrest. According to data, this is the most common type of force. Finally, the fourth type of force is *leg strikes*. The police are allowed to kick or knee an individual into compliance. Officers are also authorized to use pepper spray, a baton, canines, and a stun gun, or as a last resort, police are sanctioned to discharge their weapon and kill individuals resisting arrest. It is important to note that warning shots are prohibited. Rather, officers are trained and required to shoot to kill and not just maim or subdue. Thus, the authority to use force is deadly and ultimately a license to kill.

In the Force Report, the study outcomes highlighted glaring disparities across the state with the use of excessive force. The key findings are:

- **While using force is a normal and necessary part of policing, NJ Advance Media found glaring disparities across the state that warrant review.** Ten percent of officers accounted for 38 percent of all uses of force. A total of 252 officers used force more than five times the state average, according to the database.
- **Whenever police use force, the stakes are high.** At least 9,281 people were injured by police from 2012 through 2016. At least 4,382 of those were serious enough that the subject was sent to the hospital, though reporting of hospitalization is inconsistent. At least 156 officers put at least one person in the hospital in each of the five years reviewed.
- **Statewide, a Black person was more than three times more likely to face police force than someone who is white.** In Millville in South Jersey, black people faced police force at more than six times the rate of whites. In South Orange, it was nearly 10 times. In Lakewood, it was an astronomical 22 times.
- **The system for reporting use-of-force by police is a mess.** Different departments use different forms, making tracking difficult. Officers self-reported incidents, but thousands of reports were incomplete, illegible, lacking supervisory review or missing altogether. At least 62 times, forms were so sloppy the officers accidentally marked themselves as dead.
- **New Jersey fails to monitor trends to flag officers who use disproportionately high amounts of force.** The state recently implemented a new early warning system to identify potential problem officers but did not mandate tracking use-of-force trends as a criterion, which experts called a gaping hole in oversight.

Black people are disproportionately targeted by state violence. The Force Report indicates that, “from 2012 through 2016, Black people in New Jersey accounted for about 38 percent of arrests, yet they make up only about 14 percent of the adjusted state population.” In addition, “There were 173 local jurisdictions where a Black person who was arrested was more likely to have force used against them than a white person being arrested.” Black people across the State of New Jersey were more likely to experience every type of police force (except the most basic kind of compliance or restraint holds). However, data indicates that “Black people were less likely to threaten police verbally or physically during a use-of-force incident.” See Figure 1 for data reflecting the racial disparities and unequal use of force that are disproportionately used against Black bodies.

**Figure 1 – Use of Force in New Jersey arrests from 2012-2016**



Further, Figure 2 shows that if the State of New Jersey used systems of accountability to review reports of misconduct on par with larger cities, there would be less flagged cases of force.

**Figure 1 – Use of Force in New Jersey arrests from 2012-2016**



## Conflicts of Interest

In the U.S. legal system, particularly in criminal court, pleas bargains are the norm and a trial by jury is the exception. The plea bargain system is a device that many prosecutors disproportionately use against Black defendants. The hope for a more favorable outcome by waiving trial rights rests on the assumption that an individual will benefit from discounted sentencing and receive more lenient outcomes. This false choice between plea bargain and leniency, or trial and harsher sentencing, is weaponized to instill fear for the most vulnerable, including innocent defendants. The court system uses this fear and power differential to force poor Black defendants to plead guilty. While plea bargains should increase the defendant's power to negotiate, it can instead lead to a prosecutor's self-serving gains and clouded ambitions to increase conviction rates within a system that prioritizes performance incentives over the humanity and freedom of poor Black people. Thus, prosecutors skewed by self-interest use the plea bargain system to secure convictions rather than seek justice.

In addition, some prosecutors are motivated by biases that protect the interest of police officers and work to preserve hegemonic power structures within an unjust legal system. In a Vera Institute of Justice article, “Prosecution and Racial Justice,” research indicates that “Prosecutors in the United States have an unrivaled level of influence within the criminal justice system. They decide, among other things, whether to file criminal charges, the number and severity of offenses they will charge, whether to offer a plea bargain, and what sentence to recommend for defendants who are convicted.” Prosecutors have unmatched power within the criminal system and often exercise their influence in harmful ways that disadvantage Black and brown people.

Racial biases by prosecutors have led to wrongful convictions, harsher punishment, and other injustices that have collateral consequences for Black communities. For example, “Statistics show that African Americans, for example, account for 39 percent of the population within the criminal justice system, even though they make up only 13 percent of the national population.” Thus, Black people are left especially vulnerable and scapegoated by a legal system that merits an award system built on conviction rates, police loyalties, power differentials and other conflicts of interest that benefits the privileged and punishes the most vulnerable.

These four problem areas cause cumulative harms for Black communities and are the focus of this three-part series. To better understand the persistence of these issues and the church's role in

responding with liberative solutions, Part I explores the churches along the underground railroad responding to the deep-seated roots of anti-Black racism and policing in New Jersey.

## LIBERATING PUBLIC POLICY THEOLOGICALLY

Policing in America is a social problem that is also deeply religious. The politics of policing is rooted in covetous whiteness and the protection of private property. During chattel slavery, Black people were considered the property of whites. Thus, white people had a vested interest in controlling Black bodies. Womanist theologian, Kelly Brown Douglass, argues, “As chattel, the black body remains in its constructed space, lives into its created nature, does not disrupt the order of things, and is under the control of white people; therefore, it is not dangerous. The moment the black body is no longer chattel and thus free, it becomes dangerous.” When not the controllable property of whites, Black bodies are seen as guilty bodies and a threat to cherished whiteness. Subsequently, the mechanism of control to discipline guilty and dangerous Black bodies into obedience and docility is by enforcers of the law albeit the slave masters, slave patrols, and modern-day police.

With the abolition of the slaveocracy, dominant society invented new hegemonic systems of control that perpetuated the subjugation and servitude of Blacks. The dangerous chattel slave body evolved into the guilty criminalized Black body. Slavery ended with President Abraham Lincoln’s Proclamation of Emancipation, but in its place emerged similar systems of legal and economic enslavement. Namely, convict leasing, Black codes, and vagrancy laws ensured that freed slaves remained bound by economic debt they could only repay with labor and sharecropping. Likewise, the legal system policed the movements of freed Blacks—whether wandering, whistling, or walking the town past sundown. Consequently, jails that were once mainly occupied by whites, became exclusively reserved for freed Blacks.

Today, prisons continue to disproportionately target Black people. According to legal scholar, Michelle Alexander, there is a new legal system that functions like the “New Jim Crow.” The War on Drugs exposes the dangers of

colorblindness that overtly obscures race but covertly design laws to perpetuate punitive disparities that impact Blacks more harshly than whites. Alexander instantiates her claims by uncovering drug sentencing for cocaine, which is a drug associated with wealthier whites but has a lesser punishment than crack-cocaine, which is a drug associated with poorer Blacks.

The obsession with legally objectifying and sanctioning Black bodies as a thingified nonbeing is supported by religious teachings. White supremacists used scripture, “Slaves obey your masters,” to justify their power over Blacks. Good white Christians left church on Sunday with their bible in one hand and tied nooses in the other while bringing their families after the benediction to spectate lynching for the public worship of white supremacy for sport. More recently, Christian nationalism colluded with white evangelicalism and the alt-right to embolden antiblack racism that furthered neo-conservatist legislature overturning *Roe v. Wade*, the election of a fascist President of the United States, and whose refusal to concede office to his successor incited the January 6th coupe at the Capital led by white supremacist who grossly undermine democracy with impunity. Liberating policy theologically has high stakes and is necessary to counter these acts of Christian nationalism that uphold racial propaganda that is not only consequential in its oppression of Black people, but accepting death-dealing politics is Christolatry—or the Ant-Christ.

Rather, to follow Jesus is to support liberative practices that oppose oppression. A close examination of the life, ministry, and death of Jesus reveals his close proximity to the carceral systems of the Roman empire. According to the In the Harvard Graduate Journal article, “Penitence, Plantation, and the Penitentiary: A Liberation Theology for Lockdown America,” the historical Jesus was a brown Palestinian Jew who was ethnically profiled and arrested on trumped-up charges for his radical ministry that subverted dominant social norms. Jesus was persecuted and hanged on a cross between two criminals and died a criminal’s death. Jesus preached that the poor (and not the rich) shall inherit the earth. He is recorded as communing across ethnic and gender lines, touching the defiled, turning upside down social orders so the last becomes first, and holding accountable the tax collectors and others who exploited the least of these. According to these subversive social teachings, the Roman empire charged Jesus for seditiousness. Ultimately, his radical ministry of resistance landed Jesus on the Roman empire’s most wanted list.

According to the Christian story recorded by the synoptic gospels, the arrest of Jesus led to a trial by the Sanhedrin and the judicial order for crucifixion by Pontius Pilate, the governor. Barabbas, who according to the bible was a “notorious prisoner,” was pardoned.

Jesus, however, who committed no crime was punished to die an ignoble criminal's death. Hanging between two criminals, Jesus extends salvation to a penitent thief and thereby models restorative justice. Jesus validates the thief's humanities and restores him to the imago dei or image of God. Jesus therefore demonstrates an ethic of liberation that challenges state power. This solidarity with the least of these is a first-century model of abolition. Jesus demonstrates that people who are judged and criminalized by religious doctrine and legal systems as guilty, even to death, are still worthy of restoration, redemption, and a return to right relationship with God and their community.

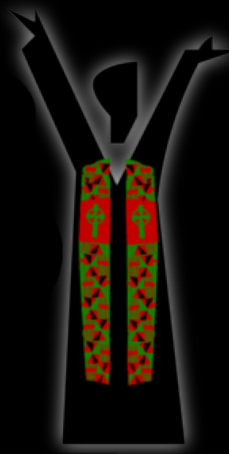
It is important to note that after Jesus' crucifixion, a Roman centurion who supervised the execution sates, "surely this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39). Some scholars have viewed this as an admission that Jesus was innocent of the charges against him, and therefore falsely convicted. The Roman empire persecuted the wrong person, and it would not be the last time that someone who is innocent unjustly forfeits their freedom. The criminal system today is imperfect. Innocent people are wrongfully committed because of racial bias and the unequal application of laws. From antiquity to the antebellum south, and an era of mass incarceration, Black bodies are constructed as guilty and religion has been used to justify their enslavement, criminalization, and incarceration.

The theological mandate, however, as followers of Jesus is to do what Jesus did: set the captives free. When Jesus reads from the scrolls of Isaiah to announce the mission statement, purpose, and inauguration of his ministry in Luke 4:18, he says "The spirit of the lord is upon me to preach the gospel to the poor." A significant purpose of Jesus' ministry was to set the captives free (Luke 4:18-21). Any system that is not aligned with the goals of emancipation is the anti-Christ and must be abolished.



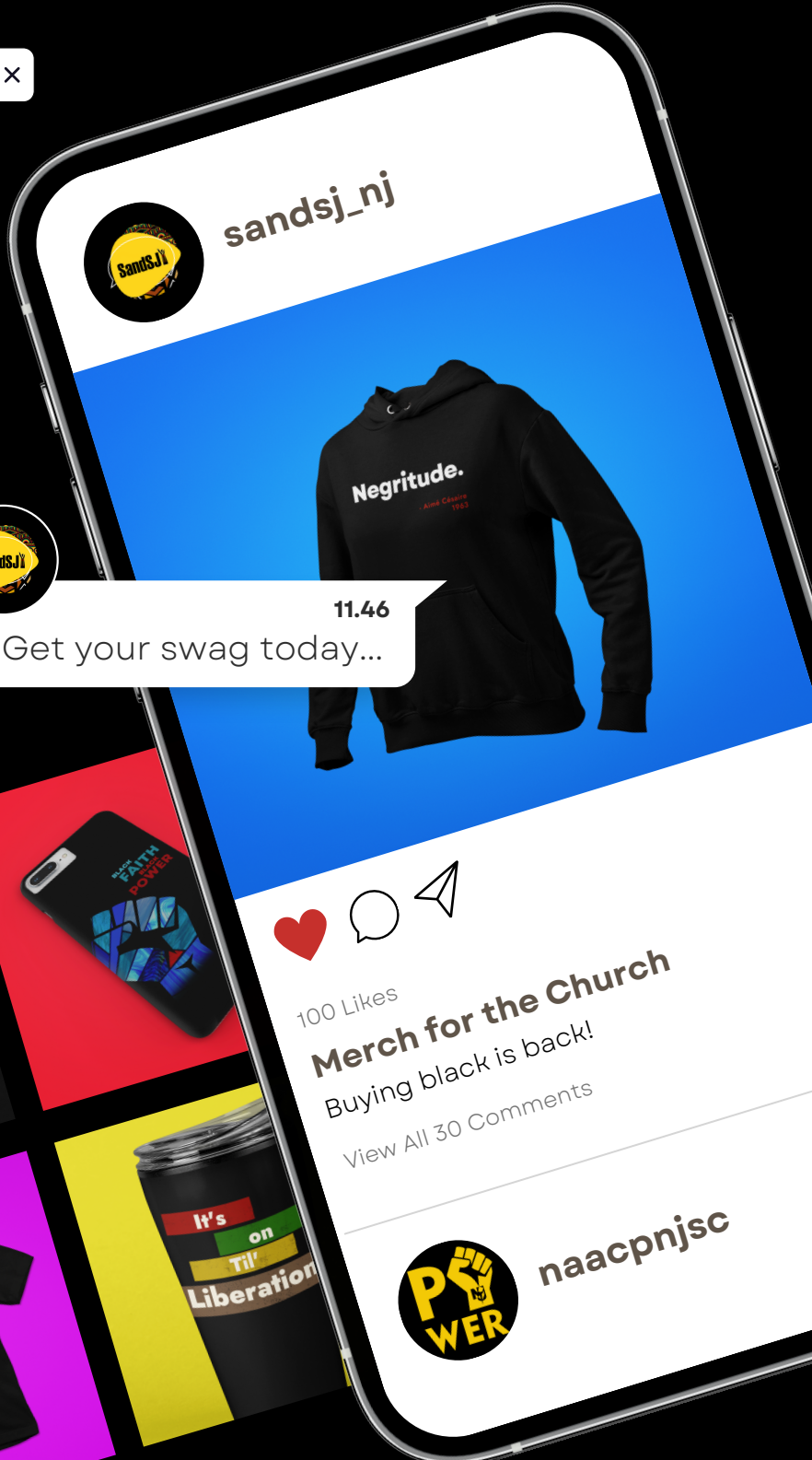
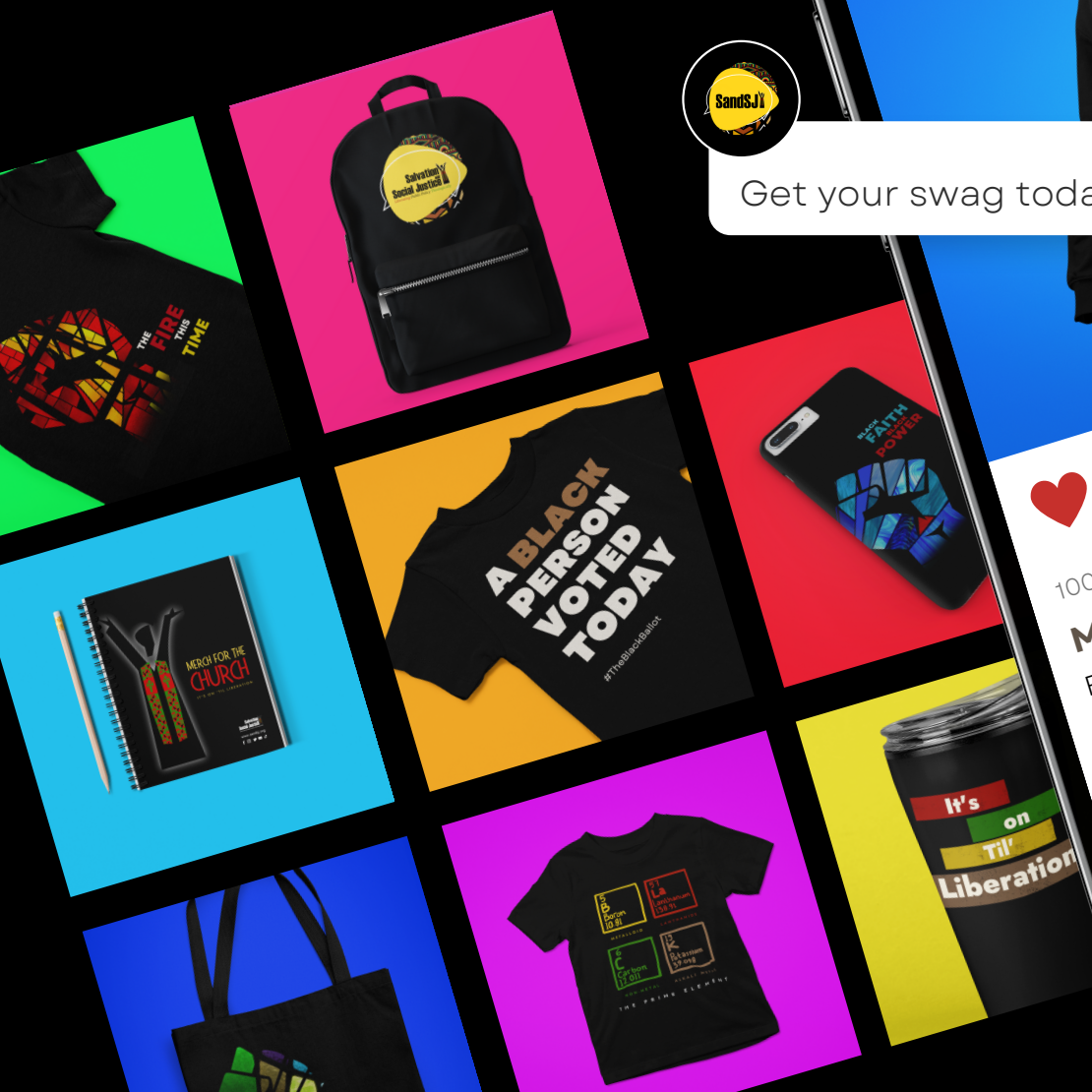
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# PREACHERS & THE PEWS

LITURGICAL SUPPORT



# PRAISE & WORSHIP

## I MADE IT OUT

John P. Kee feat. Zacardi Cortez

## I CAN GO TO GOD IN PRAYER

Albertina Walker

## WAR

Charles Jenkins & Fellowship Chicago

## FREEDOM

Eddie James

## HE TURNED IT

Tye Tribbett

## TAKE IT BACK

Dorinda Clark-Cole

## WHEN SUNDAY COMES

Daryl Coley

## WORTH FIGHTING FOR

Brian Courtney-Wilson

## TAKE MY HAND, PRECIOUS LORD

Mahalia Jackson

## IS MY LIVING IN VAIN

The Clark Sisters



## RESTORING THE YEARS

Donald Lawrence & The Tri-City Singers

## BREAK EVERY CHAIN

Tasha Cobbs

## ANGELS WATCHING OVER ME

Richard Smallwood

## SOMETHING HAPPENS (JESUS)

Bishop Paul S. Morton

## RELEASE

The Church Choir feat. Maranda Curtis & John P. Kee



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# CALL TO WORSHIP

**LEADER** We are part of a God ordained tradition of resilience and resistance. Our ancestors built safe harbors, they hid under floor boards of churches, they created Free African communities to escape the slave catcher and undermine the oppressor.

**PEOPLE** Lord, we've come so far we have the responsibility to live into this sacred tradition now.

**LEADER** Because of the commitment, blood, sweat, tears, and effort of Harriet Tubman, Fredrick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Richard Allen and other unnamed Black activists, especially those who were beaten and hung attempting to escape, I will fight for my sisters and brothers now.

**PEOPLE** Silence is not an option. Our voice will be heard.

**LEADER** Let us come together and be assured that victory is already ours - this battle is the Lord's!

**PEOPLE** We will praise the name of Jesus and lift him up in honor for all that He has done.

**ALL** **The Lord our God, the King of all kings, is present and our liberation is secure. God deliver us and we shall praise your name at all times!**



# SCRIPTURES

God's Concern for Justice, the Poor, and the "Least of These"

## HEBREWS 13:3 NIV

Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

## PSALM 79:1 NLT

Listen to the moaning of the prisoners. Demonstrate your great power by saving those condemned to die.

## PSALM 69:33 NKJV

For the Lord hears the poor, And does not despise His prisoners.

## ISAIAH 61:1 NASV

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners.

## LUKE 4:18 NET

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the regaining of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed.

## JEREMIAH 31:15 KJV

Thus saith the Lord; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.

## JEREMIAH 22:3 NRSV

Thus says the Lord: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place.

## ZECHARIAH 7:10 KJV

And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.

## LUKE 19:5-9 NRSV

When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.' So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.' Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham.'

## MICAH 6:8 NIV

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

## HEBREWS 13:2 NIV

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

## EXODUS 12:49 NIV

The same law applies both to the native-born and to the foreigner residing among you.

## LEVITICUS 19:33-34 NLT

Do not take advantage of foreigners who live among you in your land. Treat them like native-born Israelites, and love them as you love yourself. Remember that you were once foreigners living in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

## PSALM 42:9 NRSV

I say to God, my rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I walk about mournfully because the enemy oppresses me?"

## ISAIAH 59:9, 11 NIV

So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows... We look for justice, but find none; for deliverance, but it is far away.

## JOEL 2:1-3 THE MESSAGE

Blow the ram's horn trumpet in Zion! Trumpet the alarm on my holy mountain! Shake the country up.

## MATTHEW 25:35-40 NRSV

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

## BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

*Bible Translations Comparison Chart can be found in the resource section of this toolkit.*

### Word for Word Translation

- Interlinear
- New American Standard (NASB)
- Amplified
- English Standard Version (ESV)
- King James Version (KJV)
- New King James Version (NKJV)
- Revised Standard Version (RSV)
- Holman Christian Standard (HCSB)

### Thought for Thought

- New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
- New American Bible (NAB)
- New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)
- New International Version (NIV)
- Revised English Bible (REB)
- New Century Version (NCV)
- New Living Translation (NLT)
- New Int'l Readers Version (NIRV)
- Good News Bible (GNB) formerly Today's English Version (TEV)
- Common English Bible (CEB)
- Contemporary English Version (CEV) aka "The Promise"

### Paraphrase Translations

- The Living Bible (LB)
- The Message (MSG)

# SERMONS

## Sermon Preparation Tips

Remember that the preached word is in competition with the listeners' weekly consumption of news reports, commentary by critics and interpretation by persons of celebrity. The role of social media, flow of misinformation, use of disinformation technologies, listener overload and information processing has changed the landscape of delivering effective preaching.

## Liturgical Support:

The gospel message of liberation and reconciliation should push us toward the abolition of prisons and policing. Here are 10 Bible passages that help us wrestle with questions of mass incarceration, criminalization, and violence.

## LUKE 4:17–21

*"[God] has sent me to proclaim release to the captives."*

Jesus' "mission statement" when he begins his public ministry in Galilee includes a promise of liberation and release for those who are incarcerated. While the New Testament context of "captivity" wasn't entirely the same as modern imprisonment, Jesus' promise aligns liberation of prisoners with healing and good news for the poor and oppressed. Taking Jesus' words in this text seriously forces us to ask: If God's reign is characterized by freedom for prisoners, why are we supporting incarceration now?

## GENESIS 39:20-41:13

*"But the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him steadfast love."*

The story of Joseph contains a promise of God's fidelity throughout Joseph's incarceration. God never leaves Joseph, and eventually vindicates him. Meanwhile, the stories of the two men imprisoned with Joseph — Pharaoh's baker and cupbearer — highlight the arbitrary nature of incarceration, as one is freed and the other executed. As civil rights lawyer Bryan Stevenson says, our current system "treats you better if you're rich and guilty than poor and innocent." This is the inevitable result of a system that exists to serve the interests of the powerful.

## JEREMIAH 37:11–38:28

*"What wrong have I done to you or your servants or this people, that you have put me in prison?"*

The prophet Jeremiah is an early political prisoner. Before the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians, he is imprisoned because he tells King Zedekiah that God wants him to surrender to the Babylonians so Jerusalem will be spared. Jeremiah's imprisonment reminds us that incarceration is fundamentally a tool of power. In our times, too, people who oppose the powerful in ways that are declared illegal — from whistleblower Chelsea Manning to water protectors at Standing Rock to Black Lives Matter protesters — face prison.

## DANIEL 3:1–30, DANIEL 6:1–28

*"... we have no need to present a defense to you in this matter."*

Daniel and his three friends — Azariah, Hananiah, and Mishael (the Jewish names for Shadrach, Mishach, and Abednego) — present examples of civil disobedience and another reminder that legality is not the measure of morality. In these stories, the Jewish exiles in Babylon refuse to obey laws designed to interfere with their religious practice and are punished by the state for it: Daniel is thrown into the lions' den, and Azariah, Hananiah, and Mishael are cast into a fiery furnace. Their words to King Nebuchadnezzar — "we have no need to present a defense to you in this matter" (Daniel 3:16) — are a sign of their fidelity to God to deliver them, but also a challenge to the very legitimacy of punishment from an unjust state. When our systems of prisons and policing lead to unjust and racially disparate outcomes for marginalized people and communities, we can also say in response: "[W]e have no need to present a defense to you in this matter." Our current system of mass-incarceration-as-racial-control is not the arbiter of justice.

## MATTHEW 11:2-6; MARK 1:14

*“After John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.”*

Jesus' public ministry begins “after John [the Baptist] was put in prison” (Mark 1:14). Jesus preaches the coming kingdom of God under the shadow of that arrest. And when John, from prison, asks Jesus for a sign of whether he is the Messiah, Jesus' response points to practices of solidarity and liberation that he is already enacting in the world (Matthew 11:4-6).

We, like John, see signs of hope and solidarity already being enacted among those who are criminalized and incarcerated – such as organizing by groups like the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee and grassroots prisoner support organizations led by incarcerated people and their loved ones like the California Coalition for Women Prisoners. This is a potent reminder that abolition begins with smaller acts of liberative hope.

## LUKE 23: 32–43

*“... they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.”*

Swiss theologian Karl Barth writes that the criminals crucified along with Jesus formed “the first certain Christian community.” As U.S. theologian and abolitionist Rev. Nikia Smith Robert writes, Jesus' proximity to criminals and his position of criminality “make the cross and resurrection a site of retribution and resistance that points to the possibilities of transformation” of our system of mass incarceration. In other words, Jesus' crucifixion as a criminal, among criminals, sets God ultimately on the side of those who are criminalized.

## ACTS 5:17-32, ACTS 12:1-18

*“But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors ...”*

Peter is miraculously released from prison twice in the book of Acts. In considering this story as Christians, we must be careful and take its description of the religious authorities with some reservation, remembering that it was composed in the context of Jewish-Gentile schisms in the first century. The New Testament's villainization of Jewish leaders has had violent consequences throughout Christian history. The point here is not to condemn the high priest or the Sadducees, or to draw an exact parallel between the prison Peter was in and our modern prison-industrial complex – but instead to recognize God's liberating action within the story. The liberating work of God makes Peter's story resonate with contemporary abolitionist efforts.

## ACTS 16:16-40

*“Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened.”*

Paul and Silas are also imprisoned while preaching – by the Romans, in their case, and after being accused by a slaveholder whose wealth they had threatened. Their incarceration is clearly the result of challenging an established order of power. While they are in prison, God again miraculously opens the doors and breaks the chains in the prison.

Paul and Silas don't escape but instead stay in order to protect the life of the jailer, and then convert him. This story, while it again shows God's liberating power in the face of incarceration, can complicate our search for an abolitionist narrative in the Bible. Yet perhaps it demonstrates the varieties of forms solidarity and resistance can take within carceral settings. The power of God is present in the singing of hymns in the prison and among those who are incarcerated; prison is where the jailer finds God. Abolition – unlike criminal justice reform – must be driven by the needs and priorities of incarcerated people and those who love them, because that is where the liberating power of God is present.

## MATTHEW 25:31–46

*“... I was in prison and you visited me.”*

Jesus' description of the final judgment offers the last word on incarceration, and although this appears in the gospel of Matthew, it's a fitting ending because it's a picture of the end times. Jesus identifies himself with those who are criminalized and incarcerated, and even promises that our solidarity with them is what determines our eternal destiny.

As biblical scholar Lee Griffith writes, when we act in solidarity with those in prison, “It is not that we find God there; it is that God finds us there.” We can honor God's identification with those who are criminalized and imprisoned when we commit ourselves to abolition.

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## MATTHEW 18:1–20

*“So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.”*

“So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.”

What do we do about harm and violence without prisons? Abolitionists turn to restorative justice and transformative justice, methods of dealing with interpersonal harm by meeting the needs of those harmed within a community. The New Testament offers support for this work in Matthew 18, as activist theologian Ched Myers and restorative justice practitioner Elaine Enns write. The admonition to protect “little ones” (Matthew 18:6), they explain, requires we prioritize the needs of those who have been harmed or who are at risk of harm, especially when they have less power in a situation (a key insight of transformative justice); the parable of the lost sheep (Matthew 18:11–14) reminds us that God doesn't want anyone thrown away or excluded, regardless of what they have done (a foundational value of restorative justice).

A word of warning: Treating Matthew 18:15–20 as a “process” to follow is dangerous, especially if it ignores power dynamics in situations of harm or abuse! Supporting those who have been harmed must always take priority in our practices of restorative and transformative justice. Nonetheless, this chapter as a whole supports values of safety and restoration, and teaches us that God is with us in the process of what abolitionists Mariame Kaba and Shira Hassan call “fumbling towards repair.”





# PRAYER

## PRAYER #1

Oh Almighty God, Whose Great Power and Eternal Wisdom Embraces the Universe, Watch Over our congregants, All Policemen and Law Enforcement Officers. Protect Us All from Harm in the Performance of Their Duty to Stop Crime, Robberies, Riots, and Violence. We Pray, Give them the discernment needed to Help Them Keep Our communities Streets and Homes Safe Day and Night. We Recommend Them to Your Loving Care Because Their Duty is Dangerous. Grant Them Your Unending Strength and Courage in Their Daily Assignments. Dear God, Protect These Brave Men and Women, Grant Them Your Almighty Protection, Unite Them Safely with Their Families After Duty Has Ended. Amen.

## PRAYER #2

Father, I come to You today, bowing in my heart, asking for protection from the evil one. Lord, we are assailed moment by moment with images on television, the internet, books and newspapers that leave us vulnerable to sin of every kind. Surround us with Your divine hedge of protection. Encompass us round about with Your strength and Your might. Let all who take refuge in You be glad, let them ever sing for joy. And may You shelter us, that those who love Your name may exult in You. For it is You who blesses the righteous man, O LORD, You surround him favor as with a shield. (Psalm 5:11-12)

Strengthen us in the power of Your might, O God. Dress us in Your armor so that we can stand firm against the schemes of the devil. We know that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:10-12)

You are our keeper, O Lord, the shade on our right hand. Protect us from all evil and keep our soul. Guard our going out and our coming in. From this time and forever. In Jesus' name, Amen.



# PRAYER

## PRAYER #3

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Lord, I pray Your emotional, physical, and spiritual protection over our community. Protect us from all evil, and help them to trust You as our refuge and strength. I pray You will guard our minds from harmful instruction, and grant us the discernment to recognize truth. I pray You will make our community strong and courageous in the presence of all danger, recognizing that You have overcome and will set right all injustice and wrong one day. Help us to find rest in Your shadow, as we live in the spiritual shelter You provide. We know that the only safe place is in Jesus, and that our home on earth is only temporary. Keep us in the center of Your will. We will forever give you praise, glory and honor. Amen

## PRAYER #4

---

God Almighty, we ask for healthy, thriving relationships between neighbors. We pray different cultures will be able to understand and care for one another in our neighborhood. We pray that the diversity of your people will be celebrated by all neighbors, just as you affirm and love each one of us. God, our Prince of Peace, we ask for your presence in the streets and homes of our community. We pray for local law enforcement, for their safety and wisdom and compassion in all circumstances. We pray for your comfort for those who have experienced violence, and we ask your protection for all our neighbors. Amen.

# PULPIT TOOLKITS



Our **pulpit toolkits** are a "one-stop shop" for information, resources, and action that the Black Church can leverage to create lasting change in their local fights for social justice.

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and  
Social Justice  
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# MEDIA KIT

MESSAGING THAT MOVES



33



German  
CULTURE HISTORY

Mohammad Speaks

OUR FREEDOM  
CAN'T WAIT!



Randolph Warns on

# HOW TO WRITE AN OPINION EDITORIAL

An opinion editorial or op-ed is a written piece, typically 750 words in length, meant to express a specific opinion about a current issue. Op-eds are articles that appear opposite the editorial page of practically all newspapers. They are written by local citizens, experts and leaders of organizations on topics that are relevant to the newspapers' audience. Depending on the paper, the topics can range from a hotly debated national issue to a problem only important to the readers of a town's newspaper.

Within the context of the #ReturnAndRestore campaign, gun violence and police brutality overwhelmingly impact young people of color. Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown are forever ingrained in our consciousness as a people. We see ourselves in them because we know it could be us, it could be our brother or our friend. As such, it's extremely important that our youth leaders all over the country make their voices heard on this life-or-death issue of police brutality.

## BASIC OP-ED STRUCTURE

*(This is not a rule! Just one way to approaching it.)*

- Lead/Introduction
- Thesis
- Body
- Some... might...say...
- Conclusion

## LEAD/INTRODUCTION:

*The introduction should highlight the issue and include the hook, what makes the story timely and relevant.*

- **Personal** - Do you have a personal story or someone's personal account on police brutality or gun violence? This is a great hook to capture the reader's attention.
- **Anecdotal** - Why are you or your members/coalition/ etc. in this fight to end police brutality and reduce gun violence?

- **In the News** - Any state facts or historical notes on police brutality or gun violence that are staggering or attention getting? Perhaps, you can connect the historical culture of lynching to our modern-day violent culture of police brutality.

## THESIS:

*State your argument - either explicitly or implicitly.*

Sample thesis statements

- Police brutality is a serious life or death issue that disproportionately affects young people of color. As such, young people of color must be engaged for their livelihood. We must fight for safer communities for young people of color to flourish in. We must advocate and organize for the support of legislation on the local, state and federal level that aims to increase safety and decrease incidents of gun violence and police brutality.

## THESIS

This should be an area that focuses on the arguments you are trying to make. Arguments should be based on evidence such as stats, news, reports from credible organizations, expert, quotes, scholarship, history, first-hand experience. In the body of your op-ed, depending on your thesis statement, you may consider discussing the following arguments: (1) nationwide issue that must be addressed, (2) incidents of police brutality since the murder of Michael Brown, (3) 400 police killings ever year\*, (4) the practice and harms of racial profiling, (5) the importance of legislation moving through federal and state legislatures, (6) the lack of police accountability and consequences for killing unarmed citizens, (7) value of black lives, and (8) the concerns people of color have for their livelihood and the livelihood of their loved ones etc.

### Argument #1

- Evidence
- Conclusion

### Argument #2

- Evidence
- Conclusion

### Argument #3

- Evidence
- Conclusion

### “Sample Some might say...”:

This is a short paragraph where you can quickly rip apart a counter argument, which will most likely be needed. You should use something germane to your state, or at least something that would be familiar to the readership.

Some might say that if young people of color knew how to interact with police officers or if they dressed differently, they would not have to be concerned with police brutality. However, 12-year-old Tamir Rice was doing absolutely nothing wrong when he was gunned down by police officers.

Some might say that law enforcement officers are simply protecting themselves from people they perceive to be as threats. People of color are often perceived as threats due to racial profiling. People of color should not fear for their lives because of the fear that law enforcement officers claim to feel after they've murdered an unarmed person of color.

## CONCLUSION

This is an area for you to close strongly, restate the thesis, quickly summarize your main arguments and include a call to action. Ask the reader to become engaged on the issue or to support new legislation to prevent police brutality.

## TIPS FOR OP-ED WRITING

1. Own your expertise. Know what you are an expert in and why – but don't limit yourself. Consider the metaphors that your experience and knowledge suggest.

2. Stay current. Follow the news – both general and specific to your areas of specialty.

3. Cultivate a flexible mind. Remember that a good idea may have more than one news hook, indeed if the idea is important enough it can have many. So keep an eye out for surprising connections and new news hooks!

4. Use plain language. Jargon serves a purpose, it is rarely useful in public debate, and can obfuscate – sorry, I mean cloud – your argument. Speak to your reader in straight talk.

5. Respect your reader. Never underestimate your reader's intelligence or overestimate her level of information. Recognize that your average reader is not an expert in your topic, and that the onus is on you to capture his or her attention – and make the argument a compelling one.

## TIPS ON SUBMITTING AN OP-ED TO A CAMPUS OR LOCAL NEWSPAPER

1. Confirm the word length before submitting.

2. Follow the instructions provided by the newspaper to submit the op-ed.

3. If you can, be familiar with the preferences and leanings of the newspaper.

4. If you haven't heard back from the newspaper within 7-10 days, it's safe to assume that your op-ed will not be published. You can follow up with the editor with a deadline for receiving a response. Alternatively, you can try shortening the op-ed and submitting it to the newspaper's editor or submit the op-ed to another newspaper altogether.

Source:

<http://www.theopedproject.org/>

<https://www.ptcc-cfc.on.ca/common/pages/UserFile.aspx?fileId=132862>  
(Program Training and Consultation Centre)



# SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

As units bring the #ReturnAndRestore campaign to life, we must remember to share our work on social media outlets like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to name a few. If your unit has yet to create a page on these three outlets, please stop reading (just for a moment) and do so right now! We know that Youth and College units are doing great work in their community but sometimes they forget to share their work to the wider public.

Social media is a great tool to share your #ReturnAndRestore campaign work with the world. People from within and outside of your immediate community have the opportunity to take a look at what you're doing and support your efforts with likes and retweets. The Press and Publicity Committee is the perfect committee to take responsibility for updating these social media pages. The Executive Committee should have access to the account passwords as well.

Here are the big three social media outlets that you should use while promoting the work of your unit:

1. **Facebook** has over 1 billion users as such it's one of the best ways to promote your work. If your unit chooses to use one social media outlet instead of all three recommended, make sure it's Facebook. Creating a Facebook group allows members of the unit to join and supporters to like the Facebook page and receive updates on their news feeds.

2. **Twitter** has a smaller audience than Facebook but is a valuable tool as well. The main difference between Twitter and Facebook is that Twitter limits "tweets" i.e. posts to 280 characters. It's a great place to have conversations and debate with other users. It's a great space to hold digital town halls to reach a wider audience! It's also the creator of the hashtag!

3. **Instagram** is a popular free photo application mostly used on cell phones with cameras. Instagram also has a website but it's much easier to use the free phone application. A great feature about Instagram is that it allows you to simultaneously post pictures to Facebook and Twitter!

## ONCE THESE SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES HAVE BEEN CREATED DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Inform each member in the ministry of the pages so they can like or follow the page. Encourage each member to get their friends to do the same. (Your members will need to invest in gaining a "following.")
- For the cover photo, use the #ReturnAndRestore campaign cover photo, Ministry logo or you can create a unit specific cover photo like a unit group picture!
- Make sure that your first posts or tweets are exciting and eye-catching! Consider launching the pages in conjunction with an event or an activity your unit is holding!
- The Press and Publicity Committee should be charged with keeping these pages updated regularly. A page that is rarely updated isn't worth following.
- Inform Youth and College Division staff that these pages have been created.



# SOCIAL MEDIA POST

## TWITTER



### HASHTAGS:

#RETURNANDRESTORE

#REDBLACKANDBLUE

#IMATTER

#IMatter because

We'll never forget Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, and Tamir Tice. They still matter. We matter. We fight for them #IMatter

Police brutality disproportionately affects young people of color. We're committed to ending police brutality. We matter. #IMatter

#Blacklivesmatter yesterday, today, tomorrow, and always. #IMatter

Police brutality disproportionately affects every Black person in this country and has since the beginning of slave patrols. This must end. #IMatter

Black bodies have been overly policed since we were brought to this country. Enough is enough. #IMatter

Town Hall Tweet: We're so excited about our #IMatter town hall addressing police brutality on (date) at (time)! Click here for more info: (include link). Hope to see you there! (During the actual town hall, have youth members live tweet the town hall!)

#ReturnAndRestore and I'm fighting for

Let our people go. #ReturnandRestore

The Drug War, mass incarceration, and over policing have disproportionately affected the Black community. We have to #ReturnandRestore our communities.

The Drug War, mass incarceration, and over policing have disproportionately affected the Black community. We have to #ReturnandRestore our communities.

We need to #ReturnandRestore our communities because

Opinion Editorial/Blog Post Tweet: Include a great and short quote from the article, the link to the article and the #IMatter hashtag.

## USE THE SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Promote the #ReturnAndRestore campaign and your campaign activities!
- Post pictures of the aforementioned activities as well as pictures of your members!
- Promote all kinds of work that your unit is doing – an event, a direct action, a membership recruitment meeting, a leadership training, community service etc.
- Promote your unit leaders who are doing great work in the community!

## FACEBOOK



We're holding an #ReturnAndRestore town hall addressing police brutality on (date) at (time). We encourage you to attend and be a part of this important youth led community conversation!

Make sure your voices are heard. Join us for our #ReturnAndRestore letter writing campaign! We're letting our public officials know about our concerns regarding our public safety, especially as it relates to gun violence and police brutality. Click here: (include link) to download the letter and sign on!

Do you enjoy writing and want to express your feelings about recent incidents of police brutality across the nation? Are you interested in meeting with your elected officials? Are you ready to take action? Become a member of (Ministry's name) and be a leader of the #ReturnAndRestore campaign!

Our (Ministry name) matters and we're fighting to end gun violence and police brutality! Recently, we've (include your recent activities for the #ReturnAndRestore campaign)! We still have so much to do! Join us! Join the movement.

We must #ReturnandRestore our communities because we have been disproportionately affected by mass incarceration, over policing, and more. We have had enough. Join us in our fight!

Fannie Lou Hamer once declared that she was 'sick and tired of being sick and tired'. We agree with her. Join us in our fight to #ReturnandRestore our communities.

W.E.B. DuBois said "The cost of liberty is less than the price of repression." We have long paid that price of repression. It's time we paid for liberty. Click here get more information on how we can #ReturnandRestore of our communities.

Our communities have been through enough. It's time for us to #ReturnandRestore to rebuild so that we can continue to grow and thrive.

Malcolm X said that "freedom is something that you have to do for yourselves." We cannot ask people to set us free, we must take our power back by creating opportunities to #ReturnandRestore our communities. Join us in our fight by clicking here:

How has police brutality affected you? Send your responses to us so that we can showcase how much the police have taken from us in every part of New Jersey. #ReturnandRestore

# PULPIT TOOLKIT

P A T H W A Y T O F R E E D O M

Salvation  
and  
Social Justice  
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## Typography

Jost

Aa Light

Aa Regular

Aa *Italic*

Aa **Bold**

Aa ***Bold Italic***

## Droid Serif

Aa Regular

Aa **Bold**

Aa *Italic*

## Special Elite

Aa Regular

## The Color

### Primary



#FFFFFF

#EDED



#ABABAB

#000000

### Secondary



#BC0700

#D39A0D

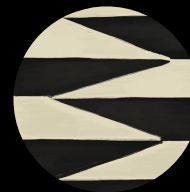
#F0A704



#267500

#785435

## Patterns



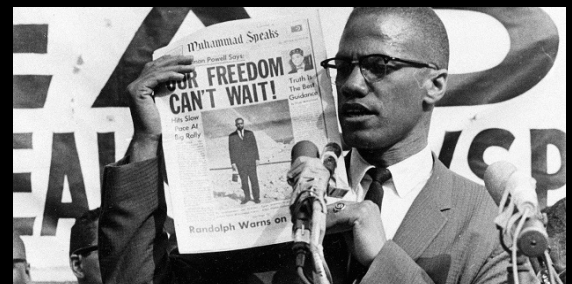
# PULPIT TOOLKIT

PATHWAY TO FREEDOM

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## Photos



# STOP

## CIRCLE TIME

#RESTORATIVEJUSTICE

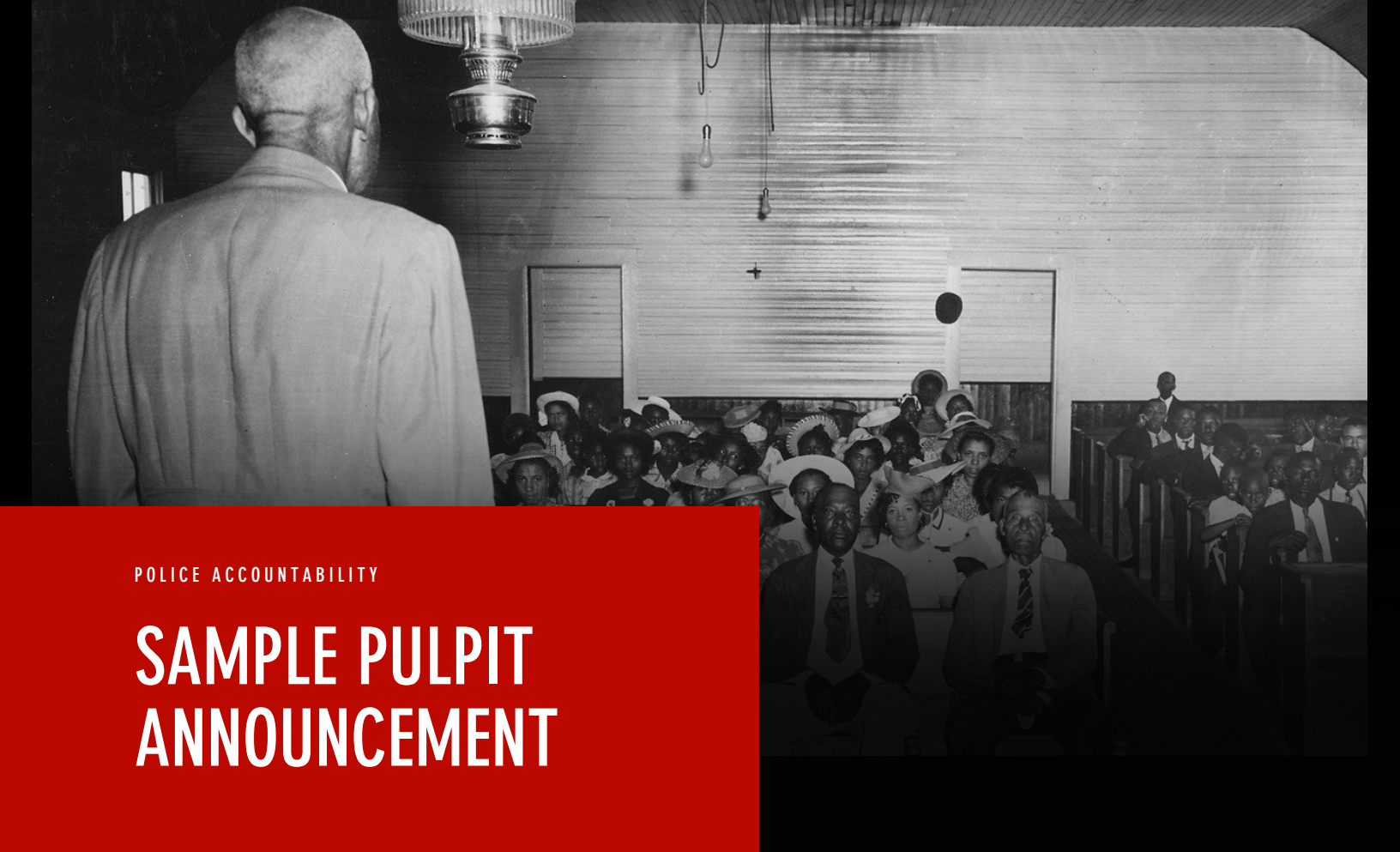
#PROMOTINGPEACE



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POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

# SAMPLE PULPIT ANNOUNCEMENT

The prophet Amos reminds us to “let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (Amos 5:24)

This year, we are urging the faith based community to be diligent in supporting equity and justice as it pertains to police accountability . We, as Black Americans, simply cannot afford to stay stay silent as our communities live in fear of the entity charged to protect us.

- We understand that the origins of our modern-day police mentality can be traced back to the "Slave Patrol".
- Law enforcement officials are responsible for the investigation of a crime and to gather evidence to identify and use against the presumed perpetrator. The presumption upon which they are supposed to operate is that individuals are suspects and innocent until proven guilty.
- As of 2018, there are 686,665 full-time employed law enforcement officials across the United States.
- The Fourth Amendment prohibits unreasonable searches and seizures and is the foundation for the protections included in our Miranda Rights: "You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be held against you in the court of law. You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be provided for you."
- A Black person is five times more likely to be stopped without just cause than a white person.
- A Black man is twice as likely to be stopped without just cause than a Black woman.
- 65% of Black adults have felt targeted because of their race. Similarly, approximately 35% of Latino and Asian adults have felt targeted because of race.

Our (faith based organization name) has created a social justice committee, led by (name, contact information) to help our congregants prepare for one of the most important topics of discussion this year – police accountability.

We ask that you empower yourself with knowledge and know your rights as a citizen.

# SAMPLE CHURCH BULLETIN



## SAMPLE #1

Freedom and liberation is your right as an American citizen. That freedom, especially for African Americans, has been bought and paid for in blood! Exercise your power to protect your freedom by knowing your rights:

- Do ask for a lawyer immediately upon being arrested or being placed into custody.
- Do stay calm and keep your emotions from getting the best of you. Be courteous even if the police officer is not. You will only give the officer more ammunition against you if you begin yelling, arguing or refusing reasonable directives.
- Do carry identification at all times and be prepared to produce it.
- Do keep your hands where the police officer can see them.
- Do take photographs if you are injured and seek medical attention as soon as possible.
- Do remember the officer's name and badge number as well as any witness information. Write down everything you remember about the encounter as soon as possible and document all property damage.
- Don't run.
- Don't touch the police officer.
- Don't make any statements about the incident without first having spoken to an attorney. Remember, anything you say will probably be held against you.

Respectful acknowledgement of these facts empowers our members to hold our law enforcement officers accountable to fulfilling their duties of protecting and serving.

## SAMPLE #2

As we live in the shadow of ongoing police brutality, it is crucial for our community and it's congregants to be well informed on our stance as we support the equitable enforcement of the law and law enforcement officers. This ministry supports accountability and transparency.

- **Accountability** - We support policies that foster greater police accountability. Specifically, we ask for improvement in accountability practices around incidents involving deadly force by police, hiring and termination decisions, and revision and review of protocols and procedures used in policing communities of color.
- **Transparency** - We support legislation that ensures greater transparency by creating publicly available data related to the race, ethnicity, gender and other voluntarily provided information about residents involved in policing actions.

### SAMPLE #3

It's time to support our youth! (Date) is the day that we will have "The Talk". The Talk will be (Church Name) Far too often, the "war on crime" is waged against innocent individuals unaware of, or intimidated into surrendering their constitutional rights. While most communities support effective law enforcement, we must also know and teach our youth the level of compliance required when approached by police officers to exercise their constitutional rights to ensure law enforcement works as it should – to protect all Americans regardless of race or ethnicity. This conversation and training will include the acknowledgement of legal rights and best practices when interacting with law enforcement officers. So please invite family, neighbors, friends, co-workers to (Church Name) on (Date) for "The Talk"!

### SAMPLE #4

We are hosting a Social Justice roundtable for all who are interested in an open discussion on police accountability. We will discuss news, legislation, strategies, and best practices as we take our message beyond the walls of the church. Please join us.

WHEN: (Day, Date)

TIME:

LOCATION:

After service, please sign up for the roundtable discussion so we can make sure that we have enough materials for everyone. Please contact (Name and Phone Number) if you have questions. We look forward to seeing you soon!!

### SAMPLE #5

(Day and Date) we (give names of any congregations and allies who are also participating) are hosting ongoing voter registration. This voter registration event will be ongoing as we understand the power of the vote in making sure legislators who support public safety are in office. Please take the time to check and update your voter registration status as it is the first step in protecting our community.

WHEN: (Day, Date)

TIME:

LOCATION:

After service, please sign up for the training so we can make sure that we have enough materials for everyone. Please contact (Name and Phone Number) if you have questions. We look forward to seeing you soon!!



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THIS LEGACY ACCESS OUR  
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AND OUR **POLICY ADVOCACY TOOLKIT** BY  
VISITING [WWW.SANDSJ.ORG/PULPITTOOLKIT](http://WWW.SANDSJ.ORG/PULPITTOOLKIT).





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# Salvation and Social Justice



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