

Woodside World

NEWS of CONGREGATION and COMMUNITY

Joyfully Defiant for the Sake of a Just World

a Congregation of the United Church of Christ, the Alliance of Baptists, and the American Baptist Churches

Woodside is a congregation long moved by the injustice of America's system of mass incarceration, which is racist, unduly punitive, inadequately rehabilitative, and embedded with capitalistic interests.

In addition to our work at the systemic level, lobbying for changes in laws, we also are acquainted with several men who are currently held in state or federal custody. We appreciate their willingness to be in touch with us, to help us understand the system; we also offer them our compassion and community, by correspondence and whatever support we can appropriately provide. Today, meet Jamie, known to us these past five years through Pastor Deb's friendship with Carol Kraemer, whom Jamie mentions below. - ed.

My name is Jamie L. Meade, Prisoner ID No. A232516, and I'm 45 years old. I'm presently being housed at the E.C. Brooks Correctional Facility in Muskegon Heights. In 1993 I was convicted of being an accessory to first degree felony murder and sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. My co-defendant (i.e. the principal defendant) was found guilty of a lesser included offense and received a 12-year sentence for committing the crime. He has long been released from prison.

I grew up in River Rouge (Southwest Detroit area). I was raised by my mother and step-father. Both worked hard and provided for me and my sister. I played hockey at a fairly high level and traveled to many cities around the state.

Unfortunately, I was intrigued by the fast pace of the street life. At an early age I started drinking, partying, and selling drugs. Introduction to the gang came next. Looking back at my adolescence, I clearly jumped on the path of the "school-to-prison pipeline."

Since my imprisonment, I have earned a BA in Interdisciplinary Studies with concentrations in Criminal Justice and Legal Studies. I graduated Magna Cum Laude with a 3.8 GPA. I'm currently working on an MBA with a focus in Leadership. I've also completed advance collegiate studies in Victim Advocacy and Alternative Dispute Resolution. In addition, I've completed 3 vocational trades and over 50 rehabilitational programs.

I am an advocate of criminal justice reform and post-secondary education for all. I use my education to advocate for reform and to help others incarcerated change their lives. I try very hard to make a difference in prison and in society.

I am a Core Member of the Chance For Life Organization (CFL) and a Trained Facilitator for the Alternatives to Violence Project-Michigan (AVP-Michigan). I am also member and

supporter of JustLeadershipUSA, Safe and Just Michigan, American Friends Service Committee, Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency, Michigan Lifers Association, National Lifers Association, and MI-CURE.

Fortunately, my hard work has gained me the support of many great people, for example: Judge Sharon Tevis Finch; Senator Coleman Young II; Professor Brad J. Bushman of The Ohio State University; Carol J. Kraemer, of the Davis-Putter Scholarship Fund*; and, of course, Pastor Deborah Conrad.



Jamie & his mom, Pauline

It is extremely rare for someone sentenced to life without parole to have the support of the trial judge who sentenced them. Judge Finch was very impressed by my educational achievements and admitted she was always bothered by the outcome of my case. Judge Finch openly supported my release by writing a letter to the Office of the Parole Board. In her letter she stated her hands were tied because of the mandatory sentencing laws, but if having an option she would have sentenced me to no more than 25 years for my participation in the crime.

I made a horrible decision when I was a teenager. There isn't a day that goes by that I don't pray for Jason and his family and ask God for forgiveness. I ask that you also pray for Jason and his family and also ask God for my forgiveness.

I close with a question for the congregation of Woodside Church, "Will you accept me?"

If you are interested in getting to know me more or just wish to write, please open a JPay account for e-mailing at www.jpays.com or write to me at

Jamie L. Meade #A232516
E.C. Brooks Corr. Facility
2500 S. Sheridan Drive
Muskegon, Michigan 49444

Please include your full name and return address on the letter. (*Envelopes and contents often get separated. -ed.*)

- Jamie Meade

* The Davis-Putter Scholarship Fund supports students working for social change.

THE SEASON OF LENT

AS I'M WRITING THIS, it is Ash Wednesday, and in a few hours we'll gather for a mark of ashes on our foreheads, a remembrance of our mortality and invitation to a new way. Lent, each year, is our season of reflection, of repentance, which means "choosing a new direction." It is a time to notice the distance between us and God's vision, between us and the common good, as we tend to default to our own desires much of the time. We want to reflect.

BUT DO YOU EVER FEEL LIKE the world works against your best efforts? Sunday mornings, we will try to reflect a Lenten mood, a theme. Much like trying to carve out Advent in the midst of Christmas tinsel, Lent will be a bit of a challenge. We want candles and dark purples and mood lighting, but we are in a shared space, with unyielding fluorescent lighting, and tables all around filled with literature and artifacts of community groups and projects. Which is also a reminder that we live our faith in the midst of a larger community, never very far from the concerns that overshadow people's lives. This is who we are; this is what faith is. Perhaps the orange chairs will be our seasonable reminder that life is not our own.

WHILE ALL THAT IS TRUE, it is also helpful to find other ways to remember what we tend to forget — that a life of faith is a life of constantly turning from failures and faithlessness to face life in a new way. It is always invitation, even in the somber season of Lent. Jesus is journeying to Jerusalem, to a confrontation with the powers of an oppressive system. We are beckoned on the road with him.

Some people do Lent by changing their diets or habits, perhaps giving up chocolate or Netflix or Facebook. I've done those things myself. But lately I find myself wanting a different approach. Something more like *remembering*.

So this year, I have chosen three ways to mark the season. I offer them to you, not as the "right" things or even particularly righteous things, but as ideas only. They seem to be the things I need to do; you will figure out for yourself what you need to do to remember.

1. With ashes on my head tonight, I will mark my bathroom mirror, also — a cross from a grease stick. Perhaps my rearview mirror, too. I'll wash the ashes from my face, but each day I'll remember them.
2. To turn my Lenten thoughts away from my own "credentials," I'm changing jewelry. Instead of my gold pinkie ring, a gift to myself when I finished my doctorate, which I wear every day, I'll wear a silver "crown of thorns." It may seem trivial, hardly a "sacrifice" in the sense of self-deprivation, but perhaps it will remind me of things beyond myself. A little change to shift the trajectory.
3. Finally, and most heavily, as a daily discipline, I'll ponder racism and whiteness in a more intentional way. As I've noted, I'll work through a 28-day workbook called "Me and White Supremacy." The workbook is a free download, written by a black woman for white people. If you'd like to do your own introspective work of racial reconciliation, you can find it [here](#).

Whatever you choose, however you observe the season, I'm here for support and encouragement. There is life; that is our faith, our hope. But first, there is a road to Jerusalem.

- pastor deb

IN OUR CONGREGATION

TIME CHANGE! FINAL NOTICE: Daylight Saving Time begins Sunday, 2 am. If you forget, you'll miss worship. In which case, consider finding us on YouTube.

MEMBERSHIP PREPARATION begins 9:30 a.m. Sunday, for 5 weekly sessions. Then, we'll welcome new members during Easter worship. If you're ready to think about it, mark your calendar and plan to attend.

CARE TEAM is planning a reboot. If you're interested in this ministry of compassion among our members, please be in touch with Karen Eaton, Laura Eufinger or Linda Angus.

GREENING OUR LIVES THIS WEEK

Our Creation Justice Team is initiating the UCC's program called 52 Ways to Care for Creation; they'll include one idea each week here in Woodside World.

THIS WEEK: COMMIT TO LOW OR NO WASTE GROCERY SHOPPING

You can reduce waste when shopping for groceries by buying unpackaged fresh produce, bringing your own containers for bulk foods (rice, granola, flour, etc), bringing your own grocery bags, including produce bags for fresh foods. Plus, if you avoid prepared foods, you also avoid excess packaging.

DO YOU CARRY YOUR OWN BAGS TO THE GROCERY YET? It is an easy way to make a big difference. By 2050, the oceans' plastic will out-volume the oceans' fish.

To help, the Creation Justice Team is sewing our old curtains into reusable grocery bags, stencilled with Woodside's name!

If you'd like to have one (they're free!), make a note on the attendance sheet on any Sunday in March. Supplies are limited. When the muslin runs out, so do the bags, so sign up soon.

OBSERVING LENT

LENTEN DEVOTION MATERIALS from the UCC are available for your personal use. The theme is *Take Nothing With You*, as we ponder what an unencumbered journey might look like. Check the back table; if we run out, we'll order more. No cost to you.

GREASE STICKS will be available in a basket on the table Sunday, if you would like to mark your own mirror as a Lenten "reflection." Feel free to take one home for your family's use. Or just use a lipstick.

WHAT'S YOUR LENTEN THING? If you're willing to share, tell us what you're doing for Lent, a way of remembering, of "turning." Just drop a note to Pastor Deb and we'll print it in a subsequent issue of Woodside World. We're in it together; your idea may become someone else's life-changing moment.

IN THE COMMUNITY

THE JOHN BRADFORD BOHL COMMUNITY CHOIR rehearses at Woodside 7 pm Wednesdays. *Please be advised we've learned that the choir is not an LGBTQ-only space. It was formed by straight allies and comprises LGBTQ and straight people.* Bring your voice and your desire for good company.