

Moving from Charity to Justice

On Sunday, June 10th, Immanuel Congregational Church, along with the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ, Asylum Hill Congregational Church, First Church of Christ Hartford and Faith Congregational church hosted a panel discussion subtitled *Society's Criminal Justice Challenge*.

The discussion was moderated by Rev. Gordon Bates, and the panel consisted of Mike Lawlor, Under Secretary for Criminal Justice Policy and Planning, State of CT; Iran Nazario, Founder/President/CEO of Peace Center of Connecticut; Deborah Rogala, Program Operations Director, Community Partners in Action (CPA) and Victoria Steele, an advocate for women who have been incarcerated.



Rev. Bates began by pointing out that in many ways, Connecticut is a national leader in criminal justice reform before introducing the panelists. He then asked the audience to ask hard questions of the panelists while considering three questions themselves; what are they good at, what are the limitations to change policy and what can the panelists do to help.

Mr. Mike Lawlor led the discussion by pointing out that reported crime in CT has been declining every year since the mid 1990's and is lower than any year since 1967. He followed with a brief history of criminal justice and incarceration in Connecticut over the past 15 or so years and especially the effect of changing the way youth, whether in school or elsewhere were treated when they acted out. The statistics bear out the benefit.

Victoria Steele followed with her experiences as an abused teenager in the criminal Justice system. She finally got the education and help that she needed to understand how to break the cycle of drug and alcohol abuse and stop returning to prison. She has since advocated for women in the system.

Iran Nazario also spoke of his early life as a gang member that also began with abuse and a father in the prison. He spoke personally of the importance of a "circle of love" available to everyone who leaves prison to help in the transition to a productive life.

Deb Rogala concluded the presentations by telling her own personal story of white privilege, for relatives who were not incarcerated. She went on to explain the importance of re-entry support that is at the heart of what CPA does and the need for public policy to be determined at least in part by the people affected by that policy.

The questions and answers that followed were also very heartening. There is much progress that can be built on, but much involvement by the public is needed to make sure it continues. To get involved or for more information, contact CPA at <https://cpa-ct.org> or Deborah Rogalla at DRogala@cpa-ct.org

More photos are at <https://photos.app.goo.gl/7nweCpkqVBDvpusU8>