

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Prison and Jail Ministries: Creating
Communities of Compassion and Care**

May 31, 2014 - The National Benevolent Association (NBA) of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is excited to initiate a collaborative ministry addressing justice issues within America's prisons and jails. In particular, NBA will focus on supporting congregations as they engage in prison and jail related ministries and in connecting conversations across Disciples-related ministries in order to strengthen this work. As part of the NBA's strategic initiatives, Rev. Dean Bucalos has been contracted with the NBA as a mission specialist for prison and jail ministries. Throughout the life of the Disciples church, ministries such as the Disciples Center for Public Witness, Reconciliation Ministries, and Disciples Home Missions have been engaged in advocacy efforts related to prison and jail ministries. Early discussions between the NBA and various Disciples ministries have been happening for information sharing and exploring opportunities for partnership.

Rev. April Johnson, Minister for Reconciliation Ministries with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) reflects that, "we welcome Dean to this timely and critical ministry and are grateful for the unique gifts and experience he offers on behalf of NBA. As Disciples, the imperative nature of our anti-racism mission is exemplified in the over-representation of people of color in our nation's prison system. Dean's appointment strengthens our Church's opportunities to embrace our passion for justice and our identity as a pro-reconciling and anti-racist church.

Rev. Bucalos' primary focus is to develop a network of support for Disciples engaging in spiritual care and advocacy ministries for those currently and formerly incarcerated as well as their families. Disciples' leaders, ministers, congregations, and social service ministries are invited to join the NBA Prison and Jail Ministries group by contacting Rev. Dean Bucalos, NBA Mission Specialist, by email at prisonministries@nbacares.org or by phone at (502) 396-3543.

Here is a message of invitation from Rev. Dean Bucalos:

I am excited about being called to serve as a Mission Specialist for the NBA Prison and Jail Ministries. With my experience as pastor and lawyer and my recent work in establishing the Disciples of Christ' first prison congregation, I feel both equipped and ready for this new challenge. I have discovered that so many members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) are involved in many important and powerful prison and jail ministries. We just don't know about each other!

My role will be multi-faceted. I hope to begin connecting us so that we cannot only provide each other support but also share with one another best practices. There is so much work to be done in this area. Ninety-five percent of those presently incarcerated in our over-crowded prisons and jails (the United States has more people incarcerated per capita than any county in the world), will be returning to our communities. As Disciples of Christ, we can lead the way in

demonstrating how our churches can be welcoming and hospitable to these returning citizens and their families. Being trained and educated on the issues is the key. That's one of the areas I hope to focus upon.

I want to hear from you and learn what you are doing as we answer Christ's call set forth in Matthew 25. Moreover, I am hopeful that our efforts will encourage the wider church to address important issues of social justice that impact those incarcerated, those returning citizens and their families and loved ones. We will explore together the pressing questions that affect our churches and our communities. Among those issues are: the scandal of a disproportionate number of people of color being incarcerated; the restoration of voting rights for ex-felons; the misuse and abuse of solitary confinement; discrimination in employment practices against those released from prisons and jails; and the benefit of restorative justice practices, especially with juvenile offenders.

In many ways, we are treading upon new ground. Our churches have often ignored and neglected this population of people who have unique needs and concerns. We can join with our ecumenical partners and offer healing to those who have lived broken and fragmented lives. As we gather our gifts and talents together in this new endeavor, I am confident that we will be led in bold and courageous directions by the Holy Spirit. Let me hear from you as we continue to serve the Risen Lord in our prisons, our jails and our communities of faith.

Rev. Dean Bucalos serves as part-time/contract Mission Specialist for NBA Prison and Jail Ministries. Connect with Dean by phone at (502) 396-3543 or by email at prisonministries@nbacares.org. Visit www.nbacares.org to read more stories and blogs from Rev. Bucalos!

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About the National Benevolent Association

The National Benevolent Association (NBA) serves as the health and social services general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The NBA is about advancing the direct care provided for and with those in need and working collaboratively with partner ministries and Disciples-related health and social service organizations. Learn more about NBA ministries at www.nbacares.org.