

**Social Entrepreneurs of Faith: Championing the Cause**  
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I teach a senior seminar class at Bellarmine University. The class is titled “Hope for Change.” As a research project, I ask my students to look at a particular social justice issue, analyze it, explore its systemic nature, and propose a project that offers a solution. The research paper serves to answer the question, “What Do I Plan to Do to Make the World a Better Place?”

As preparation for this assignment, I introduce my students to the principles of social entrepreneurship, the process of pursuing innovative solutions to social problems. More specifically, social entrepreneurs adopt a mission to create and sustain social value. I have come across some amazing ideas that incredibly innovative people have launched into reality.

Some of the more inspiring ideas address issues that support the well-being of people who have been incarcerated, are in recovery, and/or have been involved in gangs. If you haven’t read Father Gregory Boyle’s book, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (Free Press, 2010), pick it up and read it. It is inspiring. Boyle shares his experience with Homeboy Industries, a gang intervention program that has created employment opportunities for hundreds of former gang members.

In a similar fashion, Mimi Silbert founded the Delancey Street Foundation in San Francisco. This remarkable program is a residential education center where drug addicts, former felons, and the homeless learn to lead productive, crime-free lives. They earn revenue by operating more than 20 businesses, including the Delancey Street Restaurant and Café and the Delancey Street Moving Company. Now with locations in New Mexico, North Carolina, and Los Angeles, it has been called the most successful rehabilitation project in the United States, and it is entirely self-supporting. You can read more at [www.delanceystreetfoundation.org](http://www.delanceystreetfoundation.org).

Most everyone agrees that one of the key components to a successful reentry from prison or jail is finding decent employment. When faced with low-paying possibilities that make it impossible to meet minimum expenses (food, clothing, housing, and transportation), those who have been engaged in past criminal behavior resort to what they have known best to survive. Providing job skills that lead not only to a decent wage but also to independence is a recipe for success.

I recently spoke with the director of our city’s department of community services, which works with community development initiatives. I asked him if there were any projects like Homeboy Industries or the Delancey Street Foundation in our city. “No,” he said, “but they would be welcome.” “What would it take?” I asked. He said, “It would take someone to champion the cause.”

We need more of these champions. The NBA Incubate Initiative supports social entrepreneurs who are championing causes to make the world a better place. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if those with a heart for working with returning citizens began championing programs that trained and provided employment for those seeking a second chance in life? Is there a possibility that the Delancey Street Foundation could expand to your community? What a blessing it would be to redirect the energy and enthusiasm of young people trapped in a world of gangs and drugs to productive jobs like Homeboy Industries has done?

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May the Spirit move us to open our hearts to these possibilities and other innovative, creative solutions to longstanding problems. May the seeds of those ideas deeply planted within your brain begin to sprout into reality. May the wonder of God's possibilities, that nurtures and grows mustard seeds into flourishing trees, find fertile ground in your hopes and dreams.

The only thing standing in our way, is, well, us. May our faith be strong.

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*Rev. Dean Bucalos serves as part-time mission specialist for **NBA Prison and Jail Ministries**, through which we support congregations and individuals as they engage in prison- and jail-related ministries, focusing on inspiration, education, and advocacy. Learn more at [www.nbacares.org/prison-and-jail](http://www.nbacares.org/prison-and-jail).*

*Bucalos also serves as executive director of **Mission Behind Bars and Beyond (MB3)**, an ecumenical mentoring program for returning citizens that is an affiliate ministry of the NBA Incubate Initiative. Learn more at [www.nbacares.org/incubate](http://www.nbacares.org/incubate).*

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