

Ministry With vs. Ministry To

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I am ashamed to say that until almost eight years ago, the thought of prison ministry was not something that crossed my windshield. I think that is probably the case for many of our “mainline Protestant” pastors. It seems that prison ministry was relegated either to a small segment of church members who had some personal interest (a child or relative incarcerated) or to our brothers and sisters of more evangelical or conservative manifestations of the church.



Then I was introduced to an amazing ministry begun by Rev. Ed Nesselhuf, a pastor from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. He was inspired to bring mainline Christians into prisons and he took that vision farther than I believe he ever imagined. It's how the Holy Spirit operates, isn't it?

Birthing from that vision, **Prison Congregations of America** (www.prisoncongregations.org) has introduced the idea of congregations inside prisons across the country and across denominations. Now there are 26 active prison congregations in thirteen

different states representing eight denominations. I have served a prison congregation for the past eight years. It's been an unexpected blessing. Here's how this powerful ministry is described:

The PCA model is unique in that the prison inmates are the members of the worshipping community. A pastor leads them from the outside that is trained by and accountable to the sponsoring denomination. The prison church or worshipping community is supported financially by churches on the outside who also take turns being worship guests. This is truly ministry with, rather than ministry to, those who are incarcerated.

From this model have grown re-entry ministries where outside church members are trained to walk alongside those returning citizens from a **Prison Congregation** and assist and equip them to make a successful return to their communities. In the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), this idea is catching on! With prison congregations in Kentucky and Utah, a third is just beginning in Nashville, Tennessee.

Rev. Scott Jamieson is a recent graduate of Vanderbilt Divinity School and a recently ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Having a heart for those who are so often neglected and forgotten while imprisoned, and inspired and motivated by Matthew 25, Scott has served as a layperson in prison ministries for a number of years. Like many of us involved in this ministry, he never dreamed of becoming a pastor of a congregation inside a correctional facility.

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But then it happened. He heard about a Disciples of Christ prison congregation in Louisville, Kentucky and came to visit. This year, Scott will lead the inaugural worship service of the Church of Another Chance inside the Davidson County Jail in Nashville, Tennessee. Guests from the outside will join him for worship as the men on the inside embrace their new congregation. And we all celebrate!

If you would like to learn more about **Prison Congregations of America**, please visit the website. Mary Mortenson is the Director and gladly shares the hope and joy of this incredible ministry. She can be reached at (605) 321-0509 or at mary@prisoncongregations.org. To begin, just consider starting a prison congregation in your area through your denomination and then, let the Holy Spirit take it from there. You'll be surprised by what unfolds!

Rev. Dean Bucalos serves as part-time Mission Specialist for NBA Prison and Jail Ministries. Connect with Dean by email at prisonministries@nbacares.org.

www.nbacares.org