



**2015 Ecumenical Advocacy Days: Reflections from
Rev. Luis Gierbolini, Corrections Chaplain
May 2015**

Rev. Luis Gierbolini, chaplain for the Indiana Department of Correction, traveled to Washington, D.C. with the National Benevolent Association during the 2015 Ecumenical Advocacy Days. He offers this reflection of his experience.

It was a pleasure to meet the NBA staff during this year's Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD): Breaking the Chains of Mass Incarceration and Systems of Exploitation. This was the first time I attended EAD, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to witness people of faith—from various walks of life, creeds, and doctrines—come together for a specific cause and speak out against the injustices in our local and global communities.

Ecumenical Advocacy Days

There were several key points that stood out to me during this weekend conference. First, that mass incarceration is not just a national issue. It is contextually a global issue that mirrors the failures of both our economic and criminal justice systems. Second, I was surprised to see the number of people and organizations who care deeply and passionately about this topic. And finally, I was impressed by the amount of resources and opportunities provided to conference attendees to engage this topic on a level that was significant to them.

I attended all the plenary sessions as well as three workshops dealing with the issue of mass incarceration and exploitation on a domestic level. As a chaplain for the Indiana Department of Correction, working specifically with juveniles, I was drawn to Rev. Toby Sanders' session, "How Can Churches Engage To End Mass Incarceration?" I am interested in getting local churches throughout Indiana counties involved in working with incarcerated youth, and I appreciated that Rev. Sanders intentionally showed the relevance of providing an education to those who are locked up. I also attended two other workshops: "Returning Home After Incarceration: Breaking Down the Obstacles for Reintegration" and "No Place for a Child: Youth Incarceration and the Cradle to Prison Pipeline." Each of these workshops provided perspective to issues that are plaguing our incarcerated population.

"A glimmer of hope..."

An image that stood out to me during EAD was the group of young adults who led worship and young adult evening gatherings. It was a diverse group of people who were intentional and creative. Overall, I enjoyed my experience and had a wonderful time meeting new people. I am eager to continue engaging—along with others locally—the issue of mass incarceration and exploitation. The conference provided a glimmer of hope that, if and when addressed, all parties affected by a crime can have the same equal opportunity to be cared for.

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About the NBA Prison and Jail Affinity Group

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. To learn more, contact us at [*prisonministries@nbacares.org*](mailto:prisonministries@nbacares.org).

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