

Gospel of Community
Rev. Héctor J. Hernández, M.Div., MAMFT
Convener, NBA Prison and Jail Ministries Peer Group
February 2017



**National
Benevolent
Association**
of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)



Rev. Héctor J. Hernández at the Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta.

As Christians, we maintain that we are followers of Jesus the Christ, and we often profess that we have a call to be the salt and the light of this world. However, every so often I find myself thinking about the importance of professing our beliefs with actions and noticing that we may just be settling for professing only with our words. In my experience, I have witnessed how the faith of a large portion of Christianity remains trapped in an abstract reality of eschatological incarnations, a faith with limited interpretations of the Kingdom of God and salvation only around the coming world and only subscribed to a spiritual realm. It has been described as an individualistic and selfish faith.

The more I walk and experience what I call a Gospel of community, the more I have faced and struggled with principalities and powers of this world that devour and destroy the most vulnerable around us. An example will be the punitive systems in this country in which the incarceration of men, women, and children generate wealth for a few, and where justice is only for those who can afford it. Many of us are familiar with the school-to-prison pipeline, an epidemic so prevalent in our school system that targets disproportionately students of color and those with disadvantages like poverty and learning disabilities. Of all males in state and federal prison, more than half do not have a high school diploma or have been in the foster care system. The more I witness this evil, the more I understand that the Realm of God begins here and now with our concrete actions of love, towards justice and peace. The letter of James reminds us that, “faith that does not produce works is dead” (2:26).

For almost a year, I have served as NBA’s Prison and Jail Ministries Peer Group Convener by sharing and walking with an amazing, diverse group of men and women who have answered the call by saying, “Here am I; send me!” These servants of God have developed various ministries for the benefit not only of imprisoned populations but also of the families of those in the prison system. Some of these ministries are ministries of visitation, and some have given form to churches inside the prisons. Other ministries focus on providing mentorship, support, and accompaniment for those in jail and even after they are released.

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These ministries are as diverse as the people who carry them out; however, they are all ministries living out the Gospel of community, a Gospel of abundant life, hope, and salvation, that only their very existence denounces the oppressive systems in which they work. I am in awe of the courage of these servants, and the testimonies of these giants. Their stories, their victories, their struggles, and their losses are inspiring and serve as a reminder of the important yet lonely work that they do. Walking alongside them has been transforming, and together we continue to find ways to honor, celebrate, support, and encourage each other.

I invite you to learn more about NBA's Prison and Jail Ministries and to find ways to get involved. There are concrete ways to put your faith words into actions of love, justice, and peace that NBA is carrying out through its programs.

Go to **nbacares.org/prison-and-jail** to dare to be flavor and light in your community.

*Rev. Héctor J. Hernández serves as the convener of the **NBA Prison and Jail Ministries Peer Group**, one way in 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.*