

Loving Our Neighbors As Ourselves
Rev. Nora Jacob
Restorative Justice Minister, UrbanMission
Guest Blogger, NBA Prison & Jail Ministries
December 2015



Our guest blogger this month is Rev. Nora Jacob. Nora serves as restorative justice minister at UrbanMission, a joint UCC/DOC new church start in south Pomona, CA. She is also founder and executive director of the Pomona Valley Reentry Coalition and was among the creators of a Justice Not Jails resource guide in 2015 on mass incarceration and the New Jim Crow. Nora shares with us her unique perspective on reentry. Her work and ministry serve as both an inspiration and model that can be replicated.

The transition a person makes from prison or jail back into society again is almost always complex in its challenges—not only for those who themselves were incarcerated, but also for their families, friends, and communities. Those who reenter society often have limited housing options and inadequate job skills. Some struggle with mental health issues and/or substance abuse. Most face some level of stigma within their families and neighborhoods.

In the Disciples' Pacific Southwest Region, Another Chance @ UrbanMission (the restorative justice ministries within a new joint UCC/DOC church start) decided to get into reentry work because it was one way we could live out Jesus' call to love our neighbors as ourselves—specifically, our neighbors in south Pomona (in eastern Los Angeles County, California) and surrounding communities.



Another Chance @ UrbanMission initiated conversations in 2014 that have turned into ongoing relationships and service with collaborative partners to do reentry work. Together, with start-up help from a PSWR Legacy Fund grant funded by Arlington Christian Church in nearby Riverside, we created what stands today as a new nonprofit organization called the Pomona Valley Reentry Coalition (PVRC).

For the past year, PVRC has been hosting Pomona Valley Ex-Offender & Reentry Resource Fairs for men and women returning home after incarceration. On the third Wednesday morning of each month, we bring together parolees and other returning citizens from communities throughout the Pomona Valley to have “one-stop” access to job training and employment opportunities, housing, identity documents, medical insurance, food, clothing, and more.

Attendees interact with representatives of dozens of organizations, agencies, and businesses that offer services, information, and/or referrals. Thanks to our grant and other support, lunch is provided without cost. Special free services may feature confidential HIV testing, insurance enrollment, child support review and possible payment adjustment, giveaway cell phones and phone service, free bus passes, and more. Volunteers from nearby Disciples congregations in Pomona, East Whittier, and Orange serve lunch each month and staff the area where we give away employment-ready clothing and shoes.

Our PVRC coalition currently includes the local parole office; a Church of God in Christ congregation and its affiliated nonprofit group that provides job development, training, and referrals; the local GAIN employment training agency; two transitional housing providers; the parolee day reporting center; and our UrbanMission church. More members are coming on board as we gear up to write grant requests to fund our expanding efforts.

This reentry effort is an independent nonprofit organization, but its work draws on a vision for wholeness in a fragmented world that our Disciples movement articulates so well. We seek to promote wholeness and reduce crime/harm. Welcoming home our returning brothers and sisters after their incarceration with what we share at our reentry resource fairs is one way to live toward that vision of wholeness and *shalom*.

Learn more about NBA Prison and Jail Ministries by contacting prisonministries@nbacares.org.