

Special Edition

Bidding Farewell and Embracing New Direction for Mission Behind Bars and Beyond



John-Mark Hack

On behalf of the Board of Directors for Mission Behind Bars and Beyond (MB3), it is my profound honor and great privilege to announce the retirement of our Founder and Executive Director, Dean Bucalos, effective December 31, 2020. We are certain that you join us in feeling both deep sadness and profound gratitude in this moment. Dean has inspired all of us to the unifying purpose of extending God's love to people in dire need of knowing it, to people on the margins of society too often forgotten.



We also want to extend an opportunity to each of you to make a special contribution to Mission Behind Bars and Beyond in honor of Dean and his ministry. For now though, we want you to spend a few minutes reading about Dean and Anne Bucalos, possibly learning a story or two you may not have known before now. We hope that you enjoy reading more about their journey as you contemplate the best way you can personally honor the work and legacy of these two truly remarkable people.

- John-Mark Hack, Board Chair
December 9, 2020

Working on the Margins



In the Spring of 1971, Dean Bucalos was a freshman at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, feeling the fresh sting of being dumped by a college girlfriend. The Kappa Sigma fraternity Spring Formal was coming up, and Dean needed a date. His friend, Anne Browne, had also recently been through a similar experience, and agreed to help him out for the weekend.

The weekend is still going. They were married three years later, and 49 years after that weekend Spring formal, Anne and Dean now look toward a new season in their lives together.

"As I look back on this portion of my life, and the pathway that brought us here," Dean reflected, "there are a lot of connecting points."

Soon after they were married, the young couple moved to Lexington, Kentucky and joined Hunter Presbyterian Church. They were the younger couple in an older congregation, Dean was in Law School at the University of Kentucky, and

Anne was teaching. They were approached one Sunday after church by fellow member Carl Almgren, who asked if they'd be interested in an opportunity with a program called Volunteers in Corrections.

Carl knew Dean was in law school, but it was Anne who had some background working with people involved in the justice system. She had worked one summer at Central State Hospital outside Nashville, and several of the patients were there because of criminal offenses. Dean and Anne went to their first Volunteers in Corrections meeting in 1975 where they were asked if they'd be willing to work with a returning citizen.

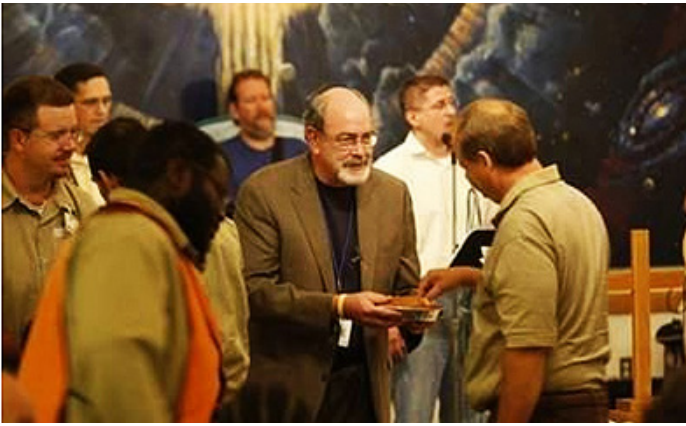
"Being young, dopey and idealistic, we said 'Sure!'," Dean recalled.

In the fall of that year, Dean and Anne were paired with Charles, who used the street nickname "Butch." He was a young man from Louisville who was soon to be released from Blackburn Correctional Institute. They picked him up after his release and took him to where he was staying.

"We spent a lot of time with Butch," Dean said. "It was very challenging, and we didn't know what we were doing."

They soon discovered that he was an active alcoholic. One morning around 2AM, they got a phone call from Butch,

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who had been arrested and was being held in the Franklin County jail. He asked Dean if he could come bail him out.

“We had about \$400 in the bank, and his bond was \$250,” Dean said. “Anne and I talked about it, and I drove to Frankfort the next day and bailed Butch out.”

Dean and Butch walked to the courthouse where he was arraigned for drunken driving. Thankfully, the court didn't revoke his parole. Dean recalled coming to realize Butch's deep struggles with his drinking and had to say, “If you keep drinking, then we can't keep working with you.”

Butch laughed, and they didn't see him again after that day. Dean and Anne decided not to volunteer again, but he would serve Volunteers in Corrections in another role.

The group was active in lobbying the state legislature. That year, there was a movement for mandatory sentencing and legislative proposals targeting persistent felony offenders. VIC was opposed to this new movement, and they needed someone to testify before the state legislature. Who better than the young law student? As a 23-year-old with little public speaking experience, Dean walked into the legislative committee hearing, approached the podium, read his testimony and answered questions.

“This little snippet of experience laid back in both of our histories dormant for a number of years,” Dean said. “I went to law school, and discovered my passion was working with people on the margins.”

God, of course, was not done working with Butch, or with Dean and Anne. Many years later, they received a Christmas card from a California address neither of them recognized. Butch had dropped his nickname and was referring to himself as Charles, reflecting a life transformation he had experienced.

As it turns out, he had moved to California, started a business, gotten married and became active in Alcoholics Anonymous. He was writing to wish Anne and Dean a Merry Christmas, and included a note in the card.

“That one day you came to Frankfort, I knew you were a young couple with no money, and you came to get me out of jail,” Charles wrote. “While we walked across the parking lot, my first inclination was to run. But I looked at you and thought ‘How could I do that to this young couple?’ That episode changed my life, it changed my perception of humanity.”

Anne and Dean thought they had failed to do what they had hoped for Butch. God continued the transformation God had used Dean and Anne to spark in Charles, a transformation that left Butch, both the nickname and the former person, in the past.

Every Christmas since, Charles sends Anne and Dean a card and signs each one, “Always a friend.”

“You never can tell the impact you might have on another person and, in fact, when working with returning citizens, it's not what you do ‘for’ them; it's how you can best equip them to do for themselves,” Dean wrote in a blog for the National Benevolent Association.

God has been using Dean Bucalos in much the same way ever since.

“For me to get involved with people who are incarcerated when I was 56 years old was ironic, 35 years after our experience with Charles,” Dean said. “I think that's how God works. God puts those markers in our lives and then at some point draws them together. Part of my experience was remembering that experience with Charles, and how ill prepared we were to really help him, how there was no network to help him. I thought ‘We can do better than that.’”

While Dean was in law school, his faith began shaping what he wanted to do as a lawyer. A friend who had a Pauline-like conversion experience sent Dean a box of books, one of which was C.S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*.

“It resonated with me,” Dean recalled. “I was at the age at which I needed to make sense of my religion, my spiritual life. C.S. Lewis brought that together for me.”

As a law student, Dean clerked with various law firms in Lexington. When he graduated, he was hired by a legal services program that provided assistance on civil cases. Dean and Anne moved to Ashland, Kentucky, and Dean worked in legal services for a couple of years.

“I knew that my faith and vocation as a lawyer were in sync,” he said.

They later moved back to Lexington, at a time when the Reagan administration was working to get rid of legal services. Dean started his own law firm with partners

Working on the Margins (cont.)



Jim Gardner and Bob Brown. It was then that he started to do more criminal work and immigration work.

“I was the pro bono person in our office,” Dean said. “I probably did more pro bono work than paid legal work, much to the chagrin of my partners.”

When Dean and Anne returned to Lexington, they brought along their first born, daughter Becca. A friend from the legal services community, Josh Santana, invited the young family to his church, Central Christian in downtown Lexington. The family fell in love with the congregation and became very active members. They soon welcomed their son Ben, who was born in Lexington two years after Becca’s birth.

They went through a number of Bible study classes at Central, including one called the Bethel Bible Study, led by Milford Walters, one of Central’s ministers.

“It was life-changing for me, and we ended up teaching the class for a couple of years. I just wanted to learn more about the Bible,” he said.

Two other Central members, Michael Kinnamon and Tony Dunnavent, were faculty members at Lexington Theological Seminary. They encouraged Dean to take classes at the seminary. He took a couple of courses and was strongly drawn to more. He took all the night courses the seminary offered. In order to get a degree, he was going to have to take day classes.

“Anne and I had long conversations, and I told her, ‘I think I’m being called into ministry.’”

Anne encouraged him to answer the call. He spent a year as a full-time seminary student, sold his partnership in the law firm, and was ordained into ministry in 1994. During his seminary studies, he served a couple of small congregations in rural Kentucky as a student minister. Some years later, he was called to be the Senior Pastor at Douglas Boulevard Christian Church in Louisville.

Dean had been there six years when he took a sabbatical paid for by the Lilly Foundation. He came back transformed, ready to introduce new ideas that he thought would be healthy, positive and new directions for the congregation,

but many of them never took root. Dean went through a period of discernment to understand what God intended for his work. In 2007, he surprised the congregation by announcing his resignation.

“Things were going pretty well, moving smoothly. We had a good leadership team, things were at a good place,” Dean said. “But it seemed like the right time for me to step away, which I did. I had no idea what I would do after that.”

Dean began applying for jobs, and found it sobering and shocking to realize that no one wanted to hire someone at his age with his background. There was, however, a church looking for an interim minister, Corydon Christian Church in southern Indiana, and he filled that role for a year in 2008.

During that time, Steven Johns-Boehme, a regional associate minister in the Christian Church of Kentucky, had been in contact with Mark Wessels at Luther Lockett Correctional Complex in Oldham County, Kentucky. They wanted to start a new congregation inside the prison.

“Steven knew I had a background in law. They had an organizing group with monthly worship services with churches coming in,” Dean said. “They invited us to come on a Friday night. Anne and I went, and it was very powerful. Anne and I were walking back to our car, and I asked her ‘Do you see me as the minister of this group?’”

Once again, Anne encouraged Dean to answer the call. He agreed to do it for three months. Like that first weekend together for the Kappa Sigma Spring formal that has now lasted 49 years, Dean and Anne’s time in prison ministry continues to this day.

Dean reflected on the critical role Anne has played in his work with MB3 in another blog for the National Benevolent Association. Writing about the importance of people in non-profit work having key confidants, Dean clearly recognizes that MB3 would not have been possible were it not for Anne.



“She is a great listener, supporter and gentle critic. She knows me better than anyone and at once can be honest and frank and loving. When I’m down, I know I can confide in her without being judged,” Dean wrote.

“And when things are going well, she is there to celebrate with me and affirm the hard work to which I have devoted my life. Frankly, without Anne’s support and backing and encouragement, Mission Behind Bars and Beyond would not have survived the lean years and tough times that were its beginning. Without Anne’s willingness to encourage me to shift vocational gears without the guarantee of a livable wage, Mission Behind Bars and Beyond would simply have been another good idea. And without Anne’s continuing reminder that this ministry’s success or failure is not a reflection of who I am as a person, I would not have been able to press on and persevere.”



Dean started a mentoring program in 2010, especially for men being released from Luther Lockett, many of whom were sex offenders. He was assisted in his efforts by several people from Jeffersontown Christian Church in Louisville. This

mentoring program quickly evolved to a non-profit organization, giving birth to Mission Behind Bars and Beyond.

Today, after 10 years, MB3 facilitates life-changing experiences for clients and volunteers alike. Services begin while our clients, both women and men, are still incarcerated. Life skills training classes are delivered in an effort to prepare clients for their release. When the time comes for clients to re-enter society, MB3 is there with trained groups of volunteers who seek to nurture, support and hold accountable the women and men assigned to their care. The goal is a simple one: keep people from going back to prison, and lay a foundation for their continued spiritual growth.

Dean sums up the ministry and his legacy in these words, a legacy that all of us are called to carry on and grow:

“This ministry is God-centered, and it wouldn’t have happened if it wasn’t for the Holy Spirit. So I want to give all the glory, honor and credit to God. I want to stress the importance of the work we’ve been called to do, and how we’ve provided a vehicle for our outside churches to do the work of the Gospel, by reaching and meeting people behind bars, treating them with dignity and respect and giving them a second chance.”

MB3 and a New Call to Prophetic Activism

As Dean enters this new chapter of his life, he will continue serving the needs of others, just as he always has. We are indeed saddened by the thought of not seeing Dean nearly as often, but we are grateful to be charged to carry on the work of Mission Behind Bars and Beyond. In fact, we feel called to grow this ministry to its full potential, realizing that Jesus needs even more hands and more feet in these times. We are committed to building on the remarkable legacy of Dean Bucalos as we journey forward together.

The foundation that Dean built has enabled us to call another remarkable person to lead MB3. Dr. D Anthony Everett, an ordained elder in the Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church, will begin his tenure as the new MB3 Executive Director on January 1, 2021. Dr. Everett currently serves as the lead pastor at University Circle United Methodist Church in Cleveland, OH. We will have more to announce about Dr. Everett’s acceptance of the role in our next newsletter. Please join the MB3 Board in extending the warmest of welcome to him as our new Executive Director.

The Dean Bucalos Gift Campaign for MB3

Many of us are searching for ways to honor the life and ministry of this remarkable man who has had such a profound impact on so many. It’s nearly impossible to think of adequate ways to do so. With Dean’s permission, we are inviting you to make a financial contribution to MB3 in Dean’s honor to help us in our efforts to grow Dean’s legacy and expand this important work. As a 501c-03 non-profit, all of your contributions to MB3 are tax-deductible. We hope you will join us as we strengthen the foundation Dean has worked so hard to establish. When you make your gift, please designate it for the “Dean Bucalos Gift Campaign for MB3.

[Click here to make an online donation or mail your check to:](#)

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