

Dear Pastor,

Your church is invited to be listed as a Greater Hartford Second Chance Church. Second Chance Churches welcome men and women released from prison (Returning Citizens) to be part of their church family and help them reintegrate into the larger community.

Second Chance Churches must agree to the five commitments described below and complete the enclosed Agreement Form. Then their information will be included on Urban Alliance's listing of Second Chance Churches which will be made available to Returning Citizens at physical hubs and appropriate online portals, and also through parole or probation officers.

**Five Commitments of Second Chance Churches:**

1. The Lead Pastor of the church wants Returning Citizens to attend the church: The Lead Pastor desires for the church to be a Second Chance Church.
2. The leaders and congregation want Returning Citizens to attend the church: Assimilation into the life of the church body is a critical need of a Returning Citizen. Therefore, it is essential that the leaders and congregation want Returning Citizens to attend the church and engage in the church community.
3. A Returning Citizen Mentor(s) is identified for your church: This person or persons will provide one-on-one help and support for Returning Citizens to:
  - Get plugged into the life of the body of the church. This will include, but not be limited to, the right discipleship plan.
  - Connect to needed programs and supports in the church and community. It is important for Returning Citizen Mentor(s) to be familiar with available community resources.
4. Discipleship opportunities for spiritual growth are available: It is important that the Returning Citizen is involved in a discipleship process beyond attending a weekend service. Sunday School, small groups, Celebrate Recovery, classes and one-on-one discipleship are examples of discipleship opportunities.
5. Safety policies or guidelines are in place to protect the congregation: It is a best practice for *all* churches to have safety policies and procedures in place. More information about this can be found in the enclosed booklet.

Once I receive a completed Second Chance Church Agreement Form, your church will be added to Urban Alliance's listing and additional information will be mailed to your church about community resources, the CT reentry process and Urban Alliance support available to your church.

Please contact me with any additional questions you may have. Thank you so much for your prayerful consideration.

Blessings,



Jessica Sanderson, LMFT., Ph.D  
Director of Initiatives  
Urban Alliance

## Position Description: Returning Citizen Mentor

A Returning Citizen Mentor will be the first and ongoing point of contact in your church for a Returning Citizen. This relationship with each Returning Citizen is meant to be one-on-one. It is a relational and hands-on way of offering support. The primary roles will be to help Returning Citizens to:

- Get plugged into the life of the body of the church. This will include, but not be limited to, the right discipleship plan.
- Provide a mix of help and accountability to acquire basic needs.

### Responsibilities:

1. Ensure that Returning Citizens are offered appropriate opportunities to get involved in your church's ongoing discipleship program(s), serving in ministry, fellowship, etc.
2. Help them integrate as necessary.
3. Follow up with parole or probation officers as needed and appropriate.
4. Help Returning Citizens overcome any problems in the church they might encounter with appropriate counsel and/or intervention.
5. Monitor their participation and attendance at church, and offer support and counsel as necessary. Consider weekly phone calls or meetings to offer encouragement and prayer.
6. Welcome their family members and assist them in connecting to your church family as necessary.
7. Be familiar with community resources that will help Returning Citizens rebuild their lives, and keep in contact with them to encourage their perseverance in accessing needed services.
8. Help as necessary with gaps in abilities and accessibility (e.g. computer skills, transportation etc.) by enlisting the help of congregants as available and appropriate.
9. Be familiar with goods, services and financial help that are accessible through the church and/or congregants and be the watch person to ensure the line is clear between compassionate help up and dependence creation. Keep the church and Returning Citizens focused on building relationships, spiritual growth and achieving goals to create increased life stability.
10. Encourage often, as accessing resources may be slow and frustrating.
11. Identify other congregants to distribute responsibilities of this position to and/or provide a same-gender contact.

## Second Chance Church Agreement Form

Please complete this form and provide the requested information. By completing this form your church is indicating its desire to be included in listings of local Second Chance Churches provided to probation officers, parole officers and community organizations.

**Mark each box to indicate that your church has completed the task:**

- Lead Pastor wants Returning Citizens in the church
- Leadership/congregation wants Returning Citizens in the church
- Returning Citizen Mentor(s) are in place. Please indicate Mentor name(s), email(s) and phone number(s)
  - Name \_\_\_\_\_
  - Email address \_\_\_\_\_
  - Phone \_\_\_\_\_
  
  - Name \_\_\_\_\_
  - Email address \_\_\_\_\_
  - Phone \_\_\_\_\_
- Spiritual discipleship options for Returning Citizens are identified and in place
- Safety policies and procedures are in place

Name of Church \_\_\_\_\_

Church Physical Address \_\_\_\_\_

Church Mailing Address (if different than above) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Days/Times of Services: \_\_\_\_\_

Lead Pastor Name \_\_\_\_\_

Lead Pastor Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Forms can be mailed or emailed to Jessica Sanderson, Urban Alliance's Director of Initiatives

**By email:** [jessica.sanderson@urbanalliance.com](mailto:jessica.sanderson@urbanalliance.com)

**By standard mail:** Urban Alliance, attn: Jessica Sanderson, 62 Village Street, East Hartford, CT 06108



**Become a Second Chance Church!**



## Reentry and the Christian Community

**The process of reentry is very complex.** Successful reentry into the community is dependent on a multi-pronged approach, including collaborations between state and municipal governments, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, families, residents and justice-involved people.

Reentry is a community-centric approach that relies on a variety of people and resources to function efficiently and effectively. For this reason, the body of Christ has a unique opportunity to support people reentering the community after incarceration. The idea of Christians supporting people who are incarcerated is not new. There are many scriptures that urge believers to support the prisoner:

*“I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me...I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”*  
**(Matthew 25:36, 40)**

*“For the Lord hears the needy and does not despise his own people who are prisoners.”* **(Psalm 69:33)**

*“Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.”***(Hebrews 13:3)**

*“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.”* **(Isaiah 61:1)**

If Jesus was on earth today, we would likely find Him in the prisons, talking and dining with criminals and outcasts. He would be there “to seek and to save the lost!” Jesus identifies strongly with the weak, the helpless and the outcast. He considers the way we treat them to be the way we treat Him. He wants us to identify with them as well, putting ourselves in their shoes and caring for them.

Because members of the body of Christ are His representatives on Earth, it is important for Christians to support people within prisons as well as those rebuilding their lives after a period of incarceration. This is where Second Chance Churches come in.



## What is a Second Chance Church?

**A Second Chance Church is a church that desires to show the love of Christ to people reentering the community after a period of incarceration by intentionally providing support and resources.**

The term “returning citizen” refers to an individual reentering society after a period of incarceration. Returning citizens are working to rebuild their lives and reintegrate into the community.

A Second Chance Church is one where the leaders and congregation want returning citizens to attend, engage in the church’s programming and build relationships with the congregation. Each Second Chance Church will identify a Returning Citizen Mentor who helps returning citizens get plugged into the life of the body of the church, engage in relationships and activities that foster spiritual growth, and offer a mix of help and accountability to acquire basic needs. By being a part

of a church community and receiving support from the Returning Citizen Mentor, returning citizens are offered a welcoming and safe place to grow, heal and experience the love of Christ.

A listing of Second Chance Churches will be made available to returning citizens at programs in the community where they receive services, and through their parole and probation officers. When a church becomes a Second Chance Church, their information is added to this listing.

This booklet serves as a guide to help Second Chance Church leaders grow in their knowledge about the process of reentry and how to most effectively meet the needs of this population.

## What is the Role of the Returning Citizen Mentor?

**The Returning Citizen Mentor is key to a successful Second Chance Church.** The role of the mentor is to help returning citizens get plugged the church and engage in discipleship. Additionally, the mentor will offer one-on-one relational support to returning citizens. This will involve helping them to learn about additional programs and services in the community that assist with needs such as food, housing, employment or counseling. While the government offers reentry support, acquisition of services and life change can be a frustrating and even discouraging process. While the church is not responsible for meeting all of the needs of the returning citizen, they do have the opportunity to come alongside them and offer encouragement, care and help as they rebuild their life.

It is important for the mentor to become familiar with the reentry process as well as community programs and resources so they are equipped to make helpful referrals.

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## Understanding the Needs of Second Chance Citizens

**The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world.** More than 650,000 inmates are released from U.S. prisons every year. That's almost 2,000 people every day. Recidivism refers to the tendency of a person who was previously incarcerated to reoffend. Nearly two-thirds of released prisoners are rearrested within three years. While this statistic is overwhelming, research suggests recidivism is less likely when a person reenters the community with a strong network of support.

The CT Reentry Collaborative describes goal areas for Connecticut's reentry system, each reflecting a reentry need that is often unmet. The following section describes needs of returning citizens and ways churches and community programs can help. A key role of the mentor is helping returning citizens connect to needed supports and services in the community:

- **Housing:** People leaving jail or prison often lack affordable housing. They need support with understanding and navigating their various housing options.
- **Employment:** Returning citizens often need help accessing job training and employment assistance programs. A critical component of successful reentry is obtaining gainful employment. Additionally, they may benefit from programs that build life skills, such as budgeting or financial literacy.
- **Mental Health and Addiction Treatment:** Mentors can ensure returning citizens are familiar with local mental health providers and help them access subsidized health insurance options. Many individuals in the prison system struggle with



mental illness or addiction. Without addressing these needs, successful reentry is very difficult.

- **Family and Social Support:** It is critical for returning citizens to build strong networks of supportive relationships. This includes strengthening relationships with family members, faith communities, friends and service providers.
- **Access to Services:** Mentors can improve people's access to basic community resources and services after release from jail or prison and ensure returning citizens have information about local services and the nearest Reentry Resource Center.
- **Reentry Transition Planning:** There is a need to continue to improve reentry transition planning for people leaving jail or prison. The planning and reentry process begins before a person is released from prison and continues for years after through support offered by government, non-profits and an informal network of supportive relationships.
- **Parole Case Management:** Mentors can facilitate strong relationship-building between the returning citizens and their parole or probation Officer, and that the returning citizen regularly attends required meetings.
- **Spiritual Support:** The most glaring gap in state-sponsored support is spiritual support. Given the heightened pressures of life during reintegration, spiritual support is of the essence. Whether this is supplied as mentorship or in small group settings, it is essential that the returning citizen be integrated into the church in one or both of these ways.

People rebuilding their lives after a period of incarceration have a variety of unique needs. When left unmet, these needs can create substantial obstacles that make the transition from prison to society very difficult.

## Creating a Welcoming and Safe Environment

**When engaging returning citizens into the church community it is first important for them to experience the church as warm, welcoming and respectful.** When this happens, it is likely they will feel emotionally safe and begin to trust the church and its members. As trust is built, opportunities for deeper connection emerge. For example, the returning citizen may feel more comfortable sharing their story, talking

more opening challenges or asking their mentor for help. They may also be more open to hearing other people's stories about how the Lord has impacted their life. People are more likely to thrive when they have supportive and caring relationships present in their lives. Relationships matter and enduring change takes place in relationships with God and other people.

### Suggested Articles on Creating a Welcoming Environment:

- **The Importance of a Welcoming Church Environment for Newcomers:** [christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2017/march/importance-of-welcoming-church-environment-for-newcomers.html](http://christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2017/march/importance-of-welcoming-church-environment-for-newcomers.html)
- **Creating Hospitable Environments of Welcome for Newcomers in Congregations:** [mccchurch.org/files/2017/03/CreatingHospitableEnvironmentsofWelcome.pdf](http://mccchurch.org/files/2017/03/CreatingHospitableEnvironmentsofWelcome.pdf)

**It is equally important for the church to create a physically and emotionally safe environment. It is a best practice for churches to have safety policies and procedures in place.** All too often churches neglect to develop safety policies and procedures until after an incident occurs. If your church does not have

these in place, links to articles that offer suggestions for creating them can be found below. While we do not want to be fearful or assume the worst, there is wisdom in being prepared and establishing protocol that protect both adults and children.

### Suggested Articles on Creating a Safe Environment:

- **Creating a Safe Church Policy:** [network.crcna.org/safe-church/creating-safe-church-policy](http://network.crcna.org/safe-church/creating-safe-church-policy)
- **Brotherhood Mutual Resources:** <https://www.brotherhoodmutual.com/resources/church-security>
- **Successful Church Assimilation of Sex Offenders:** [www.simmsshowerslaw.com/successful-church-assimilation-of-sex-offenders/](http://www.simmsshowerslaw.com/successful-church-assimilation-of-sex-offenders/)





## How Can Churches Support Returning Citizens?



While the parole or probation officer is intended to be the “hub” or “portal” for programs to meet the reintegration needs of returning citizens, there are a number of factors that can significantly impair the effectiveness of obtaining all the support needed for returning citizens to successfully reintegrate into society. There can be a gap between the support provided and the full set of their needs.

Issues that may potentially impact the effectiveness of CTDOC Correction, parole and community services come from both sides of the relationship between the parole officer (PO) and the returning citizen. On one side, the returning citizen may want as little as possible to do with their PO because they see them as law enforcement and someone with power to send them back to prison. On the other side, the caseloads for POs have increased significantly as more people are released from prison facilities each year and more are released under extended parole periods. These issues can be compounded by individual personalities as well.

So what can the Church do to effectively support returning citizens? While each individual is going to have different priorities of needs, the following should be used as guidance:

- Churches can help returning citizens learn about and connect to helpful resources and programs in the community.

- Churches can offer relationships that help guide, mentor and encourage the returning citizen as they navigate the reentry process.
- The mentor can reinforce and support a healthy working relationship between the returning citizen and their parole officer. Whenever possible, they can develop a working relationship with the returning citizen’s parole officer, and understand the agreed to supervision plan.
- The mentor can hold accountable the returning citizen in all aspects of the supervision plan being used by the parole officer.
- Dealing with government agencies and their affiliated organizations can be frustrating, lengthy and discouraging. Offering support and compassion as the returning citizen navigates these systems may be a critical component in preventing them from ceasing to pursue the support.
- Churches should welcome the returning citizens into as many aspects of the church community as possible. Small group settings are likely to be very significant for helping them integrate into the church community. They provide an opportunity for relationships to be established where discipleship can occur.

## What Are the Next Steps for Becoming a Second Chance Church?

Before becoming a Second Chance Church there are three things that will ensure your congregation is ready:

- Prepare your congregation
- Identify a Returning Citizen Mentor
- Identify a discipleship process or programming for returning citizens
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Complete the Second Chance Church Agreement form and return it to Urban Alliance. Once you complete this form your information will be included on the Second Chance Church flyer provided to local probation and

parole officers as well as community organization that offer services and support to returning citizens.

Forms can be mailed or emailed to Dr. Jessica Sanderson, Urban Alliance's Senior Director of Research and Strategy:

**By email:** [jessica.sanderson@urbanalliance.com](mailto:jessica.sanderson@urbanalliance.com)

**By standard mail:** Urban Alliance, attn: Jessica Sanderson, 62 Village Street, East Hartford, CT 06108

