



The Spiritual Side of Restorative Justice

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In my formative years when, among other things, I was exploring my still-young Christian faith, I frequently turned to music to help make sense of it all. This included a “Christian music phase” in my high school in college years, which coincided with a boom period for the genre.

During that era, one band that stood out for me was Five Iron Frenzy, a third wave ska band known for its upbeat and goofy antics (songs on their first album included a cover of “America” from the musical West Side Story and a ska version of the Doxology). However, they have also frequently touched on social justice issues, such as the United States’ oppression of Indigenous peoples, police violence, corporate greed, and the use of Jesus to justify exploitation and exclusion. The band broke up in 2003, but re-united in 2011 with an even greater commitment to naming injustice both within Christian circles and the wider world.

The band not only addresses such concerns through their music. Individual band members have also sought to embody the love of God in their individual lives and callings.

Leonor Ortega Till, saxophonist and band ambassador, has cultivated her own ministry through [Urban Skye](#), an organization based in Littleton, Colorado that “recruits, champions, and resources individuals who have the heart and gifting to serve pastorally, establishing faith communities in every day places.” People who feel a particular call to serve others in the area raise their own funds, but connect and find empowerment through the structure that Urban Skye provides.

Leonor’s current ministry involves serving as a chaplain at Denver Women’s Correctional Facility. In this role,

she leads Bible study, meets with inmates one-on-one, leads worship, and brings requested items of faith such as rosaries, prayer mats, and sacred texts to them. In her monthly newsletter, she has also shared stories of personal advocacy, such as assisting one inmate with applying to a work program and intervening when another endured verbal abuse from a correctional officer.

The work of transforming the prison system from one that is punitive and dehumanizing to one that helps restore and reform lives is multi-faceted and complex, and the arc of transformation is long. However, through the work of chaplains like Leonor, such change can and does occur on an individual basis.

You can learn more about Leonor’s ministry at [Urban Skye’s website](#). She is currently [raising funds to secure new Bibles](#) to share with the prison population.

You can also learn more about how the United Church of Christ National Setting [is advocating for prison reform](#) and [how it supports those who serve as chaplains](#).

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