



In Conversation: Tony Messenger

This past Fall, parishioners and friends of Grace Church read together *Profit and Punishment: How America Criminalizes the Poor in the Name of Justice*. The groundbreaking text, authored by Pulitzer Prize-winner, Tony Messenger highlights the stories of individuals crippled by modern-day debtors prisons.

After years in county and municipal courthouses, Messenger, a columnist for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch heard firsthand accounts of vulnerable people convicted of minor crimes and later assessed excessive fines and fees, usually collected to fund pensions of municipal employees.

Speaking from his home in Missouri, Messenger recognized the cycle of “pay-to-stay” as a human tragedy. These fines and fees, assessed by courts neglect to consider an individual’s ability to pay—disproportionately impacting low-income communities and communities of color.

US Senator Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii), and House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) have reintroduced legislation to create a justice system which will end the cycle of poverty and incarceration, creating a justice system.

According to available state data, the national court related debt total is at least \$26.7 billion.

Support and Love for Migrant Asylees

Since the Spring of 2022, thousands of migrants—many from Latin America and most from Venezuela— have arrived at Manhattan’s Port Authority Bus Terminal, sent from Texas after crossing over the southern border of the United States.

Through the Office of Faith and Community Partnerships at City Hall, Grace Church’s first donation went to one of the official drop-off locations in Brooklyn—The Bridge Multicultural Advocacy Project (MCP). This donation consisted of 15 fifty-gallon bags of clothing and toiletries.

Speaking with Grace Church’s Associate for Social Justice and Reconciliation, Mark Meyer Appel, Chairman of MCP, said “we are overwhelmed by the generosity of Grace Church and other houses of worship in Brooklyn who are making things a little easier for those in need of our help and support.”

In addition to clothing and toiletries, parishioners with legal and bilingual experience have donated their expertise to non-profit organizations providing direct support to migrant arrivals. Through Team TLC-NYC, an organization coordinating weekday volunteer opportunities at Port Authority, parishioners have also given of their time, filling orders of clothes and toiletries for individuals and families returning for support and connection to other services.

A portion of the monetary donations collected from Grace parishioners went to Team TLC-NYC to purchase food, toys for children, bus tickets and others needs of the asylum seekers. There continues to be an urgent need of clothing, winter coats, socks and shoes for men. To learn more, please contact our Associate Rector for Social Justice and Reconciliation, Rev. Leandra Lisa Lambert at llambert@gracebrooklyn.org.



Left to Right: Rev. Leandra Lisa Lambert, Bill O’Neill Ilze Theilmann, Organizer of Team TLC-NYC and Robin Ketchum after a shift filling clothing orders for migrants at Port Authority.



Rev. Leandra Lisa Lambert with Mark Meyer Appel, Chairman of The Bridge Multicultural Advocacy Project.

Grace on the Ground Rikers Island Day of Action

3 November 2022

Grace Church was represented at the vigil in front of City Hall calling for the release of inmates and closure of the detention complex after the 18th inmate died in 2022.

Grace on the Ground East Brooklyn Congregations

13 November 2022

A group from Grace attended the action at St. Paul’s Community Baptist Church to increase affordable housing; address mental health and public safety, make streets safe and repair schools.

Grace on the Ground Port Authority of New York

12 December 2022

Grace parishioners filled orders of clothing and toiletries for migrants returning to Port Authority for continued assistance after their arrival in New York City.

Holiday Cheer with Envision Freedom Fund

Formerly known as the Brooklyn Community Bail Fund, the renamed Envision Freedom Fund in partnership with Grace Church hosted a holiday community party for individuals and families recently released from immigrant detention.

The December 3rd party of festive music and delicious food served about 30 guests and included a letter-writing campaign to those currently held in detention to encourage them while separated from their loved ones during the holiday season.

Envision Freedom Fund works to secure the freedom of people impacted by the criminal legal and immigration systems, by paying immigration bonds as an act of resistance, helping more than 840 members gain their freedom.



Rosa Santana, Bond and Post-Release Director of Envision Freedom Fund addresses the attendees.



Holiday greeting cards sent to detainees.



Rob English of the Metro Industrial Area Foundation (Metro-IAF) and Lead Organizer of East Brooklyn Congregations with Carmen Daniel, a Nehemiah Homeowner and member of St. Paul's Community Baptist Church.

East Brooklyn Congregations Organizer speaks at Grace

As part of the community centered conversations, *Grace Forum* series, our Social Justice Ministry welcomed the East Brooklyn Congregations (EBC) Lead Organizer, Rob English. The October 30 gathering also included a delegation from St. Thomas Episcopal Church led by their Rector, The Rev. Sully Guillaume-Sam.

Mr. English's began his presentation with a short video clip of journalist Ted Koppel telling the story of EBC's work in the early 1980s to transform the East New York neighborhood of Brooklyn

by developing the Nehemiah Houses. This project created an estimated \$1.5 billion in wealth for for-time Black and Latino homeowners.

Rooted in the belief that organized people and organized money can bring about widespread change, EBC continues to push for affordable housing in New York. They have identified the former Creedmore Psychiatric Center in Queens as the site for 3200 affordable homes for the next generation of New Yorkers.

Want to learn more about our Ministry?
 Please contact our Associate Rector for Social Justice & Reconciliation, The Rev. Leandra Lisa Lambert at llambert@gracebrooklyn.org.

Remembering Rikers

The latest on the effort to close Rikers Island



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By the end of 2022, there were nineteen reported deaths on New York City's main detention complex, Rikers Island. The complex has seen multiple crises in recent years, leading lawyers representing detainees to sue for the appointment of a federal receiver. In November, a federal judge denied the request, leaving oversight to the City's Department of Corrections.

Grace Church has added its voice to the coalition calling for the investment in prevention by redirecting city funding to expand community-based mental health resources and affordable and supportive housing, reduction of incarcerations and closure of the complex.

According to Freedom Agenda, 90% of people held at Rikers have not been convicted—they are awaiting trial. Many are incarcerated because they cannot afford their bail, with over 1000 people awaiting trial for more than a year.