

The Rikers Reckoning

50 Years after Attica,
Grace talks Reform

During the Fall of 2021, parishioners engaged a curriculum developed to better understand the conditions of the ten jails on Rikers Island, New York City’s main detention complex.

The curriculum included Stanley Nelson’s Showtime documentary *Attica*, based on the 1971 prison uprising at the Attica Correctional Facility. At that time, inmates prepared a manifesto of demands centered on a desire for the dignity and justice due by right of their humanity.

As relatives and advocates calling for the closure of the detention complex have noted, there are parallels to the current situation at Rikers Island which led to the death of fifteen inmates during the year 2021.

Gathering in the North Room, after a presentation from Mother Leandra parishioners recollected where they were at the time of the 1971 uprising. Others shared recommendations of films related to criminal justice including the 1994 film *Against the Wall*, as well as *The Night Of*.

Parishioners expressed their desire to explore ways of supporting individuals and families impacted by the criminal justice system.



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Rev. Yolanda Johnson-Peterkin in conversation with Rev. Leandra Lisa Lambert and the Grace Church community.

Community Conversation on Criminal Justice Reform

On Sunday February 27th, Grace Church welcomed the Reverend Yolanda Johnson-Peterkin for the inaugural Grace Forum of community centered conversations. An ordained minister in the United Missionary Baptist Church, Rev. Johnson-Peterkin also works as a Chief of Housing and Community Activities for the New York Housing Authority, reunifying formerly incarcerated people with their families. Rev. Johnson also serves as the Co-Director of the Board for Women Community Justice Project (WCJA) leading criminal injustice reform through the gender-based lens.

In her opening remarks, Rev. Lambert shared that she and Rev. Johnson-Peterkin were meeting for the first time in person after two years of Zoom gatherings as part of a mentorship program for women of color in ministry through Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

Rev. Johnson-Peterkin helped give context to the challenges of reentry back into society which the formerly incarcerated experience. One pervasive challenge is overcoming assumptions about an individual’s justice history, without consideration for that individual’s personhood and the societal circumstances which led to their incarceration.

As her final word to the Grace community, Rev. Johnson-Peterkin spoke about a guiding principle which drives her life’s work: Keep hope alive. She encouraged the gathering to remember that despite the difficulties of addressing prison reform, God calls his people to pursue justice.

She believes that the hope of her office and the advocates pushing for justice will create stronger communities, new beginnings and ultimately close the detention centers on Rikers Island.

Grace on the Ground East Brooklyn Congregations

27 March 2022

Grace parishioners joined Queens Power as elected officials committed to addressing the lack of affordable housing, making healthcare accessible and improving the criminal justice system.

Grace on the Ground March for our Lives

11 June 2022

Grace parishioners participated in the movement dedicated to promoting civic engagement, education, and direct action to eliminate gun violence.

Grace on the Ground Brooklyn Pride Parade

11 June 2022

Along with other Episcopalians, Grace Church supported our Episcopal witness at the Brooklyn Pride Parade, along 5th Avenue in Park Slope, Brooklyn.

Inaugural Brooklyn Interfaith Breakfast

On Wednesday, June 15th, Borough President Antonio Reynoso hosted an inaugural interfaith breakfast for faith leaders of Brooklyn.

Meeting at Borough Hall, the gathering included remarks from the Deputy Borough President Diana Richardson and Pastor Zac Martin, Director of Faith Community Organizing in the Office of the Brooklyn Borough President.

Addressing the clergy, Borough President Reynoso underscored his commitment to reducing health disparities of maternal mortality and morbidity, which disproportionately affect black women in New York City. Other priorities for the administration include:

- Comprehensive planning for more housing;
- Addressing gun violence; and
- Combating Food Insecurity



Pastor Denese Hall, representing the 67th Precinct Clergy Council aka the GodSquad, Deputy Borough President Diana Richardson and Rev. Leandra Lambert



Rev. Leandra Lambert with Borough President, Antonio Reynoso

Bishops Lead on Gun Violence

Following the recent Supreme Court ruling on conceal carry laws, Bishops United Against Gun Violence, a network of nearly 100 Episcopal bishops, hosted a webinar for Episcopalians across the Church. The purpose of the June 28th call was to share what individuals and parishes can do locally to respond faithfully to gun violence.

Speakers included the Rt. Rev. Glenda Curry of the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama. A parish in her diocese -- St. Stephen's, Vestavia Hills--was the site of the June 16th shooting which killed two people and injured a third at a parish potluck. Another bishop, the Rt. Rev. Sean Rowe of the Episcopal Dioceses of Western New York & Northwestern Pennsylvania recalled the faithful response of his dioceses following the May 14th shooting at the Tops Friendly Markets store in Buffalo, NY.

There are a few resolutions going before the Episcopal Church's July General Convention in Baltimore, MD, calling for the regulation of untraceable ghost guns and for the investment in community violence intervention to prevent gun violence.

Looking Ahead

A Quick Look at What's Ahead

Fall 2022--

Social Justice & Reconciliation Discussion Book

Profit and Punishment: How America Criminalizes the Poor in the Name of Justice by Tony Messenger

2023--

Upstate NY Tour Abolitionist Trail

More Details to Come

2024--

Journey Along the Civil Rights Trail

More Details to Come



Suggested Summer Reads

Looking for something to read this summer? Here are a few recommendations:

All We Can Save: Truth, Courage and Solutions for the Climate Crisis
Eds. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson & Katharine K. Wilkinson

The Red Deal: Indigenous Action to Save our Earth
The Red Nation

Roe V. Wade: The Untold Story of the Landmark Supreme Court Decision that Made Abortion Legal
Marian Faux

Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America
Eds. Ibram X. Kendi & Keisha N. Blain