

THE STRUGGLE IS REAL SERIES!

How the Church can Understand Ways to Listen, Engage & form Relationships with Communities to address mass incarceration issues and their connection to poverty

Dialogue and Listening Forum with the PC (USA) Co-Moderator Rev. Gregory Bentley, other Church and Community Leaders & those formerly incarcerated

Panelist Bios

Rev. Gregory Bentley, Co-Moderator, PC (USA) Huntsville, AL in June 2020 joined Ruling Elder Elona Street-Stewart to become Co-Moderators of the 224th General Assembly. Rev. Bentley said, upon his election as Co-Moderator, that he is working toward the goals of building congregational vitality, dismantling structural racism, and eradicating systemic poverty. His work has extended beyond the walls of his church, having served as president of the Huntsville Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He is also past president of the [National Black Presbyterian Caucus](#). Rev. Bentley has also served on committees for the presbytery (the regional organization of congregations) and as commissioner to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Norris Henderson Founder & Executive Director, Voice of the Ex Offender (VOTE)/[Voters Organized to Educate](#), New Orleans LA. Norris is a former OSI Soros Justice Fellow and has had tremendous success impacting public policy and discourse about reentry, police accountability, public defense for poor and indigent people, and reforming the notorious Orleans Parish Prison (OPP), also known as the Orleans Justice Center (OJC). In 2018, Norris served as the statewide campaign director for the Unanimous Jury Coalition, a ballot campaign that ended non-unanimous juries, and thus Jim Crow's last stand in Louisiana. As someone who was wrongfully incarcerated for 27 years, Norris shares firsthand experience of racism and brutality of the criminal justice system with communities of color across Louisiana. He was a jailhouse lawyer, a co-founder of the Angola Special Civics Project, and a trailblazer for freeing other wrongfully convicted people prior to the inception of the Innocence Project. While incarcerated, Norris co-founded a hospice program and drafted a successful parole reform law for Lifers. Since his release in 2003 Norris has applied his 27 years of self-taught legal expertise and community organizing skills to several leadership positions including as Executive Director for Voice of the Ex-Offender. The organization was previously awarded a grant by Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People Committee.

Monica Jahner, Fair Chances Project Lansing, MI is a relentless advocate for people with a criminal offense. In 2018 Monica was appointed to the Governor's Task Force on Pre-Trial and Jail. In 2017, she won the Noam Chomsky Award for her work. Her advocacy began while she was incarcerated for 28 years. She founded Kids Need Moms which promotes quality visits between children and their mothers in prison. Upon release, she joined ARRO, a grassroots one-stop-shop reentry program working to eliminate barriers of reentry. She was later awarded a grant that funded Ban the Box legislation and brought Professor Michelle Alexander of the New Jim Crow book that opened the hearts and minds of Michigan Legislators. Monica earned a paralegal certificate, an associate degree in Criminal Justice, and a bachelor's degree in Behavioral Science during her incarceration. Fair Chances has previously been awarded a grant by the Presbyterian Church (USA) through the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People Committee.

Minister Chibueze Okorie, Church of the Gethsemane, Brooklyn, NY joined the Church of Gethsemane in 1991 in response to its Outreach Ministry and volunteered in many parts of its ministry for several years. He experienced a call to church leadership and attended the New York Theological Seminary where his ministry was validated. He is also a graduate of NYTS's Clinical Pastoral Education Program for Youth Chaplains. He was hired as the Minister of Evangelism and Director of Project Connect, the church's prison and re-entry program. He has received many citations and awards for his work in the field of Criminal Justice. Chibueze is also a resource to clergy and laity, throughout the NYC Presbytery who seek his help for people who are incarcerated and their families. Min. Okorie is ordained Commissioned Lay Pastor in the NYC Presbytery, a member of the Committee on Preparation for Lay Minister and a Presbytery delegate for the United Nations Committee for social Development. Currently, Minister Okorie is serving on the Executive Board of New York State Council of Churches.

Katie Talbot, Neighbor to Neighbor, Holyoke, MA - Katie is a lifelong resident of Western Mass. After her first incarceration, her eyes were open to the brokenness of the current system. Through her years as a member with Neighbor to Neighbor, since 2010, she has organized with the new majority to change the power structure with campaigns like Jobs Not Jails and stopping the pipeline in Holyoke. As the Holyoke Organizer, she is bringing her lived experience to strengthen the voice of Holyoke toward a just transition. Neighbor to Neighbor has previously been awarded a grant by the Presbyterian Church (USA) through the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People Committee for its Jobs Not Jails campaign.

Bonifacio Aleman, Health Equity Program Manager, LifeSpring Health Systems Louisville, KY

Bonifacio's professional focus is health equity and closing gaps in service delivery and programming to help address equity concerns in marginalized communities. As the Health Equity Program Manager for [LifeSpring Health Systems](#) in Southern Indiana, Bonifacio assists staff in developing culturally sensitive services and programs, particularly to people of color and other marginalized populations. Bonifacio has worked with a [coalition of people and organizations](#) in Kentucky over the past twelve years to restore the vote to Kentucky's disenfranchised folks, and has spoken at length about the impact of Kentucky's draconian civil rights restoration process on black and brown peoples, how we can all engage to address the root causes of mass incarceration, and how to build democracy in our work. Sent from my iPhone