



JOBS Coalition President
Rev. Stephen E. Tucker

D.C. CHURCHES BEWARE!

City legislation, policies and practices are pushing houses of worship, particularly African-American churches, out of the District of Columbia.

By Rev. Stephen E. Tucker

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MAKING STRIDES: JOBS COALITION ACCOMPLISHMENTS



While raising awareness of workforce challenges and potential barriers to employment, the JOBS Coalition and its members have combined their resources and industry expertise to achieve the following results:

- Built the Bellevue Resource Center, a program facility serving the hard-to-reach, hard-to-employ, and returning ex-offender populations. The Center was completed on September 30, 2003.
- Guided the creation of the Construction & Design Academy at Cardozo, providing District students access, training, and preparation for careers in the construction industry and trades after graduation. The Academy officially opened in September 2005. □



OH, HAPPY DAY! (From left) GCS Inc.'s Mike Sigal stands beside new grad Amilcar Gaitan as D.C. Apprenticeship Academy Manager Kavara McDonald proudly looks on.

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING PROGRAM CULTIVATES JOURNEYMAN ELECTRICIANS

Family members cheered and graduates smiled broadly during the 4th Annual D.C. Apprenticeship Academy Graduation ceremony, where 10 men completed 576 hours of classroom training over four years to receive papers to get their licenses as journeyman electricians.

By Arnesa A. Howell

“You overcame challenges to reach this great moment and you’re equipped with the knowledge and skills to continue learning,” said William Roberts, an electrical instructor for the D.C. Apprenticeship Academy.

During the program, registered apprentices received hands-on training in the classroom while working full-time in the construction trades. The graduates worked at companies including M.C. Dean, Hawkins Electric Inc. and A. Wash and Associates, a provider of electrical services.

“We are really proud of all of you and I wish you the best of luck,” said Kavara McDonald, manager of the D.C. Apprenticeship Acad-

emy. She also praised the graduates and the program’s instructors for all their “very hard” work to help the apprentices learn and succeed.

Food for Thought

Every story has a beginning, and Roberts shared with the graduates his career pathway while urging them to reach for and achieve their goals.

Roberts transitioned to a career in electrical construction following a layoff. He started at M.C. Dean in April 2006 as a nonlicensed electrical worker before acquiring his journeyman’s license the following year. Roberts received his master’s license in 2008, and quickly returned

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In recent years, a number of church institutions have relocated out of Washington, D.C., for reasons including lack of parking, giving way to new development, and the impact of gentrification, to name a few. Recently, New Commandment Baptist Church, located on what District officials identified as a “nuisance” block on Park Road in Northwest Washington, was not only pushed out by parking legislation, but was also forced to pay the city nearly \$300,000 in order to leave.

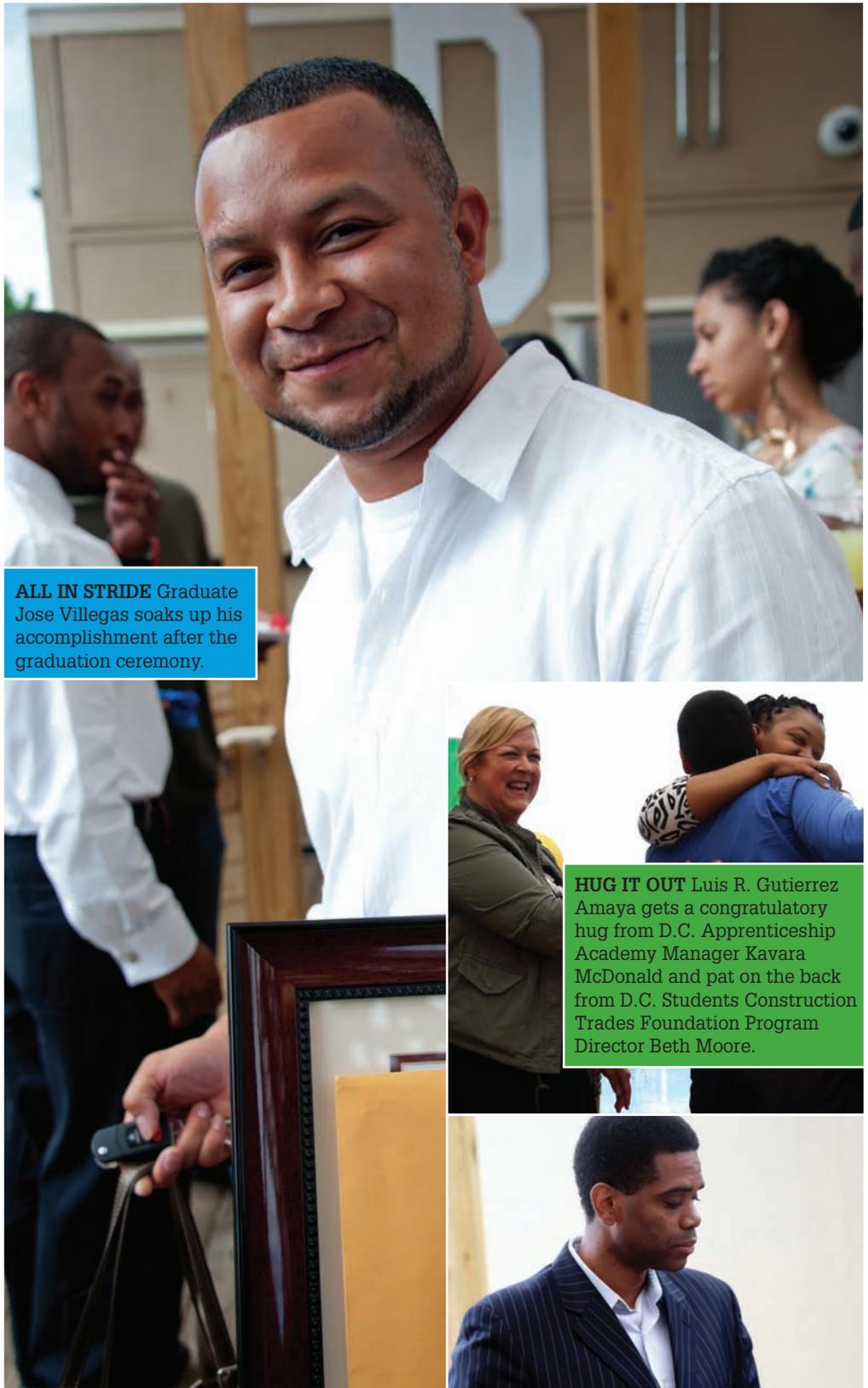
For decades, New Commandment Baptist Church, a small, inner-city institution, existed as an oasis on what was arguably the number one drug trafficking block in the city. Throughout its history of strong community service, the church and its nonprofit employment training entity, Jobs Partnership Greater Washington, worked on various projects to assist the Department of Employment Services, the Court Services Offender Supervision Agency, the Metropolitan Police Department and the United States Justice Department in addressing a myriad of social woes and poverty-related issues impacting area residents.

In 2010, the city awarded \$1.7 million in Community Development Block Grant funding to Jobs Partnership Greater Washington to build a job training center on the portion of the church’s property that served as its parking lot. The city released approximately \$300,000 of the \$1.7 million grant to Jobs Partnership, which applied those funds to costs for pre-development work on the construction site. Further grant disbursement was put on hold as Vincent C. Gray challenged Adrian Fenty in the mayoral election contest that year. The incoming Gray administration eliminated the funding, effectively terminating the city’s grant to Jobs Partnerships Greater Washington. The nonprofit had fully followed the letter and intent of the grant agreement, but it was cut off from the additional funds needed to complete the job training center project that would help revitalize the Park Road neighborhood.

Fast forward to 2013, after New Commandment Baptist Church has made the difficult decision to relocate outside D.C. Negotiations are underway to sell the existing property in order to purchase the alternate site, when attorneys advise that a restrictive covenant in that prior grant agreement stipulates the church cannot move from its Park Road location for 20 years.

New Commandment Baptist Church asks Council member Jim Graham (D) and Council Chairman Phil Mendelson (D) to intervene, but their appeals on behalf

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ALL IN STRIDE Graduate Jose Villegas soaks up his accomplishment after the graduation ceremony.

HUG IT OUT Luis R. Gutierrez Amaya gets a congratulatory hug from D.C. Apprenticeship Academy Manager Kavara McDonald and pat on the back from D.C. Students Construction Trades Foundation Program Director Beth Moore.

WISE GUY Electrical Instructor William Roberts shares words of wisdom with the Class of 2013.

Apprenticeship Graduation *Continued from page 1* to inform his employer of his updated status.

Word of his new ranking spread throughout the company, and Roberts soon realized that having a master’s license had significance and would open the door to opportunity.

The inspirational lesson in his story: “Set goals and never stop growing.”

Roberts also offered this motivational nug-

get to the new graduates: challenge yourself to continue learning, be the best at your craft and position yourself for mentorship. □



COURTESY OFFICE OF REP. DANNY K. DAVIS

INCARCERATION AND FAMILIES: THE YOUNGEST VICTIMS

By Arnesa A. Howell

The numbers are staggering: More than 2 million people are incarcerated in the United States, with some 700,000 of them returning home each year. Although every inmate's story is different, many share one life experience: parenthood.

"Practically all of these people have children," said Rep. Danny K. Davis (D-Ill.) as he compounded the numbers of returning citizens expected to rejoin their communities over the decades.

For the congressman who has spent much of his political career dedicated to ex-offender issues – from legislation like the Second Chance Act aimed at helping returning citizens transition back into their communities, to outreach to inmates of Cook County jail in his jurisdiction of the 7th District of Illinois – it's no surprise that a discussion on child welfare and incarceration is a top priority.

"More children are living with someone outside their natural parents than anywhere in the country," Davis said of his district.

Davis brought this issue to the forefront at a recent panel discussion, "What's the Impact on Children of Incarcerated Parents?" that he hosted Sept. 30 in Washington, D.C. as part of the 2013

Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's Annual Legislative Conference.

Child Left Behind

The impact, agreed panelists, is significant.

Divine Pryor, executive director of the Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions – a think tank founded and run by the formerly incarcerated and housed in Brooklyn's Medgar Evers College – framed the issue frankly: "We are in a crisis of epic proportion. We are in a crisis so dire, that our very future is at stake."

According to Pryor, the fastest-growing segment of the prison population is women – women of color and black women specifically – a trend that has a devastating impact on the family unit.

"When you incarcerate a woman, you incarcerate the entire family because it's more than likely that the woman is the caregiver – the glue that's holding the family together," he told the audience, which included National CARES Mentoring Movement Founder Susan Taylor as well as scholar and writer Michael Eric Dyson.

That leaves the children without a mother, and thus more susceptible to emotional trauma that

can lead them down the same pathway to prison.

The statistics tell the story.

"Children of incarcerated parents are nine times more likely themselves to be incarcerated," explained Pryor, who between the ages of 18 and 28 was behind bars and away from his two children.

While many of these kids are left with a custodial parent, grandparents, aunts and uncles, or other relatives to be cared for when a parent is in prison, others have a darker journey. When there is no family to rear them or properly take care of them, these children end up in the foster care system.

"Legislatively, when a child is in the foster care system and they lose contact with the parent 15 out of the last 22 months, then the foster care system is required by law to petition for loss of parental rights," he said, adding that the system has no responsibility or obligation to take children to visit their parents.

"Restoration of parental rights is nearly impossible," Pryor noted, highlighting the damage the criminal punishment system is causing "our community."

The S-Factor

That community includes those left behind – often family – to pick up the pieces after a loved one goes to prison. And they often face a daunting set of challenges, including financial issues and emotional trauma.

"Incarceration puts a great strain on grandparents and other extended family members of children of incarcerated parents, especially in the black community where our extended families often play a [more] significant role in raising children than is common in the mainstream," said Lester Barclay, senior partner in the law firm The Barclay Law Group in Chicago, Ill.

According to Barclay, whose firm represents children of incarcerated parents who find themselves in the criminal justice system, the separation factor between parent and child can have long-term impact on many levels.

The grandparents often carry with them a stigma of shame for the family circumstances, he said, and sometimes "shoulder the blame" for their adult children's problems as a reflection of their parenting. Consequently, grandparents isolate themselves from people and resources that might be able to help them, he added. Meanwhile, a custodial parent may face money issues because the incarcerated parent can't provide financial assistance.

That strain extends to the children as well.

They face "social drama" from peers in school and the neighborhood, teasing that can strain the relationship with the incarcerated parent, Barclay said. Also, he said they face the loss of childhood as the custodial parent turns to them for "emotional support" or urges them to step up as "little adults." A child can suffer from loneliness and face the "dramas" caused by

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JOBS Coalition Pathways

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The *JOBS Coalition Pathways* is the exclusive property of the JOBS Coalition, 633 Park Road, NW, Washington, D.C. 20010; 202-726-7400. *JOBS Coalition Pathways* is dedicated to disseminating information that will help strengthen the city's apprenticeship training and job placement programs, broadening the scope to reach the young, the underserved, the unemployed and the returning ex-offender. *JOBS Coalition Pathways* is published by the JOBS Coalition.

Tucker OpEd *Continued from page 2*
of the church are rebuffed. The city refuses to remove the restrictive covenant unless the church reimburses the \$300,000 initially disbursed for the job training center project. The church's nonprofit entity had applied those funds in good faith toward pre-construction costs at the start of the grant agreement. Should the city then demand reimbursement of funds from the grant, which it later eliminated? Certainly, in the case of New Commandment Baptist Church, and perhaps other church institutions, the city's actions amount to extortion rather than sound policy for urban renewal. □

Rev. Stephen E. Tucker is president of the JOBS Coalition and senior pastor of New Commandment Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.

JOBS COALITION MISSION STATEMENT

We will work together to develop a long-term strategy that creates an environment where aspiring District residents will have unprecedented opportunity to succeed. We strive to create a fair and open system, supported by government, industry, employers and the education and faith-based communities, which seeks to properly train today's apprentices while making an unparalleled commitment to educating students and others not yet in the workforce.

Danny Davis *Continued from page 3*
the distance and lack of communication from the incarcerated parent.

Ultimately, the stressors from having an incarcerated parent shake the entire family to its core, with the children at highest risk of collateral damage. While there's no final answer on this matter, child welfare experts said that having mental health professionals trained to deal with these unique family circumstances is key, as well as having culturally diverse resources available and implementing program policies that address the special needs of working with children of color.

The road these families travel is not an easy one, something "Mommie Activist" Karen Garrison, who kept the faith when her sons were incarcerated, knows firsthand. Said Garrison: "We never gave up fighting because you've always got hope, and the hope's in you." □

JOBS COALITION PROMISES

- Provide opportunities for District residents to secure gainful employment.
- Remove barriers that prevent meaningful employment.
- Provide educational and training opportunities for all District residents interested in pursuing careers in various industries and trades.
- Work toward the creation of a comprehensive, fair, and more open system of training and hiring the underserved, unemployed, and returning ex-offenders.
- Ensure that the training and educational skills being taught are relevant to the job market of today and tomorrow.
- Engage elected and appointed officials to support legislation and maintain appropriate oversight to ensure gainful employment for District residents, including the underserved, unemployed, and returning ex-offenders.

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