



MEDIA ADVISORY
September 20, 2010

To schedule interviews and other media requests,
Contact: Dr. Reverend Edward B. Smart, Pastor
(518) 463-8779 or (518) 465-9339

GWU the Center OPEN HOUSE SET FOR SEPT. 25

Children's activities, information fair and guided tours from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

ALBANY, N.Y. – Israel Community Services Program, Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit subsidiary of “First” Israel A.M.E. Church invites you to the open house and ribbon cutting ceremony for GWU the Center, a new faith-based community center located at the confluence of six neighborhoods in downtown Albany.

RSVP today at <http://gwuopenhouse.eventbrite.com/>

Sign up for a guided tour, parade through an education and information fair with local nonprofits, government agencies and businesses, and bring your children! There will be several children's activities available, including a bounce house, free cotton candy and popcorn, and games, both indoor and outdoor.

WHEN: September 25, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

WHERE: 274 Washington Avenue (former Y Building), Albany, New York

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS: Beginning at 10 a.m., a greeting and ribbon cutting will be followed by an unveiling of new awning sign, guided tours, children's games, information fair.

ABOUT GWU The Center:

GWU the Center is a 71,000-square-foot facility and the home for several programs that care and nurture the Capital Region, including a place for teens to meet, a Saturday night gang prevention program, Senior basketball night on Fridays, and the Black & Latino Achievers Program.

The facility is also currently in use as a site where the Albany District Attorney's Office sends people to work off community service hours, the Children's Place Summer Day Camp, the Smart Start Employment Readiness program, and a new Capital Region program known as Career Pathways that focuses on recruitment, credentialing, training and placement of young adults in college-connected careers.

The community center includes two gymnasiums that take up more than 12,000-square-feet; a 1,000-square-foot furnished meeting space, indoor track located in the basement, and several offices.

We're working with local organizations and businesses to find uses for other parts of the building. Current spaces available for lease/renovation include a 5,150-square-foot Olympic size pool along with a whirlpool and storage area, a 2,886-square-foot area that was once used as a pool, 3,040-square-foot of racquetball courts, and several offices/meeting spaces.

For general inquiries, building representatives can be reached at (518) 813-9733 between 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

ABOUT “FIRST” ISRAEL A.M.E. CHURCH:

Located at 381 Hamilton Street, First Israel African Methodist Episcopal Church serves the diverse populations within the Capital District through spiritual, religious, community and educational programs.

Israel A.M.E. Church has always been active in the community. The Albany Chapter of the NAACP was founded at the Church. In 1989, the church became a part of an urban church cluster ministering to the inner city. These five churches – Emmanuel Baptist, First Presbyterian, Israel AME, Trinity United Methodist, and Westminster Presbyterian – comprise the FOCUS churches. These FOCUS churches reach out to the homeless, the poor and the needy with food, lodging and educational programs.

Current ministries include the Grace T. Green Library, soup kitchen and food pantry, historical preservation, after-school tutoring, and several others that concentrate on such areas as homeownership, higher education scholarships, family life, wellness, overseas, media, missionary, hospitality, and social action.

Founded in 1809, the history of Israel A.M.E Church parallels that of the National A.M.E. Church. People of African descent were attending the Methodist Episcopal Church on State Street in Albany, NY when they were asked to pay pew taxes. They left the Church and formed the Free African Society that evolved into Israel A.M.E Church.

The present church, designed and built in 1854 by Reverend Thomas Jackson, served as a station on the Underground Railroad during the Civil War. Abolitionists, including Frederick Douglass visited Israel Church. Other historic facts include that the church served as a stop on the underground railroad and how Harriet Tubman slept on the east wall of the basement and several areas in the church that were hiding places for slaves. The church is on the State Education Department’s Historic Register as the oldest black church in upstate New York.

For more on the church’s history, services and events, visit www.first-israel-ame.org.