

## Living A Life Of Passion And Purpose For The World To See

As the producer and founder of “Godward” featured on NBBTA Radio, it’s easy to see that Rev. Jackie O’Neal is committed to sharing the Gospel message with potentially thousands of listeners around the world.

O’Neal balances ministry, family and business life with grace and energy. Indeed, her ability to competently juggle the multiple activities in her life can be envied by most other busy women. A formidable woman at age 49, she has managed to accomplish more than most women may even imagine. An ordained Old Catholic priest, college professor, journalist and radio producer, she describes herself as “hyper.”

“My journey to the priesthood taught me to realize how important it is to be humble and realize our own limitations,” she said. In 2003, applications were filed and a committee was formed at The Historic Church of the Ascension in Atlantic City, N.J., which catapulted O’Neal to make history as the only woman ever to be nominated to the priesthood at The Church of the Ascension. “It was truly humbling, and I quickly learned what I needed to do to survive in all male culture- maintain a sense of humor and not take myself too seriously,” she said. She was ordained in 2007, and completed a Masters degree in Sacred Theology through Agape of Jesus seminary. After ordination, she established her own outreach ministry and continued teaching college. “I literally went from the classroom to the altar during the week and often let my students know they were being dismissed since I could not keep God waiting. They loved it, “ she said.

She began to do religious radio in the form of spiritual talks, Bible Study and teachings on Christian morality. In 2007, she her program was nominated for The People’s Choice Podcast Award in the categories of religion and inspiration. “I became inspired by my course work in Sacred Theology, and so I began developing content for segments,” she said.

O’Neal said writing came naturally to her as a result of having maintained a continued correspondence with relatives in Argentina as a child. “My family migrated to the States when I was five,” she said. Her writing career took off in college. She received the prestigious Blanche Williams Colton Fellowship from the Hunter College English Department. “The fellowship not only provided income, but helped me realize that I could earn a living as a writer. It was an important confirmation of my talent,” she said.

Later, she was accepted at Sarah Lawrence College, home to one of the country’s finest writing programs. She completed an M.F.A. in Fiction and Poetry. “Quite a few doors swung open once I finished the program. They still do,” she said. She began teaching writing at the college level, and worked as a freelance journalist for many years. O’Neal writes a weekly charity column for Bella Online, the second largest women’s site in the world. “I have a drive to inform the public about reputable charities and also raise awareness about causes close to my heart,” she said. She specializes in issues affecting women, children, and non-profits that promote causes related to people of color and those in the developing world.

Because O’Neal came from a background in theatre arts and worked as an actress in multiple media formats, she has a special knack for improvising in last minute situations in business, ministry and family life. “I worked closely with the Priest-in-charge of my parish, and found he often allowed me little time to prepare sermons and special devotions and events. The work ethic I developed in acting gave me confidence to follow-through, but more importantly God’s grace was with me during those hectic times,” she explained.

O’Neal began studying acting at The American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York City, where she grew up. At 19, she was already a professional actress appearing in commercials for high-profile clients like Morton Salt, Ocean Spray and Revlon, among others. She also appeared on “Sesame Street,” and films such as Woody Allen’s Radio Days. “My scene ended up on the cutting room floor,” she laughingly said. O’Neal wanted to pursue other endeavors, and so she left acting after twelve years. She later returned to the theatre as a dramatist, writing and producing six plays at The New Federal Theatre under the supervision of the renowned playwright, Ed Bullins. “One of my teachers, Ruben Santiago, once told me the theatre bug was well embedded in me,” she said.

Her family life includes having raised four sons ages 19-30 in a second marriage and blended family. She has been married to Mason O’Neal for ten years. “I married a champion,” she said. Mason O’Neal is a Track and Field World Record Holder and retired N.Y.C. Child Abuse Investigator.

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