**Gethsemane welcomes new Pastor**

**Mary-Elizabeth Fitzgerald, Director of Community Life**

There is much rejoicing at the appointment of **Rev. Elizabeth Alexander** as Gethsemane’s new Pastor.

Rev. Alexander, more affectionately known as Liz, is a graduate of Union Theological Seminary and served as the Director of Church and Family Ministries for five years at The Riverside Church, Manhattan. Before entering seminary, Liz pursued a career in Early Childhood and Special Education. She is the mother of two adult children, Scott and Dawn.

An ardent supporter of many social justice issues, Liz is a member of the Presbytery’s Council on Witness to Society and the World and of Presbyterian Welcome. Liz is a member of Brooklyn Bridges, a Park Slope organization formed just after the 9-11 attacks to show support for the many families and individuals who have suffered reprisals since that time. She opened up Gethsemane to a forum sponsored by Brooklyn Bridges on February 10 on the detainees of Middle Eastern and South Asian descent. Gethsemane also hosted a forum on the Rockefeller Drug Laws on March 6 (see article).

The congregation is greatly heartened by Rev. Alexander’s collaboration with Park Slope Pastors of various denominations, her warm and wise pastoral leadership and her forward looking vision for Gethsemane.

The Congregation is indeed grateful for Rev. Alexander’s pastoral and administrative leadership, her spirit of collaboration, her passion for social justice issues and her spirit of openness.

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**Theatre at Gethsemane**

Brooklyn Family Theatre at The Church of Gethsemane premiered Friday, April 12 with the hit musical Godspell, running through May 5. Godspell’s music and lyrics are by Stephen Schwartz who also wrote Pippin and Pocahontas. Godspell featured a teen and college-age cast of ten NYC performers and musicians (pictured) largely from the neighborhood and Brooklyn. The Brooklyn critics called this new production of Godspell “divine inspiration” and “vibrant, compelling, and a lot of fun.” The theatre’s new musical production of Alice in Wonderland auditions May 28, and will open July 12. Auditions are open to all, ages 12 and over; call 718 670-7205 for information.

The theatre is dedicated to the production of affordable, family-appropriate plays and musicals in Park Slope, Brooklyn. The theatre believes that good plays and musicals are created organically with the performers, and that theatre should enlighten, ask questions, and lift the human spirit.

Gethsemane member Phill Greenland heads the program. The theatre is a community outreach program of the church, with a full fifty percent of the box office going to support mission at The Church of Gethsemane. Alice in Wonderland runs weekends from July 12 to August 4. All performances are appropriate for ages 5 and up; general admission is $12 for all ages. Call 718 670-7205 for reservations and information.
Letter from the Pastor, Rev. Liz Alexander

Dear Members and Friends of the Church of Gethsemane,

As we celebrate this past Easter season, we shout Alleluia and rejoice that in the midst of death we find new life. We praise God for our many blessings, and send thanks to all who have supported us with their gifts and prayers.

As you can see, we have expanded our Liberation Voices Newsletter. We want to share what is happening in our church building and in our ministry beyond. Our church family is not only made up of members of our congregation who attend worship with us on Sunday morning. They also include over thirty members who are in prison throughout the state of New York.

Members of the Church of Gethsemane who are in prison join through a membership class of our Project Connect program. In addition, over the last year we have baptized nearly one hundred adults and infants in prison through our chaplain, Rev. Alyce Rudden. Our Minister of Evangelism, Chibueze Okorie and other members of our congregation visit prisons monthly to talk about our ministry at Gethsemane and to proclaim the power of God’s love. In addition we write letters to those in prison.

On Palm Sunday, three new members from our Park Slope, Brooklyn neighborhood joined our church. It was a joyous occasion as the church welcomed Rosamund and John Lo Sasso and their daughter Taina, and Phillip Greenland into our congregation.

Rosamund and John are both teachers. Rosamund teaches Special Education and John is a dean, English teacher and basketball coach at John Jay College. Phil is the co-director/producer of our new theater program, the Park Slope Family Theater at The Church of Gethsemane. He also teaches drama and piano.

Several other neighborhood persons have joined us for special services and events (Thanksgiving Dinner, a Christmas Eve Service for families with children, a Good Friday Service in “the Garden of Gethsemane,” and our Easter Service and Pancake Breakfast), and recent forums on The Rockefeller Drug Laws and concerns related to the round-up and detention of some of our Arab and South Asian neighbors. On April 28 at 10 AM we will be hosting the Journey of Hope, a program on the death penalty.

We want everyone to know about the Church of Gethsemane and our unique and inclusive congregation of prisoners, ex-prisoners, their families, neighborhood persons, and those who are in solidarity with those who are marginalized. All families have been drawn closer together over these last few months, and our church family is no exception. As we reflect upon the events of September 11 and the after affects, we are reminded of how important our message of love for all God’s children is in our world today. We pray for peace and greater understanding among all peoples.

Blessings,
Liz

Garden of Gethsemane

On April 14, Ellen Kirby, from the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, spoke with members of the Church of Gethsemane’s Garden Committee about ways to improve our garden. Ellen is the Director of GreenBridge and currently serves as the President of the American Community Gardening Association. She provided the congregation with valuable information and great ideas.

Members of the committee will implement a plan to create and maintain a garden that will provide space reflective of both the sacred and recreational aspects of nature. Members of the church and the greater community will be invited to share in the care and beauty of the Garden of Gethsemane.
Deacon Gail Haynes passed away December 13, 2001. We want to remember and celebrate her life. At a presentation of “Breaking Silence” at Hunter College in NYC, Gail Haynes wrote this note alongside one of her poems, which she read that night:

“To Debbie. Sometimes we got angry at each other, but we always loved each other. I miss you. Call me sometime. Love Gail!”

As was usually the case, Gail could sum up in a few words something that would take me many more words to articulate. Also as many people at the Church of Gethsemane know, Gail and I spent quite a bit of time arguing with each other on various topics in different settings. But Gail was right: we loved each other. Well not initially. I first knew Gail through her three children: Altovise, Nikki, and Willie, who were a part of the Youth Group I worked with at the Church of Gethsemane in the Fall of 1990. Gail became a member of the Church of Gethsemane in 1988. As a lay leader, usher, or as a Project Connect writer, Gail was actively involved at the Church of Gethsemane. In 1998, she became a deacon. For their twentieth wedding anniversary, Gail and Orlando renewed their marriage vows. Gail also regularly attended and participated in the Mothers in Prison, Children in Crisis rallies sponsored by JusticeWorks Community and the Church of Gethsemane. Gail loved children. I can still hear her calling my nine year-old son, “Luke Baby”. Gail taught me many things, and in spite of our different life experiences, we grew to understand what love and respect for each other meant. Gail was headstrong, stubborn, and poetic; I miss Gail, and I’m thankful for the memory I have of her smiling face.

**Why Won’t You Touch Me?** - Gail Haynes

Why won’t you touch me?  
I wash twice a day,  
And like you I get on my knees  
Every night to pray.

Why won’t you touch me?  
Is it the color of my skin?  
Or because I am fat  
And you are thin?

Why won’t you touch me?  
I see your bitterness, I see your scorn.  
You wonder why I was born.  
Because God chose to let me.  
Like he did you.  
Hoping we would get along.

Why won’t you touch me?  
Because you cannot  
Because you have no heart  
And your mind has gone to rot  
If you cannot touch me because I  
Have a disease that you fear,  
Then let me touch you  
With these words.

Do not look upon me  
As a person with a deadly illness.  
Look at me as one who must endure  
Ignorance and prejudice  
One on a quest to tell the world  
That Jesus never left.

That he touches me without fear.  
He touches me with love.  
And it doesn’t matter if you have AIDS  
Or who you are, if you want to be  
Saved from the empty cage.

So let us begin to touch one another  
Through God’s love.  
Like the angels  
Above

**Red or White?** - Gail Haynes

Someone once asked me  
Why I wore a white flower  
On Mother’s Day.

So I replied,  
“Because my mother’s gone away, forever and a day.”

They asked me again, and I replied  
As the tears flowed down my face  
“It’s easier to say that my mother’s dead  
Than to tell the other children  
That she’s in jail  
Because of the life she’s led.”

Why do I wear a white flower?  
Because society would rather  
Break my heart,  
By keeping me and my mother apart  
Than to find another way.  
Than to find a new way.
Words from the Minister of Evangelism: Chibueze Okorie

The Church of Gethsemane, a Presbyterian community, is where I have witnessed the beginning of many faith journeys. Gethsemane is a community of faith where all are welcomed despite their past and history. It is also a neighborhood congregation where people feel welcomed to worship with one another regardless of who they are. I was welcomed in Gethsemane with love and compassion, which enabled me to start on my faith journey. My experience in prayer has always lead me to the highest expectations. My record as an ex-offender did not stop my seeking for transformations and the ability to reach out to minister to those trapped in the system. The best starting point is to let God in your life, expect great miracles to happen through you, get rehabilitated, get involved in any educational program that will be beneficial to you upon your release, and be humble and strong.

As I continued to get more involved in the prisoner outreach through visiting and coordinating our Membership Correspondence Course designed for prisoners, I can see the need to do more to help prisoners, ex-prisoners, and those who are willing to turn their lives around. Some prisoners were completely left behind by family members, friends, and society.

The majority of ex-prisoners are rearrested after a period of time. Something is not working, and it's a big problem facing families. All churches, ministers, families, groups and agencies should start to confront the issues that hinder ex-offender's abilities to cope within the society upon their release. State, city and parole board officials should create jobs and provide affordable shelter for the released ex-offenders when they are released. This would make life a little easier after a long time in prison.

Once a month, Gethsemane's Project Connect volunteers go to prison to speak to the men and women behind bars telling them about God and our programs. As we sit and listen, we hear many stories that need attention from the public including how remorseful they are, and the need for rehabilitation. Project Connect volunteers share their prison stories within the congregation and the community. We hear the voices of the children of incarcerated mothers hoping to be reunited, and we hear the voices of taxpayers, lamenting for alternatives. Every Sunday we read letters from members of our Project Connect who are in prison. Their voices contribute to our ministry for the imprisoned, because we believe that people can change.

We hope that those of you who are receiving this newsletter in prison will please visit Gethsemane when you're released and hear the stories of other ex-prisoners who have been there. Come and get involved in our wonderful ministry for the imprisoned, and join us in building a community of faith where all are welcomed. Please join us in our prayer for peace, freedom, and justice.

A report on Project Connect by Elder Louis Miner

At least once a month, members of the Church of Gethsemane join the Minister of Evangelism, Chibueze Okorie, in visiting Riker's Island or another nearby prison to raise the spirits of the prisoners, to share our concern for their welfare and tell them about our unique church. Here is an example of one of our typical visits.

On Tuesday, the 19th of February, our pastor—Rev. Liz Alexander, Minister of Evangelism—Chibueze Okorie, and I had the privilege to visit with a group of women prisoners at Riker's Island. The section we went to was called Sprung, and is where the prisoners wait to go before a judge for sentencing, bail determination, or release.

We had the joy of meeting with a young woman who had been baptized through our church by our Presbyterian chaplain, Rev. Alyce Ruddin. This woman was on her way to an upstate prison, and was so happy to meet us. She showed us the Bible we gave her at her baptism and told us she wanted to start our membership course as soon as she got settled in her new prison. When we told her members of our church would write to her, she was surprised and could hardly believe us.

We each spoke with the women telling them that they were not alone— that we cared about them, and most of all God cares about them. We gave copies of our last Liberation Voices newsletter, and information about The Church Of Gethsemane. We prayed with them and listened to their stories about their lives.

The next day, the 20th of February, Minister Okorie and I went to the Queens Detention Center to meet and speak with 2 male prisoners who would be released in a few days. They were both members of The Church of Gethsemane through Project Connect. I cannot express the excitement and child-like joy that these men showed, knowing they would be back in the community. It was wonderful to see their faces light up when we told them we were from The Church Of Gethsemane. We invited them to join us soon in worship, and offered to help them with some food and clothing.

At the Church of Gethsemane, we hold on to the vision that people can change, and we offer spiritual guidance within a community that considers people of every background to be part of our church family. I am proud to be an Elder of this congregation, and know that we are doing God's work and following the teachings of God's son, Jesus Christ.

Every time I go to the prison I feel that we have helped someone. Please join us in this important ministry. Call the church if you can volunteer to come with us.
The only reason many individuals feel forgotten in prison is because they want to be forgotten. Over a period of time the long-term effects of prison does something to you. You begin to lose some of the attributes you displayed in society, and around your loved ones, such as: Love, your relationship in terms of marriage, responsibility, respect and so forth. You start to display anti-social behavior, cold-heartedness, and in some cases, violence. This happens due to the way you begin to think which affects your behavior. In the long run it's all about your survival which leads you to become selfish only thinking about yourself. Many times you are degraded, demoralized, and dehumanized. But you must never lose your humanity as a man or human being. I have seen men give that up also, only to become someone else's plaything.

No matter what you did in life to be incarcerated, no matter if it was the prettiest or worst crime. People in today's society are stereotypical. When the name prisoner, inmate or convict is mentioned they automatically take a step back and watch your from the corner of their eyes. When people don't know a person they start to assume never knowing or understanding the circumstances which led up to that person's imprisonment.

I have seen hundreds of families set their feet upon the path that really goes somewhere: have seen the most impossible domestic situations righted; feuds and bitterness of all sorts wiped out. I have seen men come out of prison and asylums to resume a vital place in the lives of their families and communities. There is scarcely any form of trouble and misery that has not been overcome amongst us.

Willie Adams

I sit around and see these young children coming into the prison system these days. It's really sad. I see 16 and 17-year-old children with life bides. That's not until they turn 21 or 35. It's life down here. Lifers don't get paroled. So they are destined to die. Because of something they did when they were children. Where was the mother or the father?

If we continue to sit back while these family structures continue to break down. Prison and jails are the only future for many of us. It's just sad.

I'm a prime product of the system too. But I know that there is an answer to this problem.

Jesus said, "to love one another", John 13:34. when we actually learn to love one another; we take time to actually listen to the real problems. Misdirection, a breakdown of the family structure, a body of politically voiceless people, and a society that does not value individuals.

Ok there is an answer... "Learn to love one another." We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers.

Frank Green

I am overcome with great sense of love for you all. I am more than ready to be a family member of Gethsemane. But, how can I make a positive contribution to the Church. Believe you me, that when we meet out in the free world, I will still have the letter and cards you all sent to me. My God has not forgotten me. I was just looking through a wrong pair of eyes all this time, but now my vision has been corrected.

Jose Velez

I pray to the Lord God spirk of Life, Light and Love within me, that this year will be beneficial to me and others who wish to contribute to Universal Welfare, in that WE all support freedom from want, freedom from fear, freedom of expression and social-political justice. May our character be of noble heart and our speech be words of wisdom. May the father be pleased with us, that we perform our duty in righteous ways.

Keep you, all well mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually. And know he knows all we do and do not do for he is all knowing.

Maurice Samuels

I believe that the greatest of God's many gifts to us is a conscious mind that is able to make choices. The ability to determine our thoughts and feelings, our beliefs and behaviors means we each have the potentials to master ourselves, the power and responsibility, to live life abundantly and joyfully.

Our creator made us complete, gave us free will, our mind is our power. We human beings have accomplished wondrous feats throughout the ages. For us there is no dream too grand to make real, no problem too complex to solve. We possess a precious and awesome power, and it's absolute.

James Davies
Community Forum on the Rockefeller Drug Laws  Mary-Elizabeth Fitzgerald

On March 6, The Church of Gethsemane hosted a Park Slope Community Forum on the Rockefeller Drug Laws. This event developed from a series of Balancing Justice Study Groups conducted at Gethsemane during January and February. The League of Women Voters has sponsored these Study Groups statewide over the past two years. The goal is to have citizens critically examine criminal justice policy in New York State and make recommendations for change.

The forum began with a welcome by Rev. Liz Alexander, Gethsemane’s new pastor. Mary-Elizabeth Fitzgerald, Executive Director of JusticeWorks Community presented the main elements of the drug laws, the major implications of racial bias and the squandering of taxpayer dollars, the current proposals for change and the demands of the community seeking repeal. Assemblymember James Brennan, who represents the 44th District in Brooklyn, stressed the need for citizens to contact their representatives by writing, e-mailing and meeting with them to demand that changes in these mandatory minimum sentencing be made this year. William Gerena-Rochet, of the East Harlem Greens, spoke of working closely with JusticeWorks’ Seven Neighborhood Action Partnership. He also pointed out that Governor Patoki is courting the Hispanic vote and that Hispanics must make their demands about drug law reform known to the Governor. In his 2001 and 2002 State of the State addresses, Governor Patoki expressed the need for drastic reform of the Rockefeller Drug Laws, giving rise to the misguided perception that he is a drug reformer. Thus far no action has been taken. The Governor’s reform proposal:
- does not provide increased funding for drug treatment
- eliminates parole for all nonviolent offenses, including drug law violations
- gives District Attorneys the power to choose the drug treatment program
- increases penalties for certain marijuana offenses

Jeanne Bergman spoke of the initiatives of Jews for Racial Economic Justice, one of which is Schools not Jails. Jeanne also spoke of targeting Jewish politicians for much needed drug law reform and Jewish businessmen regarding private prisons.

Two speakers who have the lived the effects of the Rockefeller Drug Laws were Awilda Gonzalez, who served ten years and was given clemency by Governor Cuomo and Nazimova Varick, whose son is serving twenty-five years to life. Their experiences gave compelling reasons why the Rockefeller Drug Laws must be repealed. The next few months are critical if change is to occur.

On March 26th, Rev. Liz Alexander, Mary-Elizabeth Fitzgerald, Julie Marmando, and Nili Robin joined thousands of New Yorkers in Albany for a Day of Education as part of the Drop the Rock Campaign, to lobby for repeal of the Rockefeller Drug Laws.

Music director combines music and writing talents

Gethsemane’s Music Director, Pam McAllister, continues to combine writing and music as the creative forces in her life. Her latest book, The Bedside, Bathtub & Armchair Companion to SHAKESPEARE (co-authored with Dick Riley and published by Continuum) is now in bookstores. Publishers Weekly favorably reviewed the book, noting its “engaging blend of homage and irreverence.” Pam will be signing her book in Brooklyn Heights on Sunday afternoon, June 23rd, following a performance of The Tempest by the Kings County Players. Currently, Pam is writing a book advocating the abolition of capital punishment, which will be published next Spring.

On Sunday afternoon, May 19th, Pam had been invited to lead a public Hymn Sing and tell stories about the great hymn composers at the Codman Memorial Congregational Church in Clinton Hill. In early June, she will host a “Piano Lesson Progress Party” for the families of her fifteen piano students in Gethsemane’s Fellowship Hall.

Clerk of Session Recently Preformed In Echo Of Echoes

Louisa Horton, The Church of Gethsemane’s Clerk of Session had a lead role in Echo of Echoes, a play based on The Aspens Papers from a story by Henry James. Louisa played the role of the reclusive Juliana Bordereau, the hundred and three year old farmer lover of the author Jeffery Aspen. The play was adapted and directed by Thomas Luce Summa and was performed at the Heritage Theater in Manhattan from January 29 through February 8. Louisa gave a moving and convincing performance, especially at the dramatic climax.

Louisa is a charter member of The Heritage Theater and has been with the company since its inception in 1944. She has enacted leading roles in the Heritage revivals of Shakespeare, Ibsen, Chekov, and Wilds. Louisa has also appeared in many Broadway productions, including starring roles in The Voice Of The Turtle, A Touch Of The Poet, The Importance Of Being Earnest, and Medea. Some of her roles in films include All My Sons (opposite Burt Lancaster) and Walk East On Beacon Street.
Guiding Principles

The Church of Gethsemane is a “More Light Presbyterian” Church. People of all ages, race, ethnicity, physical abilities, and sexual and gender orientation are welcome. All members have an equal opportunity for leadership in our congregation.

At the heart of The Church of Gethsemane is a core set of values and convictions:

- We are called by God to do in history that which reflects the reality of God, namely, love as an act that recreates, liberates and gives life to all people.

- We are responsible with God for creating a just world. Justice requires that all people’s rights and interests be protected, not some more than others. The moral litmus test for justice in our society is what is done to, with, and for the poor.

- Called to be justice-makers, we walk in solidarity with the poor for our mutual empowerment. Empowerment means enabling people to make their own agendas for change, not imposing ones on them. People trusting in the power of God, are to be vehicles for their own liberation.

- Poverty, imprisonment, and physical want are symptoms of social injustice rooted in oppression. Oppression means squeezing out the lifeblood of another for one’s own advantage. Amos calls it “selling the needy for a pair of shoes and trampling the head of the poor to the dust of the earth.” To “take up our cross and follow Jesus,” means living a way of life that socially, economically, and politically confronts any established order that is oppressive.

- As people of faith we are called to live in community. Interrelatedness is essential to human experience. To deny our interrelatedness is to deny the possibility for creating justice in our world. The criminal justice system is a product of our alienation and reflects our capacity to violate human relational bonds. Individuals must be viewed in the context of families and communities.

- The Church must be an inclusive community. The Church cannot be the Church, if it does not include everyone.

- Every individual has potential for change and growth.

JusticeWorks Community

In 1992, in response to the social crisis triggered by the tripling of the U.S. female prison population in one decade, Gethsemane members were instrumental in founding JusticeWorks Community, a separate 501©3 not for profit national organization. The Mission of JusticeWorks is to educate, organize and mobilize a national partnership of progressive grassroots groups and communities of faith to advocate for just and humane criminal justice policies for women, beginning with mothers of dependent children.

On April 25th, JusticeWorks celebrated its Tenth Anniversary at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem. Ossie Davis, actor, author and activist was the guest of honor for the evening. The second annual Rev. Dr. Constance Baugh Exprisoner Woman Achievement Award was presented to Angela Scott a member of JusticeWorks Board of Directors, former intern at JWC and church secretary. The Patsy Grant Trio provided music. Esy’s Kate of White Plains catered the event.

Mother’s Day May 12th

The Mothers in Prison Children in Crisis Campaign was begun by JusticeWorks and The Church of Gethsemane. It is a national grassroots organizing campaign calling for alternatives to prison as the sentencing norm for nonviolent women with dependent children. On Mother’s Day, churches are encouraged to remember mothers who are imprisoned. Special collections are often taken for the Mothers In Prison, Children in Crisis Campaign.

The Ministry of the Church

Ministers:
All the People
Rev. Liz Alexander
Mary-Elizabeth Fitzgerald
Min. Chibueze Okorie
Pam McAllister
Gerard Nagee
Margaret Anderson, Mildred Braun,
Debbie Cordornier, Orlando Haynes,
Louisa Horton-Hill, Louis Miner,
Chibueze Okorie
Taliana Braun, Darryl Carathers,
Damien Utkewicz
### Weekly Calendar of Events at The Church of Gethsemane

(All listed events are subject to change)

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