



# The Church of Gethsemane Liberation Voices!

Rejoice! The Goodness of the Gospel is liberation from oppression

Sunday Worship 1:30 p.m

Fall 2003



## Letter from the Pastor

—Rev. Liz Alexander



Dear Members and Friends of The Church of Gethsemane,

Over the last few months, I have experienced many blessings in the midst of new challenges in my life. Many of you are aware that I was recently

diagnosed with Liposarcoma, a rare form of cancer, in my left leg. Now that I have completed radiation therapy, I will have surgery December 4th to remove the tumor.

My faith in the power of a Healing God, the prayers of so many who send their love, and the skilled medical care at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center have given me much courage and hope. The members of The Church of Gethsemane, and those who are taking our correspondence course through Project Connect while in prison have all taught me so much about courage. Each one has a story to tell about pain, struggle, healing, and transformation. My present challenge has provided me with another opportunity for spiritual reflection and growth. In fact, we are all growing together.

In spite of my personal struggle, the congregation and staff of Gethsemane have continued to successfully share their ministry with prisoners, ex-prisoners, their families, and those who are homeless and economically disadvantaged. A transition group led by two of our deacons is expanding to create a separate group for women returning home after being imprisoned. Eleven of our Project Connect members are ready to be accepted into the congregation as church members, and we now have 45 Project Connect members in our program.

Our ministry, including recent events and special programs, is highlighted in this newsletter. Please read it carefully and contact us if you have any questions. Many of you have supported us financially in the past, and we ask that you give an especially generous contribution at this time.

Thank you for your prayers for my healing and for the congregation and ministry of The Church of Gethsemane. God bless you and yours during Advent when we await the birth of The Christ Child, and remember the promise that God is always with us.

Blessings and Peace,

*Liz*

## Minister of Evangelism—Chibueze Okorie

Many years ago, an inmate was released from a Federal Correctional Institute after serving his time. He narrated his ordeals while in prison, and before he was arrested by the agents. As he told his stories to a group of church members, he said that he wanted to go forward with his life and do whatever it would take him to stay out of trouble as long as he lives.



He chose life other than death. Death to him means destruction, and going back to the old life of drug sales. Going forward with God, good intentions, and plans means life to him. As our friend continued his new life journey doing the ministry of The Church of Gethsemane, there were challenges. How could he cope with obstacles affecting his life and find the resources and necessities that would help him live an abundant life. "God provides abundant life," he said. "Life is the most precious gift God has given to us. No matter what comes across our lives, we should fight hard to choose life. Choosing life means to live without fear, but trusting in God, who watches over us." He said that prison life had taught him the positive things God can do in one's life.

As all God's children, we have a purpose for our lives. God has a use for the life we possess and wants us to make good of it. As our friend says, "God wants us to live a full life, to love each other, help and care for one another and live a clean life. Thank God," he said, "there are people at Gethsemane who care about life. They have helped me to know the value of my life, no matter my past, I have helped touch someone else's life. Give thanks to God for your life, ask God to help you choose life. Life is love, Hope and future."

## Peace Day Interfaith Celebration— Martha Gallahue

Nine Faith and ethics traditions (Atheist, Buddhist, Ethical Culture, Hindu, Islam, Jewish, Methodist, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic) from the local community reaffirmed their commitment to world peace when they gathered at The Church of Gethsemane on September 21, 2003 to commemorate the United Nations' inspired International day of Peace.

All who participated were invited to join The United Religious Initiative, an international interfaith grassroots movement for peace. The closing ritual consisted of "sowing seeds for peace" in the Gethsemane garden. Afterwards, a potluck meal was held in the basement where the children made a peace mural. Before a full Church, Reverend Liz Alexander declared this ritual to be an annual event. "Let us create together one world— diverse yet rooted in solidarity and grounded in compassion." she urged.



'Sowing seeds for Peace' at the International Peace Day Celebration

Members of The Park Slope Methodist Church Choir sing at The International Peace Day Celebration on September 21.



## Project Connect Ministry

—Elder Louis Miner



Our recent visit to The Arthur Kill Correctional Facility, was fulfilling. Minister Chibueze Okorie, Elder Peg Anderson (our Clerk of Session), and I visited with a Project Connect member who has finished our correspondence course, and will hopefully be joining us upon his release soon. Another fellow

was released not long ago. He and his son are getting involved in our ministry. We are trying to visit all who have completed our membership course, and have sent Certificates of Accomplishment to all of these individuals.

We continue to pray for all prisoners, including death row inmates all over the United States. More than 45 inmates are currently in regular correspondence with us. Please visit us upon your release. God Bless you and see you soon.

*Our suffering produces perseverance, character and hope. And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love in our hearts by the Holy Spirit Romans 5:3. That's exactly how I have felt from the very first time I have encountered your blessed family, to make this struggle more interesting. I was given a visit by Minister Okorie, Elder Anderson, and Elder Miner on Columbus Day.. What a great surprise! We had a glorious time for the moment we shared and prayed together. Thank God.*

*Anthony Simpson*

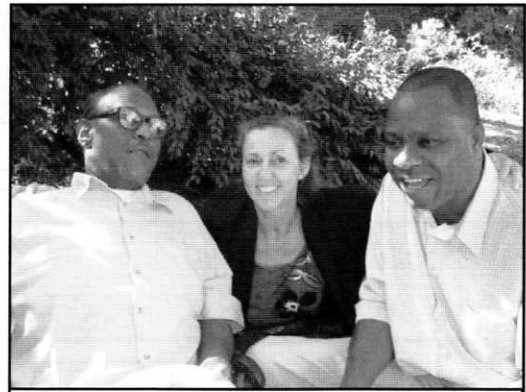


Deacons  
Ray Rios and  
Jose Reyes,  
founders of  
Breathing  
Space Inc., at  
the AVP picnic  
in the garden.

## Breathing Space, Inc. and the First Annual Alternatives to Violence Project Picnic—Ray Rios

Over 50 people attended Alternatives to Violence Project's successful first annual picnic held in the garden at The Church of Gethsemane. Since over 80% of AVP facilitators live in the New York City area, it was nice to see AVP in our own back yard or garden so to speak. Garry R. had this to say about AVP..."As a former prisoner, I think it important to give much credit to that group of inmates, who in trying to better the lives of others, has bettered the lives of thousands for 27 years, and (in) many different places in the world." Gethsemane hopes to be a continual resource for groups such as AVP, JusticeWorks, and Breathing Space.

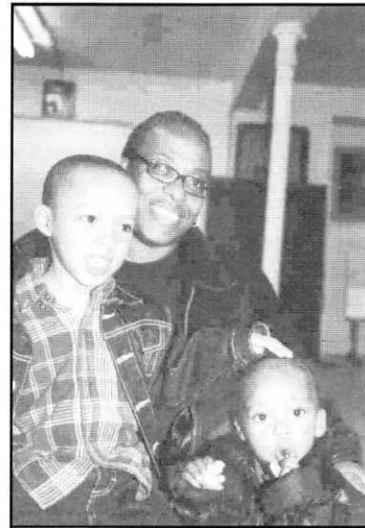
Breathing Space Inc., a transition support group for ex-offenders, meets on Saturday afternoon, twice a month at Gethsemane from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. Lunch is provided. Presently, we are in the process of organizing a separate group for women. For additional information, please feel free to contact Ray Rios at (347) 262-6975 or Jose L. Reyes (646) 234-1339



Elders Orlando Haynes, Debbie Cordonnier, and Minister Chibueze Okorie

*I want to thank you for the package that was mailed up here. I was indeed very touched by that kindness. I keep you all in my prayers on a constant basis and in my thoughts as well.*

*Darryl Freeman*



Doris Randolph and children

*It has become my lifeline to humanity knowing that there are brothers and sisters like yourselves who truly care, allowing me the opportunity to rise above the stigma of criminal behavior and express myself with a caring heart.*

*John Flynn*



Family at AVP picnic

## Pam McAllister's new book—*Death Defying*

*Death Defying*, a new book by Gethsemane's Music Director, Pam McAllister, is now on bookstore shelves. A publication party was held in the church fellowship hall on November 16th.

A rave review appeared in "Justicia", the newsletter of the Judicial Process Commission. In it, reviewer Joel Freedman wrote: "McAllister, a musician who has devoted much of her life to various human rights issues, has written a new book calling for the abolition of the death penalty in the United States. *Death Defying* goes beyond elaboration of the usual arguments...What is unique about this book is its emphasis upon respect for the beliefs of those who favor the death penalty and the complexities surrounding the death penalty debate."

Calling Pam's writing style "down-to earth and informal," Freedman praised *Death Defying* as "enthraling, sometimes surprising, always highly readable."

In her book, dedicated in part to founding pastor, Rev. Dr. Connie Baugh, Pam included a photo of the banner reading "ONE MORE PERSON WAS EXECUTED TODAY" which Gethsemane hangs from its second floor window whenever someone is executed in the U.S. It is the church's effort to fight the invisibility of capital punishment.

She also wrote about the power of the death row prayer which is read aloud every week in Gethsemane's worship service with over sixty names of people on death row. By reading that many names each week, it takes about one year for the Gethsemane congregation to pray aloud the names of approximately 3,500 people on death row in the U.S. According to Pam, by reciting the names of the condemned the church is saying, "You are not alone. We see you. We remember you."

Pam's book, published by Continuum International, can be ordered at any bookstore. *Death Defying: Dismantling the Execution Machinery in 21st Century USA*. 180 pages, \$18.95. ISBN 0-8264-1463-X



Pam met Sister Helen Prejean, author of *Dead Man Walking*, in fall 2002, at the Lincoln Center reception for the opera based on the book.

## The Brooklyn Family Theatre

—Elder Phill Greenland



Brooklyn Family Theatre at The Church of Gethsemane opened its third season with a five-week production of *The Wiz*. Over sixty young and adult performers from Brooklyn and beyond auditioned for spots in the seventeen-person cast, and the show was well received by the Park Slope community, and by the press.

In fact, The Park Slope Paper hailed the production as "Powerful as a speeding locomotive ... you'll barely have time to say 'Wow!'" Gethsemane Elder Orlando Haynes became involved in the costume department, sewing and helping to design several costumes.

Shows later this season include *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*, *Barnum*, and *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Call 718 670-7205 or visit [www.brooklynfamilytheatre.com](http://www.brooklynfamilytheatre.com) for more information.



Luke, Davian, and Chigozie  
at our Homecoming Picnic, September 7, 2003

## News from JusticeWorks Community—Mary-Elizabeth Fitzgerald

- ◆ We are happy to announce that **S. Epatha Merkerson** (Lt. Anita Van Buren on TV's *Law & Order*) joined our Board of Directors in June. Ms. Merkerson is a very talented and most generous woman.
- ◆ On September 25, 2003, the Seven Neighborhood Action Partnership (SNAP), based in Harlem, sponsored a forum connecting the Rockefeller Drug Laws with issues of housing, employment and voting rights for ex-prisoners. SNAP is working aggressively on voter education and registration in preparation for the 2004 elections. We are collaborating with the work being done by **Joseph (Jazz) Hayden** at Demos.
- ◆ We continue to bring our main public education and recruitment program, **Women of Substance**, to many communities of faith, colleges, universities and civic associations. Recently we held forums at John Jay College and Project Create. There are fifteen ex-prisoner women in recovery who participate in the Advisory Council for Women of Substance by educating citizens on the disease concept of addiction and the need for treatment instead of incarceration. We now have Spanish subtitles on the documentary film that allows us to reach more residents of the Harlem community.

To:

The Church of Gethsemane  
1012 Eighth Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 11215

**SAVE THE DATE**

**15th Anniversary Celebration of the  
Church of Gethsemane  
February 8th, 2004**

**Criminal  
Sunday**

**Justice**



**"Gethsemane, Then and Now"  
Worship and Dinner  
1:30 p.m.**

**The Church of Gethsemane  
1012 Eighth Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 11215**

**SAVE THE DATE**

The Ministry of the Church

Ministers:	All the People
Pastor:	Rev. Liz Alexander
Director of Community Life:	Mary-Elizabeth Fitzgerald
Minister of Evangelism:	Min. Chibueze Okorie
Music Director:	Pam McAllister
Administrative Assistant:	Gerard Nagee
Officers of the Church Elders/Session:	Margaret Anderson Debbie Cordonnier Phill Greenland Orlando Haynes Louisa Horton-Hill Louis Miner
Deacons:	Jose Reyes Ray Rios
Deacons in Training:	Gregory Braun Maurice Braun

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