



The Church of Gethsemane

# Liberation Voices!

Spring 2006



## Pastor's Report—Rev. Liz Alexander



Greetings,

During this Post Easter Season, we continue to reflect on the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus and the opportunities for new life for each of us. We have witnessed the miracle of transformation and change in the lives of so many of our members and friends, and we proclaim the Good News of God's love for all of us daily.

We have been blessed this year with two seminary interns, Rosemarie

Napoli and Sarah McCaslin. The spirit and commitment they brought to Gethsemane has enriched us all.

Our unique ministry continues to grow as Project Connect members return home from prison, and new members join us from the neighborhood and from our Confirmation Class for youth. With growth come new challenges and opportunities. Our deacons and elders are creating a Five-Year Strategic Plan for the church, including a financial plan that involves the sale of some of our property.

Many of you have heard that our founding pastor, The Rev. Dr. Connie Baugh, is creating a documentary film about The Church of Gethsemane and JusticeWorks Community with St. Claire Bourne, the acclaimed director/producer of documentaries. We hope this film will tell the story of one small congregation's efforts to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ fully in our lives as we seek liberation and justice for those who are most marginalized by our society.

The articles and photos in this newsletter tell only part of our story. If you are learning about us for the first time, please write or call for further information. If you are a long time supporter, thank you for your ongoing prayers and contributions. Our ministry is dependent on people like you.

Blessings and Peace, *Liz*

## Minister of Evangelism—Chibueze Okorie

Greetings to our Project Connect Members and Friends,

Our Project Connect membership is growing, and more people are getting involved in our Seven-part Membership Correspondence Course. The course is designed for prisoners who are interested in membership in our church. Those who have already been released and are in need of assistance and also a home church are welcome. We are in the process of creating a new correspondence course from the books of the New Testament for those who have completed our seven-part course.



We have been visiting members who have completed the membership course. During our visits, we share the news of ourselves, the church and our communities. In exchange we listen to the news about each individual's faith journey, prison programs, family issues and parole concerns.

We continue to welcome family members and friends of Project Connect to join us during our Project Connect Sunday letter writing. These are the Sundays when we reach out to write letters and send care-packages to our members in prison. We welcome Project Connect members into our faith community upon their release and also assist them in any area we can be of help to them. God can forgive anyone, and can transform anyone for better, and God has a purpose for each one of us.

Some of us have had some bad experiences due to the choices we made in our lives, we should not be subjected to live with our past all the rest of our lives. Today should be a new beginning for those who have chosen life. Even in prison you can do something positive with your life. Then upon your release, please visit The Church of Gethsemane and get involved with our ministry for the poor and imprisoned, and where your voice counts.

Peace & love to All!

## GETHSEMANE INTERNS

I have been living in Park Slope for the past 12 years and didn't know that the Church of Gethsemane existed. It was not until I decided to go to NY Theological Seminary that I found myself searching for a place to do my internship. My cousin-in-law Judge Margarita Lopez Torres who had on occasion attended service at the Church of Gethsemane, encouraged me to check out this church. Well, I finally got up the courage to attend a service and the minute I walked inside this church, I fell in love not only with the aesthetics but with the congregation and their mission to help those who were previously incarcerated. After a year of experiencing the many facets of church life at Gethsemane, I have decided to officially become a member, where I will continue to grow and be an asset to this community.  
*Rosemarie Napoli*



I want to extend a word of deep gratitude to you for everything you have provided me in this past year. Gifts upon gifts I have received from each of you, individually and collectively, as I have shared in worship and fellowship. You understand truly what it means to be the church in the world. Your honesty, passion, empathy, faith and refusal to accept anything less than real justice, have inspired me and shaped my own vocational discernment. Thank you, Thank you, Thank you! *Peace, Sarah Segal McCaslin*



## Project Connect ~ Voices from Inside

My Brother, this tends to be a lonesome road at times. But again, I know you understand. I have been doing time so long one would think I would get used to it. But I am still not used to being locked up. You know what, I hope and pray to God that I never get used to being in here. Because I know if I do, I will never leave here. **FRANK GREEN**

I would like to thank you all for the food packages. I know that the church and its members have made a difference in my life and if I have a problem, you are all there to listen and always there for me. I thank God for bringing you all in my life. My prayers will continue to be with you all. **MONICA RAMSAROOP**

Minister Okorie, I greet you in the name of my Lord and savior Jesus Christ. Thank you so much for replying to my letter. Your letter gave me a bundle of inspirations and lets me know that with my Lord there is hope for me. Praise him always. **AUDREY PLEASANT**

Even though I was denied parole for the third time, I refused to allow this disappointment to rob me of my inner peace. These past few weeks have been very hectic, but I am up to the challenge that lies ahead. God sustains me, and the spirit of truth gives me that peace to endure this adversity in my life. Thank you all for the previous and current packages that I received recently. Any act of kindness is deeply appreciated by me. **DARRYL FREEMAN**

In 1989, some folks came up to Sullivan Correctional Facility for a meeting with a select group of Christian men. The people that came informed us that they wanted to develop a church for prisoners and their families. We gave our input and thus, was born the Church of Gethsemane. The conceptual idea was brilliant because it gives us a church home where we can worship in comfort without having other members looking down upon us because of our prior journey. **EARL MARTIN**

## Welcome Home Nathaniel Wright

After corresponding with countless loving members of the Church of Gethsemane for what seemed like an eternity, I was released from Arthur Kill Correctional Facility on March 7th, 2006. On the following Sunday, I experienced what the writer meant when he said "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord." (Psalm 122:1)

Although the church is relatively small, the degree of love it generates is big. This is especially true for Minister Chibueze Okorie who was very supportive and encouraging. For instance, he wrote a letter of recommendation to the parole board on my behalf and also made the necessary contacts for my housing arrangement. In like fashion, Reverend Liz Alexander and Mary-Elizabeth Fitzgerald and countless members were equally as supportive.

It is indeed true, no one is turned away from the doors of the Church of Gethsemane and I thank God for leading me here. *Nathaniel Wright*



**Charles Dutton & Nathaniel at a recent JusticeWorks event**

## In Memory of Louis Miner, Sr. ~ September 23, 1933-July 26, 2005



Elder Louis Miner, Sr. was born on September 23, 1933. Throughout his life, he served many roles...High School track star, 3rd Class Airman in the U.S. Air Force (1951-1955), carpenter, singer, dancer, artist, comedian and chef for the staff of ABC TV.

From 1951 through 1955, he was a Worldwide Boxing Champion in the Light Weight Division. Louis Miner was an ordained elder of our church. He first came to the church with his son, an ex-prisoner, who also became an elder of the church for ten years. Elder Miner, Sr. was a devoted member of our church community. He would travel all the way from the Bronx to attend our Sunday services and other church functions in Brooklyn. He participated in our Project Connect activities through prison visits, sending care-packages to inmates and also helping to supervise Project Connect Sunday letter writing. Elder Miner served on the Session of the Church of Gethsemane and on the Board of Directors of JusticeWorks Community.

Elder Miner, Sr. loved to sing and crack jokes. He loved to make everyone around him happy. Elder Miner, Sr. believed that God answers all prayers. He used to say that "the answer to every prayer could be a Yes or No. God does not give us everything we ask."

## Highlights & Events



5th Avenue Presbyterian Church  
Reading Program Celebration



Pancake Breakfast on Easter Sunday



Confirmation Class retreat at Holmes  
Presbyterian Camp



Brenda Ward & daughter Cheneque



Christmas Day Chefs—Allison Lichter,  
Sam Hernandez & Martha Gallahue



Christmas Party



Baptism of Johnathan Petty



Wafiq, Chigozie & Clarence



Ray Rios & son River

### Upcoming Events

**June 18th, 2006**, Rosemarie Napoli and Pamela Schafer-Ramoutar, Park Slope residents, will be joining the church with our Confirmation Class ~ Davian Reynolds, Kai Reynolds, Clarence Scott, Tiffany Braun & Luke Cordonnier. After our worship service we will participate in the Annual Children of Abraham Peace March with Muslim, Jewish and Christian congregations in Brooklyn.

**July 9th**, the Church of Gethsemane will gather with family and friends for a picnic and to say goodbye to our garden.

**September 10th**, we will celebrate Homecoming Sunday, to start off our new program year.

### Summer Worship

The church will be open for worship on Sundays all through the summer. The worship service will begin at 12 noon instead of the usual 1:30 time, starting June 25th and ending September 3rd.



Frederick (Tyron) Thompson

# Criminal Justice Sunday

## Criminal Justice Sunday



Rev. Leslie Merlin & Johanna Woltjer visit with the Petty Family on Criminal Justice Sunday

On Sunday, February 26th, 2006, The Church of Gethsemane hosted its annual Criminal Justice Sunday. The worship service was led by formerly incarcerated persons. There were many supporters present from Manhattan and Brooklyn Presbyterian churches. Rev. Liz Alexander, Pastor of Gethsemane, Minister of Evangelism Chibueze Okorie and the Executive Director of JusticeWorks Community, Mary-Elizabeth Fitzgerald gave a brief welcome.

The sermon featured testimonies by two formerly incarcerated men who are ordained church officers: Elder Jose Reyes and Deacon Joseph Petty. With compelling honesty and passion they each spoke of their post-release experiences in society where they are forever punished for their crimes. They urged all present to work for change in society's approach to the formerly incarcerated. There was also a Litany for Justice lead by several formerly incarcerated members of Gethsemane. New York Theological Seminary intern Rosemarie Napoli sang "Come By Here".

After the service everyone gathered in the social hall for a delicious potluck luncheon provided by members and friends. Osborne Association's NYC Initiative for Children with Parents in Prison gave a moving presentation on the "Bill of Rights" for Children of Incarcerated Parents. Children with parents in prison developed these rights through the San Francisco Partnership. They are also featured in Nell Bernstein's book, *All Alone in the World: Children of Incarcerated Parents*. These ten creative teen-agers conveyed their message through photos, poetry and skits and received a standing ovation.



The Osborne Youth read the "Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents"

## Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents

1. I have the right to be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest.
2. I have the right to be heard when decisions are made about me.
3. I have the right to be considered when decisions are made about my parent.
4. I have the right to be well cared for in my parent's absence.
5. I have the right to speak with, see and touch my parent.
6. I have the right to support, as I struggle with my parent's incarceration.
7. I have the right not to be judged, blamed or labeled because of my parent's incarceration.
8. I have the right to a lifelong relationship with my parent.

*Prepared by the San Francisco Partnership for Children of Incarcerated Parents*

## Children of Incarcerated Parents

Children whose parents have been arrested and incarcerated face unique difficulties. Such as myself, born 1992, but didn't see or spend time with my mother alone until I was four years old in 1996. Yes, four long years of my childhood without my mother. I consider myself lucky though because I was one of the few children that got to see their mothers at all! Some kids have mothers who are in and out of prison their entire life, sad but very true. My mother and I received a chance through a lot of outside support and their belief that children need to be with their mothers even if they make choices that take them away and place them in prison. In California alone there are 856,000 children that have parents in the criminal justice system. California estimated approximately 195,000 currently have parents in state prisons. 97,000 have parents in jail, and 564,000 children have parents on parole or probation. In total that is nearly 9% of children's population in California ( California Research Bureau, March 2000). If you noticed, I only mentioned California. "that's lot of kids" whose parents have been in contact with the criminal justice system. When I was four I started meeting with my mother and visiting her while she was in prison. Through the Administration of Children's Services (ACS) and an organization called Hour Children I was able to visit with and spend time with my mother. I hadn't known that I had another mother beside my foster mom. My foster mother was not happy, just before visits I remember being shoved into a closet, when the worker came to the door to take me to visit my mom, I felt uncomfortable, insecure, and a whole bunch of other feelings went through my body at once. I was brought to live with my mother after she came home but she had to visit me at the foster care agency and show them she was going to take good care of me. I knew she was going to take good care of me. She played games with me and even let me jump on her bed, but the best thing was being with her and my little brother Kai and meeting my other brother's and sisters. I am older now, but I still remember those feelings. I felt like I was alone. My mother has supported me and taught me a lot about the criminal justice system and how the many agencies that come into contact with children whose parents go to jail or prison are not considered. I began to learn the truth and wanted to help other kids who that went through or are going through the same thing that I did. I joined a church specifically for people and family whose loved ones have been in prison. The Church of Gethsemane gives me and others the opportunity to be who we are...people not defined by what's happened in their lives. I have also been involved with the Osborne Association and, Blackout Arts Collective to speak out about the Bill of Rights of Children of Incarcerated Parents. I will continue doing what I am doing to help kids like myself!

*Written by Davian Reynolds*

## Gethsemane Film Project

The Gethsemane Film Project will feature the Church of Gethsemane and its sister organization, JusticeWorks Community. The film will show how our atypical church plays an important role not only in the life of our members, but also in the larger church and in the field of grassroots criminal justice advocacy.



The film will be structured in the narrative format using a classic *cinema verite* style. It will weave the stories of key characters together to tell the past and present story of the Church of Gethsemane. It will seek to lay bare the power of the human will to do what is right, and to offer testimony that passion for justice can transform the lives it touches and the community that embraces it.

Acclaimed documentary filmmaker **St. Clair Bourne** has agreed to produce and direct this feature-length theatrical and broadcast quality film. Mr. Bourne has made more than forty five political and cultural films, among them *Half Past Autumn: The Life and Works of Gordon Parks*, which aired on **HBO**, and *Paul Robeson: Here I Stand*, which is part of PBS's American Masters series.



## JusticeWorks Community



Gethsemane Interns Rosemarie Napoli & Sarah McCaslin, Elder Jose Reyes, Joyce Pyle & Director of Music Pam McAllister



Rev. Liz Alexander, Martha Gallahue & S. Epatha Merkerson

On **April 3rd, 2006**, JusticeWorks co-sponsored a Community Forum at John Jay College on the Needs and Rights of Children of Incarcerated Parents with the Osborne Association, and the Women's Center and Re-Entry Institute of John Jay College of Criminal Justice. There was a presentation by Nell Bernstein, author of *All Alone in the World: Children of the Incarcerated*. Three young people with incarcerated parents spoke very convincingly about the Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents.

On **April 24th**, JusticeWorks hosted its annual benefit, **Voices for Justice**, at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. The Liberty Ellman quartet provided the background music as guests enjoyed the hors d'oeuvres and bid on more than fifty silent auction items. The **Voices for Justice** program was co-hosted by JusticeWorks' board member S. Epatha Merkerson and Charles Dutton. Ms. Merkerson was the Executive Producer of the event along with Delissa Reynolds. The highlight of the program was the appearance of *Sweet Honey in the Rock*. The 2006 Rev. Dr. Constance M. Baugh Achievement Award was presented to formerly incarcerated mother and campaign organizer **Brenda Olive** from Little Rock Arkansas. **Lysette Navarro** also a formerly incarcerated mother and a participant in *Voices from Inside* (Massachusetts) very powerfully rendered selections from VFI's recently published anthology. Carolyn Benson Cohen, past President of the JWC Board, co-facilitates VFI.



Victoria Schell-Wolf & Mary-Elizabeth Fitzgerald

On **April 27th**, the Seven Neighborhood Action Partnership (SNAP) of JusticeWorks co-sponsored a Community Forum on the Rockefeller Drug Laws with Senator Eric Schneiderman's office. May 8, 2006 marked the 33<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the enactment of drug laws.

Young People are currently being recruited for the summer program of SNAP entitled **Fighters for Justice**. The recruitment focus is on young people who have been impacted by the incarceration of a parent.

On **Mother's Day**, May 14th, twenty-five Presbyterian Churches participated in JWC's **Mother in Prison, Children in Crisis** public awareness event. The churches received origami flowers that are the symbol of the campaign, informational brochures and material on children of incarcerated parents and the Bill of Rights for these children.

To:

The Church of Gethsemane  
 1012 Eighth Avenue  
 Brooklyn, NY 11215



**Brooklyn Family Theatre**  
 At The Church of Gethsemane  
 (718) 670-7205

During the months of June and July, Brooklyn Family Theatre, in cooperation with the Park Slope Civic Council, will be presenting a new one-act play for children. "The Fairy Tale Academy." will be performed on afternoon weekends, free of charge at these Brooklyn cultural institutions and family fun sites.

- Sat June 17 - Brooklyn Children's Museum
- Sun June 18 - Brooklyn Aquarium
- Sat June 24 - Park Slope Barnes & Noble

**JusticeWorks Community** was founded in 1992 in response to the tripling of the women's prison population in one decade. Its mission is to educate, mobilize and organize a partnership of concerned citizens and organizations to advocate for more effective and humane criminal justice policies, emphasizing alternatives to incarceration for women with dependent children.

Visit [www.justiceworks.org](http://www.justiceworks.org), or call 718-499-6704

**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:** Victoria Schell-Wolf

**Officers of the Church**

- Elders/Session:** Margaret Anderson, Debbie Cordonnier, Phill Greenland, Helene Means, Doris Randolph, Jose Reyes, Ray Rios, Louisa Horton-Hill Clerk of Session Emerita
- Deacons:** Brenda Ward & Joseph Petty, Sr.

**The Church of Gethsemane Mission Statement:**

Founded in 1986, we are a Presbyterian Church created by and for prisoners, ex-prisoners, their families, neighborhood persons, and people who feel called into ministry with the poor. In solidarity, we seek justice for our world and the empowerment of the Christian gospel in our lives. We thrive on our diversity and value our inclusiveness. No one is turned away. All are welcome. We strive to create a spiritual community that comforts and challenges, struggles and sustains, heals and liberates. We value people for who they are, which frees us to struggle for who we and the world might become.

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

Phone: (718) 499-6704 Fax: (718) 832-2832  
 E-Mail: [gethsemanechurch1012@yahoo.com](mailto:gethsemanechurch1012@yahoo.com)