



The Church of Gethsemane

Liberation Voices!

Rejoice! The Goodness of the Gospel is liberation from oppression
Sunday Worship 1:30pm - July service at 12 noon



SUMMER 2005

Pastor's Report—Rev. Liz Alexander



Dear Members and Friends,

Since our last newsletter, The Church of Gethsemane has welcomed many visitors, 7 new members, and baptized 2 children and 1 adult into our church family. Two additional members will be joining in a few weeks. Our community continues to draw people of different ages, races, ethnicity, economic backgrounds, and sexual orientation. We are truly a diverse and

inclusive congregation that provides a safe and welcoming environment for everyone.

On most Sundays, about 1/3 of the people joining us for worship have been in prison, 1/3 have had a family member in prison, and 1/3 are members or neighbors from Park Slope. In addition we have approximately 50 people who we reach out to in prison through our Project Connect Program. Although we continue to grow in numbers, we are also growing in need.

This past winter we have had many people visit who were recently incarcerated and are struggling with issues relating to re-entry into society. Our coffee hour has become a luncheon so that we can provide for those who come to church hungry and in need of a hearty meal. Some are homeless and most have no jobs. The needs are great and our resources are very limited. Our greatest resource is the encouragement and hope we provide through worshipping together and sharing our faith and the stories of our life experiences.

As I write, we find ourselves in a financial crisis. Our monthly income from grants, partner churches, rentals, membership pledges, and donations from friends does not provide enough to meet our budget requirements. In January we completed a Mission Review for the Presbytery, and now we are writing a 5 Year Strategic Plan that includes short range and long range financial planning.

We hope that some of the plans outlined in this report will help us to not only survive as a congregation, but to continue to grow and thrive as a unique and important ministry. Please support us in every way possible (through donations, prayers, volunteer help, etc.) to assure that we carry on the gospel mandate to minister to the poor, imprisoned and marginalized.

Blessings and Peace! *Liz*

Minister of Evangelism—Chibueze Okorie

My greetings and regards to you all brothers and sisters and members of our Project Connect Program. We have been staying in touch with each other over the years. Many of you have been released, some have visited us and some have become members, Deacons and Elders of the church. Our mission for the poor, and the imprisoned is bringing us together with collective ideas and commitment in doing our ministry. Bring your talents and gifts to Gethsemane upon your release to reach out to others in need.

I continue to believe that a lot of positive things could be achieved while serving time in prison. We can develop new dreams, visions and hope that will lead us to be more productive and responsible when released. We can also take advantage of any services and programs offered in prison that might be useful while doing time. The burden lies when one is released without direction and hope of survival in the community. It may not be easy, but with hope, hard work and direction, we can achieve a lot.

We recently visited members of Project Connect at Arthur Kill Correction Facility and North Central Correction Facility in Massachusetts. We continue to send care-packages to our members who are in need, and continue our monthly letter writing to all our members in prisons. As well as referral letters of Reasonable Assurance for parole hearings for those who are about to be released. Those who are interested in our membership can write us and ask for the seven-part membership course. This course is designed for those who wish to become members of the church while in prison and those who wish to have a home church upon their release. A lot of us who have made some mistakes in the past are contributing members of society today. Many paid their debts to society, turned their lives around, and work very hard to regain some of the opportunity they lost during incarceration. Please remember it's never to late to start a new life. We hope you will remember one of former Project Connect members, Mr. Gentle Gregg in your prayers. He recently died in prison, and we will miss him.



I would like to thank the Presbyterian Church of Croton Falls, N.Y. and the First Presbyterian Church of New York City for their wonderful donations of food and care packages for those in prison.

We look forward to host another prisoners family members dinner this year.

Peace & Love To All!

Minister of Evangelism, Chibueze Okorie Faces Deportation Hearing

After 13 years of service to the Church of Gethsemane and society at large, The Department of Homeland Security and INS have requested a deportation hearing to determine whether Chibueze should be sent back to his homeland of Nigeria. He has working papers, pays taxes, and has contributed enormously to our country, by inspiring men and women in prison and those returning home, through the example of his own life and his ministry of compassion and hope. Chibueze also has a 6 year old son who he brings to church every Sunday. Please hold Chibueze in your prayers. Many of you have sent letters on his behalf to The Department of Homeland Security. We are still collecting letters if others are interested in sending them before July 10th. Chibueze remains strong in his faith and believes that God will make a way for him. The media is beginning to pick up his story and he was interviewed last week on WBAI. Articles have also appeared in The New York Times and The Daily News. For further information, call the church at (718) 499-6704 ext. 207

Project Connect ~ Voices from Inside

Hello Chibueze!

...Well I know you always keep me in your prayers, likewise my Brother. There is always light at the dark tunnel. Sometimes the dark tries to overcome you, enwrap you, but the light always comes thru and guides you.

Eric Campbell

"Dear Brother Chibueze & Members,

...I have been thinking of the Church lately and all the great work that is being done by Gethsemane throughout the community. Then as I was reading Brother Chibueze's letter he sent me in June, where he asked me if there was anything I needed, a bible or food stuff. Then I remembered the passage that says "Give, and it will be given to you, a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back." ~ Luke 6:38

Aaron Talley

...Please, allow me to thank everyone that helps all our family and the sister's and brother's that are behind these painful walls that when you look at the wall you could feel the tears that call out for help...

Jimmy Gonzalez

TODAY, I woke up with one thought on my mind.

TODAY, will be the day that I make a serious impact on the world.

TODAY, will be the day that I shed all shackles that binds me to this oppressive state of my existence.

TODAY, will be the day that all un-natural habits will fall to the wayside.

TODAY, will be the day that I stand up and be counted amongst the pure in heart.

TODAY, will be the day that I no longer will use excuses to justify the errors I have made.

TODAY, will be the day that will place me above the rank of a simple convict.

TODAY, is the day that I will be recognized as a member of the human race.

TODAY is the day...but, maybe a few more hours of sleep won't hurt...

By John "Mojo" Flynn

"Thoughts in Solitude"

By Thomas Merton, Abbey of Gethsemane

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to my perils alone.

Shared by Brother Maurice Samuels

The Church of Gethsemane,

...I want to say hello to everyone from the Church of Gethsemane and to those who have kept me in prayer and write to me as well. I thank every child of God for his time and patience for writing me. I thank the Church for the package I received. I had no idea I would receive one. I thank God for this gift and I wept.

Michael Johnson

...Over the years of my incarceration I built this defensive wall around me. For a long time it was hard for me to let anybody through, until I became a member of the Church of Gethsemane.

Willie Adams

...I have received your letter of encouragement, your reading of scripture Psalms 46. Thank you very much for your act of kindness towards me. I would like for you to give my love to the saints at Church of Gethsemane.

Derek Campbell

Visitors & Supporters Come to Gethsemane



Rev. Jonathon Schenk confirmation class from Dutch Neck Presbyterian Church in Princeton, NJ

Rev. Mary Speers brings visitors from Kingston Presbyterian



Elder Cordonnier, Chigozie & Rev. Baugh

Highlights of Church Activities & Events for 2005

Easter Sunday Pancake Breakfast was a great success with lot's of pancake flipping and sausage frying! We had a wonderful turn out with visitors and members sharing fellowship and good food before celebrating our Easter worship service.



Come One, Come All! ~ New Choir Forming

Music Director Pam McAllister has announced plans to start a new Gethsemane Choir in October. Initially the choir will rehearse only on the first Sunday of the month, 12:45 to 1:15, the half hour before worship. Everyone who loves to sing is invited to join.

Pam McAllister Anti-Death Penalty Book Has Impact — Gethsemane Elder Deborah Cordonnier teaches at Rider University in Lawrence, New Jersey. In April, she invited Gethsemane member and Music Director Pam McAllister to address two of her classes on the death penalty. Students in "Race, Class, and Gender" enjoyed pizza and iced tea as Pam engaged them in her thought-provoking "Capital Punishment Quiz." (For copies of this effective discussion-starter, contact the church office.) The class on "Research Writing" had been assigned Pam's book, **Death Dismantling the Execution Machinery in 21st Century U.S.A.** (Continuum Publishers). A life-embracing, thoughtful argument against capital punishment, **Death Defying** had an impact on the students, several of whom told Pam that her book had turned them around, from being for the death penalty to being solidly against it.

The Children of Abraham Second Annual Peace March, June 9th ~ the Church of Gethsemane joined with Muslim, Jewish and Christian friends as together we marched for peace. We began at the Islamic Mission of America, Dawoud Mosque in Brooklyn and across the Brooklyn Bridge to St. Pauls' Church in Manhattan.

JusticeWorks Community

Three Major Justice Concerns:

Minor Changes in the Rockefeller Drug

Laws: On December 7th, 2004, New York State legislators voted to reduce the harsh sentences of the Rockefeller Drug Laws. However, with what most consider only minimal changes, these laws still remain unduly harsh. The changes only pertain to 446 of the 15,000 Rockefeller Drug Law prisoners currently incarcerated. The new law has the most impact on the A-1 drug felons with a reduction of 15 years to life to 8 to 20 years. Many of these drug law violators have been scheduled for re-sentencing but the process is slow since no provision for legal assistance was written into the law. The thresholds for possession only have been increased from 4 to 8 ounces. However, there are still 15,000 drug law prisoners who have not been reached by the minor changes and most significantly, discretion has not been returned to judges.

Telephone Justice Campaign: The New York Campaign for Telephone Justice is a project of the Center for Constitutional Rights. The focus of the campaign is the monopoly contract that MCI has on all calls from New York State prisons. The Department of Correctional Services (DOCS) only allows prisoners to make collect calls and only through MCI at highly inflated rates. Huge profits come to MCI and to DOCS. MCI charges families of prisoners 630% more for a phone call than they charge the average customer. Monthly bills for these families range from \$300-500. On May 16 SNAP Coordinator Rafael Mutis and 50 activists from this campaign traveled to Virginia to make these injustices known at the MCI Shareholders meeting. For more information on this campaign, log onto www.telephonejustice.org.

Equal Representation: New Yorkers for Equal Representation is a movement recently begun, which seeks to restore equal representation to poor and minority communities by changing the way prisoners are counted. For purposes of redistricting, prisoners in New York State are currently counted in their place of incarceration, rather than in their home community. In actual fact there are seven upstate senate districts that would not meet minimum population requirements without the counting of prisoners as residents. These "prison districts" distort democracy and cheat urban communities out of the equal representation they deserve. The prisoners cannot vote and these legislators do not represent their concerns, but their numbers add to the political clout of these senators. For more information on this unfair practice, which is true outside of New York State as well, log onto www.prisonersofthecensus.org.

Concerned citizens need to speak out on these instances of injustice in New York and call for meaningful change!!
Mary-Elizabeth Fitzgerald, JusticeWorks Community

To:

The Church of Gethsemane
1012 Eighth Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11215

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, or call 718-499-6704

UPCOMING EVENTS AT



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

July 9th, 2005 — from 10am to 4pm "Neighborhood Fair"
September 10th, 2005 — "The Music Hall Revusical"
October 28th, 2005 — "The Wizard of Oz"

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, Louisa Horton-Hill, Helene Means, Doris Randolph, Jose Reyes, Ray Rios

Deacons: Gregory Braun, Maurice Braun

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.

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