



The Church of Gethsemane

Liberation Voices!

Summer 2007



Pastor's Report — Rev. Liz Alexander



Dear Members and Friends of Gethsemane,

This program year has been filled with both challenges and great joys. Our worshipping community grows in its passion and conviction to our mission, as we share our faith tradition and our life stories with one another, and proclaim the Good News of God's love for all.

I wish to thank all the members and friends of Gethsemane for your continued support. The needs of those coming home from prison are great, and grants for re-entry support and our Project Connect Program for those still in prison are essential to our ministry. While we received a significant grant from Brick Church this past year to fund our re-entry support group and enhance our Project Connect program, this was a one time grant. We will need additional funding this coming year if we are to continue these programs. We pray that faithful supporters, including individual donors, partner churches, and councils, etc. from the denomination will continue to walk in solidarity with those who have been marginalized and disempowered by our society.

I also wish to thank those who volunteer their time at our church. A special thanks to the Reading Group volunteers from Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, who have provided tutoring and mentoring for our children over the years. Our intern Melodee Bottari also graciously donated her time with us this year. We thank her for her energy and insight, as well as her compassion and preaching skills. We wish her well on her path towards ordination.

If you are not familiar with The Church of Gethsemane and are reading our newsletter for the first time, please contact us for further information about how you can become part of our church family.

Blessings and Peace, *Liz*

Minister of Evangelism — Chibueze Okorie

Greetings to our Project Connect Members and Friends,



There is hope for those who believe in working hard and moving forward to success. Moving forward should always be the ultimate goal in ones life. No one should give up from the struggles of ones life journey. Failures should not be the end of our lives, but we should continue to strive for success. Having spent many years in prison should not make one dehumanize one self. We are

all human beings and loving children of God who seek changes to our lives. Many of our Project Connect Members who have been released from prison still struggle to get their lives back. Finding a job and affordable housing can be a challenge for folks coming home. Those difficulties should not deprive us from trying to achieve our dreams.

When you're released or about to be released, equip yourselves with faith in believing that you will make it, determination to go with your faith, and the principles to guide you. Remember being released from prison does not end the struggle to survive in the community. You will have to help yourself to find those services that might help you make a successful re-entry. Those changes you made to your life while in prison lead to your becoming a productive member of society when you are released.

At the Church of Gethsemane we welcome those who are released from prison as part of our church family. Project Connect Re-entry support group is our new program for those released from prison. The participants meet twice a month to support one another.

We continue to reach out to our brothers and sisters and friends in prison through our Project Connect Program. We welcomed four Project Connect members home this year. Who are now full members of our community of faith. We look forward to welcoming more members and friends by the fall. May God continue to guide you all, "Amen"

Peace & love to All! Chibueze

GETHSEMANE INTERN Melodee Bottari



I graduated from New York Theological Seminary May 2007 with a Master's of Divinity. Presently I am working on finishing ordination exams and will seek a call as a Minister of Word and Sacrament as soon as all requirements are fulfilled. Meanwhile, I am coordinating a few ecumenical events on Staten Island. I will be organizing an interfaith Thanksgiving service along with Father John O'Hara from St. Theresa's Roman Catholic Church. This event will take place at Olivet Presbyterian Church where I serve as an elder. I will also be organizing a choir fest with Rabbi Les Polansky from Temple Israel. I will be an active member of the Staten Island Council of Churches and I look forward to participating in many ecumenical/interfaith events. I enjoy spending any free time with my husband of 11 years, Gregory and the three cats who allow me to live with them, Laverne, Shirley and Pandora.

Project Connect ~ Voices from Inside



Chibueze Okorie visits Fishkill Correctional Facility

Prison Visits: An important part of our ministry is to visit our Project Connect members who are incarcerated. We also send monthly letters and care packages to over 70 members. Here are some voices from those who are still behind bars.

Who Am I to cry:

When ever I feel that life is not worth living, I am reminded by someone less fortunate the reason why I must continue to live.

Who am I to cry, when so many have forsaken their lives for the things I take for granted, and the greatest lesson comes from one who was nailed to a cross.

Who am I to cry, when looking into the faces of young children, and questioning them on what they would like to be when they grow up, and they respond "alive".

Who am I to cry, when so many families and lives have been shattered by my recklessness, and prison visits now outweigh family reunions.

Who am I to cry, when I feel that I 'm being pulled in so many directions that I have become "Dry Bones", waiting for someone to give me life and purpose.

Who am I to cry, when living this life, I now realized that there are so many who have yet to live.

John Mojo Flynn

I earnestly appreciate all the letters, cards and food sent to me from the membership of the church of Gethsemane. May God bless all of you kind and loving people. I do look forward to meeting all the nice and caring people that make up The Church of Gethsemane. **Peter Odenthal**

Hello and may the Lord continue to bless each and everyone of you. I was very happy to get the food from you all, that made me feel really good. So how are you all doing? Its always nice to hear from you all as well as it is always good for you all to hear from me too. **Joseph Petty**

It was truly a blessing to receive your letter. I praised God because I've been praying that he would send me some one to write, then I got your letter. I question myself for a minute on how you got my name to write me, but I realized that it was from The Church of Gethsemane. **Edwin Madden**

Like yourself Chibueze, I too realized where God has brought me from. I know that it was only by his grace and mercy that I have been able to endure these past 25 years in here,+ while at the same time be a blessing, inspiration and positive influence on others.

Not to mention ministries such as yours that have encouraged and supported me in so many ways. The visit we had last week was so beautiful. Please continue to bring life and hope to all those who desperately need it both on the inside and on the outside. God willing, upon my release as well as while I am incarcerated, we can work together on some ideas and endeavors for God's glory" **Paul Satterfield**

Welcome Home

Since our last newsletter, we have had the blessing of welcoming home four of our project connect members who had been incarcerated for many years. What a joy it was to have Anthony Simpson, Willie Adams, Charles Griffin and Audrey Pleasant join us in worship and become full members of our church family.



The Project Connect Re-entry Peer Support Group was formed earlier this year thanks to a grant from Brick Church. The group meets on the second and fourth Wednesday of every month from 6 to 8PM. Call Chibueze Okorie at (718)499-6704 ext. 207 for more information.

Highlights & Events



Service in the Gethsemane Garden



Leaders From Five Different Faith Traditions Participate in an International Interfaith Peace Day Service



The Annual International Interfaith Peace Day Service



Clarence Scott is Baptized & Confirmed



The Church of Gethsemane Session



Gethsemane & JusticeWorks Staff Christmas Lunch



Dutchneck Presbyterian Church Visits



Easter Pancake Breakfast



Nate and Rev. Lee Mac Callum on Criminal Justice Sunday



The Children's Christmas Party



Orlando & Rev. Liz with Louisa Horton Hill at Actors Fund Home



The Holy Spirit Team

Highlights & Events

Homecoming and Installation Service on Sept. 9th!

On September 9th, we will celebrate Homecoming Sunday at 1:30PM. There will be a light lunch following worship. At 4:00PM members of The Church of Gethsemane will host an Installation Service with invited guests from neighborhood churches and members of the Presbytery. The Presbytery of NYC will install Rev. Liz Alexander as Designated Pastor of The Church of Gethsemane. Light refreshments will follow. Please come and show your support for Liz and our ministry at Gethsemane.

Elder Debbie Cordonnier, participated in the 2007 Oxford Round Table from July 22nd-27th at Oxford University in London. The Round Table can best be described as a learning community of outstanding educational leaders. Debbie who is an English Professor at Rider University in New Jersey was invited to submit an abstract and was selected from among the 35 international delegates chosen to be one of 6 presenters. Her topic focused on allusions to God in writings of women in prison. Her presentation was on Monday, July 23rd.



Elder Pam McAllister, Gethsemane's Music Director, now writes a column, "The Contemplative Christian," for The Progressive Christian magazine. Drawing inspiration from the lyrics of favorite hymns, Pam's meditations focus on the challenges of modern life from a social gospel perspective. (www.tpcmagazine.org). Check it out. Pam's book, *Death Defying* (Continuum, ISBN# 0-8264-1463-X), about why we need to end capital punishment and 100 action-ideas of how to do this, includes several pages about Gethsemane's work against the death penalty. The book has garnered favorable reviews as "an extraordinary beacon of hope" and "a remarkably lively and hopeful look at a painful topic."

This fall, we will celebrate the publication of Pam's tenth book, *The Bedside, Bathtub & Armchair Companion to Mark Twain* (Continuum, ISBN# 0-8264-1813-9). Fully illustrated and featuring a filmography, puzzle, and Huck Finn Adventure Map, it is an entertaining tribute to our most quotable American, who began life as a "printer's devil" and became a witty "devil's advocate." Twain dismissed organized religion but never stopped struggling with his faith.



FOOD PANTRY:

This fall, Gethsemane is expanding its Food Pantry, after creating new space and supplies funded by a grant from the Synod of the Northeast. Once a month, we will open our doors to distribute food to a greater population of those in need in the Brooklyn community. We will continue to send care packages to men and women in the New York State prison system. We also provide food as needed to those who worship with us. If you can contribute food, money, or time to assist in this ministry to those in need, please contact the church office and leave your name and number.



GETHSEMANE CHOIR:

Who needs American Idol? The Gethsemane Choir is back, crooning soulful spirituals and rocking our worship with foot-stomping songs about Jesus and justice. Choir Director Pam McAllister says, "We may be small but we've got spirit!" We would love to make some choir ponchos or sashes to wear when we sing. If you can assist with money or materials, please leave a message for Pam at the church with your name and number.

Members and Staff of Gethsemane Visit other Congregations:

Rev. Liz Alexander and Minister Chibueze Okorie visited Olivet Presbyterian Church to speak about Gethsemane's unique ministry. Tina, Kai and Davian Reynolds spoke at the Union Church of Bay Ridge about Mothers In Prison/ Children in Crisis for Mother's Day, Raymond Gillyard and the Petty family joined Rev. Liz for a "Minute for Mission" at Brick Presbyterian Church, and Anthony Simpson joined Rev. Liz at The First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn for a program on the issues of Re-Entry. An important part of our ministry is to share our stories and concerns with other faith communities and join together in ministry and advocacy with and for those who have been in prison.

Gethsemane News



The Gethsemane Film Project: The Gethsemane Film Project will explore how a community like the Church of Gethsemane manifests not only the mission of the Presbyterian Church (USA) but also the principals at the heart of all faiths that value equality and justice. The film is continuing production with documentary filmmaker, Isaac Solotaroff. For his profile and background on other films Isaac has produced, please visit www.isaacsolotaroff.com.



Criminal Justice Sunday: On February 11, 2007, members of the Presbytery of New York City, friends from Park Slope United Methodist Church and The Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture, and The Church School Choir of The First Presbyterian Church in The City of New York joined Gethsemane to highlight concerns about criminal justice. Nathaniel Wright, and Anthony Simpson shared about incarceration and re-entry, and Rosemarie Napoli told about her experience growing up as the child of incarcerated parents. Following the worship service, Julie Mormando, Program Coordinator of JusticeWorks Community, and Elizabeth Leslie, Women of Substance spokeswoman, shared about women,

addiction, incarceration and alternatives to prison. Criminal Justice Sunday has always been on the Presbyterian Church (USA) calendar and is an opportunity to speak out about the need for changes in our criminal justice system.



JusticeWorks Community

JusticeWorks celebrated its 15th Anniversary on May 16, 2007 at Judson Memorial Church. Highlights of the evening were the Achievement awards given to two formerly incarcerated women in honor of Rev. Dr. Constance M. Baugh, Founder of JusticeWorks and first Pastor of Gethsemane. There were readings done by celebrity voices and voices of formerly incarcerated women and a gospel choir that performed.

As a separate 501 (c) (3) organization, JusticeWorks' mission is to engage in public education, advocacy and community organizing to alter inhumane and unjust criminal justice policies. Some of the issues JWC is currently focused on which directly affect prisoners and their families are:



Anthony Simpson, Rev. Liz Alexander, Debbie Cordonnier, Victoria Wolf & Chibueze Okorie

➤ Legislation introduced by Sen. Eric Schneiderman to count prisoners in their home districts rather than in the facilities where they are incarcerated. This practice will bring NYS into compliance with the state constitution and give NYC voters an equal political voice in Albany.

➤ Telephone Justice: a bill introduced by Assemblymember Aubry and Sen. Nozzolio will ensure that families of prisoners will continue to pay the reduced fees on collect calls put into place in January by Governor Spitzer.

➤ Another bill sponsored by Assembly member Wright suspends rather than terminates enrollment on Medicaid when individuals are incarcerated. This will ensure continued medical care upon release.

➤ The last bill sponsored by Sen. Montgomery would make people in prison eligible once again for Tuition Assistance program(TAP) so they can enroll, in degree programs and build skills while incarcerated.

➤ JusticeWorks and its constituents will continue to contact NYS legislators to support passage of these bills before this legislative session ends.



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To:

The Church of Gethsemane
1012 Eighth Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11215

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
Executive Assistant: Victoria Schell-Wolf

Officers of the Church

Elders/Session: Orlando Haynes Clerk of Session, Helene Means Treasurer, Rosemarie Napoli, Doris Randolph, Ray Rios, Nathaniel Wright, Louisa Horton-Hill Clerk of Session Emerita
Deacons: Raymond Gillyard, Joseph Petty, Sr., Anthony Simpson & Brenda Ward

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.

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

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. JusticeWorks is a sister organization of The Church of Gethsemane, with it's own 501C3.

Visit www.justiceworks.org phone: 718-499-6704 ext. 203



**Brooklyn Family Theatre At
The Church of Gethsemane**
(718) 670-7205
www.brooklynfamilytheatre.com

Directions:

Take the F train to Brooklyn ~ Get off at the 7th Avenue Park Slope stop ~ Walk to Eighth Avenue ~ the Church is on Eighth Avenue between 10th & 11th Street