



# The Church of Gethsemane

## LIBERATION VOICES!

2016~2017



### Rev. Diane Lacey Pastor



Recently a Project Connect member returning from prison said upon entering our Church "This church is small. I expected to see a big church". "Do not despise small things" is a popular quote from the Bible.

Ministering since 1984 this small church has ministered to thousands of individuals in prisons and jails throughout NY State as well as to those "returning citizens" who have become members of our congregation.

This year has been full of joys which include; new volunteers from First Presbyterian Church Brooklyn (FPCB), Second Presbyterian Manhattan and Kingslawn United Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, the Interfaith Young Adults of Brooklyn Heights and we welcomed, Adriene Thorne, the new pastor at FPCB. Several of our members were released from parole. Additional good news included two weddings, new members and the ordination of Minister Okorie as Commissioned Ruling Elder (aka Lay Pastor) which enables him to baptize, serve communion and perform weddings in prison and in our church.

There has also been sadness in our life together. There were two deaths of beloved Elders. One, Elder Margaret "Peg" Anderson who gave Gethsemane 22 years of leadership and love--and Elder Shirley Jones who shared her gifts of creativity and care for all of us. We said farewell to Intern Holly Reid and her husband Jim when she graduated from Union Theological Seminary after we benefitted from her good work during the past academic year. We have promised to visit her in Maine when good weather and lobsters are available.

We are very grateful to God who continues to bless this ministry. Finally I am personally grateful to all the volunteers from our sister Churches who have enabled us to expand our letter writing and prison visits; grateful to the Churches which annually support us both financially and with good will; grateful to our supportive Park Slope neighbors; grateful to Kolot Chayeynu, Brooklyn Acting Lab, the AA groups, FA Group, Rock Blossom and all the groups who share our space; grateful to the Session (our guiding council), grateful to our hard working staff and finally grateful to my former colleagues and friends who continue to generously donate men's' clothing.  
Peace & Blessings, Rev. Lacey

### Minister Chibueze Okorie Minister of Evangelism & Director of Project Connect



Our Project Connect Program is very much a part of life at Gethsemane. 2-3 letters are read at the worship service each Sunday. They are always very inspirational. The turn-out at the PC Support meeting is always heartening. Important transitional issues are openly discussed such as parole, housing, employment and relationships. Veteran members are able to impart much wisdom on these issues. Newly released members are extremely grateful for their assistance. We witness many members being rewarded for their determination

Project Connect members returning home from prison are no strangers to the Gethsemane community. The church has been in correspondence with them for some years, some have been visited, and we have been able to meet some of their loved ones. Gethsemane is a home and a place of welcoming and hospitality, and a place of peace, strength and growth. No one is turned away. Many of us came from different backgrounds and faiths, and we strive to work with one another in making a difference for our lives and community. God called us for many reasons regardless of our backgrounds. Many of our members have had difficult life experiences before their incarceration as well as in prison. They derive strength and energy from sharing these experiences.

The community of Gethsemane has a number of formerly incarcerated members who attend weekly worship and engage in the life of the church. Over 250 PC members are incarcerated, and are eager to be released to join our community of faith. Some members become ordained Elders and Deacons of the church and contributing members of the community. They strive to have a relationship with God and to grow into Godly men and women. They are ready to lead and honor God and demonstrate good character, and respect for themselves and others.

Gethsemane and its staff work with people of faith from our sister churches city wide that support those returning individuals during their transition back to society. Many of the volunteers have accompanied us on prison visits. They are living out Jesus' command "Remember those in prison as if you are there with them." I am deeply grateful for the efforts of the sisters and brothers of Gethsemane whether they are incarcerated or released they continue to contribute to the strength of the ministry through their many gifts and talents. Please join us at Gethsemane to welcome and create a better future for those returning home from prison.  
In solidarity, Minister Okorie



Gethsemane Session



Gethsemane Staff



# Gethsemane News

## Sincere Thank You!

To the partner churches who support our ministry: Brick, Fifth Avenue, First in New Canaan, First in NYC, First of Brooklyn, Madison Avenue, Second and Rutgers Presbyterian Churches, Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims and the many faith communities who gave benevolence year-end grants. Friends and Community members who donate gently used clothing, household items and food for our food pantry; the Brooklyn Botanic Garden and Elder Karla Chandler-McCord for plants and supplies which keep our gardens beautiful; Fifth Avenue and Madison Avenue Presbyterian Churches for donating the gifts for our annual Children's Christmas Party; our wonderful space sharers who help support Gethsemane all year long.

## Two weddings! A Hallelujah time for our congregation!

One took place during the Christmas Holiday season at the end of 2015 and the other in February 2016. The first wedding joined Jose Quinones a member since 2011 to his beautiful bride Marisol Marabel. The loving couple brought joy to all. The Christmas decorations in the sanctuary made for a beautiful setting and the delicious Spanish food served during the reception completed the experience.

February seems to be a popular wedding month at Gethsemane. Elder Karla Chandler married Jerry McCord. Karla, a leader in our church and Jerry who has shared his gifts as a musician, a contributor to PC and recent member were married in a simple service of their choosing surrounded by both families, friends and Gethsemane members. Karla wore her mother's wedding dress. The sanctuary and social hall were decorated with succulent plants and each person was given a miniature succulent as a remembrance of the joyous occasion.



This year our **Director of Music, Andrew Huang** continued to hit high notes from Sunday to Sunday as well as for our special church holidays and weddings. A Chorus of enthusiastic members lead our congregational singing each Sunday.

## **We Welcome New Members:**

Peaches Gillette, Calvin Gossett,  
Jerry McCord, Marisol Quinones and  
Peter Thomas

## In Memoriam

2016 brought both sorrow and gratitude to Gethsemane at the loss of two well-respected Elders.

**Elder Margaret Anderson** died suddenly in April in Massachusetts. Peg had been a member of First Presbyterian Church in NYC for 30 years. After serving on the Organizing Committee for Gethsemane in 1986, she soon transferred her membership to Gethsemane and played a major role in the life of the church for the next 22 years. There was a memorial service for her on September 25th, 2016 with many friends, colleagues, and church members in attendance.

**Elder Shirley Mae Jones** left us suddenly at the end of July. She had migrated with her family from Sanford, N.C. to NYC when she was two years old. She attended NYC public schools, Washington Irving H.S. and Hunter College. Shirley was a community activist and advocate for children for all of her adult life. She was a member and Elder at Good-Shepherd Faith Presbyterian Church for 10 years and transferred her membership to Gethsemane where she was an Elder and Clerk of Session. A Memorial Service is planned for February 2017. We remember them with deep gratitude and love. Rest in Peace.



## **Documentary Chosen for Film Festivals:**

The Gethsemane documentary film, *Walk With Me*, has been positively received by film festivals across the country. To date there are six live festivals where people gather to screen the film and one online festival which draws the attention of distributors to international documentaries. Six of the festivals that have accepted our film are the *Freedom Film Fest* ( D.C. in December 2016), *Oneata Festival* (Iowa, April 2017 ) the *National Black Film Festival* (Houston, May 2017), *Houston Black Film Festival* (Houston, March 23, 2017), (In) *Justice for All Film Festival* (Chicago. April 20-22, 2017), *First Annual Atlantic Avenue Film Festival* (Brooklyn, NY May 5-7, 2017). One award has been granted called the **IMPACT Documentary Award**. There are 14 other festivals who are considering inclusion of the film.

## **Special Days at Gethsemane:**

We begin each year honoring historic days and months with readings, music and tributes, beginning with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's Birthday, Criminal Justice Sunday, Black History and Women's History Months, Hispanic Heritage Month, Mothers and Fathers Days as well as Thanksgiving.

Church holy days are given special attention. Our Maundy Thursday service which takes place around a very long table commemorates both Jesus' Last Supper and his suffering in the Gethsemane Garden. It is a moving experience for new and old members and friends. Our Easter and Pentecost services are full of joy and Holy Spirit excitement. The year ends with Christmas services for both children and adults in our beautifully decorated sanctuary. On the second Sunday of December we have a pageant and gifts for the children of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated members. On the following Sunday there is special music often by guest musicians, carol singing and a holiday meal to enjoy.



## **Hortensia Gooding**

Union Theological Seminary Intern 2016-2017

## **Loss of a Champion of Justice**

Kenneth Thompson, the first Black District Attorney in Brooklyn, died of cancer on October 9, 2016. He was 50 years old. Thompson impacted the cause of justice immensely in Brooklyn and across the country. He created a unit which focused on wrongful convictions and in his short time in office brought 21 wrongful convictions to a just conclusion. Gethsemane was blessed to have collaborated with DA Thompson and his office on several occasions.



## Project Connect Re-Entry Program

**Upon release** Project Connect Members are welcomed into the Church of Gethsemane. Here they can receive assistance with counseling, food, clothing, emergency funds and referrals for housing, job placement, and health care benefits. The Project Connect Re-Entry Peer Support Group is open to returning PC Members and those outside the Church community who have been recently released from prison. The Support Group provides a forum for individuals to discuss specific issues and concerns relating to transition from prison to life on the outside. Participants are urged to share their joys and struggles and learn from each other's experiences. Together group members become involved in problem solving and networking and provide feedback and support for each other. A meal and roundtrip transit fare are provided to each participant. The group meets twice monthly and occasionally invites outside speakers. Discussions are kept confidential.



I became a member of Project Connect while in prison. It was the love and support of The Church of Gethsemane and Project Connect that helped with my release. The love and support never stopped, it only got stronger and better. I have been home since three years after my release. I am currently serving as an Elder of the church and one of the mentors of the Project Connect re-entry program. The church gives and serves me with unconditional love, and now I am able to show the same love to others. We are here for you too. **Ruling Elder Robert William (Pop Love)**

I am blessed and fortunate to be part of the church and Project Connect. Most of my life, I have surrounded myself with negative people which in turn led me to prison. Now I have the Project Connect that helps me stay positive with my life, and also helps other brothers and sisters returning home from prison. **Jimmy Torres**

I am a member of Project Connect and a Ruling Elder of The Church of Gethsemane. I am blessed with my lovely wife Angela, two jobs, an apartment, and strong family support. The Project Connect program has helped place my feet on a solid rock, Amen and Amen. I share my story with anyone who wants to be a true soldier in the army of the Lord, and grow spiritually among the saints of Gethsemane. Come and visit our family in Christ and learn the true meaning of love and growth where the air is fresh with God's love. **Ruling Elder Sidney Baptiste (Bap)**

I came to Gethsemane after my release from prison. The Church family welcomed and accepted me for who I am and not who I was. This church is a true church of God. They guided me through my re-entry and continue to offer the love of Jesus Christ. I come to church service every Sunday and attend Project Connect meetings. I will always support my church in any way I can, and also welcome those returning home to the Gethsemane community. **Calvin Gossett (Spongey)**

I had made up my mind, through the strength of God in me, to change my life around while I was incarcerated. I could no longer live my life, my addiction to drugs and harming other people. I took every course that I could until I found my niche in the law library. I learned everything I could about the law while incarcerated. I completed the Project Connect membership correspondence course of the Church of Gethsemane while in prison.

Today, I am a Ruling Elder, and a mentor of Project Connect. It was easy to gain employment through the mentoring of the staff at Gethsemane and the clothes closet, where they provided clothes for me to go on interviews.

Since coming home and in my position of employment, I have been able to give to others by helping them to find apartments, jobs, and other assistance to men and women when coming home. However, you have to be prepared. I urge you in the name of almighty God, prepare yourselves! You will always have "manna" from heaven. **Ruling Elder Louis D. Rodriguez**

I came to be involved with The Church of Gethsemane and Project Connect through my wife who is a Ruling Elder in the church. My background was in the Criminal Justice System, in the State of New York. I was a probation officer, a parole officer, and a parole revocation specialist. In this position I was able to see the benefit of the Parole system along with the harm that the system causes people and their families. I was a proponent and sculptor of the existing re-entry program and understand that it needs to be improved and expanded.

I regularly attend the Project Connect meetings and discuss the problems that the members are having with the parole system and with life. I see Project Connect under the enlightened leadership of Min. Chibueze Okorie as a model for the type of re-entry program needed in our communities across the State.

**Gerald McCord, Project Connect Volunteer**

We were first introduced, two years ago, to The Church of Gethsemane by our Interim Pastor Rev. Nadine Hundertmark of First Presbyterian Church Brooklyn (FPCB). Upon our first attendance at a Gethsemane worship service, my wife Jane and I were immediately drawn to the sincerity of member testimonies, the importance of the Project Connect program, and our warm and loving reception by the members.

Rev Lacey and Minister Okorie recommended two ways in which we could help: soliciting a monthly group letter from our church to be sent to incarcerated Project Connect members, preparation and serving of a monthly lunch after worship. FPCB members became very supportive of writing letters, particularly after we read correspondence coming back from incarcerated Project Connect members. Many FPCB individuals and groups regularly volunteer to prepare and serve lunches for fellowship.

Jane and I feel blessed and privileged to be associated with The Church of Gethsemane. Being called to support this congregation and its impactful work with both incarcerated and formerly incarcerated men and women has made our retirement more meaningful. It has also given us a better understanding of the harm that mass incarceration has caused through the ongoing racial discrimination in our society and the need for forgiveness and acceptance by church and society of formerly incarcerated men and women. **Dave Ehlike, Project Connect Volunteer**



# Project Connect Voices From Inside

We believe that people can change and that God keeps pulling us to life and to a new world of joy and peace!



Project Connect is our network with men and women in prison. The Project Connect Program reaches out to incarcerated persons through letter writing, prison visits, care packages, birthday cards and the Gethsemane newsletter, Liberation Voices. Prisoners are invited to participate in our 7-part Membership Correspondence Course. Membership offers them a connection with a supportive faith community and the experience of an extended family. We provide emotional and spiritual support, letters of reasonable assurance for parole board hearings, making contact with family members and an annual Christmas party for children of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated parents. During the past year over 40 new people joined our Project Connect Program. Many individuals have completed our membership correspondence course and have received certificates of completion. Church members write monthly letters to our 250 Project Connect Members in prisons throughout New York State.

**We Welcome Home!**  
 Elijah Arrington, Pedro Callazo,  
 Joyce Campbell, Melvin Ginyard,  
 Kenneth Hayes, Terrence Reid,  
 Charles Rhoden, Michael Smith & Isaac Teel



**Welcome food packages being sent to Project Connect members in prison**

I am afraid there is no other church except Gethsemane and sister churches that believe that one should be given a second chance to stand up again in society. Jesus says that one who has genuinely turned his life around will be known by his fruits [Matthew 7:16, 20].  
**Sal Emma**

First thing I'll like to say is thank you for the card and blessings from all the members that took the time out to make sure that we are never forgotten just because we are incarcerated. Well, God has plans for everyone, and some just came sooner than others. I will keep struggling and never give up. **Eric Nash**

I also want to thank church members for the many wonderful and inspiring letters they sent me this holiday season and the past years. The letters are filled with encouragement, and they have given me much hope to journey on. Once again, thanks to Gethsemane for loving me. **Noel Belgrave**

**Raise the Age:** NYS remains one of the two states to automatically prosecute 16 & 17 year-olds as adults for even minor offenses. The juvenile system is much better than the adult system in offering rehabilitation to them. Raising the age will reduce recidivism & offer young people who have made a mistake a chance to become productive citizens. It is definitely the time to RAISE THE AGE. There is wide support for raising the age, contact your elected officials and urge them to pass legislation to raise the age of criminal responsibility in our state. The NYS Assembly passed the Raise the Age bill on February 14, 2017. The real test is in the Senate.

**The Role of Risk Assessment in Parole Decisions:** It has been said repeatedly that the purpose of the Parole Board is Not to resentence the individual at a Parole Hearing. Recently a regulation was proposed for Parole Board hearings. The board must focus on the Risk Assessment evaluation that has been calculated for each inmate before their parole hearings. They are asked to use the results in determining whether the individual will be released. If there is a reason that this is not followed, the reason(s) must be written down. Hopefully this will lead to more parole releases than we have witnessed in the past.

**Prisoners Held past their Release Dates:** In NYS dozens of sex-offenders are currently being held beyond their release dates because of a new interpretation of a state law that governs where they can live. The law has been in effect since 2005 and determines that they cannot live within a 1,000 feet of a school—with a relative or in a room or apartment. However, since February 2014 this same interpretation has applied to Homeless Shelters, making most of them off-limits because of the proximity to schools. This interpretation has had a profound effect in NYC: only 14 of the 270 shelters in NYC qualify under this interpretation and they are always booked to capacity. Currently there are several law suits being filed to bring some resolution to this extremely difficult matter.

**Join us in urging Governor Cuomo and legislators to pass these criminal justice reform measures!**

**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 Ministry of the Church**

Ministers:	All the People
Pastor	Rev. Diane Lacey
Pastor Emerita	Rev. Dr. Constance M. Baugh
Director of Community Life	Mary-Elizabeth Fitzgerald
Minister of Evangelism	Chibueze Okorie, CRE
Executive Assistant	Victoria Schell-Wolf
Director of Music	Andrew Huang
Custodian	Toussaint Washington
Bookkeeper	Margery Davis

**Session:** Rev. Diane Lacey, Moderator, Elders-Sidney Baptiste, Karla Chandler-McCord, Louis D. Rodriguez, Glendon Taitt, Clerk of Session & Robert Williams, Treasurer

**Why We Are Called Gethsemane:** The Church of Gethsemane takes its name from the olive grove, the garden, where Jesus went to be strengthened in his time of despair. The Garden of Gethsemane has become a symbol of suffering and agony. But we who gather together under this name also understand the Gethsemane story as a symbol of strength. We who worship together at Gethsemane are creating a place of strengthening. We believe that in this place, together, we can do as Jesus did; we can transform our cup of suffering into a cup of strengthening, in order to create right relations and justice in our world.

**The Church of Gethsemane ~ 1012 Eighth Avenue Brooklyn, New York 11215  
 Phone: (718) 499-6704 Fax: (718) 832-2832 website: churchofgethsemane.org**

**Sunday Worship Service is at 11AM Please Join Us ~ All Are Welcome!**