



# The Church of Gethsemane

## LIBERATION VOICES!

2017-2018



### Rev. Diane Lacey Pastor



The Bible says, "The joy of the Lord is our strength. God has given me an extra measure of joy this year which sustains and energizes me here at the Church of Gethsemane. Our leaders, staff, Union Theological Seminary intern, as well as long time members' who support the worship and prayer services, provide a strong foundation for the ministry. Our "returning citizens" have brought new life stories and the challenges faced in re-entry. Our open door has welcomed neighbors who have become friends of the church and added new life.

Although the cold, bleak, winter storms and illnesses from colds and flu decreased the number of prison visits we were able to make, still we met with many women and men who appreciated the time we were able to share.

The experiences of the volunteers from First Brooklyn Presbyterian Church, Kingslawn Presbyterian Church and Second Presbyterian Church, Manhattan who joined us in visiting the women were so positive that they all have signed up for future visits. Our thanks to the Pastor and Women of St. Albans Presbyterian Church, Queens, for their material support of the ministry.

Last Fall we hosted Presbyterians from all over the City for my installation service. Friends from my pre-ministerial days as a community organizer and political activist came to bring well wishes. Although my leadership role has not changed but my position as Minister of Word and Sacrament now adds the title Installed Pastor.

In addition to my work in the Church, I am active in the work of our Presbytery by serving as a member of the Board of Trustees and the Good Works Committee. Minister Okorie and the Elders who serve on Gethsemane's governing body, the Session, also participate regularly in the work of the denomination through Committee membership and attendance at Presbytery meetings.

There are many challenges ahead and we continue to look forward in hope. As we seek a "closer walk with God", we are encouraged to dream new dreams, make new plans, start new projects and involve ourselves with others working for a beloved and just society. Please join us. Peace, joy and blessings.

~Rev. Diane Lacey



Church of Gethsemane Members and Friends

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



The Church of Gethsemane created the Project Connect program in 1988 to network with brothers and sisters incarcerated in New York state prisons. Through this program the church reaches out to persons who are interested in the Membership Correspondence Course. After the completion of the course, a certificate of completion is issued; we also write letters of reasonable assurance for parole hearings.

The Church and Project Connect have been blessed with the love and grace of Jesus Christ. The church is a place of worship, fellowship, redemption, a place of openness and welcoming, a place of learning, growth, prayer and renewal. We believe that God forgives all sin, and that people can change. A relationship with God provides us with the ability to recognize who we are and what our purpose in life is.

Many citizens languish in prison; some are incarcerated past their release dates without a suitable residential address. Some are released with no support or skills for employment. Some have mental illness and may be a risk to public safety. Many people leave prison and vow never to return. Some manage to acquire education and training--a plus in re-entry. Yes, prison is a difficult place. To succeed after prison, one must leave the prison life behind and face the reality of the real world. Returning to Gethsemane requires you to adopt a new life style and to learn to let things work in the right way. Moving forward to a better life is the key. It will also convince others that you're a changed person. Some people return to prison for a variety of reasons. Re-integration is not easy and there are many factors that hinder a successful re-integration. Some individuals still have problems even when they have received support. Follow the rules, be a law abiding citizen, and do your very best.

After a lengthy time in prison, the process of integration can be difficult and challenging. Many of those challenges can lead to more troubles and cause formerly incarcerated persons to return to prison. Many are eager to return home, but realize that after many years of incarceration, they have nothing to offer themselves and the community. Many in prison struggle with stress and hardship. The commitment to get an education, trade, or vocational training enables many to obtain employment and housing. Special thanks to Erik Brogger, Steve Defuiter, Dave Ehke, Rev. Stephen Phelps and Jabe Ziino for their outstanding commitment with Project Connect prison visits. ~Minister Chibueze Okorie



Church of Gethsemane Staff

# Gethsemane News

**Sincere Thank You!** To our partner churches who support our ministry: Brick, Madison Avenue, Fifth Avenue and Rutgers Presbyterian Churches, First Presbyterian Church in NYC, First Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, The Synod of the Northeast, St. James Episcopal Church, Plymouth, Church of the Pilgrims, J.C. Flowers Foundation. We could not do it all without the support of our space sharers, Kolot Chayeinu, Brooklyn Acting Lab and our self-help groups.



**Rev. Diane Lacey's Installation:** On October 15th 2017 the Church of Gethsemane and the Presbytery of New York City changed Rev Lacey's title from Temporary to Installed Pastor in a meaningful service at the Church. Elder. Brunhida, "Sandy" Lane, Moderator Elect, presided. Rev. Patrick O'Connor, Pastor, First Jamaica Presbyterian Church, preached and brought his choir. A happy crowd of Presbyterians and long time friends of Rev. Lacey were present to support her. Special thanks to the Commission members, to the members and friends of First Presbyterian Church Brooklyn who provided food for the fellowship and to Selma Jackson, Committee on Ministry Liaison for her assistance in the planning and implementation of the event.

On May 13th, 2018, nineteen communities of faith joined in the **Mother's Day Public Awareness Event** sponsored by Gethsemane. We are grateful to all who participated in this event. Since 1992 thousands of individuals have had their consciousness raised about the plight of nonviolent incarcerated mothers and the children they leave behind. The children are the forgotten victims in this scenario. Barbara Barron was the guest speaker at Gethsemane's Mother's Day. Barbara is a formerly incarcerated mother of four. Two of her children accompanied her that day. She is employed at the Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (C.A.S.E.S.) Her message was powerful and inspiring. The informational bookmarks and origami flowers we provide to each participating community were distributed to the Gethsemane congregation.

## Special Days at Gethsemane:

In addition to Christmas, Maundy Thursday, Easter and Pentecost Sundays, our calendar is full of special remembrances during worship. We begin the year with tributes to the work of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, Black History, Women's History, Hispanic History and Asian Pacific Heritage. On Mothers Day we continue our tradition of raising awareness of the plight of Mothers in prison and the impact on their children. Fathers Day includes testimonies and special preaching. For Criminal Justice Sunday in February, Min. Chibueze Okorie invited guest speakers Chris Owens, Director of the Reentry Bureau, Kings County District Attorney's Office & Eddy Rosario, well known justice advocate, who gave powerful presentations. Certificates of Appreciation were given to volunteers from First Brooklyn Presbyterian and Kingslawn Presbyterian Churches who have joined us in visiting women and men in prison.



**Maryann Verghese**  
Union Theological Seminary Intern  
2017-2018

**We Welcome New Members:** Esther Blue, Melvin Ginyard, Robert Patterson, Jimmy Torres, Millie Williams and Cecilia Young

**Thanks to the women volunteers who participate in visits to women in prison.** Linda, Hilary & Valerie Antoine, Janet Dewar Bell, Uda Bradford, Jane Ehke, Mary Lynn Fiske, Diane Grimes, Diane Hutchinson, Harriette Mandeville, Mary Robinson, Gloria Sellers, Judy Selman, Kristen Smith, Sandra Turner, Sara Wyss, Rev. Leslie Merlin & Rev. Adrienne Thorne



**Women's prison volunteers from Gethsemane Church and First Brooklyn Presbyterian Church**

Jazz instrumentalist, **Esther Blue** currently plays at most of our worship services, as we seek a permanent Music Director. We are most grateful!

## Andrew Huang:

It was with great sadness that we said goodbye to our incredibly talented Music Director, Andrew Huang, at the end of July 2017. Andrew inspired us all to sing better and pray better with his beautiful and powerful vocal and instrumental renditions. He shared his rich talents generously with everyone. Our thoughts and prayers accompany him as he continues his journey.



**Mary-Elizabeth Fitzgerald & Victoria Schell-Wolf**

**In Memoriam:** Gethsemane prayerfully remembers three individuals who died in 2017 & 2018.

**James Morse** died on March 16, 2017 at Westchester Medical Center after a 29 year long relationship with Gethsemane. Blessedly his daughter, Lateefah, was with him when he passed. He earned a Masters degree in Professional Studies from New York Theological Seminary and taught in a pastoral program at Green Haven Correctional Facility. He was a prolific writer and was one of the early members of Project Connect.

**Charles Ransom** died on October 22, 2017 after only two months on Parole. We first met Charles in 2013 at the HIV Aids conference at Otisville C.F. He worked tirelessly on behalf of his fellow inmates. Charles was the President of the Lifers and Long termers Organization at Otisville. After his release he attended worship services at Gethsemane, continued to work on behalf of those he left behind, and was soon hired by Appellate Advocates.

**Peter Thomas** died on March 8, 2018 after struggling with several progressive illnesses. Peter and his wife Peaches Gillette joined Gethsemane in November 2016. Theirs was a loving and unique relationship over a span of 36 years. Peter died in Ithaca, New York where they had relocated after a devastating fire in their Park Slope apartment. They traveled down for worship service and fellowship as long as Peter's health and the weather permitted. **May they rest in peace.**

## 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.

When I was in the system everybody would down me for wanting to do the right thing. I stood strong to my belief and I'm going to church and becoming a better man. ~Ivan

I love being a part of the Church of Gethsemane, they are always there for me. They help me out a lot since I got out of prison. I thank them for all they have done for me and I will always be a member of this church no matter what. ~Vincent

The Church of Gethsemane has been my Gethsemane. The place that has prayed for me, struggled with me, and helped me through my transition with love, peace, and the Lords will for me. The Church of Gethsemane has become my church, my sanctuary, my home. ~Harold

One week after my release from Fishkill Corrections, I ran to the Church of Gethsemane. Praise God. I am a faithful member and allow God to see me as a vessel to bless others in Christ, Amen. Brothers and Sisters in Christ please remain faithful in Christ. God has a plan for each and everyone of you. Praise God! God is blessing me tremendously after 32 years of incarceration. Amen! ~Vonn

At my lowest point and only 6 months in freedom I turned to the Church of Gethsemane who opened their doors, arms and hearts allowing me to once again believe in the humanity of humans and find my love and faith in what has kept me alive and hopeful throughout my prison sentence and now. I thank God and all my Brothers & Sisters here at Gethsemane where the spirit of God truly does mend and heal lives and rejoice. ~Alberto

The church of Gethsemane is a blessed place to worship because of the Brothers and Sisters, the Pastor, the Minister, are all wonderful people...truly! Please stay strong and positive and make your way to the church once you are released. The feeling and acceptance and family is what you will get...and it is all real and sincere! ~Stanley (The Man)



Project Connect Re-Entry Group

Gethsemane has been a blessing. They welcomed me with love & are now my new family. Sending love to those I left. Stay strong. ~Joyce

I came home on 05/31/2018, and immediately started to attend the Church of Gethsemane. This church has lived up to every reputation that is heard. As a church that focuses on Re-Entry as well as helping the poor. As Christ said, "by love you shall know my disciples." This church definitely shows the love of Christ. ~John

Recently being released from incarceration, it is God's blessing to return to my extended church family at Gethsemane, who never give up on you Brothers and Sisters who are still incarcerated. Our love and support will always be here for you all. Our church is doing many good things. Do your part and come here. ~Charles

## Criminal Justice Issues

**Raise the Age:** One of the issues raised in our last newsletter was the Raise the Age Movement. In the NYS FY 2018 budget, the age of criminal responsibility was raised to 18 years of age for youth charged with misdemeanors or non-violent felonies. The new measures will be phased in over time with the law taking effect for 16 year olds on 10-1-2018 and for 17 year olds on 10-1-2019. New York's youth will no longer be housed in adult prisons or jails. Individuals who live crime-free for 10 years after they complete their sentence for a non-violent crime will be able to apply to have the record sealed. Thank you for supporting this movement.

**Bail:** Freedom before trial should be the rule not the exception. There is growing support in NYS to eliminate monetary bail for people facing misdemeanor and nonviolent felony charges. Instead of detention, a person would be released on their own recognizance or with a stipulation to report to a pre-trial services agency. Eliminating bail in these cases will level the playing field for those who are economically disadvantaged. Unfortunately, NYS Legislature left the session without dealing with cash bail.

**The Role of Risk Assessment in Parole Decisions:** It has been stated repeatedly that the purpose of the Parole Board is not to resentence an individual at a Parole Hearing. A regulation was proposed for parole board hearings that the board must focus on the Risk Assessment Evaluation completed on each person before the hearing to ascertain the progress the individual has made and their readiness to adapt to society. If there is a reason this regulation is not followed, it must be noted in writing. Because this was only a proposal, it is not being followed and 10,000 persons a year are denied parole. The only solution is to pass the SAFE Parole Act. Contact [www.parolejustice.org](http://www.parolejustice.org) to register your support.

**Voting Rights Restored:** In April Governor Cuomo signed an Executive Order which restores voting rights to persons on parole. 35,500 parolees will now be able to vote! Get the correct form from your parole officer in order to vote.

# 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 Gethsemane's network with men and women in prison. Project Connect reaches out through letter writing, prison visits, birthday cards and our newsletter, *Liberation Voices*. We invite people in prison 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 their parole hearings, make contact with family members and hold an annual Christmas Party for the children of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated parents. Visits to women in two facilities have increased as a result of the participation of volunteers from sister Presbyterian churches. New women are joining our contact list as a result of positive word of mouth in Taconic and Bedford Hills. Church members write monthly letters to over 275 Project Connect members. During the last year over 40 new people have joined our Project Connect program. Many have completed the correspondence course and have received certificates of completion.

## We Welcome Home!

Garry Bell, Erwin Canady, Stanley Cottle, Vincent DeNicolantonio, Albert DeLeon, Charles Griffin, Vonn Myer, Santiago Rivera, Ivan Rodriguez, John Taylor and Harold Verley



Prison visit Volunteers from First Brooklyn Presbyterian Church receiving certificates for their support with our ministry

It's nobody's fault but my own side. I am now a child of Jesus. I should have learned to put my pride aside a long time ago. Though I struggle with this now, as much as ever before. ~Philip

I was writing to thank you for the visit I had with the sisters a couple of weeks ago. It was very uplifting and made me feel very blessed! I also received a letter from the members of the church last week that was very inspiring and touching. As some of you may know, some days in here can be very dark and depressing and all it takes is that one letter or person to hold on awhile longer and gain the strength to persevere. ~Karen

I would like to take the time to thank each and everyone of you for your messages that you post individually in your monthly letter. Yes, I do read them all and often wonder how your words of encouragement always seem to arrive when I need them most. ~DeAtrick

I would like to thank you all and the members of Project Connect, all the people from the Presbyterian Church of St. Albans for your prayers and words of encouragement. These words that I read lift up my spirit when I read them. ~Howard

You are all special, important and needed. You are loved and cherished by Christ and myself. As for me, I pray that God continues to bless your personal life and ministry. May health, joy and prosperity be part of your life at all times. ~Nano

The parole commissioners were very pleased with the letter. They were pleased that they decided to grant me parole. God is good and I am so thankful for his love and blessings. ~Darren

Praying that all the congregation and members are well and in God's hands Thank you for your letters, moral support and encouraging words. ~Florence



We welcome food packages from Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church to be sent to Project Connect members in prison

## 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:  
 Pastor  
 Pastor Emerita  
 Director of Community Life  
 Min. of Evangelism & Director of Project Connect  
 Director of Administration & Building Operations  
 Custodian  
 Bookkeeper

All the People  
 Rev. Diane Lacey  
 Rev. Dr. Constance M. Baugh  
 Mary-Elizabeth Fitzgerald  
 CLP Chibueze Okorie  
 Victoria Schell-Wolf  
 Emmanuel Calderon  
 Margery Davis

## Session:

Rev. Diane Lacey, Moderator, Elders-Sidney Baptiste, Karla Chandler-McCord, Nathaniel Wright, Louis D. Rodriguez, 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.

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