



The Church of Gethsemane LIBERATION VOICES!

2019



Rev. Diane Lacey Pastor



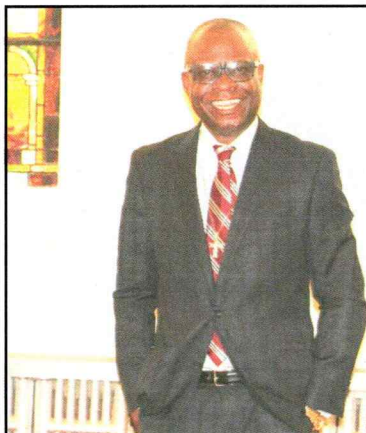
The butterfly has long been a symbol of transformation as it grows from stage to stage emerging finally as a beautiful creature. Here at the Church of Gethsemane we celebrate the changes we witness in those returning citizens and in persons in prison with whom we correspond monthly.

Thanks to Susan Lassen from the J.C. Flowers Foundation, which sponsors the Circles of Support Program, a number of our members were able to participate in the Raising My Voice Program which provides training and coaching enabling participants to improve their communication skills. Thanks to the dynamic staff led by Director Linda Steele, assistant Lila Garcia and coaches Nathaniel Wright and Thomas Little each participant did so well that they received a gift, a certificate and a stipend. It has helped them in their job interviews. They now participate more comfortably in worship and are able to represent us at gatherings in the community.

This has been a good time in the movement for justice for those incarcerated and those returning. We rejoiced with our members who are no longer on parole and celebrated with those who's right to vote has been restored. We have participated in letter writing, petitions and actions for change such as: Close Riker's, End Cash Bail, End Solitary Confinement, Release Seniors from Prison.

We always strive to ensure that our church grows stronger and more vital to our members, our Project Connect community inside and to our immediate community. We seek your prayers and continued support for this challenging ministry of hope in action. *Peace & Blessings, Rev. Diane Lacey*

Minister Chibueze Okorie Minister of Evangelism & Director of Project Connect



Project Connect of the Church of Gethsemane is an outreach program designed for our brothers and sisters in New York State prisons. This networking has been active for more than 30 years serving the church community, those in prison, and their families. These ventures are supported by our partner churches. This program is interfaith and all are welcomed.

Our mission is to imitate Christ in our world, reaching out to the broken hearted, showing inclusiveness, and advocacy for the poor and imprisoned. In an effort to help those returning home with a successful re-integration, we establish trust and relationships with those persons interested in our membership and those committed to make changes in their lives.

Through our monthly correspondence and visitations, we deal with ways to heal wounds and to forgive oneself. We acknowledge that we must take responsibility for our crime, the impact of a criminal record, and to become the people God made us to be. Most people cannot wait to visit the church the same week of their release to worship and meet their new Gethsemane friends. We celebrate their release at Gethsemane with joy and praise.

A person must be determined to make changes in their life. Returning home from prison has many challenges. It's a gradual process which takes patience and determination. Returnees should leave their prison attitudes and behaviors behind. Maturity, forgiveness, respect and self-control are needed. At the appropriate time one may get involved in their community with a special focus to educate young people about the realities of prison life.

Our Project Connect re-entry peer group meets several times a month. Veteran members give valuable advice to the newly released. Breakthroughs come for those who work hard and stay on the path to success. We encourage those returning home to learn new things that will help them move forward.

In Solidarity, Min. Chibueze Okorie



Church of Gethsemane Staff



Church of Gethsemane Session

Gethsemane News

Sincere Thank You!

Thanks to the many individuals and churches who support our ministry with the incarcerated and newly released. Partner churches include: Brick, Madison, Fifth Avenue, First and Second Presbyterian Churches in NYC; First Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims, St. James Episcopal NYC, Synod of the NE, First Churches of Northampton, Women's Association of Fifth Avenue, and several churches who give year-end benevolence grants. We also receive support from our Annual Appeal. We could not do it all without the support of our space sharers, Kolot Chayeinu, Brooklyn Acting Lab and our Self-help groups.



Raising My Voice: On May 15th, 2019 this program graduated, Gary Bell, Leon Harris, Carolyn Hodges, Rasheen Morris, Vonn Myers, Peter Odenthal, Santiago Rivera, Glendon Taitt, Darren Walston, Florence Walker and Robert Williams. The program is based on the belief that "when you tell your story you free yourself and give other people permission to acknowledge their own story."

Kingslawn United Presbyterian Church continues to support Gethsemane in increasingly creative ways. In addition to inviting us to join with them in their special services, they supply volunteers for women prison visits, donate toys for our Children's Christmas party, men's clothing and donating metro cards for our recently released men and women for job interviews.

Women Prison Visits: Our visits to women in prison have been greatly enhanced by the participation of new women volunteers from our Sister Churches. On a recent visit we had 14 volunteers which enabled us to see more women than usual. Churches represented on our team come from the following Presbyterian Churches in NYC: Kingslawn United, First Brooklyn, Second Presbyterian, Manhattan and St. Alban's, Queens. These churches along with First Presbyterian, Manhattan, also contribute written messages of encouragement to be included in our monthly letters to more than 270 Project Connect Members in prison. Thanks to the women volunteers.



Special Worship Services: Our Church year of special services begins with World Communion Sunday in October. A special November Thanksgiving service is followed by a meal which includes Turkey and the 'fixins' prepared by volunteers. December begins with a Children's Christmas service with a nativity play, music and parade around the sanctuary. Fellowship time is a party for children whose loved ones are incarcerated who receive gifts donated by Fifth Avenue and Madison Avenue Presbyterian Churches. On Maundy Thursday, after Rev. Lacey washes feet, we gather around a table spread on the Chancel commemorating Jesus' last meal with his disciples. Easter and Pentecost Sundays are days of great celebration at Gethsemane. Very important during the year are observances during worship of MLK's Birthday, Black History Month, Women's History Month, Hispanic Heritage and Asian Pacific Heritage and this year, Immigrant Heritage. A Sunday in February is devoted to Criminal Justice Awareness Sunday.

Mother's Day 2019:

On May 12th, 2019 nineteen Communities of Faith joined in the Mother's Day Public Awareness Event sponsored by Gethsemane. We are grateful for all who participated in this event, helping to raise the consciousness of their congregants about the plight of nonviolent offenders. Rev. Jacqueline Bullock delivered the sermon for that special day. Her words were powerful and inspirational. The informational bookmarks and origami flowers, which are the symbol of the campaign, were distributed to the Gethsemane congregation. These items are provided to each participant congregation. Gethsemane has spearheaded this event since 1992 for mothers in prison and the children they leave behind. The children are the forgotten victims of this injustice.



We Welcome New Members & Elders!

Gary Bell, Joyce Campbell and Albert Deleon.
Elders Aaron Talley and Uriah Williams

We Welcome Home!

Mitchell Kalwasinski, David Kusinow, Charles Ocasio,
Peter Odenthal, Joseph Rivera, Jimmy Torres,
Florence Walker and Darren Walston



Holly Reid, Gethsemane's 2015 intern from Union Theological Seminary was ordained to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament and Installed as Co-Pastor of her home Church in Bath, Maine on June 2nd. She thanked the Church of Gethsemane for guiding her and sharpening her interest in prison ministry. Welcomed by her co-pastor Rev. Bill Bliss, her husband Jim and the gathered crowd, Rev. Lacey preached the ordination sermon. Holly's ministry includes prison outreach, chaplaincy, a weekly Café for community people and Sunday worship with new and seasoned Christians. Her work with Gethsemane, supervised by Rev. Lacey strengthened our Women's prison visiting program and encouraged her leadership skills.

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.



Project Connect Re-Entry Group

Once I came home, I was determined to restart my boxing career but family and circumstances led me in a different direction. I am currently an asbestos handler making good money, far less than boxing, and I know everything happens for a reason. I also changed church's since I've been home and the Church of Gethsemane has been a true blessing from God!!!! They have helped with clothes, metro cards, and mostly spiritual blessings, thru their service, nurturing, and good advice! It is a family environment where I get stability, learn the Bible and how to live it out in Christ like manner. (Isaiah 54:17) *Gary Chico Bell*

Hello my name is Peter. I was were you sit. My mother had ALS and was dying. I prayed, read all the parables, scriptures and Psalms. I asked God for a miracle. I went to church service at Sing Sing Correctional Facility. I saw the newsletter you are now reading and enrolled in the Seven Step correspondence course offered by the Church of Gethsemane. I received many blessings of hope, strength and encouragement from all the great believers in God at Gethsemane. I ask God to bless you and we welcome you to our church. *Peter Odenthal*

I have been coming to this church since 2016 and God is blessing me. I am loved by everyone. This is where I want to be. The church is helping me and standing with me. My hope is to continue with the Lord with the Brothers and Sisters. God is merciful and loving. I want to be there with the family of the Lord.

Uriah Williams

My Brothers & Sisters in Christ, The Church of Gethsemane is a foundation of hope. Hope for us who believe we are forgotten for whatever reason ~ I ask that you do one thing in life and that is to ask Jesus to come into your life. For the love he has is unfathomable, endless, he will be there when you least expect it to fill a void you need filled ~ life isn't easy at all. But, through his grace and love we will be blessed. Brother in Christ. *Joseph Rivera*



Criminal Justice Issues

Reform of Three Major Criminal Justice Issues in New York State:

As of January 2020, there will be three major changes in the Pre-Trial process in New York which has been cited as the worst in the nation: Bail reform, discovery and speedy trials.

Bail reform

Cash bail requirements for misdemeanors and 90% of nonviolent felony cases have been eliminated. This ensures that New Yorkers will have a more fair and balanced Criminal Justice system. Bail has been essentially a war on the poor. There will also be a concerted effort by law enforcement to give Desk Appearance Tickets (DAT) in lieu of arrest.

Discovery

Currently prosecutors can withhold evidence from the defense up until the morning of the trial! Under the new legislation prosecutors must turn over discovery data to the defense within 15 days. This data includes names/statements of witnesses, grand jury testimony, police reports, 911 calls, photos, lab reports and expert opinions. Sanctions will be levied again prosecutors for non-compliance.

Speedy Trials

Prosecutors must be ready for trial within 6 months for a felony and within 90 days for a misdemeanor.

A notable case that demonstrates the need for these reforms is the Kalief Browder case. At the age of 16, he was held at Rikers Island for stealing a backpack which he denied. He was given a \$ 3,000 bail which his family could not meet. He was held at Rikers Island for three years much of the time in solitary confinement. He made 31 court appearances before 8 judges and ultimately the charges were dismissed. He made 2 suicide attempts while inside. There was also word that the prosecutor never turned over phone records which supported Browder's alibi. After 3 years he was released, He got his GED and studied at Bronx Community College and attempted to deal with the aftermath of those fateful 3 years. He committed suicide at the age of 22.

Project Connect Voices From Inside

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 215 Project Connect members. During the last year over 25 new people have joined our Project Connect program. Many have completed the correspondence course and have received certificates of completion.



Men and women from our partner churches who volunteer to do prison visits with the Church of Gethsemane. For many, these visits are the first visits they have received and are very welcomed.



Peace and blessings family. Over these last 5 years of being in prison your letter, prayers and gifts have helped me stay humble and patient. Thank you, the Church of Gethsemane for always loving me for who I am and what I have done. Your prayers are loving and caring and I will never stop embracing the Lord's blessing. **Rodney Pierre**

I have been receiving the Project Connect letters for approximately 3 to 4 years now and I really appreciate you, the Pastor and all the believers at Gethsemane and First Presbyterian Church. Amen. Again thanks. **Eugene Deshazor**

Praise the Lord, his mercy endures forever. I just wanted to send you all a thank you for your years of ministry. The words of encouragement and receiving mail from you all have been an inspiration to me. Keep up the good work, it shines glorifying our Father in heaven.
Edgar Brown

I feel I've known you all my life. I feel the connection and love from you all. There is a closeness, you are truly my family. I want you all to know that you're all appreciated and loved. I thank God for you all. I will meet you all soon. **Charles Carrasquillo**

Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth. I want you to know that the work you do is a blessing. May God bless and keep you always. **Louis Leath**

Surely I send my thanks for everything you all do for me. My family is relieved to know that I am supported by church members close to this prison. When I say close, I mean you are close in terms of having a Godly heart for those who are shut-in. I may be shut-in but never am I shut-out and that's because of you.
Senora Bolarinwa

From myself and fellow brothers behind these walls, we send our thanks for everything you do for us and our families. From your encouraging words, your visits and packages. My life is all the better. My hope for a better life never fades because I know that all of you believe in me and pray for me. I want to give a special thanks for those who came to visit on March 21st. I was very surprised and overwhelmed. I have not had a visit in a very long time. To see all of you there was amazing. **Hilberto Ramos**

I just wanted to say thank you for the very nice visit you gave me. Thank you very much for feeding me on the visit. I felt God after the visit. I'm grateful. **Deborah Barnes**

Delegate to UN Social Development Commission:

There were three delegates from the Presbytery of NYC who were sent to the February 2019 Meeting of the UN Social Development Commission. Min. Chibueze Okorie from Gethsemane was one of the delegates. This was the first time that members outside the UN Ministry Office were present to discuss international social justice issues which included Global Prison Reform and what communities of faith are doing to change the current dialogue and to address inequalities and social inclusion.

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
Min. of Evangelism & Director of Project Connect	Min. Chibueze Okorie, CLP
Director of Administration & Building Operations	Victoria Schell-Wolf
Pianist	Esther Blue
Bookkeeper	Margery Davis
Custodian	Emmanuel Calderon

Session:

Rev. Diane Lacey, Moderator, Elders Aaron Talley, Uriah Williams, 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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