



The Church of Gethsemane

LIBERATION VOICES!

2012



Rev. Diane Lacey Pastor



Dear Members and Friends,

The children's Christmas service and party marked my first year as pastor of the Church of Gethsemane. It has been a spiritually rewarding and challenging year working with the staff, session and community.

Our worshipping congregation is made up of long time and new members, formerly incarcerated persons and visitors from the neighborhood. We have received strong support and encouragement from the members of the Friends of Gethsemane led by Elder Joan Ryan.

The grants, food and clothing we've received from partner churches as well as generous individual donations have enabled us to reach into the prisons, the area halfway houses and the women's shelter nearby not only with messages of hope in Christ but also with material help.

Our worship services have been joyous, enhanced by our Director of Music, Andrew Huang's extraordinary talents. We hope to see a choir develop from those who have been attending regularly and are being inspired by his talent.

Our most memorable services included: Homecoming, Revival Sunday, World Communion Sunday, the Children's Christmas Service, Criminal Justice Sunday, welcoming and baptizing new members, Black History Month, ordaining and installing new elders, Maundy Thursday and Easter Sunday.

We continue to reach into the prisons with visits, Christian education materials, counseling, monthly letters, bibles, letters of reasonable assurance, birthday greetings, food packages and responses to crises.

We are ever vigilant for opportunities to join with others seeking to make change in the criminal justice system.

Thanks to our brother and sister members of the Presbytery of New York City who support prison ministry with prayer and acts of love and compassion.

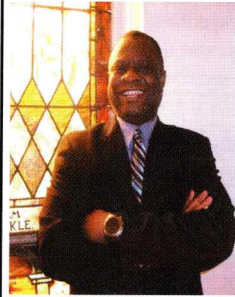
Peace & Blessings,
Rev. Lacey

The Church of Gethsemane Session:

Matthew Arlyck, Sandra Blue, Mildred Braun, Shirley Jones, Clerk of Session and Nathaniel Wright, Treasurer

Min. Chibueze Okorie

Minister of Evangelism & Director of Project Connect



Greetings to our Project Connect Members & Friends,

Some members of our Project Connect Program have been in prison for many years, praying that justice will come. Many have struggled within the system and have become their own legal representatives. Many are serving time past their release date because they cannot provide an acceptable address. Many rehabilitated individuals are denied parole every two years due to the nature of their crime, in spite of

having completed mandated programs. Many in the community question the purpose of imprisonment, is it a place of correction and reform? The majority of those formerly incarcerated face obstacles when released—lack of employment and affordable housing. They are released into a web of rejection and poverty, unequipped with a concrete plan on how to better their lives and the lives of their family. There are former prisoners who do great good upon release. Over the years, I have listened to some of our Project Connect members say "If they knew ten years ago what they know today, they would not have committed the crime." Some of the Project Connect members that I have visited, desire release so they can help others avoid similar mistakes. Many are praying for a second chance and wish their voices could be heard for their release.

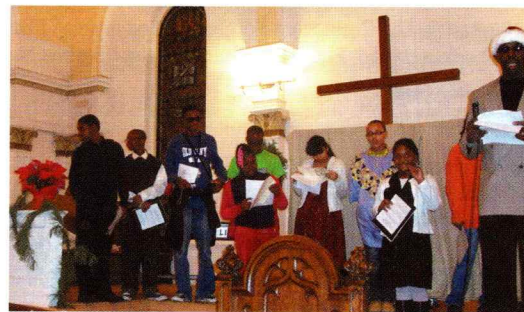
Crime deteriorates society and victims suffer. The popular slogan is "If you do the crime, you do the time." However, after doing the time, some people continue to pay for their mistakes. At the Church of Gethsemane, all are welcome as children of God, who seek to change their lives, believing they are capable of transformation. According to my friend Sal, "Forgiveness is so important to our faith. It is the key that unlocks the imprisoned heart, the dawning light in a dark soul and the beginning of peace."

Formerly incarcerated members of Gethsemane are humans who made mistakes. Prison should not continue to identify them. This hinders their chances of successful re-entry into society. We should assist them in knowing God and moving forward with their lives. Those who have completed their sentences and mandated programs, and are not a risk to society should be released. (See the article on The Safe & Fair Evaluation Parole Act) Please visit us at The Church of Gethsemane upon your release and become a voice for the voiceless.

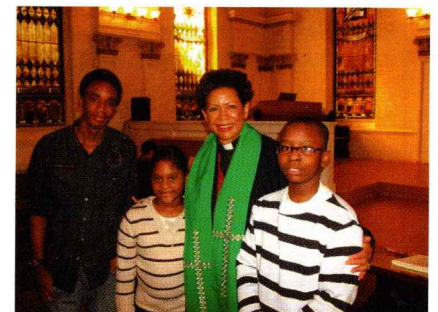
Love of God - Chibueze Okorie



Gethsemane Session



Gethsemane Christmas Pageant



Rev. Lacey & Gethsemane Youth

Gethsemane News & Connecting With Our Neighbors



Thanks to the Friends of Gethsemane, under the devoted leadership of Joan Ryan, the Fundraising Dinner on November 10th, in the Great Room of First Presbyterian Church Manhattan, was a gala affair. Many things contributed to the success of the evening ~ the ambiance of the room, the superb talent of the musical performers, Marion Moore and Andrew Huang, the delicious cuisine and the tangible support of the guests for the ministry of Gethsemane. Hopefully this will become an annual event.

As part of our Mother's Day campaign, "**Mother's In Prison Children in Crisis**" origami flowers will be given to all who pass by the church to remember mothers who are incarcerated and their children.

We began our Fall and Winter worship season by renewing Gethsemane's traditional services beginning with a spirited Homecoming service, followed by a challenging Revival service featuring old time gospel music. Our guest preacher was Evangelist Shirley Thomas, M.Div., former seminary intern now a Princeton seminary graduate.

Building Improvements

The interior of Gethsemane's building has been enhanced in many ways since the beginning of the summer. We are grateful to a crew of men from 820 River Street, Inc. who performed community service here. They began by helping to refurbish the sanctuary. Several of the men are skilled carpenters. The workmanship they brought to the task of repairing the antiquated pews was remarkable. There are also new cushions for the pews which improve their appearance greatly. Painting the sanctuary walls, the radiators and the chancel adds to the pleasing appearance of the sanctuary.

Real Estate Renovation transformed the lower area of the church by covering the electrical wiring in the social hall and lower lobby and painting the wainscoting down the stairs, along the corridor and the social hall.

Our goal in 2012 is to install new carpeting in the sanctuary and on the stairs to match the new pew cushions.

On the 20th anniversary of his membership in Gethsemane, we surprised Minister Okorie by honoring him with many personal tributes for his dedicated work on behalf of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated persons. His remarkable Christian journey from prison to the church door has enabled him to both lead and serve others even though suffering many years of immigration woes. His son Chigozie joined the chorus of well wishers which moved the cool and affable Chibueze to pause for silent reflection. His words of gratitude encouraged us all.



In 2011 We Welcomed New Members:

Malika Alcindor, Celia Blas, Elder Shirley Jones, Meri Kroll, Rita Marksman and Glendon Taitt by re-affirmation. Baptism: Daniel Neve, Lawrence Peterson, Jose Quiones & Leianna Braun, Infant.

"It is true that God has the whole world in his hands and I've been truly blessed since becoming a member of the Church of Gethsemane. The worshippers who gather here are all so cooperative as they struggle towards living their lives as good Christians. God is always present here, lifting up my spirits."

Elder Shirley Jones

At the beginning of the summer of 2011, we welcomed Kristin Lynch and the children of the Young Players Theater. The children enjoyed a wonderful summer filled with music, dance, theater, art and the daily nature walk through Prospect Park. We are looking forward to having Kristin's program continue throughout the year as well as returning this summer.

Sincere thanks to all the churches and agencies that support the ministry of Gethsemane :

The Friends of Gethsemane raise funds for the church programs through an annual appeal and fundraising events.

Food drives for the Gethsemane food pantry: Fifth Avenue, Brick and First Presbyterian Churches, Iqra Mosque and The Presbyterian Hunger Program for a grant of \$1,000.

Christmas gifts for the children associated with the ministry of Gethsemane: Madison Avenue and Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Churches, Kolot Chayeinu Voices of Our Lives and Union Church of Bay Ridge for donations of children's books.

Project Connect supporters: Presbyterian Churches: Madison Avenue, Brick, Fifth Avenue, First in NYC, Second, Rutgers, Church of the Master, Riverdale, St. Albans, First Church, New Canaan, Hitchcock, The Council on Witness to Society and Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims (Congregational). Brick church also assembles care packages for members in prison. Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims has also donated children's books and computers.

All congregations that participate in the annual Mother's Day Public Awareness Event each Mother's Day.

Park Slope Parents have provided food and served at the annual Thanksgiving dinner. They also contribute food periodically for the pantry and men's clothing for those in need. The Women's Association at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian donated women's clothing. Many neighborhood individuals have also contributed men's and women's clothing and food.

Pizza Plus and local restaurants prepared dishes for our Thanksgiving dinner.

Project Connect Voices

During the past year over 30 new people joined our Project Connect Program. 15 individuals have completed our membership correspondence course and 12 members were released, some of whom have joined us for Sunday worship. Church members wrote monthly letters to our 107 Project Connect Members in prisons throughout New York State. In addition we have written numerous letters of reasonable assurance to parole boards and have been in contact with family members. Visits have been made to 55 members in 7 prisons.

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



"As always I am overjoyed, and felt truly blessed as I read your words of love and encouragement. Your words of encouragement remind me of how much the Lord has blessed me. He walks beside and steers me around trouble, shelters me in troubled times, gives me strength to endure the hardships of incarceration. Best of all, he sent Chibueze and you, my sisters and brothers in Christ, to help uplift my spirits and to remind me of the fact that I am not alone." **Floyd Rhem**

"Dear Mary Elizabeth & The Church of Gethsemane: Most importantly, I want you to know that I truly appreciate your spiritual, physical and mental support you have provided me over the years. It has truly shown me the kingdom of God on earth and that you still believe in the power of God as I have experienced, studied and taught. That really means plenty to me. Jesus never threw anyone away. Some of the things you said in your letters will also be highlighted in my article 78 and it will greatly assist me in making my case before the court." **Louis Rodriguez**

"Well we never met face to face, but I ask that you might have faith in me and that I am a real person who is of a sincere heart of God and family. My hope is that you can look beyond a person's shortcomings and failures, toward a new person that God has restored. My proof will be in my conduct and character which I have been demonstrating from prison. My desire is to continue my renewed life in the ministry. Your encouragement has been like spiritual vitamins to my soul." **Sal Emma**

Project Connect Re-Entry Program

Newly released prisoners are invited to join the Project Connect Re-Entry Support Group. This group meets regularly to discuss transition issues and other concerns in their lives. Everything that is discussed is kept confidential. Topics range from employment and housing to relationship building. 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 light meal and roundtrip transit fare are provided to each participant. Members of the group take turns facilitating the meeting. A small stipend is provided to the facilitator. We recently Welcomed Home formerly incarcerated members of Project Connect, James Bronson, Gregory Bush, Michael Glover, Wayne King, Joseph Petty, Sr, Patrick Uzoefuna, Peter Wheeler.



The Safe and Fair Evaluation (S.A.F.E.) Parole Act

Thousands of community-ready men and women in prison are unfairly denied parole each year due to the nature of the crime.

The Project Connect Program of the Church of Gethsemane has many members who have been repeatedly denied parole because they are A-1 violent felons. Most of them have exemplary disciplinary records and many have outside clearance. It is an unofficial policy to deny parole release to A-1 felons due to the "nature of the crime". We ask our readership to support the SAFE Parole Act, which is currently a bill in both houses of the NYS Legislature.

Unfair parole board decisions present a national problem. The "nature of the crime" will never change, but a prisoner's efforts at rehabilitation create major changes in these men and women. In place of repeated parole denials based on the nature of the crime, this bill requires the Parole Board to specify in detail what it requires of parole applicants. This Act gives the Parole Board tested criteria for making their decisions and requires them to provide a list of steps the parole applicant can take to gain release in the future. Once these expectations have been fulfilled, the applicant must be released. Under the SAFE Parole Act the release decision is based upon the parole applicant's preparedness for reentry and reintegration.

In the event that parole is not granted, the Parole Board will be required to state in detail the reasons for the denial and the specific requirements for actions to be taken in order to qualify for parole release at the next Parole Board appearance.

We ask our readership to consider the merits of the bill and contact your state representatives at www.nysenate.gov or www.assembly.state.ny.us and write to Gov. Cuomo at NYS Capitol Building, Albany, NY 12224