



# The Church of Gethsemane Liberation Voices!

Rejoice! The Goodness of the Gospel is liberation from oppression  
Sunday Worship 1:30 p.m.—July service at 12 noon

Winter 2004



## Pastor's Report—Rev. Liz Alexander



Dear Members and Friends,

Praise God! The Church of Gethsemane continues to be a "beacon of light" in Park slope, and a welcoming and caring ministry for those we meet in prison, as well as those who come through our doors on Sunday. While our

mission is with and for those who are in the prison, ex-prisoners and their families, we draw people from all backgrounds.

Our light burns brightly thanks to our members, faith communities in our neighborhood and congregations from throughout the Presbytery of New York City who join with individual donors to provide financial and spiritual support and inspiration for our church. The personal stories of Project Connect Members who remain in prison, and the stories of church members who have overcome incredible obstacles to create new lives after incarceration, strengthen our ministry with their words of faith and encouragement.

The articles in this newsletter share some of these stories, and reflect Gethsemane's deep commitment to the mandate of Jesus, to "love one another" and "to set at liberty those who are oppressed." The Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assemblies have repeatedly called for congregations to care for those involved in the prison system, those who are "serving in it, or affected by it." (Marc Maurer, "The U.S. Criminal Justice System," Church & Society PCUSA: Justice And Only Justice, p.21)

We remain one of the few congregations who "remember those in prison, as though you were in prison with them..." (Heb. 13:3a), and as far as we know are the only congregation founded by prisoners, ex-prisoners, their families, and those in solidarity with them.

The spirit is with us at the The Church of Gethsemane. In spite of the personal adversities of members, and the financial challenges we face in seeking funding for our church, we continue to draw new people from our neighborhood and from behind bars. If you are hearing about us for the first time and want to know more about us, write to the address on the back of this newsletter or visit us at our 1:30 P.M. Sunday worship service. Donations are always appreciated.

Hold us in your prayers and help us keep the beacon burning.

Blessings and Peace!



Annual Children's Christmas Party

## Minister of Evangelism—Chibueze Okorie

The Church of Gethsemane Project Connect Program includes a Seven part Membership Correspondence Course that has brought many of us together from the prison, from all walks of life. Recently Project Connect took us to Eastern, Arthur Kill and Attica Correctional Facilities where we met with fellows who are members of the church and those currently taking the course. One of those we visited could not control his emotions because he had not had any visitor in seventeen years.



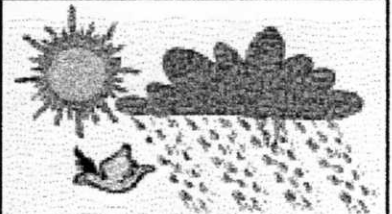
Last spring we gave a special award to Elder Louis Miner who volunteered many years of his services to the Project Connect Program. Elder Miner, due to his health reasons has not been able to volunteer his time with project Connect until he's fit. On behalf of the congregation of the Church of Gethsemane, I thank elder Miner for his love and kindness to the incarcerated men and women trapped in the system.

At the Church of Gethsemane, our door is open to everyone who feels called to minister with us. Some of us are disenfranchised without hope and no where to start. The Project Connect Program has continued to bring many of us together especially during the Project Connect Sunday letter writing. Gethsemane members, friends and members of other faith communities gather together once a month to write our friends in prison. The church is constantly working with ex-prisoners who have the ambition to turn their lives around. Today, some of them are Elders and Deacons of the church, and contributing members of our society. Hard work and hope are the most contributing assets towards the future of ex-prisoners.



Clerk of Session, Peg Anderson with NYTS interns Neill Alleva and Janet Martin

**Breathing Space, Inc.** exists for the express purpose of creating a safe place for all ex-offenders, their friends and family. We strive to improve the quality of life and sense of fellowship in our community by promoting unity and communication between all ex-offenders, their families and organizations that support them. We meet at Gethsemane and were founded by Deacons of the Church.



[www.breathingspace.org](http://www.breathingspace.org)

For additional information, please call Ray Rios at 347-262-6975

# Project Connect—Words from Behind Bars and from Ex-prisoners at Gethsemane

"Dear Chibueze,

...I am very grateful for the visit I received from you and the pastor. I am still not realizing the visit and just how good God is. How he instilled love in you and the Church of Gethsemane...(violence in my youth) cause me to spend the majority of my years in prison. I have served 16 years. I came to prison at age 17...I pray for the wrong I have done, and look now to Jesus, the author and finisher of faith. Love you all..."

Michael Johnson

Attica Correctional, 7/19/04



Members with painting donated by Vincent Dowling, P.C. member

From a letter to Gethsemane youth

" Here I sit locked away from society because of my actions, paying a price I hope none of you will have to pay. Despite how bad you see your life as being or how no one seems to understand your pain, listen to those people who do care, because if you don't, you might end up locked away from the world...sometimes I lay on my bed thinking about taking walks in my favorite park, or going to the beach for a swim, spending time with grandma. Here you have no privacy, and it's always noisy. At night you can hear others cry themselves to sleep...Listen to those who want to see you make it through life. There is nothing here for you."

Terrence Reid

Eastern Correctional, 7/5/04

Santa with River, Chibueze, and Chigozie



## What is Peace?

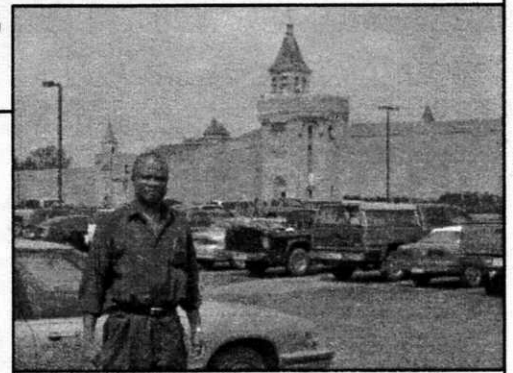
Peace is not hate. I thought you knew.  
Don't tell me I'm wrong. I been black too long  
Fighting a senseless goal since the day I was born  
Watching my brothers and sisters die for senseless reasons.

Peace isn't violence. Don't get mad at me  
You know you started it all  
I'm not your political puppet.  
Don't want to play your game of ball.  
"Army", you say, "Be all you can be."  
Yeah, right! In your world I can't even be me cause I'll never be free.

Peace isn't hypocritical.  
I can plainly see your world peace is hypocrisy  
A thirteen-year old kills another for you dollar bills,  
And you say he's wrong.  
A nation's leader kills thousands for barrels of oil,  
And you say he's right.  
Don't give me that hype!

Peace isn't blind. So leave me alone.  
I been without too long.  
I've always had less:  
Job-less, Dollar-less, Home-less, Father-less  
Now you threaten my blackness.  
Attempt to take my dignity.  
But you say it's true that world peace is you.  
Then why am I so Black and Blue?!

Bernard Patterson  
Attica New York  
7/10/03



Elder Okorie at Attica

"Dear Brothers and Sisters at Gethsemane,  
...I have a very heavy debt to pay society, and my community, Hopefully, one day I can use my life as a living testimony and sacrifice to educate the youth about the negative thinking of holding down the "code of the streets."  
...now that I submitted to allow God to do his work on me, I now better understand myself."

John "Mojo" Flynn

Otisville Correctional Facility

9/15/04

# Highlights of Church Activities & Events for 2004

## 15th Anniversary, March 14, 2004—Faith Made Visible: Gethsemane Past and Present

was the theme of the 15th Anniversary Celebration at the Church of Gethsemane last March.

Church members, old and new friends, the founding pastor, Rev. Dr. Constance Baugh, the present pastor, Rev. Liz Alexander, Executive Presbyter Arabella Meadows-Rodgers of the Presbytery of New York City, invited guests and members filled the sanctuary. During the service and afterwards at a light buffet and program in the social hall, we remembered the church's history, mission and vision and looked to the future. The most moving facet of the day was the personal journeys of faith shared by five ex-prisoner men and women from the congregation—Helene Means, Tina Reynolds, Chibueze Okorie, Ray Rios and Jose Reyes. Another highlight was the presentation of an award to 83 year old Louisa Horton Hill, the "eldest Elder" of Gethsemane and Clerk of Session for many years who has been active in prison ministry since the Attica uprising. The church was energized with new courage and strength and renewed its mission for justice for all.



## 2nd Annual International PeaceDay Interfaith Celebration, September 26-

Over 120 people from 6 faith traditions (Moslem, Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, and Humanist) and 9 local communities of faith communities participated in an

interfaith worship service in the sanctuary followed by the dedication ceremony in the garden of a Peace Pole from the World Prayer Peace Pole Project. The celebration included a peace march to the church with Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture and The Park Slope United Methodist Church, the reading of sacred texts, music (including a music from members of The PSUC Choir and Pam McAllister and Sistasharee, leader of a Kirtan chanting group), meditation and prayer and stories of peacemaking. Visitors and members united in expressing a commitment to peace.



## PRESBYTERY DAY, OCT. 16—

Elder Helene Means and Deacon-In-Training Gregory Braun provided resources and information about the ministry of The Church of Gethsemane, criminal justice concerns of The Presbyterian Church (USA), and reasons for ending the Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Death Penalty, to church members and clergy of the Presbytery of New York City.

## BROOKLYN PARENTS FOR PEACE, OCT. 16—

While Helene and Gregory were at Presbytery Day, Rev. Liz Alexander, Martha Gallahue, Pam McAllister, and Joyce Pyle participated in the Brooklyn Parents for Peace Fair in downtown Brooklyn, handing out materials about our unique ministry and networking with other churches and community organizations.

## Pam McAllister preaches against Death penalty—

In observance of Amnesty International's 7th Annual "National Weekend of Faith in Action on the Death Penalty," Pam McAllister, Music Director of the Church of Gethsemane preached a sermon entitled "From the Cross to the Syringe: A Christian Confronts Capital Punishment" on October 24, 2004. Pam is the author of eight books including *Standing in the Need of Prayer: Devotions for Christians in Prison* and *Death Defying: Dismantling the Execution Machinery in 21st Century USA*.

## December 26, 2004—New members and new Deacons and Elders joined the Church of Gethsemane.

We celebrated the addition of Jill Cordes, Raymond Gillyard, Janet Johnson, Ralph Kercado, Kim Kolvinsky, and Michael Winston, as members of our church family.

Elected to the office of Deacons were Gregory Braun and Maurice Braun. Helene Means, Doris Randolph, Jose Reyes, and Ray Rios were elected as Elders of the Session.



Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church Reading Group with Gethsemane youth

To:

The Church of Gethsemane  
1012 Eighth Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 11215

**JusticeWorks Community**—In 1992, in response to the social crisis triggered by the tripling of the U.S. female prison population in one decade, Gethsemane members were instrumental in founding JusticeWorks Community, a separate 501©3 not for profit national organization. Programs include Women of Substance, The Seven Neighborhood Action Partnership (SNAP), and the National Mothers in Prison, Children in Crisis Campaign.

Visit [www.justiceworks.org](http://www.justiceworks.org), or call 718-499-6704

### UPCOMING EVENTS

**January 17, 2005**—Martin Luther King Jr. Sunday  
**February 13, 2005**—Criminal Justice Sunday—1:30  
Worship followed by program and reception  
**March 6, 2005**—Rev. Alexander speaks at First  
Presbyterian Church, New Canaan, CT  
**March 13, 2005**—Confirmation Class from  
Princeton, NJ visits Gethsemane

#### 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  
**Administrative Assistant:** Gerard Nagee  
**Officers of the Church**  
**Elders/Session:** Margaret Anderson, Debbie Cordonnier,  
Phill Greenland, Orlando Haynes,  
Louisa Horton-Hill, Louis Miner  
**Deacons:** Jose Reyes, Ray Rios  
**Deacons in Training:** Gregory Braun, Maurice Braun

#### 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 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 who are seeking 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 are— and the world might become!



Brooklyn Family Theatre  
At The Church of Gethsemane  
(718) 670-7205  
[www.brooklynfamilytheatre.com](http://www.brooklynfamilytheatre.com)

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