

# Spring 2017 Prison Partnership Program (PPP) Newsletter!!

An Ecumenical Ministry Program by the Hudson River Presbytery

"...he sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners" - Luke 4:18

## In this Newsletter....

In this Newsletter, you will find information on the PPP Prison Forum at Rye Presbyterian; PPP's participation at the 55th Session of the UN; Hitchcock's Church's Correspondence Program; A Prison Visit to Sing Sing; the stress of being a Corrections' Officer; PPP's outreach to Inner-City Churches for Re-entry; Art Changing Lives, and much more!

## NGO's Participate in the 55th Session of the UN Commission for Social Development

A Human Dignity and Faith Perspective on the Eradication of Poverty for the Incarcerated Population of the World

*"Attending the meeting at the UN was life changing! ... the panelists and the active audience opened up a new world of endless possibilities and underlined the need to continue supporting "Human Dignity and Faith Perspective on the Eradication of Poverty for the Incarcerated Population of the world", said one of the eighty attendees from the Hudson River Presbytery at the UN Event on the relationship between poverty and incarceration.*

PPP co-sponsored this event with the Permanent Mission of Denmark to the United Nations; the International Prison Chaplains Association (IPCA); and Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE) on February 7, 2017.

Presenters included, as well as those pictured below; **Dr. Robert McCrie**, John Jay College of Criminal Justice; **Dr. Baz Dreisinger**, John Jay College of Criminal Justice and author of *Incarceration Nations*, who joined us via video from South Africa; **Dr. Anita Lightburn**, Director, Beck Institute on Religion and Poverty, Fordham University; **Marta Nelson**, Executive Director, NYS Council on Community Re-Entry and Reintegration; **Rev. Dr. Petero Sabune**, Director, New York Theological Seminary, Master's Program at Sing Sing; **Rev. Dr. Jill Schaeffer**, Professor of Ethics, New York Theological Seminary; and **Katherine Vockins**, Executive Director, Rehabilitation Through the Arts.



**Hans Hallundbaek**, PPP Coordinator and UN NGO Representative for IPCA and CURE;  
**Ib Petersen**, Ambassador to the UN for the Permanent Mission of Denmark to the United Nations;  
**Jean Didier Mboyo**, VP of IPCA; and  
**Charles Sullivan**, President of CURE, presenting at the United Nations

## Prison Forum A Day to Remember

*"Thanks to both of you for an incredible event today. There wasn't a speaker there who was not inspiring, informative and interesting. It was good to be moved to tears by the genuine love expressed in the room. I needed to be in the presence of that kind of dedication, service and respect, and also to find myself once again awed and moved by the lives of other humans."*  
 -Anne Whittaker, PPP Prison Forum Attendee

The PPP Prison Forum, generously hosted at Rye Presbyterian Church, was held on November 12, 2016 to an enthusiastic crowd of seventy.



The Audience listening to Barbara Devir (standing) speak with fellow Panelists (L-R) Nancy Christie, Joni DeMauro, Judi McCandless, Theresa Colyar, Louise Crawford, Suzanne Katz, Tanis Moore, Leslie Mardenborough, Jim Polos, Charles Moore and Katherine Vockins

The first Panel consisted of people who are actually volunteering, or have set up programs within their churches, to help those currently living in Prison.

These speakers were: **Nancy Christie** and **Joni DiMauro** on the Woman2Woman Visiting Program at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility (BHCF); **Judi McCandless** on how visiting an inmate at Sing Sing changed her; **Theresa Colyar** on Bryn Mawr's Pen Pal Program; **Barbara Devir** on her collection of Christmas cards

and calendars for those in prison; **Louise Crawford**, **Suzanne Katz** and **Tanis Moore** of Mt Kisco Pres Church on their "Bars of Soap" program in which they assemble toilet article bags for women at BHCF; **Leslie Mardenborough** on a Book Study group she leads at White Plains Pres Church on *The New Jim Crow*; **Jim Polos** of Katonah Pres Church on Summer Homes for children so that they can visit their mothers at BHCF; and **Katherine Vockins** and **Charles Moore** of Rehabilitation Through the Arts (RTA).

The second panel was composed of professionals in the field:

**Rev. Darren Ferguson** of Healing Communities; **Dr. Anita Lightburn**, Beck Institute at Fordham University; **Rev. Dave Mason** of Union Pres Church, who has worked closely with connecting the Rotary Club (and its awareness of jobs) with Returning Citizens; **Rev. John Miller** of Rye Pres Church and **Janet Donat** on Rye's "Coming Home" program for Returned Citizens; **Rev. Winfield Peacock** on Bryn Mawr's work with Returning Citizens; **Dr. Linda Woodbine**, Director of Development for Exodus Transitional Community; and **Emilie Trautman** on the Restorative Justice Program.



L-R: Rev. Darren Ferguson, Rev. David Mason, Dr. Anita Lightburn, Janet Donat

The final panel was a very personal one, consisting of those for whom Prison is very real: **Rev. Darren Ferguson**, a Returned Citizen and now minister at Mt. Carmel Baptist C.H.U.R.C.H.;

**Carolyn Jones**, a retired Corrections Officer at BHCF; **Rev. Peter Johnson**, a former Corrections Officer in Florida and now minister at Denton Pres Church; **Charles Moore**,



Rev. Darren Ferguson, Rev. Peter Johnson, Charles Moore, Rev. Ted Miller, Paul Kim and Dr. Linda Woodbine

a Returned Citizen and now an employee of RTA; **Rev. Ted Miller**, a former Corrections Officer and now minister at Westminster Pres Church; **Paul Kim**, a Returned Citizen and a student at Bard College; **Dr. Linda Woodbine**, whose husband is in Prison; and **Rev. Cathy Surgenor**, who spoke about the need for support for Corrections Officers.

## Reaching Out to Neighboring Presbyteries

### The Importance of Inner-City Churches to Re-Entry

In a Synod gathering of the Northeast US in Albany on March 3-4, PPP initiated developing relationships with neighboring Presbytery leaders on Long Island and in New York City to look at how we can work together. Our first task is to develop a Coming Home program to connect returning citizens from our local and state prisons with their home churches in the Inner-City and Long Island.



NYC and Long Island see the value in reaching out to those imprisoned who will be coming home. Because Westchester has had much experience in this area, we hope to share that experience with them. PPP also hopes to gain from their expertise. We have been meeting with **Redeemer Church** in NYC and meetings with other churches are scheduled.

We can help each other so that none of us need to reinvent the wheel!



# We Celebrate our Tenth Anniversary!

The Presbytery Prison Partnership started in 2007 and is still growing.

We owe the birth of the Prison Partnership Program to **Susan Andrews**. When she joined us as General Presbyter, and learned that **there are as many people in prison in our Presbytery as there are congregants in our pews**, she nurtured the start of a prison ministry program. It is because of her vision and her passion that we are celebrating our tenth anniversary this year. Thank you, Susan.



## The PPP Advisory Council

We are thrilled to welcome this talented group of people who has volunteered to advise us.

If two heads are better than one, five heads are a think tank. As we celebrate our tenth anniversary, PPP is very fortunate to have five people who have volunteered to step up and stand up to be on the PPP Advisory Council to enhance the work of Prison Ministry.

**Janet Donat** is a member of Dobbs Ferry Presbyterian Church. At Family Services of Westchester, Janet started a group, Educating Mothers to Embrace Re-entry and Gain Employment (EMERGE), for women in prison. The group focuses on how our childhood experiences influence our parenting style. Janet is the Coordinator of the Coming Home program at Rye Presbyterian Church.



**Peter Johnson** is the minister at Denton Presbyterian Church in New Hampton.



Peter has the unique perspective of also having been a Corrections Officer, an area in which PPP wants to expand its work. Peter, along with all of the Advisory Council Members, was a presenter at PPP's Prison Forum held at Rye Presbyterian Church in November 2016.

**David Mason** is the minister at Union Presbyterian Church in Newburgh. Dave has long been involved in Prison Ministry and has brilliantly formed an alliance with his local Rotary Club to help Returned Citizens acquire employment. Dave is a founding member of the PPP "Club" - those churches who donated money to PPP so that we were able to be the beneficiaries of the Legacy Fund.



**Judi McCandless** is a member of the Reformed Church of Bronxville which, in 2009, created their "Coming Home" program to support individuals in transition from incarceration. It is through this program that Judi became involved in prison ministry. She joined volunteers from Brick Presbyterian Church (NYC) in visiting Sing Sing once a month to meet in a discussion and support group with men earning their Master's in



Professional Studies through NYTS.

A primary focus of the group conversations revolve around the deliberate study of the Desmond and Mpho Tutu book, *The Book of Forgiving: The Fourfold Path for Healing Ourselves and our World*.

**Win Peacock** is the minister at Bryn Mawr Park Presbyterian Church in Yonkers. Bryn Mawr has a long history of involvement in Prison Ministry, has a very active Prison Correspondence Program, and recently fought hard to establish a re-entry program at their church; a program that was blocked by the community. But Bryn Mawr inspires us all, as they fight on to do this work. Win is also a founding member of the PPP "Club".



## Corrections Officers

### The Forgotten "Prisoners"

Being a Corrections Officer is a difficult and dangerous job. PPP has long desired to develop a specific outreach to this group of people, many of whom are "in prison" longer than those convicted of a crime.



Top: Carolyn Jones and Rev. Peter Johnson  
Bottom: Rev. Ted Miller

We are fortunate in our Presbytery to have former Corrections Officers, such as **Carolyn Jones** of Katonah Presbyterian Church, **Rev. Peter Johnson** of Denton Presbyterian Church and **Rev. Ted Miller** of Westminster Presbyterian Church, who are helping us to explore ways of developing a meaningful outreach program. Each of them are pictured above presenting on their lives as Corrections Officers at PPP's Prison Forum in November.

# Dramatic Escape

PPP Co-Sponsors NYC Screening

In cooperation with one of our partnering organizations, Rehabilitation Through the Arts (RTA), PPP co-sponsored the screening of *Dramatic Escape*, an award-winning documentary. Over two hundred invited guests attended the screening at Redeemer Presbyterian Church 150, W83.

*Dramatic Escape* is a documentary that transports viewers into the lives of maximum security prisoners at Sing Sing where they are part of an arts program that has had tremendous success in rehabilitating prisoners. The incarcerated men put together a stage production of *A Few Good Men*. From auditions to the final curtain call, the men reveal their personal stories, their every day struggles, and the importance of the arts in their journey and their rehabilitation.



Rev David Bisgrove, Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in NYC, introduces the film

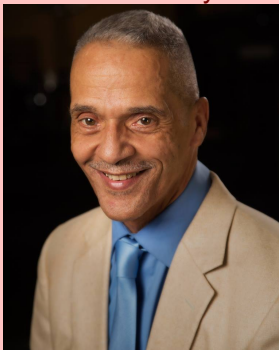
This documentary is available free of charge to individual churches interested in organizing a screening for their local community.

[Click here to see a trailer of Dramatic Escape](#)

## Theo Harris

A GoFundMe page has been established for Author, Returned Citizen, and our beloved former PPP Staff Member, Theo Harris

**Theo Harris**, BA, MA, MPS, author of *Blessed and Highly Favored: Memoirs of A Multiple Felon*, is, in fact, a seven-time felon himself. He spent most of his life in and out of prison as the result of an ongoing battle with substance abuse. Theo was the subject of a segment on "60 Minutes" with Lesley Stahl focusing on how he completely changed his life around, partly through his performance music. He holds a BA in Liberal Arts from Syracuse University, an MA in American Studies from the University of Buffalo, and a Master of Professional Studies degree from New York Theological Seminary, each of which was earned at various stages of his incarceration. He devoted his life on the outside to working for prison reform with the Hudson River Presbytery as its Prison Partnership Associate Coordinator, representing its eighty-four Presbyterian churches in the Hudson Valley.



Despite his successful efforts to constantly battle a lifetime of what would be, to most of us, insurmountable odds, Theo's life continues to present relentless challenges. Theo has been diagnosed with liver cancer, which has metastasized into his bones. A liver transplant is no longer an option. His medical bills are mounting and he is unable to work due to his illness. The medical expenses are just one of the expenses that are accumulating and we are asking for your help to support Theo and his wife, Phyllis, who has faithfully stood by him all these years. This is a couple who is rich (and richly) in love and quite limited in dollars and cents. Theo's story is an inspiration to us all, as he truly went from a position of being "the least of these" to a man devoted to helping others

change their lives as well.

[Click here for Theo's GoFundMe page](#)

## NEXT Church

PPP goes to Missouri

In March, NEXT Church gathered





The Opening Ceremony at NEXT Church

close to six-hundred Presbyterians in Kansas City, MO for its annual meeting, "Wells & Walls: Well-being in a Thirsty World".

PPP was honored to present a workshop on "Living Waters Behind Prison Walls", which focused on outreach to those incarcerated in our huge prison system and how to assist in their safe re-entry back into community.

## Ecumenical Advocacy Days

### "Confronting Chaos, Forging Community"

**Alonzo Johnson**, shown here, Coordinator for Self-Development of People, Compassion, Peace and Justice Ministry out of Louisville, KY, co-presented with Hans Hallundbaek on "Adopt Your Local Prison" at the EAD Conference from April 21-23 in Washington, DC. This workshop has been scheduled to be repeated at **Big Tent, July 6-8, in St. Louis.**

In the Town of Bedford, Westchester County, NY, work has already begun on this project, starting with meetings with a supportive Town Supervisor, **Chris Burdick**, and forming a group of interested citizens. One idea by one person, **Doug DeCandia**, who is an organic farmer, is to start a small farm on the grounds of the facility as a way for those in prison to literally get their hands in the Earth, as well as to learn some valuable skills. As this group develops, look for more in our next Newsletter!



Rev's Johnson (above) and Hallundbaek will present at the Presbyterian Community Peace and Justice Day at NY Ave Pres Church in Washington DC



Parishoners at Hitchcock Presbyterian Church using their Coffee Hour to write Christmas cards to those in prison. Cards are welcome all year round!

# CURE Conference

## PPP Presents in Costa Rica

The revised United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners will be the theme of the 7th International Conference on Human Rights and Prison Reform in San Jose, Costa Rica from 25 –29 April.

"Less than two years ago, the UN unanimously voted for these landmark reforms and named them after Nelson Mandela," commented **Charles Sullivan**, the President of International CURE (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants) which is sponsoring the conference.

"In past conferences held in New York City, Washington, Geneva, Abuja, Nigeria, and the last in Bangkok, Thailand," Sullivan continued, "there were many prison reform speeches, but there were not any guidelines to structure prison reforms."

"The Mandela Rules have not only given us the framework for treatment of prisoners in the 21st century," Sullivan says, "but aim to transform imprisonment from wasted time to personal development, resulting in substantially less crime."



Charles Sullivan,  
Pres of CURE

Ten panels with participants from 17 countries (Argentina, Brazil, Canada, China, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, India, Japan, Malawi, Peru, Rwanda, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States, and Zambia) will make presentations on different aspects of prison reform based on the Mandela Rules.

PPP's Coordinator, Hans Hallundbaek, who is also CURE's NGO Representative to the UN, will be presenting "A New Local and National Community Initiative in the USA: Adopt Your Local Prison" at the conference.

## The Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act

### Seeking to Give Judges Sentencing Options

Women go to prison for, often, very different reasons than men.



Nancy Gernert, left, of Woman2Woman organized this presentation at Bedford Presbyterian on April 2. She is shown with Sharmaine Smith, Case Manager of Brooklyn High School for Leadership and Community

The overwhelming majority of women in prison are survivors of domestic violence.

Three-quarters have histories of severe physical abuse by an intimate partner during adulthood.

82% suffered serious physical or sexual abuse as children.



Service; Gail Smith, Director, Women in Prison Project; and Rev Dorothy Muller, Chaplain at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility.

## The Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act

(DVSJA) seeks to give judges the flexibility to sentence domestic violence survivors convicted of offenses caused by that violence to shorter sentences or to alternative-to-incarceration programs.

The campaign seeks not only to change policy, but also to raise public awareness about the devastating connection between abuse and women's pathways to prison. It passed the NY State Assembly in May of 2016 and will be reintroduced in the Senate's 2017 legislative session.

For further information about the DVSJA and how you can get involved in getting it passed in the NY State Senate, contact Nancy Gernert at [nancygernert@gmail.com](mailto:nancygernert@gmail.com)

You invited us...

...and we came!

White Plains Presbyterian Church, Germonds Presbyterian Church, New Rochelle Korean Presbyterian Church and Patterson Presbyterian Church, as well as many others, have invited PPP to come to share our work with their congregations, as well as screen one of our films for their viewing. It is a privilege to talk about Prison Ministry with congregations. We welcome all invitations from each of your churches to spread the word about working with those on both sides of prison bars.

What is to Come...

Opportunities

At the PPP Prison Forum in November, 2016, several people signed up for a tour of a prison. Their desire is to gain a better understanding of, and experience a bit of what it is like, to live within prison walls. On **Wednesday, May 17**, thirteen people will be **touring Sing Sing**. We are very pleased that the Interim General Presbyter of the Hudson River Presbytery, **Rev Gavin Meek**, will be joining us on this tour.

On **June 13**, four people will have the unique, and very moving, experience of attending the **graduation** of inmates at **Sing Sing** from the New York Theological Seminary's Master of Professional Studies program. Those attending are **Rev. Jeff Geary**, Pastor at White Plains Presbyterian Church; **Rev. Bruce Knotts**, Director of the Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office; **Don Scott**, Town Board Member of the Town of Bedford; and **Ken Waldemar**, a member of PPP's Adopt-A-Prison Committee.



**In the Fall**, we are planning a Tour of Bedford Hills Correctional Facility with eight ministers who have asked to have the spiritual experience of being in and with a prison.

Please let us know if you would like to be included in any future experiences. All are welcome!

## PPP's Facebook Page

Just a reminder that PPP has its own Facebook page, which we encourage you to have a look at, "Like", and to "Write Something" that you would like to post or share with others about the important work that we are all doing.

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