

Alētheia

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The Newsletter of

Fall 2006

N.Y. Theological Seminary Students and Alumni and Rye Presbyterian Church

GRADUATION 2006

WOW!!! What a graduation. Denzel Stewart's drawing of a trumpeter embodies the celebration. The NYTS 2006 ceremony included 14 graduates, including Rory Anderson, who was released in April and allowed to return to receive his degree (parolees are usually forbidden from entering a correctional facility), two resounding speeches by graduates who are certainly on the way to oratorical careers, "Nobody Knows the Trouble You've Seen" sung by a soloist from the Riverside Church Choir, and a keynote talk by J. Richard Cohen, Esq., president of the Southern Poverty Rights Law Center.

The acting president of New York Theological Seminary, Dr. Dale T. Irvin, applauded the men of what he called the "Northern Campus." He let them know their fellow graduates sent their congratulations, also.

Brian Fischer, Superintendent of Sing Sing, advised that, "Men and God put you here. Man forgot you, but God did not. Whether God forgives you is between you and Him. Your families never expected you to be here now. The world had basically written you off ... you will do more than a good day's work ... work with young people to keep them out of prison. THAT IS NOT ENOUGH. Give to your community. THAT IS NOT ENOUGH ... You need to be the man you were supposed to be." He encouraged them to live up to, and go beyond, everyone's expectations.

William "Shante" Johnson, speaking for the Class of 2006 at the 24th Master's Degree Commencement Program, directed the graduates to turn "stumbling blocks into stepping stones." He asked, "Can anything good come from Nazareth? Can anything good come from incarceration, life sentences, and parole denials? Yes, something good has come from Sing Sing, and here we are."

Nigel Lawrence, another graduate, said if, "I were a singer I could sing it, a chef I could cook it, an artist I could paint it." He described the past year as a year of "perpetual discovery, of serving humanity and taking responsibility for your past, your present and your

future." He took the time to thank a family member of each graduate, telling them, "There are limitations, but there are also possibilities."

Dr. Hunt spoke of Dewey Bozella, a former boxer, who encountered an experience far more difficult than any experienced in the boxing ring. He advocated that the men "be eagles, spread your wings because God has blessed you."



Richard Cohen was particularly impressed with this year's class when he spent time with them last winter. He admitted, "I don't know whether I would have the strength of character you have if I found myself behind these walls." They were admonished to have faith no matter how long the road.

A family member or friend hooded each graduate, and Dr. Hunt presented their degrees. He then introduced several visitors, including Bill Webber who started the MPS Program 24 years ago. And we proceeded to dinner.

Graduation Photos inside

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*"Lead me in Your truth
and teach me..."*

Psalms 25:5

Aletheia is published as a collaboration between New York Theological Seminary prison program students and alumni, and the Rye Presbyterian Church. *Aletheia* is the Greek work for truth, the truth that first appears when something is seen or revealed

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Success Stories

Cause for celebration. There appears to be a decided increase in the number of NYTS graduates granted parole this year. Many articles in this issue explore how inmates may prepare for parole and for the outside world. NYTS graduates are men who are educated, lead many endeavors within the prison, and act as mentors to younger men. We hope this increase in numbers of NYTS graduates paroled continues, as well as efforts to help the formerly incarcerated become contributing members of society, as suggested in excerpts from an article by Joseph P. Fried, writing in *The New York Times* (Sep. 17, 2006).

"Rehabilitation experts say that an inability to find a job is a reason that many people with criminal records get into further trouble. In the 1980's and 90's, as crime rates climbed sharply in the nation, rehabilitation often took a back seat as politicians and criminal-justice officials focused more on providing harsher sentencing than on cutting recidivism. In the last few years ... are stressing the need for rehabilitation programs, including those dealing with employment. The programs are now called re-entry more often than rehabilitation, as in re-entry to law-abiding society. A panel of lawyers noted that under state law, an applicant considered qualified to do a job cannot be refused employment based on a criminal conviction unless there is a "direct relationship" between the offense and the job, or unless hiring the ex-convict poses an "unreasonable risk" to property or safety. To make those determinations the law requires the employer to "engage in a balancing test," weighing factors like the job's specific duties, the applicant's age when the crime was committed and the time that has since elapsed."

Preparation for re-entry, work-release, and obtaining and keeping a job when paroled are all concerns of prisoners who have undergone change. They attempt to speak to this when they appear before the parole board.

Rising Hope at Mid-Orange Correctional Facility

By Don Mason

February 2, 2006 eight men proudly walked into the visiting room at Mid-Orange with graduation gowns and stoles on. Behind them in the processional was the faculty (and, out of respect, Bill Webber, Bob Luckey, and Debra Moore) in their academic gowns, followed by the teachers' aides. The audience gave the graduates a standing ovation.

Our outside coordinator, Rev. Bruce Younkin, opened the ceremony and thanked the people that helped to make the day possible--such as Bill Webber & Rev. Edward Muller in the past, and our current staff advisor, Deacon Rosado. Then each graduate spoke for three minutes throughout the program that included the invocation, a solo, four readings of the same Psalm in different language, an overview of the year, and the benediction/blessing of the food.

The keynote speaker was Rev. Muller. He challenged the graduates and gave insights to the others there. He told of numerous examples of men who were incarcerated that went from "the morning of their lives" (self-centeredness & immaturity) to "the afternoon of their lives" (self-actualization & change) while in prison "by going deep" into the causes of why they were there. When released many acquired more degrees and socially responsible jobs.

When the certificates were handed out Bob Luckey, gave the graduates a challenge to give back for they had received much from the program at no monetary cost to them. Basically he stated that each one should teach one. Then pictures were taken and a fine meal was served.

What an appropriate name, Rising Hope. Who knows what these eight men will do with the credits, knowledge, and growth they have gained? Hope is the springboard to the next step.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR ONE'S ACTIONS AT THE PAROLE BOARD

By Patrick A. Campbell

Some incarcerated people find it difficult to take full responsibility for their crimes when they appear before the Parole Board. From my experience with men in prison, many will say they did not commit the crime for which they are incarcerated. They will put the blame on everyone except themselves. I used to be one of the people who blamed the informers, my accomplice, the judge, the district attorney, and my lawyer for my incarceration. I was living in a state of denial. After I stopped blaming everyone else, and I accepted responsibility for my actions, the healing began.

If you claim innocence, you have to make a personal decision about how to deal with the Parole Board. A word of advice to all incarcerated people going to the Board: If you are guilty of the offense you were charged with I recommend you take complete responsibility for your actions. More than likely, the first question you will be asked is, "Do you have an appeal pending?" They want to know if you are still appealing your criminal conviction. The parole commissioners do not want to hear about your innocence. You have to take your question of innocence to the Appellate, Appeal, or Federal Court. The courts will deal with your innocence, not the Parole Board. The Parole commissioners want you to accept responsibility, and show remorse to the victim (s) and society. They are more concerned about why you committed the crime.

Whether or not to take responsibility before the Board is a Catch-22 situation. If you do not take responsibility for your crime, you will likely be denied parole for showing lack of insight or lack of remorse. If you take complete responsibility for your crime, you may be denied parole for the nature of the crime. However, a person stands a better chance of being paroled when he/she accepts responsibility for his/her actions. It always baffles me when the Board of Parole denies parole to a person who has an immaculate institutional record. From my investigation, I came to find out that the Board of Parole does not always deny a person parole (several times) solely on the nature of his crime.

Some incarcerated people refuse to take responsibility for their actions because of the nature their crimes. For example, some men who are guilty of rape, child molestation, murder, and other serious crimes are reluctant to take responsibility for their actions. They are too ashamed or embarrassed to admit to their crimes. Consequently, these men would rather be denied parole (numerous times) than to take responsibility for their crimes. Think about that!

I have known a few incarcerated men who might have been paroled at their first or second Parole Board appearance if they had accepted responsibility for their crimes. For instance, I have a comrade who went to the Parole Board five times and each time was denied parole. One day, I was curious about why he was constantly being denied parole. I said to him, "Are you taking responsibility for your crime when you go before the Parole Board?" He replied, "I am sorry that a life was lost and my sympathy goes out to the victim's family, but I didn't commit any crime." I agree no person should admit to something they have not done. Sadly, my comrade does not have any appeal pending in the court. More than likely, the Parole Commissioners will never release him unless he takes responsibility. To re-emphasize, the parole commissioners will consider parole to only those people who take responsibility for their actions. They are adamant on those principles!

Incarcerated people who are guilty of their crimes and serving a life sentence should be the first ones to take responsibility for their crimes. Why? Lifers do not have any Conditional Release date. Their maximum expiration date is life imprisonment. Therefore, these men should not play games with Parole Commissioners because they will keep them in prison for the rest of their lives. The most the Board of Parole can do to those incarcerated people not serving a life sentence is to keep them in prison until their maximum expiration date; lifers are not that fortunate.

Finally, if you know that you are guilty of the crime for which you were incarcerated, the wisest thing to do is to take responsibility for your action. Those incarcerated people who are living in a state of denial, rationalization, projection, and displacement are going to have a hard time being granted parole. Most incarcerated people do not know that some of those Parole Commissioners background are psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists, or criminologists. When you appear before them, they listen attentively to what you say while watching your body language. You cannot easily fool these people! Many Commissioners know who are parole-ready, but some times politics plays its part in their decisions making.

Nevertheless, if you are guilty, take responsibility and show remorse for the victim(s). One of these days, the Parole Commissioners are going to see transformation, genuineness, and remorsefulness written all over your forehead and set you free.

Prison Release: Wilderness or Promised Land?

By Aaron Talley & Don Mason

A man was released from prison after serving 25 years. He was denied the opportunity to transition back into the reality of the work world. Our high tech society was confusing to him, and he did not have the resources to make a successful transition back into society because there was no temporary (educational or work) release program. Within six months he was back in prison. Freedom, to him, had been the wilderness rather than the Promised Land.

Another man came out of prison after 25 years. For him, freedom was the Promised Land. He made a successful transition and was immediately contributing to society and his family again. He had worked, the last two years of his sentence, out in society, returning to a facility each weekday evening and, after six months of successful work release, spent weekends at home. He saved enough money to help his family move out of public housing and to pay debts they accrued during his long incarceration. And, he regained his family's and his own self-respect.

At present, prisoners in New York prisons with violent crimes are ineligible for participation in any temporary release program as a result of Governor Pataki's Executive Order No. 5.1 (9NYCRR 5.5.), issued pursuant to a 1995 amendment to Correction Law §851 (2). In one stroke of his pen he eliminated all violent offenders from a program that had been running well since 1969. Not long before this, former Commissioner Coughlin, of the NYS Dept. of Corrections, testified at a legislative hearing that statistically violent offenders are among the best prisoners to be released on temporary release. He went on to say it was because by the time they were eligible they had been incarcerated for many years and were older and more mature than most non-violent offenders.

The Governmental Educational Organization (GEO) work release sub-committee at Mid-Orange Correctional Facility believes it's time to include violent offenders in this valuable program, which originally was intended to reduce recidivism by helping formerly incarcerated individuals return to a normal and productive life. The program also reintegrates ex-offenders back into society as law abiding and tax paying citizens.

Temporary release programs include work release, furlough, community service, industrial training or educational leaves, and leaves of absence. People in these programs reside in correctional facilities, but are allowed to leave the premises for a stated number of hours during the day to work or for educational purposes. Our organization believes work release is a powerful incentive, and should be offered to a majority of people

in prison, conditioned on completion of major rehabilitation programs, education and demonstration of rehabilitation.

Comprehensive rehabilitation programs, such as work release, have proven to reduce recidivism significantly. Our organization is concerned about public safety and our communities. But we understand that lower recidivism resulting from rehabilitation not only adds to public safety but also has other cost savings. Even the Department of Correction's union leaders' research indicates that prisoners make a more crime-free transition if they go to less secured facilities before their final release. This transition provides opportunities to assume increased personal responsibility for behavior. We believe, in the interest of public safety and financial prudence, that every prisoner should successfully serve some time in a minimum or work release facility before their release into the community. Allowing prisoners with violent crimes to participate in a work release program will lower costs of incarceration and reverse the sad fact that NYS spends more per year on their criminal justice system than they do on higher education.

How do we achieve the goal of restoring temporary release programs so that people with violent crimes can once again participate? We request your assistance and support in restoring this program for those with violent crimes. Help us return with as much of a chance as possible for success. Please write your state representatives and Governor Pataki concerning this vital issue.



*Class of 2006
Graduates, Faculty and Bill Webber
"Double-0-6"*

Prisoner from Provenance

By Michael McLean (Fishkill)

I've eye witnessed sweaty brows too tired to blink, too
scared to flinch, too proud to give in or up.

I AM...

I'm privy to shackled hands, sweet homeland earth still
under fingernails.

I taste stings souls feel from the whip of the master's
hand - black leather severing ebony flesh.

Wounds of misery time can't heal.

I AM...

I see ghosts of black men dangling, human piñatas,
swinging off steady oaks on ropes of evil.

Patient wind sways corpses to tick-tocks beat.

Lynched for deeds done in thought, convicted by
wayward glances.

Kin cut warriors loose, noose shed, grave bound at
sundown finally free.

I attest to rape of kidnapped mamas from our
motherland.

Digging deep for dignity ripped from virgin loins for
bleached men's whims.

I AM...

My eyes bleed memories forgotten by souls glued to a
TV noose. I forever smell fear on young faces torn
from mothers' bosoms, drowned eternally in a sea of
human commodities.

I hear silent whimpers from strong-backed men whose
bodies bleed from the field.

Veins flow rage blood - skin ever marred by decades of
lashes.

All hearts pump vengeance.

Retribution is dream fuel.

I AM...NOT A SLAVE!

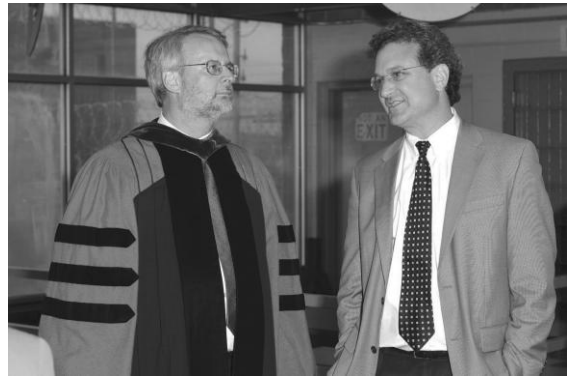
I am WOMAN.

Populator of Mother Earth, incubator for Nubian tribes
in the struggle.

Sister to humanity.

Lover to the universe.

Slave only to time.



*President of NYTS and J. Richard Cohen, Esq.,
President of the Southern Poverty Rights Law Center*



*The new and the old.
2006 Graduate Rory Anderson
and Alumni Darryl Butler and Tom Ryer*

I APOLOGIZE

By Siddiq A. Najee

Wife, son daughters for love deferred, for precious and
valuable time not given, for the shame brought on our
family; for shattered dreams, broken promises and hearts,
the tears shed, and having to visit, when we should be as
a family together, I do apologize.

Dear Wife and Companion, for the long nights crying
yourself to sleep, awaiting phone calls that never came,
but hoped would. For the embarrassment you've endured
with head held high as you struggle to care for our family
'alone' and without support from others, for that I truly do
apologize.

For the countless songs which now hold the memory of
times we've been apart, a love shared from a distance,
songs which cause your eyes to '[;fill with tears of
emotional pain and a deep sense of aloneness, I
apologize.

I speak not for the hundreds or thousands of men who
feel as I do. However, for those who share in our pain,
our suffering and truly seek the forgiveness, love and
respect of family, a friend or just the ability to forgive
yourself, I do apologize.

To Allaah, to you, to our children and to myself, I
apologize.

HUMAN BEING

By David "Dawud Ziyad" Wheeler

Created and formed in a Sentient and Cosmic Womb
complex yet not complexing
in Time

Evolved and Involved evolving in
Sense Consciousness
a Mind

Receptive and Perceptive
Awakens
purpose clear
errors become lessons removing doubt and fear

A spirit inhaled inspires
Motivation
Beyond
the need of tangency
Patience
"dawns"
and immediacy abates
Generations await to unfold
Creation's Scroll
potentials yet unseen
the
human being

Shaped and form through Nature's troubled storm and
pain

A spirit contained in density
With
propensity profound
destined to be
"crowned"
the human being

Laughter has its Place
tempered by
Grace
A Divine Design
emerges an entity taught by Signs
Thought Provoking
Ideas

Uncovering sight sensitized by the light
brings forth a vision pristine
the
human being

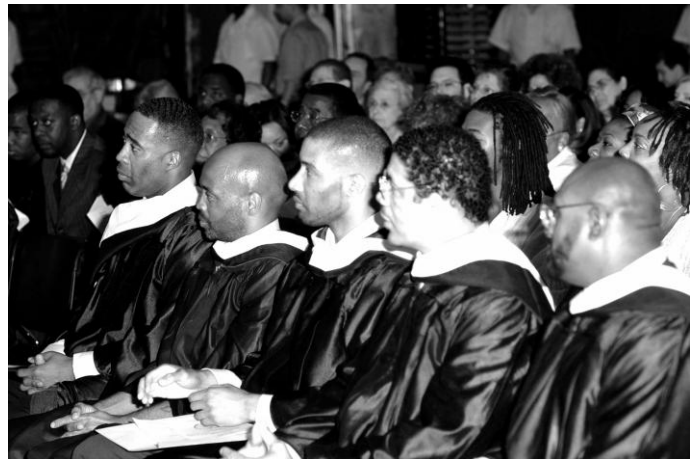
With Intelligent inquiries from birth
a sensitive soul
learns
its worth

as it develops in the Earth

Once a child error-prone
takes its place
upon the
throne
free of arrogant deceits
at last
complete
the
human being

Denied and Oppressed
not allowed to express what innately had been blessed
equal to any man
a woman
takes her stand
the
human being

Confined and Restricted
for moral crimes
convicted
repentant and repaired in Time
from its Cocoon emerges
a New Mind
in
Self Esteem
The
human being



*Class of 2006
Listening to Speakers*

PEACE BE STILL

By John "Mojo" Flynn (Certificate Program)

My testimony begins in the year 1975, when I was sentenced to a term of 57 years to life for the crime of 2nd degree murder. At that time the very thought of doing that much time was inconceivable. I was 17 years old, and I felt that life ended for me at that moment. The more I thought about my plight, the more the idea of "death" began to be more appealing than dying of old age in a hostile environment. Not being as brave as I thought, I couldn't end my own life. So I began to indulge in all the negative behaviors the system had to offer hoping that my uncaring attitude and destructive behavior would ultimately give me peace in death.

Christians were some of my favorite victims because of their humble nature. I used to scorn anyone with a bible, and would go out my way to make fun of them. Extortion was a way of life for me mainly because it gave me a false sense of power over weaker inmates.

Eventually, it got to the point that my friends thought I was losing my mind because I started going after the stronger inmates as well. What my friends didn't understand was that I didn't care whether I lived or died. I had a very deep hatred for what I had become. (A social parasite.) Life became more of a burden than pleasure.

In 1985, while standing around in the yard contemplating chaos, a friend of mine, who was well respected in the system, asked me to join him for a weekend program called A.V.P. (Alternative to Violence Project.) From that moment on my life took on a new definition. Around this time, I was able to give the courts back 32 years. That was like getting a monkey off my back. Also, this program helped me get in touch with the "kid" in me. I was amazed to see grown-ups aged 20-60 playing kid games. But, what really impressed me the most was coming to learn that I was made of stronger substance than I was led to believe. I learned that I wasn't that cold-hearted person I thought I was. And that caring for others actually made me feel alive.

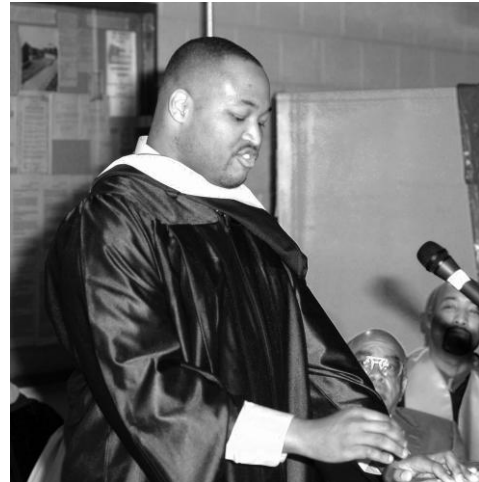
Eventually, doing long term bids often leaves you in a severe state of depression. So much so until it snatches all the joy out of life itself. Especially if you are the type of person that comes to realize the true impact of the crime you committed and the life you have wasted with your selfish acts. But, even more, knowing that you will be paying a heavy price for the rest of your life. The true trauma comes into play when those that you love most slowly begin to fade from your life which leaves a void that can't be filled. You now begin to understand how your victim's family felt when their loved one was ripped away from them. This thought humbles you greatly and fills you with shame and self-loathing.

Now I sit here in my cube, 30 years later, and I often think about my past troubles. I've come to realize that my

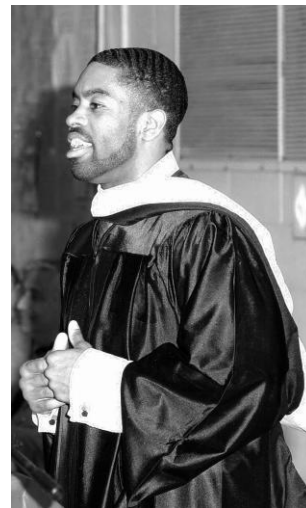
greatest failure was not understanding God's plan for my life. Nor allowing God to be a part of my life.

I was baptized into the faith in June of last year, and since that time things have become much clearer for me. I have found peace in the midst of prison chaos. Jesus has rid me of my stony heart and replaced it with a heart of love and deep compassion for myself and others. I now seek the good in all things rather than the bad. I have worked as a peer counselor for twenty of my years of incarceration. My greatest joy has been in the last year. Having a true love for the things I teach, knowing that I'm doing this not for selfish reasons but with concern for my fellow prisoners.

Although I will always look forward to the day when I am released I now have a peace that transcends my desires. This allows me to be at peace wherever I am. I once contemplated death, now I rejoice in life ... Jesus has given me a purpose to love, and a new life to live.



William "Shante" Johnson, speaking for the Class of 2006



Nigel Lawrence speaking for the Class of 2006

CHOOSE TO CHANGE

By Danny Matos

(From the 2006 Graduation Program)

New challenges for a fruitful life,
Year round studying under the night light.
Trudging through the piles of information,
Sensing that inner transformation.

No longer does the old person exist.
You become a new being with a slight twist.
Transforming yourself with a higher level of
consciousness,
Stitching the tapestry within, healing your brokenness.

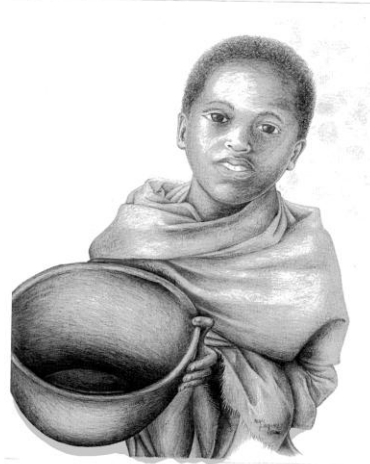
Niebuhr, Tillich, Barth, and Bultmann,
Your mind opens up like a flowering
Theologian.

Testing your beliefs by faithfully disbelieving,
Sipping from the cup of knowledge your thirst becomes
empowering.

Narrow-mindedness is no longer a part of your character,
Youthful exuberance is once again your motivating factor.
Transcending obstacles and self imposed barriers,
Sacrificing your comfort to become wiser.

Nurturing your mind and soul assisted by powerful
professors,

Yesterday is history and only for regressors.
Tomorrow's ocean is filled with uncharted water,
Serving others is the definition of a true LEADER.



Aletheia needs
your contributions.
We always need

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