**CHRISTIAN SPEECH**

**FOR**

**MARIE MOORE**

Hell everyone. (**If you’re not being introduced, you can say)** Forthose of you that may not know, I am Marie Moore and I have been a member of Upper Room Deliverance Tabernacle for the past \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years. Throughout that time of building faith, community, great comfort, and insights through worship here, I have had the pleasure and privilege, of getting to study with, think with, question with, and resolve with, our wonderful Pastor Lev and First Lady Natasha Oliver. What I have learned..... how I have grown... and how we have all come together in good times, times of sadness, and times of greater or lesser challenges, all goes back to these two selfless lights who guide us through it all.

Just recently, I listened to a speaker share some thoughts on the existence of God. He asked the question, “If God is responsible for everything in this world.... the good, the bad, the violent, the questionable, why does He have us deal with all of the negativity?” His reply.... to himself... was that God allows us “agency.” He allows us the space and latitude to learn to cope and handle situations.... or not.... and to become more present, aware, and more in touch with our own integrity and purpose. He also asks that we question.... “What is the **purpose** of **LIFE**?” He explains that this... this life.... is a test... to see if we choose to be righteous or if we choose to be evil..... It’s a test to see if, after we’ve done it all, seen it all, reacted to it all..... if we are prepared to meet our Maker..... if we’ve chosen the path of integrity, the honest search for wisdom, and the quest of living a meaningful life. Worshipping with Pastor Lev and First Lady Oliver has been a deeply important element in searching and finding the faith to lead that kind of life.

Pastor Lev is a father of three... (**if you want to make a little joke you can say**) ... not counting all of us!!! (**And wait for the laugh)**, a devoted husband, caring friend, insightful motivational speaker... someone who is always sharing and displaying the fruits of his spirit. He began in ministry nineteen years ago. He saw himself as a “faith builder...” one who would act as a channel... a backbone of support.... a “magnifying glass” for his parishioners.... and himself.... to answer the impossible questions life throws at us. In Proverbs 1:5, we are taught, “Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance...” Pastor Lev self-identified a long time ago, as the one who will obtain the guidance and help the rest of us find the way. Along with First Lady Oliver, we have been blessed all these years with a dream team filled with knowledge, compassion, and the strength to teach us how, when, and where to act. It has always been up to each one of us, as individuals, to take what we’ve been given to find our own way. We learn that nothing is perfect. We will stumble. We will make errors in judgement, but the true test of a human being’s worth is the way in which he or she honors their life.... takes responsibility for the spills and falls, and makes amends. I am sure you would agree that even in the darkest moments we have had to endure.... whether it’s personal, professional, as part of this congregation or the broader community, thanks to these two, we have all experienced that the “light at the end of some seemingly impossibly long, dark tunnel,” is **not** the oncoming train, but the caring and wisdom of these two souls.... true lights in our lives.

A long time ago, I heard the expression, “I am part of all that I have met.” Each one of us is a part of the other.... whether we like it or not. Every exchange... every argument... every gift.... stays with us... sits with us.... teaches us. Pastor and First Lady Oliver are brilliant examples of the exquisite patchwork of thoughts, feelings, and faith that is built and constantly renewed from being dedicated leaders in this congregation. They are clearly, integrally parts of each one of us.... and if I dare say.... let’s believe that **WE** are a substantial part of them!!! Looks like we trained them well!!! (**Wait for the laugh**) After all, that’s what community and congregation **really** mean.

This past year has been a challenge to all of us, on every level of humanity imaginable, but we cannot... must not... lose sight of the blessings we have... and that’s each other, our families, friends, our faith, and **LIFE** itself. We all owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Pastor Lev And First Lady Natasha. While each one of you will do what you feel is best and most appropriate to express your own personal heartfelt appreciation for all they have done and shared, on behalf of this very grateful congregation, I want to say, simply, strongly, faithfully, and “unwaveringly,” **THANK YOU**!