



*The Rev. Lynn Phillips-Gaines gives a hug to a woman holding her certificate of completion in the Bridges Out of Poverty program.*

## Deacon focuses on issue of poverty

*By Lynn Phillips-Gaines*

Thank God for the Rev. Carol Bourne Spencer's job description of the vocational deacon as "The Deacon Entrepreneur meets the God of Opportunity." I have taken her at her word.

In my community, I have used my ordination as a stepping stone to establishing the Starkville Bridges Out of Poverty initiative. Just a little more than a year ago, we began with a vision and now we have helped hundreds of middle-class residents see through new eyes the plight of a person in poverty. We have graduated 12 participants from our "Getting Ahead in a Just Getting By World," and nine others will graduate this October.

We have also created the BB4K Building Bridges 4 Kids program, teaching hidden rules of the middle class to 22 children of the Getting Ahead participants through this age-appropriate curriculum. Thanks to Mississippi State University, we have one mentor working with each child for 2.5 hours a week.

As a deacon, we are not "priest-lite" or people who wanted to be priests, but couldn't hack the seminary. Our call is to keep the church relevant, to take our congregations into the sloppy, organic, frustrating, exhilarating experience of building relationships with the poor, so we realize these people are not deficient or "less than," but a child of God.

As deacons, with our feet both in the world and in ordained ministry, we can step outside of the church bureaucracies and make things happen. As deacons we have a special vantage point, as we serve without housing allowances, health insurance, retirement plans and stipends/salaries. We are unbridled-free to be open to the God of Opportunities.

*The Rev. Lynn Phillips-Gaines serves as deacon at Resurrection/Starkville.*