

# AVENEWS

Newsletter of THE NEW YORK AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, Washington, DC

## Rev. Héctor Méndez Preaches at NYAPC on World Communion Sunday

by Marilyn J. Seiber

Rev. Dr. Héctor Méndez, pastor of NYAPC's partner church, First Presbyterian-Reformed Church of Havana, preached in our pulpit on Oct. 5, World Communion Sunday. His sermon, "All for One, One for All," focused on the importance of practicing Christian love and relationships with each other as well as our individual relationships with God.

Between services, Rev. Méndez led a Christian education class discussing the current activities of First Havana and the challenges to the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba. Steve Yu, NYAPC member and deacon, translated for Rev. Méndez for both worship services and the class. This was Rev. Méndez's fourth time visiting and preaching at NYAPC; the first time was on World Communion Sunday in 1998.

Following the 11:00 am worship service, the congregation surprised Rev. Méndez with a celebration of the 49th anniversary of his Oct. 26, 1965, ordination to ministry. Cuban music, lots of food, a "49th Aniversario" cake, banner, balloons, and flowers greeted Rev. Méndez in Peter Marshall Hall. In addition to the congregation, guests included Rev. Dr. Wilson Gunn, general presbyter

of National Capital Presbytery, the pastor and members of Leesburg Presbyterian Church, Church of the Pilgrims Presbyterian Church, and other Presbyterian Church members who have visited First Havana with NYAPC. On behalf of the congregation, Rev. Gench presented signed cards for Rev. Méndez from the children, Presbyterian Women, Cuba Partners, Diaconal Ministers, and a letter signed by members of the Session.

Rev. Gench and liturgical artist Susan Tilt then presented a congregational gift to Rev. Méndez, a quilted wall hanging depicting both churches and typical scenes from each capital: the houses of Havana, its palm trees, and the ocean waters off the Malecón, alongside the homes of Washington, D.C., cherry blossoms, and the Potomac. Rev. Gench also gave a copy of his just-published book to Rev. Méndez. It was a grand party!

We are thankful for Rev. Méndez's presence with us and for the opportunity to renew friendships with him and his church. His visit represented in a very personal way our partnership with First Havana, especially for those at NYAPC who have not yet been closely involved with our partner church in Havana.

## Nature & Nurture at Community Club Camp

by Paul Dornan

Forty-five DC public school students and 35 tutors braved the wilds and cold of Prince William Forest Park Oct 4-5 for the annual Community Club Camp.

Camp has been a fixture of Community Club since the ministry began in 1962. Camp offers the single best opportunity during each year for both tutors and students to get to know each other better in a relaxed and bucolic setting.

Students and tutors play football and softball, hike, carve pumpkins, tie-dye shirts, prepare spaghetti, do craftwork, perform and spoof in the annual amateur hour.

The two days are full, but there's still time just to hang out and take in the autumn air and colors. There's also time to sleep, if you can, in well-used beds in rustic cabins. Students and tutors bring back to the city stories of nature, competition and camaraderie that last them the rest of the year and beyond.

This year 16 of the 116 active tutor members of Community Club are also members of NYAPC. New students come into the program each week in the autumn awaiting tutors. If you have the time and energy, there is a student waiting for you. There is no education quite like learning from a child.

## New McClendon Scholar-in-Residence Events Coming Soon!

Please put these on your calendar and plan to attend. All of you are invited to each one:

**Wednesday, Oct. 29, 6:30-8:00 pm.** Organizational meeting of the Urban Ministry Study and Action Group. Radcliffe Room, following light supper at 6:00 pm.

**Wednesday, Dec. 10, evening.** Dr. Harold Dean Trulear, professor of applied theology at Howard Divinity School and director of Healing Communities, USA, will present and enter into conversation on mass incarceration and its implications for our city and its communities of faith.

**Feb. 6-8, 2015.** Dr. Norman Wirzba, professor of theology and ecology at Duke Divinity School and author of *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating*, will lead a weekend on Food and Faith. If we are what we eat, what does what we eat, where it comes from and how we share it say about our faithfulness?

We have heard wonderful things about Dr. Trulear and Dr. Wirzba, don't miss the opportunity to hear them.



Tutor Joel Schrag and eighth graders Knori Teshome and Alyson Jones. Pumpkin unidentified.

## NYC Climate March numbered 400,000

by Fritz von Fleckenstein

Fritz and Ruth von Fleckenstein marched in the People's Climate March in New York City Sept. 21. As it was billed as the largest climate action ever held, we did not expect to actually see anyone we knew, and we didn't.

We gathered before the march with the interfaith contingent. We saw a number of Presbyterians, as well as Catholics, Methodists, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Unitarians, Pagans, and Atheists.

There were delegations from several cities representing Interfaith Power and Light, a group NYAPC belongs to that has assisted us to reduce our carbon footprint. The interfaith contingent completely filled 58th Street from Seventh Avenue to Eighth Avenue, so tightly packed that we could hardly move. While waiting for our turn to join the march, there was a worship service including readings, prayers, songs and chants from many different traditions.

Other contingents gathered along the west side of Central Park all the way up to 88th Street. The march began about 12:30 at Columbus Circle, went along the south side of Central Park on 58th Street east to Fifth Avenue, south on Sixth Avenue to 42nd Street, and then west on 42nd Street to 11th Avenue.

The interfaith contingent started moving about 2:00 and we finally had some breathing room. Along the entire route of the march we observed nothing but

friendship and support from demonstrators, spectators and police.

After we had been marching for more than an hour, Ruth and I decided to leave the march for a drink and to rest a bit. After a longish rest, we started back toward the march route, expecting that it would have ended. To our surprise, it was still going strong, and we entered it at a different place and saw new and different signs. The march continued past 5:00, when the organizers began telling us that their permit only lasted until 5:00, so that we should leave the march.

Our pictures of the march can be found by [clicking on this site](#). The leader of the DC Chapter of the Sierra Club was in a different part of the march, and took [these pictures](#).

Along the way, large screens were showing footage of people in other cities around the world demonstrating as well. In all, around 625,000 people marched worldwide. The organizers were ecstatic. They had expected perhaps 100,000 people to demonstrate in New York, but they brought out 400,000.

The stage was well set for the informal meeting of 120 heads of state to talk about climate that was held on Sept. 23. Unfortunately, Vladimir Putin, PM Modi of India and the leader of China were missing, although they preside over countries that are, with us, the major polluters in the world.



## New York Avenue Foundation

by Jen McIver

The mission of the New York Avenue Foundation (NYAF) is to be a catalyst of educational advancement for youth in need throughout Washington, D.C. Through its grantmaking and the work of an all-volunteer Board of Directors, NYAF seeks to promote a nation's capital that empowers each and every young person to realize his or her potential and become a productive citizen.

This past September, the Foundation welcomed Brian Schimming as the new chair of the Board of Directors. Brian, an attorney, has lived in the D.C. area almost all of his life and became a member of NYAPC in February 2012.

Fellow board member Jen McIver recently sat down with Brian to learn more about his vision for NYAF:

### How did you learn about the New York Avenue Foundation?

I think I first learned of the New York Avenue Foundation during new member class, but because I was learning about so many of the various ministries of NYAPC in a short period of time, the Foundation stayed under my radar until Miriam Dewhurst gave a minute for mission about a year and a half ago seeking additional directors to serve on the board. I approached Miriam that day and said to her that I was aware of the Foundation, but I did not know much about its activities. Miriam told me about the Foundation's mission to support organizations that promote the city's underserved youth, and I was immediately interested.

### Why did you decide to join the board?

At first, I was just looking for a way to further participate in the NYAPC community. I was drawn to the Foundation specifically when I learned about its ongoing support of Community Club as well NYAF's grantmaking to other grassroots, nonprofits that operate programs benefiting the underserved youth of D.C.

### What aspect of the Foundation's work do you find most exciting?

I have been affiliated with NYAF for just over 18 months now, and I still get excited learning about the organizations to which the Foundation is connected.

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## Open Arms Housing Spreads Its Wings

by Paul Dornan

Since Open Arms Housing (OAH) opened its doors in 2009 to long-term homeless women affected by serious mental illness, NYAPC has been a steady source of support for its building and program, the Dunbar, at 57 O St., NW.

In its 16 units, the Dunbar has assured safe, secure and comfortable permanent supportive housing for 25 of this city's most vulnerable women. In fact, in those five years only one woman has returned to life on the streets.

Now, in relatively short order, OAH will be serving its target population at two new sites in Washington. In the last year, with city help, OAH purchased and is currently rehabilitating a four-unit building that will house four additional women starting in the spring of 2015. In addition, OAH has forged an agreement with a developer who has just received word of city funding to build a new six-story mixed-income residence on Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue in Anacostia. Four units of that development have been set aside for OAH's clients.



There are estimated to be between 300 and 400 women in Washington who fit the description of OAH's target population, people affected by serious mental illness who have been on the streets or in shelters for a long period, most often, an average of seven years. Eight new units of targeted housing is certainly only a modest response to that desperate need, but it is something.

As NYAPC considers the future of its response to homelessness, it would be well for us to consider our financial support to OAH, through the Deacons' Fund and the Alternative Christmas Store, as part of a broader tapestry of response that includes: the direct and pastoral support of the Radcliffe Room, the clothes closet and the Downtown Cluster's social workers; homeless advocacy through WIN and the Downtown Cluster of Congregations; homeless prevention through the McClendon Center, the 7-2-9 Program and the Benevolence Fund; meeting of basic human needs through open access to our bathrooms; and support of direct housing through financial and other support of programs like Open Arms.

The former days of small church-run homeless housing programs are probably over given the evolving institutionalization and professionalization of homeless response over the last 30 years. Our church, though, will continue to make an imprint on the city's answer to homelessness, and will be constantly on the lookout for new, imaginative ways to bring our energies to bear on that inhuman condition of homelessness.

On behalf of the Board of OAH, I want to thank the congregation for its ongoing support. You do not know how much it means to us.

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The New York Avenue Presbyterian Church welcomes  
all people into community, worship, service and leadership.

## Happy Birth Day, Grandson!

by Cathy Schultheis

On September's Birthday Fund Sunday the parents of a member of the congregation entered the Narthex and saw the festive trays of decorated cupcakes and the birthday-themed bears. They asked about the cupcakes and the Birthday Fund. Later that morning we received a donation from them—for the Benevolence Fund—in honor of their grandson's pending birth. This was the first time that we received a gift honoring a birthday that was yet to be. What a beautiful thought and wonderful legacy for their grandchild, that his first birthday gift was loving help, in his honor, for those in need!

The Planned Giving Committee appreciates your contributions to the Birthday Fund (for Benevolence and/or Endowment) and thanks the congregation and its many friends for their generosity. We invite you to celebrate your birthday or the birthday of someone you love by giving a dollar for each year of life, or any amount, to the NYAPC Birthday Fund. Your gift will make a lasting difference in the life and ministries of the Church or help provide immediate aid to those in our community.

Birthday Fund envelopes are available in literature racks throughout the church, from the church office and from me. Special birthday cards are available at the front desk for you to give as well!

## Cuba Corner ...

### Young Adults at First Presbyterian-Reformed of Havana

On Sept. 21, the Young Adults of NYAPC's partner church, First Presbyterian-Reformed Church of Havana, celebrated the fourth anniversary of their evangelism project, "One More for Christ" or "Uno Mas Para Cristo."

They conducted an inspirational worship service with singing, dramatizations, and testimonials. Each week the Young Adults plan and present a worship service with the idea of each congregant bringing a new person to the worship service.



Rev. Méndez said, "We are grateful to God for our young people and for this project which is an excellent way to develop church leaders. To God be the glory!"

### Havana Member to Enter Seminary

Congratulations to Tirisay Duran Martinez, young adult at First Havana, who began seminary studies in September 2014 at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Matanzas, Cuba. The congregation of First Havana said good-bye to

Tirisay on July 6 as she embarked on a summer work project at the Presbyterian Church in Nueva Paz in the Havana Presbytery before entering the seminary in September.

Tirisay was one of three young women selected by First Havana to visit NYAPC in 2013, but all three were denied U.S. visas. Instead, the NYAPC group visiting First Havana in April 2013 spent the day with Tirisay and other young adults of First Havana.

### African Students Celebrate Worshiping with Havana Church

A group of about 50 Young Adult African students celebrated their first year worshiping at First Havana on Sunday, Aug. 10.

The students from Ghana, the Congo, and Angola are mostly medical students. They have become an integral part of First Havana's worship service and young adult group. They have organized a choir. On this first-year anniversary, the students planned the worship service with African dance and song as part of the liturgy and read the Bible in Portuguese, French, and Spanish.



## NYA Foundation

(Continued from p. 2)

There is the great work of Community Club and the lives that are changed through the one-on-one tutoring and mentoring that Community Club offers. There are also many other small organizations that are run by only one person or just a handful of staff working with limited resources to provide a wide range of creative services and programs benefiting D.C. youth.

I have lived here almost all of my life, and I was not aware that these groups existed until I joined the Foundation's board. I still get excited learning about these organizations and their remarkable activities, whether it's in the arts, education, technical training, citizen return, experiential learning, wellness programs, mentoring—the list goes on.

All of these groups work incredibly hard to deliver high quality programs and to raise the resources required to operate successfully. I don't know how they do it, but it is gratifying to hear from them about the impact of our grants on their efforts.

**Are there any particular projects or new areas of work that you'd like to see the NYAF undertake while you are chair?**

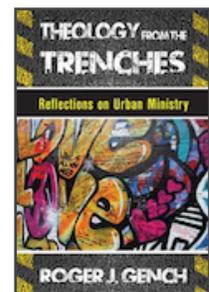
Last year's grantmaking program was the first with which I was involved. The hardest part for me by far was evaluating the grant applications and selecting those organizations that would receive funding. In 2013, NYAF provided \$68,000 in grants to community nonprofits.

I know the entire Board wants to be able to do more. I am excited to learn about the array of nonprofits that are serving D.C.'s most vulnerable kids. I would like to see NYAF build new relationships with these organizations as well as deepen our existing relationships with current partner groups.

### Theology from the Trenches

by Roger J. Gench

Our own Rev. Roger Gench's book is [now available from John Knox Press](#). There may also be copies still available from the church office. Order yours today!



## KENYA Partners News

by Beth Braxton and Fritz von Fleckenstein

There are several interesting bits of news from our partners at the P.C.E.A. church in Njoro, Kenya, and their Orphan and Vulnerable Children (OVC) ministry.

### Letters and Pictures from the Children

When the chair of OVC ministry, Francis Muchemi, and his wife, Rev. Jennifer Muchemi, visited NYAPC in late May after her 2014 graduation from Columbia Seminary in Atlanta, they brought with them a number of letters that the Njoro children had written to us. We put them together with their pictures and put them up on the NYAPC website. You can [see them at this link](#) (or look under Kenya Partners in Ministries).

### Chicken Seminars

Although the three-year Chicken Project ended in 2014, and all of the guardian families had received chickens, some of them were much more successful at raising these chickens than others. Those who did succeed received additional income and also improved their nutrition by consuming eggs and sometimes meat.

Jeremiah Nduyu, a member of the Njoro OVC Committee, who visited NYAPC in 2011, decided to have some educational seminars to reiterate some of the lessons of good poultry raising. In order to do this, he contracted with Mr. Walter Siro, the local field extension officer of the Ministry of Agriculture, to give the first seminar in October.

Mr. Siro intends to teach one more seminar and then to do individual family/farm visits to see how the trainees are coming along with their chickens and to reinforce some of the lessons taught in the seminars. This is a method called Training and Visit (T&V), which is common in Agricultural Extension. Francis took a



Participants in the first Chicken Seminar

picture of the seminar participants where all agreed that it was a very useful experience. The only disappointment was the lack of full participation, since some of the families had to attend an important funeral on that day.

### New Addition to the OVC Program: Zipporah Wanjiru

Cathy Wambui, the OVC social worker, reports that a new child has now entered the OVC program, making the list complete at 35 students. Her name is Zipporah Wanjiru; she is in first grade.

### 2015 Mission Trip Plans

According to Francis Muchemi, an invitation is forthcoming from the session of the Njoro Church for NYAPC members to come work with children and youth of the OVC program in August of 2015. Therefore, we soon will be preparing a flyer with the preliminaries of this mission trip. Please consider whether God

may be calling you to spend a week with the orphan and vulnerable children to enrich their lives through learning and recreation activities.



First-grader Zipporah Wanjiru has just joined the OVC program.

## Digital Estate Planning

by Cathy Schultheis

The topic of Digital Estate Planning may seem strange for inclusion in a church newsletter, but it is very much a vital aspect of estate planning for people today—including Presbyterians!

If you have a family or significant wealth, you probably have an estate plan in place to pass on assets like real estate and investment accounts to your heirs. If you are young, unmarried, childless or of average wealth, you probably do not have an estate plan in place. In either case, have you thought about what will happen to your digital assets, which include everything from online photo albums and music collections to email and social media accounts to blogs and online bank accounts, as well as complex digital property such as software, or intellectual property?

Jamie Hopkins, a professor at The American College of Financial Services, says a 2011 study estimates that the average Internet user has amassed a digital estate worth \$55,000. That is why it is so important to make sure your family knows how to access your digital assets and what to do with them.

Without a digital estate plan, your family could suffer emotional distress when they are unable to access things with sentimental value, such as online photo albums. Tangible financial problems could arise if survivors don't have passwords so that they can pay online accounts. Recurring charges linked to a closed account could result in a lien against your estate.

Holly Isdale, financial consultant, tax attorney and founder of DigitalDeath.com, a website about digital estate planning, says the ramifications can be real and damaging when someone dies without a digital estate plan.

How does one protect a digital estate? Start with some simple things such as making a list of all online assets, along with the passwords to access secure accounts. Include everything from a Netflix account to an online brokerage account. Then make sure this information gets in the right hands after your death. Do not put passwords or online account numbers in your will because your will becomes a public document. You most likely need a trust and a digital executor.

## History Happens ... at NYAPC Rev. Héctor Méndez

by Edith Snyder

*(As part of the History Committee's "Bicentennial Interviews Project," Marilyn Seiber and Edith Snyder interview long-time NYAPC members and friends for the archives files. Edith and Marilyn interviewed Rev. Méndez on Oct. 5 for this project and for this article.)*

Héctor Méndez was 12 years old when he first encountered NYAPC in his hometown of Placetas, Cuba. Preaching at our church Oct. 5, World Communion Sunday, Rev. Méndez told the congregation that he saw the film *A Man Called Peter* about Rev. Peter Marshall, including his ministry at NYAPC, in 1953. "I never dreamed that I would become a minister then, let alone preach in this very church," said the pastor of First Presbyterian-Reformed Church of Havana.

Rev. Méndez also never imagined that he and his congregation would become part of NYAPC's history. For more than 15 years, First Havana and New York Avenue have nurtured their partnership as sister churches, an idea that began when Rev. Bryant George, parish associate at NYAPC, visited the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba and was aided by interpreter Suecia Méndez, an elder at First Havana.

Rev. Méndez and NYAPC Senior Pastor Roger J. Gench have exchanged pulpits several times, and former NYAPC pastors Alice V. Anderson and Robert H. Craig also preached in Havana. On this World Communion Sunday and whenever they meet to worship, Pastors Méndez and Gench wear complementary stoles, made by artist Susan Tilt to commemorate the alliance between their churches.

### A Growing Partnership

Through 2014, NYAPC has dispatched 12 delegations to First Havana, beginning with the initial group led in January 1999 by Rev. Anderson and now involving more than 80 members of the congregation. First Havana and the Presbyterian Church in Cuba have sent a dozen of their congregants to NYAPC in the intervening years. Delegations have included directors of music and members of both choirs. Hymns have been exchanged and are now sung in both churches—hymns such as "Un Son," the traditional Cuban song that was the anthem at NYAPC's worship services on World Communion Sunday. The churches have formed joint Bible study groups using shared texts and recognize births and deaths in both congregations.

NYAPC also worked with the National Capital Presbytery (NCP) to form the

Cuba Partners Network under the Presbytery's Global Mission Network, broadening its relationship with First Havana to other area churches and NCP Presbyterian Women. The Cuba Partners Network received its first Global Mission Network grant of \$1,000 earlier this year and used these funds to provide 163 baseball and tai chi t-shirts to First Havana for the church's four baseball teams and the growing number of tai chi participants in its classes.

Speaking in Spanish with able translation by NYAPC member Steve Yu, Rev. Méndez emphasized in his Oct. 5 sermon that the formal partnerships between First Havana and New York Avenue, five other churches in Illinois, Florida, and New York, and the National Capital Presbytery is not about money where one church relies on the other for financial assistance. Rather, "ours is a relationship based on prayer. It is a relationship in which we learn from each other," he said. "We are all one family under God. We are one in Jesus Christ."

### The Call to Ministry

While at NYAPC in October, Rev. Méndez celebrated 49 years in ministry. He did not plan on the life he has led, helping to shepherd so many Christians in his island nation and traveling to the United States and more than 40 other countries to teach and preach and bear witness to faith in Cuba.

Born on July 24, 1941, Héctor was raised in a family with a Roman Catholic background. However, he grew up across the street from a Presbyterian school and was drawn to the youth groups there, eventually becoming president of Presbyterian Youth of Cuba.

In 1960, all US-owned businesses, including oil refineries, factories, and casinos, were nationalized by the new Communist government in Cuba. The United States responded by ending diplomatic

relations with the country and imposing a trade embargo that still stands today.

Héctor went to Havana University to study law, but when more than half of the country's pastors left Cuba in 1961, he reevaluated his path. "I saw the people without pastors to lead Bible study," he said. "I thought God was calling me to be a pastor."

Héctor entered the Matanzas Evangelical Theological Seminary in October 1962 and was ordained three years later by the Presbyterian Church in the United States, because at that point the church in Cuba was part of the Synod of New Jersey. In 1967, the Presbyterian Church in Cuba separated from the

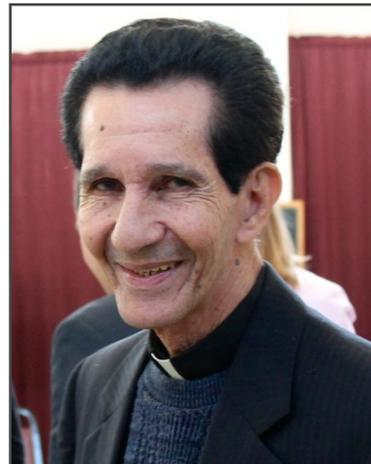
church in the United States, as did the Presbyterian Churches in Chile, Guatemala, Mexico, and Venezuela. They did so with acceptance by the US Church of their independence.

### Preaching Hope

"It was a difficult time in Cuba. The churches and seminaries remained open, but people were afraid to go to them," Rev. Méndez said. "Neighbors would turn their cheeks when they passed by my house so that they would not have to look at me." His wife, Oneida, a former elementary school teacher, left her work to help with Héctor's ministry. At that time the friends of their two daughters, Oneida and Suecia, would not accept their invitations to go to church.

Rev. Méndez first served at Second Presbyterian Church in Cardenas (El Fuerte) for four years and then at Sancti-Spiritus for 21 years before becoming pastor of First Havana in March 1991. While at Sancti-Spiritus, he also pastored a smaller church at Taguasco, some 25 kilometers, or 15-plus miles, away. "There was no transportation to Taguasco. It took the better part of the day to get

*(Continued on p. 7)*



there, and there was nothing to eat or drink along the road,” Rev. Méndez recalled. Usually 10 to 12 people attended worship at Taguasco, with this number growing to between 20 and 25 people during Christmas and Holy Week.

One day in 1984, however, Rev. Méndez arrived to find one woman, Nena Gomez, sitting alone in the church. She urged him to return home to his wife and daughters. He refused, noting that she had come to worship and that was what they were going to do. He put on his robe and conducted the full service. “I preached about hope and predicted that one day the sanctuary at Taguasco would again be full.”

Today, 30 years later, Rev. Méndez’s prophecy has come true. Sanctuaries at First Havana and elsewhere in Cuba are full, and congregations are growing. The daughters of the people who did not permit friendships with his girls have come to him to baptize their children.

Similarly, while in the early years relationships with the Presbyterian Church in the United States and its congregations were very difficult to maintain, Rev. Méndez persisted and now these connections are flourishing as First Havana’s partnership with NYAPC attests. Together, the congregations work for and model reconciliation for their respective nations.

Asked whether in his long career he has ever despaired, Rev. Méndez shook his head firmly and said, “It is not possible to lose hope and continue as a pastor. Some with whom I began ministry are no longer pastors. I understand. It is hard. But you can never lose hope. I always preach hope.”

NYAPC’s next trip to Cuba and First Havana is scheduled for April 13-20, 2015.

# Annual “Cuba Coffee in the Park” a Success!

by Marilyn Seiber

The Triangle Park and Cuba Partners Committees sponsored their annual summer “Cuba Coffee in the Park” after the worship service on Aug. 17. Varieties of food, a Cuban cake, and Cuban music were in abundance—but, alas! no “real” Cuban coffee, only Starbucks, was consumed. It was a beautiful Sunday morning laying aside the jinx in past years of 100-degree temperatures or rain. More congregants attended than ever before and all enjoyed a delightful social hour in the park!



The Triangle Park Committee’s Barry Tindall replaced the former “Cuba tree”—planted to commemorate the 80th anniversary of Presbyterian Women in Cuba—with a beautiful Blue Point Spruce. The first tree died when it was covered by plastic sheeting during church renovation.

## Deacon's Corner

by Kathryn Sparks

The Deacons coordinate the outreach, social education and social action ministries of NYAPC. Work includes outreach to the homeless, recovering alcoholics and drug abusers, tutorial programs for the city's youth, socialization for people with serious mental illness, outreach to people who are elderly, international missions, urban housing, and other cooperative inner-city missions with the Downtown Cluster of Congregations and Washington Interfaith Network. The Deacons also have responsibility for leading ushering at worship services.

During this year, the Deacons want to share with the NYAPC community information on organizations our church is supporting financially. Each spring, the Deacons review requests for funding from about 15-20 organizations (city-wide and farther afield) and prayerfully deliberate on how best to support them. In 2014, we are supporting 12 organizations that are doing great work in the world! In this *AveNews*, we highlight four of them for you.

### Heeding God's Call

Heeding God's Call is a faith-based movement to prevent gun violence that unites people of faith in the sacred responsibility to protect our brothers and sisters and our children. The movement seeks to do this through: helping local faith communities organize advocacy campaigns to encourage gun shops to adopt a code of conduct to deter illegal purchasing and trafficking of handguns; providing support and resources for faith communities to form multi-ethnic, ecumenical, and inter-faith partnerships to work together to actively support gun violence prevention; serving as a "connection point" for these congregations and partnerships to connect with, learn from, and support the work of gun violence prevention organizations and efforts already in place; and advocating for faith communities to make commitments, raise voices, and take action to end gun violence.

### ONE DC

ONE DC's mission is to exercise political strength to create and preserve racial and economic equity in Shaw and the District. ONE DC organizes and builds the leadership skills of low income people of color, women, and allies in DC to speak up, engage in direct actions, and utilize

public policy advocacy to address the growing disparities in employment and housing that plague the city. The organization focuses on low-income residents and women of color who have been historically excluded from the public policy and decision-making processes and have not equitably benefited from city jobs and economic growth.

### PC(USA) Liaison for the Caribbean

As regional liaison for the Caribbean, Reverend Jo Ella Holman's ministry focuses on churches in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, Curacao, Grenada and Trinidad & Tobago. She works closely with the Caribbean and North America Council for Mission (CANACOM), an organization that enables mutual mission among churches from the two regions.

Her ministry involves facilitating and supporting programs of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) partner churches and organizations. This includes four mission coordinators in the DR and Haiti in addition to local presbyteries, seminaries, and partner churches in the regional countries. She also works with PC(USA) congregations and presbyteries in the US involved in the 100+ partnerships in the Caribbean. Reverend Holman has been a big support to NYAPC's Cuba partnership, both strategic (leading the annual Cuba Partners meeting in Houston this past year) and logistical (coordinating trips and visas for travels both to and from Cuba). In between all of her regular duties, Reverend Holman is also studying at the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary for a Doctorate of Ministry focusing in Mission.

### Roots of Development

Roots of Development is a project on an island in the Bay of Haiti: LaGonave. Roots is neither a charity nor a relief agency but, rather, a community investment organization which helps impoverished communities on the island to acquire the financial resources and organizational skills they need to manage their own development. The goal is community development and empowerment realized by supporting the local populations in working independently and autonomously. Thus it is a partnership for progress.

Monitoring and trouble-shooting are the roles of Roots. There have been water projects, conflict resolution, accounting, bookkeeping, and computer skill development projects. The citizens develop

their own priorities in building a community entity and addressing basic needs projects—with monitoring and trouble-shooting help—while working toward independence.

## The Triangle Park and NYAPC

by Beth DuMez

The beautiful little area of openness in front of NYAPC, which we fondly refer to as "The Triangle Park," is in fact titled "Reservation 172" by the National Park Service. The space is a national park (even though we may think of it as a wee parcel)! And, it is beautiful, even if not always tidy...

Thanks to Hal Hiemstra's connection with the Business Improvement District (BID), members of the NYAPC Triangle Park Committee (Beth DuMez, Marilyn Seiber, Barry Tindall) had a fruitful meeting with Ellen Jones and Megan Kanagy Sept. 18.



The primary subject was our omnipresent neighbors: the rats. A commemorative plaque, honoring our partnership with First Presbyterian Church in Havana, Cuba, is mounted on the front of the church at eye level. Our group has endeavored to sustain an attractive setting for the plaque, for our neighbors, and our congregants. We have, however, been repeatedly defeated by the persistent rats.

### New Possibilities

The meeting led to several possibilities, including exploring a partnership with the International Development Bank (IDB). Not only do our parishioners use that passageway in their comings and goings but a constant flow of people in

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## News from the Presbyterian Churches in Iraq and Syria

by Marilyn Seiber

The New York Avenue Presbyterian Church is a member of both the PC(USA) Iraq Partnership Network and the Syria/Lebanon Mission Network. NYAPC Deacons support the Iraq Partnership Network. The following is recent news about the Presbyterian Churches and congregational mission work in these countries:

Rev. Elmarie Parker, PC(USA) regional liaison for Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, writes: "Thank you so much for your continuing prayers for us and for the church here and for the region...there is so much going on. Our church partners in Iraq are doing OK in the midst of all of this. Everyone is safe and together. They are working to respond to the overwhelming needs of those who have had to leave everything behind, whether Christian, Muslim, Yizidi, or other minority. The last remaining Presbyterian family in Mosul was able to leave before ISIS took over Mosul and they are now staying in Erbil with family there. Both the Kirkuk and Baghdad congregations are continuing in ministry—relief work and all the usual things that are part of church life.

"The church in Kirkuk is housing 13 families and supporting more in other churches. The church in Baghdad is assisting 50-60 displaced families living in temporary housing within a 10-kilometer radius around the church property in Baghdad. The crisis is overwhelming—over one million people displaced, seeking shelter in Erbil and Dohuk and the Kurdish region. Church leaders concentrate on enabling Christians to remain in Iraq, but many seek ways to emigrate. Presbyterian Disaster Assistance has sent a solidarity grant to the churches in Iraq for assistance to refugees from Mosul and other areas affected by the ISIS takeover. The PCUSA Middle East office has also identified funds for a partnership grant for the churches in Iraq."

Rev. Parker further writes, "I had the opportunity to visit with Elder Zuhair

Fathallah (Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Basrah). He and the congregation in Basrah are facing increased pressures and the grief of having another key family from the congregation leave for the United States. This raises concerns for their continuing ministries. In the midst of this loss, they are also celebrating the return of Rev. Magdy from Egypt. He was finally given a full residency visa from the Iraqi Government—this is an answered prayer."

Rev. Parker also reports that the Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches hosted a workshop in Beirut to



introduce a new Sunday School curriculum. Twenty-eight young people from churches in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq attended. "I am now at a Sunday School Teacher training being hosted in Lebanon for teachers from Syria and Iraq. They are getting ready for a new Sunday School year in the midst of all that is going on around them. There are six teachers here from Iraq (Kirkuk and Baghdad) and 22 from Syria. This alone is so immensely uplifting...they are not throwing in the towel by any stretch, even though

the circumstances are awful. They continue to seek ways to live Christ's life toward their neighbors."

Rev. Fadi Dagher, General Secretary of the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL), has proposed to help 5,000 families survive the

coming winter by helping them with funds and vouchers for fuel, electricity and water. NESSL has done this for three years, and last year served up to 1,500 families. Their help makes an enormous difference in the lives of displaced Syrians—Christian and Muslim—who are among the poorest of the poor. Families are selected by Local Relief Committees (LRC's) using space in the Synod's Presbyterian Churches and that infrastructure, locations, and volunteer network will be utilized for the new aid program. Priority will be given to widows, the elderly, poor and single mothers.

The project is intended to provide services for at least six months, operating from about November 2014 through the end of April 2015. NESSL hopes to raise \$266,800 for this project. The NYAPC Peace & Justice Committee has sent \$500 to support this effort.

## Triangle Park

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the public realm do as well—especially the staff from the IDB, which is immediately across New York Avenue from the church. IDB staff might also enjoy the park as a lunchtime site. IDB staff tend their own contiguous city property conscientiously, such as thoroughly cleaning adjacent sidewalks and tending planters. According to BID's Ellen Jones, IDB is a new member of the BID Board, and BID might be able to invite IDB to partner with NYAPC on cleanup. NYAPC could also partner with the bank on arranging occasional events (e.g., an outdoor art exhibit in conjunction with the IDB gallery).

But the rat problem first must be addressed. Several ideas came up, including making the area immediately in front of the NYAPC building more open (e.g., less protective plantings), so that it would be less inviting for rats and for public urination. (In fact, the BID representatives told us that DC Metro stations have a successful and regular rat eradication plan throughout DC).

Robin Nixon of BID will be in contact with NYAPC with a sustainable rat eradication plan for "our" park.



## School Kit Update!

by Rev. Alice Tewell

On Sunday Sept. 7, the children and youth packed 85 back to school kits (goal was 75!). Thank you to everyone who donated, supplied and helped with the pack! The kits were driven to Church World Service in Maryland on Wednesday, and they should soon be shipped out to assist the unaccompanied children crossing the border.

### Join the Advent Festival Choir

Sing two fun-to-sing and easy-to-learn anthems with the choir on Sunday, Dec. 7. We'll be singing a lovely setting of Every Valley by John Ness Beck and Comfort, Comfort Ye My People from the "old" blue hymnal.

Come at 10:15 to sing at 11 am worship. Let's sing together to celebrate and observe the second Sunday of Advent!

### Mark Your Calendars . . .

**Oct. 29** - Organizational Meeting of Urban Ministry Study and Action Group. (Light supper at 6:00 pm, meeting at 6:30 pm)

**Nov. 15-16** - All Church Retreat at Meadowkirk

**Nov. 27** - Thanksgiving Day Service at 10 am

**Nov. 30** - Congregational Sunday/Advent Festival 10 am in Peter Marshall Hall

**Dec. 7** - Advent Festival Choir - come rehearse at 10:15 am and sing with the choir at 11 am worship.

**Dec. 10** - Dr. Harold Dean Trulear to speak on mass incarceration (McLendon Scholar-in-Residence).

**Dec. 14** - One Service at 10 am - Children's Pageant

**Dec. 21** - One Service at 10 am - Special Music - Selections from Bach's Magnificat

**Dec. 24** - Christmas Eve Services at 5 pm and 8 pm

**Dec. 28** - One Service at 10 am

