

AVENEWS

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

Ecumenical, Interracial Conversations Bear Fruit

by Paul Dornan

Did you ever notice that we don't always know how everything is going to turn out? Well, that's certainly the case with the McClendon Scholar-in-Residence program's current emphasis on race and class in our beloved Washington. We of the McClendon Council started talking with Mt. Lebanon Baptist Church and Emory United Methodist Church, two primarily African-American congregations in the city, two years ago about ways in which we might collaborate; now, in late winter 2013, we see those initial conversations among the pastors of the three congregations bearing fruit.

In March of last year, President Brian Blount of Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond came up to Washington as our Scholar-in-Residence; he lectured and preached and entered into conversation with attendees from the three congregations about the relevance of the book of Revelation for our time and place. Then, in January 2013, the three congregations and four choirs came together in the New York Avenue Church sanctuary for a common choral worship service, and hundreds of worshippers commemorated our oneness in diversity of choral expression. It was a vibrant and moving celebration!



During Lent this year, each of the three congregations will be hosting a Lenten discussion of James Cone's book, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, with the pastor of each church – Reverend Joe Daniels of Emory, Reverend Lionel Edmonds of Mt. Lebanon Baptist and Reverend Gench -- leading a session. Following each pastoral meditation so far, we have formed small groups of five to seven at-

tendees to share insights and personal stories about the book and our experiences – and to listen as others share theirs. After each discussion, the members of each small group are asked to arrange meetings with the other members of their groups to get to know each other better. After Lent, we intend to schedule one more common discussion before Professor Cone comes down from Union Seminary in New York to become our next Scholar-in-Residence. Professor Cone, one of America's foremost theologians, will lecture on Friday evening, May 24, and there will be plenty of time for questions and answers. His thoughtful and provocative presence with us, we trust, will thrust us into the next phase of the three congregations' collaboration.

Where might it all lead? Already we are being told that nowhere else in the city are similar inter-congregational, interracial, inter-class conversations occurring. We pray that that's not the case, but, if it is, that circumstance says much about the common challenges that face the Washington community. How will we ever work through the puzzles of gentrification, of lower income housing, of a criminal justice system that puts young black men in prison and keeps their white counterparts out for comparable crimes, of homelessness, unless people of faith learn each other's stories and forge friendships across the diversities of which we say we are so proud? We hope that our collaboration might lead to common projects and mutual support of individual ministries. We hope that our example might prove useful to the Washington Interfaith Network (WIN) as they organize and advocate for the poor and distressed people of this community. We hope that each congregation will be in some fashion re-energized in worship, evangelism and ministry by something new in our midst. Stay tuned!

Editor's note: The following essay is excerpted from member Meg House's blog, "White Space Moments," with her permission. It has been edited for length.

Old Roads ... New Places

...As I set off one Saturday for Emory United Fellowship Church, history was everywhere. I drove on roads with old names, names whose meanings have long faded in our memory. ...

This feeling of being surrounded by history continued at Emory. The church perches next to a Civil War fort on a hill between 13th St. and Georgia Ave. ...

The dark gray stone church looks formidable from the street, its steep steps and chunky walls almost a barrier to the sidewalk below. A woman near me wondered aloud if we were at the right place, and we were both lucky that a young man near us answered. The three of us climbed the steep steps together to emerge into wide open space at the top of the hill, then took side stairs down into a basement fellowship hall. As we crowded into the hall, filling out name tags, a man at the microphone welcomed us, inviting us in. "Sit near someone you don't know," he urged.

We broke into small groups to discuss the first chapter of Cone's book. None of us in my group, black or white, had considered the relationship between the cross and the lynching tree before. But Cone cites black preachers during this period of our nation's history who compared the cross to the lynching tree in sermons, and argues that gospel tunes like "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?" had particular power and immediacy for blacks during this time.

Our first response: How can this be? The cross is all about hope! But we also agreed that the cross was the worst kind of death the Roman Empire could dole out, and that for Christians, it is a symbol

Continued on back page

Arabic Presbyterian Church in Baghdad: New Pastor, Floods, Challenges

After years of Interim Pastors, the Arabic Presbyterian Church in Baghdad has called a new pastor, **Rev. Farouk Hammo**. Rev. Hammo participated in the PC(USA) Iraq Partners Network in Irbil, Iraq in November 2012. Rev. Hammo was born in Iraq, but went to Australia 25 years ago where he went to seminary. He returned to Iraq two years ago and was called by the Baghdad Church.

Elder Yousif al-Saka has written twice, first with prayers for NYAPC and the congregation in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, and, second, with Christmas greetings and news of the church's Good Shepherd Children's Center that NYAPC has supported for three years with Alternative Christmas gifts. **Elder al-Saka writes:**

Re Hurricane Sandy: "Hope you relieve my worries about your conditions as well as our friends in Washington. Are there any damages in the beautiful church that we have visited? Please tell all the friends that their brothers back in Baghdad have devoted a special prayer for them, we cannot forget your prayers for us during the inconvenient conditions of our country."

Re Christians, Children's Center, Christmas: "Still there are a lot of Christians leaving Iraq especially from the middle and the southern places; this would really influence the activities of our churches as our parish is decreasing in a continuous manner.

For the *Children's Center* project, we called its first stage 'The Good Shepherd'; it is working in great success. Obviously the Muslim children are approaching in twice as much as the Christians. This made me so happy; as I am the owner of the whole idea and the project's sponsor from its very beginning. The second stage is unfortunately [at a] standstill that maybe we could overcome in the future.

This year even the humble [Christmas] celebrations, except the church's services of course, for Christmas and the new year are obviously canceled because these events are happen[ing] together with Muslims' special ceremonies of the [Shiite] sect. There is a total mourning going on in the state so our celebrations will be at home."

Rev. Farouk Hammo has written the following to PC(USA) Mission Co-Worker for the Middle East, Rev. Dr. Nuhad Tomeh, about the conditions of Christians in Iraq and the Christmas flooding of the Baghdad Church. He has also acknowledged receipt of the NYAPC Alternative Christmas gift for the Children's Center, and Rev. Tomeh has acknowledged the Peace and Justice gift for flood repair. **Rev. Hammo writes:**

"Yes there are difficulties & threats here and there, and daily we are confronted with hardship, yet we are blessed to have brothers like you [PC(USA) Iraq Partners Network] whom we are sure that they stand with us and for us in the gap before the almighty Lord for our safety and growth of ministry.

The almighty [L]ord has blessed us and answered our prayers with rain when gates of heavens opened on Christmas day for 16hours, but flood followed to invade the church ground. The minister's office; Library; bookstore; church hall and the church backyard ground were all covered with 30cm of rain water. Everything that was underwater level [was] damaged including books; furniture; electric appliances; carpets and the main electric cable that feed the church hall was completely damaged and need to be replaced urgently. This has coincided with a very cold winter which means that we are unable to use heating system due to the disconnection of the cable. We have inquired around and found that replacing this cable & the electric maintenance which is needed to fix the damage would cost around +\$7000 USD."

To: "The Reverend Nuhad Tomeh,

Greetings in the awesome Name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

This is to certify that we the Arabic Presbyterian Church in Baghdad have thankfully received \$565.00 USD this amount being a **contribution from the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington DC**, and was spend on purchasing gifts for our Good Shepherd Kindergarten first year graduation and purchasing stationeries for kids. As we sincerely thank you for your support we uplift our hands with prayer to our Lord and Savior to bless you richly and keep us in your mind for further support, and to proceed and continuous working of our

childhood center for the glory of our Lord and Savior. Thank you.

Sincerely Yours,

Rev. Farouk Hammo.

Pastor of the Arabic Presbyterian Church in Baghdad

From Rev. Tomeh:

"Thank you very much and NYAPC On Behalf of the Arabic speaking Presbyterian church in Baghdad, for your quick and generous responses, to help with the repair of the flood effect in the Baghdad church."

*A poem by NYAPC member
Gwenn Gebhard*

A Beautiful Girl from a Good Family *for musicians exiled from Mali*

They broke her one-string njarka
They broke her electric guitars
They broke her ngoni
They broke her drums
They wanted to break the back of her
music
break her praise songs
break her call and response
songs
They wanted to send her back to the
desert
send her north to the salt mines
send her away from Timbuktu
Mali musicians lament: *music is like
oxygen —*
now we cannot breathe
They howl: *music is against religion—
we are in a struggle against all
the musicians of the world*

Splintered wood, tangled strings, tears
Khaira Arby continues to sing praises to
Allah

The njarka is a small fiddle made from a gourd, with one gut string, which is native to Mali. The ngoni or "n'goni" is a string instrument originating in West Africa. Its body is made of wood or calabash with dried animal (often goat) skin stretched over it like a drum. In the hands of a skilled ngoni instrumentalist, the ngoni can produce fast rapid melodies. Most likely, the American banjo is descended from similar instruments.

Taking Responsibility as a Good Steward

By Cathy Schultheis

If you have ever been in a situation where a loved one has died and did not make any plans for the distribution of their assets, you can certainly appreciate the value of taking the time to make an estate plan. It can be difficult guessing who should receive remaining assets. Did they want to leave a gift to their church and perhaps the humane society where they volunteered, and where did they keep their insurance policy? This only hints at the decisions to be made - decisions that could have been made in advance.

For Christians, there is an added dimension to estate planning - recognizing God as the owner of all assets places us in a responsible position as a steward. It is important that we use our God given assets to their fullest potential during our lifetimes for ourselves, our families, our businesses and for His glory. As a steward, we must also arrange for the most efficient and effective transfer of the assets at death to individuals or charities in a manner that reflects our faith and our values.

For the sake of your loved ones, take the time to think about your present plans and meet with a legal adviser to help create or adjust your plans to reflect your response as a steward of God's gifts to you. Information about including a bequest to The NYAPC is available through Planned Giving Committee Co-chair John Schultheis at 301-622-3149 or thenyapc@yahoo.com.

Members and friends of *all* ages are invited to an adult Christian Education class at 10 a.m. on April 21, sponsored by the Planned Giving Committee in connection with our observance of Legacy Sunday that day. Attorney and church member Brian Schimming will lead a class that reviews the basics of estate planning and administration including topics to consider when preparing a will, current federal and state estate tax law, titling of assets and beneficiary designations, planning issues for minor children, intestacy rules and probate procedures in DC, MD and VA, uses of revocable and testamentary trusts, powers-of-attorney and medical directives. Coffee and snacks will be available in the classroom.



Celebrate your birthday or that of someone you love by making a gift to The NYAPC Birthday Fund.

- Obtain Birthday Fund envelopes from the sanctuary or front desk
- Indicate Benevolence or Endowment Fund on checks and envelopes

- Return envelopes to the Church
- Birthday Fund cards to send to honorees available at the front desk

OR give online at www.nyapc.org.give

Over \$6,200 was contributed to The Birthday Fund in 2012!

Questions? Contact John Schultheis at thenyapc@yahoo.com

or call him at 301-622-3149.

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

NYAPC Participates in Marriage Study Pre-Test

by Miriam Dewhurst

The 220th General Assembly (2012) called the whole PC(USA) to enter into a season of serious study and discernment concerning its meaning of Christian marriage, and to direct the Office of Theology and Worship to prepare and distribute educational materials on the subject to all presbyteries and congregations. The issue before the PC(USA) is whether to say something new about marriage, specifically concerning same-gender couples.

The Office drafted a six-week study on marriage and invited 13 congregations, diverse in theological bent, geography, and size, to participate in a pre-test of the material and suggest ways to sharpen the guide's faithfulness and effectiveness. The study guide is organized around the Statement on the Gift of Marriage found in the liturgy for Christian marriage in the Book of Common Worship, and engages participants in the scriptures, confessions and other resources to see what the church has said on Christian marriage.

The Session accepted the invitation to participate, and a group of 11 – Miriam Dewhurst, David Inoue, Molly and Benno Lauer, Kendrick McCabe, Whitney McColley, John Quinn, Jim Rhodes, Mike Smith, Courtney Spearman and Sarah Williamson – met for seven weeks to study and to provide feedback. We found the study interesting and valuable. We had lively discussions and have all learned a great deal about what the church says about marriage. We also found that the study skirted the issue of gay marriage and hope that it will be revised to address this issue more directly.

Cuba Corner

◆ Rev. Joel Ortega Dopico, current President of the Cuban Council of Churches and Presbyterian pastor of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Varadero, Cuba, visited NYAPC on Saturday and Sunday, February 23 and 24, with Hilda Del Real, also with the Cuban Council of Churches. This was their first visit to Washington. Rev. Ortega Dopico was in Washington to attend meetings of the World Council of Churches; a representative of the PC(USA) Washington Office will also attend.

◆ Three young adults from First Presbyterian-Reformed Church of Havana will visit NYAPC in fall 2013. They are:

- Tirisay DURAN MARTINEZ: Tirisay is 25 years old and will graduate this June with a degree in Social Communication. She is an Elder at First Havana and is Secretary of the Young Adults of the Presbytery of Havana.

- Miladis Elba IBARRA SUAREZ: Miladis Elva is 22 years old. She is in her fourth year of Medical Studies, and is a student assistant in General Surgery.

- Leyanet HERRERA GONZALEZ: Leyanet is 21 years old and studies ballet in the School of Dance of the Higher Institute of Art.

◆ Sandra Santos, Music Director of First Havana who visited NYAPC in October 2010, and her husband, Oscar Cañizares, welcomed



son David Cañizares Santos on December 8, 2012. Bienvenidos David!

◆ Nine members from NYAPC, two from Church of the Pilgrims, and the pastor of Leesburg Presbyterian Church will visit First Havana in mid-April. This will be the first visit to Cuba for six of the members. For the five members who have visited previously, the changes in Cuba and the related challenges to the Presbyterian Church in Cuba make every trip a new experience!

First Havana Celebrates 111 Years!

by Marilyn Seiber

On December 9, NYAPC's partner church, First Presbyterian-Reformed Church of Havana, celebrated its 111th anniversary. The sanctuary was filled to overflowing with members, visitors, and guests. A highlight was the appearance of the daughter of the first Presbyterian Cuban pastor, Rev. Evaristo Collazo. Now 82, Enriqueta Collazo was escorted to the front of the sanctuary and greeted warmly by the congregation. Other visitors included Rev. Jo Ella Holman, PC(USA) Mission Co-Worker for Cuba and the Caribbean;



Maria Arroyo, PC(USA) General Assembly Office for Latin America and Caribbean in Louisville; and retired Rev. Dean Lewis, Chair of the PC(USA) Cuba Partners Network and Executive Director of the Cuba Connection, all of whom had

participated in the Cuba Partners Network meetings the previous week. The Session (Consistory) of First Havana had invited representatives from three of its partner churches to give brief remarks (in place of the usual sermon) on what the partnership with First Havana means to their respective churches and to them personally. Rev. Glenn Dickson (ret.) spoke on behalf of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Gainesville, Fla.; Don Wallace spoke for First Presbyterian Church of Colorado Springs; and Marilyn Seiber spoke—*en español!*—for NYAPC. First Havana presented the speakers and special guests with its new music CD performed and produced by the Young Adults of First Havana, *Uno Para Cristo* (One for Christ).

Easter Greetings from Rev. Mendez

TO OUR PARTNERS:

The Easter message is that, even after death, there is Resurrection and unending hope and so the message of the first Easter resonates down the centuries and can bring a special meaning to all those who are feeling at their most vulnerable in these difficult times. Easter brings hope to all who suffer with the unending truth that love prevails and that God quite simply shares our journey and leads us forward so we have nothing to fear.

The truth of the Resurrection is a message of hope and it is one that we are called to share with our friends, neighbours and strangers through acts of kindness and by loving service. You and I are called to simply live our Hope.

I wish you all a happy and joyful Easter.

Blessings and Best Wishes Always

Rev. HECTOR MENDEZ and First Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Havana

PC(USA) Cuba Partners Meet in Cuba

By Marilyn J. Seiber

The annual meeting of the PC(USA) Cuba Partners Network met in Matanzas, Cuba, in December at the Evangelical Theological Seminary. The theme was “One Mission, Two Contexts: An Opportunity for Effective Accompaniment.” The “Encuentro de Hermanamientos,” or Cuba Partners Meeting, focused on how the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba and the PC(USA) could achieve greater effectiveness together in service, evangelism, and creating a prophetic voice. About 35 Americans and 40 Cubans gathered in large and small groups for Bible studies, worship in the seminary chapel, learning Cuban hymns, and confronting each other’s “reality” in our countries’ economic and political situations and in our respective Churches—the challenges, the future, the issues with which we grapple as churches.

We learned about the declining Cuban population—with the lowest birth rate in Latin America and an aging population—the challenges that poses for the economy, the effect on Cuban families, emigration, a growing “crisis of values” among Cuban youth, and changing Government laws and regulations that will affect the whole society. The Cubans learned about the effects of “The Great Recession,” the housing and mortgage crisis, homelessness, unemployment, declining educational achievements, political divisions, and the impacts of two wars on American society and its future.

The conditions in each country affect the churches and how we proceed with evangelism and a prophetic voice. In November 2012, the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba convened Institute IV, a church-wide gathering to consider how it will grapple with training new members, doing church work with too few pastors, and how to best serve during difficult economic-cultural times. In the U.S., the General Assembly grappled with social and economic issues that cause political and church divides, but also provide an

opportunity for coming together for God’s purposes.

Both churches agreed that our partnership is called to be bridges between our people, maintaining God’s call between us, despite our governments’ relationship and policies. Our challenge together is how and what we can bring to the process



of **Reconciliation**. God is calling us to be agents of Reconciliation between our peoples, churches, and governments, and the partners considered what concrete steps we can take as Presbyterians to implement a “mission of action.” The challenges are great, but our commitments together as partners will guide us in the coming years when many projected that in 15 years our countries and partnership will be very different from our current experience.

Lauren Dwyer from Church of the Pilgrims Presbyterian Church and Marilyn Seiber represented NYAPC at the meetings.

15th Street Presbyterian Women Host NYAPC for Bible Study

The Presbyterian Women of 15th Street Presbyterian Church hosted NYAPC’s Presbyterian Women for a joint Bible study on February 9. This is the third year of biannual joint Bible studies held in the fall and winter/spring hosted by each church. Both churches use the PC(USA) annual *Horizons* Bible study that we study together when we meet. This time, however, 15th Street had a special study of “The Wise Men” done by Elder Benny

NYAPC Hosts Presbytery’s Global Mission Network

By Marilyn J. Seiber

On Saturday, January 12, NYAPC’s Peace and Justice Committee hosted the Global Mission Network of National Capital Presbytery. Eleven people represented seven churches in the Presbytery with international mission programs in such countries as Kenya, Malawi, Thailand, Haiti, Mexico, and Cuba. The purpose of the Global Mission Network is to exchange information and support each other’s programs. An example of such support is the Leesburg Presbyterian Church that hosted an Alternative Christmas Store on December 2 and invited other Presbytery churches in the Network to display tables of their partnership programs. New York Avenue participated in this for its Cuba and Kenya programs. The Global Mission Network sponsors the “Prayer Sundays for Global Mission,” encouraging all churches in the Presbytery to pray for the churches, partners, and programs that are part of our global mission and partnerships in the Presbytery.

The Network meeting discussed changes in the Presbytery’s grant programs under the auspices of NPC’s Mission Coordinating Committee, a major effort of which is to encourage greater network development between churches in the Presbytery with a common-country program. There was a report on the Malawi Network, and Marilyn Seiber reported on the PC(USA) Cuba Partners Network meeting recently held in Cuba. The chair of the Global Mission Network also reported on PC(USA)’s Medical Benevolence Foundation and mission opportunities related to its work.

McCottry who leads weekly adult Bible studies at 15th Street. Using both Old and New Testament texts, McCottry brought new perspectives and insights to the traditional stories of the Wise Men!

The 15th Street women also provided a wonderful potluck lunch which gave us more opportunity to socialize and better know each other.

-- Marilyn J. Seiber

History Happens . . . at NYAPC: Blonnie Thompson

As part of the NYAPC History Committee's "Bicentennial Interviews Project," Marilyn Seiber and Edie Snyder interview long-time NYAPC members for the Archives files. They interviewed Blonnie Thompson on January 13 for this project and for the article below.

"Church comes first in my life," says Blonnie Thompson, a member of The New York Avenue Presbyterian Church for nearly 50 years. "I like this church; I really do. I hate to miss." And true to her word, Blonnie rarely misses volunteering in the Radcliffe Room, attending Sunday worship services, and bringing refreshment in the form of an apple to music director Stan Engebretson. At age 82, she still takes the



bus early Sunday morning from her home near Anacostia Park down Benning Road to H Street and NYAPC, and back again in the afternoon. To this day, Blonnie has never owned a car.

Church has been central to Blonnie's life since she was a girl growing up in Tennessee. Blonnie is one of triplets born in 1930 at home in Knoxville, each baby weighing between two and three pounds. The girls' grandfather, carpenter George Carter, converted orange crates into cribs for Martha, Blonnie, and Lillian. Their parents were Meek and Emily Carter Cox, and their father worked in a steel mill. Emily died at age 25 when the triplets' second brother was born. Not long after, their father left the family. "My sisters and I were three or four years old at the time," recalls Blonnie.

The children went to live with their maternal grandparents who raised them and were central to their education and religious upbringing. George insisted that Blonnie and her siblings become proficient readers and he regularly conducted spelling bees among the children. George was a Baptist and a Presbyterian and served as a Bible teacher. In keeping with Baptist tradition, "we didn't dance, play cards, or go anywhere without each other,"

Blonnie says of those early years that tightly bound her and Martha and Lillian together for life. Blonnie preferred the Presbyterians because "they kept you busy and were socially active." Overall, though, "we weren't exposed to much beyond church life."

In fact, they were exposed to what matters most: the children knew without a doubt that they were loved and valued. Blonnie and her sisters and brothers called their grandfather Papa. Blonnie describes him as tall and light skinned with grey hair. George and her grandmother, Mary Elizabeth, would play with the children in the yard—"two old people out there, playing ball," she remembers with a smile.

Blonnie and her siblings learned to be confident in themselves and their abilities. And something more: "My grandfather made it so I wasn't afraid of anyone." George Carter would take the children to downtown Knoxville where "WHITE" and "COLORED" signs ostensibly told them where to go and what to do. He ignored the signs. "Are you thirsty? Do you want some water?" he would ask the girls. "Go get some."

As teenagers, Blonnie and her sisters left home to attend Swift Memorial Junior College, a Presbyterian boarding school in Rogersville, Tennessee, about 80 miles from Knoxville. Blonnie played basketball, ran track, and, with Martha and Lillian, sang in the choir. To ensure that all three girls could participate, they taught themselves to sing different parts. Their clothes bore their names, and it wasn't unheard of for the Cox sisters to exchange clothing, masquerading as each other.

An Initial Encounter with NYAPC

Blonnie worked at school during summers and stayed on at Swift after her sisters returned home to attend Knoxville College. Swift was a mission school, and Blonnie worked to sort clothing sent to the school for distribution to those in need. It was through this work that she first encountered NYAPC, which sent boxes of clothing to Swift. Years after Blonnie, Martha, and Lillian attended Swift, the school was relocated to West Point, Miss.

Blonnie met her husband, James Thompson, at an interfaith church conference in Knoxville when she was 20 years old. They fell in love and were married in the yard of her aunt's home. "Marriages were not performed so much in churches then," Blonnie recalls.

She and James have been married for 62 years. They have three children—Blonnie Marlene, Laverne, and Paul—and live in the same "little bitty old house" that James bought when they moved to Washington in the early 1950s. Their children all live in Maryland and are now Jehovah's Witnesses, and she and James have five grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. Blonnie enjoyed being home while her children were growing up. For 25 years, she also worked with the DC Parks and Recreation Department where she taught ceramics, cooking, cheerleading, and sports to both children and adults.

When they first moved to Washington, the Thompsons attended Mt. Bethel Baptist Church. James is a member of Mt. Bethel still where he sings in the choir, teaches, and is an officer. Blonnie says that music ultimately led her from Mt. Bethel to NYAPC.

Not fond of gospel music and aware of NYAPC's mission work from Swift and of Peter Marshall's ministry from the book, *A Man Called Peter*, Blonnie visited the church. She wanted to sing in the choir and auditioned with Stephen Prussing, then director of music. Steve brought her into the choir as a soprano, joking that being a Baptist, she would need to take care not to sing too loudly.

Not everyone at NYAPC was welcoming, however. With the practice of pew rentals still in place, Blonnie was told that she could not sit in her preferred Amen Corner of the Sanctuary. Two women refused to sit next to Blonnie in the choir, but she told them if that were the case, they would have to move. When Blonnie's daughter, Laverne, complained that her Sunday school teacher let the other children call her "chocolate," Blonnie spoke to the teacher and "she eventually came around." Even the Session asked Blonnie

Washington Interfaith Network Plans New Initiatives

NYAPC is reinvigorating its engagement with the Washington Interfaith Network (WIN). On Sunday, March 3, leaders from WIN joined more than 20 members of the NYAPC congregation for conversation about WIN's initiatives this year and how we can be more involved.

WIN, founded in 1996, is a broad-based, multi-racial, multi-faith, strictly *non-partisan*, District-wide citizens' power organization, rooted in local congregations and associations. WIN is committed to training and developing neighborhood leaders, to addressing community issues, and to holding elected and corporate officials accountable in Washington, DC. WIN's dues-paying members (which include NYAPC) represent more than 25,000 families in every section of the District and reflect its theological, racial, geographic, and economic diversity.

WIN has two major initiatives this year:

◆Build Homes:

- We support the dedication of \$100 million for the production of additional units of affordable housing

- Invest \$32 million in affordable housing programs for FY14

- End chronic homelessness in 5 years.

◆Invest in our Youth:

- Reach all homeless youth by 2018

- Connecting disconnected youth education and a career

A Modern City with Jobs for All

DC must upgrade its infrastructure to green and modernize our city. This creates opportunities to connect unemployed residents with careers. In the FY 2014 Budget Support Act, WIN will organize to include language on accountability and incentives

for hiring unemployed residents in areas such as stormwater infrastructure upgrades at DC Water, and DC Department of Environment and Energy retrofits on private homes and public buildings.

In support of these initiatives, NYAPC has committed to:

- Bring at least 20 people to a WIN Action (large gathering) on April 22, to engage DC WASA and council members on the stormwater jobs initiative described above.

- Engage at least 75 people as WIN voters, who will email and call DC Council Members on May 1 to ask them to support the WIN initiatives (described above) in the 2014 Budget vote.

For more information or to volunteer for the WIN Action or as a WIN voter (you DON'T have to live in DC to be a WIN voter - just being associated with NYAPC is sufficient), please contact Courtney Spearman at courtneyspearman@gmail.com or 202.631.2688.

Blonnie Thompson

if she had been sent to the church by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People when she applied to become a member.

Rosa Parks?

Blonnie stood her ground and joined the church. During this period, she particularly appreciated the support she received from Mary "Jerry" Shirlaw Docherty, Senior Pastor George Docherty's wife, and from the minister's beadle, a lay official and African American who wore a black robe and opened the pulpit Bible at the start of every worship service. Her husband James suggested to Blonnie that "you thought you were Rosa Parks." But Blonnie wasn't seeking notoriety of any kind; she simply wanted the equality and respect she had been taught to know was hers. "It's the way we were brought up. We were religious. We owned our own home. We weren't going anyplace."

Blonnie's friendship with Dr. and Mrs. Docherty deepened and their daughters, Blonnie Marlene and Mairi became friends. Blonnie also became close to Thelma M. Odom, a Presbytery National Missions worker who served as a full-time staff member at NYAPC from 1961 to 1971. "Thelma got us all involved" in

the Mother's Club, a neighborhood outreach initiative, and with the House of Ruth, an organization that helps women and children overcome homelessness and domestic violence. Thelma sang in the choir with Blonnie and traveled with the Dochertys and Rev. Jack McClendon to Selma, Alabama, to march for civil rights. She told Blonnie about those trips. During the Poor People's Campaign, Thelma also drove Blonnie around to see and experience the campaign.

Blonnie says of membership at NYAPC that "here, you're dedicated." She expresses admiration for the many committed members of NYAPC with whom she has worked over the years, people like John and Roberta Lentz.

Looking to the future for New York Avenue, Blonnie "is excited about where the church is going." She is pleased to see the increasing number of young adults and more parents and children coming to church. The children, she notes with pleasure, "call me Ms. Thompson." She is also glad that the Radcliffe Room program for homeless has expanded, that people are giving more in the way of food and clothing, and that "what we offer is free."

Board of Deacons Seeks Suggestions

The Board of Deacons coordinates the outreach, social education and action ministries of NYAPC. One of the ways the Deacons carry out this vital mission is by providing financial support to local, national and international organizations. In 2012, we supported 11 organizations with almost \$35,000. As we make our decisions for 2013, we're happy to consider other potential recipients. If you know of an organization that would benefit from our support and fits NYAPC's mission, please contact Kristin Ford at kristin.elisabeth.ford@gmail.com by April 15.

Dancing at NYAPC?**Big Mountain Circle Dance!**

Come to church Saturday evening, May 18, and you'll find Peter Marshall Hall transformed into a dance hall - you might even see some hay bales! Nurture Committee has invited Glenn Bannerman, a specialist in recreation, folk dance and worship, to lead us in the Big Mountain Circle Dance. Bannerman, who was professor of recreation and outdoor education at the Presbyterian School of Christian Education, is a renowned caller of circle dances and an expert in intergenerational activities. There will be punch and light snacks. The dancing will start at 6 pm - early enough for families with young children - and end by 8, so there's still time to go out to dinner with friends!

Annual Ice Cream Social

Build your own sundae and enjoy live music at the Fifth Annual Ice Cream Social following 10 a.m. worship on Sunday, June 9, in Peter Marshall Hall. Enjoy sandwiches and all necessary ingredients for you to build your personal ice cream confection. The choir will perform selections from George Gershwin, and any donations will go to the choir fund. Join us for this annual fun ... and sweet! ... summer celebration.

All Church Retreat

It's been a few years ... and it's time for an NYAPC all-church retreat. Mark your calendars now for Nov. 2-3. We'll gather at Meadowkirk in Loudon County for intergenerational programming for families, young adults, octogenarians, and everyone in between. Details on registration and theme coming soon!

***The Cross and the Lynching Tree***

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of God's power to transform. We struggled with the idea of transforming the lynching tree, or today's problems, like gun violence and incarceration rates, into hope.

I felt we were sitting on sacred ground, in this old basement, in this old church, on an old hill, having driven on old roads that so many before us have taken. There's sacred ground everywhere, isn't there? So many dreams precede us. How do we keep going knowing that many of these dreams have died unfulfilled? We can point to progress, to how life has gotten better. And we can point to new shadows on our land.

The idea that day was to do a new thing. To form new relationships. What work of transformation can some everyday people in church basements accomplish? We don't know. All we could do was begin to share concerns and disappointments, to share some of our stories, and promise to meet again.

