NYAPC Welcomes Rev. Dr. Heather Grace Shortlidge as Transitional Pastor
by Edith Snyder

On August 18, 2019, the Session voted unanimously to accept the recommendation of the Personnel Committee, chaired by Elder Brian Schimming, to call Rev. Dr. Heather Grace Shortlidge to NYAPC as Transitional Pastor. Rev. Shortlidge begins her work with the church on September 17.

She thought she wanted to be a ballerina and trained for that profession nights and weekends through high school. But God had a different plan, and fortunately for The New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, serving this congregation is part of it.

This month, the Rev. Dr. Heather Grace Shortlidge begins her call to NYAPC as Transitional Minister. In this role, she will help the church through a period of discernment and change as NYAPC searches for and calls our next Senior Pastor. “I’m confident of where we’ll start and where we’ll end,” Heather says of the process. “What happens in the middle, though, is what we’ll figure out together.”

Experienced in Discernment
Heather brings to this call patience and a willingness to accept and wrestle with uncertainty, to figure things out. Her own journey to ministry “was not linear”, she explains. Growing up in West Grove, Pennsylvania, Heather attended a small Presbyterian church that was truly her mother’s family’s church, witnessing marriages from the union of her great-grandparents to her older sister’s wedding, and funerals including her grandmother’s service last year. Heather’s father was a Quaker, and she and her parents and two sisters occasionally went to meetings on Sundays “where we sat in silence”.

The arrival of a new pastor at her home church when Heather was in middle school led to a break between her mother and their home church. Through her high school years, “we church hopped, which was difficult because I never really belonged to a youth group, but positive in that I was exposed to lots of different ways of being church,” she recalls. At the same time, Heather faced a major decision as she approached graduation from high school. “I loved ballet, but couldn’t keep dancing at a professional level and also go to college.” Education was very important to Heather’s father, whose own formal education ended with high school when he went to work for General Motors, where he assembled cars and participated as a union member for 35 years. Heather gave up dance and went to The University of Richmond.

While earning her Bachelor of Arts in leadership studies and minoring in business administration and women’s studies, Heather went to chapel on Sundays where she encountered a dynamic Baptist preacher. “I was mesmerized by his sermons and did a lot of community service with him” throughout her college years.

Nonetheless, she was surprised when the chapel’s pastor called her the spring semester of her senior year to say he thought she should go to seminary. He wanted her to attend an inquirer’s weekend, and she went out of politeness to her mentor, even though she already had a job waiting in Washington, DC. She initially wanted to turn down the scholarship Union Presbyterian Seminary offered “for people exactly like me,” who had been identified as potential seminarians, but had yet to see that possibility in themselves. But one day while riding the Metro, she heard the question, “Why are you so resistant to this?” and found herself answering that she was scared. Having acknowledged her fear, Heather put her DC job on hold, moved to Richmond, and began her studies, discovering just how much she loved learning what

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Union had to teach and gaining knowledge in general.

**Finding Her Role in the Church**

After completing her Master of Divinity degree, Heather began her next “negotiation with God” about where she would serve. She was concerned about the leadership potential for women in parish positions and so initially accepted the role of Chaplain at Children’s Medical Center Dallas in Dallas, Texas, providing spiritual support for a diverse community of patients, families, and staff in The Center for Cancer and Blood Disorders. However, “after watching dozens of kids die, I determined this work wasn’t sustainable for me.”

Heather yielded to the call of church service, accepting the position of Associate Pastor of Rivermont Presbyterian Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. In addition to preaching, teaching, and providing pastoral care for Rivermont’s 550-member congregation, she worked to deepen the church’s partnership with The Children’s Nutrition Program of Haiti. She also developed a tutoring program with Rivermont Elementary School and worked with the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Campus Ministry Program to provide worship leadership for college students.

Ultimately, Heather found it challenging, though, as a single educated female, to find a community in Chattanooga, and she missed her family on the East Coast. When it came in 2007, she accepted the call to become Associate Pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Annapolis, Maryland.

For the past 12 years, she has served the congregation of 700 members drawn from the Annapolis community, preaching, teaching, and serving as Acting Head of Staff when called upon to do so. Heather designed and taught First Presbyterian’s 18-week confirmation class, including a three-day world religions retreat that involved significant relationships with Temple Micah, Masjid Muhammad, The Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, and St. John’s Russian Orthodox Church in Washington, DC. She has participated in strategic planning for the church and coordinated capital campaigns.

Heather also organized 25 local faith communities and non-profits to launch Anne Arundel Connecting Together (ACT), an Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) affiliate, which seeks to tackle systemic racism, poverty, and interfaith issues in Anne Arundel County. She has served on the Strategy Team of ACT and as Co-Chair of its Immigration Research Action Team.

During her time in Annapolis, Heather earned her Doctor of Ministry in Preaching from McCormick Seminary in Chicago. As a result of her studies, she now delivers the text on which she preaches from memory. “I find that learning the text gets the scripture inside me in a deeper way, informing my sermons and engaging the congregation, which helps with Biblical literacy,” she explains.

In the past 12 years in Maryland, Heather has also become a certified yoga instructor and volunteers as a puppy raiser for FIDOS for Freedom an organization that trains assistance dogs. Heather is currently raising her seventh puppy, a black Lab named Newman, who will be returned to FIDOS at the beginning of September for a permanent assignment.

“I have had a really great experience in Annapolis,” she concludes. Now with the retirement of its long-time Head of Staff/Senior Pastor, First Presbyterian is in the midst of its own transition, and the time has come for Heather to respond to her next call as Transitional Pastor at NYAPC. While working here, Heather will continue to live near the water in Annapolis with her partner, John.

**Connecting with New York Avenue**

Heather already has connections to our congregation. Last fall, she officiated at the memorial service of long-time NYAPC member Ralph Reeder, in which former Senior Pastor Rev. Dr. Roger Gench also participated. She helped supervise and develop...
NYAPC’s previous Interim Associate Pastor Katie Cashwell during Katie’s yearlong seminary internship at First Presbyterian Church of Annapolis. And years ago, Heather had the privilege of studying New Testament with Rev. Dr. Frances Taylor Gench while at Union.

Heather now looks forward to meeting and getting to know the people of New York Avenue. “I want to hear your stories,” she says. “Our time together will be brief, so I want to begin developing relationships right away.” Heather adds: “I want to listen to you and to love you, just the way you are. It is my job to keep things humming in worship, Christian education, and mission programs while helping you think about what’s next for the church. I will help you form your Pastor Nominating Committee, and I’ll support the staff to ensure they are getting what they need. I am confident that, with God’s help, we will figure this out together.”

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Peace Candles Travel!

This quarter NYAPC’s small peace candles have traveled to Mobile, AL, Havana, Cuba, and Pittsburgh, PA. The candles are a reminder that the light of peace can shine far and wide with each person having a hand in spreading peace. Visitors to NYAPC are encouraged to take a candle to their homes or churches.

Visitors taking candles were:

Ann Bradley
NYAPC member taking a candle to her home church, Government Street Presbyterian Church
Mobile, AL

Rev. Liudmila Hernández
First Presbyterian-Reformed Church of Havana
Havana, Cuba

Karl Thomas
The Open Door (PCUSA)
Pittsburgh, PA

Note: All words anywhere in this issue typed in blue with underlining are actually hyperlinks or email addresses and can be accessed by clicking on them.
Rescuing Martha
Sermon by Meg Hanna House, B.A. (Wesley Seminary)

I have a confession to make: I am not so fond of this Mary and Martha story.

I sympathize with Martha. She’s the one getting stuff done, and Jesus doesn’t quite seem to address the issue. Are they both supposed to sit at Jesus’ feet? Who’s going to be the host? The story feels unresolved: Martha forever coming to Jesus, wringing her hard working hands. Mary, forever sitting at Jesus’ feet. Jesus, forever saying, Martha, Martha.

Frankly, I feel an urge to rescue Martha. I want to rescue her from portrayals as an angry and jealous sister. I want to rescue her from portrayals as a too-busy hostess, fussing over lace doilies. I even want to rescue her from feminist interpretations that point out that though Luke includes more women than the other gospels, women’s roles remain circumscribed – women’s work (Martha), and silent devotion (Mary).

I feel as though we’ve all been affected by a “woman bustling in the kitchen” lens - and it’s hard to shake. I toyed with changing the characters’ names. What if Mary and Martha were brothers. What if they were named Murray and Martin? How would we read the story then?

After all, the story we read today from the Hebrew Scriptures is all about the important work of hospitality. Abraham practically leaps around to feed these mysterious three visitors. What starts with him offering a little bread and water becomes a huge feast as he runs to tell Sarah to prepare a tremendous amount of bread and his servants to kill the tender calf. Abraham doesn’t know it yet, but these three men turn out to be more than your average visitors. They bring good news, predicting the birth of a long-awaited son, Isaac, and as the story goes on, we discover that one of them is God.

Abraham welcomes three visitors in a grand way, and receives good news from God. Martha welcomes Jesus into her home … where’s the good news for her?

To give this story some context – Martha’s story links to others in Luke that emphasize hospitality. It is one of the earlier scenes in the long section of Luke known as the Journey to Jerusalem. Not long before this scene in Martha’s home, Jesus leaves Galilee and “sets his face” to Jerusalem. And one of the first things he does is to send 70 people out ahead of him. He tells them to rely on each village’s hospitality, and then to cure the sick and spread the good news that the kingdom of God has come near. If a village doesn’t welcome them, they should just move on to the next village. The 70 come back celebrating success. Spreading the good news relies on hospitality … on people doing exactly what Martha does here.

Martha’s welcoming Jesus is a good thing … and what about the specific work she is doing? Luke uses the word “diakonia” – the word we get Deacon from. The NRSV translates it here as “many tasks” – “Martha was distracted by her many tasks,” but everywhere else in Luke, the word is translated as service or ministry. A more literal translation might be: “Martha was distracted by much service.” Or “much ministry.”

So far, so good in my mission of rescuing Martha! Martha’s welcome of Jesus is a key part of spreading the good news, and she’s not doing busy work. She’s doing the important work of ministry. But of course, there is a problem. And, it is Martha who complains. She herself is not happy with the situation! So, much as I want to defend Martha, to rescue her, I’m afraid there is something going wrong with Martha’s hospitality.

Radical hospitality is one of the five core values in our congregation’s new Strategic Plan, along with Nurturing Community, Joyful Stewardship, Prophetic Witness, and Foundational Worship. Hospitality is one of the values we try to live by in everything we do. Our Session has recently adopted a Vision, Mission statement and these core values. You can see parts of the strategic plan in our bulletin – our vision statement is on the front - right under the words “Celebration of Worship.” It reads:

“Following Christ into places of brokenness and joy, we will do justice, treat all with kindness and mercy, and walk humbly with God.”

The vision task force, which I am part of, is now working on goals and strategies to present to Session for approval this fall.

As we did our work, one really important exercise we did was a “so that” exercise. We started by telling stories of when we’d felt proud of our work as a church. Stories ranged from being open for the Women’s March, to individual experiences of support and love. Then we summarized these stories with a sentence: “NYAPC exists to …” A couple of examples: NYAPC exists to show up during the hardest of times. NYAPC exists to challenge us. And then we went further.

To each of these sentences, we added a “so that.” NYAPC exists to show up during the hardest of times so that … NYAPC exists to challenge us so that … We did the same for the passage from Micah that’s on the banners outside our building: NYAPC will do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God so that … and we discovered that our answers were almost always close to the same – so that we can do God’s work. So that we can be part of God’s work. So that others might feel God’s love. Our “so that” was never about us. It was always about God. This is where the phrase on the back of our bulletin right under our logo comes from: “Expressing God’s love, Engaging in God’s transforming work … How does this relate to Martha? Martha is offering hospitality. She is doing good work. But Martha has forgotten her “so that.” She got distracted by, worried about the work she was doing, and forgot the reason she was doing it.

Martha, Martha, says Jesus. You are worried about many things. There is need of only one thing.

What is this one thing? What if it is Martha’s so that? In Luke, hospitality is a way to spread the good news that the kingdom of God has come near. When Jesus sends the 70 out ahead of him, those villages who receive the 70 into their homes receive the good news of God. This is Martha’s “so that.” What does Martha do? Receive Jesus. How does she do it? Through service. Why does she do it? To hear the good news. Mary is hearing the good news. This is the one thing. This is the so that. It will not be taken away.

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This story shows what happens when we forget our so that. Look what happens – Martha is worn down, upset, worried and distracted. And her relationship with her sister breaks down too.

Here at NYAPC we’ve decided that we are here on this corner in Washington, DC to express God’s love, to engage in God’s justice. How do we keep that front and center, when our hands are busy, busy with much service? How do we remember what’s important when decisions are difficult, when things get messy?

There are so many times when I am busy and worried about many things, important and unimportant, and forget to look up and listen to what the people around me have to say, let alone remember to listen to Jesus! How do we remember our so that?

We may all have our own answers – coming to worship … meditation … song … friendships … relationships … poetry … prayer. This story, of course, points to Mary, sitting at Jesus’ feet. Many scholars read the story of Martha as a partner to the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is right before this story. Luke is telling his readers – and us – that as we follow Jesus on the way, as we follow Jesus from Galilee on the way to Jerusalem, we need both service and contemplation. That we need to love both God and neighbor.

Sometimes this sounds to me like another thing on my to do list, and, I find myself sighing. Ok let me add “sit at Jesus’ feet” to my list of things to do. Or I end up picturing us all teetering on some kind of balance beam between contemplation and service, afraid of falling off.

But I think the lesson here isn’t about to do lists and either/or balancing. It’s about where we choose to look, what we choose to pay attention to, even when we are busy with service.

And I think there’s more. Martha isn’t here in this story only as an example of what not to do. I think that just like Abraham, who received good news when he provided hospitality to God, Martha gets good news too. Look at what she asks Jesus – “Don’t you care, that my sister has left me to do the work? Don’t you care?” And Jesus answers her question. He says “Martha, Martha.” We sometimes hear it as a rebuke, but I think a better read is as a way to get her attention. And then he responds. He does care. He sees her. He understands that she is worried and distracted, and reminds her of her “so that.” It turns out Martha doesn’t need my rescuing here. Jesus is already doing that. And immediately after this story in Luke, the disciples ask Jesus how to pray, and he teaches them the Lord’s Prayer. Maybe Martha’s there too! The poet Mary Oliver died this year. For those of you who don’t know her work, she was all about paying attention, especially in nature. This story of Mary and Martha made me think of her poem, “I Happened to Be Standing”:

I don't know where prayers go, or what they do. Do cats pray, while they sleep half-asleep in the sun? Does the opossum pray as it crosses the street? The sunflowers? The old black oak growing older every year? I know I can walk through the world, along the shore or under the trees,

with my mind filled with things of little importance, in full self-attendance. A condition I can't really call being alive
Is a prayer a gift, or a petition, or does it matter? The sunflowers blaze, maybe that's their way. Maybe the cats are sound asleep. Maybe not.

While I was thinking this I happened to be standing just outside my door, with my notebook open, which is the way I begin every morning.

Then a wren in the privet began to sing.

He was positively drenched in enthusiasm, I don't know why. And yet, why not. I wouldn't persuade you from whatever you believe or whatever you don't. That's your business.

But I thought, of the wren's singing, what could this be if it isn't a prayer?

So I just listened, my pen in the air.

This Mary and Martha story is about how we should journey along the way. It’s about remembering why we are here. And it’s about paying attention. Listening to Jesus. It’s about, as Mary Oliver says, keeping our notebook open, so we notice the wren’s singing.

This story still bothers me a little. I still get a little defensive. I’m busy with important things, God. I am worried about important things. But when I step into the story, and stand next to Martha, I get to experience what happens. We all notice what Martha is doing wrong here, but there’s something else she does that is just right. What does Martha do? She goes to Jesus. Her words are clumsy, angry, imperfect, but Jesus listens anyway. And he’s there, calling “Martha, Martha” – calling our names, twice to get our attention – to remind us, to rescue Martha, and to rescue us. Pay attention, Remember your so that. And even while your hands are busy, lift your head and listen. Amen

We will explore faith and social justice through song on Wednesday, Oct. 2 with hymn writer, worship leader and social justice worker John Bell of Scotland's Iona Community. John Bell will lead a "Big Sing," helping us all (singers and non-singers alike!) explore how the Jesus we follow is so much more than the "gentle, meek and mild" Jesus of Victorian hymns.
History Notes:

Pastor Gurley and the Columbia Hospital for Women

by John O’Brien

An article last month in the Washington Post (“Remembering the Women’s Hospital that became a Trader Joe’s,” August 20, B-6) recalled the significant history of the old Columbia Hospital for Women. The article highlighted the role of the founding physician, Dr. John H. Thompson. Rev. Dr. Phineas Gurley, pastor of The New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, played an important part in assuring the rapid success of this project. The pastor expressed his faith through many civic projects that anticipated the later activism of our congregation and helped to reconcile social divisions and relieve suffering in Washington immediately after the Civil War.

Rev. Gurley was recognized as the most involved and influential clergyman in Washington during the transformative 1860s. During 1866 alone, he was asked to lead the public fund collection drive for the relief of victims of the great fire in Portland, Maine; raise funds for relief of “the suffering South;” organize the new board of the D.C. House of Corrections; and initiate the North Presbyterian Church. At the same time Gurley was preparing for the Presbyterian General Assembly in Louisville, Kentucky. There he would make historic proposals to reunify the Old and New schools of his church. But Gurley understood that his experience with hospitals and his government contacts were urgently required to get a needed women’s hospital started.

Dr. John Thompson, a former army surgeon, started to plan the hospital after he observed that destitute women were delivering their babies “in public parks, police stations, and, once, on the steps of the State Department.” He noted that many of these women were the wives of army veterans, including those of African-American soldiers, and stipulated that this hospital was “open to all, without reference to color,” nor to ability to pay. Thompson began soliciting donations from the public and wanted to include support from the War Department. He reached out to a clergyman friend, who directed him to Phineas Gurley.

Gurley was president of the public oversight board for the Government Hospital for the Insane, also called St. Elizabeths. He agreed to become a vice president of the board for the new women’s hospital. Gurley asked the superintendent of the government hospital, Dr. Charles Nichols, to write an endorsement letter for Gurley to secure admission.

Gurley to the Hill Mansion, first home of the Columbia Hospital for Women, 1866 to 1869. (Library of Congress).

From the beginning, Columbia Women’s developed an outstanding reputation for high quality, compassionate, and innovative medical care. It was one of the first private hospitals to benefit from federal government funding. The hospital was also one of the first community organizations in Washington to provide services without regard to a person’s race. Gurley was successful in easing public concerns about the policy of admitting both African-American and white women.

Rev. Gurley practiced a form of “social gospel” long before the phrase was adopted as mainstream theology at the end of the 19th century. He apparently accepted a progressive view of the gospel that differed with the literal doctrines in which he had been trained. This seemed to suggest that he was listening to the theologians who taught that Bible interpretation must go beyond the words and language to incorporate the sensations inspired by the character of God. This style of interpretation encouraged action for social improvement. It was described as “faithful Christian living that would stabilize society and shape the national destiny.” Gurley’s preaching remained true to the strict construction of Calvinist doctrine. His sermons tended to emphasize acceptance of Christ’s love over the mystery of God’s awful sovereignty in predestination. He urged his listeners to be inspired by the gospel story examples without prescribing what social actions they should take. In his life, he set a progressive example by his leadership in the community on behalf of the needy and suffering. Gurley was described as one who “inculcated practical lessons of Christian living” which helped to make his church “a vigorous center of service” that worked for improving the city.

Trained in the conservative and non-political Princeton theology, Dr. Gurley began an evolution when he first preached about the end of slavery and the “rebirth of American freedom” on August 6, 1863. President Lincoln was in attendance. After the war, Gurley would expand the service expression of his faith to begin to incorporate racial reconciliation. His role in the founding of the racially-integrated Columbia Hospital for Women was one of several civic projects he undertook to demonstrate the Christian imperative for opening all community services and faith forums to African-Americans.
Seeing Beyond Our Vision
A Sermon Preached by Jess Cook

Isaiah 58: 9-14; Luke 13:10-17

The Rev. Jess Cook holds a Master of Divinity from Union Presbyterian Seminary, a Master of Fine Arts in Photography from the University of North Texas, and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Studio Art from Baylor. Jess served as a summer intern at NYAPC eight years ago. Jess is currently on the staff of More Light Presbyterians.

Last month, I had the joy and privilege of serving as the conference pastor for a week at Montreat, for a session of their Youth Conference. As a cradle Presbyterian who playfully wore it as a badge of honor that I hadn’t been to Montreat until January of 2018, when I attended the College conference in my capacity for More Light, I confess I have really grown to love it. I’ve begun to see the six hour drive from my home in Richmond to the mountains of Western North Carolina with a sense of anticipation, a time to gather myself and my thoughts as I prepare for what awaits me. There’s nothing like that time on the road when I don’t need to do a thing except be on the road. Often on these trips I’ve found the accompaniment of a podcast or book on tape - or, on my phone - can be the perfect companion. If I time it right, I can find story that will take me right to the iconic stone gate outside Montreat’s entrance.

Now, I’m not one to tout my accomplishments, but I feel like I’m pretty good at selecting audiobook companions. For me, at least, I find a sense of accomplishment in selecting a book that will kind of define the journey for me - that’ll not just pass the time, but enrich it - something that will offer some humor, or uplift me in just the ways I need to be uplifted. For this last trip, I decided to listen to The Handmaid’s Tale. As I’m sure folks who are familiar with the story can likely attest, if the desire to be uplifted is the goal, the Handmaid’s Tale isn’t really the best of options. For those who may not be familiar, or who didn’t see the adaptation of the book on Hulu, The Handmaid’s Tale is Margaret Atwood’s dystopian novel about a near-distant future where, among a number of other things, people’s bodies are being rigidly regulated and used solely for reproduction of the powerful. Every atrocity committed by the controlling regime is done in the name of patriotism and faith, with some messages that hit almost eerily close to home in today’s society. What’s disturbing for so many folks is how quickly it all seems to happen. While hindsight illuminates more of the trail that led to their present nightmare, it seems that prior to the downfall of life as they’d known it, most folks were so caught up in their day-to-day lives that they didn’t look up or see the precursors to the nightmare life would become. People’s blindness became a way of living, turning their heads to minor and then major infractions against the fullness of one another’s humanity. Until, well, until it was too late.

As I moved closer and closer to Montreat, my anxiety didn’t wash away, my breaths didn’t deepen, my mind didn’t become more contemplative. Instead, almost without knowing it, my fingers tightened their clutch around the steering wheel, my shoulders hunched up, my breathing shortened. I was so caught up in the story that I jumped in my seat when my phone rang. My mom’s voice rang on the other end of the line as I plugged in my headset and found my breath.

We talked for a while, caught up on what had been going on in life, and I mentioned that I’d preached a couple of weeks prior at a More Light church in West Virginia.

Having never heard me preach, but knowing it’s a significant part of my job at More Light, my mom asked if I always preach on “gay stuff.”

Chucking a bit, I told her, no. When a text or an event in the world brings it to the surface, I’ll preach about things related to the LGBTQ+ community. More often than not, if there’s a thing I talk about or preach about with regularity, it’d be the sacraments. You may be tempted to chuckle a bit at my mom’s directness, but it’s a thing I get asked often, in a variety of ways - if I’m gonna preach about gay stuff.

Now, if I’m being honest, I’m not quite sure I could tell you with any real clarity about what the “gay stuff” is. And not because I don’t know what people mean when they ask - they want to know if I’m gonna talk about suicide among LGBTQ people, or rejection by family or church, or how often I am asked by a young person if they are going to hell. I understand for sure what people mean when they say that. What I don’t understand on a deeper level is why these conversations are relegated solely to the LGBTQ community. I mean, yes, there are definitely specific things to address when discussing the fraught relationship between the church and the LGBTQ community, and my years of work within the community has definitely shown me the power that comes with a church that is unapologetically affirming of LGBTQ people and identities, and the heartbeat that can come in the absence of such affirmation.

My confusion isn’t about any of that. My confusion is more about why the messages should be relegated to the experiences of LGBTQ people. Because while it’s especially poignant with LGBTQ folks, I believe to my bones that the fear that we are unworthy of God’s love is part of the human experience, especially if we are honest with ourselves about the ways in which we fall short of that love. I believe we all struggle to set down the mantles that hold us, the projected norms or assumptions of what it looks like to be good or bad. I believe we all struggle to find hope in the face of overwhelming uncertainty, that we all have a deep desire to be seen and known. And I believe that the more we allow ourselves to see and to name that struggle, the closer we are not only to one another, but to God.

Today’s text from Luke offers a potent example of the power that comes from seeing and being seen. The woman has been weighed down not only by a crippling burden, but by a broken heart. Unable to stand up straight, she cannot look anyone in the eyes. She appears in the synagogue, bent over, hopeless. The only other thing she has been weighed down not only by a crippling burden, but by a broken heart. Unable to stand up straight, she cannot look anyone in the eyes. She appears in the synagogue, bent over, hopeless. The Anakupto (continued on p. 8)

1 Jill Duffield, Looking Into the Lectionary
story isn’t just about her healing, or even her healing and the immediate praise she offers as a response to it. It’s a story about being seen. Jesus not only sees her, but he calls out to her — he proclaims her healing and then he touches her — a woman seen as unclean, who’d likely been coming to the synagogue for every one of those 18 years she’d been doubled over in despair, invisible among the crowd. Jesus sees her and he calls to her, proclaiming not only her healing but modeling a new way of being for the community.

And yet, not everyone in the synagogue shares the woman’s joy at her healing. The leaders of the synagogue, frustrated by Jesus’ continued lack of regard for the proper observation of Sabbath laws, call him out. It’s likely they could’ve used caution from Isaiah about trampling the Sabbath as justification for their anger. They see Jesus as trampling the Sabbath, pursuing his interests by healing this woman. He’s breaking the rules, the time-honored practices the community had been given by God to observe. They’d seen enough in their history to know that deviating from the law led to trouble, to exile, to a loss of identity and suffering for their people. We have a set of rules, they declared, and we will follow them.

Jesus, though, is not having it. “You hypocrites,” he says, “you’ve given more attention to your animals today than you’ve given this child of God.” With his proclamation, Jesus shows the leaders of the synagogue that they are the ones who’ve trampled on the Sabbath. Jesus shows them that their religious practices are empty if they end in themselves. Our worship should be about healing, about connection, about seeing one another and being seen so that we may become the people and the community God created us to be, or it shouldn’t be done at all.

This weekend marks the 400th anniversary of the first ship carrying people from Africa to Virginia with the purpose of enslaving them. For the centuries that followed, millions of people were shuttled across the Atlantic and sold as property, as chattel. Though there was dissent among abolitionists, the practice of buying and selling human beings was largely accepted by white folks as a way of life and supported by the church. Robert Dabney, the former professor of theology at Union Presbyterian Seminary, my seminary alma mater, who later wrote the theological justification for slavery, argued that while all people are created equal, this equality of nature shouldn’t translate to civil equality. The church became a bulwark for the atrocities of chattel slavery.

While many of us have longed to see the world as a more just place than it was when those first people were put on ships 400 years ago, looking around today, it’s hard to argue that we’ve done anything to be the repairers of the breach Isaiah talks about. We want to fix it, to clean up the mess of injustices around us, to calm the collective anxiety or guilt we may hold about the sins of our ancestors. We see racism as an invasive plant, and seek to pull it from the soil anytime a new sprout appears. Yet, in our desire to separate ourselves from the sins of racism, we remain willfully blind to our complicity in supporting a system that has relegated People of Color to the margins of society. We miss that racism isn’t an invasive weed; it’s the soil we are all growing in, cracked and drying out, suffocating us all.

How do we look at all of the brokenness around us? How do we remain faithful in seeing such atrocities so harmful that any attempt to describe them fails because they’re beyond words? Even more, how do we hold ourselves and one another accountable to our collective healing?

There was once a town in the midst of a severe drought. Every day, a group of well-intentioned church folk would walk up and down the steep road to the church in the center of town and pray for rain. And every day they would pass by the house of an old woman in town who, though she lived only fifty feet or so from the church, never went inside. Each day, as the church folk would walk by, she would pause whatever she was doing, look up at the group, shake her head, and return to her activity. This went on for several weeks, while the ground remained dry and cracked. After some time, one of the well-meaning church folk, fed up and frustrated by this woman’s judgment and the lack of rain, stopped in front of her porch, hollering up to her: “Who are you to judge us? At least we are doing something to try and bring rain. If you have better suggestions, please do let us know.”

The woman paused her sweeping and turned to the group: “I’ve seen you all walk up and down this hill for weeks now, each day you hold your head high, saying you are going to pray for rain, that you are sure God will answer. And yet, never once have I seen anyone carrying an umbrella.”

More often than not, the world feels as dry as the cracked and hardened ground of a land too long in drought. We may pray for rain, look for that magic fix or perfect model that will bring things back to life. In the church we are especially prone to this — we see a problem and we want to fix it. We have structures and models, committees and boards. We often feel like we’ve got stuff pretty well figured out, so we do things the way we’ve always done, until at times we may forget why we were doing them in the first place. To say we forget our proverbial umbrellas is an understatement; it’s more like we forget what it has ever felt like to have rain.

Over the last couple of years, we at More Light have been on the journey to uncover our own entanglement with the dominant norms of whiteness. We recognize the ways in which we’ve all been held captive to debilitating ideas about ourselves and others. And it is hard. Many of us were taught that it’s best to avoid potentially divisive topics, and while racism may not have been explicitly named as one of these formidable topics, it was definitely best to avoid. The potential conflict that could arise from such conversations would fracture relationships and families. It was best to just keep the peace.

Only, we’ve found that, keeping the peace doesn’t avoid conflict as much as it gives us license to avoid seeing one another. Bent over in our own guilt or shame, we avoid contact with others, begin to lose the image of God in one another when our brothers, sisters, and siblings in Christ are reduced to issues or talking points. Contrary to what many of us have heard, talking about difficult subjects, even when they bring conflict, gives us the freedom to see and be seen by one another in the fullness of who we are.

Talking about racism is hard. Talking about white supremacy is even harder. For white folks, it pushes buttons many of us didn’t realize were there. Acknowledging the ways in which we have been complicit in systems that prioritized our whiteness and caused undue and unyielding harm to People of Color is difficult. To deflect from this pain we can incorrectly think, “those were the sins of our ancestors, perhaps, but we are different.”

Yet, as we’ve stuck with it, we’ve started to find that, rather than feeling a deeper level of conflict with one another, each of us feels more connected and seen. The People of Color in
the room feel more seen and heard when they share the pain of living in a world that devalues their identity; the white folks feel more equipped to examine their complicity in that world. This conflict doesn’t bring more division, it brings deeper trust. There is a real freedom in being able to look at one’s actions and intentions, in hearing the ways in which we’ve been harmed and caused harm, and to hold one another in love as we make this journey together.

It’s a radical thing in its own way, talking about the stuff we were taught not to discuss. Yet, in the process, we’ve found that we are able to see one another in ways previously unimaginined. The white folks especially have found the ways in which our mindset has been held in a rigid understanding informed by assumptions of what is good, or normal even, despite their causing harm or death to People of Color. Like the woman in Luke’s story, we are all collectively straightened up, lifted by the Spirit that tells us we are healed from the yoke of our willful ignorance, of our blindness, of the lie that puts a hierarchy on human lives.

At some point in seminary I came across the idea of remembering my baptism every time I interacted with water. When we baptize infants in the Presbyterian Church, we do so in part to show that God’s grace is offered to us even when we do not have the capacity to ask for it, so over the years it’s roughly translated to the acknowledgement that I am loved, even when I cannot ask for it. This idea has held so strongly through years of practice that it now comes without thought — rain starts falling and every drop that falls on my head, ever plink I hear on the gutter reminds me that I am loved, even when I do not have the capacity to ask for it. Tear ducts become wellsprings within me, sometimes gushing open at the most unexpected moments. The rain on my back, each tear a reminder of the Holy Spirit within me, grounding me in who I am and connecting me to everything around me. It rains and I am loved. I cry and I am loved. I wash my hands, and I am loved. Hard as I may try sometimes, I have realized that I cannot outrun my belovedness. None of us can.

It is easy to look around at scarcity, which is scary. The world is a mess, we are at wit’s end. We want to clamp down on what we know, on models we have seen work in the past, and we try the same formula again and again. We pray for abundance but then push against learning anything new. We avoid one another, we avoid discomfort. Yet, this scarcity creeps into the rest of our lives, too. It creeps into our homes, into our worship. We begin to draw lines around what it looks like to be a person of God, to be good. And slowly we begin to cordon ourselves off, our practices become walls between us and each other. We begin to assert that this is how God works, that this is what the community of God looks like.

At this point in my life I know enough about God to know I don’t know much about God. I don’t know why particular things happen, or how things fall or don’t fall in place. I don’t know what happens when we die. But I do know that the Spirit seldom moves in a way that fits within the Church’s expectations. Our job is to remember who we are and to trust that God will continue to be God.

And we — we are baptismal people, called to remember our belovedness and God’s unending grace. And as baptismal people, we should always be ready for rain. Amen.

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**Peace and Global Witness Offering**

“Now may the Lord of peace... give you peace at all times in all ways.” — 2 Thessalonians 3:16

The themes for the 2019 PC(USA) Peace and Global Witness Offering encourage the church of our time to cast off anxiety and fear, discord and division, and embrace God’s reconciling love to those around the corner and around the world. The 2019 Season of Peace begins Sunday, September 1 and culminates on World Communion Sunday, October 6. These five weeks give us an opportunity to reflect on peace, its meaning to us and our neighbors locally, nationally, and internationally. As the Presbyterian Mission Agency says, “For generations, and to the ends of the earth, Presbyterians have borne witness to Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.”

The themes of this five-week journey are “Come to the Table” and “Opening the Door to Peace.” You will find inserts in your Sunday bulletins reflecting these themes. We all are called to be faithful witnesses to Christ and to answer His call to be peace-makers. Each in our own way is called to give our time, our spirit, and our resources to create a world in which we are united in peace as God’s people.

In addition to the peace work we do as individuals and as a church, we can contribute to the annual Peace & Global Witness Offering. The Offering was created to support the work of peace at all levels of the church. Our NYAPC congregation will retain 25% of the Offering for its peace and justice work. National Capitol Presbytery will receive 25% of the Offering for its Peacemaking grants to churches in the Presbytery. PC(USA) receives 50% of the Offering for its Peacemaking Program that develops resources, events, and programs responding to Christ’s call for peacemakers.

In past years, NYAPC has hosted PC(USA) International Peacemakers, including Elders and Rev. Farouk Hammo from the Presbyterian Churches in Baghdad and in Basrah, Iraq. In 2016 we were privileged to host Rev. Rami al-Maqdasi from Iraq, born in Basrah, ordained in Syria, and now a pastor—and U.S. citizen!— at First United Presbyterian Church in Dunkirk, NY. We are called to Christ’s Table to help those suffering at home and globally—those fleeing flood waters and fires, immigrants, the homeless, the hungry. Your support of the 2019 Peace & Global Witness Offering will contribute to helping those in need and creating peace.

On October 6, 2019, World Communion Sunday, we formally collect the Peace & Global Witness Offering. Between now and October 6, in addition to bulletin inserts, you will find brochures and offering envelopes in racks and pews in the sanctuary. You also may donate online at the NYAPC web site here. The Peace and Justice Committee asks that you prayerfully consider what you might give to promote Christ’s peace in the world and the neighborhood around us. May the Spirit be with us all as we move to help others.

*Come to the Table! Open the Doors to Peace!*
Enough

Sermon on Isaiah 1:1, 10-20 for August 11, 2019

Rev. Alice Rose Tewell

Enough.

I often feel like many of us are living lives through two different sets of lenses. There is the lens of relative security and the freedoms that come from that. In my family, I think of this lens as our regular routine. For the summer it is getting kids up and dressed and to camp in the morning, enjoying a cup of coffee, often while on the move, and, during this time of the year, taking in the last moment of summer while considering a new backpack and some school supplies in preparation for kindergarten. But that hope of new beginnings also brings the fear that comes with the other lens.

This lens of violence is one that is the primary reality for so many in our country. Rebecca Davis, who will give us a Moment for Mission on her work on gun violence prevention, pointed me towards everytownresearch.org providing research on gun violence.

Nearly 2/3 of gun deaths are from suicide. Most people who attempt suicide do not die unless it is by a gun. Our suicide rate in the US is 10 times that of other high income countries. I have shared with some of you that suicide has affected my life personally. In my work, in my sharing, I have found that my story is too common. Suicide creates trauma that can’t be undone with effects that reach deep into family histories. It is an epidemic in our country that stays largely out of public conversation — perhaps because we are afraid.

Enough.

One third of gun deaths are by homicide, and black males are fifteen times more likely to be shot than white males in our country. Friday was the 5th anniversary of Michael Brown’s death in Ferguson.

Enough.

Firearms are the second leading cause of death for children and teens in our country and the leading cause of death for Black children and teens. In 2019, 31 children were shot in Washington DC, 15 of them from Ward 8.

Enough.

From domestic violence, women are 21 times more likely to be killed by firearm violence than women in other high income countries.

Enough.

According to the Washington Post homicide tracker, there have been 174 homicides in the DMV in 2019. 126 of them were from shootings.

Enough.

In 2019, according to the Gun Violence Archive there have been 254 mass shootings including people who were injured only. Mother Jones reports on the most tragic of 4 or more victims including death in 2019 in Sebring, FL, State College, PA, Aurora, IL, Virginia Beach, VA, Gilroy, CA, El Paso, TX, Dayton, OH.

Enough.

When, O Lord, when will we stop?

The reading from Isaiah 1 is not something that I would often pick out of the lectionary choices for today on an August summer morning. It feels so heavy, but that weightiness is what our souls need today. We are reeling as a country over this violence we wreak on our very bodies. We are scared. And as for those of us who still enjoy a lens of relative security, we are scared because of this violence that we have often tried to shut out: Gun violence in places where people of power often do not live — that most of us do not live — like Wards 7 and 8. Violence committed on black and brown bodies; Violence committed at home through suicide and domestic violence. Our relative silence is a sin.

Violence has crept into our schools, so that lockdowns are a norm. Our kindergarteners already know how to hide in a closet, and our teenagers are having to lead the movement in gun violence prevention. Many of us check the exits when entering a public place from movie theaters to markets to even church.

This kind of existence in fear must end.

As has become the slogan this last few months, — Our Thoughts and Prayers are not Enough — or at least not the empty thoughts and prayers that lead to no action. The empty thoughts and prayers used as something to say to fill the void — to make it look as though our leaders are doing something — are an abomination. This kind of prayer that doesn’t really mean anything is using God’s name in vain. This kind of prayer is equating God’s power to something feeble that is inconclusive that makes no substantial change.

I do not worship or pray to a feeble God.

I pray to the God who created the heavens and the earth who led the Israelites out of slavery, who was born a human to deeply know the realities and the pains of being human, who was killed by the authorities, and who has defeated evil being resurrected to new life. I worship the God of the resurrection — the God who calls us into mutuality in the same way that God has entered into mutuality with all of creation. I worship the God who calls us God’s own beloved children.

I pray to this Triune God confessing my sins of where I have turned to the lens of comfort and security and turned a blind eye to those who are suffering. I pray to this Triune God that I am tired and filled with anxiety and anger about the deep suffering in this world. I pray to God asking for strength, for courage, and for hope.

I pray to God pleading for prophetic action.

(continued on p. 11)
That is the message I hear all over our Isaiah text for today. Perhaps you will read it as I do as a prayer of lament, a prayer of anger, a prayer that says that in order to live — in order for our souls to survive — we must turn towards God’s redemption.

It is a prayer put in the words of God. Verse 2 opens with God speaking. The English doesn’t fully capture what the Hebrew does here. Normally, in Hebrew the verb comes first followed by the subject. But here, the subject, the name for God — YHWH — comes first with the verb “to speak” following, emphasizing that this indictment comes directly from God. The religious and political leaders are compared to the rulers of Sodom and Gomorrah who with so much sin turned to a pile of salt. And we hear the Word of God: “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices, says the Lord? I have had enough of your burnt offerings… Trample my courts no more.” I hear the message — I have heard enough of your empty thoughts and prayers. Enough. No more.

Richard Rohr, the Franciscan theologian, in his book Falling Upward says that our religiosity has become like a Greek tragedy. We are filled with pride and delusion. We create religious camps of infighting — denomination against denomination — conservative vs. liberal. We forget that what makes us Christian — what makes us followers of Christ is never about our politics. What makes us followers of Christ is believing in God’s divine revelation for the world where we are invited to seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, and plead for the window.

Rohr puts it this way: “The genius of the biblical revelation is that it refuses to deny the dark side of things, but forgives failure and integrates failing to achieve only promised wholeness… Jesus is never upset at sinners; he is only upset with people who do not think they are sinners.” (Rohr, 59) Rohr continues that we as clergy and as the church have gotten into the business of sin management rather than sin transformation. “We have blamed the victim, or have had little pity for the victims while daring to worship a victim image of God.”

We have been so horrified by this gun violence that we have often stood by paralyzed by horror. Whether it is children being murdered in our streets, whether it is black and brown men and women being killed by police, whether is the family tragedy of suicide, domestic abuse pushed into the shadows, or mass shootings stoked by the vile rhetoric and defense of white supremacy from our leaders with the most power, we, as people who follow after the God of the resurrection, as people of faith, must rise up in mutuality with victims and with all power and strength proclaim prophetic action that comes only from the power of God.

From the brink of rebellion, resurrection is what God offers the people. Commentator Gary W. Light suggests we can read verse 18 and 19 two ways: “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.” The Hebrew might invite us to see these as an interrogative: “If your sins are like scarlet, can they become like snow? If they are red like crimson, can they become like wool?”

Whatever Israel tries, it cannot make itself innocent again. Their sins are real; God’s accusations are accurate. Yet, there is also the possibility of God’s grace. This is not cheap grace where God says “Don’t worry about things. I’ll take care of them.” But God is merciful, and God recognizes that on their own the people are powerless to change.

God is offering a transforming presence of change — return from rebellion to obedience — return from death to life, says the Lord.

If you look after verse 20, where I stopped today, there is a break where commentators suggest there should be a pause. In this space of silence, the court holds it breath — God gives the people the choice: “If you are willing and obedient you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the mouth of the sword.” After all that, the defendant, the people, the leaders, we today need to say that “We are willing.”

If you read on, that is not how the people of Isaiah’s day responded, but we can be different.

That is the hope. We will not choose silence. We will choose action. We will choose resurrection because our lives and the lives of our children depend on it. Amen.

Sources:

Richard Rohr, Falling Upward: Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life

Gary W. Light, Isaiah Interpretation Bible Study

http://everytown.org

NYAPC Members Protest at NRA

Anne Laroche and Jack Mathison have been recruiting members on the 14th of every month for the 10:00 AM protest before the NRA Headquarters in Fairfax, Virginia. The hour long protest draws adults and parents with children every month with a total of well over 100 sometimes reaching 200 protesters on all kinds of weather. Some times NRA staff come out and fold their arms glaring at us.

Many recall the days when not monthly but weekly protesters appeared before Realeco Guns on Marlboro Pike in District Heights, Maryland until the State Legislature passed a law requiring 4 hours of training under state police before a permit was granted to purchase a gun. This resulted in gun sales at Realeco dropping by over 50 per cent.

It is also apparent that the US Congress, with support of both political parties, realizes that some legislation is needed to reduce gun violence nationwide.
Preventing Gun Violence
Minute for Mission, August 11, 2019
by Rebecca Davis

I’ve been volunteering with Moms Demand Action on an ad-hoc basis for the last few years. I think of this work as violence prevention. It’s an extension of both my faith and of the civil rights movement, with its focus on non-violence as tactic and way of life.

Last weekend, Moms Demand Action held a large conference at the Marriott Wardman Park hotel here in DC to train its volunteers. There were 1,800 people from all fifty states and DC: moms, dads, grandparents, law enforcement, physicians, social workers, people of faith, and of many backgrounds. About 700 gun violence survivors were there.

On Saturday, I was sitting in an enormous ballroom full of people when the organizing lead, Debbie Weir, took the mic and told us that there had been a mass shooting in El Paso. The crowd grew silent. A few minutes later, a young organizer from Baltimore, Joshua Turner, got up spontaneously. He said, yes. It’s awful. And last night there were four people shot in Baltimore, and more in Chicago. And the people sitting in that giant ballroom got up to applaud them both. That night many of us marched to the White House and later to the Capitol.

About 36,000 people lose their lives to gun violence each year. One hundred thirteen thousand are shot, and countless others are terrorized by the threat that it might happen to them. This week, as many weeks before, that included all of us, and most especially our brothers and sisters in El Paso, Dayton, and in all the cities that are affected. This week, we saw the deadly combination of white nationalism and guns, this time targeting Latino and Latina people.

Gun violence is really four related problems. In order of deaths per year, they are suicide, which 2/3rd of the gun deaths each year; city gun violence; domestic violence and mass shootings.

Our community in DC is most affected by suicide and city gun violence. Suicide mostly affects older white people, and the highest incidence is in Ward 3, a wealthy part of the city. City gun violence mostly affects a very small percentage of African-American men in Wards 5, 7 and 8. This year DC just had its 100th homicide of 2019. This year DC had its 100th homicide of 2019. This is higher than 2018, which was higher than 2017. Most of them are gun related.

No single tactic will solve these problems. However, for city gun violence, there is an emerging consensus on how to address those at highest risk, and a hunger among people in the city to find practical solutions. Focusing on the highest risk people has the possibility of stopping violence, delivering services, and reducing over-policing. Relative to the enormous cost of violence, these programs cost very little. They include:

- Violence interruption, where trained workers identify people who are at high risk and work to organize truces/breaks
- The "Kennedy model," where law enforcement and services use a carrot-and-stick direct intervention with a city's highest risk people
- Crime prevention through environmental design, where cities remodel "hot spots" that are particularly dangerous by improving lights, cameras, landscaping, and amenities

The best practice is a balance of these kinds of programs with law enforcement, in about equal measure, to ensure that people who need services get them, and victims and families get justice for their loved ones. (For more information on city gun violence, I recommend Thomas Abt’s new book Bleeding Out.)

As we learned from McClendon Scholar-In-Residence Shelley Rambo, trauma has lasting impact on people’s ability to live fulfilled lives. Trauma and suffering are a part of life. But we need to reduce it as much as we can so each person in DC can live the life God intends for us all.

What is our response to all of this?

There are an enormous number of small, grass roots organizations serving people affected most by gun violence. They include our own Community Club, but they also include those that serve people directly in wards 7 and 8. We can amplify their work and voices. The DC Council passed something called the NEAR Act in 2016, and they have been implementing it slowly. It activated some of the tactics I described.

Moms Demand Action DC is organizing an Advocacy Day on October 2, 2019 to meet with all of the Councilmembers and the Mayor in Washington DC. It’s a Wednesday. We’ll serve lunch, hear from people most affected by gun violence, and then meet with our Councilmembers. We’ve never done this before, but our goal is to convene a broad cross-section of the city to keep gun violence at the forefront of the Mayor and the Council’s work. This year, Virginia’s election provides an opportunity to find and support candidates who want to enact evidence-based violence prevention solutions.

There is also important work to do as a community to be a healing presence in our city and country. We can teach people to pray. We can provide safe spaces for community events. We can be family to people who are alone. We can love each other. We can support people who are targeted because of their race, gender, or age. We can provide respite and calm in our worship and in our daily interactions.

And we can take our petitions to God, who watches over all of us.
I was hanging donations to the Clothes Closet, mostly lightweight women’s wear, wondering when cold weather will arrive. Suddenly, several Center staff members and four blue uniforms rushed through the anteroom where I was working, into the adjacent Center Manager’s office.

From the anteroom, I overheard a report that one Center guest had assaulted another, with the victim having summoned police. For the next 25 minutes or so, police and Center personnel hunched over the Manager’s desktop to review tape of the alleged incident. Their conclusion: The tape showed no assault, only the careful efforts of manager and staff to defuse an argument between the two guests.

Officer A to Center manager: “You and your staff handled this exactly right. You did what you could to prevent harm, and no harm occurred. Probably, the guest was not thinking clearly when he called us. But we are not sorry we came. Better to be safe than sorry.”

Departing Officer B to NYAPC volunteer: “Keep up the good work. My church does something like this during the week, but on a smaller scale. We probably should do more . . . .”

Women of Ezher Bloom Mosque Join Summer Pot-Luck at NYAPC
by Marilyn Seiber

At the invitation of NYAPC’s Presbyterian Women, four women and two children from the Ezher Bloom Mosque in Fairfax joined us for the summer congregational pot-luck lunch on July 28 sponsored by the Nurture Committee. The pot-luck invitation was a reciprocal event to the five Presbyterian Women who participated at the mosque in May 2018 for the Iftar meal, or breaking the fast during Ramadan.

Among the four young women attending the pot-luck, Resia is a chaplain at the Med Star Hospital Center in Washington, D.C., the only Muslim chaplain on the staff. She had previously resided and studied medicine in Jordan for six years. Seda is a medical student in Istanbul, Turkey, but arrived in Washington, D.C. for the summer to study English. Namura brought her two young children, and Bayramgul, or “Gul,” has lived in Fairfax for a number of years.

Barb Dornan talked with the women about the many NYAPC activities and programs of the church on a daily and weekly basis. David Powell of the History Committee gave them a tour of the church after the luncheon.

All of the women were delightful guests, but their stay with us was too brief. Finding NYAPC and parking was a challenge, so we had little time for the conversations we hoped to have. The Ezher Bloom Mosque also houses the Institute of Islamic and Turkish Studies, so we hope to learn more about its work the next time we meet. We look forward to the next time that we can gather and share a meal!

Elder Carmina Blasco Returns to NYAPC
by Marilyn Seiber

Elder Carmina Blasco returned to NYAPC for a brief visit August 17-22 to see church friends and participate in Sunday worship. Carmina is an Elder at partner church First Presbyterian-Reformed Church of Havana as well as an accountant for the national church, the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba. She is the translator, organizer, and guide for NYAPC’s annual visits to First Havana and has many friends here. Rev. Tewell hosted her for a barbecue when Carmina arrived.

On Sunday, after Carmina gave Moment for Mission greetings to the congregation, the Cuba Partners Committee hosted a lunch/reception where Carmina gave a briefing on news and ongoing renovations at First Havana as well as answering questions about the state of the Cuban economy. Carmina was able to meet with former Capitol Hill staff, toured Leesburg with the pastor of Leesburg Presbyterian Church, and met for dinner with members from NYAPC, Immanuel Presbyterian, and Old Presbyterian Meeting House who had previously traveled to Cuba. Carmina had a brief but well-filled visit with us, and we look forward to a possible visit in 2020.

THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF
A brief report from the Downtown Day Services Center
by an NYAPC Center volunteer

I was hanging donations to the Clothes Closet, mostly lightweight women’s wear, wondering when cold weather will arrive. Suddenly, several Center staff members and four blue uniforms rushed through the anteroom where I was working, into the adjacent Center Manager’s office.

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TRANSITIONS

BIRTHS
none

BAPTISMS

Harry Reeves Reasonover, son of Carrie and Stephen Reasonover, May 26
Devam Heff Patel, son of Nancy and Vimesh Patel, June 16
Paul Benjamin Nowak, son of Alison and Andrew Nowak, August 11

WEDDINGS
none

DEATHS

Bainbridge Eager, father of Susan Bainbridge, June 16.
Peter Goode, attended NYAPC and the Academy of Hope, June 15.
James Tabe Tataw, the father of Glory Eyong, the sixth family member to die this year, July 24.

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Elder Carmina Blasco Returns to NYAPC
by Marilyn Seiber

Elder Carmina Blasco returned to NYAPC for a brief visit August 17-22 to see church friends and participate in Sunday worship. Carmina is an Elder at partner church First Presbyterian-Reformed Church of Havana as well as an accountant for the national church, the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba. She is the translator, organizer, and guide for NYAPC’s annual visits to First Havana and has many friends here. Rev. Tewell hosted her for a barbecue when Carmina arrived.

On Sunday, after Carmina gave Moment for Mission greetings to the congregation, the Cuba Partners Committee hosted a lunch/reception where Carmina gave a briefing on news and ongoing renovations at First Havana as well as answering questions about the state of the Cuban economy. Carmina was able to meet with former Capitol Hill staff, toured Leesburg with the pastor of Leesburg Presbyterian Church, and met for dinner with members from NYAPC, Immanuel Presbyterian, and Old Presbyterian Meeting House who had previously traveled to Cuba. Carmina had a brief but well-filled visit with us, and we look forward to a possible visit in 2020.
On Wednesday morning, June 12, more than 300 American religious leaders and activists gathered in the NYAPC sanctuary before they marched silently to the White House in protest of administration policies they claim are immoral. The protest, called “Moral Witness Wednesday”, was headed by Rev. Dr. William Barber II, President of Repairers of the Breach and co-leader of the recent Poor People’s Campaign. The protesters called on the White House to abide by the 14th Amendment, halt mandating a census question on immigration status, terminate its attack on the Affordable Care Act, focus on ensuring clean air and water, effectuate a humane immigration policy and end child detention. The march organizers reminded the assembled congregation that this very church had been the downtown headquarters of the original Poor People’s Campaign.

The Rev. Dr. James Forbes, previously of Riverside Church in New York City, offered the invocation. Then Dr. Barber addressed the assembly: “This president, his administration, and those upholding him in Congress … are extremist leaders, driven by the idols of racism, greed, and power. [They] have broken the two covenants – the deepest values of our religious traditions and the moral commitments of our Constitution”. With that impassioned charge, the congregation moved outside to begin the silent march.

The Rev. Beth Braxton reports on the march itself. “The marshals for the march were wonderful, well-organized and thoughtful in their directions and gentle in their remarks as they moved us from sanctuary to the street. We marched five abreast with three feet between rows. I was awed by the gift of this silent march; I do not think I have ever heard such quiet on 14th Street in the middle of the day! We marched up 14th Street to I, down Vermont to Lafayette Park. I remember my spiritual mentor once told me, ‘Silence is the language of God.’ I sensed God in the steps of our feet and in the watchful eyes of spectators.

Initially the Secret Service barred us from entering Lafayette Park. The marshals asked us to stay on if we could, as barring entry was a tactic the Secret Service uses in expectation we would disperse. After waiting fifteen minutes, though, the leaders commenced with the speakers on the sidewalk outside the park. After about four or five speeches, the park was reopened, and we went in and gathered at the stage that previously had been prepared. Each speaker offered articulate and compelling testimony. And Rev. Barber kept reminding us between speakers how important it was for us clergy and lay folk to take our faith message into the public square in this particular moment. I was moved to see a mentor of mine – Rev. Dr. James Forbes, still urging love and justice! As we departed, the march leaders taped our petitions to the fence barricades outside the White House.”
Congregation Action Network (CAN)

We are a network of faith communities in the DC/MD/VA region acting in solidarity to end detention, deportation, profiling, and criminalization of immigrants and demanding justice, dignity, safety, and family unity. In the face of hate and discrimination our faith calls us to act with love, compassion and hospitality.

Congregation Action Network (CAN) Helps Yeslin’s Family

The Hosting & Resources Team of CAN is dealing with Yeslin and her children, her husband Kenneth, and her mother in law Orquidia:

We continue to support Yeslin and her family with efforts to sustain and stabilize them here in the US. The family is in rental housing provided by the Lutheran Church subsidized by National City Christian Church until April 2020. After that time, the church may sell the property and the family will need to find new housing. Yeslin received her work permit and has a job interview scheduled with the Latin American Montessori Bilingual Public Charter School.

Allessandro, her older son, has been accepted into pre-school and will start August 29.

Orquidia has been admitted to the emergency room twice this year with gallstones. She has surgery scheduled for August 19. Her deportation order has been withdrawn pending her amnesty appeal.

Kenneth has been deported and is presently in Mexico attempting to pull together his ID papers, passport and visa to travel. Orquidia and Yeslin are working with an attorney on a humanitarian visa for Kenneth that would allow him to return to the US to assist Orquidia with her medical issues. Senator Cory Booker’s offices have indicated that they will support Kenneth’s application for a humanitarian visa when it is completed by the attorney.

There is an ongoing need for financial support for this family. A few individuals in the Hosting and Resources Team have been making large donations from their own pockets, which is not a sustainable situation. We need support from other congregations of the network, particularly for the $500 a month just to sustain the family and pay its rent, including that of Kenneth in Mexico. Checks may be made out to: Trustees of the Christian Church, mark for "Migrant Assistance". Send to: Board of Local Trustees. 5 Thomas Circle NW, Wash. PC 20005

Stop Deportations
Dance Party with Ocho de Bastos

Saturday, September 28, 2019 at 7 PM – 9:30 PM
ALL SOULS UNITARIAN 1500 Harvard Street NW @ 16th
FREE  www.eventbrite.ca  Find Tickets

When the world is upside down - what do you do? Get up and dance! With their motto “Unite people through music,” Ocho de Bastos sizzles and shakes the night away! Charismatic, multicultural, electric and happy, Ocho de Bastos (https://8db.us/) pulls you in!

Join us and enjoy great music, dancing, and refreshments. Have a blast while making the world safer for migrants.

While you boogie with abandon your dollars go to two hard-hitting organizations unlocking shackles: Congregation Action Network (CAN) & Capital Area Immigrant Rights Coalition (CAIR). The attacks don't stop but neither do these organizations. Please give as much as you can!

Contact Denise Woods at 202-415-9757 or woodsassoc@gmail.com with any questions

Ready to go? Please RSVP by ordering tickets through Eventbrite: https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/stop-deportations-dance-party-fundraiser-tickets-69195747343

CAIR COALITION
Donate here: https://act.myngp.com/Forms/-6389254379169182976
CAIR Coalition offers legal hope to the children and thousands of adults languishing in detention in the DMV area. Detainees may be seeking asylum from violence or torture or long term US residents with strong community and family ties. People freed by CAIR’s attorneys can be found celebrating in the CAIR office!

DMV CONGREGATION ACTION NETWORK
Donate here: https://tinyurl.com/y4mj63en
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Congregation Action Network (CAN) Pushes DC To Reform Corrections

The CAN City Immigrant Policies Team emphasized that there were still urgent actions needed to bring DC City policies into line with their stated intention to remain neutral with respect to ICE. The worst offender is the Department of Corrections, which is still informing ICE when they release prisoners, so that ICE can come and put them into immigration detention. The Team showed us sample scripts to be used when phoning City officials, notably the Director of the DC Department of Corrections, Quincy Booth, at 202-698-4932. The two main things we are to ask him for are:

1) Not allowing ICE to use DOC detention beds, even on a temporary basis, and
2) Not notifying ICE when an inmate with an immigration detainer is released.

Congregation Action Network and Others Organize “ICE Out of DC” March
Saturday, June 29, Columbia Heights Civic Plaza

The previous Saturday, June 22, ICE agents had roamed freely through Adams Morgan and Columbia Heights, entering a private home and taking 2 parents away from their children. They also interrogated people in several local businesses, spreading fear and alarm throughout the community. This came despite Trump’s “delaying” massive ICE raids by two weeks, which were planned to target families in cities across the country, including DC.

This was also almost exactly one year after ICE conducted raids in Mount Pleasant, Columbia Heights, and Petworth, detaining 12 people, including random bystanders on the street who were racially profiled.

The Congregation Action Network and other allies were determined that we would not stand by while our neighbors were terrorized by a secretive racist Federal Police Force. They asked people to please come out for a community support rally, which marked one week, almost to the hour, of the previous weekend’s ICE activity in our neighborhood – and one week ahead of Trump’s supposed deadline before large-scale immigration raids would begin. We were rallying both in support of our neighbors AND to demand that DC take concrete steps to make its “Sanctuary City” claim a reality (see story on this page).

There was a community gathering at 4:30, where we heard from a set of community and organizational leaders at 5pm, and then walked through the streets of our neighborhood in a show of support for our immigrant neighbors. At previous rallies we know that this loud and visible public demonstration has meant a lot for undocumented folks who live in the neighborhood but don't feel safe coming out to public events like this.

Congregation Action Network Organizes the “Lights for Liberty” Vigil

On Saturday, July 12, the Lights for Liberty Vigil was held at Lafayette Park, for Children Who Died in US Custody. The Lights for Liberty demonstration was organized by the Congregation Action Network and a number of other organizations, including Jews for Justice, who attended a Tisha B’Av service at NYAPC, and then walked over to participate in the vigil at Lafayette Park.
Cuba Partners Network Gathers in New Orleans  
by Marilyn Seiber

The annual Cuba Partners Network meetings were held June 19-22, 2019 in New Orleans with a larger contingent of both Cubans and U.S. partners — over 90 people! — than in previous meetings. The large number determined the month and facility for the meetings — a Loyola University dorm and meeting rooms during summer months that could accommodate the registrants. The theme for the gathering was “Cuba and the U.S. at a Crossroads: Faith, Crisis and a New Generation.” The Washington, D.C. delegation included Anne Laroche, Betsy Merritt, and Marilyn Seiber representing NYAPC; Mitch Fulton from Church of the Pilgrims PC; and Rev. Rick Snyder, retired pastor.

Among the Cuban pastors attending were Rev. Dora Arce, Moderator of the Cuban Presbyterian Synod; Rev. Liudmila Hernández, Vice-Moderator of the Presbyterian Synod and Pastor of First Presbyterian-Reformed Church of Havana; Rev. Dr. Carlos Emilio Ham, President of the seminary in Matanzas. Rev. Dr. Jo Ella Holman, Regional Liaison for the Caribbean gave an overview of “Past as Prologue: We’ve Been Here Before.” U.S. Senator Chris Coons of Delaware — and a Presbyterian — gave a presentation via video conference.

The theme addressed the impact of the U.S. Administration’s new regulations on travel to Cuba and the effects of tightened economic restrictions and the effective closing of the Consular Section in the U.S. Embassy in Havana, both on Cubans and on church partnerships. The Cuban pastors and Rev. Holman all emphasized that the impact has been difficult economically and socially, but that Cubans and partnerships have weathered similar past challenges and will do so again in this new round of barriers. Senator Coons emphasized educating other Members of Congress on issues affecting Cuba. The greatest result of the conference was the focus on advocacy work on behalf of Cuban church partners in which U.S. partners must become actively engaged. Workshops were held on how to plan for an advocacy program and the steps needed to begin such work. Anne Laroche, Betsy Merritt, and Marilyn Seiber are members of the Network’s Advocacy Committee and participated in group discussions. On behalf of the Committee, Betsy Merritt presented “Plans for Advocacy” to the closing plenary. The next Cuba Partners Network meeting will be in Central Cuba in November 2020.
NYAPC hosts Njoro visitors
by Rev. Beth Braxton

In my morning meditation time I read 1 Peter 4:10 “Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.” I was thinking about the wonderful gift of hospitality that The New York Avenue Presbyterian Church has for so many – for DC residents, for those of us from as far away as Herndon and St. Mary’s, Silver Spring and Fairfax, for those who frequent our Sunday breakfasts, for those protesters from every state in the Union, for those visitors to inaugurations, for those guests from Cuba, Syria and Iraq.

Now once more we are opening our doors and hearts, offering hospitality to our Kenyan partners from Njoro this October. On the team coming for a visit is the new young vibrant Pastor Rev. Tony Matiko, the new Social Worker, Susan Wambugu, Francis Muchemi, businessman and chair of the OVC Committee, two teachers, Josephine Mwangi (primary teacher), and Alice Mbatia (secondary teacher), and Lucy Kungu, a procurement officer for the government. Again we are blessed to be able to have four students from the OVC program: two high school students: Matthew Mokua (9th grade at the national school), Ann Njeri, (11th grade) and two college students: Purity Kaduka (studies in social services) and Ken Mwaura (doing an internship at Egerton University in computers).

They will be with us in DC for the week of October 4-10. It is significant, when we celebrate World Communion Sunday, to have Kenyans here to share in worship. The Njoro Steering Committee of the church will plan to host a lunch following worship so that the Kenyans can have conversation with our congregation members and friends – an important time of building relationships. Mark your calendars.

Rev. Rami al Maqdasi Becomes U.S. Citizen and is Called to New Church
by Marilyn Seiber

On July 31, 2019, Presbyterian pastor Rev. Rami al Maqdasi became a U.S. citizen at a naturalization service in New York. His wife, Raya, and two daughters, Mimi and Lisa, had become U.S. citizens a few months previously. Rev. Al-Maqdasi is the pastor at First United Presbyterian Church in Dunkirk, NY. He has received a new call from First Presbyterian Church in Millersburg, OH and will move to Ohio in September to begin his position on October 1, 2019. He was a PC(USA) International Peacemaker hosted by The New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in September 2016 sponsored by NYAPC’s Peace & Justice Committee. He was raised in the Presbyterian Church in Basrah, Iraq; went to seminary in Egypt; was ordained at the Presbyterian Church in Damascus, Syria; and worked with refugees in Lebanon and northern Iraq.

Congratulations, Rami and family, on your new citizenship and church!

Njoro, Kenya, Table Banking is Doing Well
by Fritz von Fleckenstein

Francis Muchemi, Chairman of the Njoro Orphans and Vulnerable Children Program, reports that on Monday, August 26, they had training for Table Banking. Many of the participants, who are parents and guardians of the children, are doing very well, and already some of them have paid all the original amount of 5,000 shillings as agreed, and are awaiting an additional 10,000 shillings to expand their businesses.

Rev. Matiko talked to them, saying: “A business person can sell ice cream during hot weather and cold weather, that is, during hot weather you can sell by saying Iced ice cream and during cold weather the same ice cream can be sold as Sweet ice cream.” This was a good idea, telling them that they can do business round the year. Also, they had time to share the challenges and how the money has helped them in improving their living standards and getting into business.
Rev. Liudmila Hernández Visits NYAPC from First Havana
by Marilyn Seiber

Rev. Liudmila Hernández, pastor of partner church First Presbyterian-reformed Church of Havana and Vice-Moderator of the Synod of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba, came to NYAPC for a first-time visit and Fourth of July celebrations in Washington, D.C. from June 27 to July 5, following her participation in the Cuba Partners Network meetings (see page 17).

Rev. Hernández preached at the NYAPC worship service with a sermon entitled “Called to Unity and Moved by Love,” based on the text from Philippians 2:1-5. She led an Adult Christian Education Class on “News from Cuba and First Havana,” assisted Rev. Tewell with Time with Children, and gave greetings to the congregation from First Havana. A reception/lunch was hosted by the Cuba Partners Committee where Rev. Hernández made a presentation. She later preached at an evening service at Immanuel Presbyterian Church.

At NYAPC, she toured the Downtown Services Center, was briefed on other church mission programs, and met the staff. She then did a similar tour of Church of the Pilgrims Presbyterian Church, culminated by a lunch with the two church pastors and NYA/Pilgrims travelers to Cuba.

Rev. Hernández reported on conditions in Cuba and the effects of U.S. economic and consular policy on church partnerships and Cubans in meetings at the State Department with Timothy-Zuniga-Brown, Coordinator for Cuban Affairs; Rep. Jennifer Wexton’s staff that had helped secure Rev. Hernández’s U.S. visa; and a briefing with an inter-denominational group hosted by the PC (USA) Office of Public Witness.


Rev. Hernández had a full, productive, and enjoyable partnership visit with NYAPC. We hope she is able to return soon!