



The Metropolitan Spirit

Church Newsletter

Volume XXII, Number 1
Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church

Winter Issue - February 2010
Washington, District of Columbia

CELEBRATING A CENTENARIAN DEACONESS WILMA G. SHEPHERD

This issue of "The Metropolitan Spirit" is dedicated to Deaconess Wilma "Waltina" George Shepherd, former financial sponsor and editor of this newsletter beginning in 1973.

Mrs. Wilma George Shepherd celebrated her 100th birthday on January 15, 2010. I once commented to her that she was born on the same day as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. She quickly and politely smiled and then responded saying that was not the case; rather Dr. King was born on *her* birthday (displaying her sense of humor).

Born in Macon, Georgia, Wilma George's devotion and willingness to serve the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church was planted at an early age by her parents Walter Sanford and Pearlina Gertrude Brown George.

In August 1923, when Wilma was 13, her father moved the family to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania seeking greater opportunities for self betterment. Wilma was educated in the Pittsburgh, PA Public School District. After graduation from Peabody High School, Wilma attended the University of Pittsburgh (1928-1932) and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English with a minor in Latin and History. She was among the first Black women to earn such a degree from the University.

Wilma George became a member of the Iota Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha, Incorporated (AKA) on April 29, 1929, and

she has been a faithful Soror since, serving in numerous leadership roles. Mrs. Shepherd was the 20th President of Xi Omega Chapter of AKA (1967-1968), a charter member of Xi Zeta Omega Chapter AKA, and is their Diamond Soror.

Upon graduation from the University, Wilma came to Washington, DC to pursue a career as an educator in the DC Public School System. After arriving in DC, she met and married the Late Lawrence Shepherd, with whom she traveled the world extensively.

Mrs. Shepherd balanced work and family life while serving over 30 years in the DC Public School System, teaching primarily English, but also instructing in Math, History, and Latin. Mrs. Shepherd was President of the DC Retired Teachers Association (1980-1982).

Using her skills and natural talents, Mrs. Shepherd was an expert in proofing and editing manuscripts. She graciously used her abilities to critique and review written documents, offering constructive editorial suggestions to the authors. Mrs. Shepherd gave coaching to enhance the oratorical (conversational and public speaking) skills of others.

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Together the Shepherds joined and promoted the Gideons. She was a devoted member of the Auxiliary of the Gideons, International, an organization of women that assists the Gideons in achieving its mission of distributing Bibles and evangelism.

In spite of her other activities and busy schedule, Deaconess Shepherd, a quiet, gentle, and sweet spirit still found time to share her time, talents, and resources with the entire Metropolitan A.M.E. Church congregation.

For many years, this newsletter was the unselfish product of Mrs. Shepherd's faithful labor of love. She dutifully toiled on her manual typewriter drafting and creating "The Spirit" for distribution on the First Sunday of each month. Note, this typewriter had no corrective techniques as are now available on the computer. Being the consummate English instructor, Mrs. Shepherd also took major responsibility for editing and proofing of the newsletter. She worked diligently getting the newsletter ready for copying. Once she had a final product, Mrs. Shepherd took it to her local commercial copying company for duplication (this did not include collating and stapling).

A group of us gathered at Mrs. Shepherd's home to assemble the newsletter for distribution. Frequently we shared a home cooked meal that included her "to die-for" yeast rolls and freshly baked cookies. Mrs. Shepherd made this a time of true fellowship.

Deaconess Shepherd has served Metropolitan A.M.E. Church in various roles and has received many well-deserved honors. She was an active participant with these ministries and organizations:

- Editor and financial sponsor of "The Metropolitan Spirit," the church newsletter
- Silver donor for Metropolitan's elevator installation (financial donations made during various fundraising activities)

- Achievement Award for Dedicated Christian Service Demonstrating High Ideals and Principles as Mandated in the Scriptures from the A.M.E. Church – Young People's Division of the Women's Missionary Society (1987)
- Trustee Board – named Trustee Emeritus (June 7, 1992)
- Metropolitan's Woman of the Year (1992)
- Progressive Club
- Church School teacher
- Class Leader
- One Star General, Payne-Tanner Memorial Scholarship Endowment (1993)
- Sarah Allen Missionary Society (SAMS)
- Church Women United
- Deaconess Board (April 14, 1994)
- Breakfast with Mother Special Honoree (May 8, 1994)
- Church School Intermediate Girls Classroom, funded and furnished (1998)
- Special Women of Metropolitan Honoree, God's Blossoms in the Garden (2008)

Mrs. Wilma G. Shepherd is acknowledged for her dedicated service to Metropolitan A.M.E. Church and to helping others realize their goals. Deaconess Shepherd, we thank you for your kindness, gracefulness, and faithfulness.

Carolyn McClain

Recognizing Metropolitan's Living Legends
at least 100 years old*

and Celebrating Them Always!!

Eddye Williams - 110

(Oldest documented resident in DC)

Daisy Bivens - 105

Wilma G. Shepherd - 100

* This list was developed based on data available to us.

MAKING GOD REAL

A new year is a time for fresh beginnings. People often take this opportunity to reflect on their lives and think about the things they can do to either make improvements in themselves or in their circumstances. In 2010, in addition to the other goals you may have set for yourself, why not consider adding one more: Making God real.

Making God real means breathing life into all the biblical passages you have read, the sermons you have heard, and the hymns you have sung. It means believing in and feeling the very existence of God's presence in your life every minute of every waking day.

This goal can be achieved in numerous ways, but four strategies that will put you squarely on the path include turning to God as your first refuge, keeping God the central focus of your life, realizing that it is God who brings blessings, and always knowing that God is your friend.

I have frequently heard people in the midst of a crisis say, 'I've tried everything else, so there's nothing left to do but pray.' Why not pray first? Why not make God the initial resort? Learn to instinctively call for and reach out to Him for guidance, then look and listen for the subtle messages in your life confirming that He has heard your plea and is quietly working on your behalf.

Yet, don't merely acknowledge God's presence when you're in a panic. Make Him the central focus of your life. Attending church and participating in worship services were always important to me, but I often viewed my work and home life as separate from the worship experience. It was years before I realized that whether I was coping with the difficult supervisor, musing over whether I'd find an available parking space after pulling on to that Metro lot too late, or navigating through the frustrations of having too much month left at

the end of the money, all were issues that I could take to God.

There is a genuine freedom in the knowledge that after you've prayed over a situation, and done everything humanly possible to make it either right or at least tolerable, you can let go knowing that your Higher Power is working for your greater good.

This daily awareness of God's presence in your life has an added benefit: It helps you to view your good fortune through a new lens simply because you will know that it was not merely luck, fate, or even your own work that brought you blessings – but God – the only One who is in the blessings business. No, it wasn't just a coincidence that the falling tree branch missed your car by mere inches. And though taking good care of yourself certainly contributed to your last, stellar medical report, it is not the result of your lone efforts. God's hand is always in it, and being aware of this fact allows you to give Him the praise and gratitude that He deserves.

Finally, it just feels good knowing that you have a friend in God, in Jesus. When the tension starts mounting, I know I can mentally conjure up any number of scriptures that will be a balm to my soul: "He will keep in perfect peace all those whose thoughts are stayed on thee..." "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid..." "Trust in the Lord with all thy heart and all thy might and lean not unto thy own understanding; in all ways acknowledge Him and He will direct thy path."

These words are not static. They have power – the power to heal, to console, to comfort. They also have power to make God real, and to keep Him out front and central in your life.

R.D. Ford

PLAYING WITH THREE STRINGS

Philippians 2:12-16 (Message Bible Translation) "...What I'm getting at, friends, is that you should simply keep on doing what you've done from the beginning. When I was living among you, you lived in responsive obedience. Now that I'm separated from you, keep it up. Better yet, redouble your efforts. Be energetic in your life of salvation, reverent and sensitive before God. That energy is God's energy, energy deep within you, God himself willing and working at what will give him the most pleasure. Do everything readily and cheerfully—no bickering, no second-guessing allowed! Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God. Carry the light-giving Message into the night so I'll have good cause to be proud of you on the day that Christ returns. You'll be living proof that I didn't go to all this work for nothing...."

Probably one of the preeminent violin virtuosi of the 20th century, Itzhak Perlman is known for his brilliant technique, direct interpretation, and precision. He is a conductor and a master instructor. Perlman was born to Chaim (a barber) and Shoshana Perlman in Israel in 1945. He contracted polio and lost the use of his legs at the age of four. Shortly after, he began to study the violin. Perlman has appeared with every major orchestra in the world, showcasing his talent at music festivals, recitals, and concerts worldwide. Mr. Perlman's recordings include not only all standard violin repertoires but also those of contemporary composers. Listening to and learning from him are deemed essential for anyone even considering studying the violin. The man who plays sitting down has never ceased to bring audiences and truly, the world, to their feet in appreciation of his exceptional gift.

There are many anecdotes about this gracious and somewhat eccentric soul. One that especially resonates is the story

that during one of the seminal concerts of Perlman's career, a string broke on his instrument in the middle of his performance. The audience waited breathlessly, and patiently, assuming that he would simply remove and change the string, and then continue the performance.

Instead, after a brief pause, Mr. Perlman proceeded to play, using just three strings to deliver all of the notes that would have been played on four strings. The story does not indicate which string had been broken. If it was the D string, then all of the deep, resonant low notes had to have been hit on three strings; if it was the E string all of those stirring soaring, high notes were played on three strings. Whichever the case, Mr. Perlman successfully completed his musical performance.

Presently, Metropolitan has been called to play the notes of four strings on just three. We have acknowledged and felt the impact of these economic stressful times: treasured homes have less value, jobs have been lost, and many life-long savings and retirement accounts have been basically depleted.

We know and accept that tithes and offerings are the very fundamental foundation of this church's financial base. Yet, the collective church body has already faced, accepted, and acted upon the need to sustain and restore an edifice that is truly an historic building and testament. In addition, Metropolitan is committed to continue providing service to auxiliaries and the community. Even though volunteers fuel most of these efforts, they still need funding and pastoral and staff support.

Finally, situations arise to which the church morally and spiritually must respond. These issues seem to come when the chips are already down. The crisis in Haiti is an example of such a situation. Let me be clear, there are many who are grateful to be able to contribute time, prayer, and

finances to persons in Haiti. The A.M.E. church supports two clinics in that country.

Metropolitan's commitment and contribution of human and material resources have not wavered. Indeed, if anything, they have deepened. Nonetheless, this occurrence was not predicted and the need for such support was clearly not foreseen. Though sincerely and willingly donating to the Haitian crisis, I will say what some may be thinking, that funds raised could be used for Metropolitan's restoration and ongoing budgetary needs.

Yet, as did Itzhak Perlman, Metropolitan has chosen to play on three strings what normally would have been played on four strings. Mr. Perlman and Metropolitan are in good biblical company: Moses stuttered when he spoke; David chose five smooth stones; Samson was blind when he tore the temple of the Philistines to the ground; Joshua had no army at Jericho; the Hebrew children made bricks with no straw; the widow that Elijah helped never ran out of oil; and somehow in these days, grandmothers and aunts always have enough soup in the pot, and room at the table for one more.

The passage from Philippians exhorts the people, and by extension Metropolitan, to continue to pray, and watch as God enables us to hit those high, soaring notes and not miss a beat. We are instructed to keep our eyes on the prize. Remember in whom we believe, on whose behalf we work, and watch, for God will reach way, way down and bring out those deep, resonant notes. Stand up, be involved, and watch God move those on the sidelines to the active lineup!

Of course, sometimes, faith falters, and we just get plain tired. But it is clear, individually and collectively, that by, through, with, and because of the Grace of God Metropolitan has risen. The church has been

enabled to play on three strings beautifully and graciously.

Dr. Anne Bouie

RESTORING OUR LEGACY – INSURING OUR FUTURE

It is sometimes easy to forget that "our house" must be maintained both physically and mentally. Our restoration effort at Metropolitan A.M.E. Church, the National Cathedral of African Methodism, is representative of this notion.

While aware that restoration planning was on-going, when a ceiling tile fell in the sanctuary, the congregation knew that something had to be done to protect all who entered our church. Once this reality was faced, we also acknowledged that the ceiling repairs were just a part of the problem of this beloved edifice. The problem was assessed in its entirety. There was an investigation of the ceiling integrity and a determination was made of the course of action to take, and the best method for repair and/or replacement. We surmised that the nature of the structural issues was critical and sought immediate and long term professional solutions.

First, as a safety precaution, the worship services were held in Douglass Hall. We then began in earnest to develop a plan to finance efforts to alleviate the "building problems." Parishioners and the broader community contributed to the church's summer fundraising efforts, which resulted in over a quarter million dollars in sacrificial donations.

Metropolitan knew, however, that the needs were larger than our personal resources could provide. The church secured a 3 million dollar loan to assist in financing the restoration efforts and is in the midst of raising an additional \$900,000+ to complete the current phases of the work. A lesson learned during this restoration is that deferred maintenance is not a good thing.

LEGACY from P. 5

Human nature allows us to put off issues that don't seem important, are difficult to solve, and are feared. It is that way in life as well. We think if a particular problem is ignored it will go away. Seldom does it go away, but instead, it seems to magnify.

Metropolitan faces a tremendous challenge as we seek to identify ways to raise money, save souls, and adhere to the mission and vision of our historic church. The members have been asked to continue to support the church in typical fashion and then also to make sacrificial donations to assist in the renovation and restoration efforts.

This is being asked even as we face an economy that has reached depths not seen since the depression era. Persons too young to actually have experienced the depression, a world changing event, may not understand and have a true appreciation of this unsure footing we face as a family, a community, a nation, and a world.

A consistent message heard in church is that we must have faith, faith as small as a mustard seed, faith based on things unseen, and faith unshakable in the midst of troubles. Metropolitan is faced with a crisis of enormous proportions as the problem of our edifice represents not just our past, our legacy, but it greatly represents our future.

Each generation seeks to leave something for its youth to build upon so that the gift may be enhanced for the general uplift of people and the future. Metropolitan must step out on faith to maintain this great edifice, which serves as a beacon of hope not just now but for generations to come.

With commitment and this hope we will build the physical structure. Prayerfully, our "mental state" which allows us to persevere under difficult circumstances will also be built and then there will be success for we are blessed.

Dr. Ruby M. Gourdine

RESTORATION Frequently Asked Questions

This article answers some questions/issues that have been raised regarding Metropolitan's restoration process.

The goals of the restoration Phases 1 and 2 are to: stop the church building from continuing to suffer damage and deterioration from water intrusion; restore selective exterior masonry; install new gutters, downspouts and flashing; and upgrade life, safety and other building systems.

- **What is the scope of this planned restoration?**

This work will restore and replace the sanctuary ceiling and re-point and re-grout the building's exterior masonry (to address mortar deterioration, structural damage in the rear of the building, and water damage). The work will also: **Restore** stonework and replace missing bricks to protect the structure's envelope against weather conditions; **Upgrade** life, safety and building systems; **Install** fire suppression and detection systems, including a sprinkler system in the sanctuary that will be connected on each level of the church and will bring the facility up to current DC building code standard; **Restore** and secure the Episcopacy Stained Glass Window; **Upgrade** heating, air conditioning, and fire alarm systems in the sanctuary, Douglass Hall, and the lower level of the church; **Refurbish** the first floor restrooms, including the plumbing; and **Restore** and refinish the front upper level area nearest the organ pipes on both sides of the balcony to its original appearance.

The mechanical system will be completely renovated and the electrical system upgraded to accommodate additional loads.

In the areas where mortar is missing and brick is resting directly on brick, the mortar will be replaced to reinforce the areas. This work should be instrumental in alleviating moisture seepage into the building.

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- **What has caused the seepage of moisture that is clearly visible in the crumbling walls, primarily on the 15th Street side of the church, but also in other areas throughout the building?**

Interior leaks were generally caused by a dislodged metal flashing around the roof and improperly installed and rusted gutters and downspouts. These problems allowed water to seep through the masonry walls and bricks, causing the deterioration and cracking.

Another cause of the seepage was the overflow of the evaporation pan under the rooftop air conditioning unit. Moisture from the pan caused a weakening of the sanctuary ceiling plaster and tiles. In 2000, the pan, which draws away the evaporating water, was replaced at the time of ceiling repairs. Only recently did the church become aware of the underlying damage to the ceiling from overflow.

- **Who is the architect; who is the contractor? Will the Trustees be solely responsible for monitoring the contractor and the work that will be done? Has there been any outreach to engage persons in the congregation with technical, mechanical, electrical, and architectural expertise/skills to serve in an oversight role?**

Devroux and Purnell of Washington, DC is the architectural firm; Gilford Construction Corporation is the contractor. A construction manager has been hired to perform the oversight function. A team of professional and technical parishioners will serve as consultants and provide construction oversight as a "second set of eyes" throughout the duration of the restoration project. These persons will monitor the tasks to ensure that items are properly installed to maintain value, quality workmanship and timeliness of construction are provided, and the project stays on budget. At present, a

number of construction experts in the congregation have volunteered their time and have shared their expertise in assisting Trustees with this restoration project.

- **How long will it take to complete the renovations?**

Barring any unforeseen issues, the renovations should be completed within 12 months after the start of the project. This work will be an extensive upgrade to an aging structure. It is anticipated that the completed renovations will last for many years and will bring the sanctuary and lower level up to DC Code standards. The passage of time will reveal additional needs for restoring and maintaining the church.

- **What are the short- and long-term plans for maintenance and upkeep? What safeguards will be instituted in an attempt to prevent the church from experiencing costly repairs and age-related problems in the near future?**

Going forth, to support upkeep of the restored infrastructure, the Trustees will develop a maintenance plan to be implemented upon completion of this restoration project. This plan will be updated as needed.

- **In addition to the emergency nature of the currently needed structural repairs, are there other restoration concerns?**

The edifice continues to deteriorate daily, causing serious safety concerns. While restoration work is delayed costs are escalating; and the construction contract and loan are time-sensitive. If construction cannot go forward because of funding and work must be halted, then Metropolitan must repay \$572,854 to the bank immediately. Each day Metropolitan is delayed in acquiring needed funds, the physical status of this beloved church is jeopardized, not only as being a place to worship and serve God, but also as a cornerstone of

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African American heritage.

One of the forerunners of Metropolitan A.M.E. Church, Union Bethel provided a safe haven to runaway slaves in the 19th century. Over the ensuing years the church has continued to offer a helping hand to many who needed to know that God will provide.

This church's ministries and outreach programs in 2009 provided food to nearly 6,000 people, spiritual materials and support to over 2,500 people, education and training to over 170 people; nearly 300 Angel Tree gifts at Christmas to children of incarcerated parents, over 1,500 school supplies to DC public school students, and over 400 items of clothing to those in need.

Metropolitan continues to be an institution in the forefront of the civic, cultural, and intellectual life of this nation, while carrying out its mission of serving God and His people. It is urgent that with deliberate speed all be done to restore this legacy.

- **Is the church adopting a phasing plan for the renovations? If so, what is to be done in each phase and what is the projected timeline?**

The current restoration plan is a modification of an original plan previously presented to the church. The original plan called for a \$5-5.5 million renovation, which included Douglass Hall, but did not include the Episcopacy Window. When the ceiling tile fell in the sanctuary, scaffolding was erected to determine the repairs that are needed and to protect the congregation from falling debris.

During an assessment, it became clear that steps had to be taken to preserve and secure the Episcopacy Window. This task was added to the restoration plan, along with restoration and repair of the ceiling, which shows signs of instability and poses a safety concern.

Douglass Hall is not included in the current restoration plan, since funding is not

currently available. The bank (SunTrust) approved the church for a \$3 million loan. This amount limits restoration efforts to urgently-needed repairs.

These repairs will be addressed in 3 phases, linked in terms of work to be done and expenditures. At this time, planned renovations are those absolutely needed for the safety, security, and stability of the building (Phases 1 and 2). These renovations are projected to be completed within 12 months after the work begins. Scaffolding is expected to be removed in approximately 7 months. The timeline for Phase 3 will depend upon the completion of Phases 1 and 2 and the funding available.

Plans for renovations to Douglass Hall and other areas of the church will be reassessed in the future.

- **How much are the overall construction costs; what is the cost of the work being done in the current phase?**

The overall construction cost for the original restoration project is \$5-5.5 million. The cost for safety, security, and stability renovations (Phases 1 and 2) is \$3.5 million. The cost of scaffolding, which was procured under a separate purchase order (before the bank loan was approved) and was funded from sacrificial donations, is \$76,000, which includes installation and removal after 5 months. There will be a cost of \$6,000 per month, for each additional month that the scaffolding remains in use by Metropolitan.

- **What is the amount of funds available for the Phase 1 and 2 (\$3.5 million) restoration; how are the funds to be allocated?**

Expenditures from the \$3 million bank loan (which was finalized on December 3, 2009) include: \$40,705.50 in settlement costs; and mortgage payoffs totaling \$532,148.73 (church - \$256,371.29; Q Street residential rental property - \$275,777.44). Funds remaining after these expenditures are

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\$2,427,145.57.

These amounts are based on data available as of January 17, 2010. At that time a total of \$340,754.97 had been received from sacrificial giving, monthly pledges, and donations. Expenses totaling \$98,307.25 have been deducted from the sacrificial giving amount. This includes [\$40,438.61 - Episcopacy Window, \$24,500 - contractor, \$25,685 - work permit, \$7,500 - bank fees, \$175.17 - poster used as a visual display to track financial donations recorded, \$8.47 - incidentals]. The contractor is owed a balance of \$94,307.25 for the Episcopacy Window restoration (the total cost is \$134,745.86). A balance of \$148,090.95, from donated funds, was on-hand as of the January 23, 2010 church conference.

When construction is completed, the monthly mortgage loan payment is estimated to be \$22,000. This amount is expected to be paid primarily from the monthly restoration "sacrificial pledges and offerings."

- **What additional funds must be raised to complete Phases 1 and 2 of the restoration project?**

The amount needed to be raised is \$900,000+ [determined by \$3.5 million (restoration costs for Phases 1 and 2) less \$2,427,145.57 from the \$3 million loan]. This additional amount will cover the actual removal and replacement of the ceiling and safety, security, and stability phases of the work.

The church must raise \$900,000+ by Resurrection (Easter) Sunday. At the church conference on January 9, 2010, members defeated the motion to sell the Q Street property to raise funds. The church conference on January 23, 2010 approved the sale of the parsonage at 2257 Sudbury Rd., NW, which is estimated to sell for approximately \$700,000, in today's market. Pursuant to "The Doctrine and Discipline of the A.M.E. Church," church law requires a

review process at various levels before a sale of church property is approved and finalized.

- **What is proposed if unexpected construction problems are discovered during the renovations?**

The construction contract includes a contingency of \$293,000, to address new concerns that may be revealed once the renovations have started. The contingency will come from the additional \$900,000+ to be raised.

- **Are church organizations raising and contributing funds to the restoration?**

Various church organizations have made contributions (totaling over \$16,000) to the Restoration Fund. All church organizations have been asked to support and participate in a "Rainbow Project," a restoration fundraising effort being coordinated by the Metropolitan Restoration Special Events Committee.

- **Are fundraising activities being explored that have a wide-range appeal?**

The Metropolitan Restoration Special Events Committee was established primarily for short-term fundraising efforts and has a goal to raise \$200,000 over the next 12 months. Several fundraising activities identified include Gospel brunches, baked goods and dinner sales, and concerts. Other special events are being identified.

- **Does Metropolitan intend to solicit grants for restoration projects; have any applications been written to request grant funding?**

Sources of grants are being identified. Members of the church and member referrals are needed to volunteer their time as grant writers. A national fundraising campaign is being planned. An experienced capital campaign consultant, the Gatsby Group, has

been hired (using funds from a grant and funding sources outside restoration funds) to prepare a Phase 1 marketing brochure or planning document to use for outreach to corporate and philanthropic donors.

Several church members are working to secure two historic designations for the church: a national historic landmark designation, which would position the church to receive corporate gifts and grants from foundations such as the Casey and Kellogg Foundations; and a national significance designation, which would enable the church to apply for federal grants. Metropolitan currently has a local historic landmark designation only.

In January 2010, the church submitted an application to the National Historic Trust for Historic Preservation to be listed as 1 of 11 most endangered historic sites in the United States. A decision on this application is expected by April. If approved, this will afford the church visibility and prominence to those entities that donate and make funds available to historic places.

Details on other restoration phases will be discussed in a future article.

Janet Oakley Higgins

References: Materials distributed at the Church Conferences on January 9 and 23, 2010; information presented and provided by Trustees Terry Johnson, Gwendolyn Kimbrough, and Leroy Nesbitt, Jr.; Stewards Thedford Collins, Willie D. Elliott, Dorothy Gilliam, Ernest Green, Marie Johns, and Walter Morris; and church members Dina Curtis, Alton Green, and Dr. Wilma Harvey.

"Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain." (Psalm 127:1)

REFLECTIONS THE SENIORS' PERSPECTIVE

I consider myself a senior – a young senior perhaps – but nevertheless, a senior. The dictionary defines the words “senior” as ...an elder; one who is more advanced in dignity and rank, and “senior citizen” as one who has retired.

Seniors are expected to possess, not

necessarily, more knowledge than their younger counterparts, but rather more wisdom, which is the application of that knowledge. This wisdom, insight, or just plain common sense is attributable to their life experiences.

Some often believe that with age comes a certain sense of complacency with the status quo and an unwillingness to change. Some may even go so far as to say that the older one becomes, then the more likely that his/her contributions to society will diminish. These however, are erroneous assumptions. In fact, there is much documentation that would support just the opposite.

Every day we read or hear stories about the miraculous accomplishments of senior citizens: 91-year-old wins National Water Ski Championship; 94-year-old runs for political office; 70-year-old swims the English Channel; 78-year-old becomes the oldest to ride a bicycle across country. And, then there is John Glenn, 88, who at the age of 77 made his last travel to space and became the oldest space traveler.

We don't have to go far to see Seniors making a difference, still enduring change, still making adjustments, and still making significant contributions. We need only to look within the walls of our great church, Metropolitan.

During this season of *Restoration*, like everyone else, our Seniors have had to endure much – changes in the hour of worship; changes in the location of worship; changes in the format of worship; and changes to the very infrastructure that makes us the National Cathedral of African Methodism. These changes, these radical movements from the status quo, have perhaps been more difficult for Seniors.

Yet, generally, our deaconesses have been available every Sunday to perform their duties, as have been many other Seniors in the congregation. Despite

the many challenges and debates that have taken place, the one message that has been strong and clear amongst our Seniors is that we must preserve and protect our church.

Some of our Seniors have sat at the knee of their forefathers and heard the stories of how this great edifice was built. It is the dollars of our Seniors that have sustained Metropolitan over the years. And, it is their continuous dedication and love for this church that will carry us into the future. 1 Peter 5:5 reads..."You younger men, follow the leadership of those who are older. And all of you serve each other with humble spirits, for God gives special blessings to those who are humble, but sets himself against those who are proud." (Living Bible)

Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, who will be 79 this year, reflects on the respect afforded elders in his country. "In the traditional village there used to be those who are called elders. They were no longer fit physically to do strenuous things, but they were looked up to because they were seen as the repositories of experience, wisdom – which they wanted to share with succeeding generations. They would say to young people, 'Sometimes the best way of winning an argument is not to have an argument at all.'"

Hear ye the words of our elders.

Ellen H. Figer

BECOMING A MEMBER OF METROPOLITAN A.M.E. CHURCH WASHINGTON, DC

For several years, I did not regularly attend church. I was looking to join a church that would provide spiritual guidance and nurturing commensurate with my life style of a very mature (senior citizen), educated African American woman, who enjoys life as a mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. As well, I was looking for a

church home to which I could drive within thirty minutes of my home.

I do believe that I have found this church home at Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1518 M Street, NW, Washington, DC.

My first visit to Metropolitan A.M.E. was in early October 2008, for a regular Sunday worship service. I was there because I felt the need to go to church to pray for a very dear friend and neighbor David Pendleton, who had been diagnosed with terminal brain cancer and the doctor had given David only a few months to live.

Prior to his diagnosis, David had been attending Bible study at his church in Washington, DC. He would share with me and anyone who would listen, all that he had studied and learned each week. I found it fascinating that David was learning so much about how good God is and I knew I wanted to feel the way that David felt. I wanted to feel God's love and learn to love and trust more in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior!

During a hospital visit to see David, he shared with me that he had no fear of dying. David said that he had found Christ early in life and trusted that he would be welcomed into God's kingdom. I realized then that I wanted to have this kind of peace should I be given such diagnosis. My friend David died on December 31, 2008.

I felt ashamed that it had been so long since I had given time to worship God in the midst of a church congregation setting. At that time I had been listening to WAVA radio station, which featured various religious leaders who discussed and taught biblical scriptures. Even though these discussions were comprehensive and provided substantive information, each leader would end the program reminding listeners, "*Do not use this station's presentations as a substitute for attending church services. Find a church and worship with the congregation. Also, do not expect a perfect*

church because churches have problems that they are constantly working on. Just find your niche within the church."

I continued to visit Metropolitan A.M.E., so that I could get a feel for the church and the congregation. Later in 2008, my friend Dr. Dorothy Payne Bryan, a member of Metropolitan A.M.E., invited me and I accepted her invitation to attend Bible study with her on Wednesday nights. I felt lucky that the class was being taught by Pastor Ronald Braxton. As much as I had listened to WAVA, I had never heard the approach used by Rev. Braxton.

I was relieved and inspired by Rev. Braxton's intellectual and sincere spiritual approach to the scriptures. His teaching approach helped to take away the fear of God that I had harbored since childhood. I have continued Wednesday Bible study and many of my questions about God and His mercy have been answered. As well, many of my concerns about life have been addressed in a very spiritual way.

Even though my "church shyness" was gradually disappearing, because of my age, I did not feel inclined to stand before a large congregation and say "*I am looking for a church home.*" I was simply ashamed to do so.

To prepare myself for joining Metropolitan A.M.E, I invited my friend and confidant The Rev. Fr. Darryl F. James, Priest-in-Charge of the Parish of Grace Church, Queens, New York, to attend worship with me. He attended and the service impressed him so much so that later, he confided, "*You should join this church;*" and I responded, "*Why?*"

He answered, "*The minister can preach, the music is excellent, and it has a good distribution of membership within its congregation – just as many men as women. This is the church for you!*" I replied, "*I will join, but only at the Wednesday Noon Day service because I suffer with "church*

shyness," if you know what I mean. Darryl, I also want to be in a church before the New Year of 2009."

That following Wednesday, I attended the Noon Day service and Assistant Pastor, Rev. Kimberly Barnes presided. At altar call, I responded with a request to join the church and I was given the church's membership form to complete. After almost three weeks passed I had not been notified about attending a New Members Class.

I mentioned this to Rev. Braxton during Bible study and he requested that the Pastor's Steward Frederick Price take care of my concern as quickly as possible. Within a couple of days, I received a notice in the mail to report to a "New Members Class" the following Sunday morning.

This made me feel very welcome for I had been concerned about the earlier lack of notification to participate in the class. I assume the membership card I completed on that Wednesday was misplaced and therefore was not timely processed. Rev. Aisha Karimah directed the New Members sessions. During these sessions, lessons were presented about how the church was formed, the various organizations that operate within the church, and the requirements of church membership.

On April 12, 2009, I received the Certificate of Full Membership signed by Rev. Ronald E. Braxton. It has now been almost a year since I received my Certificate. To date, I have no regrets about having joined this church; I am proud to have been received into full membership. I am in prayer to find my niche for service within this church.

Delores Zimmerman-Jeter

(NOTE: Sister Delores Zimmerman-Jeter desires to be addressed as "Sister Zimmerman-Jeter" not as "Sister Jeter".)

USHER NOTES

A TRIBUTE TO THE LATE MS. DOROTHY SPELLS

Paul, in his second letter to the church at Corinth, declares "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him." (2 Corinthians 5:8, 9)

This article is a tribute to my friend, fellow church member, usher, and South Carolinian, the Late Ms. Dorothy Spells. Sister Spells loved her church, Metropolitan A.M.E. Church, but even more so she loved serving in her church.

Thoughtfulness, dedication, and devotion are some character traits exhibited by Dorothy. In addition, she could be a little stubborn and willful at times. On some occasions when Dorothy and I disagreed about usher matters, she would stop communicating with me. I could not discern why Dorothy had responded in this manner.

I began to think that I was the only person on whom Dorothy used this tact. Later, however, I found out that was not the case; she treated others likewise. Dorothy could only remain silent briefly and soon would resume communicating as if nothing ever happened. Her thoughtfulness always won out.

During the recent holiday season my wife, Viola and I received a Christmas card from Dorothy; then a few days later a second card from Sister Spells came in the mail. This last card was in acknowledgement of Viola and my wedding anniversary on December 29th. This was so like Dorothy; she rarely missed recognizing a special occasion.

In fact, on her last Sunday at church she thoughtfully sought to say thanks to Brother Elias Prioleau. Dorothy had a card to give Brother Prioleau to thank his family for the hospitality extended to the South Carolina Club members during a meeting

and fellowship at the Prioleau's home. This was the Dorothy that I knew, absolute dedication and strong devotion to duty.

Sister Dorothy Spells was an usher's usher. The 15th Street side rear post of Metropolitan A.M.E. Church's sanctuary was her domain and she ruled it without question. Sister Spells did not desire to be assigned to any other usher post in the church and this was obviously where God wanted her to be. Dorothy's dedication was also evident during her last opportunity to be of service to Metropolitan.

Though she had been ill for awhile, on the first Sunday of January 2010, God allowed Sister Spells to return to her church for one last time. She ushered as usual and was looking well. On that Sunday, Dorothy paid her annual dues to both the Usher Board and South Carolina Club. The day that Sister Spells became fatally ill I believe she was on her way to Metropolitan A.M.E. Church to usher for a funeral service. God saw that this faithful servant had paid her dues, had completed her service, and He called her home.

"When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation, And take me Home, What joy shall fill my heart." Well done, good and faithful servant, Dorothy Spells.

James F. Robinson

TRACING OUR A.M.E. ROOTS

A press release announced a joint worship service would be held by Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church and St. George's United Methodist Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on Sunday, October 25, 2009, 11:00 a.m. This worship service would be the very first time that these two congregations would have worshipped together at the 11:00 a.m. hour in 200 plus years. What an experience to attend such

an historic service.

After several brief conversations and some quick planning among us, we decided that we had to go to the service. The thirteen of us boarded the Metropolitan bus in a very early hour on that Sunday morning to travel to Philadelphia. Departing Washington, DC after a very powerful prayer which intensified our anticipation, we all excitedly shared personal enthusiasm from the very beginning.

Even Mother Nature was in her splendor showcasing vivid colors as we traveled I-95 on that bright sunny day. On board the bus there were engaging conversations on A.M.E. history and trivia. All culminated in a very pleasant and enjoyable trip. As we rode along the Interstate, we encountered fellow A.M.E.'s who greeted us enthusiastically as they too journeyed to Philadelphia for the service.

After being warmly welcomed by Mother Bethel and St. George's pastors and members, our hearts were rejuvenated as we sat in the St. George's sanctuary recalling its historical legacy to the A.M.E. denomination. Many photos were taken to document this rare experience.

Rev. Dr. Mark K. Tyler, 52nd pastor, Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church, was the anointed messenger for the worship. He delivered a powerful and befitting message, "Blood is Thicker than Water" taken from Genesis 25:7. This was truly a thought provoking message for many of the estimated 500 worshippers in attendance. Rev. Tyler taught a lesson on the reconciliation of Abraham's sons Isaac and Ishmael.

A highlight of the worship was the presentation of a handmade cross to Rev. Tyler by Rev. Fred Day, St. George's pastor. This simple but elegant cross was crafted from nails that had been used in the building of the St. George's balcony, the place where

our ancestors worshipped before their exodus.

After enjoying the fellowship of a home cooked meal at Mother Bethel, we completed our visit with a tour of the beautifully restored church. We visited the church's museum, making the pilgrimage to the tomb that holds the remains of Bishop Richard Allen, founder of the A.M.E. denomination, his wife Sarah Bass Allen, and Bishop Morris Brown, second consecrated bishop of the A.M.E. Church.

Most of our group (Robie Beatty, Dianne Gant Black, Roslyn Stewart Christian, Darwin Curry, Isiah Dupree, Marie Fleming, Harriett Harper, Jocelyn Harris, Thelma Dean Jacobs, Loretta Johnston, Leila Kendrick, Carolyn McClain, and Muriel Martin) had also toured St. George's Church and Museum after the worship and before leaving to go to Mother Bethel. Many of us sat in St. George's balcony as our ancestors had sat.

This trip was one of spiritual empowerment and historical pride. We were blessed by this opportunity to experience a piece of history as it unfolded. As an A.M.E., if at all possible, make a pilgrimage to Mother Bethel and come face-to-face with the denomination's roots and founding. You will be blessed by the experience.

Carolyn McClain / Thelma Dean Jacobs

AM I REALLY NEEDED?

Xvxn though my typxwritxr is an old modxl, it still works wxll xxcxpt for onx of thx kxys. l'vx wishxd many timxs that it workxd prxfctly. Trux, thrx arx 42 kxys that function, but onx kxy not working makxs all the diffxrncx.

Somxtimxs, it sxxms to mx that our church, [sorority, and family] arx somxwhat likx my typxwritxr – not all thx pxoplx arx working propxrlly. You might say, "Wxl, I'm only onx pxrson, it won't makx much diffxrncx." But you sxx, any organization, to bx xffixxnt, nxxds thx activx participation of vxvry pxrson. Thx ntxt timx you think your xfforts arxn't nxxdxd, rxmxmbxr my typxwritxr, and say to yoursxlf, "I am a kxy pxrson and thxy nxxd mx vxry much."

(From Deaconess Wilma Shepherd's files, shared at her 100th birthday celebration)