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THE PASTOR'S PEN

For a long time, I have been living under the illusion that it's my calling and my responsibility to discern the vision for the congregation. It's called "casting the vision." In more cases than not, it's a top-down process that goes something like this: 1.) The Pastor gets a vision for the church through prayer, Bible-reading, or the latest church leadership conference; 2.) the Pastor communicates the vision to the leadership, who support it; and 3.) the Pastor preaches about the vision to the congregation, who also support it.

One of the problems of this process is it doesn't include the dreams and visions of the church members, and it doesn't take into account their gifts, passions, and things they enjoy doing. Consequently, people don't get behind the proposed program or ministry, which leads to frustration, resentment, and a sense of failure in the Pastor.

I have also bought into a glass-half-empty mentality that tells me we can't do something because of our limitations, the two most common ones being limited human resources and limited finances.

But what if I looked at the glass as half-full instead of half-empty? What might I see? And what if I let go of the responsibility (entitlement) of discerning the vision for the congregation, and instead, empowered the congregation to do it for itself? What if my role was more to affirm the gifts and passions of the church members? What if, instead of casting (dictating) the vision, I facilitated the congregation's discernment of its own mission? And what if the process was fun? And what if it took no more than an hour after a church potluck?

I hope I have your attention. Stay tuned; there's more to come! I'm looking forward to what God has in store for us! 2018 is going to be a good year! I can feel it in my bones!

Peace and blessings,
Charley

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

The following is a tentative list of upcoming church activities and community events. Contact the church for a confirmation of the calendar.

Weekly Events:

- **Central Texas MCC Worship** (1601 Clay Ave.) on Sundays at 11:00 a.m.
- **Live and Let Live AA Group** (4209 N. 27th St.) on Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, January 28 – Chili Cook-Off immediately after worship in the Social Hall. Suggested donation of \$10 to taste and vote.

Saturday, February 3 – Women’s HIV Support Group. If you are an HIV+ woman, then join others at 11AM for a support group followed by a home-cooked meal.

Sunday, February 4 – Accessibility Sunday. Worship will take place downstairs in the Social Hall.

Sunday, February 11 – Choir Rehearsal for an Easter special music performance in the Social Hall following a light lunch.

Sunday, February 11 – Potluck Social immediately after worship in the Social Hall. Good food, good fellowship!

Sunday, February 11 – Choir Rehearsal for an Easter special music performance in the Social Hall following the potluck social.

Wednesday, February 14 – “Becoming the Beloved Community by Understanding Racism” Workshop at St. Alban’s Episcopal Church Parish Hall (305 N. 30th St.), 3PM-5:45PM. Ash Wednesday Service at St. Albans Episcopal Church follows at 7PM.

Thursday, February 15 – HIV Support Group at 6PM in the Social Hall begins with a home-cooked meal and continues with connection and conversation.

Sunday, February 18 – Accessibility Sunday. Worship will take place downstairs in the Social Hall.

Sunday, February 18 – Lenten Conversation in the Social Hall following a light lunch after worship. The conversation will be based on excerpts from Barbara Brown Taylor’s best-selling book, “An Altar in the World.”

Sunday, February 18 – Choir Rehearsal for an Easter special music performance in the sanctuary following a light lunch.

Sunday, February 25 – Lenten Conversation in the sanctuary following a light lunch after worship. The conversation will be based on excerpts from Barbara Brown Taylor’s best-selling book, “An Altar in the World.”

Sunday, February 25 – Choir Rehearsal for an Easter special music performance in the Social Hall following a light lunch.

BIRTHDAYS

The following people, who join us for worship, have birthdays this month. If you have corrections or additions to the birthday list, please call the office at 752-5331 or email us at centexmcc@earthlink.net.

- Ronnie Johnson – January 30**
- Natalie Hoelscher – January 30**
- Valerie Golston – February 4**
- Michael Dionne – February 14**
- Cameron Talley – February 25**

Chili Cook-Off



It's time, once again, for our church's annual chili cook-off! Everyone is welcome to bring a pot of your best homemade chili on **Sunday, January 28**. After worship, people will sample the entries and vote for the best-tasting chili and the hottest chili, with prizes given out to the winners. Then everyone is welcome to return for as much chili as you can eat! A \$10 donation is suggested to sample and vote. But if you can't afford it, don't let that stop you. We want you to join us for the fun and fellowship more than we want your money!

Rev. Elder Darlene Garner Retires



With gratitude for her long fruitful and faithful service, Metropolitan Community Churches announces the retirement of Reverend Elder Darlene Garner from the staff of MCC, effective January 1, 2018. She also retired her active clergy credentials on the same day. At this time, all concerns regarding her role on denominational staff are mutually resolved between Rev. Elder Garner and MCC.

Rev. Elder Garner was the first African-American to serve on the MCC Board/Council of Elders and the only person of African descent to have served on the Senior Leadership Team. She continues to serve on the Council of Elders.

Rev. Elder Garner gained her clergy credentials in 1988, was first elected to the Board of Elders in 1993, and had served as MCC staff since 1999. Throughout her 29-year clergy career, she held numerous positions, which included being Associate Pastor of MCC Philadelphia, Pastor of MCC Baltimore, Senior Pastor of MCC of Northern Virginia, and Assistant District Coordinator for the former Mid-Atlantic District. She was also the Interim Pastor of Good Hope MCC in Cape Town (South Africa), a member of MCC General Council, Clerk and then Vice-Moderator of MCC, Judicial Officer, and Elder for Region 6 (Arizona, southern California, New Mexico, southern Texas, and Latin America).

In addition, she served on the Elders Task Force on Structures and Systems and the Elders Task Force on Education and was an MCC representative to two General Assemblies of the World Council of Churches (held in Brazil and South Korea). She is also the Founder and Convener of the MCC Conference for People of African Descent, Friends, and Advocates. MCC's Darlene Garner Institute for Ibero-American Leadership Formation was named in honor of her work in Latin America.

Most recently, Rev. Elder Garner served as Director of the Office of Emerging Ministries. In this capacity, she designed the Oasis Program through which individuals across the globe are now being touched by MCC's ministry, the Emerging Church Program that supports the development of new churches and church leaders in all parts of the world, and the Diversity and Inclusion Program. Among other things, the Diversity and Inclusion Program focuses primarily on the full inclusion within every part of MCC of bisexuals, heterosexuals, older adults, people living with HIV/AIDS, people of African descent, people of European descent working against racism, people with disabilities and differing abilities, transgender people, women, and young adults. It also focuses on resourcing churches to address both mental health and women's health.

The plans for her immediate future include gardening and sharing quality time with friends and family, especially with her wife Rev. Candy Holmes. As the founder of Garner Peace, she will conduct mediations and provide consulting services to individuals and organizations in the areas of diversity, leadership integrity, embracing change, strategic planning, and managing conflict.

Black History Month



Black History Month is celebrated annually in the U.S. and Canada in February, as well as in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands in October. It is known as African-American History Month in the U.S. and Black Achievement Month in Canada, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands (as of 2016). It began as a way for remembering people and events in the history of the African diaspora.

David Mathis has this to say: “[W]e welcome Black History Month all the more, when racial tensions nationwide may be at a generational high, in the wake of the Ferguson unrest, viral videos of police brutality (or innocent officers being shot and killed), and a racially charged election cycle. Campaign 2016 repeatedly pushed racial buttons, not only for Mexicans and Muslims, but African Americans. And observances such as Black History Month, even though they can’t do all the work on their own, have a role to play in our healing as a nation.

“Into our racially charged environment, as we stumble forward to see if we will find any balance as we learn to walk under this president, Black History Month meets a need, and presents an opportunity not just for Americans, but followers of Christ.”

(<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/we-need-black-history-month>)

How will you recognize Black History Month? Consider watching “13th,” a Netflix documentary by Ava DuVernay. If you like to read, check out “Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation,” by Jennifer Harvey; “Tears We Cannot Stop: Sermon to White America” by Michael Eric Dyson; “Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God,” by Kelly Brown Douglas; or “Between the World and Me,” by Ta-Nehisi Coates. For more resources, check out MCC’s Black History Month Resources at: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/alysc5uo13ndzsu/2018%20Black%20History%20Month%20Resources%20Final.pdf>

Becoming the Beloved Community by Understanding Racism



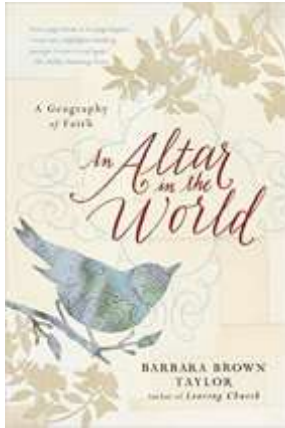
On **Wednesday, February 14**, at 3:00 p.m., St. Albans Episcopal Church (305 N. 30th St.) will host in its Parish Hall “Becoming the Beloved Community by Understanding Racism.” This event aims to foster personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural transformation through story-sharing: offering and receiving stories about racism within our churches, between diverse churches, and beyond the Church.

The film, “Race: the Power of an Illusion,” will be viewed, followed by an open panel discussion. Panelists include Kenneth McNeil, Rev. Alberto Melis, Wesley Lloyd, and Salma Shiren. If you are interested in attending, check out the Facebook event at

<https://www.facebook.com/events/155250408441354/>. Please review the Kaleidoscope Respectful Communication Guidelines in preparation to attend:

<http://www.kscopeinstitute.org/respectful-communication-guidelines/>. You are asked to arrive 15 minutes early to ensure beginning promptly at 3:00 p.m. A free reception and soup supper will be held after the event at 6:00 pm, sponsored by the Province VII Anti-Racism Network, The Episcopal Church. St. Alban's will be holding a 7:00 p.m. Ash Wednesday Service for those interested in attending.

A Lenten Conversation



In Barbara Brown Taylor's book, "An Altar in the World," she reveals meaningful ways to discover the sacred in the small things we do and see, from simple practices such as walking, working and prayer.

You are invited to an after-worship conversation based on excerpts from her book beginning **Sunday, February 18**. It's not necessary to have read the book to participate. The conversations will follow a light lunch in the Social Hall and will take place on alternating weeks in the sanctuary and the in the Social Hall.

Our conversations will explore vision (the practice of waking up to God), reverence (the practice of paying attention), incarnation (the practice of wearing skin), community (the practice of encountering others), and prayer (the practice of being present to God).

Easter Choir Rehearsals



This year, we are especially fortunate to have Megan Talley has agreed to direct a choir in a special music performance for Easter Sunday. Megan received a Bachelor of Music in piano performance at Loyola University, a Masters of Music in piano performance at LSU, and a Master of Divinity in church music and composition at Baylor University. She has experience in jump-starting church choirs.

If you are interested in being a part of the Easter choir that Megan will be directing, then stick around after worship for choir rehearsals beginning **Sunday, February 4**. The rehearsals will follow a light lunch in the Social Hall and will take place on alternating weeks in the sanctuary and the in the Social Hall.