

GABRIEL'S HORN

First Congregational United Church of Christ

February 2018



As we enter Lent: Reflections on Justice and Work

Rev. James D. Ross II
Minister of Justice Formation

The season of Lent – and its culmination with Holy Week, Good Friday and, ultimately, Easter – is my favorite liturgical season. Perhaps that seems odd, given the pain and wrenching nature of the season. Our faith tells us that this is the time that Jesus spent wandering in the wilderness, facing and staring down temptation and moving deeper into his ministry. In the ancient church, it was a time to prepare new Christian converts for baptism and their official entry into community.

The season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, which this year is February 14, and ends on Easter. Most Protestants now see this 40-day period as a time for self-reflection, growing deeper in faith, and engaging in acts and sacrifices that remind us of the life of Jesus. Some people fast. Others give up a habit, shut off the TV or limit their use of social media and technology.

While I think people should practice their faith in the ways that make sense to them, I have never focused on those types of sacrifices for myself. Perhaps it has to do with my personality; in general, I just don't find it that difficult to put the brakes on a habit or give up an indulgence, especially if I know it is only for a while. Given that, it wouldn't feel like giving up much to me. I also want to make sure that I don't use those types of obvious efforts as a way to avoid the work that I feel more especially called to do in this season.

The theologian Walter Brueggemann (and I know I quote him a lot!!!) writes in *A Way Other Than Our Own: Devotions for Lent* of this journey as an "alternative to empire." This is wholly consistent with our faith. We know that throughout his public ministry, Jesus confronted the powers that were oppressing the poor, women, minorities and others. He was such a problem that he was tried as an enemy of the state and crucified, facing the worst, most humiliating and painful execution that was in use.

"Lent is a question, a gift, and a summons," Brueggemann writes. He suggests that Lent offers these questions: What are we doing? Are we working for that which does not satisfy? Are we spending for that which is not bread?

The gifts, he writes, are free. They are gifts that sustain life – the sacraments, as evidenced through wine and milk, water and bread. I believe taken seriously, the sacraments remind us that we are not to be one with empire but one with God and one another.

And the summons of Lent? We must bear new fruit. We must do what is in sync with the God of the gospel

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that we profess. This God calls us to lives of purpose, beyond accumulation, indulgence, and self-aggrandizement. This God calls us to remember the transforming work of Jesus as well as his assertion that we can do even greater works.

This, I think, is why I love this season. Whether we take the Bible literally or use it as other inspiration in our lives, the story of a love so deep that it would sacrifice it all is humbling and at times overwhelming. When the work of creating beloved community gets hard, reflecting on this story helps us remember that the opportunity to do that work is a gift.

So whatever you do to observe the season, I invite you to also join me during these 40 days in thinking of new ways to change our world. Even though political realities, economic and social equality, human unkindness and destruction of the ecology can lead us to feel that all is lost, as Christians, we are imbued with hope, and we know that change happens bit by bit.

This is no great revelation to the First Church community, which continues a long history of working to build God's beloved community. But should you need inspiration, here are some possibilities: join us at the drop-in center, take part in a church conversation, help the sanctuary committee stand up for immigrants, or simply engage differently with our neighbors whom you meet on the street. It doesn't matter if you know them, if they are housed or not, or if you recognize anything of yourself in them. We all share our humanity.

I also invite you to join us on the morning of Ash Wednesday, as we offer ashes to those who pass our church during our second year of "Ashes on the Go." You also might be interested in the Ash Wednesday worship service that day at noon at Lincoln Temple Congregational UCC, where we will participate alongside other local churches. And I certainly hope to see you as First Church hosts its own service that evening at 7:00 PM.

In reflecting on Lent as an alternative to empire, Brueggemann reminds us of these words from Isaiah:

*Ho, everyone who thirsts
Come to the waters;
And you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?*

Our money is valuable, and no less so are our labor and time. We can't use them to purchase God's goodness; that is free at Lent and always. But we can use them in ways that draw us closer to God and one another.

In this season, we are invited to return to our true selves, rather than allowing our culture and all of its allures and attractions to convince us that we are someone other than God's beloved people, called to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God. May our ever-reconciling God grant us courage and strength as we continue the journey. And may we remember always to trust in the mercy, grace and love of God.

Rev. James D. Ross II
Minister of Justice Formation

Care of Parish Commission



February Potluck Luncheon: This Sunday, February 4

Join us in the Community Hall this Sunday, February 4, immediately following worship for a “super” potluck luncheon. Bring your favorite tailgate dish – perhaps some Philly cheesesteaks or some New England clam chowda!



Coffee Hour Hosts:

February 4	Andy Raver	Tory Christensen	Nan McConnell	Nick McConnell
February 11	Carol Malone	Susie Hayward	Joan King	
February 18	Bruce Hanson	Jean Alexander	Faith Brightbill	Karl Gotting
February 25	Mary Alice Ball	Andrew Hamilton	Robert Burns	

Christian Education Commission



Crossing Boundaries Mark 5:25-34

By Sam McFerran, Minister of Faith Formation

Recently, I was running along listening to my “Rock and Roll playlist” on my headphones. After bopping along to “The Eye of the Tiger”, the soft soulful sounds of Sam Cooke entered my ears. For those of you who belong to a younger generation, Sam Cooke was a wonderful gospel and soul singer from the 1960’s and 1970’s. His hit songs include “It’s Saturday Night” and “Twistin’ the Night Away.” (Unlike the other members of my family who listen to the latest pop hits on Fresh FM, I like the oldies.)

Sam Cooke was singing this beautiful song, “Touch the Hem of his Garment.” And while not an adrenaline pumping song, it is a beautiful song that reminded me that Sam Cooke was also a Gospel singer. “Touch the Hem of his Garment” tells the story of Jesus bringing healing to a poor sick woman. (Mark 5:25-34) Coincidentally, this was the same story our youth studied while they were in Baltimore during their Urban Ministry Retreat over Martin Luther King.

This story is about crossing and breaking down boundaries.

The story starts with a poor, sick woman. She’s sick of being sick. So she decides to do something about it. She heard that Jesus was in town. Jesus is in the middle of the big city, leading a huge crowd, and he’s surrounded by his disciples, all of whom are men.

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The first thing she does is she musters up the courage to enter the busy street, navigate her way through the large crowd, approach Jesus, and touch him on the edge of his coat, with the hope that just by touching Jesus, she'll be cured. And amazingly, it works. At the instant she touches his cloak, suddenly she becomes cured. To do so, she had to cross the boundaries of gender, class, and status (as Jesus was understood as a pretty important person).

Jesus stops and looks around and asks "Who touched me?" The disciples, eager for Jesus to continue to lead the crowd, shush him and say, "Jesus, we are in a crowd. There must be many people bumping into you. Let us keep going." Then, the woman for the second time crosses all these boundaries and approaches Jesus. In fear and trembling, she falls at Jesus' feet, thinking that Jesus might be mad or angry that a woman dared to touch him.

Jesus ignores the warnings of the disciples. He stops everything else he's doing in leading the crowd, and he directs his attention to the woman. He sees her. He hears her. He validates her. He, too, crosses boundaries by doing this. And he tells the woman that it was not merely Jesus who healed her, but it was her faith. She lived out her faith by having the courage to come to Jesus to ask for healing.

The theme of both the story and the youth retreat weekend is the importance of challenging and crossing boundaries. What's a boundary? A boundary is something that separates or keeps us apart. In a city, a boundary may be a wall, a fence, or a forest. But, as the story illustrates, people also experience lots of other types of boundaries that separate us from one another. Boundaries could be based on gender, age, appearance, who we love, or how much money we have. All of these are human-made boundaries that separate us from one another. What we need to remember is that God calls us to recognize these boundaries, challenge them, and cross them so we can see, hear, and care for each other as a community.

In your neighborhood, at your school, or in your clubs and teams, what are examples of physical boundaries? What about human boundaries? See if you can work with your parents or friends to identify examples of these boundaries? How is God calling you to cross them?

And if you have time, listen to Sam Cooke sing this wonderful Gospel song, ["https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKADAdCwpYI"](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKADAdCwpYI)

Look out for next month's Gabriel's Horn, as we study this story from a perspective of power.

In hope, faith, and love,

Sam



A Wider Circle: Volunteer Opportunity, February 10, 2-5 PM

Please help make a difference by volunteering with
A Wider Circle on Saturday, February 10, from 2 PM – 5PM.

6 and older are welcome to volunteer. Children 12 and under need an accompanying adult.
Please contact Rev. Sam McFerran if you would like to volunteer.
AWC's location is at 9159 Brookville Road, Silver Spring, MD 20910



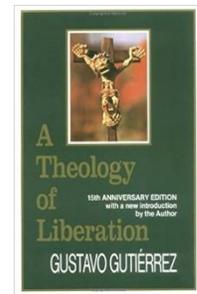
**The American Story
Through the African American Lens
Sunday, February 25 at 12 PM in the Community Hall**

Dr. Dwan Reece’s reflections on her work of telling the American Story based upon her work at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

First Church is so privileged to have our own Dwan Reece share her personal and professional journey at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC). To the world, she is the founding Curator of Music and Performing Arts at NMAAHC, a role she has had since 2009. Prior to her work at the Smithsonian, she was the Senior Program Officer for the National Endowment for the Humanities. Her training is in the arts as she has a Ph.D. in Performance Studies from New York University, a MA in American Culture from the University of Michigan, and a Bachelors in Arts from Scripps College. To us, she is a beloved member of the church and a beautiful soprano. Please join us for this wonderful opportunity.

Theology Reading Group, March 20, 6:30-8:00 PM

Theology Reading Group, March 20, 6:30 to 8. Join us for a discussion the Gustavo Gutierrez’s classic work, *A Theology of Liberation*. For information, please contact Peter Byrne, byrne@law.georgetown.edu. All are welcome.



Worship, Music & Arts Commission



Ushers Needed

Worship Commission continues to be grateful to everyone who has helped with ushering this year. We are currently in need of volunteers for the first three Sundays in February. Please contact Marian Drake if you are able to usher February 4, 11, or 18 or look for the link to the sign-up genius in your email.

Never been an usher before and not sure what to do? Worship Commission will provide written instructions to new ushers and Marian will be available to answer any questions.

Ushers

February 4	Matthew LaGamma	Fredda Sparks
February 11	Volunteer Needed	Volunteer Needed
February 18	Volunteer Needed	Volunteer Needed
February 25	Christ Byrne	David Greer

Join us for Ash Wednesday observances

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of a season of self-reflection, forgiveness and reconciliation. During the 40-day season, we are intentional as we open ourselves up to God and seek to heal our brokenness and restore our relationships with God and one another.

February 14, 8 until 9:30 AM: "Ashes on the Go"

This is the second year we will be in front of our church for **Imposition of Ashes** for Metro riders and others on the street during their commute to work.

UNION ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICE

Wednesday, February 14, 2018

12:00 Noon

Lincoln Congregational Temple

United Church of Christ

1701 11th Street, NW (corner of R Street)

Washington, DC 20001

The Preached Word by Rev. Adalphia Johnson,

Assistant Pastor of Community UCC,

*We extend an extravagant welcome to you, your friends,
and your congregation to attend the Union Ash Wednesday Service.*

*The Union is a community of UCC Churches in Washington, DC that come together in
sisterhood and brotherhood several times a year.*

Refreshments will be served before and after the service.

Ash Wednesday Service: "My Heartbeat"

February 14 at 7:00 PM



We invite you on February 14 to spend time with the Love of your Life—God. "You shall love the Lord Your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." Mark 12:29-30

The Ash Wednesday service will begin our Lenten journey where we will explore "*The Breath of Life*," "*Letting Go*," and "*The Breath of Life*." Worship will engage us in stations—within the sanctuary—as we listen and diagnose our heartbeat, culminating with the imposition of ashes. Come and share in this time of being in tune with your "Heartbeat."

Call to Worship, December 31, 2017

On December 31, 2017, Mike Zawada shared this Call to Worship with the congregation and he has been kind enough to share it with all of us:

The year 2017, how will it be remembered? The year 2018, what does it have in store?

For me, in some ways, 2017 has tested my hope and my faith that things will all turn out okay. There were again shootings and terrorist attacks both home and abroad. There were devastating hurricanes among many other natural disasters around the world. There was persecution and displacement. The talk of nuclear conflict. Insult and injury to the environment, the full consequences of which we might not even imagine. And threats to civic institutions; alarming policymaking and lawmaking; and political leadership that I question whether it is leadership at all and not just recklessness for the sake of self-interest and vanity.

Most of these are not unique to 2017, and maybe I was just paying more attention to the news and current events than I have in other years. But 2017 shook me. It upset me. It sometimes infuriated me.

God, where are you? Have mercy. Help us out.

But there's further reflection to be done. This world has been a scary place before. Jesus was born into a violent and troubled world. And yet hope and life have persisted.

In 2017, in so many challenges, in so many tragedies, there were everyday heroes; protest; people standing up for what is right, taking risks for those beliefs, even while understanding the potential consequences to themselves in those risks. We saw this year, even within our own sanctuary, demonstrations of the power of the people. Unity and solidarity. Institutions tested that held strong. In crisis and tragedy, humanitarian efforts that gave hope and changed lives. Surely, God is with us.

In 2017, speaking personally rather than worldly, I was humbled and somewhat embarrassed at my apparent underestimation of the extent of sexual assault and sexual harassment. This year I was further humbled, learning a lot more about white privilege. But, looking beyond my own self-consciousness, there is clearly hope in the speaking out, the awareness, in conversations that work toward advancing justice, equity, and safety.

Among the other things that have stuck with me in 2017, I can't help but think of those who died this year. Some of them belonged to this church family, others were family or friends outside of this congregation. The death that was most significant for me was that of my Uncle Jerry. It's not an exaggeration to say that he committed his life to social justice. Indignant at any injustice. Humble more than I've ever seen or experienced. Yet fearless in the face of authority and threat. He had a profound impact on my life. And many lives. It was an honor and a blessing to have known and to have learned from him.

So I'm in reflection about 2017.

This sanctuary, this community is a place where I come for reflection, to grow in appreciation and understanding, to be humbled by the enormity, power, and beauty of the creation and universe.

As we approach this demarcation of time, as we contemplate what has been and hope for what will be, we also recognize that this year was but one; and this coming year is but one. And God's love is eternal.

I invite you to be in this place and in this community, to worship and to be in peace.

February 2018 Second Sunday offering on February 11

The Second Sunday offering on February 11 will be split between ThriveDC and Empower DC.



ThriveDC works to prevent and end homelessness by providing vulnerable individuals a comprehensive range of services -- meals, showers, laundry, and more -- to help stabilize their lives. Originally founded and housed at First Church from 1979 to 2009 (when it was known as the Dinner Program for Homeless Women), ThriveDC is comprehensive, professionally staffed, and bilingual, now located at 1525 Newton Street NW. It is unique in providing the last available safety net for people facing economic crisis and housing instability while also providing the first step toward independence for people experiencing extended periods of homelessness. Go to their website at www.thrivedc.org for more information. Here are some excerpts from Executive Director Alicia Horton's mid-2017 report:

We're incredibly busy! More clients are participating in our programs this year. Our women's re-entry and substance abuse programs especially are seeing substantial growth. ... But the big news is how we're stepping up in our greater DC community. We have accepted leadership positions in the Re-entry Action Network, the Women's Service Provider's Network, and the Women's Task Force, which is a temporary committee formed by the Interagency Council on Homelessness.

We've also started the Ward One Network, bringing together nonprofits and churches in our community to discuss how we can work together to better serve our clients. One thing that's really exciting is a discussion we had last month with Councilmember Nadeau's office about a concentrated intervention strategy for areas of concern in Ward One. Thrive DC is spearheading that effort and, if it works, it will offer an interesting model of intervention for other areas of the city that are in trouble.

We are definitely looking at funding fluctuations, and working on how to navigate reduced funding from changes both at the city level and the federal level. Ultimately, these changes could have major impacts on our programs. We're also working with sanctuary organizations to make sure our clients are aware of their rights as immigrants in the new political environment



Empower DC is a city-wide grassroots organization committed to building the power of low-income communities of color to create long lasting, positive change and to counter forces of displacement and gentrification. The organization is actively organizing to save and improve public housing, to ensure all children have access to high-quality neighborhood public schools, to challenge the city's Comprehensive Plan revisions to safeguard citizens' rights from developer overreach, and to support the residents of Ivy City as they improve their neighborhood. Members lead campaigns and public housing tenants serve on the Board of Directors to set the organization's priorities. Empower DC has a relatively modest annual budget of \$350,000. There are no set dues for organization members, but any donation is gratefully accepted. Go to their website at www.empowerdc.org for more info. From their website, here is a selected list of their accomplishments since 2003:

- Won \$21 million increase for DC's Child Care Subsidy Program (June 2005).
- Won passage of a bill mandating a community hearing before public property is sold or given away (December 2009).
- Won approval of law outlining community input process into DC's Master Facilities Plan (May 2010).
- Supported the revitalization and re-launch of the Ivy City Civic Association (2012).
- Won injunction blocking establishment of a polluting tour bus parking lot in Ivy City (December 2012).
- Won \$11 million increase for childcare (May 2013).
- Won \$10 million to support the transformation of Ivy City's abandoned Alexander Crummell School into a community center (Spring 2014).
- Formed the Barry Farm Tenants and Allies Association (BFTAA) to assist Barry Farm (Ward 8) residents with advocating for improvements to their community.
- Stopped the DC Department of Parks and Recreation from shuttering the community's only recreation center and leaving the community without services for a year before the opening of a new one.
- Won "party status" at the DC Zoning Commission and supported resident involvement in zoning hearings.
- Mobilized over 100 public housing and homeless residents to engage in budget advocacy, including over 40 who testified at the City Council for the first time.
- Won the first ever local budget investment in repair and maintenance of public housing – just under \$1 million for fiscal year 2016, and \$15 million in the Mayor's budget for fiscal year 2017.



Social Action and Awareness Lending Library

The Social Action and Awareness Commission is building up a lending library on the shelves in the Living Room. We are starting with books on racism, white privilege, and racial justice, and hope to expand the library to other justice issues

over time. We have two or three copies of more than 20 books for you to borrow. Please borrow them and return them to the Living Room when you're done. Also, please let us know if you have a book you want to donate.

The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing, Joe Feagin, 2013, 225 pp.

White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son, Tim Wise, 2011, 275 pp

Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice, Paul Kivel, 2011, 315 pp

Witnessing Whiteness: The Need to Talk About Race and How to do it, Shelley Tochluk, 2010, 330 pp

Between the World and Me, Ta-Nehisi Coates, 2015. 152 pp

Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption, Bryan Stevenson, 2015, 315 pp

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, Michelle Alexander, 2012, 260 pp

America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America, Jim Wallace, 2016, 225 pp

Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God, Kelly Brown Douglass, 2015, 230 pp

Interrupting White Privilege: Catholic Theologians Break the Silence, Laurie Cassidy and Alex Mikulich, 2006, 190 pp

Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong, James Loewen, 2007, 360 pp

Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability, Mary Elizabeth Hobgood, 150 pp

Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race, Debby Irving, 2014, 288 pp

White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity, 2004, 250 pp

White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack, Peggy McIntosh, 1989, in *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*, ed. Paula Rothenberg, 160 pp

The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor, Patricia Williams, 1992, 270 pp

Learning to be White: Money, Race, and God in America, Thandeka, 2000, 135 pp

The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race, Willie James Jennings, 2010.

The Racial Contract, Charles Mills, 1999.

Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil, W.E.B. DuBois, 1999.

Why are all the black kids sitting in the cafeteria? And other conversations about race. Beverly Daniel Tatum, 2017.

Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants since 1882. Roger Daniels, 2004.

Calendar

Thursday, February 1

7:30 pm Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*

Sunday, February 4

9:15 am Bible Workbench
9:30 am Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*
9:30 am Christian Ed. Comm., *Ed. Suite*
10:15 am Child Care provided, *Ed. Suite*
10:30 am Sunday School, *Ed. Suite*
10:30 am Morning Worship, *Sanctuary*
Audrey Price preaching
11:30 am Potluck Luncheon, *Comm. Hall*
12:00 pm Pastoral Search Comm., *Ed. Suite*

Monday, February 5

6:00 pm Downtown Drop-In Center
for Homeless Youth

Tuesday, February 6

6:30 pm White Privilege Discussion Group,
Chapel

Wednesday, February 7

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation, *Chapel*
6:45 pm Finance Comm., *Chapel*

Thursday, February 8

7:30 pm Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*

Sunday, February 11

9:15 am Bible Workbench
9:30 am Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*
10:15 am Child Care provided, *Ed. Suite*
10:30 am Sunday School, *Ed. Suite*
10:30 am Morning Worship, *Sanctuary*
Audrey Price preaching
11:30 am Coffee & Fellowship, *Narthex*
1:30 pm Brooks Pumphrey Memorial Service,
Sanctuary

Monday, February 12

6:00 pm Downtown Drop-In Center for
Homeless Youth

Tuesday, February 13

6:30 pm Church Council, *Living Room*
6:30 pm White Privilege Discussion Group,
Chapel

Wednesday, February 14

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation, *Chapel*
7:00 pm Ash Wednesday Service, *Sanctuary*

Thursday, February 15

7:30 pm Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*

Sunday, February 18

9:15 am Bible Workbench
9:30 am Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*
10:15 am Child Care provided, *Ed. Suite*
10:30 am Sunday School, *Ed. Suite*
10:30 am Morning Worship, *Sanctuary*
Audrey Price preaching
11:30 am Coffee & Fellowship, *Narthex*
12:00 pm Pastoral Search Comm., *Ed. Suite*

Monday, February 19

6:00 pm Downtown Drop-In Center
for Homeless Youth

Tuesday, February 20

6:30 pm White Privilege Discussion Group,
Chapel
6:30 pm Home for All Task Force, *Comm. Hall*

Wednesday, February 21

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation, *Chapel*

Thursday, February 22

7:30 pm Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*

Friday, February 23

7:00 pm Washington Bach Consort Concert,
Sanctuary

Sunday, February 25

9:15 am Bible Workbench
9:30 am Choir Rehearsal, *Sanctuary*
10:15 am Child Care provided, *Ed. Suite*
10:30 am Sunday School, *Ed. Suite*
10:30 am Morning Worship, *Sanctuary*
Audrey Price preaching
11:30 am Coffee & Fellowship, *Narthex*
12:00 pm Adult Nurture: Dwan Reece,
Community Hall

Monday, February 26

6:00 pm Downtown Drop-In Center
for Homeless Youth

Tuesday, February 27

6:30 pm White Privilege Discussion Group,
Chapel

Wednesday, February 28

12:15 pm Break Away Meditation, *Chapel*



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Ministers – Friends & Members of the Church
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Minister of Faith Formation – Rev. Sam McFerran
Minister of Justice Formation – Rev. James D. Ross, II
Director of Music – Mr. John Horman
Building Manager – Mr. Byron Adams
Administrative Assistant – Ms. Cindy Dobbs
Members in Discernment – Dwight Davis, Lynaya Morris
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