

Worcester African Community Ministry
2018 Annual Report
Rev. John Edgar Freeman, Missioner

Last Annual Report Submitted January 5, 2018

GENESIS TRAINING GROUP

January 29 - February 2, 2018, the Genesis Training Group, an Episcopal Organization, held a workshop in San Antonio, Texas. As the Diocesan Missioner for the Worcester African Community, I attended. Genesis Training offers training to Church Planters and Missioners to learn how to 'use the old way of doing church in a new way.

We learned that today, many people don't come to church. It is, therefore, necessary to take the church out to the people and teach them a new way of worshipping God. One does not have to use the same worship style, but can create new ways to worship. These ways were shared by various speakers and in small groups by the 100 people in attendance.

I believe that worshipping God can take many forms. God is not interested in the buildings where we gather. We, God's people are the Church, not the building. Scripture says, "Ye are the temple of God", (1 Corinthians 3:16-17), not one made by human hands. Church planting and missioner work starts with evangelism. We are all church planters, missioners and evangelist.

BISHOP CYRIL BEN-JONES VISITS

The Worcester African Community Ministry, was asked by Bishop Douglas Fisher to receive and host the visiting Ghanaian bishop, Bishop Cyril Kobina Ben Smith of the Diocese of Asante Mampong, Ghana on a trip to Worcester. The April 26th visit included a guided tour of four Worcester Episcopal Churches for Bishop Cyril, his wife and daughter. Bishop Cyril was accompanied by Bishop Fisher's secretary, Jill Senecal. Bishop Cyril, and his family were first received at St. Matthew Parish by Rev. Mother Nancy B. Strong and Rev. John Edgar Freeman, Diocesan Missioner to the Worcester African Community (WAC). Rev. Mother Nancy, Rector, walked Bishop Cyril and his family through the church and gave them a brief history of the St. Matthew's and its Tiffany windows.

After the tour at St. Matthew, Fr. Freeman took Bishop Cyril and his family to St. Michael on the Heights on Burncoat Street where they were met on arrival by Rev. Fr. Dave Woessner, Rector. Fr. Dave led Bishop Cyril and his wife on a guided tour of the parish, giving them some history of the church as well. Dr. Deborah Harmon Hines, wife of Fr. Freeman, took away the bishop's daughter on a separate tour of Worcester universities and colleges while the bishop and his wife continue their tour with Fr. Freeman.

After the tour at St Michael's, our next and last stop was the St. Luke's Episcopal Church on Pleasant Street. At St. Luke's, we were met on arrival by Rev. Tim Burger, Rector. Rev. Tim then received our visiting bishop and his wife, and led them on a tour and gave brief history of the St. Luke's.

Bishop Cyril gave an exquisite Ghanaian Kente stole as a gift from his diocese to each of the four priests he met.

Bishop Cyril's visit to Worcester was climaxed by a fabulous African banquet held at the All Saints Episcopal Church prepared by the women of the Worcester African Community. All Saint's Senior Warden David Okerlund offered greetings and gave a tour of All Saint's after the dinner. Deacon Beatrice offered grace before the meal. Shelley Yarnie offered greetings from the All Saint's African Diaspora Guild. Mother Nancy gave Bishop Cyril a gift. Father Freeman presented a gift to Bishop Cyril from the Worcester African Community. Deacon Jane Greisbach spoke about the long relationship between the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts, dioceses in Ghana and the Mampong Baby's Home. Bishop Fisher introduced Bishop Cyril, who then made brief remarks. After dinner the entire group entered the sanctuary to take a picture.

The next morning Fr. Freeman and Debbie joined Bishop Cyril, his family, Bishop Fisher and Jill Senecal for breakfast at the Hilton Garden Inn Hotel.

WAC MINISTRY BIBLE QUIZ

The Worcester African Community (WAC) Ministry sponsored its inaugural Bible Quiz Contest for high school students and Essay Competition for college students. These events were intended to engage the young people in the Word of God in a meaningful way and be inspired by the faith we all profess.

The BIBLE QUIZ CONTEST was held on April 8, 2018. The students were asked to read the entire sixteen chapters of the Gospel of Mark, and the questions were based on this. Six High School students from St. Matthew's Parish signed up. They were: Christian Jeffrey Harmon Hines, Jaiden Shekoni, Alisa Jande Gailor, Debren Nimsi Doe, Ryan Walter Rossi and Emily Diane Balden. The Judges were: Bengt Albinson; Augustus Kormah, George Gailor and Festus Konneh. The score keepers were Rev. Meredyth Ward and Staci MacGregor. The questions were drawn up by Rev. Mother Nancy B. Strong and Rev. John Edgar Freeman. There were great excitement and anxiety in the Parish Hall as members of St. Matthew's sat to witness the first time ever Bible Quiz contest.

At the end of the contest, three winners emerged. The First-Place winner was Debren Nimsi Doe, Second Place winner was Jaiden Shekoni; and the Third-Place winner was Ryan Walter Rossi. The prizes were: First Place, \$150; Second Place \$100; and Third Place, \$50.

WAC MINISTRY ESSAY COMPETITION

The essay competition was meant for college students of St. Matthew Parish and All Saint's Episcopal Church, on Pleasant Street. The topic of the Essay Competition was "My experience with Diversity in my Church." The WAC Essay Competition Team was comprised of: Catherine Goodwin (chair); and judges Nancy Smith (St. Matthew's); David Okerlund and Robbin Shrophire (All Saint's). The judges meticulously read through the four essays received with all identifiers removed. The four college students who submitted essays were: Emmanuel Gilbert Freeman, Alexis Shaina Naphtalia Lidonde, Brenda Juah Doe, and Magdelene Deconte Barjolo. The winners of the Essay Competition received their awards on July 8, 2018. Awards are: First Place, \$200; Second Place, \$150; and Third Place, \$100.

Winners of both Bible Quiz and Essay Competition and participants received certificates from the Worcester African Community (WAC) Ministry on July 8, 2018 during our 9:00 am worship service, before the Multicultural Festival.

MOTHER'S DAY, May 13, 2018

On Mother's Day, the Worcester African Community (WAC) ministry, recognized and honored all mothers of St. Matthew's Parish by giving each mother a red rose. Three mothers were selected for special recognition. Flower bouquets were given to Rev. Mother Nancy B. Strong, Rev. Mother Meredyth Ward and Rev. Deacon Julie Butcher.

UNION OF BLACK EPISCOPALIANS 50th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

At the end of July, Debbie and I attended the 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Union of Black Episcopalians (UBE) in Nassau, the Bahamas. Nightly worship services hosted by local parishes began and ended with full police escort for our convoy of buses to and from each church. Every Black Bishop in the Episcopal Church was in attendance. Every service was marked with a full choir, a cadre of well-trained ushers, spirited preaching, incense, liturgical dancers and music from the Island, African and Anglican traditions. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry preached at the opening Eucharist. At the Youth Service Suffragan Bishop Gayle Harris (Massachusetts) co-celebrated with Bishop Julio Murray (Panama), who was installed as Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Central America on August 11th. Debbie and I gave him a ride to the airport when he was running late for his flight to Honduras. Debbie was one of the honorees at the Closing Banquet for her years of service as UBE National President. The meeting's host, the Bishop of the Bahamas, Turks and Caicos, and his wife were our table guests at the Closing Banquet.

WAC MINISTRY DIABETES WORKSHOP

We hope to reschedule the Diabetes Workshop, perhaps on a Sunday immediately after service, hoping that we have people present to attend and benefit from the information of the cause, treatment and effect of this devastating disease. It is our hope and prayer that this program becomes successful as it is very educational and for the general good of those effected by diabetes.

Our profound thanks and appreciation go to Dr. Christine V. Hoogasian, Dr. Deborah Hines, All Saint's Senior Warden David Okerlund, for their effort in preparing and making the hall available for the workshop.

MOTHER NANCY

Rev. Mother Nancy announced her retirement after serving St. Matthew's Parish for seventeen unbroken years and deserves a celebration as such on her exit to retirement. I am very grateful for her support since 2004 for my ministry in Liberia. It has been my pleasure to serve under her. I plan to participate in any planned activities for Mother Nancy. Meanwhile, we as members of WAC need to remind ourselves of the campaign 150. Let us make sure to fulfil our financial obligations and commitment of pledge and the Campaign 150.

MISSIONERS MEETING WITH BISHOP FISHER

On September 19, 2018, I met with the Bishop, Canon Simpson and the other Diocesan Missioners. Bishop Fisher is pleased with the work of the Missioners.

WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS REVIVAL

I am also serving on the WMA Revival Committee in Worcester, and encourage those connected to the Worcester African Community Ministry to attend on October 21, 2108 at 5:00 pm at the Hanover Theater.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Throughout the year, I continued to visit African businesses, churches, and hair salons encouraging those I met to come to St. Matthew's Parish. I also visited places frequented by Africans: Mekong Seafood Market, the Asian Market in Webster Square, Maria's Kitchen on Main Street. I visit African churches and network with African pastors in Worcester. They have warmly embraced me.

During this time, I have supplied at a number of churches in the diocese, discussed the Worcester African Community Ministry and asked their financial support of this ministry. Those churches are:

- All Saint's, Worcester
- Christ Church Cathedral, Springfield
- Christ Church, Fitchburg
- Christ Memorial Church, North Brookfield
- Christ Church, Rochdale
- Grace Church, Oxford
- Holy Spirit, Sutton
- St. John's, Ashfield
- St. Michael's on the Heights, Worcester
- St. Peter's, Springfield
- Trinity Church, Milford
- Trinity Church, North Brookfield
- Trinity, Shrewsbury

When not supplying at other churches, I serve at St. Matthew's at the Wednesday 10:00 am Mass and Healing Service, the Saturday 5:00 pm Mass, and the 8:00 am and 10:00 am Masses on Sunday. My office days are Tuesdays and Wednesdays at St. Matthew's Parish.

Since my appointment is half-time, in order to supplement my income, I work as a Substitute Teacher at Worcester East Middle School, an inner-city school, on Thursdays and Fridays. In this role I meet students from diverse backgrounds: socioeconomic; racial; ethnic; immigrant; refugee; and gender-related. When the students see me in public, they introduce their parents to me, and I invited them to church.

I was asked to conduct *two funeral/committal services for non-St. Matthew's Parish member*. One was for a family from New York who wanted a service at Trinity, Shrewsbury, and committal in the family plot in the Shrewsbury Center Cemetery. The other was a Service of Committal for a Portuguese family at a cemetery in Taunton.

I visited a number of sick St. Matthew's parishioners in the hospital and in the homes.

WORKSHOPS, MEETINGS AND EVENTS ATTENDED BY THE MISSIONER

1. Genesis Training Group, San Antonio
2. 50th Annual Celebration of the Union of Black Episcopalian, Nassau, Bahamas
3. Safe Church Training, September 16, 2018, Good Shepherd, Clinton
4. Completed my second year of monthly Fresh Start meetings
5. CREDO for priest from the African Diaspora,
6. Participate in monthly ECoW meetings and activities
7. Bi-Monthly Worcester African Pastors Group
8. Bi-Monthly Liberian Pastors Group
9. Worcester Police Department Monthly Police-Pastors Partnership

I am very grateful to my wife, Dr. Deborah Harmon Hines, for her support of my ministry. Debbie has also been a source of strength and encouragement to me.

I am appreciative to *our* Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts for supporting the Worcester African Community Ministry.

Blessings, Edgar +
Rev. Fr. John Edgar Freeman
johnedgarfreeman@gmail.com