



A Letter from Our Pastor

*After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning,
Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb....
~ Matthew 28 ~*

Easter 2024

Dear friends ~

Jesus is not on the cross! He's not in the stone-sealed tomb, according to Matthew. ~ He's on the loose! Go tell the others, the angel who appears will tell the two Marys ... "Jesus is going ahead of you."

When the Easter Gospel is proclaimed this year, some ~ perhaps most ~ will focus on a message of eternal life and a promise beyond our earthly existence. What pulls at my heart, though ~ what resonates with me this Easter of 2024, in what we hoped would be the aftermath of a global pandemic, only to be bombarded with newer viruses springing up in major cities like ours, and as the world faces the resurgence of genocidal onslaughts from a small sliver of land in the Middle East to the borders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and places like Sudan; as whatever we conceived the promise of America to be, whether a vision worthy of global aspiration or a great experiment to be emulated, seems to daily be farther and farther from the reach of those for whom Emma Lazarus penned the words, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free," ~ what pulls at my hearts are those words of the Risen Christ, "I go before you," as if to say it's what's ahead of us, not behind us that matters.

Moving forward—always—never turning back or getting stuck in what has happened. There's nothing behind us that can save us or open the door to a better future. That is in front of us. Christ goes before us ~ that's Matthew's message.

In Matthew's view, Jesus' resurrection signals the time when God breaks into the world and challenges us to push forward. Something bigger is happening in Jesus' resurrection, Matthew is saying; something bigger than just one person experiencing eternal life. Those of us who follow the Presence in front of us are moving into a new period of history in which God's reign is unfolding with every step we take forward.

Matthew's story focuses not on describing what happened to Jesus ~ but on what can happen to us, if we will keep our eyes and hearts and spirits attuned to what is always in front of us: the loving and life-giving presence of Jesus the Christ.

The issue guiding Matthew's Gospel is what direction to head in. With the story of the appearances of the Risen Christ, Matthew is saying ~ head in the direction of the one who taught love over every other option—always; the one who taught unending forgiveness—70 times 7; who said the only thing we'll ever be asked about when we are ourselves raised up and stand before the throne of God is how often we fed the hungry or visited the sick and imprisoned.

The point of Matthew's resurrection story is there's always someone in front of us, whose teaching and ways promise a better life for everyone. Follow that one's lead. *(continued on page 2)*

The Query Quarterly/Spring 2024

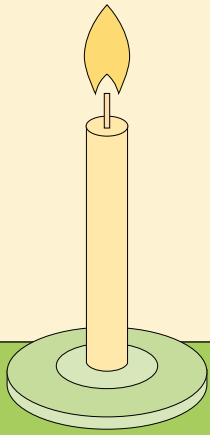
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MCCNY 
METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF NEW YORK

MCCNY is a member of Metropolitan Community Churches, a global movement of faith with congregations in 28 nations. The Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson, Moderator

A Letter from Our Pastor (continued from page 1)

... Four years ago this March, the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic, and our lives as we knew them, much like those of the earliest disciples, were turned upside down. We had to learn how to relate, how to play, how to access health care, how to shop, even how to worship—how to do almost everything—on our own. And to many of us, even to those of us who adjusted well, I think it felt like things would never be the same again ~ that things we centered our lives in were forever gone. Matthew is saying, perhaps somewhat more gently than I am here, what's gone is gone. In another Gospel, an angel will say to the grieving women, "Why look for the living among the dead?" Focus on what's right in front of you: a Presence that promises to lead you into a future that holds nothing but hope and possibility.



We must always push forward, if for no other reason than we cannot have a better past. There is always the promise of a better future, because Christ goes before us. And that is the Good News we will be celebrating as the Church Alive this Holy Week and Easter. I hope you will be here.

With love,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink.

The Rev. Elder Pat Bumgardner

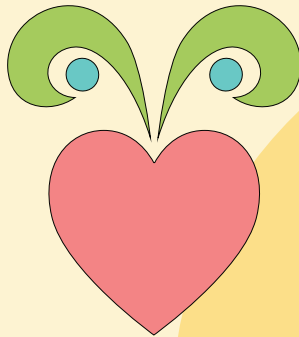
A Letter from the Editor

In preparing to write my letter for this edition of *The Query*, I found myself struggling to find something to say that felt both hopeful and authentic. Then, I remembered a poem I wrote several years ago that opened with a line about Easter. I found this poem on my computer, reread it, and discovered that it still gives me hope, despite the passage of time. So, I want to share it with you, acknowledging the limits of my own prose at the moment. May hope guide you this Easter.

With love,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink.

Frances Wood



Procession

On Easter night, I am the duty that carries me,
the flame moving me down the aisle.

My mother lit candles for my father
as he rewired the shed.

Who, then, is the maker?
Oh, great mystery.

As a child, I found the flashlight
when the fuses blew.

My face like a swelling skirt in the
mirror beneath the glow,

clearing the space for this short dream:
a woman silhouetted against a dip in a ridge

not clothlike, but patient and substantial,
drawing faces in the sand, waiting for me.

THE QUERY

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Sunday Worship Services at 9 am (Traditional), 11 am (Celebration)

On TV in Manhattan: Sundays 1:30 p.m.,
Time Warner channel 57, RCN channel 85

Rev. Jim Honored as Trauma Chaplain

On Friday night, August 4, 2023, at around 11:00, two Orlando police officers were shot while on duty in downtown Orlando. The officers were quickly placed in the back of another police cruiser and rushed to the Level One Trauma Center at Orlando Regional Medical Center, where Rev. Dr. Jim Merritt was on duty as the Trauma Chaplain. Through the efforts of the entire Emergency Room staff, including physicians, nurses, and many others, and after long hospital stays, both officers survived their injuries. Chaplain Jim, as he is known there, coordinated the hospital's work that night with the police department, the Chief of Police, and the many family members and colleagues of the injured officers.



On Wednesday, March 6, 2024, the entire Orlando Regional Medical Center Emergency Room staff received the Orlando Police Department's Life Saving Award for their efforts on that night. Rev. Dr. Jim says, "We are always prepared for whatever rolls in the door of our trauma center. It was our honor

to take care of these law enforcement officers and their colleagues. While it's nice to be recognized, just knowing they lived through this terrible tragedy is all the reward we need."

(photo by Orlando Police Department)



Rev. Brett at the Vatican *by Joe Kennedy*

Rev. Dr. Brett Degoldi attended the Pope's Christmas Eve Midnight Mass at St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City and discreetly snapped this picture at the end of the Mass as the Pope prepared to have a statue of the newborn Baby Jesus placed in the crèche near the altar. This came just days after Pope Francis, heeding the Holy Spirit and rebuffing anti-LGBTQ hatemongers, issued an historic official document authorizing Roman Catholic priests to bless Lesbian and Gay same-sex couples. Thanks to his Metropolitan Community Churches clerical collar, Rev. Brett was escorted to a good (second pew!) seat along with other non-Catholic Christian clergy, including several Anglican priests he befriended while waiting to enter the basilica for Midnight Mass.



~ HONORING NEX BENEDICT ~

Rev. Pat, Isabella, Mary Elizabeth Poole, Lyndsey McAdams, and Annie Crowley (*photographer, not pictured*) attended a vigil at Stonewall for Nex Benedict, a transgender Oklahoma high school student who died the day after being beaten by three girls in a school bathroom. GOP representatives in Oklahoma have fostered a culture of transphobia, sponsoring over 50 anti-LGBTQI+ bills in the state legislature. Further, the state superintendent of instruction, Ryan Waters, has denied the existence of trans and nonbinary people while working hand-in-hand with the hideously bigoted influencer Chaya Raichik to actively endanger LGBTQI+ students across the state. Waters and the Owasso Police Department were quick to shield Nex's attackers from blame and later released a highly suspect autopsy report, which made no mention of the injuries Nex suffered from the attack. Nex's adoptive mother has called the Owasso Police Department's report a "big cover" and is joined by the leaders of HRC, GLAAD, and many other LGBTQI+ organizations in demanding independent investigations by the DOJ and DOE as well as Waters' removal from office.



What Black History Month and Being Black Means to Me

by Joshua Cherry-Holmes

Hello Church, I am Joshua Cherry-Holmes, and I would like to talk to you about what Black History Month and what being Black means to me.

Being Black means a lot to me because being Black means being rich. Rich in culture, rich in education, rich in life experience. Black history month is the month designated to celebrate all these riches, but honestly I, and all of us should celebrate every day.

Two examples I would like to talk about for being rich in culture is food and music. Food is very important to us. It is always made with love and creativity because we didn't have the best of the best for ingredients, but what we did and still do is so delicious and rich! Like my mom's macaroni and cheese and fried chicken, yum! Part of cooking is us sitting and eating together sharing stories and our love for each other.

Music is another example I would like to talk about. Jazz is a genre that was created here in the United States by African Americans in New Orleans, Louisiana. It was started in the late 1890's. Some of the most famous jazz musicians lived here in NYC in the 1920s like Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, and Duke Ellington. That time period was known as the Harlem Renaissance which was a cultural revival of Black music, dance, art, and literature centered just a few train stops north of us in Harlem.

Black people have amazing minds. For example, Phillis Wheatly was an enslaved African and came to America when she was only 7 years old. Despite her age she was able to learn English in only 16 months from when the ship she was on landed in Boston. Other examples include Katherine Johnson, who is a Black woman that rechecked the computer calculations for the Friendship 7 mission. Also Garrett Morgan, who created the 3 light traffic system that is used to this day, while he only had an elementary school education.

I think the most important reason why I love being Black is life experience. Let's face it, the institution of slavery was not set up for us to thrive as a people, its intention was for oppression and eventual annihilation. But here we are some 400+ years later, still contributing to the culture, still contributing to education, and still contributing to life experiences. Collectively we are creative geniuses that always found a way out of no way, even when the law was NOT on our side. Think about Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad, think about Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X and the Civil Rights Movement. Think about Ruby Bridges, Thurgood Marshall, and school integration.

Being Black hasn't been easy and it still isn't easy, but I wouldn't have it any other way. I stand before you, a Black and Japanese 13-year-old boy and I and my ancestors couldn't be more proud. Happy Black History month, this month and EVERY MONTH!

Thank you.



Cecilia Ministered to All by Sam Davis

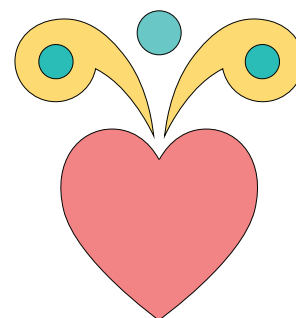
Over 1,000 people came together at St. Patrick's Cathedral on Thursday, February 15th, to celebrate the life and eternal legacy of Cecilia Gentili: Mother, activist, artist, storyteller, performer, and trans icon. During the service, Rev. Edward Dougherty remarked that he does not typically see St. Patrick's "turned out like this" except on Easter Sundays: a statement met with snaps, laughs, and cheers from everyone in attendance. The fierce looks adorning each pew and the plentiful red flowers laid gently on the altar were a physical tribute to the beautiful and joyous impact of Cecilia's life, art, and activism.

During a eulogy, founder and executive director of G.L.I.T.S., Ceyenne Doroshow, said, "Y'all may have heard the story that Jesus ministered to all... Cecilia ministered to all." As part of the service, and much like our beloved Saint Sylvia Rivera, Cecilia was honored and crowned by her loved ones and the broader trans and queer community as Saint Cecilia, Madre de la Putas, for her unrelenting love and organizing for trans and sex workers' rights. Outbreaks of "Cecilia! Cecilia! Cecilia!" echoed throughout the sanctuary with every hard truth each eulogist offered in Cecilia's spirit, such as calls for gender-affirming healthcare and affordable housing.

As the press coverage of the LGBTQ+ star-studded event spread, so did controversy. In response to accusations from some Catholics that Cecilia's funeral should not have occurred at St. Patrick's, the Archdiocese of New York released a statement condemning the celebration of Saint Cecilia's life. Claiming that the Church only knew that the funeral was for a practicing Catholic, the statement lamented, "That such a scandal occurred at 'America's Parish Church' makes it worse; that it took place as Lent was beginning, the annual forty-day struggle with the forces of sin and darkness, is a potent reminder of how much we need the prayer, reparation, repentance, grace, and mercy to which this holy season invites us." The statement closed with St. Patrick's agreeing to hold a Mass of Reparation, as requested by the Cardinal.

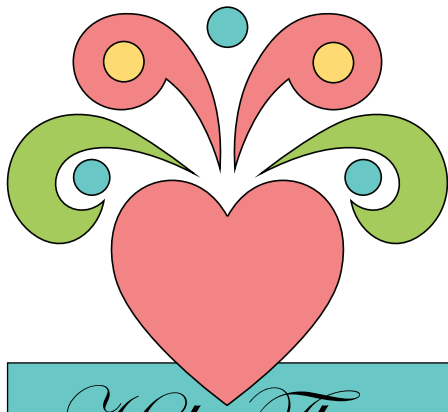
Of course, this is a profoundly incomplete way of understanding religion at the expense of the lives of LGBTQ+ people of color. Some Catholics also wrote and published defenses of the celebration of Saint Cecilia. Jessica Gerhardt and Arend Lee Jessurun wrote for the National Catholic Reporter that the Archdioceses "reflects a poverty of imagination regarding how the church might integrate queer culture and symbolism within a Catholic liturgy in a way that holds sacred both tradition and LGBTQIA+ dignity." However, Cecilia's chosen family and loved ones refused and resisted the Church's trans- and queerphobic response. Doroshow, in a press conference responding to accusations that she deceived the Church, clearly stated, "I did not dupe the Church, I did not tell them her gender orientation, I did not have to. You do not need to know what is in between her legs to respect her wishes or to respect her proper funeral."

To learn more about Saint Cecilia's life and legacy, check out her interview with the NY Trans Oral History Project, or read her book *Faltas*, and take action for trans and sex workers' rights with organizations like G.L.I.T.S, Trans Aylas, NY Transgender Advocacy Group, and more. If you would like to see the memorial bulletin or other materials handed out at Saint Cecilia's Celebration of Life service, please ask Sam or email them at dykearchivist@gmail.com to set up a time to visit with these materials (which are now a part of the MCCNY archives!).



The left side of the altar space featured photographs of Saint Cecilia and artwork created in her honor.

The right side of the altar space had photographs of Saint Cecilia surrounded by red flowers. The only requests of attendees for the service were to "bring red flowers" and to "serve cunt."



Easter

at MCCNY!

Holy Thursday, March 28th at 7pm
Foot Washing Service with The Rev. Dr. Brett Degoldi

Good Friday, March 29th at 7pm
Stations of the Cross and Reading of the Passion
+ Carolyn Traore and MCCNY Choir!
+ The Rev. Gale Jones, preaching

Holy Saturday, March 30th at 7pm
Easter Vigil and Lighting of the New Fire
+ Carolyn Traore and MCCNY Choir!
+ The Rev. Kristen Orion, preaching

Easter Sunday, March 31st
One service at 11am!
+ Carolyn Traore and MCCNY Choir!
+ The Rev. Pat Bumgardner, preaching
Gala Reception and Easter Egg Hunt for Children!

