



We Must Have Each Other's Backs

The following is an excerpt from a speech the Rev. Elder Pat Bumgardner delivered at a ceremony honoring Rev. Gale Jones on December 10th.

When I was in Cuba about a month ago, as I stepped off the plane, the first thing the folks meeting me said was “what happened?”—meaning in our national election—and the second thing was: “The United States is the laughingstock of the world.”

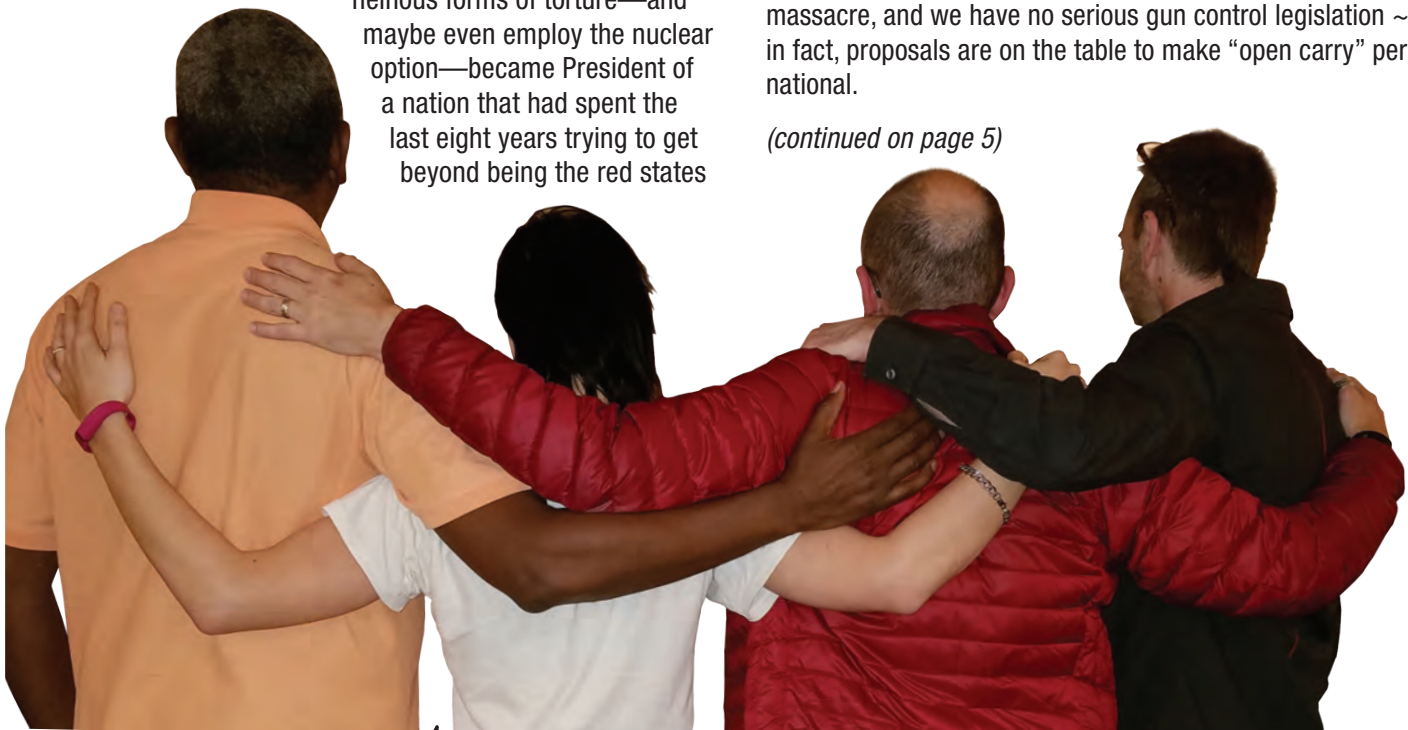
There is a sense in which I feel like I don't know what happened—how could a system designed to give slaveholders more power in this country still be in place and used to override the popular vote? There is another sense in which I am very clear about what happened. What happened is that a system originally designed to give slaveholders more power prevailed. And so a race-baiter, a man who refused to denounce the KKK, a chronic liar, tax evader, and sexual predator, a misogynist who has promised to dismantle health care and leave at least 20 million people with no reasonable alternative, promised to target Muslim Americans for surveillance, promised to build a wall on the border with Mexico and deport human beings to certain danger and suffering, promised to ignore the Geneva Conventions and use

heinous forms of torture—and maybe even employ the nuclear option—became President of a nation that had spent the last eight years trying to get beyond being the red states

and the blue states, to become the United States—a nation that, though still deeply mired in racial animosity and unexamined bigotry, saw a President publicly mourn the loss of a young black child in a hoodie, as if he were his own, and so began the process of self-examination. A nation that sent a woman into some of the most violent and hostile places on the face of the earth, to represent us as Secretary of State; a woman who stood before the United Nations in Geneva to declare simply, eloquently, and unequivocally ~ “gay rights are human rights.”

What happened was what happens when you don't deal with an open wound ~ when black lives matter so little that an African-American man running away from a white law enforcement officer can be shot in the back and killed under the auspices of self-defense. When women are so disenfranchised that men can seriously propose criminalization as a response to birth control choices. When children in North Carolina can be told they can carry race to school to use in case a trans child enters the bathroom ~ and the man who will apparently hold the seat of Vice President proposes that trans people simply use the bathroom before leaving home as a solution. Over 400 thousand people have been injured or killed with firearms in this country since the Sandy Hook massacre, and we have no serious gun control legislation ~ and, in fact, proposals are on the table to make “open carry” permits national.

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MCCNY 

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF NEW YORK

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446 West 36th Street | New York, NY 10018 | Phone: (212) 629-7440 | info@mccny.org | www.mccny.org

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- 2 - **A Christmas Message from Our Pastor**

*There will be no gloom for her that was in anguish...
In the latter time, God will make glorious the way of the sea...
The people who walked without light, have seen a great light...
~ Isaiah 9*

“Aleppo’s Faces Beckon to Us, to Little Avail”—“Philippines’ President Boasts of Killings”—“Record Homelessness Hits a High Rent City”—“Terrorism Suspects had Mainstream Lives”—“Malaysian Dissident Loses Bid for Freedom”....

These are the headlines, my friends, that we fall asleep to every night, and that greet us with each morning’s awakening.

As I write, I want—I think we all want and desperately need to find the hope in this season—the promise of gloom and gore lifted from us, and some light shining at the end of the long and dark tunnel much of 2016 was for many in our world.

I want some hope. So here it is: A child entered this world as it was/as it is some 2,000 years ago, championing love and goodness over greed and terror. A child was born to the tune of angels singing about peace in a world decidedly and doggedly enshrined in unrest and hostility.

“Christmas,” writes Eugene Kennedy, “tells us that God entered the world as it is.” Love thrives on the imperfection, he says.

That 10-year-old child, Yazmeen Kaimouz, already an orphan in Eastern Aleppo, broadcasting before a war-weary world with other orphans in tow, “We wish you get us out of here. We want to live like everybody else,” holds our hope. Every parent who’s ever worried for their child’s future, like Mary and Joseph did, or had to flee a dangerous government as they did; everyone who’s ever lived at the margins of what the world labels acceptable, as Jesus

himself did—all of us, born into this world as it is, so ripe for love and mercy, care and generosity, are each other’s best hope simply because we offer each other the chance to love the way God first loved us.

Hope, as we’ve quoted a priest named Ernest Ferlita saying, is what happens when love finds you. —So, what are any of us waiting for? Let love find you, so that the hope we all need right now can happen. Do something you don’t normally do, just for love’s sake.

*Buy an extra gift for a young person at Sylvia’s or a child in the Food Pantry, even if the toy drive is over!

*Make a donation to a hospital that turns no one away and treats all children who are ill for free (they still exist!) or Doctors Without Borders or an organization that serves wounded veterans or one that shelters abandoned animals.

*Volunteer one Thursday morning downstairs on the first floor, and be amazed at how far a warm embrace and a few cans of food can go in creating goodwill among all.

Hope isn’t lost, ever—even if sometimes we are. Get found by love this season and keep hope alive. Come home to the house love built almost 45 years ago and has sustained through thick and thin. That part inside you that really needs to find the promise of this season will be glad you did—and you just may find yourself singing with the angels, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and joy, goodwill and hope for all of us.”

With love,


Rev. Elder Pat

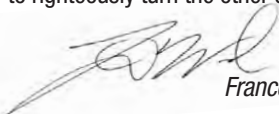
Dear Family,

The past month has been more disorienting and gut-wrenching than any I can remember. As someone who deeply loves Hillary Clinton and was so ready to share in her victory and to live in a country that she was guiding, I feel like the sinking feeling of the current reality will never end. As Les observed, it feels as though we have slipped into an alternate reality.

The night of the election, Les and I were at Hillary’s rally at the Javits Center, and when the atmosphere got too foreboding to bear, we walked the two blocks to church, sat in the sanctuary, lit a candle, and prayed. It was a refuge when we desperately needed it.

Church is the place where I have learned that we are saved through relationships. I don’t know exactly what the future holds, but I know that we have to challenge each other to be braver than we have ever been. Church is where I have gained the tools, the language, the faith to challenge bigotry, and where I am reminded, again and again, that Jesus said to turn the other cheek, which does not mean—as some would say—that we accept abuse, but instead that we stand up and face our challengers and demand to be treated as the children of God that we are. Now is the time to hold each other accountable to the standards set by Sylvia Rivera, who demanded that the movement for LGBTIQ rights never, ever throw trans people—or any member of the community—under the bus in order for the rest to get ahead.

None of us has a completed playbook for what to do next, but I know, as Russian journalist Masha Gessen (who MCCNY honored at last years’ Easter banquet, and whose words have been invaluable to me post-election) says, that we have to be willing to be outraged. “It is no fun to be the only hysterical person in the room,” she writes, “prepare yourself.” I look at coming to church as essential preparation, and as a way to hold myself to my promise to contribute to resistance with the skills that I have. For me, one of those skills is writing, and in the coming year I will hone this skill by going back to school. As a community bound by our commitment to diversity and justice, I believe we can devise a plan of concrete action that allows us to challenge bigotry, and to righteously turn the other cheek. That is what I will hope for this Christmas.


Frances Wood

Letter from the Editor

The QUERY

Editor Frances Wood
Graphic Design and Layout Editor Les LaRue
Staff Photographer Dallas Phelps
Contributors Robert Daniel Arnau, Mike Easterling,
Rev. Edgard Francisco Danielsén-Morales,
Iris Rodriguez

Metropolitan Community Church of New York
446 W. 36th St., New York, NY 10018
(212) 629-7440 • www.mccny.org

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11 a.m. (celebration), and 5 p.m. (praise & worship)

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Time Warner channel 1997, RCN channel 84

Stewardship Update!

by Mike Easterling

Stuff the Stocking 2016!

MCCNY's annual end of the year fundraising campaign is back with the goal of raising \$45,000 by January 8, 2017. Why \$45,000? Well, MCCNY is celebrating its 45th anniversary on Epiphany Sunday and we are looking to go into our 45th year with steady footing. As of the writing of this column near the fourth Sunday in Advent we were half way to our goal! Help us reach our goal and support our mission and work by making a donation today with the envelope included in this Query or online by visiting www.easytithes.com/mccny Thank you for your generous support of MCCNY and this vital annual fundraiser.



Gratitude: At this time of the year, we are all thinking of what we are grateful for and I am particularly grateful for all who have volunteered or donated this year at MCCNY and MCCNY Charities. Without your support and generosity we would not be able to accomplish what we do and we are forever grateful. Thank you for an inspiring year of generosity and I look forward to sharing 2017 with you.

With an abundance of thanks and love, *Mike*

Picture our Generosity

Stewardship Month 2016

MCCNY spoke about stewardship and pledging this year through images and pictures. As a church family we discussed where we have been, where we are now, and where we are going. Through a journey series, testimonies, sermons, weekly announcements, and a wall of snapshots, MCCNY found new ways to discuss and reflect on stewardship and the role it plays in our lives and the life of our church. Stewardship month culminated in Pledge Sunday on November 20th where the clergy, pastoral staff, and board made public their intentions to pledge and support MCCNY before the congregation made their pledges for 2017. The Board of Directors prepared and served a pasta luncheon as a thank you for the outpouring of support for stewardship month and for a chance to come together and celebrate our blessings over a meal. Thank you to all MCCNyers who made pledges for 2017. It is not too late to make your pledge if you have not yet done so. Email me at mike@mccny.org to make arrangements.

Credit & Debit Card Giving has never been easier!

Options abound!



- ▶ Sign up for one time or recurring giving at www.easytithes.com/mccny
- ▶ Donate with just one swipe at our new giving kiosk located at the entrance to the sanctuary
- ▶ Donate by text message by sending any numerical amount to 646-681-7445
- ▶ Email Mike Easterling to have credit giving setup for you

Save the Date!

Join Rev. Elder Pat Bumgardner and Metropolitan Community Church of New York as we celebrate our 45th Anniversary on Epiphany Sunday, January 8, 2017! We will celebrate with services at 9 am, 11 am, and 5 pm. There will be a special anniversary luncheon at 12: 30 pm at The Houndstooth Pub, 520 Eighth Avenue between 36th and 37th streets. Come and share a meal and stories of our time together over the years. Tickets are \$25 and scholarships are available. Please contact Mike Easterling at mike@mccny.org to reserve your spot today. Come and celebrate our 45 years as a church family!

The Faces of MCCNY



In September, MCCNY Charities welcomed a group of social work students from Universität Vechta in Lueneberg, Germany. MCCNY Charities has a long-standing relationship with the social work faculty at the university who coordinate a biannual trip to New York City with their students to learn about social services in the U.S. As always, the visit was warm and productive. Students toured the shelter and sat down with Charities staff to discuss LGBTQI youth homelessness. Thank you to Bettina Motschmann for coordinating another great visit, and for all the students and faculty that made the day so special.



MCCNY celebrated the diversity of sexual expression on Leather Sunday. The yearly service includes a procession of the flags of the Leather and Bear communities.



Choir member Sylvester McCracken grooves on the saxophone during an 11 am service.



Rev. Elder Pat Bumgardner serves food to guests during Community Dinner. The dinner is held the last Tuesday of every month at 5:30 pm on the ground floor, and all are welcome to join us!

MCCNY marked World AIDS Day with an ecumenical service. The service included the lifting up of the names of those lost to AIDS and acknowledging the work that still needs to be done to end AIDS worldwide.

Longtime MCCNY member Tressie Carter was baptized on November 27th at the 11 am service. Congratulations, Tressie!



We Must Have Each Other's Backs

by the Rev. Elder Pat Bumgardner

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We may not know who the next White House resident really is, since he seems to change his presented position more frequently than ~ what ~ a hummingbird flaps its wings in 60 seconds or a chameleon changes colors going from dirt to grass. But this we do know: it is a very big mistake not to take what is being said and proposed seriously ~ the *New York Times* is on record as saying some 80 or so years ago in the 1930s that Adolf Hitler's stance on Jewish people—his anti-Semitism—was all puff. And then 6 million people, not to mention the Roma and the Queers and the political dissidents, died. And a world went to war. And apparently learned very little, as Germany prepares once again to ban face-coverings of certain women of faith and Russia rattles its sabers on the Ukrainian border and a Syrian demagogue kills, bombs, and gasses his own people.

We all know what the issues are and how urgent the moment is ~ the question is: what shall we do? And before we ask ourselves what is the right or wrong thing to do, ask this: what's the moral thing to do? The first thing morality demands we all must do is renounce denial and escapism ~ "I can't watch the news anymore," so many people have said to me. But Jesus's command at advent is: watch! Keep awake! All it takes, as they say, for evil to win is for good people to do nothing. Pay attention to what is going on ~ don't let rudeness, racist jokes, off-color remarks go unchallenged. Act up! Fight back! That was the mantra that mobilized a generation and saved many of the lives in this room. None of us can afford the luxury of zoning out.

Make the connections. Build alliances. If we made one mistake in the early days of AIDS, it was allowing ourselves to be categorized as a gay movement. Much, much too late we included the need for culturally appropriate education and care—both domestically and internationally—and never did we really solve or address the global reality of what we face, which is why 39 million people still died last year of a disease we could have under control if the fight to end AIDS was universal and included things like clean water and needle exchange programs instead of pogroms, and condoms instead of castigation and all that goes with the dehumanization of women.

Care about things like free press. ~ 40 journalists have been killed this year—and many others sit in jail cells for reporting what powerful leaders did not want people to know. ~ You may not think that is a problem here, but there is no law that says the White House must hold press briefings and we have already seen how the man-who-would-be-king treats those who disagree with him or picture him in a less-than-favorable light. Freedom of the press is a defense against xenophobia, against warmongering, against Queer-bashing. Information empowers us. 60% of the adults in this country get their "news" from the internet, which means that much of what they are reading is fake—and designed only to increase the number of hits to a site ~ it is driven by profit, not truth.

Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free, said the prophet we've given our lives to.

A patriot, said William Sloane Coffin, is someone willing to have a lover's quarrel with their country. Love is not a sentiment; it is a way of life ~ a way that, as the Pope has said, builds bridges not walls; a way that understands mercy and compassion as the foundation of greatness.

Social action in the post-electoral context will have to take seriously the original motto of this country: *e pluribus unum*/out of many one—will have to take seriously the truth of King's admonition that we live together or we die together.

And we do not live together by compromising our beliefs in human equality and the value, dignity, and worth of each life. Looking for the good we can do in an evil system is not the way of the cross that Jesus called us to embrace. Compromise is not the answer. ~ Being willing to stand against what dehumanizes some while lifting up others and standing for what elevates us all is what Jesus gave his life for. *Black lives matter* must become the rallying cry for every person of conscience and good will. The dismantling of the prison-industrial complex, which President Obama took steps to initiate, must become a Queer rights issue. Social justice in the post-electoral climate must become intersectional ~ we must have each other's backs.

The foolish person built a house upon the sand, and the wise upon rock, the Gospel we've read and reverence says.

And most people take "rock" to mean Jesus the Christ—but here's the thing ~ Jesus himself will say, "It's not those who say to me 'Lord, Lord,' who will enter the reign of heaven, but those who hear the word of God and do it."

To profess the faith in Christ that you and I share is to build our lives, our nation, and our world on the solid rock of the values and principles and core beliefs he taught and practiced—beliefs and practices that left no room for complacency and called everyone to the practice of solidarity. Standing Rock is our example today ~ people of many tribes and cultures digging in for what they really believe in.

We are not the people from whom this nation needs to be recovered. We ~ Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Sikhs, Muslims, atheists and agnostics, black, white, Latinx, Asian, old and young, intersex, trans, Queer and straight, rich, poor and barely making it, housed and homeless, healthy and struggling to regain health—are the people to whom this country belongs. That statue at the end of Manhattan still means something—and its clarion call is to stand together.

We, our lives, the safety of our children in schools (whether the presenting issue is the public education to prison pipeline and policing of kindergartners or bullying of gay kids and excluding trans children from full participation), our safety in public places like bathrooms are not "boutique issues," but Human Rights issues, and therefore related to dismantling the gun lobby, restoring community-based policing practices, building grocery stores with fresh produce not waste disposal facilities in underserved communities, increasing the number of sanctuary cities, protecting free speech, upholding the rights of workers to organize, and preserving the Affordable Care Act—the only option for health care that 20 million of us have.

What will protect and serve and make a way out of no way for a future bright with promise for all of us is standing together for the things that protect and serve us all. Social activism in the post-electoral era is about solidarity ~ the moral imperative of the Gospel we preach and have given our lives to.

You're Making Magic Happen!

Your generosity is making this holiday season a very special one for the youth of Sylvia's Place! This year, MCCNY Charities' staff invited the community to help us make our holiday "goals" a reality. We introduced these goals by e-mail and community members were encouraged to help out in the ways they could. Goal #1 was to replace the shelter refrigerator. The fridge we have used for years recently broke and the youth had nowhere to store their snacks and beverages. Nine minutes after sending the e-mail, we received the funds to purchase the refrigerator!

For Goal #2, we invited individuals to fill the youth's holiday stockings by purchasing items from our Target wish list. Our stalwart supporters from the online community "Knitters for Sylvia's" had already crafted handmade stockings for the youth, we just needed to fill them! From gift cards to Harry Potter socks to razors and makeup, you came through in a big way! Within a week of asking for your help, nearly every item on the list had been purchased.

Goal #3 was a bit more physical. We scheduled a "sprucing up" day at Sylvia's Place on Sunday, December 18th and asked you to volunteer to paint and clean the pantry space. The result was a phenomenal effort by volunteers, including members of MCCNY's Young Adult Meetup group, resulting in newly painted walls in the shelter and front bathroom!

Goal #4 is an invitation to become a Fabuloso Fairy, MTA Mermaid, or Laundry Leprechaun! By committing to make a monthly donation to MCCNY Charities you can help us keep the shelter clean (\$10), provide metrocards for youth (\$22), or ensure the youth have clean laundry (\$60). To keep the magic of the season going in 2017, e-mail Frances at frances@mccny.org to find out how you can sign up or to learn about other ways you can help the Charities continue to provide a safe space for homeless LGBTQI youth! Thanks to everyone who has made this our most joyful holiday season yet!



GJI Builds Bridges in Cuba

by Frances Wood

The lifting of the travel ban between the U.S. and Cuba has opened up exciting potential partnerships between the Global Justice Institute and Human Rights groups on the island. With the opening of Cuba's borders has come an influx of fundamentalist missionaries, making it that much more important to support groups on the ground who are inclusive and committed to sharing God's love for all people. In November, Rev. Elder Pat Bumgardner traveled to Matanzas, Cuba to meet with a congregation that is in the process of becoming an MCC. Matanzas is located about an hour and a half outside of Havana and, like the rest of Cuba, is characterized by the cars and architecture of the 1950s—a reminder of the history of this community.

Despite years of government-sanctioned persecution of LGBTQI people—including internment, compulsory psychological testing, and forced labor—Cuba is home to a number of ambitious LGBTQI and HIV/AIDS organizations. The congregation in Matanzas not only serves as an affirming spiritual center, but also works directly with a local organization caring for orphans with HIV/AIDS. GJI plans to partner with the congregation to purchase a house that will serve as a meeting place for the church and a hub for community organizing.

Matanzas is also home to an ecumenical seminary that could offer interesting opportunities for potential MCC clergy. The seminary could serve as a training ground for those aspiring clergy members in Central America who are barred from the more conservative seminaries in their home countries and might also provide a route to a low-cost Masters of Divinity for those from the U.S. who are fluent in Spanish or who are willing to learn the language.

GJI and MCC's work in Cuba is not limited to the projects in Matanzas. On December 10th—International Human Rights Day—Rev. Robert Griffin represented GJI at the opening service of the first MCC in Havana.



(Photo by Iris Rodriguez)

It remains to be seen, said Rev. Pat, what effect the influx of investors and the influence of U.S. politics will have on the people and organizations in Cuba, where the income provided by the government to each citizen averages \$25 a month (though most supplement this income with the tips they receive from tourism jobs), education through college is free, and compliance with medical visits is government-enforced.

Despite these differences between Cuba and the U.S., Rev. Pat received a warm welcome, and met many Cubans who expressed a kind of pan-American unity not often voiced in the United States. The belief, said Rev. Pat is that "America (including Central, South, and North) is a people who have been separated by political ambitions and governments, but that we really belong together as one." Many people she met expressed deep concern about the recent election, to which Rev. Pat responded: "this election could easily jeopardize the last 40 years of work."

"In one way they were shocked that I said that," she said, "but as a people who have themselves been struggling for the past 40 years, there was a sense in which they got it."

Lamenting and Hoping: Programming in the New Year ^{- 7 -}

by Rev. Edgard Francisco Danielsen-Morales

In the midst of the political turmoil in the USA, wars and famine and destruction around the world, and the rise of neoliberalism and supremacy ideologies that destroy the fabric of our humanness, it is important for us to remain faithful to the values of the commonwealth of God: All of God's creation is beloved by God (reality) and affected by racism, classism, transphobia, and other "isms" (ideologies) within our community and in the world. In addition, we are called to see reality as it is, and use words and images that convey our pain and hurt and fear, i.e. the walls of denial must come down. Finally, we are called to hope, a hope upon which new generations will be able to stand, or as Reinhold Niebuhr beautifully expresses: "nothing that is worthy takes one lifetime to accomplish, therefore we must be saved by hope."

There are a few opportunities this new year to learn how to become prophets in our communities: to acknowledge reality, to lament, to hope.

On Sunday, January 15, our own Dr. Jules Netherland will help us explore "Masculinities." On Sunday, February 26th, The Rev. Miller Hoffman from Open Door MCC in Maryland will lead a workshop on "Intimacy, Sex, and Consent." On Sunday, March 12th, The Rev. Marie Alford-Harkey, from the Religious Institute in Connecticut will help us explore the forgotten "b": bisexuality. Finally, on a date to be announced later, queer theologian Robyn Henderson-Espinoza from the Pacific School of Religion in California will be exploring the theme of "Belonging in this Post-Election Time." All these Sunday Conversations happen at 12:30 pm.

In addition to the aforementioned Sunday Conversations, in our Bible Study each Tuesday at 6 pm, we are reading and reflecting on the Gospel of Mark through the lens of the prophetic task: to acknowledge reality, to lament, to hope. The Jesus of Mark destroys ideologies (separation, exclusion), the Jesus of Mark does not deny the forces working against the reign of God, the Jesus of Mark holds onto the hope that freedom is coming. Each week we take only a few verses at a time and try to imagine the first communities that heard this gospel and how they were impacted by the good news, then we try to imagine what Mark's story is telling us in the 21st century.



Reflecting on the Journey to Ordination *by Robert Daniel Arnau*

Imagine yourself in a train that is—somehow—racing along the edge of a narrow mountain at a gazillion miles per hour. The train cars are bumping into every mountain point and scraping along the sides of the jagged façade but the train manages to keep you chugging along. You are filled with adrenaline but you are also scared out of your mind ("mind" wasn't my first choice to use, just saying) because you know you have a responsibility to maintain this train on the track. You think you can do it but you are not totally sure. The only thing you hold on to is the fact that whoever put you in charge of driving this train in the first place knows you can accomplish the task. That, my dear friends, is how I feel as a Candidate for Ministry.



Everyone has a different journey when they go through candidacy so I am not, in any way, generalizing the experience. For me, however, there is a sense of wonder and anxiety. I feel called to the ministry but, like all new things, there are moments where I find myself asking God "Hey, are you sure you got the right dude?" I mean, there is so much in this world that has a blanket of need covering it. There is so much work to do and I wonder: am I equipped for it? But then I come across one person—just one—in a week who needs something: advice, an ear, a shoulder, a compassionate hug. And when I can be used by God and deliver the essence of God—love—to someone in need and, most importantly, they walk away comforted, that is when I realize that I am right where I need to be.

Being a Candidate for Ministry in my home church is quite an experience. I am involved in the choir and music ministry but I have also been exposed to the challenges of, what they call "parish" life. I have interacted and bonded with many different people on different levels, and I have seen firsthand MCCNY's work and the need for us to continue its mission. Part of my duties as a candidate is to create a project, so I am working on a blog for the church that can get the message out online of what we are truly about. I want to fill it with pictures and videos, messages from our services and from the testimonies of people in the congregation in order to increase our online presence. We are a faith community of diverse people and I want the world to see that. MCCNY's mission is not over. We are destined to fill this community—and all communities—with compassion and hope. It's all about putting the passion of the message of the Gospel into action; putting the message of Jesus into work. As long as I am on this journey towards ordination and God is by my side, I promise to do just that.

Celebrate

Christmas and Kwanzaa

with

MCCNY



Christmas Eve

Saturday, December 24

7pm Celebration
"Silent Night" by Candlelight
Annual Holiday Party!

Christmas Day

Sunday, December 25

11am Celebration only
Service of Lessons & Carols
Annual Holiday Brunch!

Kwanzaa Sunday

Sunday, January 1st

11am Celebration only
Lighting of the Kwanzaa Candles