

connections

May 2000

Volume 3 Issue 5

Our Mission is to make the worship of God primary in all our gatherings, foster relationships within and outside the Alliance, create places of refuge and renewal for those wounded or ignored by the church, side with the poor, pursue justice with and for the oppressed, care for the earth, work for peace, honor wisdom and lifelong learning, and hold ourselves accountable for equity, collegiality and diversity.

Paula Dempsey is clear about her ministry and objective: To be a Christian minister who, in community with other Christians, welcomes all persons into the family of faith; strives to foster a caring community of mutuality, respect, and trust; demonstrates a commitment to spiritual formation; and seeks to be an agent of reconciliation, peace, and justice.

She will be living out that objective this year in her role as President of the Alliance of Baptists.

Paula has been an active member of the Alliance since its inception and is especially interested in the partnerships that have developed among Alliance churches and churches in Cuba.

Since 1991, the new Alliance president has served as campus minister at Mars Hill College, affiliated with the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, in Mars Hill, NC, just outside of Asheville. "As campus minister, I have worked to create a concerned and sensitive community on campus which cares for and supports its members as they move toward developing spiritually and intellectually," she said. Her duties there include planning and coordinating worship for students, faculty, and staff; offering pastoral care and counseling; supervising and directing the various religious life programs on campus; and cultivating relationships among the Baptist constituency.

Beyond that role, Paula is also interested in spiritual formation and since 1994 has assumed "with great delight" the leadership responsibilities for the Gathering of Baptists and Others Interested in Spirituality that has occurred on the Mars Hill College

campus every summer. This year she is the co-coordinator for the event that will be held July 24-29.

She has also co-coordinated the beginning of the Advent Spirituality Center whose purpose is to nurture Christian spirituality in a Baptist setting. The Spirituality Center draws upon resources from various faith traditions and offers hospitality to all who search for a growing life in God. Currently the Center offers a

weekly community of prayer, a dream group, spiritual guidance and sponsors the annual Gathering.

Prior to going to Mars Hill, from 1981 to 1991, Paula served as pastor of two congregations: for seven years at Oak Chapel Baptist Church in Orange County, VA, and for three years as the bivocational pastor of Mintz Baptist Church in Roseboro, NC. "My calling to the church in Roseboro was a first for North Carolina Baptists," she said. "I was the first woman in the state to be called as senior or sole minister of a church

affiliated with the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina."

During 1982 and 1983, Paula served as Director of Christian Social Ministries for Eastern Baptist Association, located in Warsaw, NC. There, her primary responsibility included the development of a program of ministry to migrant farm workers. The duties included program planning, implementing and evaluating; administration of budget; supervision of summer staff; and recruiting, training, and encouraging laity in ministry.

(continued on page 2)

PAULA DEMPSEY

Alliance president has clear objectives for her ministry



Alliance President Paula Dempsey, with some of the young members of Iglesia Bautista Clara Rodés in Cuba.

This May issue of the newsletter went to press prior to the April 27-29 Convocation. Look in the June issue for a full report from Austin.

Paula Dempsey

(continued from page 1)

Paula served on the Board of Directors of the Alliance for several years prior to becoming secretary for two years. She was also on the Task Force on Cuba and co-chaired the Convocation committee the year the meeting was held at Grace Baptist Church in Richmond.

Locally, Paula is on the board of the Madison County Habitat for Humanity; and is the corresponding secretary for the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance. The mostly African American clergy group is committed to addressing needs of the church and society be they political, social, economic or spiritual.

At Mars Hill Baptist Church, she is a choir member and teaches a Sunday School class. She has served six years on the Board of Missions.

happenings

David Farmer, pastor of University Baptist Church in Baltimore, has resigned to accept the pastorate of an ABC congregation in Wilmington, DE.

Alliance member **Vaughn Crowe-Tipton** is the new pastor of First Baptist Church in Auburn, AL. Vaughn writes the Sunday School commentary material for *Baptists Today*. He previously was pastor of Northwest Baptist Church in Ardmore, OK.

Two Alliance members have recently published new books. **Chuck E. Poole**, pastor of Northminster Baptist Church in Jackson, MS, has a new book published by Smyth & Helwys — *Beyond the Broken Lights: Simple Words at Sacred Edges*. **Paul D. Simmons** of Louisville, KY, has edited a book titled “Freedom of Conscience: A Baptist/Humanist Dialogue,” published by Prometheus Books.

She is a supporter and member of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, Baptist Women in Ministry - North Carolina, and Bread for the World

Paula is an M. Div. graduate of Southeastern Seminary, and earned a B.A. from Meredith College in Raleigh, NC. She studied Clinical Pastoral Education at the University of Virginia Medical Center in Charlottesville.

She was ordained in June 1979 by Pullen Memorial and Berry’s Grove Baptist churches at a service held in Raleigh.

Paula was born in 1955 to parents who were farmers in northern Orange County, NC, in an area called Hurdle Mills. She made a public profession of faith at the age of nine and grew as a Christian through her involvement in Berry’s Grove Baptist Church in Timberlake, NC.

She is married to Paul W. Dempsey, a native of Clinton, NC, and a professional pharmacist currently employed by the Hot Springs Health Program, a non-profit health provider in rural Madison County, NC. They are the parents of two children, Joel, 15, and David, 11.

During her time off from work, Paula enjoys reading, needlework, making music, homemaking, and experiencing nature.

Last year she took a group of students to Cuba. This year she plans to go to South Africa for a month with students and participate in an international conference on nonviolence.

Paula Dempsey, right, preached the ordination sermon earlier this year for Rosalva Pérez, pastor of Iglesia Bautista Clara Rodés in Piedrecitas, Camagüey, Cuba. Mars Hill Baptist Church in Mars Hill, NC, is a partner with the Cuban congregation and sent a small delegation to the ordination service.



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2000 GATHERING: “WHO TOUCHED ME?”

The 2000 Gathering of Baptists and Others Interested in Spirituality will be held July 24-29 at Mars Hill College in Mars Hill, NC. The theme for the week is “Who Touched Me?” taken from the story about the woman who is healed when she touches the hem of Jesus’ garment. The Spiritual Guides Retreat July 25-27 will focus on “Noticing What Happens to the Spiritual Guide.” The conference July 27-29 will feature four presentations on women’s spirituality, including both historical and contemporary figures, and its gifts for all people who search for a growing life in God. The week will begin with a retreat July 24-25 for theological students attending all week on scholarships provided by the Alliance. Lynda Poston-Smith will be the guest musician for the week, and Nancy Hastings Schested will be the guest preacher. For information about registration, cost, and student scholarships, contact the Campus Ministry Office at Mars Hill College, 828-689-1128.

Powerful, Womanly: A Tribute to Anne Thomas Neil

inspire, challenge, comfort, educate, nurture, rebuke and help to transform.

On March 21, Anne celebrated her 80th birthday. As she approached that milestone her church family, which includes the folks who know her best, decided it was appropriate to affirm and confirm the ministry that Anne has exercised throughout her life. Not all ordinations mark the beginning of the journey.

As a part of the ordination service, Anne's daughter, Elaine, called on the creative abilities of the poet Adrienne Rich to describe her mother:

I have wished I could rest among the beautiful and common weeds I can name, both here and in other tracts of the globe. But there is no finite knowing, no such rest. Innocent birds, deserts, morning-glories, point to choices, leading away from the familiar. When I speak of an end of suffering I don't mean anesthesia. I mean knowing the world, and my place in it, not in order to stare with bitterness or detachment, but as a powerful and womanly series of choices: and here I write the words, in their fullness: powerful; womanly.

(Your Native Land, Your Life, p. 27)


Powerful; womanly.

A decade ago Anne was honored by her alma mater, Winthrop University in South Carolina. In her remarks, Anne identified the dominant commitments of her life — the life of the mind, the life of the spirit, and the life of the community along with an urgency to commit oneself to the pursuit of biblical justice. She has affirmed those influences in her own life and has extended them generously to others. As a recipient of Anne's generosity of spirit, I join countless other women and men who have been gifted by the friendship and wisdom of Anne Thomas Neil and thank God for her.

perspectives



By Jeanette Holt
Associate Director



The last thing in the world I want is for this to sound like an obituary.

Last month, as I prepared to travel to Raleigh for the ordination of Anne Thomas Neil at Millbrook Baptist Church, I read in the *Washington Post* that “the Vatican has agreed to consider whether to grant sainthood to Dorothy Day, heroine of the Catholic left, journalist, anarchist and pacifist, ignoring objections from church traditionalists and possibly Day’s own wishes.”

It all sounded remarkably familiar—the description of Day and the discomfiture of those within her church tradition who had great difficulty dealing with who she was and what she espoused.

I heard Anne Thomas Neil speak for the first time at an early meeting of Baptist Women in Ministry (then called Southern Baptist Women in Ministry) held in Pittsburgh prior to the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1983. The externals, the nouns, were so familiar and reassuring — retired missionary, wife, mother, nurse, educator — and all of that is accurate.

In the intervening years I have had the opportunity to get to know Anne and to add to the list of nouns — mentor, trailblazer and friend. But it is the verbs that are truly amazing. Always a lady and with a disarming, soft South Carolina drawl, she can and does

alliance finances

2000 Operating Budget:

Needs: \$81,644
Receipts: \$95,166

2000 Mission Offering

Goal: \$85,250
Receipts: \$20,764

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connections

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One of the reasons the Center for Women in Christian Leadership was established in 1994 was because of the belief that God calls women as well as men to service. But that doesn't mean God makes the road easy, as director Katheryne L. Goodman and the board of the center have now discovered.

Faced with limited financial resources, the board at its April 6 meeting decided to discontinue the position of full-time director beginning June 1. "It has become a financial necessity," Katheryne said. "The center will be staffed by a student during the summer and the board will meet again in July. At that time, they will work on developing a new vision for the center, not a pared-down vision."

Located in Richmond, the center is dedicated to the full inclusion of women in all areas of professional and lay ministry. It serves women across denominational lines.

By the time of the next board meeting, Katheryne hopes that at least one of several outstanding grant proposals might be funded. "But the money hasn't come quickly enough," she said. "We never want to be seen as being an iffy organization. We have worked for a stable influence in the community and for a stable appearance."

"I still believe there are benefactors who would like to see us succeed, not so much the grant-making institutions but the women out there that we serve," she

said.

Despite the financial problems, the programs of the center are going very well, Katheryne said. "BTSR invited us to cosponsor the Hoover Lectures that brought Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner from the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary in Dubuque, IA. That sort of



thing gives us a credibility we aren't able to earn on our own as a new and small organization."

"But overall, we don't have the support of the institutions we serve," she said. "We need their unqualified support. We are here for the students and women in ministry."

The center hosts speakers and sponsors conferences on women's leadership. It initiates conversations within the Richmond Theological Consortium and in the wider community on current gender issues. It offers an accredited class on challenges women face in ministry, which includes a mentoring component.

It has participated in the publication of manuals on development of women as leaders and women's retreats. These

manuals are available through the center. Recurring programs include a one-day workshop titled "A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence" and a two-part event, "Women Speaking With Authority in the Church," which includes theological rationale as well as practical training in public speaking.

Some of the topics discussed this year include: "How to Get Your Joy Back - Women's Spirituality," "Can We Talk? - Male-Female Communication," "Can We Talk? - Inclusive Language."

Recent initiatives to facilitate communication beyond the student population include a bimonthly newsletter, *The Water Jar*, with a circulation of about 2000 households. *The Water Jar* contains articles of interest to women in ministry, a schedule of events related to gender concerns, editorial pieces and biographical sketches of women. One more issue is planned.

A speaker's bureau is also still functioning, and speakers are available to discuss subjects like depression, leadership gifts, and women and spirituality. To engage a speaker or receive a brochure about the bureau, call the center at (804) 353-1233, or e-mail womenscenter@unidial.com.

Katheryne is the first and only full-time staff member at the center. She formerly worked for the Presbyterian Church in the USA and hopes to find a full-time job in a church-related organization.

ISRAEL: ALLIANCE SPONSORS TRIP

Past Alliance president John Ewing Roberts, pastor of Woodbrook Baptist Church in Baltimore, will lead an Alliance-sponsored trip to Israel June 18-28. A scholar from the Melitz Institute will accompany the group. If you would like to go, please contact John at Johnroberts@home.com or call him at (410) 377-2350.