



Building and Strengthening Voices for Action

SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCATE

MARCH/APRIL 2026

This Women's History Month, we honor the sacred strength of Black women rooted in faith, resilience and community.



The Four Essential Human Freedoms

By President Franklin Delano Roosevelt

- Freedom from Fear
- Freedom from Want
- Freedom of Speech
- Freedom of Worship

The context for the Four Essential Human Freedoms: In his Annual Message to Congress (State of the Union Address) on January 6, 1941, Franklin Roosevelt presented his reasons for American involvement, making the case for continued aid to Great Britain and greater production of war industries at home. In helping Britain, President Roosevelt stated, the United States was fighting for the universal freedoms that all people possessed.

Click [here](#) for FDR and the Four Freedoms Speech

Tutor Opportunities Available to Support CMS Students

By Sonja Gantt

Just under one hour twice a week can strengthen a child's reading skills. Early literacy success can reduce the likelihood of academic struggles, increase graduation rates and open doors to future opportunities.



Gantt

The Public Education Committee remains committed to supporting Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools by recruiting tutors in partnership with the district's tutoring collaborators, Heart Math and the Augustine Literacy Project (ALP).

On Jan. 29, the committee hosted its second tutor recruitment session of the school year. During the virtual event, Kathy Graham, recruitment coordinator for the ALP, shared how the organization equips volunteers to become confident and effective tutors.

The ALP provides comprehensive training that helps volunteers understand lesson structure and reinforce foundational reading skills. Each lesson is prewritten, scripted and based on evidence-based literacy strategies, making them easy to deliver with minimal preparation.

The ALP currently partners with 14 CMS schools, offering volunteers the flexibility to tutor in-person or remotely. Training is delivered in the same format as tutoring:

- In-person tutors complete two days of on-site training
- Remote tutors receive virtual training

The ALP staff continues to support tutors throughout their service, both virtually and in person.

Attendees also heard directly from Public Education Committee members who currently tutor and were able to share their personal experiences and the impact they witnessed firsthand.

"I can't say enough about ALP. It's a great organization. They really do support you. It's not just the beginning training but you have ongoing training that you can participate in throughout the year," shared Cheryl Watts. "I think more importantly it's the students. They are just a joy to work with. We make them feel special. They look forward to seeing you. They really want to learn."

Stephanie Ganey tutors with both the ALP and Heart Math.

"I feel as though it's really fulfilling," she stated. "It's worthwhile. It's a way to give back. It's a way to help the student ... but we are helping our community and we're helping our church building a future."



Stephanie Ganey tutors a second-grader at Winding Springs Elementary School.



Cheryl Watts and Chyrese are partnered through the Augustine Literacy Project.

How to Get Involved

To tutor with the ALP, volunteers must commit to meeting with a student twice a week for 45-minute sessions across two semesters. Information about upcoming training sessions, along with opportunities to visit a school and observe tutoring in action, is available on the Augustine Literacy Project website: <https://alpcharlotte.org>

Interested in tutoring with Heart Math?

Volunteers must be able to instruct students in math and commit to one hour per week. Find out more about volunteer opportunities by using this link: <https://heartmathtutoring.org/>

Parity, Access, and Justice:

How Our Laws Are Shaping Mental Health Care

By Jessica Hobbs

In the United States, the policy landscape around mental health continues to evolve, creating unique legal challenges. Each year, millions of Americans with mental health disorders interact with our legal system, particularly through the criminal justice system. Though poorly equipped to handle mental health and psychiatric needs, jails and prisons often become default providers of mental health services, creating a revolving systemic failure of incarceration, inefficient treatment and release. Outside of jails and prisons, agencies, faith and community-based organizations and treatment facilities are doing their best to address the growing demand for services but lack adequate funding and support.



Hobbs

In recent years, policymakers and mental health advocates have increased efforts to address the critical mental health care gap and better integrate mental health treatment and services into legal, justice and social welfare frameworks. Take a look at a few of the following enacted and proposed legislative initiatives:

- **Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (2022)** (BSCA) aims to delegate significant federal funding to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and other agencies for critical services. This includes, in part, expanding Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics to every state, implementing and enhancing school-based mental health programs, maintaining the 988 Crisis Intervention Lifeline, and funding community and first responder mental health training programs. The BSCA provides necessary, increased support for children and youth, whose mental health needs are often overlooked.

- **Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (MHPAEA)** provides federal protections that prevent group health plans and certain health insurance providers from engaging in discriminatory practices against individuals seeking mental health services. Specifically, the MHPAEA stipulates that financial requirements (e.g., copays and coinsurance) and treatment limitations (e.g., visit limits) cannot be more restrictive for mental health treatment than the requirements and limitations for other medical and surgical benefits. This also means that financial requirements like copays must be similar in cost.

- **Mental Health Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2025** is a proposed bill introduced to address behavioral, mental health, and substance abuse facility shortages across the U.S. If enacted, this bill would establish a new loan program via the Department of Health and Human Services for the renovation or building of treatment facilities, reserve funding for adolescent and pediatric facilities, and prioritize facility needs in underserved and rural areas. As one bill sponsor, Jeff Merkley, aptly states, “Mental health care is essential health care ... by investing in mental health care facilities, we can make meaningful progress in addressing the mental health crisis affecting so many of our friends, neighbors and loved ones.”

- **ATTAIN Mental Health Act of 2025** is another proposed, bipartisan bill that, if enacted, would establish an interactive ADA-compliant online dashboard, identifying federal grants that support mental health and substance use treatment. The dashboard would provide applicants from various sectors (including nonprofits, faith and community organizations, municipal governments, and tribal governments) with the ability to determine their eligibility and status for mental health and substance use grant funding. This ease of access created by this streamlined portal could mean increased funding for advocacy groups, treatment facilities, and agencies in need.

The U.S. legal system is at a crossroads between punitive measures and proactive treatment-focused reform. Laws based on true reform efforts, like the ones outlined above, have the potential to expand access to care, increase funding, and bolster service delivery and transparency. Meaningful reform demands alignment between law and care, which means we must ensure individuals experiencing mental health challenges receive support and timely care, and maintain dignity, rather than criminalization. You can help, too! Reach out to your local, state, and federal lawmakers today, and encourage them to move these initiatives forward for our communities.



By Valaida Fullwood

Note: This reflection was originally published by the Lake Institute on Faith & Giving.

“Our ancient history began with slavery and the yearning for freedom. During the Middle Ages my people lived for a thousand years in the ghettos of Europe. Our modern history begins with a proclamation of emancipation.”

— Rabbi Joachim Prinz, 1963 March on Washington

Writing during the week of the MLK Holiday, in the year 2026, while reflecting on a Black-Jewish interfaith program I organized in Charlotte, NC late last summer has brought into laser-sharp focus the fine-knit weave of Jewish and Black American histories. It also illuminates stark realities about our unending vulnerabilities in today’s chaos.

As a young girl, I read Anne Frank’s *The Diary of a Young Girl*. When an even younger child, I saw historical footage about Birmingham’s “four little girls”: Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson and Cynthia Wesley. A regular Sunday School goer, member of the church youth choir, budding writer, and precocious preteen, I could identify with all these girls. I learned early about anti-Black racism, anti-Semitism, prejudices, and hate that humans hold a profound capacity for. With loving care, my parents made sure I knew of these societal threats for my physical safety and to protect a sentient soul.

“History doesn’t repeat itself, but it often rhymes.” Mark Twain’s quip rings truer now perhaps more than ever. News of a mass shooting of Jewish

worshippers on Bondi Beach, and we flash back to the Mother Emmanuel massacre. Scenes from a charred synagogue in Mississippi a few weeks ago conjure images of the burned churches of Southern Black congregations. Two evenings after the King holiday, local media reported spray-painted Nazi imagery at a campus for Jewish life in Charlotte. The emotional assault of hate made manifest through symbols and tropes is a familiar one. Confederate flag sightings and abusive epithets—scrawled somewhere or hurled at me—cut.

And now coverage of Alex Pretti’s killing in Minneapolis pokes at unhealed wounds from viewing George Floyd’s murder. An ICU nurse, Pretti stirs remembrance of aspiring nurse and EMT Breonna Taylor. Yet still, his circumstance harks back to Freedom Riders Goodman, Chaney and Schwerner.

Last summer when [NGAAP](#), the philanthropic collective I’m a part of, announced an interfaith program featuring clergy and philanthropists from both Jewish and Black Christian traditions, the timing seemed fraught. The U.S. had entered a new era, and Americans were shell-shocked from six months of heavy battering on issues of race, religion, identity, and diversity. In Gaza, the conflict with the Israeli government was taking its toll on not only Palestinians but also relationships with and among Jewish people. Tensions, suspicions, and security concerns, everywhere, were escalating.

In actuality, the program could not have been more well timed. Bondage and bonds of solidarity. Liabilities and opportunities. Oppression and liberation. Just us, or justice. The interwoven, often rhyming histories of Blacks and Jews rendered our interfaith discussion significant. So, on an auspiciously beautiful evening, more than 250 people of myriad backgrounds gathered for a curiously convened forum on Black philanthropy, Jewish philanthropy, and how faith drives giving.

The program, titled “Understanding the Soul of Money, Animating the Soul of Philanthropy,” began with a seed of an idea planted and watered for a year. Fellow *gardener* and kindred spirit was Rabbi Dr. Judith Schindler. A community bridge-builder, “Rabbi Judy” is Sklut Professor of Jewish Studies at Queens University of Charlotte. She also serves as Executive Director of [Spill the Honey](#), a national organization working to deepen understanding of the historic Black-Jewish alliance and strengthen



the present-day Black-Jewish coalitions across our country.

I was drawn to a collaboration with Rabbi Judy, in part, because of my esteem for the prolific philanthropy of Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald. Their unlikely friendship and cross-cultural cooperation is one of the most compelling stories of American philanthropy. Washington's ability to see possibilities and his strategic insights combined with Rosenwald's vast resources and faith-guided generosity transformed the American South. Facing Jim Crow-era White Christian rule, Jewish philanthropy and Black philanthropy, buoyed by the genius of community, built nearly 5,400 schoolhouses for descendants of the formerly enslaved, educating and uplifting generations.

Early on in tending the idea, I invited Rev. Dr. Clifford A. Jones, Sr., Senior Pastor of Charlotte's Friendship Missionary Baptist Church—my place of worship—to collaborate. His involvement proved golden. Rev. Jones not only granted us use of the space, amenities, and services of Friendship's conference center, he also urged us to envision and plan for far more than a few dozen attendees.

Together, the three of us sketched a program featuring a panel of givers from our respective religions, anchored by two 15-minute sermons—one by Rabbi Judy and another from Pastor Jones. Rabbi Judy titled her sermonette "Money Matters," based on a past sermon inspired by Lynne Twist's book *The Soul of Money*. In it, Twist posits "money is a mirror" and explores how our attitudes toward money reflect our core values.

Absent from the lexicon of a good many Black Baptist preachers, the *sermonette* delivered by Rev. Jones carried the title "Pennies, Nickels and Dimes." Each of their short talks drew on holy scripture, clarified religious and cultural perspectives, and gripped the audience with personal stories. Discussion among the four panelists and moderator followed, delving into one another's journey as a philanthropist, religious values, and joys in giving. The speakers' messages asserted the necessity of courage and generosity, as well as sacrifice at times, to combat inequities and injustice.

One specific program element was an agreed-upon hit: the opening social reception with food from both cultures. Ladies from Friendship's food service staff joined with a popular Kosher deli owner to serve punch and light bites of chicken-n-waffles, hummus, black-eyed pea salad, kugel, and more. This and every element was made possible thanks to wide-ranging local and national support, including: NGAAP Philanthropic Collective, Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, Stan Greenspon Center for Holocaust Education, The Soul of Philanthropy - CLT Homecoming, Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte, Spill the Honey, Charlotte Black-Jewish Alliance, and Lake Institute on Faith & Giving.

Still struck by the strong audience turnout and their sustained focus, I'm curious to see what can come next. Despite a time of unsettling breaches of decency and morality, that night at Friendship we glimpsed the *soul of philanthropy*. It is the very human, yet immaterial spirit of generosity that compels friends and neighbors to pool resources and then gather up more friends and neighbors to break bread, share stories, and

nurture relationships, kindling hope for mutual safety and thriving. Ancient ways for modern movements. Ancestors like Washington and Rosenwald, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rabbi Joachim Prinz, the NAACP founders, and countless others provided blueprints for these times. Bold, moral leaders, with trust in God, are meant to unite and confront injustice, clearing paths that help free us all. Coalitions of conscience, powered by Jews and Blacks, constitute poetic justice in the fight against historical rhymes.



Fullwood

Named Lake Distinguished Visitor in 2014, Fullwood is the award-winning author of "Giving Back: A Tribute to Generations of African American Philanthropists," co-creator of [The Soul of Philanthropy](#) exhibit, and a founding member of NGAAP. Formed in 2006 as New Generation of African American Philanthropists, NGAAP is Charlotte's Black philanthropic collective that inspires action through the power of Black philanthropy.

Chartering the West Charlotte High School NAACP Chapter

By Cydney F. Duncan



During the second half of my freshman year at West Charlotte High School, I had the opportunity to attend an information session about the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). During the session, the current president of the Charlotte chapter, Rev. Corine Mack, shared the importance of the work that the organization has done and needs to continue to do. As I listened, I began thinking of how I could help with the efforts. I talked with Rev. Mack after the session and shared that I was interested in starting a chapter in my school. She gave me the contact information I needed to begin the process, and thus my journey to charter the West Charlotte High School NAACP chapter began.



Duncan

While researching, I was invited to attend the 116th NAACP National Convention, in July 2025, held here in Charlotte. I had the opportunity to meet and talk with many influential members who have advocated and influenced things that my peers and I take for granted. Having secured over 25 students to join this new chapter, I returned after summer break. As a sophomore, I began sharing some of the things

that I had learned, and we discussed ways to give back and become a part of the movement that the NAACP represents. We started by serving as volunteers with the Charlotte chapter's Back-to-School Drive at the Little Rock Apartment Complex. We were able to assist families with obtaining supplies they need, allowing them to focus on other things for a successful school year.

Currently, we are implementing a book drive that will support the Little Free Libraries (small structures that hold books individuals can borrow then return them for others to enjoy) located around our campus and surrounding communities. We believe this effort will give families a chance to focus on literacy, while inspiring people to read more.

We also participated in the Martin Luther King Day parade on Saturday, Jan. 16, 2026.

With these efforts, I hope my ability to engage the West Charlotte High School NAACP chapter will continue to support social justice.

Cydney, a member of Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, is the current president of the West Charlotte High School NAACP chapter.

Social Justice Ministry Marches in MLK Holiday Parade

By Earnest Winston

Members of Friendship Missionary Baptist Church's Social Justice Ministry took to the streets of uptown Charlotte to participate in the annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Parade, joining thousands who gathered to honor the life and legacy of the civil rights leader.



Winston

The parade has long been a staple of Charlotte's MLK holiday celebration. More than 100 community organizations, marching bands, step teams and drill teams moved through the streets as crowds lined the route, cheering and waving in support.

For members of the Social Justice Ministry, the walk was more than symbolic. It was personal.

"As I walked down the parade route, I thought about how safe I felt," said Faye Johnson, who coordinated the ministry's participation. "It wasn't the same for Dr. King and his followers. I can't imagine the terror they must have felt. But there I stood — safe — no dogs, fire hoses or beatings." Johnson reflected on the stark contrast between today's celebratory atmosphere and the violent resistance faced by those who marched during the Civil Rights Movement. "His sacrifices opened many doors that I didn't want to be taken for granted," she said. "Walking a few blocks was the least I could do to honor Dr. King and everything he stood for and what he fought to give so many people."

The ministry's presence in the parade served as both remembrance and recommitment, a reminder that Dr. King's work calls each generation to show up, speak up and continue striving for justice.

By participating in this year's parade, Friendship's Social Justice Ministry honored a legacy rooted in courage and sacrifice while affirming its ongoing commitment to faith in action.



PHOTO CREDIT: DIANE DUNN AND KIM ELLERBE



Click here for March 3 election results.

Candidates Traded Jobs at Forums Ahead of March Primaries

By Cliff Harrington



Harrington

It was a candidates' forum that gave the audience an array of viewpoints.

One candidate cited South Carolina as a possible model for public school funding, but failed to explain that South Carolina does not fund schools through property taxes. North Carolina does.

Two candidates staunchly embraced the philosophies of United States President Donald Trump. They clearly articulated their views to the audience.

There were direct haymakers and subtle jabs thrown during the candidates' forums held Feb. 10 and Feb. 12 at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church (FMBC).

You can listen to these discussions online:

[Session 1](#)
[Session 2](#)

The event was timed to precede the March primaries and featured candidates running in city, county, state and national races. Primaries are the processes through which the field of candidates is narrowed to those who will be on the ballot for the November 2026 elections.

So this was just a first step in the process. You have until March 3 to vote in the primaries. Then it's on to the November elections.

The candidates' forums were a collaborative effort of the Social Justice Ministry at FMBC and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

There is a plan for more forums in the fall as we approach the time to cast our final votes. Now is the time to be vigilant in preparation to vote. Ensure you have proper identification and are registered.

For a more detailed examination of the candidates, please visit this [link](#). A message you will hear constantly in 2026 is "register, and then VOTE."

Reclaiming Our Story: Why Family History Matters

By Earnest Winston

As I attended the 2026 North Carolina Afro-American Historical & Genealogical Society Conference (AAHGS) at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church in February, I was reminded that history is not as distant as we sometimes think. It is not confined to textbooks or museum exhibits. It lives in our families.



Winston



Sitting in the sessions and listening to researchers, historians and everyday people share their journeys, I was struck by a simple truth: for African Americans, studying family history is more than curiosity. It is reclamation.

For generations, names were changed. Records were lost. Families were separated. Entire branches of our stories were erased or hidden in courthouse ledgers and faded church documents. To search for our ancestors is to affirm that their lives mattered and still matter.

Scripture often speaks of generations, reminding us to remember those who came before us and to teach those who come after. That rhythm of remembrance is not accidental. It is sacred work. When we trace our family lines, we participate in that sacred act of remembering.

This work is personal for me.

My late parents migrated separately from Mississippi to Chicago, part of a movement of Black families seeking opportunity beyond the South. It was in Chicago where they met and I was born. For years, Mississippi was simply "where they were from." It felt distant, like more of a story than a place.

More than a decade ago, one of my maternal grandmother's two living siblings — there were nine children in her family —

drove me through her hometown of Canton. We passed quiet country roads and familiar church names until we arrived at a small house that, Aunt Ida Mae told me, once sat on a former plantation. That was the house, now abandoned and in disrepair, where my grandmother was born and where she later stood on the porch to be married on Christmas Day. The land, I learned, was where my grandparents had been sharecroppers. About eight years ago, I took my family to the house.

Standing there in the late July heat as bees swarmed around us, history no longer felt abstract. It was not a chapter in a book. It was the ground beneath my feet. Sacred ground. In that moment, I understood something I could not have grasped from a document alone. The distance between enslavement, sharecropping, migration and my own life is not as wide as it sometimes seems. It is only a few generations.



The Winston family visits the Mississippi home of their ancestors.

That is why gatherings like this conference matter. And it is why our upcoming 70th family reunion in Washington, D.C., feels especially meaningful.

From a porch in Canton on land once worked by my grandparents to standing in the nation's capital, where monuments rise in tribute to freedom and justice, the journey tells a story of movement, perseverance and possibility. It reminds me that history is not just something we visit. It is something we carry.

Seventy years of reunion means generations have made a conscious decision to remain connected. This year, we are being intentional about honoring that legacy. We plan to tour Frederick Douglass' home, walk through the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, and take a family photo at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial. One day has been set aside as Official T Shirt Day, but it will also be a day of roots and reflection, a time to honor our ancestors, our history and our collective journey.

We are also hosting a Saturday morning session titled "The Family History Project." More importantly, it will deepen our understanding of the ties that bind us across time, across states and across stories.

Family reunions are more than cookouts and coordinated colors. They are living archives. They are spaces where stories are told and retold. They are where children learn the names of great-grandparents and begin to understand that they are part of something larger than themselves.

The conference at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, hosted by the Charlotte chapter of the Afro-American Historical & Genealogical Society, reinforces something I already believe: preserving Black history is not only the work of institutions. It is the responsibility of families. It is a form of social justice. When we document our lineage, we push back against the narrative that our stories began in chains. We affirm resilience, faith, migration, entrepreneurship and service.

If you have ever thought about researching your family history, here are a few simple ways to begin:

- Interview the oldest living relatives and record the conversation.
- Write down full names, including maiden names and nicknames.
- Look at the 1870 Census, the first federal census to list formerly enslaved people by name.
- Search church records, obituaries and local archives.
- Organize what you find so the next generation can build on it.

You do not have to be a professional historian. You simply have to care enough to ask questions.

As we prepare to gather in Washington this summer, I carry Canton with me. I carry the image of that porch. I carry the understanding that survival, sacrifice and faith are not distant concepts, but part of my own family story.

And perhaps that is the deeper lesson. When we honor our ancestors, we do more than remember them. We strengthen the foundation beneath our children. We connect porch to monument, field to city, past to promise.

History lives in our families. And when we take the time to preserve it, we honor where we come from and the generations God is still writing through us.



In this episode of *Friendship Talks, Are You Listening*, Rev. Dr. Paul McAllister and veteran journalist Cliff Harrington examine redistricting and gerrymandering. With more than 30 years at *The Charlotte Observer* and *The Rock Hill Herald*, Harrington explains how redistricting differs from gerrymandering, how map-drawing shapes political power, and offers practical context for listeners—especially community leaders and engaged voters—who want to respond to the issue.

About the guest

Cliff Harrington is a retired executive editor and the author of two books:

1. Just Tell the Truth: A Black Man's Perspective on America and Its History — <https://a.co/d/ivMoaox>
2. Write It Right: A Guide for Aspiring Writers and Truth-Tellers — <https://a.co/d/gz65g61>

Podbeans

<https://www.podbean.com/ew/pb-gugfu-1a3408c>

Spotify

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/6qhaKXE2E9FnSM4Q5vTbMs?si=Em-fTpWlQSK6DIIT1rzuTMQ>

Apple Podcasts

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/friendship-talks-are-you-listening/id1711849045?i=1000747583815>

Serving with Purpose: Answering the Call to End Human Trafficking

The SJM Human Trafficking Committee (HTC) continues to expand its impact through education, awareness, and community partnership. In 2025, the HTC has deepened advocacy efforts, strengthened church engagement, and supported frontline organizations serving survivors. In this Q&A, Tonya Woods speaks with Chairperson Jennifer Loney about highlights from the past year, plans for the year ahead, ways to increase participation and how members can support this ministry.



Woods



Loney

Q: How has support for the HTC been so far?

A: The support of leadership, specifically our lead, Andrea Betaudier, has been tremendously helpful. She's been an encouraging force behind the efforts we have introduced to the church in the past year. I want to say a big thank you to Malisha Ross and Tonya Woods, members of our sub-committee who worked fiercely in 2025 to put on our first educational forum. In addition, I also want to thank our entire social justice membership for the support they gave us. I believe our team efforts led to a greater understanding of how human trafficking impacts our local community and beyond.

Q: Going forward, how will HTC continue to foster community partnerships for its efforts?

A: As a church advocacy group, the HTC will continue to foster community partnership, by supporting the efforts of those who are in the trenches. These are our local organizations who are actively and daily providing mentorship, housing, education and the various support systems necessary to eradicate human trafficking. We do this by becoming actively engaged on an individual basis, such as volunteering personal time with these agencies. In addition, we also assist by providing meaningful monetary contributions to support the work they do and by having them come into our church, and educate us, through our forums.

Q: What programs or activities do you foresee for 2026?

A: In the spring of 2025, we were able to host our first human trafficking educational forum. Many aspects of the forum served as an eye opener for attendees who benefitted by understanding the role individuals can play to help victims of human trafficking. It is my prayer that before the summer of 2026, we will host another educational forum and open this to a wider audience, to include not just church membership, but our Mecklenburg County community. In addition, we will keep our eyes open for opportunities to support our local human trafficking partners, as they hold various events and training programs.

Q: Is there a theme you want to focus on this year? If so, what would that be?

A: Now that's food for thought. I've not thought about a theme to focus on for this year. My prayer is that whatever we do, we do for the glory of God and that God gets the praise and honor. To this extent,



DARIUS BASHAR

I'm praying that God will be revealed gloriously through our efforts.

Q: How will participation in the HTC be increased?

A: Through answered prayers. I've often said the heart to actively serve in the work of human trafficking, has to be a heart that God has spoken into. Our HTC is open to all who have the heart to serve persons who are victims of horrendous experiences. Our goal is to be supportive, encouraging and uplifting to persons who need us in ways we may not understand. This will help us increase the participation in our HTC through prayers and acceptance of God's will.

Q: How can individuals show their support for the HTC?

A: Through their prayers. Going forward, an individual can support the efforts of the HTC through connection with the team members. They will be able to learn how they can become engaged in our church's efforts, and how they can personally support the work of our partner agencies through volunteerism.

Q: There have been confirmed cases of human traffickers impersonating Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents to target and exploit vulnerable individuals. Given the current climate and some communities disdain for ICE, share your thoughts on how citizens can remain safe and compliant?

A: This is such an explosive subject, happening in real time, in what I consider to be a volatile environment. While my thoughts on this subject matter varies based on what we are privileged to learn through media on a daily basis, I believe we must first be cognizant of where we are and how we operate and respond to what's happening. To this extent, I would encourage everyone to stay within the confines of your state laws, so as not to become unalive. For personal identification, if possible, I have carried a U.S. passport card in my purse since 2017, just before this administration came into power, the first time. I do this to easily identify my citizenship if it becomes necessary at any time. Be prepared ahead of time and educate yourself as to what is possible. Take steps needed to avoid unwanted mistakes that could cause you harm. Ensure that your actions with officials are always within the confines of the law. Pray daily for protection over your life and your family. Give thanks daily and remember to breathe.



Friendship M.B.C. Social Justice Leadership Team



Andrea Betaudier
Chair, Social Justice Ministry

Andrea has been an engaged citizen through many activist mediums within Charlotte-Mecklenburg County since 1988. Based upon biblical scriptural references, Social Justice and its many components continue to be her most serious passion. Since 2016, it has been a joy to serve in this leadership role at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church. In addition to people, Andrea has a love for theater arts, music and travel and is willing to lend a hand where needed.



Chester Cooper
Marketing & Technology Initiative

Chester has been an active member of FMBC for over 30 years. I currently serve on the Marketing & Technology Committee with a focus on social media and podcasting. I enjoy finding creative ways to connect with people via technology on Social Justice topics. I am married and father of two adult children. Whether it's through faith, media, or community outreach, I am always looking for ways to make a positive impact.



Diane Dunn
Secretary, Social Justice Ministry

Following God's guidance and the steps He has ordered for me, I strive everyday to do God's will and to be of service to others. Always learning, Always growing, Always grateful!



Sonja Gantt Gibson
Public Education Initiative

Sonja is the executive director of the CMS Foundation – the nonprofit fundraising partner of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. The organization invests in innovation in CMS to increase opportunities for students and teachers in the school district. Sonja brings to the job a deep knowledge of the area having served the majority of her 30-year media career as a reporter/anchor covering Mecklenburg County. She passionately believes a truly great community must include a strong public school system.



Cliff Harrington
Political Action Movement Initiative

Retired newspaper executive editor. Graduate of UNC Chapel Hill, with post graduate studies at Miami of Ohio and University of Maryland-College Park. Author of two books. Just for fun I'm involved in music and coaching tennis.



Lashanda Faye
Mental Health & Wellness Initiative

Born and raised in Charlotte, NC and have been a member of Friendship Missionary Baptist Church since 2000. I am the leader of the Mental Health and Wellness team on the Social Justice Ministry. I am passionate about Mental Health based on witnessing and enduring challenges from the people around me and my own experiences. I have always tried to be a voice for the voiceless and remember being quiet and timid when I was young. Finding my voice was liberating and I want others to experience that freedom. I



Jeniffer R. Loney
Human Trafficking Initiative

My passion for the healing of humans who are being trafficked, leads me to know that I am "God's hands and feet" on the earth. I served in corporate America as a financial consultant to a major financial organization for 25 years. The Human Trafficking arm of our FMBC Social Justice Ministry, seeks to educate, inform and actively engage our church and community in doing our part to eradicate human trafficking. I am deeply committed to doing the work of justice and restoration. I reflect daily on the words in Hosea 6: 6 as follows: "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings."



William "Bill" Ryans
Vice Chair, Social Justice Ministry & Housing Initiative

I have been a member of the Social Justice Ministry since its inception. My hometown is Newark, NJ. I attended undergraduate school at Howard University where I majored in Chemical Engineering. I am currently employed as a Sr. Sales and Marketing Manager with Indorama Ventures. I am the father of two adult children and the grandfather of one grandson.



Earnest Winston
Editor of the Justice Advocate Newsletter

Earnest is an educational leader and a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. He serves on the Board of Directors for Friendship Day School for the Sciences and the Arts and is the editor of the Social Justice Advocate (SJA), the newsletter of the Social Justice Ministry at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church. If you're interested in contributing to the SJA, we'd love to hear from you.



Tonya Woods
Justice Advocate Newsletter & Human Trafficking Initiative

Tonya enjoys being flexible in her efforts to give back to the community. As part of her involvement with the Social Justice Ministry, she serves as a contributing editor and writer for the Justice Advocate newsletter and takes part in the Strategic Planning Committee and the newly established Human Trafficking Committee. Professionally, Tonya works as a technical writer, drafting user manuals, process documentation, and policy guides. Additionally, she writes feature articles for Lake Norman CURRENTS magazine. Remaining actively engaged, Tonya adheres to the belief that any talents or gifts God bestows should be used to help others.



If you want to know more about the Social Justice Ministry at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, please contact us at sjm@friendshipcharlotte.org or 704.391.3842.

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