

PCBA Notes

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First Baptist Church of Berkeley to Close its 133 Year Ministry

The historic First Baptist Church of Berkeley will close its ministry at the end of June at which time it will celebrate its 133rd year. Much has been noted about its significant impact over the years on the lives of many individuals and of the life of the denomination itself. It's anticipated that more will be written in the future. The Rev. Dr. Nancy Hall, Pastor, has said concerning the decision to close, "This hasn't been an easy decision for the congregation. But the time has come to exercise good stewardship, give thanks to God for the church's historic and faithful service to Berkeley and far beyond for so many years. Thank you to all our wider family of churches and individuals who've journeyed with us. Bless you, and to God be the glory!"

Berkeley Food and Housing Project to Open "Hope Center"

Hope Center, a new six-storey facility designed to serve very low-income and chronically homeless people will open this fall in downtown Berkeley. It is being built by Berkeley Food and Housing Project together with BRIDGE housing. BFHP, which sprang from the cooperative work of south-of-the-campus churches in the 1970s, will bring together housing and onsite support services. These will include 53 permanent supportive housing units, 12 transitional beds for veterans, 32 emergency shelter beds, 89 affordable apartments (by BRIDGE), and will supply meals to anyone insecure in food needs, whether housed or unhoused. Last year BFHP served 63,000 meals. They report that with the new facility, they will be able to serve 200,000 meals annually.

J. Alfred Smith, Sr. Endowed Chair Announced

Berkeley School of Theology has announced the James Alfred Smith, Sr. Endowed Chair of Theology in the Public Square. Dr. Smith, a graduate of BST, was a distinguished professor, acting dean, and is now emeritus professor of Christian Ministry and Preaching. As Senior Pastor of Allen Temple Baptist Church, he oversaw a community ministry including housing, AIDS, social services, job and food programs, and mentoring in ministry. Enabling the chair's creation was a one million dollar contribution by the First Baptist Church of Palo Alto from the sale of its property.

People and Churches

The Old Testament scholar, **Norman Gottwald**, died in March at the age of 95. An active member of the First Baptist Church of Berkeley, he formerly taught at BST and the Graduate Theological Union. An article in the current issue of the respected journal, *Christian Century*, called him “the most important and influential Old Testament scholar of the 20th Century in the United States.” His seminal work, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 BCE* has been translated into numerous languages. Space at his memorial service, August 6 at 2:00 at BST, is limited. To attend, one should contact the Rev. Dr. Nancy Hall, neh@amural.com.

The Grace Baptist Church of San Jose, under **Pastor George Oliver**, has approved a plan to sell its property to a development firm for construction of a housing facility which will, in turn, include adequate space for the congregation to continue its ministry. While the plan has been approved in principle, the congregation has yet to determine details in the project. . . **Wendy Neale** was recently honored by **Shell Ridge Community Church** in Walnut Creek for her work with an interfaith feeding program serving people in the East Bay Area. . . **Greg Ledbetter**, a former pastor of Shell Ridge Community Baptist Church, and his wife, **Jan**, are moving to Vermont, where they will be building a new home.

The First Baptist Church of Berkeley had the unique distinction of ordaining *two* of its members this Spring. **Nathan T. Brittsan** was ordained on May 1 in a service held at Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church. **Dr. Zulu Lemtur** was affirmed for ordination by the First Baptist Church of Berkeley in their morning worship service on June 12. . . Giving leadership at the Ministers Council Retreat in April were a “father and daughter” team, **Don Ng**, President of PCBA (and former President of American Baptist Churches, USA) and **Lauren Ng**, Director of Leadership Empowerment for the American Baptist Home Mission Societies. The retreat’s theme was Fostering Connection and Community Through the Power of Stories.

Several members of **Lakeshore Avenue Baptist Church**, led by **Allison Tanner**, Pastor for Public Ministry, participated in an interfaith state-wide “pilgrimage” to privately operated, for-profit “detention centers” for non-documented persons. The intent of the trip was increase awareness of the legal and health conditions of the centers and to call for “just closing” of the institutions. A related concern was to promote passage of the Vision Act which would prohibit local law enforcement officials from turning over to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”) un-documented persons who have completed serving sentences in jails or prisons for often minor offenses.

The Feeling is Still on my Cheek

By Dale Edmondson, Editor

It was 83 years ago this past Easter, April 9, that Marian Anderson gave her memorable concert at the Lincoln Memorial. Wearing her fur coat on a cool, damp and drizzly afternoon, she began to sing: "My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee, I sing."

Six years later, as a boy of 12 in Bakersfield, I knew nothing of that concert, nor that she had been refused lodging at the Hotel Padre in our town when she arrived to give a recital. My father took me to that concert at the Fox Theater. It was unlike anything I'd experienced: the smooth richness of her voice, like cream it seemed; the quiet dignity of her bearing; and the mystery of how her voice could reach deep inside you, even if you were a boy. (Newsreel coverage of the event may be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XF9Quk0QhSE.>)

The concert began with Bach's "All is Fulfilled" from the St. John Passion and concluded with the spiritual, "My Soul's been Anchored in the Lord," as arranged by composer, Florence Price. When the ovation ended, my father suggested that we see if we could get Ms Anderson's autograph. Clearly others had the same idea: the wings on stage left were crowded, yet orderly. I waited my turn. When I arrived at the table where she was seated, her manager suddenly announced, "Ms Anderson will sign no more autographs tonight." She looked straight at me and said, "No! I will sign many more." When she reached across the table to get my program, the sleeve of her fur coat brushed my left cheek. After 77 years, I still feel that fur on my face! Who knows how it does?

I believe Anderson's impact on racial equality was not through public protest, but through an undiscouraged demonstration of quiet dignity in the face of discrimination. She had a self-understanding of her own worth as a human being and as a child of God. That view can be attributed both to the strong family in which she was raised and the Union Baptist Church of Philadelphia which early sensed her unique gift, supporting and encouraging her in her musical preparation.

Who she was became her testimony to the worth of individuals. It guided her in her steps along the way. Once, after being accepted for voice training by a noted instructor, she rejected the arrangement when she learned it was to be paid by being her teacher's household servant and house cleaner.

Singing at the Lincoln Memorial took place after she was prevented from singing at Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. by the Daughters of the American Revolution. This rejection had been preceded by unprecedented acclaim throughout Europe for her concerts there. In a rare public statement she said, "I'm shocked beyond words to be barred

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AMERICAN BAPTIST MINISTRIES ON-LINE

American Baptist Churches, USA - "Everyday Conversations" series on critical issues such as homelessness. <https://www.abc-usa.org/?s=everyday+conversations>

Baptist Peace Fellowship - Register for Virtual Summer Conference 2022 and read the Fellowship's newsletter. <https://www.bpfna.org/summerconference2022details>

Evergreen Baptist Association - Serving "a culturally diverse people who are one in Christ and who value the liberties of our American Baptist Heritage." <https://www.ea-abc.org/>

Welcoming and Affirming Baptists - Read "Welcoming Spirit" and AWAB support for transgender children and their families. <https://awab.org/newsletter/>

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from the capital of my own country after having appeared in almost every other capital in the world." Speaking of Eleanor Roosevelt's role in arranging the concert at the Lincoln Memorial, she said further, "She seemed to me to be one who really comprehended the true meaning of democracy." What more powerful affirmation of her belief in America's true values could she have made than to stand resolute and regal before the Easter throng and sing of her country?

When nearing retirement and living in Minneapolis, I visited a traveling exhibition assembled by the Smithsonian for its 150th anniversary. Moving through it, I encountered—displayed in a glass case—Marian Anderson's fur coat. I stood there for a while, thinking, then moved on. But turning back for a last look, I saw a little black boy, about five years old, standing in front of the coat looking at it! I stepped over to him and said, "That's a pretty coat, isn't it?" To which the boy replied, "Yes, it is."

I wondered at the time how much that boy would come to know about Marian Anderson, about her remarkable achievement, and about the repeated rejection she had experienced because her skin was dark. I wondered if he knew of the blood shed by many in the years since that Washington concert in hopes that he could grow up with the common freedoms I had. And, out of necessity, I thought of the racist hostility he would most certainly experience in the years that would follow his visit to the museum.

As I look back in these latter years, a question has surfaced: did Marian Anderson close her Bakersfield recital with that spiritual to provide a musical balance or because it was her personal testimony—"My soul's been anchored in the Lord?"