

### Historic Ordination of Addie S. Banks into Pulpit Ministry: June 18, 2011 at Riverside Church, New York City

By Kenneth Thompson

Saturday, June 18, 2011, became a historic day in Mennonite Church USA and the local New York City area as Addie Banks was officially ordained into full pulpit ministry. The service was officiated by leaders of two conferences (Atlantic Coast and Lancaster Conferences), the NYC Mennonite Oversight Council, Iglesia Menonita Hispana, and attended by representative members of Mennonite Church USA Executive Board (Janeen B. Johnson, Kenneth Thompson), African American Mennonite Association Board and Mennonite Church USA Intercultural Relations Reference Committee (Kenneth Thompson), along with members and friends from churchwide agencies and several local congregations.

The event was very moving, filled with good humor, high praise & worship, awesome solemnity and thoughtful history. There only had been one Mennonite woman ordained by Lancaster Conference for ministry in the New York area, 100 years ago. Now, 100 years later, Addie Banks is the first woman in this area since 1911 to be formally ordained for ministry. Bishop Michael Banks remarked that this ordination also is significant because it is "true to the spirit of Anabaptist/Mennonite theology which urges us to search the Scriptures and apply it in present time. This is a faithful response to God's call to do justice and express His progressive revelation."

The speaker for the evening, Sister Terry Ricard, ODM, taking her text from Paul's words in Philippians 3, encouraged Addie and everyone to believe "the sufferings of Christ yield both the likeness and the newness of His life within us. We are scarred by struggle yet transformed by hope. True conversion is a continual, ongoing communion with our Lord. We embrace suffering, believing God in the midst of it, that it will yield both a greater character and purpose."

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### You Can't Do Mission Without Inclusion

By Wil LaVeist

(Reprinted from Beyond Ourselves, Oct. 2011-Vol. 10, No. 3.

A recent opinion piece in The Mennonite titled, "Confessions of a white anti-racist," gripped my attention. The commentary by Sarah Shirk is about her initially cold reaction to the changed worship style at the adult services during the annual Mennonite Church USA Convention in July. Shirk wrote honestly about how she was rattled and disappointed by the missing four-part harmony hymns she and other white friends had anticipated. Instead, the predominantly black Calvary Community Church band of Hampton, Va., led worship with contemporary guitars, syncopated drums, and keyboards blended with soulful voices singing unfamiliar gospel tunes. "I didn't know the songs the worship band led. I missed the hymns I had grown up singing and come to love," Shirk wrote.

But as the week went on, something happened.

"I noticed a middle-aged black woman standing a few rows ahead of me. She had her head tilted back, face raised, and was swaying and clapping along with the music. I wondered how many conventions and how many church services she had previously sat through, feeling as I now did—disconnected and a bit out of my element. But today it was her turn to worship in a style familiar and nurturing to her. So this music is Mennonite music."

As a black American and member of Calvary attending my first Mennonite convention, I was proud that God had used my church to be such a bridge to understanding. But I was even more intrigued by the reactions posted at the bottom of Shirk's column, particularly those ripping her point of view.

Jono11 posted: "...You don't walk into an Amish service and demand that they stop singing the way they sing, or that they start driving SUVs and watching satellite TV..."



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AAMA/Lark Newsletter is a newsletter which is distributed biannually.  
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## Historic Ordination *continued*

She went on to compare Addie Banks' life to this point as a daffodil flower growing up amidst an open lot strewn with debris. And how, like that flower, Addie has grown, pushed through and up past racism, sexism, and poverty. And like that beautiful flower the anointing on her life beautifies her into an encourager and animator of the gospel among us.

Everyone listened intently as Addie Banks began her examination with the words: "I have heard the call of Jesus Christ, and in the words of Isaiah, I respond, 'Here am I. Send me.'" After kneeling, hands were laid upon her, solemn prayer was offered up, and Addie banks rose to receive her ordination license from the area bishops and a specially quilted mantle made by several women to commemorate her historic step. Lancaster bishops Keith Weaver and Dale Stoltzfus followed with a Statement of Resolution on behalf of their conference that officially recognized and affirmed her call unto full pulpit ministry in Mennonite Church USA.

Addie Banks, alternating between tears and a winning smile, thanked everyone present for making this a significant event, and invited as many as could stay to join her for food & fellowship afterward. The evening closed with joy and laughter, singing and dancing unto the Lord in praise for His grace among us, as Addie continued to meet people and personally thank them individually.

Congratulations to Minister Addie Sanders Banks!



*Minister Addie Banks has been a member of the King of Glory Tabernacle pastoral leadership team for many years. She is the director of Groundswell, a Community Resource Center in the Bronx, focusing on peacemaking and economic justice. Addie is a Christian educator and has conducted numerous seminars and workshops in the area of prayer, peacemaking and women's issues. She currently serves on the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board and has served in various churchwide roles.*



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## Mission Without Inclusion *continued*

And you don't join the Mennonite Church just to change the way we worship, change the way we sing, and ultimately transform us from a vital, unique peace church into just another bland vanilla-Christian nothingness."

Hmmm. I respect Jono 11's valid point, which is shared by many Mennonites, I thought to myself. I wouldn't want someone to attend Calvary and insist the flava be diluted from the worship music.

I get it because I, too, believe that my unique black American cultural context is as equally relevant, valuable and godly as the European. The same is true for the Asian, Middle-Eastern, African, South American and Native American.

Anyone who understands the history of persecution that European Mennonites suffered over generations that forced them to North and South America, and how that has deeply shaped the church we appreciate today, should understand the need to preserve this great heritage, right? Is the distinctive European-inspired singing style as much a pillar of what makes Mennonites unique and attractive as our emphasis on peace, justice and missions?

Ironically, there in lies the angst and the answer.

Working as a staff member in the marketing department of Mennonite Mission Network, it has become clear to me that you can't truly believe in missions without also believing in cultural inclusion. If you serve and witness to someone outside of your culture, as Jesus has clearly commissioned Christians to do in commanding that we "therefore, go and make disciples of all nations," a natural result is that the people we lead to Christ would want to join us in worship at church. This has been my personal experience over the years and has been the experience of many mission workers I've been honored to write about recently. So, it must also follow that through missions, God is bringing about the "house of prayer for all nations," and through our individual and collective spiritual growth, God's will is being "done on earth as it is in heaven." Inclusion is God's intended consequence of mission work.

What Sister Shirk shared was that in experiencing what it is like to be a cultural fish out of water at church, and allowing the Holy Spirit to lead her beyond her initial discomfort zone, she grew another level closer to heaven. If we focus on the superior Spirit that unites us, we'll find there is more than enough room at the table for us to sample, appreciate and value each other's equally godly styles.

Personally, one of the most beautiful moments of the adult worship experience at the convention was when we took communion together and sang hymns in unity. Our blended voices sounded angelic, especially mine as I tucked it below the voice of the white brother next to me who could really sing.

Praise God for him.

*Will LaVeist is managing editor for multimedia at Mennonite Mission Network.*