

Touching Lives Through Music

Alfreda Burke is First Mennonite Church of Chicago's Adult Sunday School Teacher, Church Facilitator and Music Director. She and husband, Rodrick Dixon, taped Prague PBS Special, *Hallelujah Broadway* in February 2010. *Hallelujah Broadway*, a performance of inspiring, uplifting songs from Broadway musicals, was aired on PBS internationally beginning July 31, 2010; and released on DVD/CD on EMI/Manhattan Records, September 14, 2010. *Hallelujah Broadway* will be performed under the baton of Maestro John Morris Russell with the Cincinnati Pops Symphony and the May Festival Summer Chorus, August 6, 2011; and at Chicago's Auditorium Theatre, September 17, 2011. Soprano opera singer Alfreda Burke has appeared in concert throughout North America and Europe. From Carnegie Hall to the Chicago Symphony to singing the National Anthem for the Chicago Bulls, Burke has performed in a range of venues. Please visit www.sopranoalfredaburke.com and her Facebook page. Burke shares below from her journey.

Pastor John H. Burke Jr. and First Lady, Mamie R. Burke always made sure that faithfulness in ministry, the Word of God, music, arts, academic diligence and quality family time were part of my sister, Renee Davis' and my daily regimen and environment. Dad played trombone in the Drake University Band, Army Airforce Band and Thad Jones Band prior to later pastoring; Mom sang in the renowned Rust College A Cappella Choir. They took us to diverse concerts and performances as well as church and school; and inspired excellence. I took piano and organ lessons and was featured in musical performances in elementary and high school. I received Master and Bachelor of Music Degrees from Roosevelt University, Chicago Musical College. I loved the twenty-five plus years that I worked in music education and vocal instruction. One of the highlights of my career includes working with Maestro Daniel Barenboim and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at Carnegie Hall and Symphony Center in Strauss' *Elektra*. There have been so many diverse and inspiring musical performances as well, from Puccini's *Turandot* to *Show Boat* under Hal Prince's direction, *Too Hot to Handel* and *Hallelujah Broadway*. I love works by Richard Strauss, Mahler, Tchaikovsky, Handel, Mozart, Verdi, Puccini, Poulenc, Barber, Gershwin, Bernstein, Boatner....to Andre Crouch and Dottie Rambo!



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MARK YOUR CALENDARS

And prepare for an exciting time together
JULY 4-9, 2011!

The African American Mennonite Association (AAMA) will host an event you don't want to miss on the evening of Wednesday, July 6, 2011 at the Mennonite Church USA Convention in Pittsburgh, PA. "We are the Church" day of the convention also takes place on Wednesday and will celebrate our and the other racial/ethnic groups' gifts and cultures. The entire convention will feature several speakers, presenters, singers and other participants from our diverse races and cultures.

The AAMA gathering will include spirit filled praise and worship, a slide show of AAMA churches in ministry, refreshments, and more. All AAMA churches are asked to email high quality resolution jpeg images of their congregation in ministry for the slide show to aama_org@yahoo.com by June 3, 2011. Congregations that submit pictures in the requested jpeg format will be entered into a drawing for a door prize. We will have another door prize for AAMA churches that access AAMA's web page for the songs that will be sung that evening. The song selections and lyrics are on www.aamcusa.org. Three door prizes will be given that will be great resources for AAMA churches. Churches must have a member present at the time of the drawings to win.

AAMA's Business Session will also take place on July 6th during the gathering. Bylaw amendments will need to be voted on at that time. The membership provision will be amended.

Mennonite Church USA registration rates are available online. Please visit <http://www.mennoniteusa.org/Home/Convention/Pittsburgh2011/tabid/1441/Default.aspx> for convention and registration information. Also please visit AAMA's web site at www.aamamcusa.org for information about the AAMA gathering. We hope to see you at the convention in Pittsburgh on July 4-9, 2011 and look forward to hearing from you in the coming months.

AFRICAN AMERICAN MENNONITE ASSOCIATION/ LARK LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

2311 Tower Place • Hampton, Virginia 23666
(757) 262-0128 (office) • (757) 825-8771 (fax)

aama_org@yahoo.com

www.aamamcusa.org

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And there's so many more! I've always known that music — whether sacred or secular — can be ministry; and this international language resonates, touches and heals those who hear. Music transcends all boundaries.

I'm convinced that each of us are called, chosen, anointed, purposed, gifted and destined by God for unique work and specific ministries. (I Peter 2:9) God empowers and enables us to reach many and further His Kingdom with those gifts. (Ephesians 3:20) We are the body of Christ. "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes!" (Psalm 118:23) "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." (Zechariah 4:6) I've always worn many hats at First Mennonite (i.e., Sunday School Teacher, Children's Choir Director, Music Director, Piano and Voice Teacher, Custodian, etc.); so, it seems right to continue now that my father and Pastor of 37 yrs. has gone to his Heavenly home with the Lord. It's rewarding because it's Kingdom work. Thankfully, it's always been a family affair at First Mennonite Church of Chicago. My mother, husband, son (Dean), sister, brother-in-law (Bill) and niece (Danielle) have always served faithfully in music ministry and other service.

I've been tremendously blessed and privileged to sing with world class musicians and conductors; and work with brilliantly creative minds. I'm very grateful! It's life changing to sing inspired works of great composers who have scored masterfully for the voice and orchestra. The rich cultures, people, architecture, churches, history, traditions and food of the countries that we've sung in have been intriguing, delightful and enriching. There is an undeniable connection between audience and stage; the exchange of energy and electricity. It's a blessing to do what you love. However, as with anything worthwhile, it requires diligence, focus, research, practice and preparation. You must study, learn and coach several languages, translations, transliterations (i.e., Italian, French, German, Czech, Russian, Latin, Hebrew, etc.); continue to study with a voice teacher; research and develop roles and characters.

What I would say to others desiring a professional singing career is: Seek God first and foremost! Make sure that singing is your talent, gift, and calling. Start with an excellent voice instructor/pedagogue that will lay and build upon a strong technical foundation. You need a set of ears and someone to guide you healthily to the right, appropriate repertoire. Whatever your aria, art song, musical theater or crossover choices are, do your due diligence in meticulous preparation (technical, musical, artistic, dramatic, *linguistic*, etc.); and enjoy the moment fully! There's always a lot of 'meat on the bone'! Be your authentic self! Choose that which resonates within you and be willing to work hard. Audition for young artist and apprenticeship programs, summer programs, international programs; competitions; and management — if appropriate to your ability level. Be willing to go to the next level. Work with a good, trustworthy coach. You learn a lot about yourself, your instrument, the workings of the industry, life, the importance of forging relationships and being a good colleague the more you stand on the 'X'! Be tenacious and stay encouraged! Wishing you God's blessings on your journey!

Black Christian News Network Recognizes Dr. Natalie A. Francisco

Earlier this year, Black Christian News Network (BCNN1.com) named Dr. Natalie A. Francisco among the 25 most influential black Christian female history makers. She is noted as a speaker, author, conference host, minister and mentor. We extend our congratulations to Dr. Natalie and our appreciation for her sharing her gifts throughout Mennonite Church USA.



Dr. Natalie A. Francisco has served as co-pastor of Calvary Community Church and co-founder of Calvary Christian Academy in Hampton, VA alongside her husband, Bishop L. W. Francisco III. She has also served extensively in full-time ministry for over 25 years in areas of leadership in both the Music and Arts and Christian Education departments of her local church. As founder and executive director of the Women of Worth Conference and the Women of Worth and Worship Institute (WOWWI), Francisco seeks to provide godly and practical instruction to women who desire to learn and implement biblical truths and principles from her life's lessons.

She furthers her mentorship through the three books she's written: Wisdom for Women of Worth & Worship: Lessons for a Life of Virtue, Value & Victory and Parenting and Partnering with Purpose: Linking Homes, Schools and Churches to Educate Our Children and A Woman's Journal for Joyful Living: Successful Steps to Holistic Health (all published by St. Paul Press). Francisco's latest book was listed number one for BlackCBC.com, Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com online sales for February's list of the leading nonfiction books by black independent Christian authors. She will be one of the seminar presenters at the Mennonite Church USA Pittsburgh Convention and part of the worship band. Visit www.nataliefrancisco.com for more information about WOWWI, Francisco's books and other resources.

Philadelphia Mennonite High School (PMHS) transforms the lives of their students through education. They need our support though to continue fulfilling PMHS' mission. Please see the enclosed letter and prayerfully consider one of the two suggested responses. Also please keep the school in your prayers. More information about PMHS is available at www.pmhs98.org.



Visit www.aamamcusa.org to read issues of the **AAMA/Lark Newsletter** and for other news and information.