



Interwoven Congregations™

Quarterly

Issue 1: April 2021

A journal of insight and expression on the road to racial justice and healing

Welcome!

We are delighted to share this inaugural issue of Interwoven Congregations Quarterly! This space will strive to lift up a broad array of voices and talents that express the longing, the joy, the frustrations and the victories of this work of seeking racial justice and healing. We invite your comments on this and future issues! And we extend our great gratitude to all of the contributors to this first issue!

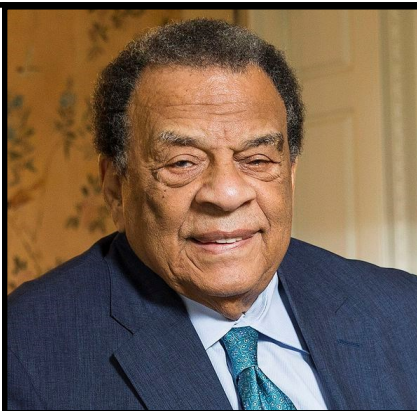
— *The Board of Interwoven Congregations*

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(Photo credit: Alina Hvostikova)

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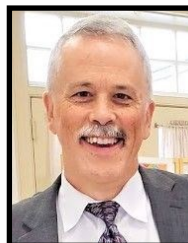
A Conversation with Ambassador Andrew Young

Of James Brown, Dr. King, grandmothers, and the march for racial justice today

In dialogue with . . .



Rev. Bernice Parker-Jones



Rev. Charles Booker



Rev. Cassandra Wainright



Rev. Pat Jackson

*We thank the Rev. Dr. Paul Smith, an Interwoven Congregations Board member, for arranging this interview with Ambassador Young. Rev. Pat Jackson, co-executive director of Interwoven Congregations, moderated the discussion on **March 18th** and edited it for publication.*

Interwoven Congregations (IwC): Ambassador Young: Forgive me, Mr. Ambassador, there’s so much going on between the pandemic, the still shocking experience of January 6th, voting restrictions moving through state legislatures, and now the beginning of the trial for the police officer charged with the killing of George Floyd. How are you feeling at this moment?

Ambassador Young: Forgive me, but my first reaction is James Brown. “I feel good!”

IwC: Why does James Brown come into your mind?

Ambassador Young: Because I always wished I could do that little dance that he does. “I feel good, I know that I would now. So good, so good.” And I do. Because I’m not looking at the

world situation or the national situation. I'm looking here in Atlanta. Yes, the state legislature has got 51 bills or so on voter suppression. We've dealt with that before. I think the Congress is strong enough now. The voting rights bill [H.R. 1 For the People Act] will pretty much negate anything that the state legislature passes. Never in my lifetime has almost \$2 trillion gone directly to mostly poor people. It's going to end up moving up to the top and the rich will get their share. But this child credit is revolutionary. And I see a time where [Senator] Raphael Warnock, who is Martin Luther King's successor at Ebenezer Baptist Church and was John Lewis' pastor for years – has replaced Herman Talmadge's seat after 30 years. All I can see is how much better things are. Yes, white folk are still racist. Policemen still get out of hand. But when they do, it's news all over the world. When we started out in Birmingham in 1962, there had been over 60 bombings of people's homes because poor white people didn't like the fact that Black folk were coming back from the army, getting the GI Bill and financing little houses. They were little framed houses, but they had a picket fence on them, and azaleas growing in the yard. It really made white folk mad and they bombed 60 homes in the period of

“Never in my lifetime has almost \$2 trillion gone directly to mostly poor people.” — Ambassador Young

'61 to '62 and bombed Fred Shuttlesworth's church three times. It never appeared in the paper in Atlanta 150 miles away. Now, anything happens anywhere in the world -- we know about it. We're dealing with it. So I think of this as wonderful times.

lwC: You're in a place of hope!

Ambassador Young: Yes, because I've been in the valley so long. Ralph Abernathy used to say, "I don't

know what the future holds, but it doesn't bother me because I know who holds the future." And that's the way I feel now.

lwC: Rev. Bernice Parker-Jones – are you channeling James Brown? What's on your mind and heart as you reflect on where we are today?

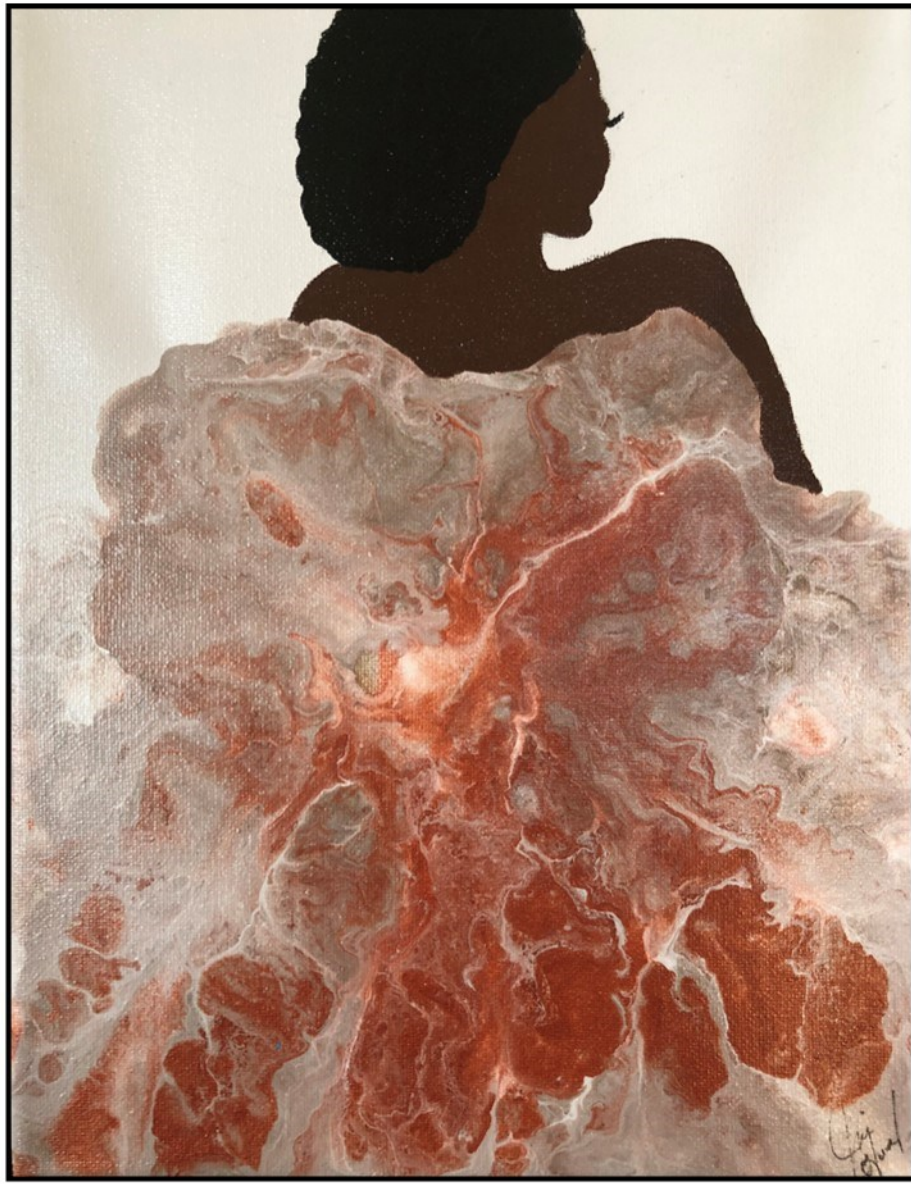
Rev. Parker-Jones (Pastor of Faith Presbyterian Church, Washington, D.C.): I don't have a song just yet. I can't say that I'm feeling as fine as Ambassador Young. I am feeling hopeful however. Of course, given the Ambassador's historical context, I can understand your "feeling good." However, the community in which my church resides is one of the poorest of the eight Wards in the District of Columbia. The income level is below the poverty level and purchasing a home is not within reach. In addition, when we look at the recent killings of Blacks in this country, including George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and other murders, together with attempts to restrict or deny voting rights, many in our congregation are becoming increasingly angry. I'm talking about people who are generally very calm and very knowledgeable of things in the world. But I hear their words such as "I'm just angry and I'm tired. I'm tired of trying to figure this out." It's very difficult for me to be feeling good as I share the pain of my congregants. But, I'm hopeful because I do see a light at the end of the tunnel. Despite all of this, with the new Administration of President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, the new Secretary of Interior (Deb Haaland), I am hopeful and I am seeing light at the end of the tunnel. And that's where my hope is.



Ambassador Young: Let me give you a song that I thought of as you were talking. "I don't feel no ways tired."

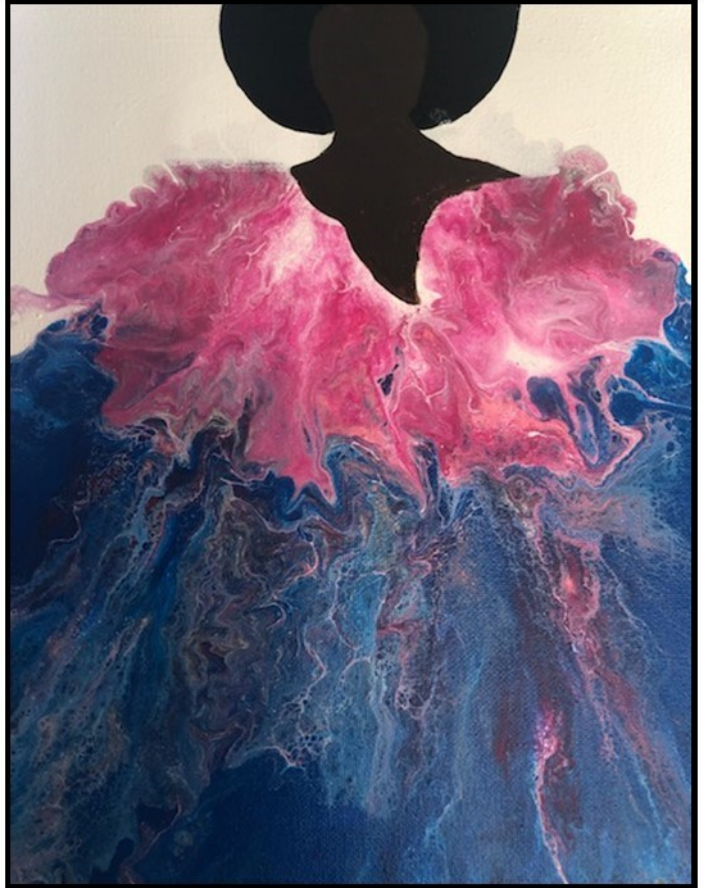
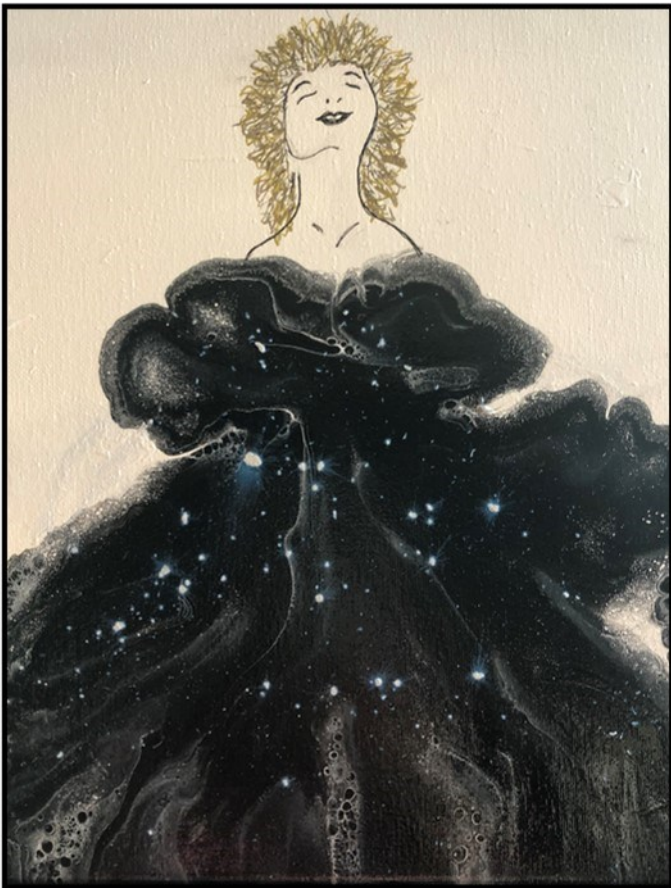
Rev. Parker Jones: "I don't feel no ways tired."

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About the artist – Joni Harbaugh

Joni Harbaugh is a happily retired, spiritual, family - oriented woman who is enjoying new found hobbies — including painting. Residing in Cleveland, Joni also loves to cook, cater small events and continues to maintain her Master Gardener credentials. “The inspiration for the series ‘Ladies in Flowing Gowns’ came from a beautiful painting by the late artist Virgie Patton. From there the ladies’ faces and expressions evolve after I create the gowns. They are an expression of the beauty, dignity, exuberance, pride, self-assurance, boldness and resolve of African American women.” This is the debut public showing of Joni’s work. *To reach the artist: joni.harbaugh@gmail.com.*



Ladies in Flowing Gowns

Ambassador Young: *“We’ve come too far from where we started from and nobody told me the road would be easy. But I don’t believe He brought us this far to leave us.”*

Rev. Parker-Jones: Amen, I agree with that, thank you. I usually come up with a Sam Cooke kind of song — *“A Change is Gonna Come.”*

Ambassador Young: I grew up in New Orleans and the Mississippi River has been part of my growing up. *“I was born by the river in a little shack. And just like the river I keep on coming back. It’s been a long time coming . . .”*

Rev. Parker-Jones: *“But a change is gonna come.”*

Ambassador Young: *“A change is gonna come. Oh yes it will.”* We used to call this in the civil rights

“I’ve been living with white supremacy since I was four years old.”

— Ambassador Young

movement, when people get like I am now, we used to call it ‘freedom high.’ It would usually come when something had happened that was really tragic and you were really low. Ralph Abernathy used to say, “Segregation is like that old hen that my grand-mamma had wrung her neck and threw it out in the yard. She used to say, ‘Don’t worry son. It’s jumping up and down, but it’s dead.’” That was the way he looked at segregation. It’s still jumping up and down, but it’s dead. I feel that about the last administration, the spell that it cast on the world. I went to congress the same year Joe Biden went to the Senate. I watched him through all of his sufferings. There couldn’t be a guy who’s been through more and who’s handled it any better. He’s been prepared for a time like this through his sufferings.

Two weeks ago, I went back to my little country

church where I started out in Thomasville and Beachton, Georgia in 1954. I go back down there thinking that they’re all collapsed – and they’ve been fixed up. They have carpet on the floor, new pianos, they have cushioned seats. I had 15 members; they now have 80 members. Just to see how strong people are and how they fixed up their houses, how good the church looks. It depends on what you expect. I was born in 1932 when everything was bad. I was born in New Orleans with the Nazi party on the corner of my block. I’ve been dealing with white supremacy since I was 4 years old. My daddy said then, “White supremacy is a sickness. You don’t get angry with sick people. You don’t let their sickness get you upset because that kind of sickness is contagious and you don’t want to catch it.”

IwC: Rev. Chuck Booker, we have a couple songs in our playlist. Is there a song that comes to your mind when you think about where we are today?

Rev. Booker (Pastor of Bethesda Presbyterian Church, Bethesda, MD): A song that popped in my mind, when I’m down, is “There must be a God Somewhere.” I always thought that was not a very strong statement of faith. But when you’re down, you need to hear that.



Suffering breeds endurance, endurance gives character and character gives hope that the Apostle Paul talks about. Another one I think of when I’m feeling more connected is “Call Him Up and Tell Him What You Want.”

Ambassador Young: *“Jesus is on the mainline . . .”*

Rev. Booker: *“Jesus is on the mainline,”* — exactly!

Ambassador Young: *“Tell him what you want!”*

Rev. Booker: I've been reading a little of your book, Mr. Ambassador, *An Easy Burden*. Is there a sequel you have in mind?

Ambassador Young: [The Rev. Dr.] Paul Smith is the one who introduced me to Martin Luther King. When Dr. King was assassinated, just before he went to Memphis, he had a meeting in New York with us and said "We have to find a way to get the energy of this



movement into politics. We shouldn't have to demonstrate every time something is wrong. That's what electoral politics is all about." He should have gone to sleep because we weren't due in Washington until the next night. But Dr. King said, "No, I'm going to get up and get the 6 a.m. flight to Memphis." He made that decision alone. We would never let him go into a conflict alone. He had a team around him that really loved him and would die for him. But he deliberately broke away from us and went to Memphis on his own. I think he knew where he was going.

lwC: What was it like to lose Dr. King, Mr. Ambassador?

Ambassador Young: He had prepared us for it. He used to talk about death all the time. But he would do it in a humorous way. It would always be somebody's else's death. He said, "I know my time is coming. But death is the ultimate democracy. Everybody's got to die. You don't have anything to say about how you die, when you die, where you die. Your only choice is what do you give your life for." He'd say, "I know there's a bullet somewhere with my name on it. But I'm going to be around for a while

because you guys are so anxious to get your pictures in the paper that you'll jump in front of me and take the bullet. And then I'll have the responsibility of trying to preach you into heaven. I don't know how I'm going to explain you to God." And he would preach your funeral. It would be more like Richard Pryor. He was a real comedian when he started clowning and preaching sermons about your death, saying every embarrassing thing he could think of. He made us laugh at death.

lwC: What do you think Dr. King would say today?

Ambassador Young: He was always the perfectionist. He would be very upset about all that was wrong and the things that are left undone. And there is a lot. But he would be pleased, I think, that Black Lives Matter completed the mantra he suggested for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which was to redeem the soul of America from the triple evils of racism, war and poverty. He went to Memphis -- the poor people's campaign was an attempt to deal with poverty. We didn't do it. He was killed. But he said such profound things like, "The bombs we drop on Vietnam will explode at home in inflation and unemployment." And I think we've seen that. Citicorp did a study that said poverty and discrimination cost the

"[Dr. King] made us laugh at death."

— Ambassador Young

economy \$16 ½ trillion between 2000 - 2020. If the economy was working the way we know it should, we would be \$16 trillion richer. Poverty is very expensive.

lwC: What's the role for faith communities at this time for racial justice?

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Psalm 42

By Rev. Bob Melone

(September 2020)

1. As a parched forest fawn, yearns for
the refreshment of a babbling brook,
As a frightened child, cries for the
protective arms of a grandparent,
As a weary war-torn land, begs for relief
from the violence of its inhabitants,
So does my soul long for God.

2. My heart aches for an awareness
of the Spirit's presence:
For Christ's face
For Wisdom's grace
For Love's embrace.

3. Tears flow too quickly, too easily,
in the early morning hours.
Before the day has even begun, our streets
overflow with sickness and suffering
With injustice and inequity
With despair and death.
"Where are you God?"

4. Hands gloved, facial masks
Physically distanced, lonely tasks.
Rubber bullets, pepper sprayed
Angry shouts, emotions frayed.
This is what has replaced my songs of
thanksgiving, and I have no shouts of joy!

5. Why is my soul so sad? Why is my heart
so heavy?

Is that not clear?

6. Trust . . . praise . . . they are just not here!
From Wuhan to New York, from Minneapolis
to Louisville.

7. Deep calls to deep. Sorrow like sea
billows roll.

And all is NOT well with my soul.

8. With the thousands lost to COVID-19,
With the millions lost to racial injustice,
We cry out "why have we been forgotten?"

9. We know God is our rock; that Divine
love is never-ending.

But right now, it doesn't feel that way.

10. So . . . where are you God? We all
want to know!

11. Why does my soul continue to long
for your presence?

Why can I find no hope? Why is there no
song, left to sing?

We're told you can be trusted.

I'm told you remain worthy of praise.

But I can't.

Not yet. Not today.

(Rev. Bob Melone pastors at Mt. Vernon Presbyterian Church
in Alexandria, Virginia)

Rev. Parker-Jones: I'll start with the local church. I was thinking earlier today that 15 years ago Faith Presbyterian church, which is all black, partnered with Bush Hill Presbyterian, which was predominantly

"I think churches need to work together, not just black/white, but churches in the community to build that voice."

— Rev. Parker-Jones

white. We partnered with them and looked at a series of videos on racism and did some things together. We have partnered again with another predominantly white Presbyterian Church. We recognize that we have to have some really open, honest, raw, sometimes painful conversations. I think the church on the larger level has to become involved in the local, grassroots politics. In the community where my church lives (in Anacostia, Washington, D.C.), the average income is \$37,000 a year. The average price of a home is \$375,000. We are below the poverty level. So we have to start with the local politics, the local community -- Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, our Ward councilpersons, the people in the community. We have to continue to get our white churches, our white sisters and brothers, to be allies with us because unfortunately their voices are heard a lot louder than our voices. I think churches need to work together. Not just black/white, but churches in the community to build that voice. We have to start at the bottom line -- grassroots politics, getting involved and keeping the lines of communication open.

lwc: Rev. Booker, where should faith communities be today?

Rev. Booker: A fellow once said to me, "Scratch a problem long enough, you come down to money." Now we see with Heather McGhee's book, "The Sum

of Us," how racism leads to money. I've banked -- that's a good metaphor here -- banked my theology a lot on this. The words that we use for money we use for faith. Same words -- *save, redeem, trust, bonds, worth, value, debt*. And my favorite is *possession*. Are you possessed? I think that really gets close to the spiritual matter. As a church, I see it has to do with asking those tough questions "Where do you live? Why do you live there? Is your neighborhood open?" Looking at the heart of those concerns. Seeing where our churches have been placed. The land we have owned as a Presbytery and where did that come from? Who had the land? How are reparations coming from us in that regard? Economic justice. I really think it has to do with how do we get into the messiness of money, realizing the same words we use for money we use for faith.

A personal experience. I moved into this neighborhood after living next door to the church for 10 years in Bethesda. Bethesda has a higher median income than where Bernice cited, quite a bit. I moved into an

"A fellow once said to me, 'Scratch a problem long enough, you come down to money.'"

— Rev. Booker

area that's about 6 miles north of the church after I got married two years ago to a wonderful woman who hails from Salvador originally. This neighborhood is much more mixed. We have Bolivian borders below us, Turkish neighbors next door and Brazilian neighbors on the other side. What we have here is a neighborhood that is quite different than six miles away where the church is. So that's opened my eyes a lot. How can we look at these deeper issues?

lwc: Rev. Wainright, where do you believe faith communities should be?

Rev. Wainright (Pastor of Heaven Sent Ministries, Kansas City, MO): For me, and especially in Kansas City, I think we need to continue to echo the clarion call that the church really must be at the forefront of



dealing with race and racial healing -- in our congregations, in our city, in our communities, and even within our families. For me and the circle that I'm in, from Dr. King and the work you all did Ambassador Young, those have been

great strides, great efforts, great sacrifices that have been made. Somewhere along the line, after that time, the church became slothful in carrying forth the work that needed to be done along those lines. I think the church needs to elevate our voices in this time among this culture. Because if true transformation and enhancing the work that was begun years ago before we became engaged will take place, I think we need to get back to that.

IwC: A question around the horn. Who is inspiring you today in this work for racial justice, be it a voice from the past or a new voice coming up?

Ambassador Young: The first thing that came to mind is the first thing I started my ministry with, and that is Tolstoy's "The Kingdom of God is within" . . . One of the reasons that people give up is that they don't have anything to live for. So I worked out an agenda based on Mathew 25. What is the Lord going to ask me when I knock at the pearly gates. Did you feed the hungry, did you clothe the naked, did you heal the sick, set at liberty those oppressed? That's what [the Andrew Young] Foundation is built around. We're trying to figure out how were' going to feed people in Africa and India with global warming when you are not able to grow food in the ground. Everything is going to change. The governor of California is saying everyone will be driving electric cars by 2035.

I'm trying to figure out how we make that kind of world available to all of God's children.

Rev. Parker-Jones: There's a voice from the past that inspires me, and that is the voice of my grandmother, Katie Boney. She could not read. In fact, she was not able to walk. She is, Ambassador Young, what the songs say: "I had a praying Grandmother." She prayed for me. When I think of her, and feel her presence around me, in my struggles, and even in times of my quest to retire from ministry, I just feel the presence of my grandmother urging me to "*Keep going, keep going.*" In the present, the voice that encourages me is the 92 year old member of my church, who the other day went to get her second dose of the Covid vaccine. I asked her if she drove herself, and she said "Yes." I look at her strength and her mental strength and her spiritual strength. She will not give up. And she is always on my side. Just to hear her say "Pastor, we're going to stand behind you" encourages me. Those are the voices I hear.

Rev. Wainright: For me, even though I was a young girl at the time of Dr. King's assassination, I hold onto the inspiration that I received from the civil rights movement. From Dr. King, Ambassador Young — all of you literally gave your lives for the movement. You sacrificed your lives, your families, your own resources. I grew up in that understanding. That was always very, very clear to me.

"I think the church needs to elevate our voices in this time among this culture."

— Rev. Wainwright

I saw the work of Malcom X, and even Louis Farrakhan. I hold on to the teachings in our bible about Micah 6:8 of how our responsibility is to do justice,

(continued on page 11)



and to walk humbly with our Lord. Those are the things, those are the people that inspire me to continue in this work. Even now in our city, we have an 88 year old evangelist. She had a vision for the Sankofa for Kansas City movement. Her whole vision and mission is to go back and get those things that we have forgotten. When you look at the dismantling of the family, the dismantling of everything regarding our race, it's bringing those things back to our culture, to our communities, so that we will never forget the sacrifices that many have made for years for us to be here -- the cotton that our ancestors picked. All of those things inspire me. For the sake of our children and our grandchildren and those who come after us, we cannot afford to forsake the mantle, we cannot forsake carrying the baton forward so that we can move the needle in our lifetime toward racial justice. Because every system that we are a part of, every system that we have been impacted by -- all of them have been impacted by race. And we need to continue that work.

Rev. Booker: We're doing a meditation series during Lent on Howard Thurman. He once said, "Don't ask what the world needs, ask what makes you come alive and then go do it. Because what the world needs are people who have come alive." We think we know all this information, but we've forgotten about formation. I love what you said Cassandra. Going back and getting things that have been

"Howard Thurman once said 'Don't ask what the world needs, ask what makes you come alive and do it.'"

— Rev. Booker

forgotten. Going back and hearing about your grandmothers. It gives me some rootedness in this uprooted time. That's what Howard Thurman really does for

me. He was a mystic prophet. Mystics and prophets have one thing in common. God is kind of a little bit in the shadows. You can't quite see the face of God. But God's will is being made known. What did William Coffin use to say, "God is short on protection but long on support?" There's something deep

"I don't want to think of us as a weak people. We survived slavery, segregation. We'll survive this [Covid] too."

— Ambassador Young

about being grounded in that support that Howard Thurman gives me, regardless of whether God is protecting me or not, to see how God is providing.

Ambassador Young: We haven't said anything about the pandemic. I've been working with African traditional healers in Senegal. When I asked one of them who is a trained western physician -- his grandfather was one of the leading healers -- he says for 2000 years they've been using these methods to keep people healthy. So I asked him what he thought of our vaccines. He said "Your vaccines want to kill the disease. We find a way to help the body flush it out." I know statistically that in the United States more people of color are dying. But I also know that young people of color are thriving and are the essential workers of our society. I don't want to think of us as a weak people. We survived slavery, segregation. We'll survive this too. My granmamma, when she lost her sight, she was ready to go. What's the song? "Plenty of good room in my Father's kingdom, just choose your seat and sit down." And there are a lot of black folk that have been struggling to try to help their children and children's children and their neighbors. And when they get sick, they say "Well, I've done my part, I'm ready to go on to glory."

And that's what I heard from my granmamma from the time she was 80 to 86. Every day, 'cause I had to read the bible and newspaper to her because she had lost her sight. She fussed with God about taking her home. She was ready. "Why you leavin' me here?" Well I know now, she was left here to make me read the bible to her, and to listen to her give me the wisdom and faith that helped her to make it 86 years.

lWC: We're hearing a lot about grandmothers in this conversation. Do you recognize your state of Georgia Mr. Ambassador, electing two democratic Senators?

Ambassador Young: But you see, we have never stopped since Martin's death. The last meeting we had with him, he was saying "We have to take the energy of the movement and put it into politics." And we started to do that. I was elected in '72. We had gerrymandering, voter suppression, and we only had one day to vote. I know it's unfair. They will continue to try to make it unfair. But I think our people are

*"The Lord bless you and keep you . . .
And you shall overcome."*

— Ambassador Young

awakened now. Black Lives Matter awakened more white people than it did black people. Black people were already woke. We had to watch George Floyd die for 9 minutes and 29 seconds. It reminded me of the little girl walking down the road naked on the cover of Life magazine from Vietnam. We saw that, and we said "No. That's not the America we want to be in." That was the end of the war in Vietnam. And I think George Floyd and Breonna Taylor are the end of this vicious racism. The neighborhood that tilted Georgia was just to the north of Atlanta. When I was in Congress, it was all white. Now it's the United Nations. The world is ever changing but the Lord is still on the throne.

lWC: I want to express our gratitude to everyone for sharing in this conversation today. Does anyone have a final comment for Ambassador Young?

Rev. Parker-Jones: I just want to say it's an honor to be a part of this discussion. Thank you Ambassador Young for your role in civil rights and your continued role. Thank you very much.

Rev. Wainright: I feel the same way. I want to express my sincere gratitude for being invited into this conversation. And Ambassador Young, thank you for your time with us today, thank you for being able to recall not only the struggles but the victories of dealing with race in America. I believe we have a long way to go, but I'm grateful to be a part of the team with Interwoven Congregations, to know that we need to bring about change in our various communities and around the world. I am honored to have been a part of this conversation.

Rev. Booker: Mr. Ambassador, I was reading *The Easy Burden* the other day. I saw the quote from Benjamin Mays that Dr. King used to say a lot, "One tiny minute, just 60 seconds in it." Thank you for the moments you gave us today. Thank you so much for each minute.

lWC: Mr. Ambassador, we'll leave you with the final word.

Ambassador Young: The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace and grace and mercy. And you shall overcome.

lWC: That is a benediction for the rest of our lives.

Ambassador Young and Rev. Wainright are members of the Advisory Board for Interwoven Congregations. Rev. Booker serves on the Executive Board of Interwoven Congregations. Want to support Interwoven Congregation's mission of promoting racial justice and healing? Visit us at www.interwovencongregations.org!