

Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church

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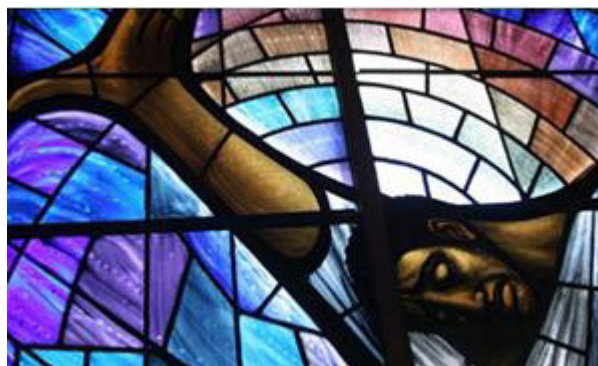
By Jeffrey L. Brillhart, Director of Music and Fine Arts



Last May, members of the Senior Choir and friends from the church and community traveled to the south on a pilgrimage to many of the key sites of America's Civil Rights Movement. For some it was their first visit to the South, for others it was their first visit to the South that had a focus on *civil rights*. I daresay that for all on the tour – white and black – it was a learning experience that was both powerfully inspirational and profoundly disturbing. In Matthew's Gospel are the words, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." Those words proved to be a reminder to us over and over as we heard the stories of countless brave men and women who fought for equal rights.

One of the most powerful experiences took place while visiting the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama to screen the Academy Award winning film *Mighty Times, the Children's March*. This was the church in which thousands of children and youth gathered in May 1963 to rally together in preparation for a march on Birmingham – *a children's march*. The world saw images of the police releasing attack dogs on children, firemen knocking over groups of children with powerful water cannons, and more than 4000 children being arrested. The march finally brought the racist leaders of Birmingham to their knees and marked a turning point in the march toward equal rights for African-Americans.

Four months after the children's march, 16th Street Baptist Church was bombed by the clan and four little girls were killed. Learning of this tragedy the people of Wales contributed a new window for the church. Installed in 1965, it shows a black figure, his chest thrust out and arms outstretched as though on a crucifix, the right one pushing away hatred and injustice, the left offering forgiveness. A rainbow, representing racial diversity, arcs over the head. Christ - *As a black man. In the South. In the 60s*. "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me," the artist employed the last refrain: "You do it me".



Five minutes into the screening of the film, one of the marchers – now an adult – appears. Startled, I looked over at our tour escort's wife, Gwen. She looked at me, smiled and quietly nodded. It was *she*, the marcher in the film – now in *our* midst. From that moment on I knew that Gwen would have to come to BMPC and tell her story – and the story of transformation that took place in Birmingham in May 1963. And help us become agents of transformation in world that needs to be reminded that *as you did it one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me*.

Hold fast to dreams; For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird; That cannot fly
Hold fast to dreams; For when dreams go
Life is a barren field; Frozen with snow
–Langston Hughes