

VARIOUS GIFTS - ONE BODY, ONE SPIRIT

The Gift of Love: Mother Delores Burrell (part 4 of 4)

In African American churches, “Mother” is a term of great honor. Delores Burrell is “Mother” to members of the Kwanzaa Community Church, Roseville, MN. According to Pastor Alika Galloway, Delores is much too “modest” to say much about herself but she is “adored” by the congregation, especially the men among whom she has found a unique ministry.

Delores lives with chronic foot pain which limits her ability to stand, walk, or climb stairs. Some time ago, however, Pastor Ralph Galloway asked her to begin an at-home ministry. Every Wednesday evening, men’s recovery groups meet at the church after the weekly prayer meeting. Every Tuesday afternoon and evening, Delores calls every one of the twenty-five to thirty men with a reminder to attend.

Kwanzaa is located in a high-crime Minneapolis neighborhood. Unemployment is high and the HIV/AIDS rate is one of the highest in the nation. Addiction is a major community problem but the recovery groups at Kwanzaa, led by Pastor Ralph, go beyond addiction to the recovery of human worth and dignity. According to Pastor Alika, men don’t talk about hurt, anger, or pain. In contrast, the recovery groups give them a safe place to express their feelings.

When she calls the men, Delores tries to speak personally to each of them. She leaves messages with any she can’t reach but prefers to have what she calls “little conversations” with them. In referring to a man who is not well she said, “It helps him to know that someone is thinking of him.” Speaking with satisfaction of her ministry, Delores said, “I enjoy doing it. It helps me and it helps them too.”

Delores was born in 1927 in Keokuk, Iowa. She and her husband moved to Minnesota forty-eight years ago so that he could find work. Delores also worked, standing for many hours a day in a factory. This may have contributed to the problems she is experiencing with her feet.

After her husband’s death, Delores raised their four children as a single mother. “I did a good job,” she said. Those who know any of her children agree. Daughter Regina has been a mentor to many neighborhood women as they, too, struggle to recover their humanity.

Mother Burrell’s disability has not prevented her from using her gift of sensitivity to the needs of others. For men who have been abused by racism and classism, she has been a gentle but persuasive instrument for God’s love.

“Now there are a variety of gifts” (I Cor.12:4)... “And the greatest of these is love.” (I Cor.13:13)

Commentary and stories by Rev. Bebe L. Baldwin