

Henrietta Spring Stith Andrews, A Ministry of Presence



1. Getting to Know Henrietta¹

Name: Henrietta Spring Stith Andrews
പേര് (Pereu): ഹെൻരിയറ്റാ സ്പ്രിംഗ് സ്ഥിത്ത് ആൻഡ്രൂസ്

A. Brown Recipient:
എ. ബ്രൗൺ കിട്ടിയത് (A. Brown kittiathu): **1995**

Career: Conference Staff
ജോലി (Joli): കോൺഫറൻസ് സ്റ്റാഫ്

Color of my hair: Dark Brown
എന്റെ മുടിയുടെ നിറം ഇരുണ്ട തവിട്ടു നിറം
(Ente Mudiyuude niram): (Erunda thavittu niram)

Color of my eyes: Brown
എന്റെ കണ്ണിന്റെ നിറം തവിട്ടു നിറം
(Ente Kanninte niram): (thavittu niram)

Brothers and Sisters: 2 brothers, 3 sisters
സഹോദരീ സഹോദരന്മാർ 2 സഹോദരന്മാർ, 3 സഹോദരിമാർ
(Sahodhari sahodharanmar): (2 Sahodharanmar, 3 Sahodharimar)

Birth Order: Oldest of six
ജനിച്ച ക്രമം ആറുപേരിൽ ഏറ്റവും മുത്തത്
(Jenicha kramam): (Aruperil ettavum moothathu)

I enjoy baking cookies and pies; keeping a journal
ഞാൻ ഇഷ്ടപ്പെടുന്നത് കുക്കിയും, പൈയും ഉണ്ടാക്കുക,
(Njan eshtapedunnathu): സ്വന്തം വിവരണക്കുറിപ്പ് എഴുതുക
(cookium, paiyum undakkuka, swantha
vivarana kurippu ezhuthuka)

Favorite Color: Blue
പ്രിയപ്പെട്ട നിറം നീല നിറം
(Priyappetta Niram): (Neela Niram)

¹ With gratitude to the translator, Mr. Bobi Chandy. The second language is Malayalam language, the home language of the people who are the Church of South India, UCC.

Favorite subject പ്രിയപ്പെട്ട വിഷയം (Priyapetta Vishayam):	Difficult subjects like algebra and Latin പ്രയാസമുള്ള വിഷയങ്ങളായ ആൾജിബ്രയും ലത്തീനും (Prayasamulla Vishayangalaya algebra yum Latinum)
Favorite People: പ്രിയപ്പെട്ട ആളുകൾ (Priyapetta Alukal):	Family; our pastor's wife who was my piano teacher and future mother-in-law posthumously; Mrs. Beatrice Fox, a leader in our church and an elementary school principal who later helped me make the adjustment into the school system as a new teacher. സ്വന്തം വീട്ടുകാർ. ഞങ്ങളുടെ അച്ഛന്റെ ഭാര്യയും എന്റെ പിതാനോ സാറുമായിരുന്നതും, കാലവിയോഗം ചെയ്ത ഭാവി അമ്മായിഅമ്മ. പള്ളിയിലെ പ്രധാനിയും, താഴ്ന്ന സ്കൂൾ പ്രിൻസിപ്പാളും, എന്നെ ഒരു അധ്യാപികയാക്കാൻ സഹായിച്ച ബിയാട്രിസ് ഫോക്സ്. (Swantham veettukar. Njangalude achante bharyaum, ente piano saru mairunnathum, kala viyogam cheitha bhavi ammaiamma. Pallielle pradhaniyum, thazhna school principalum enne oru adhapika aakan sahayicha Beatrice Fox.

The night before her interview, Henrietta Andrews curled up with the journal she has kept since early childhood and began to write²:

2. If They Could See Me Now

I stood there in my bare feet before two thousand people in Kottayam, Kerla in south of India getting ready to deliver the message. I thought, if my parents could see their daughter, the one so shy that she found public speaking difficult, standing before all these people about to deliver a message. That was a mountain top experience. I could have died in that moment and been happy.

When Henrietta Andrews became Associate Conference Minister for Detroit Metropolitan and Eastern Associations, the Church of South India (CSI) was already formed. A couple ministers had served the church when the bishop advised the congregation to be in fellowship with other churches in their adopted land. He did not want the people who came to Detroit to be alone.

In 2002, Henrietta began with the Division for Church and Ministry a series of conversations that welcomed the congregation as the CSI of the Great Lakes, United Church of Christ. From the very

² From journal notes emailed on January 29, 2007, and phone interview on January 30, 2007.

beginning of these discussions, she said, she has experienced the enrichment of South Indian culture. The church, which shares the motto "That they may all be One" and refers to its pastor as "Ahchem," alternates Sunday services speaking in Malayalam and English. She reflected:

When I go to worship with the Church of South India congregation, I take my shoes off and leave them at the door. When I traveled to India, I learned something of their culture ahead of time. I wore, for example, what I wear normally, but mixed it with shawls so it looked to anybody like I was trying to be one of them but not copying them.

In 2004, the bishop invited a seven-member contingency from Michigan to India to participate in a weeklong Diocese Annual Convention or revival. While there we shared conversations, meals and visits to a number of mission sites and sight seeing in the southern region of South India. The bishop asked Henrietta to preach at the final revival service.

How in the world did I get myself into this? I spent the whole week trying to absorb everything around me and then to bring it into this sermon. The sermon was to be translated as I spoke. I became aware of the difficulty for the translator since I have a penchant for long phrases and use of idioms that do not translate easily. If the translator did not translate what I was saying in a way that meant sense to the congregation, ultimately, the meaning intended would be lost.

My translator did his job well. Both he and I relied in a mighty way upon the work of the Holy Spirit. We allowed ourselves to become vessels.

3. Beyond Racism

In addition to this congregation, the Metro Detroit area includes other ethnic congregations. Among them are an Armenian, a Chinese, a Philippine and five African congregations. Henrietta has lived in Cleveland, Yankton, SD (during her college years), New York and Lancaster in the Philadelphia area. In Detroit, however, she found a culture around racism that differs from any other place she has lived.

When I arrived in Detroit a decade ago, I found that generally the people of Detroit do not talk about the issues of racism. I learned over the years that part of the reality is a

strong independent black community. The implicit message from the black community is, "We don't need the conversation."

It is as if you have two worlds here, a black world and a white world and now a large Muslim community. People don't talk about race but it is a conversation that needs to happen. There has been, since September 11th a recent effort among church leaders of all faiths to create opportunities for open dialogue around issues of racism.

I grew up in a home in which tolerance was taught, an acceptance of all people. My parents and even some of our teachers reminded us that we had to work harder if we were to accomplish our dreams. We were well aware of the consequences of racism. From my mother, I learned to speak to injustice. From my father, I learned that people are people with different points of view. They modeled for us every day how to get along in this life.

4. Issues of Racism

When Henrietta was in the sixth grade, her family moved into their first home. Only one white family still remained in the neighborhood. Except for her schoolteachers and a few shopkeepers, she could go for weeks without seeing a white face.

In spite of the segregated community in our northern city, we experienced racism. My mother had visits to the school fighting for her children to be placed in classes that would prepare us for college. My dad talked about situations in his work as a bricklayer. He was an excellent tradesman but often overlooked because of his race. I knew that education was important. I had heard that from before I went to school.

We were taught how to get along in a "white world." We knew the stereotypes and did over the years embody them. There are very few days that go by without my taking a shower because of the belief that black people smell. I bristle at the notion that it might not be safe to travel in some communities or that my options for where I might wish to live are limited.



Henrietta chose to attend Yankton College. In her freshman year, 1960, she was one of about fifteen minority students on campus. She wanted a small campus and, in spite of its size, the college had an excellent music program. She majored in violin.

It was tough being in the minority but my parents had prepared me well. The experience was good preparation for my life's work. I have sometimes described myself as a "bridge" person between the races.

5. A Ministry of Presence

Because I was shy growing up I was never with the popular people. I didn't mind being by myself. I did enjoy, when included, being with the smart girls in my class. I also sidled up to those who had no friends. My mother pointed this out, not understanding why I spent time with people no one else wanted to be bothered with. Without making a big issue of it, I still am the one who goes to bat for people nobody else wants to be concerned about.

I have for years been conscious of myself as a person of color. I know what it is like to feel encouraged by the success of another person of color. I know how the failures of a person of color can cause me to feel deep sadness. I tried for years to do and be my best as a woman and as a person of color. I resisted any notion that I could not do whatever I wanted to accomplish. I sometimes took on too much in the burden of my identity as a woman and person of color.

But something happened when she moved to Michigan.

After I crossed the border from Ohio in 1998 to join the Michigan Staff, I soon realized that I approached my ministry differently. I didn't come as an African American. I didn't come as a woman. I came as Associate Conference Minister.

In the last several years, Henrietta has felt comfortable enough and trusted enough among people that when she needs to address an issue of racism or to bring it into a sermon or into a meeting, she does so.

I am careful how I do it. I lived by a model when it comes to issues of racism and talking about it with people:

*I want you to hear what I am saying.
I want you to feel what I feel.*

So I share what point I need to make through a story, my own story. It has been effective because people know me. When I tell them these stories that are painful, I have people

come back to me, obviously having thought about what I said, to offer an apology or just to say, "You know, I hadn't realized that we haven't really made much progress."

I don't want them to say, "Oh, we see you like everybody else." I would rather you see me for who I am and perhaps think in your work place, "Well, the Associate Conference Minister is African American. I can get along with her. Why can't I get along with these people I hired in my office?" I hope *that* is in their heads.

This ministry of presence began when Henrietta was in seminary and also a student pastor at a church of about 1500 members. On many Sundays, she alone was the person of color.

The first two of three years, many people – the worshippers – would just file right on by me with no apparent desire to shake my hand. The third year I realized one Sunday that as people were filing by, they were actually stopping to shake my hand. Each fall when I returned for the school year, I had asked myself, why have I decided to be back to this church again? What is important about being here? It was during one of those reflections that I realized my ministry is a ministry of presence.

Most of my life I have been in predominantly Euro-American, not African American settings. Even today as part of my ministry within the United Church of Christ, I sit at difficult tables to help represent racial and gender diversity. Sometimes sitting at those tables is quite challenging. Often, spur of the moment decisions have to be made whether to name as racist or sexist a remark made during the meeting or to let it go. There have been times when I needed to flee a meeting – to put as much distance between the location of the meeting and myself as quickly as possible.

6. Seedbed of Hope

Henrietta uses the same principles in her profession that came hard for her in college. It took her four years to learn how to practice, but the basic principles she has applied to her living.

In the practice of my instruments, I learned how to break down a musical piece by working on the most difficult measures first and then playing the entire piece. In my ministry today, I listen for what the people do that affect everything else. I help people take apart a situation and

study it. I help them look for the positive and the challenging. I try to help them see how the little things affect the larger picture of their life, their work place, relationships and church.

Henrietta's parents taught her to appreciate community and planning together. From them she learned sacrifice, commitment and the value of taking care of people and things.

What keeps me centered and focused now is honoring my prayer life. My parents taught us to pray. When I asked my mother about how God could have created the world in five days, she said, "There are some things we accept on faith."

Her grandmother taught her about the omnipresence of God. Henrietta was about six then and it was her grandmother's last visit. Their first meal together her sibling came to the table before she did, so she could not sit next to her. When her grandmother asked why she was so unhappy, Henrietta said from the end of the table that she had no one to sit next to her. "My grandmother's response was planted in my being that day. It was not resurrected until I sat in a seminary class many decades later. Grandmother said, 'You always have God with you.'"

I simply believe in God. I believe in the power of God. I believe in the forgiveness of God and the patience of God. I remember at one time in my twenties making a conscious decision to reject evil and whatever symbolized the dark side. I made choices not to take in anything that would destroy my body.

7. Jobs

Her first job after receiving her music degree was as a member of the Recreation Department of the Hillcrest Center for Children in Bedford Hills, New York. This was a home for children who had been removed from their homes in New York City. From about 1962-1966, she was an elementary school teacher in classroom music for the Cleveland Public Schools. She was part of a Graduate Fellowship Program in Early Childhood Education, 1986-1987, that led to seven years as a director for a day care center sponsored by the Salvation Army in Cleveland.

Her family, husband Stephen and two children, Catherine and Stephen Jr., moved to Lancaster in 1979. There her husband attended Lancaster Theological Seminary. During the early years in Lancaster, Henrietta was "mom at home." It was not long before

she needed to return to the world of work. The money was needed but Henrietta missed the people and the challenges of the work place. She found the most satisfying work in day care centers in Lancaster where her ability to work with staff and the children was further developed. During those years, the call to ministry grew strong and clear. Within a few years she found herself sitting in a classroom at Lancaster Theological Seminary as a student.

Henrietta tells this incident:

Early in the afternoon one day in June about 1966 her car went off the highway at 70 mph with her asleep behind the wheel. By some miracle, she managed to stop the car with no injury to herself or to the car. Safe, she decided that day that she had survived because God had something for her to do. She just did not know what it was to be.

For years after that I found myself working in some pretty tough situations. I accepted the challenge of each setting as preparation for this unknown work that God needed me to do. I would remind myself that I was gleaned some skill that would become valuable at some point in the future. I believe that I committed myself to God that day on the road. I believe that I could not do the ministry I find myself in today without all the preparation of the challenges of the work I found myself involved with over the years.



I knew as a young woman that I could not work in the business world. I knew that I wanted work where I could have freedom to be myself. I wanted work that I could not wait to get up out of bed for in the morning and work that I didn't mind putting in long hours to complete. God has answered those prayers.

Henrietta said she had little conscious sense of ministry then. One Sunday, Yvonne Delk,³ the first African-American woman ordained in United Church of Christ, had preached at her church. She was the second woman preacher Henrietta had ever met. In coffee hour after worship, she said, "I didn't go over to her and shake her hand. I just stood there glancing at her. I realized later that this twenty-year-old probably was standing there wanting to be like her."

³ Visit the [Finding Voice](#) chapter about Yvonne Delk.

8. The Calling

For many years a recurring image used to pop into my head. It was of a community of people gathered around a table filled with appetizing food. I always was standing at a large window looking through the glass at this gathering and always thinking that over there – on the other side of the glass was God.

God present with others on the other side of a window but was always just out of my reach. I would go to seminary with that image. One day in a seminary class I remembered that image and shared it for the second time in the hearing of one of my professors. He simply said to me, “Henrietta, what is the possibility that God is standing with you looking through the glass?” I never had that image again. Once again it was affirmed that God is always with me.

The first day I sat in class as a seminarian, I felt an overwhelming sense of peace knowing that I was doing what God wanted me to be doing. After five weeks of class, this shy, meek, introverted person began to blossom. Those years at Lancaster were absolutely rich as I was being formed for ministry. I learned during those years to recognize and celebrate the gift God had given me. I learned also to live with the pain that resulted by ending our marriage. We had simply grown apart in too many significant ways.



After completing seminary, Henrietta was ordained. She served a congregation in New York for six years then went to Cleveland. There she served on the Association Staff for Western Reserve two and a half years. In 1998, she began her present position.

"One thing I love about this fine theologian," said the Rev. Margaret M. Slater, national staff person, "is that when she takes on something, she is like a dog with a bone. She gnaws on it and chews on it and she puts it aside and she comes back to it."

"When she finely speaks," she said, "it speaks from her heart and her soul and her fine brain. She has something to say. It is well thought out and is filled with patience with God's wonderful/awful people. She is an artist with words and fabric and putting together worship."

9. Another Language

Into a profession filled with words, Henrietta is bringing a new form of communication. It reaches beyond words to artistic symbols then invites conversation again.

My creative side has been bubbling up, so I have given space, energy and focus to it. These creative expressions have come up from out of my being through my hands. During a time of sabbatical, I found a new depth of spirituality when I selected an art and spirituality class.

One night when she returned home from work, she felt the call to be creative. She answered with a mosaic. As it was late, she selected a medium of construction paper, scissors and glue. In the process of creating the sun within the circle shown earlier here, she surprised herself. Ordinarily, she would have used scissors. Now she enjoyed random tearing of the paper. When positioning the sun, she allowed herself to follow the inner leading of her hand that kept moving the sun off to one side. It need not be centered. She placed it where her inner hand wanted it to be.

When I finished, I loved it. Precise by nature, I was delighted that I could give myself permission to be less exacting. Everything need not be perfect. It was the first time I had felt the experience of being led. It was a wonderful experience, seeming also to represent a shift deep from within -- a beginning. That piece brought me some joy and satisfied my soul's need. The next day, I placed it on the table at a clergy meeting and said, "Well, what do you think?"

It *was* a beginning. She began to display her wall hangings in the conference office, changing them several times in a year. They have brought new impetus for dialogue about important things. Now, she said, when persons come into the room and take time to look at her art, they also begin to talk about life and God and prayer.

She tells them about how she opens up herself when she does this work. "Hopefully when people hear that, they will translate that into their own live," she said. "The sabbatical was a gift. My creations are simple, bright and sometimes whimsical. I don't plan that. It just happens. I am drawing symbolic sketches now. I am drawing joy. "

10. On a Scale of One to Five

I have worked hard over the years just enjoying every aspect of ministry. My ministry is my life and I could not imagine doing anything differently. I appreciate that no two days are alike and that I can be alone when I need to be. I don't mind the irregular days and schedules.

Henrietta did not pursue a plan but responded to life as it was unfolding for her. She also has tried not to have her life dictated but to live it in a way that it answers a larger question.

Henrietta closed her journal entry late night on January 29 with these words:

The fullness of who I am is what I am today. I hope they say about me when I have completed this work that I:

*listened attentively to what was said;
asked the questions that helped me refocus myself in
a time of crisis;
turned toward God and prayer;
laughed;
was unafraid of my tears;
enthusiastically shared with others what brought joy
to my heart;
added color through my interest in art and harmony
in my singing; and
offered a keen sense of the Spirit of God through my
presence.*

11. Church Family Projects

- ✓ Visit with your youth group advisor about having a "Hard to Talk About" youth conversation. Invite youths to write down a specific, difficult-to-talk-about issue. Read the suggestions aloud and see where it goes.
- ✓ Do a youth group blog through your church's youth page.
- ✓ Invite your Conference Minister or Association Minister to visit your youth group and talk about his or her work.

12. So What About You?

- Henrietta spoke about the struggle of being the person of color in the room, what that meant and wondering if she had to teach everybody all the time.

Reflect about a time when you have stood out in a room by being the only female, person of color or person with a disability or something else.

**How did you feel?
What did you do or say to put others at ease with you?**

- Henrietta talked about her shyness as getting in the way. Her lifework tells us that she was not stopped by it.

How do you think living with shyness might have helped her in her work first as a minister and then as a conference minister?

- Henrietta described her ministry as a ministry of presence.

**What do you think she means by this?
How would you describe your ministry of presence?
How do you think you come across to other people? What does that say about you?
What does it say about what you want to communicate to others about who you are?**

- Throughout Henrietta's life, she filtered her plans through the wondering of what God might want her to do.

**What important questions are you thinking about?
How do you think through the important questions?**

- Henrietta found an art form for expressing what goes beyond words.

What is your art form?

- **What would you like to have people say about you when you have completed your lifework?**

13. Still Curious?

To learn more about the Church of South India, visit <http://www.michigan.csichurch.com>.

To read Henrietta's "Reflection on Trip to India, CSI-UCC in Mission," visit http://www.michigan.csichurch.com_reflections.html.



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Dallas (Dee) A. Brauning. *Antoinette Brown Women: Finding Voice*, September, 2007