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*What does the Lord require of you?
To do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.*
Micah 6:8

A note from Rev. Richard Rose...

Dears Sisters and Brothers,

As we begin the New Year of 2008, we find ourselves deeply enmeshed in the Post-Modern era. What we have witnessed in recent years is a transition from a period of Modernity, with a far more clearly decipherable dominant paradigm, to an era in which many minority voices are now finding a foothold in the social arena. An interesting, yet sometimes difficult to navigate, by-product of post modernity is that voices of equal power and influence are constantly clamoring for our attention; leaving *us* to decide who and what to believe.

Recently two prominent Baptists, in radically different settings, addressed what they deemed the greatest crisis facing us today. While Pat Robertson was speaking ostensibly of the crisis facing the United States, and Al Gore speaking of the crisis facing humanity, both speeches are sure to inform our contemporary culture and sociopolitical understanding.

"We, the human species, are confronting a planetary emergency — a threat to the survival of our civilization that is gathering ominous and destructive potential even as we gather here. But there is hopeful news as well: we have the ability to solve this crisis and avoid the worst — though not all — of its consequences, if we act boldly, decisively and quickly." — Former Vice President Al Gore from his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, addressing the growing threat of global warming.

"The overriding issue before the American people, is the defense of our population against the bloodlust of Islamic terrorists. Our world faces deadly peril...and we need a leader with a bold vision who is not afraid to tackle the challenges ahead." Christian Coalition founder Pat Robertson endorsing Rudy Giuliani for President in a November 2007 address to the National Press Club.

Perhaps Baptists have been Post-Modernists longer than we realize, as one of our principal Baptist tenets explicitly affirms our *Soul Freedom* in issues of interpretation, faith and God. Soul Freedom additionally, according to fellow Baptist Walter Shurden, affirms the sacredness of our individual choice.

So *each* Baptist voice is sacred. And each soul is sacred. And each of us has the responsibility to respond with our *own* sacred voice. But how do we choose who speaks truth to us and for us these days? And who speaks for God? Personally I find prospect in the words of American poet Walt Whitman (not a Baptist) who in the preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* boldly encourages us to: "...reexamine all you have been told at church or school or in any book, dismiss what ever insults your own soul..." Perhaps this isn't the best advice we will ever receive, but it does afford us a starting point for discernment as we seek to navigate our way now that we are well on into the 21st Century.

May God bless your sacred soul with discernment in the obvious and not so obvious issues of faith, life and politics,

Peace be with you. Renee, Owen and I wish each of you a happy and healthy New Year.

Walk A Path of Prayer into the New Year

The circular labyrinth, modeled on the one set into the floor of the Chartes Cathedral in France (1194-1220), will once more be available to all who wish to walk a prayerful meditation into the New Year. This labyrinth, in the Sanctuary at First Baptist, will be open December 29th-31st from 7:00-9:00pm and during the day January 2nd and 3rd.

January Bible Study at Longview

Beginning Monday, January 7th, we will be watching a video hosted by Barbara Walters including interviews with people of many faiths regarding Heaven: Where is it? and How do we get there? We will spend the remainder of the month viewing the videos of Marcus Borg's October 2007 Ithaca talks. Please join us at Longview as we continue our journey inspired by our reading of Borg's *The Heart of Christianity*.

To be with God is to be involved with some enormous, overwhelming desire,
and joy, and power which you cannot control, which controls you.
God is a means of liberation and not a means to control others.
James Baldwin~ *Nobody Knows My Name*

New Board of Education Schedule

Adult Education

January	6	11:30-12:30	Omer Bajwa will give a Power Point presentation on what he calls Islam 101, an Introduction to the beliefs of the religion of Islam
January	13	11:30-12:30	NO ADULT ED -Board Meetings & Brunch
January	20	11:30-12:30	Josie Zanfordino will continue last year's presentation on transgender spirituality.
January	27	11:30-12:30	NO ADULT ED- ANNUAL MEETING
February	3	11:30-12:30	Rich and Lil Barron will give a presentation with pictures of one of their mission trips to Latin America (Nicaragua, Honduras, or Brazil.) There will be time for discussion and questions.

Church School News

New Series in the New Year: Family Dinner/Discussion/Play:

This monthly get together is meant to be a casual, relaxed opportunity for our children and families to share a meal, provide input on church school, and enjoy each other's company. Dinner will be provided. These events will take place on the Wednesday after the 3rd Sunday of each month from 5:30-6:45. Please mark these dates on your calendar and plan to attend:

January 23rd February 20th March 19th April 23rd May 21st

Lectioary Readings for January

January 1

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13; Psalm 8; Revelation 21:1-6a; Matthew 25:31-46

January 6 ~ Epiphany of the Lord

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

January 13 ~ Baptism of the Lord

Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 29; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:13-17

January 20

Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11; I Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42;

January 27

Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 4-9; I Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23

Many Thank Yous

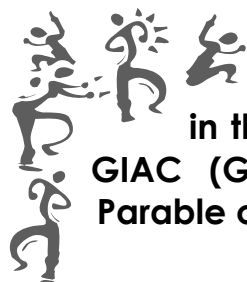
Firstly, Bukurije Hasani wants to thank all of you who kindly responded to her request for help for her sister in Kosovo. We raised some \$300 for her and, along with other funds Bukurije gathered, she was able to wire the equivalent of 330 Euros. Even though the exchange rate is now very poor going from dollars to other currencies, this has allowed Bukurije's sister to buy enough fuel to heat their home for the winter with a little left over for food. Their family is very grateful.

I would also like to thank everyone - and this means many people in the congregation - who have been so generous towards Kitchen Cupboard this year. The need for food items and money to buy them does not get any less these days, but First Baptist's contributions have been significant all year long. Although your support is anonymous please know that you are performing a wonderful ministry in the community. Lastly, a special hug from Sue Hemsath and myself to all of you who have helped serve at the Kitchen every third Friday. You are wonderful, and we continue to need you and anyone else who has time between 1:00 and 3:00 p.m. to take an occasional turn.
~Amanda Ufford

Deadline for the February Visitor is January 15.

Please have your items in to guarantee they will appear.

SOCK HOP 3!!!



YFOFFI will be playing our 3rd annual benefit sock hop on Friday, February 8, 2008 from 7:00-10:00 p.m. in the FBC sanctuary. All proceeds will be divided between GIAC (Greater Ithaca Activities Center) youth programs and the Parable of Talents. At \$5.00 a head, still the best music deal in town!



We need to update our email and street address information!

Please help us out by sending us an email at fbdewitt@verizon.net today and include your name, the names of family members who may be reached at your address, and your current street address and phone number. Please do not assume that we have this information even if you have recently received something from First Baptist. It would be a great help to us if you could do this very soon. Thank you!



Spiritual Direction: A Ministry of Presence

Emily Wilmer, director, *The Julian Group, a resource for soulful living, Ithaca, NY*

In the press of family and work life, we can often feel distant or isolated from God. Work and family demand much of us: time, creativity, crisis management, carpooling, Band-Aids on knees and wounded spirits - and what seems to be the never-ending list of meetings. It is easy to lose sight of God in the midst of daily life. Our prayer life lags or disappears. We may find clarity difficult and our ability to develop a spiritual practice all but nonexistent. Within us lies the desire to find meaning beyond the moment and to listen more deeply to what Henri Nouwen has called 'the inner voice of love'. How do we get back on track - or maybe on track for the first time - to claiming our life in God?

The ministry of spiritual direction, a ministry of presence, could be helpful. Spiritual direction is the experience of one-to-one companionship in which you, with the guidance of your director, strive to discern and increase attentiveness to the movement of the Spirit, listening for the 'hints and rumors' of God in your prayer and everyday life. Through shared conversations you and your director explore your deepest yearnings for relationship, love, joy, compassion, freedom and justice.

Though the terms direction and director are used when speaking of this ministry, God is the true 'director' and the process is more one of mentoring, guidance, or companioning. It is a process grounded in trust and confidentiality. A spiritual director has the ability to listen attentively and prayerfully for the deep longings of your heart. It is best to seek out a director who has been formally trained in a program that includes both study and practical supervision, is currently in spiritual direction her/himself and is receiving supervision.

Spiritual direction is different from counseling or therapy as the focus is on you and your relationship with God and the ongoing discovery of God's presence in life. You might look to direction to help:

- identify and trust your own experience of God
- integrate spirituality into your daily life
- discern and make difficult choices
- share your hopes and joys, struggles and losses
- develop a sensitivity for justice and concern for the poor
- live the essence of your spiritual affiliation with integrity
- develop a spiritual practice

(above points from Spiritual Directors Intl.)

Once deciding on spiritual direction as a way to recover and/or enrich your experience and life with God there are several avenues for finding a qualified director.

- ask for recommendations from colleagues and friends who are in direction
- contact your pastor for referrals
- if you can make the drive to Syracuse area, talk with the Spiritual Renewal Center which has a large staff of directors
- go to the website of Spiritual Directors' International (www.sdiworld.org) and click on the *Seek and Find Guide* and follow the directions to get to NY listings.
- contact religious communities such as St. Margaret's House (New Hartford) or Mount Savior Monastery (Elmira)

A director does not need to be of your denomination. Rather, comfort with a person's style and presence is important as is a sense of her/his ability to listen without judgment and respond to your questions objectively. Always feel free to ask questions about the director's training or if s/he is in ongoing spiritual direction.

Usually a spiritual direction session is from 50-60 minutes once a month. Why only once a month? The work of the Spirit is nuanced and often slow. It takes time, patience and attentiveness to discern the presence of God so once a month gives you the time required for noticing the actions of God and your experience of God. Generally most directors request a fee per session using a sliding scale. After three or four sessions you should have the opportunity to evaluate the relationship and the direction experience. At that time you can continue with your director or you may decide to seek another one more suited to your style and temperament. Sometimes it can take a false start before finding a good fit. Do not be discouraged.

Ask yourself: when have I felt God near recently? It may be hard to answer that question. Life is full of so many good things, as well as challenging and stretching moments that it can be hard to become still and quiet to hear the voice of the One who Loves you. Yet, if we do, we may sense a deep yearning within reaching out for the presence of the Holy. If you find it difficult to notice God's presence and grace in your everyday life, consider spiritual direction. Often God is hidden in plain view if we learn to see again.

"You never know what form love will take, but you can trust that it is there, and you can trust your desire for it... Seek the presence of love everywhere. Let there be no dark corners."

Gerald G. May in [The Awakened Heart](#)

A note from Marti Garrison:

Marti is a staff chaplain at St. Luke's hospital and nursing homes; Paul is chaplain at MethWick Retirement Center, both in Cedar Rapids. They are enjoying their big back yard with oak trees, two wild and crazy Manx kittens, and the ease of parking and driving, compared to Seattle.

January 2008 Calendar

The following weekly events are not listed in the calendar. If new to these gatherings, please call to confirm dates & times. For New Creation Singers rehearsals (David 273-7864)~ Morning Meditation (Wednesday at 8:15 a.m. (Tony 277-1158)~Bible Study at 7:00 p.m. ~Choir Rehearsals, Thursdays at 7:00 p.m. and Sundays at 9:30 a.m. (Jennifer 277-7664).

Tuesday	Jan	1		New Year's Day
Wednesday	Jan	2		Labyrinth during the day
Thursday	Jan	3		Labyrinth during the day
			6:00	Cornell Gender Alliance
Friday	Jan	4	7:30	PIC board and breakfast
Saturday	Jan	5	1:00	YFOFFI Practice
Sunday	Jan	6	10:00	WORSHIP-Communion
			11:15	Coffee and Conversation
			11:30	Church Classes
			2:00	Sacred Harp Singers
Monday	Jan	7	7:00	Bible Study at Longview
Tuesday	Jan	8	5:30	12 Step Meeting
Thursday	Jan	10	6:00	Cornell Gender Alliance
Saturday	Jan	12	1:00	YFOFFI Practice
Sunday	Jan	13	10:00	WORSHIP
			11:15	Coffee and Conversation
			11:30	Church School 'Round the table
				Board Meetings- No Adult Ed
			1:00	YFOFFI Practice
Monday	Jan	14	7:00	Bible study at Longview
Tuesday	Jan	15	5:30	12 Step Meeting
Wednesday	Jan	16	7:00	Southern Tier Gender Alliance
Thursday	Jan	17	6:00	Cornell Gender Alliance
Sunday	Jan	20	10:00	WORSHIP
			11:15	Coffee and Conversation
			11:30	Church School
			2:00	Sacred Harp Singers
Monday	Jan	21	7:00	Bible study at Longview
Tuesday	Jan	22	5:30	12 Step Meeting
Wednesday	Jan	23	5:30	Church School Dinner
Thursday	Jan	24	6:00	Cornell Gender Alliance
Saturday	Jan	26	1:00	YFOFFI Practice
Sunday	Jan	27	10:00	WORSHIP
			11:15	Coffee and Conversation
			11:30	Church School
				ANNUAL MEETING- No Adult Ed
Monday	Jan	28	7:00	Bible Study at Longview
Tuesday	Jan	29	5:30	12 Step Meeting
Thursday	Jan	31	6:00	Cornell Gender Alliance
Sunday	Feb	3	10:00	WORSHIP- Communion
			11:15	Coffee and Conversation
			11:30	Church School
			1:00	YFOFFI Practice
			2:00	Sacred Harp Singers

An Invitation for FBC to Join the TCWC

Many of you were present at the December 2nd Service and had the opportunity to hear Pete Myers extend an invitation to First Baptist to become an Organizational Supporter and Member of the Tompkins County Workers' Center (TCWC). As Pete stated during the service, this relationship could mean as much or as little as we want it to. Some examples of opportunities for engagement and mission in partnership with the Workers' Center are: attending demonstrations, protests and direct actions, participate in petition drives, write letters/Op Eds to the newspaper, speak at public hearings, call or write to elected officials, participate in neighborhood education. In short we are being asked to partner with, support and advocate for workers, especially the underpaid and underrepresented in our county in solidarity with the TCWC. This proposal for potential partnership will be raised at the Annual Meeting of the Congregation on January 26th, 2008. Please seriously consider supporting this partnership as it will not only extend the scope of our mission, further bolstering our pledge to do justice and love mercy, but will afford each of us another opportunity to locally live out our faith. You may visit the TCWC website for more information at www.tclivingwage.org Please let me know if you have any questions. ~Rev. Rose

Building Use Requests

If you wish to use space at First Baptist Church for any event, whether personal, church related, or organizational, please contact the church office with a minimum of two weeks prior notice to guarantee your event or group can be scheduled on the calendar. As many events go on at FBC, and many groups use the space, much coordination goes in to making the space available to those who need it. We wish to make the building available for use in a way that is convenient for all involved so ample notice is appreciated in order to coordinate cleaning, church needs, and events already on the calendar. If you have need to use space at First Baptist, please contact Beth McGee in the church office by emailing fbdewitt@verizon.net or call **273-5800**. Thank you for helping us to make using the space at First Baptist a pleasant experience.

Giving Tree Project 2007

A big, BIG thank you comes to First Baptist from Enfield School. On Monday, December 10th, forty boxed gifts for children and 24 mom's bags and four dad's bags were delivered to the school. Also in the delivery were two large bags filled with extra toys and clothing to be used where needed. Mary Cole said this year the need was tremendous. Over 100 children representing 43 families are to receive support and gifts from the school. Again, thank you to those who took gift tags, brought personal care items and helped wrap the mom and dad gifts. Cornell Women's Law Coalition also collected personal care items for our use. Over 45 small bags were filled! Half of these went to the Kitchen Cupboard. ~ Sue Hemsath



First Baptist Church Great Women's Luncheons of 2007

The group has met five times during 2007. In February, we celebrated Valentine's Day with a lunch at church. April favored us with bad weather so we did not go out to Lil Barron's as planned, but again ate at the church. In June, Nancy Given hosted the group at her place. Everyone enjoyed seeing the animals, the ox, the sheep the miniature pony, the goat, rabbits, ducks and geese.

In October, the group was very small so they met at Liz Wilkinson's house. Our final luncheon of 2007 was held at Longview. Here we were able to enjoy the company of four First Baptist members who are residents there. It was very well attended. We look forward to meeting again in February.
~Liz Wilkinson and Mary Rollins

The Trustees are currently preparing next year's budget. If you have not done so, please return your Declaration of Intention materials as soon as possible.

All are Welcome to Dish-to-Share Dinner! - The Dinner Discussion group didn't get underway this fall. We have a tentative date of January 18th at 6:00 p.m. for a meal. Whether you have been to this gathering before or not, please let me know if you are interested in attending! *Linda Caughey (273-7864)*

Please save

"Labels and Box Tops for Education"

These are found on soup cans, cereals, baking items, paper products, etc...On our bulletin board is a list and photos of products with the accepted labels. We send these to our home in Oneonta, Springbrook, where they are redeemed for education materials for the residents. Please put them in the church office or give directly to Naomi Hollister. Thank you.

QuickTime™ and a TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor are needed to see this picture.

Website News

The First Baptist Church website is updated frequently with the most current information about the goings-on at First Baptist. Please use the site as an informative tool to keep yourself informed about events you may be interested in. Please be patient as the site is developed. As time allows, we will be making changes to the information there and making it a full resource for members and the community alike. Visit the First Baptist website at:

firstbaptistithaca.org

Throughout the Advent season, a series of poems by Howard Thurman were shared in worship. They are printed here for further meditation.

I Will Light Candles This Advent

Candles of joy, despite all sadness,
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch.
Candles of courage for fears ever present,
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens.
Candles of love to inspire all my living,
Candles that will burn all the year long.

The Sacrament of Christmas

I make an act of faith toward all people,
Where doubts would linger and suspicions brood.
I make an act of joy toward all sad hearts,
Where laughter pales and tears abound.
I make an act of strength toward feeble things,
Where life grows dim and death draws near.
I make an act of trust toward all of life,
Where fears preside and distrusts keep watch.
I make an act of love toward friend and foe,
Where trust is weak and hate burns bright.
I make a deed to God of all my days—
And look out on life with quiet eyes.

This Is Christmas

The evergreen singing aloud its poem of constant
renewal,
The festive mood spreading lilted magic everywhere,
The gifts of recollection calling to heart the graces of life
The star in the sky calling to mind the wisdom of hope,
The warmth of candlelight glowing against the darkness
The birth of a child linking past to future,
The symbol of love absorbing all violence.

At Christmastime

The tides flow out from the Inner Sea
At Christmastime:
They find their way to many shores
With gifts of remembrance, thoughts of love—
Though the world be weary and the days afraid
The heart renews its life and the mind takes hope
From the tides that flow from the Inner Sea
At Christmastime.



The Work of Christmas

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers and sisters,
To make music in the heart



During this New Year's season as we reflect upon the past year, we recall being profoundly touched by the presence of Mariam Keita and her family as Mariam fought aggressive breast cancer. We admired her spiritual strength; we felt the smile of their baby Jokebed; we witnessed God's Miracle for Mariam. This Visitor presents the reflections of Maimouna Harouna and Bill Phelan with behind the scenes descriptions of the events that brought them to Ithaca. The remainder of their story about Mariam's sojourn here in Ithaca will appear in next month's Visitor. Hardcopies are available in the sanctuary or can be read on First Baptist church's website at:

<http://www.firstbaptistithaca.org/ministries.html>

God's Miracle for Mariam

by Maimouna Harouna and William Phelan

MAIMOUNA'S REFLECTIONS

Humble, faithful and, above all, brave are attributes that come in my mind when I think about Mariam Keita. Mariam is a quiet person, but on several occasions as she tried to talk about how so many people cared for her over the nine months of her breast cancer treatment in Ithaca, emotions of joy and thanks welled up within her and she was unable to finish her sentences. Tears fell from her eyes to express the love she had experienced. Mariam, her family, the Evangelical Baptist Church of Bamako (EBCB), and all her friends are touched and forever grateful for the generosity of women and men of First Baptist and other Ithaca churches, Cayuga Medical Center and Roswell Park Cancer Institute doctors, technicians, nurses and staff, and all the volunteers of Mariam's Care, the care-giving group that formed to support her and her family during their stay.

My husband Bill and I got to know Mariam and Andre in Bamako, Mali, during the five and one-half years we lived there and attended her husband, Pastor Andre's, church—the Evangelical Baptist Church of Bamako (EBCB). Pastor Andre

has built his congregation from few to many to the point that the church is now constructing its own building and is serving others through its outreach mission to several villages northeast of Bamako. By the time of these events my husband had returned to the US to prepare for the return of our family.

Mariam and I met almost every Sunday at church. Mariam had, after 11 years of marriage, just given birth by Caesarian to Jokebed, named after the mother of Abraham in the Bible. Mariam's story is about her stoicism in the face of possible death and the series of amazing events and people that gave her a chance at life with her daughter and continued service to God's people with her husband in Mali.

I especially remember the day when seven-day-old Jokebed was presented at church. The church was crowded, for many came to honor the couple and newborn Jokebed. All participated to make the ceremony truly unique. It was magnificent. Everybody wanted to express his or her appreciation to the couple. I truly experienced the joy of being part of this friendly church. Mariam was radiant, as was her husband Andre; both their faces were shining and smiling, an image of a happy family blessed with a baby.

Unknown to me at the time was that Mariam had undergone surgery to remove a nodule on her breast a year before. The lab results reported that the tumor was benign, but that she was pre-disposed to cancer, and was advised not to take the birth control pill. However, four months later, Mariam was pregnant and the nodule had returned and doubled in size. It was clear that the nodule grew as her pregnancy progressed, fed by the hormones that were also bringing forth the joyful birth of their first-born. In the face of all this physical suffering, Mariam now had to decide whether or not to carry the pregnancy to term, as she had been advised that the cancer could not be treated while she remained pregnant. The life that was springing forth decided everything for her and her husband. Her desire to give birth to life was stronger than the threat of possible death. Filled with faith in God, but conscious of the risk to her own survival, Mariam opted for the life of her child.

Just two months before the birth of Jokebed, Mariam underwent a needle biopsy 'treatment' by her gynecologist. This became infected and, in treating it, a nurse, thinking it was a skin infection, squeezed what was in reality a tumor. Now, Mariam was in great pain and not sleeping. I first became aware of the sadness of the situation when we were often invited at church to pray for Mariam's health. What amazed me was the peace and joy reflected in Mariam's face even during her worst times of suffering and pain. I witnessed the frequent and profound prayers that were expressed at the EBCB. We prayed with all our hearts.

WILLIAM'S REFLECTIONS

I had returned to the US when I received an email from a friend and member of the church cabinet at EBCB that Pastor Andre's wife Mariam was seriously ill with breast cancer and had little hope of receiving adequate treatment in Bamako.

As members of the Bamako church began gathering all medical information, I approached the only doctor in our church in Ithaca, an internist, for advice and assistance to translate certain words in the medical documents into English so that missionary friends of Mariam and Andre could use the documents to bring Mariam somewhere in the US for treatment. While in Mali she could receive a mastectomy and a semblance of chemotherapy. However, her previous experience with hospital treatments there did not encourage her and the final and necessary treatment for her aggressive form of breast cancer – radiation therapy – was not available anywhere in Mali.

Initial efforts seemed positive for Mariam to go to the USA and preparations were begun! Then, suddenly, it was *no go*. It was difficult to call Andre to tell him the news. I can still remember the strain in his voice as he tried, being a Pastor, to not make it any more difficult for me, but at the same time he could not hide the fact that his hopes had been dashed. I sensed his great heaviness and pain as he wondered out loud how he would tell Mariam. I tried to be encouraging by reminding him that we were also continuing to seek a place closer by for Mariam to receive treatment.

When I called my wife in Bamako and told her she didn't sleep that night, rocked by Mariam's disappointment. In sympathy and support, she went and spent time with the couple at their home. I later learned that part of Mariam's fear was that she had been traumatized from the experiences of three prior surgeries in Bamako hospitals and that she was very afraid to undergo another surgery in Mali.

"KNOCK AND THE DOOR SHALL BE OPENED"

God works in His time and in His ways, which are beyond the comprehension of humankind.

That next Sunday I asked Dr. Jud Kilgore to see what might be possible with his contacts at our local medical center. By Wednesday, I had received an email from him that I should go see the administrator of the local medical center. He cautioned me, however, that the administrator was very busy so it might take a few days to get an appointment. I quickly prepared the packet of the translated materials and photos sent from Mali and went to leave them off for the medical center administrator to review. When I arrived and said here is a package for the administrator, his assistant said, "He's here now, would you like to see him?" To my surprise and joy, he gave us a qualified **yes** to our request to take on Mariam's case, the qualification being that the doctors would review her case and also agree to treat her pro-bono. Driving down the hill from the hospital into Ithaca, tears of joy and hope blinded me--how I could have doubted the Lord's ability to help Mariam.

My thoughts and energy then shifted to organizing Mariam's arrival as quickly as possible, including surmounting the next hurdle--a visa for the entire family. Time was of the essence. The advanced state of Mariam's illness left many me with many questions. Would the airline doctors approve her departure? Would the US Embassy believe them, and give them a visa? Dr. Kilgore had advised that this would be a long and difficult fight and he felt that Mariam must come accompanying by her support system and inspiration—her husband and child.

PREPARATIONS

God in His mercy made all things possible for Mariam

Once the door had been opened a crack everyone who knew Mariam and many who had just learned of her situation let their compassion flow. We all felt and experienced the power of God's wonderful Love as literally, around the globe, prayers, energies, actions were focused following the sign that treatment was possible.

Many people mobilized and worked night and day to make the treatment happen: the Evangelical Baptist Mission pre-funded the air tickets for the entire family in the hope that additional funds could be raised; letters needed by the US Embassy to issue the necessary visas were obtained; the medical center promised to cover all medical expenses once the many doctors and surgeons and the all-important radiation group agreed to work pro-bono; First Baptist Church in Ithaca promised to cover all other non-medical expenses; their hosts Sue and Tony sent a letter to the American Embassy in Mali inviting the Theras to live in their home (not far from the medical center) for the duration of the 6 to 9-

months of expected treatment; and EBCB wrote a letter of temporary furlough for their Pastor until such time as his wife completed her treatment.

We had hoped that Mariam could leave that Wednesday, since we learned that her condition and pain had worsened considerably in the week since the first evacuation attempt to the States had failed. However, no space was available until the Friday flight. Prayer vigils were held at the church as Andre, Mariam, Mali church trustees, missionaries, doctors, airline doctors, and many church members worked day and night to prepare the required paperwork in record time. All of the passports, airline medical clearance, photos, etc. – were ready for the embassy interview. Emails and telephone calls of support from friends and former missionaries now elsewhere in the world continued to come in to Andre and Mariam in Mali.

Within seven days all was in place and Mariam and family left for their new temporary home in Ithaca, New York State. The trip wasn't easy for them, especially when they arrived at New York. They were shocked, but managed to overcome their timidity of speaking English and facing a new culture and world.

To be continued...

To help support Mariam Keita and Andre Thera personally in their work in Mali, West Africa you may send a check payable to: FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH and mailed to FBC Ithaca, P.O. Box 254, Ithaca, NY 1485. If you would like to further designate your support, please note on the check memo line: Mariam & Andre Support Fund or one of their projects: Neighborhood Youth Center, or EBCB Village Ministry.

**ANNUAL MEETING IS ON SUNDAY, JANUARY 27.
ALL ARE WELCOME AND ENCOURAGED TO ATTEND.**