

The

RASHAD

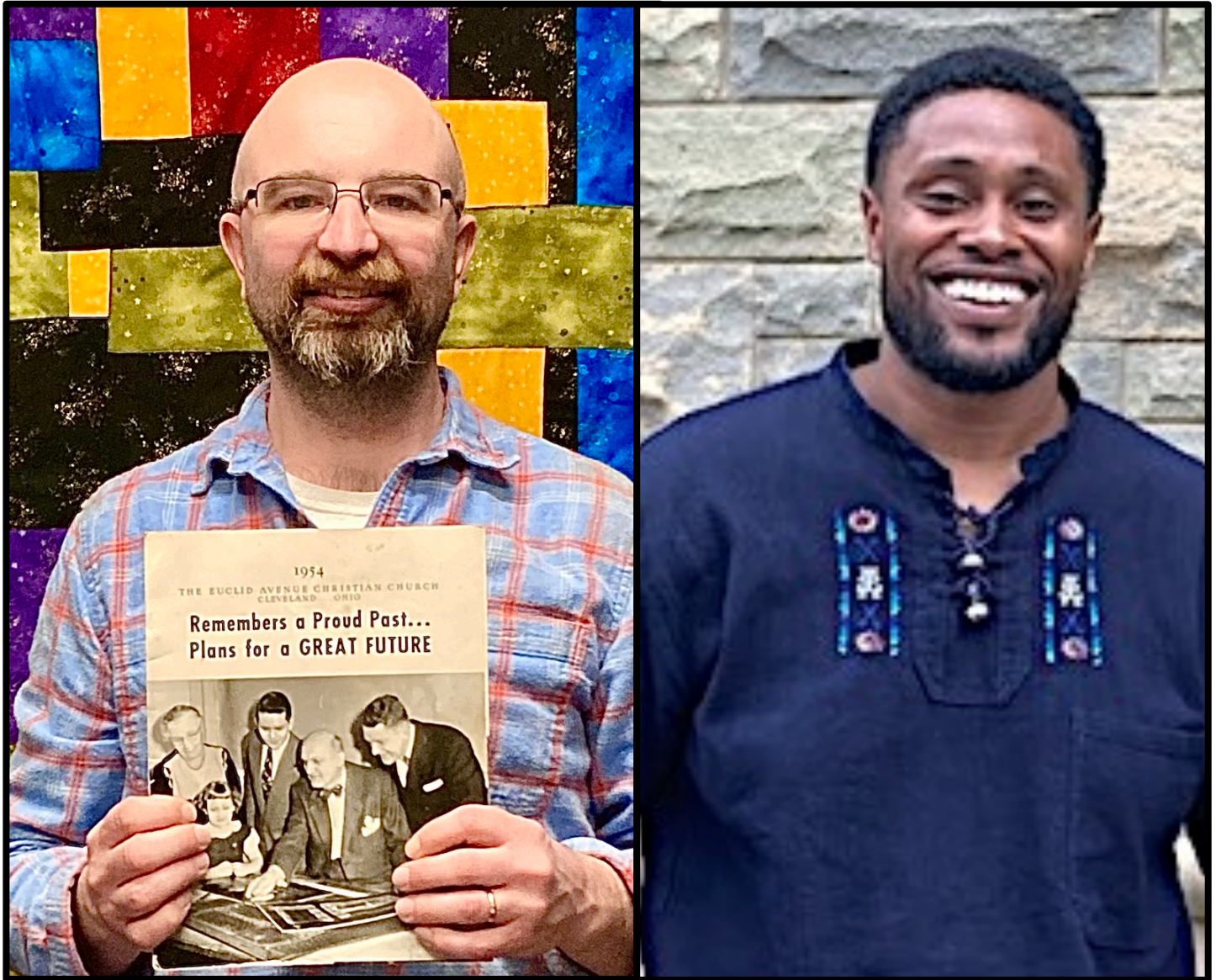
Center, Inc.

Traditions & Beliefs

Fall - Winter 2022-2023

Inside:

- The Greenstone Church Oral History Project
- Tribute to Dr. King and Rabbi Heschel
- Around Greater Cleveland with RASHAD



Rev. Jason Bricker-Thompson (left) holds the 1954 building fund project overview for the Euclid Avenue Christian Church, now the Disciples Christian Church in Cleveland Heights, where he currently serves as pastor. **The Rev. Dr. Brian Cash** (right) is the pastor of the East Mt. Zion Baptist Church (EMZ) in Cleveland. EMZ is located at 9990 Euclid Avenue in the historic “Greenstone” building that the Euclid Avenue Christian Church called home from 1908-1955. During the fall and winter months of 2022-2023, current and former members of both congregations shared their first-person narratives in order to help reveal the “stories behind the stone” that covers this landmark worship center.

Traditions & Beliefs

The *Traditions & Beliefs* Newsletter
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Front cover: Dr. Regennia N. Williams (Nathaniel Rhodes, Photographer)

From the Editor

The Greenstone Church Oral History Project: Revealing the Stories behind the Stone

By Regennia N. Williams, PhD

As one of the co-authors of the proposal to establish "The East Mount Zion Baptist Church 'Greenstone Church Oral History Project': Opening Eyes and Ears to History Lessons about Cleveland, Ohio," I was overjoyed to learn that the Ohio Humanities Council had awarded East Mt. Zion (EMZ) a \$20,000 grant to launch the project in the summer of 2022.

Under the leadership of EMZ's pastor, the **Rev. Dr. Brian Cash**, team members spent part of the fall and winter months of the 2022-2023 project year scheduling, conducting, and recording studio-quality digital oral history interviews, gathering additional audio and video from narrators in remote settings, and sorting and digitizing documentary evidence that will facilitate the sharing of these stories with members of the general public. For more information, please plan to attend the program described below.

Saturday, April 15, 2023, 10 a.m.

"Revealed:

The Stories Behind the Stone"

The Greenstone Church Oral History Project's Capstone Event and Community Open House

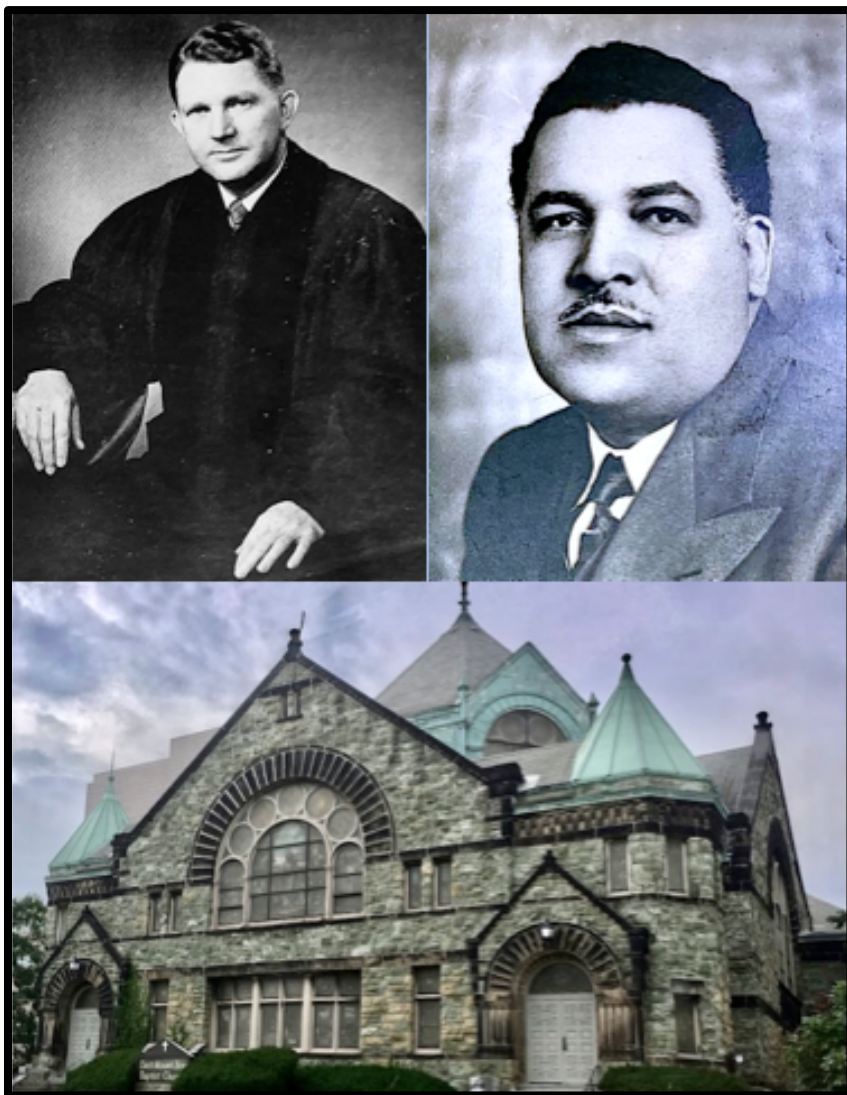
East Mt. Zion Baptist Church
9990 Euclid Avenue

Cleveland, Ohio 44106

The Rev. Dr. Brian Cash, Pastor

Free and Open to the Public

Presented with support from East Mt. Zion Baptist Church, the Ohio Humanities Council, the RASHAD Center, Inc., African American History Initiatives at the Western Reserve Historical Society, and Renovare, this event will include audio-video presentations, panel discussions, facility tours, refreshments, and more.



Clockwise from the top left: The Rev. Dr. Walter F. McGowan, former pastor of the Euclid Avenue Christian Church; the Rev. Dr. William Downs, former pastor of the East Mt. Zion Baptist Church; and the historic East Mt. Zion Baptist Church, "The Greenstone Church," on Euclid Avenue in Cleveland, Ohio. (Source: The East Mt. Zion Baptist Church Museum Archives)

Pictures, Progress, and the Building of the Beloved Community: The Legacies of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

**A presentation delivered at Hawken Upper School on January 13, 2023 and via Zoom on January 19, 2023*

By Regennia N. Williams

Introduction and Overview

Good morning, students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends of Hawken School, and thank you for attending this special Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. School Meeting. I am especially grateful to Mr. Darnell Epps for inviting me to join you here today, especially since this is the first time that I have been inside one of the buildings on this campus since I graduated in June of 1977. Fashions, hairstyles, and so many other things have changed since the 1970s, but this campus remains a beautiful place to be in the world.

I also want to acknowledge the late Rabbi Joel Chazin and staff members at Montefiore, “Where Jewish Tradition Endures.” Rabbi Chazin invited me to speak at Montefiore for a January 17, 2011, Martin Luther King Day event. The title of my presentation on that occasion was “1963: A Year in the Life of a Nation, As Reflected in the Words of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.” That was my first time on the Montefiore campus, and the first time that I had spent a significant amount of time focusing on the 1963 speeches and writings of Rabbi Heschel and Dr. King. For today’s presentation, I want to focus on another year in the lives of these great writers and orators, and an iconic photograph by Matt Herron.

As we prepare to celebrate the 94th anniversary of the birth of the child who would one day be known as the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., I would like to share my thoughts on the subject of **Pictures, Progress, and the Building of the Beloved Community: The Legacies of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel.**

The abundant evidence in the sources that I consulted suggests that Dr. King and Rabbi Heschel were two of history’s most renowned **community-builders**. They were religious leaders, advocates for civil rights, and social, political, and economic justice. They were anti-racists, and, by the end of their lives outspoken anti-war activists. The time period for much of their work together coincides with that of the **Modern Civil Rights Movement (c. 1954 through the late 1960s)**.

Both King and Heschel were prolific writers who benefited from the work of the earlier activists and scholars, including those responsible for pioneering work associated with this idea of **the Beloved Community** in the second decade of the 20th century.

Often, when someone mentions the **Beloved Community**, or I see these words in print, I am immediately reminded of a passage from Dr. King’s 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech, which he delivered after the **March on Washington** for jobs and freedom. King also stated on behalf of the approximately 250,000 marchers, “We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now” and the need to, in the words of a familiar song, “Let Freedom Ring.” Here is the passage, however, that seemed to speak directly to the idea of building a Beloved Community:

Continued on page 5.

READING AND REFLECTING ON THE WORKS OF THE REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. AND RABBI ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL

Presented Thursday, January 19, 2023

by

Regennia N. Williams, PhD

The Center for the Study of Religion and Spirituality in the History of Africa and the Diaspora
and

The Western Reserve Historical Society



Cover slide for January 19, 2023, PowerPoint presentation.

Continued from page 4.

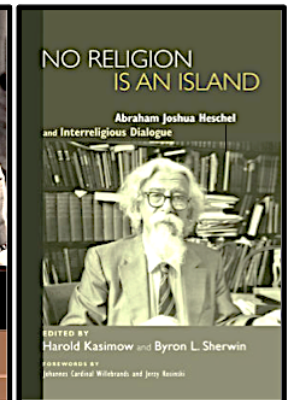
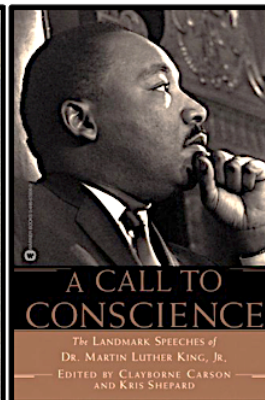
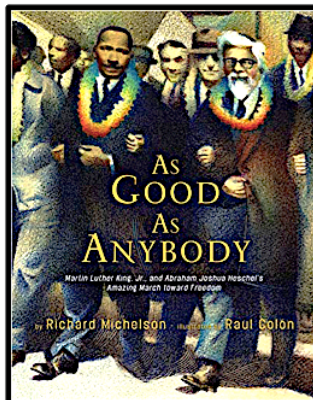
From every mountainside, let freedom ring. [. . .] And when this happens, and when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: "Free at last. Free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last.

As it turns out, however, the Beloved Community predates this 1963 March on Washington by more than 50 years. Philosopher Josiah Royce coined the term in the early twentieth century to denote an ideal community. "In 1913, Royce wrote, "My life means nothing, either theoretically or practically, unless I am a member of a community." Royce observed that, besides the actual communities we experience on a daily basis, there was also an ideal "beloved community" made up of all those who would be dedicated fully to the cause of loyalty, truth and reality itself. Royce was a founding member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), an organization that King joined as a young adult. King frequently used "Beloved Community" to "describe a society of justice, peace, and harmony which can be achieved through non-violence." (The King Center)

A close reading of several written sources and a careful examination of an iconic photograph allows readers and viewers to achieve a better understanding of the roots of the 20th-century ideas that influenced King's thinking about the need for a Beloved Community, the level of interreligious and interracial support for the historic Selma to Montgomery March, the outcomes associated with this march, and challenges that activists faced in the 1960s and in the 21st century in their efforts to complete the building of the Beloved Community.

Three Major Sources (Shown on the Right)

The first source is an iconic image of participants in a 1965 Selma to Montgomery, Alabama voting rights march that inspired numerous other works, including the cover of *As Good as Anybody*, the children's book shown here. The second source is Dr. King's "Address at the Conclusion of the Selma to Montgomery March," one of the works in *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin*



Luther King, Jr. and shown in the center photo. The third source is Rabbi Heschel's essay, "No Religion Is an Island." Originally published in *Union Theological Seminary Quarterly Review* in 1966, it is the first chapter in the 1991 collection on the far right, *No Religion Is an Island: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue*.

King, the Alabama Campaign, Segregation, and Voting Rights: Selma to Montgomery, 1965

Congressman John Lewis contributed the introduction to Dr. King's anthologized "Address at the Conclusion of the Selma to Montgomery March." Lewis, himself a Protestant minister, was a co-founder and former chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). He was the youngest speaker at the 1963 March on Washington. In the "Selma to Montgomery March photo, he is shown on the far left. In this introductory statement, Lewis said, among other things:

Continued on page 6.

Continued from page 5.

Dr. King came to Selma [Alabama] on [March 8, 1965.] as he had done so many times before. He issued a nationwide appeal for religious leaders to come to Selma and to walk the same path we had taken on Bloody Sunday. More than a thousand priests, rabbis, nuns, and ministers responded to the Macedonian call of Dr. King. [. . .] I will never forget as long as I live when more than ten thousand of us began our march from Selma to Montgomery two weeks later on a Sunday afternoon, March 21.”

In Addition to Rev. Lewis and Rabbi Heschel, one of Dr. King’s closest lieutenants, Rev. Ralph Abernathy, and Dr. Ralph Bunch [between King and Heschel] were among the Marchers. In describing his experience, Rabbi Heschel said, “I felt like my legs were praying.”

At the conclusion of the four-day March, Dr. King included the following statement in his address: Our whole campaign in Alabama has been centered around the right to vote. In focusing the attention of the nation and the world today on the flagrant denial of the right to vote, we are exposing the very origin, the root cause, of racial segregation in the Southland. Racial segregation as a way of life did not come about as a natural result of hatred between the races immediately after the Civil War. There were no laws segregating the races then. As the noted historian C. Vann Woodward, in his book *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, clearly points out, the segregation of the races was really a political stratagem employed by the emerging interests in the South to keep the southern masses divided and southern labor the cheapest in the land. [. . .] Later in the address he says,

Let us therefore continue our triumphant march to the realization of the American dream. Let us march on segregated housing until every ghetto of social and economic depression dissolves, and Negroes and whites live side by side in decent, safe, and sanitary housing. Let us march on segregated schools until every vestige of segregated and inferior education becomes a thing of the past, and Negroes and whites study side by side in the socially healing context of the classroom.

Let us march on poverty until no American parent has to skip a meal so that their children may eat. March on poverty until no starved man walks the streets of our cities and towns in search of jobs that do not exist. Let us march on poverty until wrinkled stomachs in Mississippi are filled, and the idle industries of Appalachia are realized and revitalized, and broken lives in sweltering ghettos are mended and remolded. [. . .]

Let us march on ballot boxes until brotherhood becomes more than a meaningless word in an opening prayer, but the order of the day on every legislative agenda. Let us march on ballot boxes until all over Alabama God’s children will be able to walk the earth in decency and honor. [. . .]

In ending his address, King borrows lines from The Battle Hymn of the Republic: Glory, hallelujah! Glory, hallelujah! His truth is marching on.”

On August 6th, voting rights advocates claimed a significant victory when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 into law . . .

Rabbi Heschel (1907-1972), Interreligious Dialogue, The Civil Rights Movement, and Artistic License

Less than a year after the historic Selma to Montgomery March, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel delivered his inaugural lecture as the Harry Emerson Fosdick Visiting Professor at New York’s Union Theological Seminary. He was the first non-Christian scholar to serve in this capacity.

Continued on page 7.

Continued from page 6.

In the opening passages of that lecture, he demonstrated his complete understanding of the significance of his life and work as a 20th-century Jewish American and a faculty member at UTS:

I speak as a member of a congregation whose founder was Abraham, and the name of my rabbi is Moses. I speak as a person who was able to leave Warsaw, the city in which I was born, just six weeks before the disaster began. My destination was New York, it would have been Auschwitz or Treblinka. I am a brand plucked from the fire, in which my people were burned to death. I am a brand plucked from the fire of an altar of Satan on which millions of human lives were exterminated to evil's greater glory, and on which so much else was consumed: the divine image of so many human beings, many people's faith in the God of justice and compassion, and much of the secret and power of attachment to the Bible bred and cherished in the hearts of men for nearly two thousand years. I speak as a person who is often afraid and terribly alarmed lest God has turned away from us in disgust and even deprived us of the power to understand his word.

As someone who had risked his life many times in the struggle to help defeat anti-Semitism and anti-Black racism in America, he included loyalty to the U.S. Constitution among his many "loyalties," stating:

My life is shaped by many loyalties—to my family, to my friends, to my people, to the U.S. Constitution, etc. Each of my loyalties has its ultimate root in one ultimate relationship: loyalty to God, the loyalty of all my loyalties. That relationship is the covenant of Sinai. All we owe to Him. He has enriched us with gifts of insight, with the joy of moments full of blessing. He has also suffered with us in years of agony and distress.

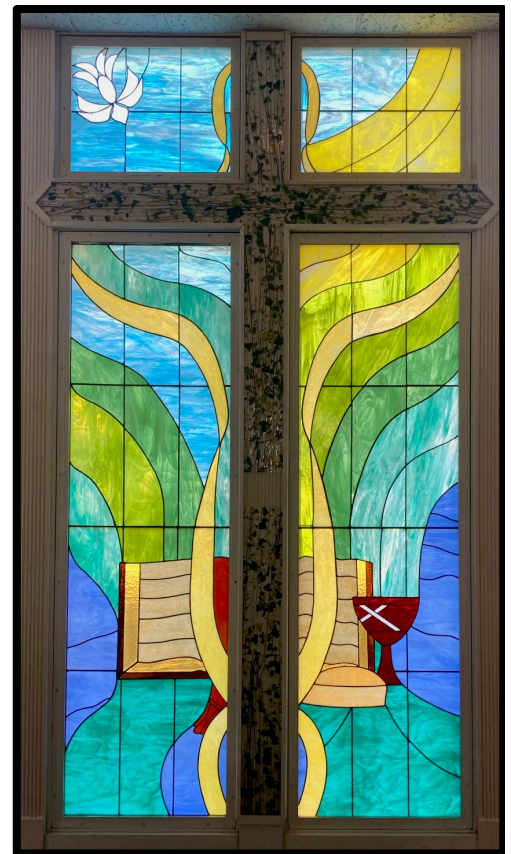
That said, Rabbi Heschel continued to believe that human beings could help transform even the most unjust societies, and he concluded this lecture with the following words:

What then, is the purpose of interreligious cooperation? It is neither to flatter nor to refute one another, but to help one another; to share insight and learning, to cooperate in academic ventures on the highest scholarly level, and what is even more important to search in the wilderness for well-springs of devotion, for treasures of stillness, for the power of love and care for man. What is urgently needed are ways of helping one another in the terrible predicament of here and now by the courage to believe that the word of God endures for ever as well as here and now; to cooperate in trying to bring about a resurrection of sensitivity, a revival of conscience; to keep alive the divine sparks in our souls, to nurture openness to the spirit of the Psalms, reverence for the words of the prophets, and faithfulness to the living God.

Marching for Freedom in the 21st-Century

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the some of the major victories of the Civil Rights Era, including the Supreme Court's unanimous decision in *Brown vs. Board* in 1954, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. I must also admit, however, that activists, elected officials, and other Americans continue to struggle to eliminate failing schools, entrenched poverty, and overcoming challenges associated with providing safe drinking water, affordable healthcare, and restoring faith in the electoral process. I will end by offering these suggestions for further reading, listening, and viewing: Sarah Elizabeth Lewis, *Aperture* 2016; the Activist photography of Amanda King and Daniel Levin, and the words of the formerly enslaved abolitionist, author, and statesman Frederick Douglass, who said in 1857, "If there is no struggle, there is no progress."

Around Greater Cleveland, Ohio with RASHAD . . .



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Clockwise from the top left: The members of the Robinson Sisters Gospel Quartet at The Star of Bethel Church (March 2023); Stained glass window at the Disciples Christian Church (March 2023); and (left to right) Dr. William H. Caldwell, Mr. Steven Weems (tenor), and Dr. Regennia N. Williams (October 2022) at the Philippi Missionary Baptist Church.