



Master of Ceremonies, Judge Derek Mosley

Rational Justice

Fall 2014

Celebrating Four Decades of Compassion, Justice, Action, and Transformation

Since 1974 we have provided advocacy and support to improve the lives of men and women involved in the criminal justice system through our direct service, citizen action, and community partnerships.

Building on our proven track record, the criminal justice system continues to refer women to our program to receive counseling, education, and support to build safer and healthier lives for themselves and their children. We also continue to advocate for policy changes to ensure our justice system is effective and equitable for all people.

Thank you to all who sponsored, attended, and donated to our 40th Anniversary celebration. The keynote speaker, Dr. Marilyn Van Dieten, addressed the driving force behind the Benedict Center programs in her talk, **Why Gender Matters in the Criminal Justice System**. For more about our legacy, view more pictures and link to Dr. Van Dieten's interview on Lake Effect, visit our website at www.benedictcenter.org.



Benedict Center graduate Jennifer Butterfield and Fr. Johnny Klingler, Priests of the Sacred Heart



Tom and Marcia Flanagan, John Flanagan, family of founder and community activist, Margaret Flanagan



Sgt. Theresa Janick and Sister's Program Outreach Workers, Shavon Pope and Genevieve Williams

Cover photos by Jackie Schneider



The Color of Love, Hope, and Transformation

Thanks to the Johnson Controls Women's Resource Network, women from the Benedict Center recently enjoyed an afternoon they will not forget. According to Georgette Simms, Johnson Controls Principal Engineer, "the Johnson Controls Women's Business Resource Group Community Involvement committee was honored to sponsor the Benedict Center trip to see *The Color Purple*. We are excited to see that the lives of women are being impacted and changed for the better through cultural events such as this. These events add to the richness of life experiences and allow the women to grow in ways that cannot be taught in a classroom."

From the moment the music started, the women were swaying in their seats, transfixed by both the soaring music and powerful story come to life by the more than two dozen African-American actors.

In the playbill, Milwaukee Rep Artistic Director, Mark Clements reminds us that when Alice Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*, first appeared in 1982, "it spurred lively conversations about gender, race, and class." He adds that this production at the Rep "aims to further such conversations across the City of Milwaukee." The Rep certainly met that goal with the women of the Benedict Center.

Those conversations happened in the Benedict Center classroom with discussions and written reflections led by MATC instructor, Jim Kennedy. The women's enthusiasm could also be heard in the Center's hallways, in the elevator, over lunch, during the intermission and on the walk back to the Benedict Center after the play. Commands of, "Read the book!" could be heard between the women. "It's about me!" one cried. "The book came to life!" was echoed while leaving the theater.

Kennedy says, "The women's reflections on the play showed how important the themes of the play [love, hope, transformation, and the resilience of the human spirit] were to them personally." These themes are prominent at the Benedict Center. The women related to the characters struggles, including an abusive husband,

separated family, and "never feeling good enough." They related to Celie because "she always wanted to protect her sister, Nettie."

The women said the play "was about love" giving examples from the play including, "the way Celia and Nettie continued writing each other even if they didn't know the other was getting the letters;" "the way Harper showed love for Sophia;" and the "way women can show love to each other."

Beyond the relevant themes of the play, the women got to experience: "going to the theater;" "the beautiful white marble; and most importantly, "feeling special." We are so grateful to the Johnson Controls Women's Resource Network for this moving and memorable experience.



Benedict Center women outside the Rep



Donna Hietpas Honored with Empowering Women Award

On December 2, our Sister's Program Director, **Donna Hietpas** was honored by the YWCA of Southeast Wisconsin at their annual **Evening to Promote Racial Justice**. This award recognizes individuals who have demonstrated a commitment to empowering women in Southeast Wisconsin through their volunteer or paid work, advocacy, and leadership.

Donna has certainly demonstrated that commitment. For the past 25 years she has dedicated herself to the women of the Benedict Center—justice involved women who have been marginalized by society, experience abuse, trauma, drug addiction, mental illness, racism, and poverty. But Donna sees their worth and never gives up or loses patience. “Donna always has time to listen to what women are really saying, to walk with them to a better place, to make sure they understand what will be required of them and what will be gained. She also knows how to help women manage disappointment and never quit trying because they are at heart very strong, brave, and capable women,” says Kit Murphy McNally, previous Executive Director of the Benedict Center who nominated Donna for the award.

She takes time and meets the women at whatever point they are in their life and encourages every step of the way forward. The success of her dedication is evidenced by the women. One Benedict Center graduate who is now a community leader working at a local nonprofit shared that, with Donna and the Benedict Center's intervention, she believed she could change her life—and she did.

Donna is the architect of the Women's Harm Reduction Program and is responsible for bringing effective programs like Moving On for the women before they were nationally recognized as best practice. Executive Director, Jeanne Geraci notes, “Donna is applying her wealth of experience in developing the Sister's Program, an innovative, compassionate strategy to help women in the sex trade.”

Donna works tirelessly to ensure that women have a chance to avoid criminal prosecution and rebuild their lives at the Benedict Center. We are most grateful and proud of Donna for her years of service.

Sister's Program Wish List

As the temperatures continue to drop, our women have a **critical need for warm winter clothes**. The women need the following items:

- Winter hats
- Warm coats *all sizes but especially XL-XXL*
- Scarves
- Gloves
- Warm socks
- Towels
- Toothbrush/toothpaste
- Feminine napkins and tampons
- Deodorant
- Toilet paper
- Wet wipes (*individually wrapped*)
- Reading glasses *various strengths*
- School supplies, including: notebooks, pocket folders, pens, notepads

Items can be dropped off at the Benedict Center at 135 W. Wells Street, Suite 700. We appreciate your help!

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Thank you for your support and interest in our work. Please share this newsletter with friends and colleagues!

*Newsletter designer: Ilona Gonzalez
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A Special Thank You to Johnson Controls

Georgette Simms, Johnson Controls Women's Business Resource Group Community Involvement committee member, presents MATC instructor, Jim Kennedy, with one of the many GED books purchased for the women in our education program.

The Benedict Center is an interfaith, 501(c)(3) nonprofit criminal justice agency working with victims, offenders and the community to achieve a system of justice that is fair and treats everyone with dignity and respect. All donations are tax-deductible as allowable by law.

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