

## THE BARNET AND QUEENSBURY CIRCUIT



### East Finchley Methodist Church celebrates Black History Month – October 2005

Shirla Philogene tells this story of a pioneering project in her church that helps us to understand more of the glory of God's people, and offers a practical way of valuing the achievements of many significant individuals.

#### **Background**

The declaration of October, as Black History Month by the London Strategic Policy Unit in 1987, emanated from a desire to promote equality, respect and understanding among the diverse communities of ethnic people in London. It would be a period when schools, colleges and centres of higher learning would be encouraged to research and publish materials of the Black presence in England, Black inventors and the general contribution of Black people to changes in society. It was a bold attempt to bring into focus the positive contribution of Black people to the development of world society. This focus had hitherto been marginalised, distorted, trivialised and ignored.

Over the intervening years, many organisations and Boroughs throughout the country, including the London Borough of Barnet, have embraced the notion of the celebration of Black History, and have dedicated a series of programmes and activities that are aimed at bringing communities together in a spirit of mutual understanding and respect for each other's cultural heritage. It was with this in mind that we at East Finchley Methodist Church decided to organise an event that would acknowledge the contribution made, and enable us to foster and develop a greater understanding of the culture of the African and Caribbean members of our congregation.

#### **Focus of the Event**

The event took place on the afternoon of Saturday 29 October 2005. Two videos were shown. One was based on a cruise around the Caribbean. The other was of a recent visit to Ghana by one of the members of our congregation and it gave us an opportunity to appreciate the warmth of the people in Ghana, the vibrancy of the Methodist church, the terrain and rich vegetation of the country.

There were artifacts and literature on display from the African Countries of Ethiopia, Ghana and Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Zambia along with the opportunity to ask questions.

The Caribbean display centred on the books and publications of Black Writers and Pioneers. There was a brief history of Methodism in the Caribbean from the 1700's, also a photograph and information about Patrick Prescod, a fellow Vincentian who wrote Hymn 408 in our Hymns & Psalms.

We devised **A Did You Know?** quiz and displayed posters advertising a newly launched Exhibition at the Geffrye Museum in East London depicting The West Indian Front Room of 1960's England - well worth a visit!

No truly African and Caribbean event can take place without a cuisine. So, along with the display of fruits and vegetables from both countries, came the various foods and drinks to be sampled, savoured and enjoyed.

The event, the first of its kind, was not as well publicised as we would have liked. Yet, a number of individuals having seen our last minute poster that we stuck to the railings were so intrigued at the Church's involvement in Black History, that they came out of curiosity. As organisers, we felt that we were stepping into the unknown. For us, it meant taking a risk. However, from the kind comments that we have since received, it seems that it was a risk worth taking.

There are plans for 2006, and an invitation!

You are invited to  
East Finchley Methodist Church on Saturday 28 October 2006  
for a Celebration Of Black History Month

This year's celebration takes place shortly after the inauguration of the New District. We at EFM believe that this event provides us with an excellent opportunity to host a dual celebration both of Black History and emergence of the New District. Members at EFM have written to Ministers and Stewards in the District, inviting them and the members of their congregation to participate in this dual celebration.

Our Youth Leader and young people will also participate in the programme of the day.

#### QUESTIONS:

- Why do you think it is that the black contribution to humanity and the world has been 'marginalised, distorted, trivialised and ignored'?
- What can we learn from East Finchley about appropriate ways for our churches to respond? What else do you think your church might do?
- What black person do you most admire for their contribution to humanity? ...and why? (There are some suggestions from Shirla below!)
- What can we do as a District to value not just black history, but the heritage and achievements of people of all cultures in our global city?

**Bible Study:** Shirla has chosen a text very dear to her mother, 'In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy path'. We will look at the whole passage, **Proverbs 3:1 – 8.**

- What are the best ways to help children not to forget the Lord's teaching? What would you say are the most important parts of that teaching for young people? In what ways might they change as people get older?
- Verse 3 speaks of the great value of 'loyalty and faithfulness'. What examples from your experience would demonstrate that value?
- What examples can you share from your experience of the difference between your own judgement and the wisdom of the Lord? Are there ways that you are happy to talk about in which you have acknowledged him and He has directed your path?
- What Bible passage would you choose to go with a Black History Month celebration?

#### And finally, a short quiz!

- What do you know about the lives and achievements of: Dame Nita Barrow, Patrick Prescod and Beryl Gilroy?

*(To make a start on finding the answers, accept the invitation from EFM!)*

**For more information on Black history and culture contact Sam Walker at ‘Black Cultural Archives’ – details through the District Website.**