

The Reverend Willetta Helene

By Rev. Patricia Walton

The opening scripture passage that was just read is/was so aptly chosen as we let our hearts embrace the spirit of Rev. Willetta Helene and how she embraced and gently retained the essence of so many who entered her presence.

When I was first told of Willetta's demise, I mournfully contemplated the reality of losing her, and then the following few words quietly entered my mind: "To have known Willetta is a blessing and a joy. She enriched a genuine friendship that I will forever cherish, always miss, but never forget!"

Perhaps you might notice that my choice of wording included both past and present tenses. You see, though her physical being may have transitioned, thankfully her loving Spirit remains.

I have to acknowledge that there is a part of me that doesn't want to accept that our **one on one** chats are now only in my imagination. There are times when I find myself still conversing with Willetta and **envisioning** her response...sometimes using that sense of humor putting me at ease or sometimes seriously commenting on my concerns and then reminding me that all will be well when God is in charge.

A remembered reality is it was Bloom in the Desert Ministries UCC of Palm Springs that benefited by Rev. Willetta's move from Pasadena to Palm Desert. Bloom in the Desert Ministries UCC of Palm Springs was blessed by her attendance. Our Pastor, Rev. Dr.

Kevin Johnson described her as a knowledgeable and supportive colleague. To quote Rev. Johnson, “the Bloom congregation enjoyed her readings of scripture and her occasional preaching.” He also said “it was always great to see her come through the doors as a refreshing breeze in the sometimes horrendously hot setting of Palm Springs yet bringing with her a delightful burst of energy.”

Most know that she was a wise preacher but Pastoral ministry was her passion. It was her nature, it was her calling. And her passion was a blessing to all she served. She simply cared deeply for the wellbeing of God’s children and pastoral counseling revealed her compassion. It was the gift she possessed and shared.

Like many of you, I am honored to have called Rev. Willetta Helene, friend. It is my sense that whomever she encountered there was no distinction for her between being a pastor or a friend.

During the surge of the Covid-19 pandemic when quarantines prevailed, our telephone calls increased as did our shared comprehension of ministry. We questioned our worthiness of the honor to be called minister. Perhaps unintentionally she even became a minister’s minister. It was evident that Rev. Willetta Helene exemplified the teachings of the Hebrew Scripture Micah 6:8 “What is it God wants of you: “To do justice, love kindness and walk humbly, with your God!” Her pastoral calling reflected a justice initiative, she was the perfect example of love and kindness and she maintained a sense of humility that doesn’t “look down” on those in need. After having a conversation with her you came away joyfully,

somehow feeling fulfilled and appreciated. She had the gift of helping you realize the importance of your life contributions in God's realm and that each one's life was important even though imperfection is a human trait.

It wasn't until preparing these words that I discovered the definition and *meaning* of the name "Willetta". It is "Determined Protector", how appropriate a name for our friend, colleague and pastor.

We knew she cared about us. Her thoughtful insights protected many from foolishness and self-doubt and her caring was without prejudice.

In closing I would like to prayerfully share with you words of thanksgiving for the Life of Rev. Willetta Helene

Gracious and loving God, Thank you for the family and friends gathered here today acknowledging that even in our sadness we have much to be thankful for, because our lives have been enhanced and enriched through the life of Your daughter Rev. Willetta Helene. Thank you for the abundant blessings you bestowed upon us through her life. Thank you, Gracious God for the love and compassion that you placed in your humble servant and the joy of friendship, laughter and wisdom she shared with us in the past and which will remain in our hearts eternally. Amen.