

INTERVIEW



REV. DR. ZINA JACQUE EARNS
BADDC'S 2022 CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

BY LISA STAMOS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS BALSAMO

“THE REV. DR. ZINA JACQUE is well-known in the Barrington area as the immediate past pastor of the Community Church, but her spiritual impact and leadership went far beyond the corner of Lincoln and Grove Streets,” said Rev. Jeanne Hanson in her nomination letter to the BADC Board. “She was a pastor to the community whenever there was a problem, and the first name on everyone’s lips for a moving invocation or inspirational wrap-up message. We were all blessed by her faith, pastoral presence and perspective, and we continue to benefit from her legacy.”

While retired from the Community Church, Rev. Zina, as she was always known, has relocated to the Washington, D.C. area and now serves the historic Alfred Street Baptist Church. However, she maintains strong ties to our Barrington community through her work with Courageous Conversations and her friendships here. Quintessential Barrington is proud to share her Citizen of the Year 2022 award and recognition through a heartfelt interview about her life, her faith, and moving mountains.

Your post-graduate education includes a Master of Divinity and a Ph.D. in Practical Theology from Boston University. How do those two areas differ and complement each other?

A Master of Divinity Degree is an applied course of study intended to prepare one to serve as a pastor in a church or faith-based setting. A Ph.D. is a research degree meant to extend the field of knowledge in a particular discipline. My Ph.D. focuses on the intersection of faith and psychotherapy, in the delivery of mental health care. My research extends the field of mental health care by adding an understanding of the importance and benefit of the interplay between faith and psychology, especially for clients who desire to use their faith as a source of meaning-making.

What was your doctoral thesis centered on?

During my time in Boston in the mid-90s, I served a historic Black congregation in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Union Baptist Church is mid-way between Harvard and MIT and close to a housing project. The Sunday morning congregation was a broad mix of African American and Caribbean, of highly educated and streetwise folks, and seniors and young ones. However, when mental health needs arose, I learned quickly that in resource-rich Boston/Cambridge, there were virtually no mental health offerings that honored faith, understood the

cultural nuances of the Black community, and offered a sliding fee scale for those who were without insurance. My Ph.D. was a real, live experiment to see if we could construct a counseling center to meet the needs of this church’s members and others interested in investigating mental health care that honored faith as a way of healing and growing.

My Ph.D. focused on the intersection of faith and psychotherapy as partners in healing and strengthening the mind, body, and soul. Ultimately, my research added to an understanding of the interplay between faith and psychology as a vital option in the delivery of positive mental health care outcomes. Out of my research, the Trinity Church Counseling Center was founded in April 2001. It is now in its 21st year, housed at Trinity Church (Episcopal), Boston.

What pivotal moments in your life shaped you in such a way that you said “yes” to leading The Community Church, the oldest church, in Barrington?

My parents, Wiley and Willa, were both deceased when I accepted the call to Community Church. Still, the way in which they raised me and my sister and the life they made for us directly impacted my decision to come to Barrington and to serve my beloved Community Church.

My parents were born in Mississippi in the 1920s. They made their way to the Chicago suburbs and created opportunities for their daughters to explore the world, experiment with ideas, and emerge confident. They taught us to observe, study, work hard, and take risks. They instilled within us who we were as children of God, descendants of kings and queens, and that no one on earth was better than or less than we were in the eyes of God. My parents reminded us that for every blessing we received, we ought to seek to be a blessing somewhere else, and they surrounded us with amazing adults, both family and friends, who poured into us the kind of wisdom that comes from commitment, generosity, laughter, and faith.

While I am forever indebted to my parents for their guidance and love, I am very grateful for my grandfather. Born in the late 1800s, scant years after slavery was abolished, this man was an unlettered philosopher and a teacher. Each night we spent with him in his South Side Chicago home, he would tuck us into bed asking two questions about the day just passed. He would ask, “Who did you help, and what did you learn?” The bedrock

ethics given to me by my grandfather were curiosity and benevolence. His name was Peter James, and I am so blessed to be his grandchild.

My family birthed and raised inquisitive, open, risk-taking, self-aware girls who knew few bounds that they would not push. And, so, when the oldest church in Barrington, one that was almost 100% white, one that had never known a minister of color; called an African American Ph.D., my attitude was, why not! When Community Church called, I saw an opportunity to add my essence to the heart of others who were just as curious, just as willing to try something new, and just as deeply faithful. It was a match made in heaven.

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—ZINA JACQUE

What experiences did you have that delighted you and challenged you in your role as pastor?

The challenge of pastoring a small church in the shadow of others much larger always seemed to come down to *why are we still so small? How can we grow, too?* I worried about the scale and size of Community Church far too often and prayed about it even more often. And then, one day, while sitting in the sanctuary of the church, I **shouted** at God and asked, “What do you want me to do!” My “prayer” was not very respectful and even a bit cheeky. Who shouts at God? But I really did want to know what to do next. Community Church was a hidden jewel within the community. How could I help others see its beauty? How could I help it flourish?

I shouted at God, and then I sat in silence. And, in the midst of that silence, I think I heard God chuckle. I looked up and said aloud, “It’s not very nice for you to laugh at my prayer.” And then, deep in my soul, all of a sudden I knew something that I had not known the moment before. It was as if God had spoken in a still, small whisper deep within. At that moment, I knew that the next step for Community Church was not to focus on growing, but on deepening. I knew God was calling each of



us to deepen our faith, our commitment, and our witness of God's justice, righteousness, and grace. I knew that God's church did not need numbers of people, but people who number among those faithful enough to focus on loving our neighbors, no matter who they are, and loving God.

This outpouring of love of neighbors is what delighted me during my tenure at Community Church. I was delighted that we grew as one of the Community Meal's earliest (and most frequent) hosts. I was delighted that, in response to a request from the Barrington Township Food Bank, we instituted a monthly Produce Sunday, where we collect and deliver fresh produce to those in need. I was delighted we became known as the "boot church" for Barrington Giving Day, outdoing ourselves each year with more and more warm, winter boots. And I was delighted that the leadership of Community Church chose to financially support local, regional, and international organizations in a myriad of ways.

What challenged me was, in the end, what delighted me; that a church would measure itself not by way of the world (numbers) but by the words of God; by the way we share our love. That is still true about Community Church, and that makes me smile.

Over your nearly 15 years of work in Barrington, what do you feel you accomplished, and what is left to be done in our larger community?

When I think about my tenure in Barrington, there are so many memories that fill my heart. I remember working with the Barrington Area Ministerial Association, drawing churches together to serve and for fellowship; the Barrington Area Development Council, focusing on educating new citizens and making Barrington better; and the Barrington Area Council on Aging, creating space for seniors to thrive and flourish. Through each organization, Barrington's citizens stood up and worked together for the greater good of our community.

But, if I had to choose one community-based

experience of which I am most proud, it would be the work of Courageous Communities. Begun in 2019 under the vision of Claire Nelson and Jessica Green, Courageous Communities has opened a space in Barrington to learn and practice how to foster greater inclusion and belonging.

Since 2019, 1,000+ people have joined us, virtually and in person, for monthly conversations on topics as diverse as, "What does your faith say about belonging to each other, Reckoning with the history of slavery, Uncovering hidden violence against women, Fostering belonging for different abilities, and Befriending radical disagreement." Each conversation is meant to bring people together in a brave space to open up dialogue, challenge notions, deepen understanding, and strengthen connections. And these goals are lofty; the deepest hope for Courageous Conversations is to create spaces where people who thought themselves not connected find meaningful connections and a sense of belonging to one another.

In fact, this year, a groundswell of community members has come together to nourish a culture of belonging in Barrington and beyond. Creating connections between people who previously understood themselves as disconnected is a significant part of the work Barrington is called to next. If we can better understand that we belong to one another through Courageous Communities, our ability to learn, grow, and work together toward a shared future is enhanced (courageouscommunitiesbarrington.us).

In the challenging and changing world we share; how can we move mountains for the better?

All around us, the world as we know it has shifted; the cost of a borderless pandemic, the shout of marginalized communities around the world, the rise and fall of fortunes and leaders, and a future shaped by technological inventions not yet imagined has changed the way we live and think. But babies are still being born, love remains alive in our hearts, visions still fill the souls of dreamers, and questions still compel us to seek and learn. The inherent desire to connect and belong to something greater than our individual selves will always call us together and I believe, outweigh the challenges we face.

The task for each person alive at this moment in time is to rise each morning and seek to find ways to connect with others, to seek to replace judgment with curiosity, indifference with caring, isolation with belonging, and fear with love. Imagine a world filled with curious, caring, connected, loving souls. Imagine it, and then may we make it so.

Would you share your purpose as you see it today, with us?

I am so glad you asked about purpose. At 66 years of age, I have found it helpful to answer this question after a retrospective look. I am not sure I knew my purpose early in my life. But, after sharing in several workshops with folks my age and older, I have discovered that when we turn around and look back, our purpose becomes clearer. Now, from this temporal position in my life, I know that my purpose is to support others in discovering who they are created to be. But, the statement is not as simple as it seems. I do not believe people are born with limitless paths to travel. We each are born with and for our own purpose. We spend our lives discovering, refining, expanding, and living into that purpose. As I walk with people through my

work, my most profound prayer is that something I contribute will help open the paths leading them to their deepest purpose.

Indeed, there are people in my life who have guided me in this way, and they are some of the most influential people in my life. Some have asked the right question at the right moment in my life. I have encountered others at the right intersection of confusion and fear, and their actions have opened or closed a particular way. And some have whispered prayers over me that awakened a curiosity that turned into a passion. I pray I can do for others what has been done for me.

And for those who wonder about their purpose, no matter your age, turn and look back over your life; what threads do you see, and what moments of coherence arise? These may hint at your purpose and guide you more deeply into who you are created to be. Be curious, be a risk taker, be open, and keep pursuing that purpose.

As you enter into it, you and the world will be deeply blessed. U



Congratulations Zina, and thanks for helping change our lives for the better. We wish you well in the years ahead.