

Marilyn Adams Moore

Social Prophet/Profeta Social

1. Getting to Know You/Conociéndote

Name/Nombre: Marilyn Adams Moore

Antoinette Brown Award/A.B. honor:
1991

Life/Vivió: January 30, 1933 - January 3, 1991
(Enero) (Enero)

Place of birth/Lugar de nacimiento:
New York

Color of hair/Color de cabello:
Brown/Castaño

Color of eyes/Color de ojos:
Brown/Castaño

Brothers and sisters/Hermanos y hermanas:
Two brothers/Dos hermanos

Order of birth/Orden de nacimiento:
Middle/Segunda

She enjoyed/Disfrutaba:
Cooking and entertaining in her home;
doing things with family and friends in
Manhattan; church activities/Cocinando y
siendo la anfitriona en su hogar; ir a
Manhattan con su familia y amigos; las
actividades de la iglesia

Mentor/Mentor: Dr. S. Garry Oniki

2. “You do not know someone’s journey, so how can you judge them?”

What made Marilyn Adams Moore such a good minister? Was it her sense of humor, that she laughed a lot, her ability to laugh at herself? Imagine her smile, her enveloping warmth, the white streak in the front of her Afro that made her look like a super hero. She did not try to be young, yet she was always current.

She taught with the ease of one who has a direct relationship with God. "You can connect anytime," she said. "Praying is so simple you can do it anywhere."

Had a young woman asked her to describe God, she likely would have answered, "How do *you* describe God? That is what is important." Had a youth been called to a particular work but not to ordained ministry, she likely would have said, "That is your gift, there are many ways to serve God and do well."

She taught young people that the biggest way to show one’s faith to others is to live in a certain way. She lived through her faith and was serious in her actions.

One youth in her church said, "She was a fantastic listener and perhaps the least judgmental person I have met in my life." She told us, "You do not know someone’s journey, so how can you judge them?"

3. Family, Too

Marilyn enjoyed people and assisted them in many ways, often without their knowledge, so they could keep their pride. Known as a good cook, she prepared more food than the family needed because people were always dropping by her home.

She made room for anyone who needed a place to stay for a night, a week, or sometimes even a year. No wonder the young members of the church, as well as her two daughters, saw her as a model and trendsetter.

Marilyn raised her family while she continued her education, worked full time, and was involved in considerable volunteer work. Her devotion to people never excluded her daughters. Marilyn always found the particular birthday cake that one daughter liked and never missed cooking curried chicken and rice in celebration of the other’s birthday. Marilyn’s eldest daughter recounts, "With everything on my mom's plate, it never seemed like a she was juggling or stressed out. My sister and I always felt we were number one."

Marilyn integrated her daughters’ lives with her work before and after her ordination. She was grateful that most of her employment allowed her that flexibility, especially when she became a single parent. Her daughters often accompanied her to work and to seminary, sneaking off to Xerox their hands while visiting at her national office, and met other members of the clergy like

Bishop Desmond Tutu as well as Greek Orthodox priests at national church gatherings.

Marilyn was not preachy, whether at home or at church. Through the tapestry of her work, people, including her daughters, grew from the exposure to her charitable lifestyle. She helped to make them well-rounded individuals and continued to influence their lives and careers, even after her death.

4. Beginnings

Born to Ernesta Clarisa Larrier Adams and Clarence Lancelot Adams, Sr., Marilyn Adams Moore received her primary and secondary education in New York City public schools. It was a good time to live in Manhattan and enjoy doing things with classmates who became lifelong friends.

Marilyn grew up in the Church of the Master (Presbyterian) in Harlem. This church held special meaning for her. Significant life steps were made there -- her confirmation, her marriage to Gerald Moore, and the confirmation of her two daughters.

In 1982, Church of the Master hosted Marilyn's ordination as a minister in the United Church of Christ. In 1982, Marilyn also became a member of Grace Congregational Church of Harlem, Inc., United Church of Christ, and, according to the senior minister, "ministered to them as often as asked and as time permitted."

5. S. Garry Oniki

Dr. S. Garry Oniki served as assistant pastor at Church of the Master. He was ordained in the United Church of Christ. He would become an important guide in Marilyn's life.

"Garry gave me my first job working in the day care program at Church of the Master at Morningside Avenue," Marilyn said in a 1982 interview for *Common Lot*.¹ "My father had a stroke. I was in college and needed a job."

Garry's commitment to mentoring led Marilyn to work with the mental hygiene clinic and then to church camp as a registrar. Marilyn had opportunities to work with Garry at the National Council of Churches (NCC), Church Women United and later the United Church of Christ Council of Christian Social Action. It was out of that Council, she said, that the Committee for Racial Justice (CRJ now known as Justice and Witness Ministries) was born. Marilyn went on to work for the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries (UCBHM). She left after her first daughter was born.

6. Charles Earl Cobb

A few years later, Marilyn received word that the CRJ had a new executive, Charles Cobb, who was looking for an office manager.

“I sent Dr. Cobb my résumé,” she said. “But when he hired me over the phone, I was hesitant and made many excuses and had to ask myself, *do you remain a homemaker?* or *do you go out and do this job?* He said he would wait for me to decide, but that he would not take *no* for an answer.”

“I believe now,” Marilyn said in the earlier interview, “that it was the Holy Spirit that moved me 13 years ago this September (1982) to work for the Committee for Racial Justice.” Marilyn spent a total of 20 years working for the United Church of Christ.

In 1976, she became the assistant to the executive director of the CRJ and, in 1981, she became Associate Director. For two years (1986-1988), she served as assistant pastor and as executive director of the St. Alban’s Congregational Church and the St. Alban’s Family Life Center in the New York City Borough of Queens. She worked with the Rev. Robert Johnson.

She served as Associate Director for the Social and Racial Justice Program, UCCBHM, from 1988 until her death from cancer on January 3, 1991, just days before her 58th birthday.

7. Continuing her Education

While at the Commission, Marilyn completed her education at Long Island University where she received her Bachelor of Science degree. After she graduated, Garry Oniki suggested she round out her education and go to seminary.

“Seminary was the farthest thing from my mind,” Marilyn said. “Dr. George (Bill) Webber at New York Theological Seminary (NYTS) suggested I begin with some courses that would be helpful in my work.”

Working for the church, Marilyn served on many committees. “I was often the token woman and/or the token Black -- usually the token woman,” she said.

Later Marilyn was approached by Garry Oniki who wanted to talk to her about her spiritual growth. During this time, she was taking a course called “Integration Seminar.” She said, “I found that things were leading me to Christian ministry all my life. Until then, I hadn’t been aware of it.”

She described the seminary as “a truly Christian community -- women, men, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Caucasian, Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish -- quite a community. It was there that I really got in touch with my spiritual self, my mission, and how I could serve in the name of Jesus.”

She encountered men who felt uncomfortable with women attending seminary. “Our time together and the process of our work enlightened them. In the end, they accepted me as well as the other women.”

8. Ordination?

Marilyn still was not convinced that ordination was the answer for her. She struggled over 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 (NRSV): "...To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.... There are different ways of serving but the same Lord is served."

"Does one remain a strong lay woman or become clergy?"

How can one best encourage others to see the strong gifts of the laity?"

She saw herself as being strengthened as a layperson. She felt that was her mission. She told her classmates that she was unsure that she was called to be ordained. Marilyn said, "The group made me promise to follow the Holy Spirit and preach when asked. The very next week my pastor asked me to preach. That was the beginning of my turning point."

As part of the dual seminaries program, she transferred from NYTS to New Brunswick Theological Seminary. In 1980, she attended the International Summer School in Theology at Leiden University in the Netherlands. She received her certificate in ministry from NYTS and her Masters of Divinity from the New Brunswick Theological Seminary in 1981.

9. Ministry of the Laity

Marilyn gave significant volunteer time and service to many community, social and civic organizations. She engaged in ecumenical work and the work of the church in the Harlem neighborhood in Manhattan.

Among her activities, she was a member of the Concerned Black Parents and Citizens of South Brunswick, served on the board of directors of the South Brunswick Chapter NAACP and was a chaplain at hospitals and prisons. She also worked on international peace effort projects, with migrant workers and Native American nations. She founded and chaired "The Positive Influences" Women's Organization. She also served as chaplain for the Manhattan Civil Air Patrol Cadet Squadron #434.

She received the 1986 Volunteer-of-the-Year Award from the Bay View Correctional Facility. She also served there as chaplain. Marilyn spoke about her extensive prison ministry. Marilyn's interest began when the Commission was involved in the 1970s with "One America, Inc." One America placed female inmates from Alderson, WV, Federal Prison in local UCC churches when they were first released from prison.

She had been involved with women prisoners in Atlanta, screening women who were in their last phase of prison, so they could go into a halfway house (church sponsored with CRJ funds).

She was also involved with PACE (Prisoners Accelerated Creative Exposure) and their women and children visitation program. Through CRJ's Mentally Retarded

Offender Program, she worked with the Annex of Bedford Hills where women who are mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed were housed.

10. “When, Marilyn?”

Marilyn said, “One day, my brother asked me when I would be ordained. I said, ‘I’m not sure about that.’”

In 1982, Marilyn was ordained through the Metropolitan Association New York Conference. “Ordination was the end of a struggle I had all through seminary,” she said.

Davida Crabtree,² friend and colleague, gave the ecumenical charge at her ordination. They had worked together ecumenically for many years. “Finally,” Davida told her, ‘You’ve *got* to be UCC.’”

“Davida also had encouraged me to go to seminary,” Marilyn said. “Her understanding words had a lot to do with the wrestling that went on inside of me.”

Marilyn’s daughters responded favorably to her ordination and ministry. Marilyn said, “I exposed them to female clergy whenever I had a chance. They did not feel strange about it by the time of my ordination because I had always included them in my ministry.”

Marilyn’s firstborn was in high school when Marilyn was ordained. Her younger child was in elementary school. Even though their mother was among the few women who went to seminary at that time, her ordination seemed to them like a natural progression, nothing out of the ordinary.

Marilyn began work on her Doctorate of Ministry at NYTS in 1985.

11. Passion for Justice

“Marilyn’s passion for justice was deep,” said Faith Adams Johnson, a colleague on the Board for Homeland Ministries. “Her ability to organize around justice issues was impressive. Her death came much too soon.”

In the celebration book, UCC@50: Our Future, she was commended as “the staff member of the Racial Justice Commission who brought together racial and ethnic groups.”

“Marilyn was the number two person to Charlie Cobb,” said the Rev. Dr. Yvonne Delk.³ “Under Charles, the Commission had a strong emphasis on fighting for criminal justice. Marilyn was involved in all of it.”

As the assistant director, she oversaw all program issues the staff was engaged in during particularly tense racial times. Among them was the Wilmington Ten political imprisonment. The Wilmington Ten was a group of civil rights activists. One man was Benjamín Chávez, the young UCC minister who spent nearly a

decade in jail. Ben Chávez along with eight other African-American men and one white woman were arrested, tried, and convicted for arson and conspiracy. They were sentenced to nearly 28 years in prison.

“The Commission fought for Ben Chávez right up to the time that he was released,” Yvonne Delk said.

Another criminal justice issue in which Marilyn was involved was the landmark Supreme Court case in the mid-70s. It led to the suspension of capital punishment for a decade until United States policies were re-written. Marie Hill, a 17-year-old African-American woman from North Carolina, had been condemned to the death sentence for committing murder.

12. Equality for Women – All Women

“In the midst of that,” Yvonne Delk said, “we were fighting for women’s issues.” Yvonne describes when the big moment for women came in 1975 while she was on the floor of General Synod:

Valerie Russell and Davida Crabtree began to fight for women’s rights. Valerie was the staff person from the president’s office.

I was sitting in the balcony of the ‘75 synod. Marilyn and I and one or two others were sitting with women in the Church and Society section, so that was bridged.

I was so concerned about racial justice. If they were focusing on the role of women in church and society, would they still stay faithful to racial justice? Valerie said, “This is your issue, too. Black women have to have a voice in that. We don’t need to be isolated from each other.”

Then the women got the idea to bring all women into these structures across the boundaries so we can dialogue together – serious dialogue among women clergy, white *and* women of color, equality for women – all women.

13. COREM

Marilyn, who was also a member of the Women’s Inter-Staff Team, was a strong voice at those tables, Yvonne Delk said. Marilyn was in the middle of it:

She engaged us and helped to bridge that gap. She said, “It is not enough for us as women to talk about these boundaries. We have all these racial and ethnic groups. We are competing with each other. We have got to be working together.”

“Marilyn birthed the idea of COREM (Council for Racial and Ethnic Ministries),” Yvonne said. As a result of the 14th General Synod, representatives from the Pacific Islanders and Asian American Ministries, Council for Hispanic Ministries, Council for American Indian Ministry (CAM), United Black Christians, and

Ministers for Racial, Social, and Economic Justice all came together in COREM to advocate for racial and ethnic concerns within the UCC.

The Commission became the place that began to empower all persons. Marilyn brought Héctor López (Hispanic Ministries) and Yvonne Delk (United Black Christians) into the conversation.

During that process, Yvonne was ordained in 1974. She too spent a long decade wrestling with her call. The two women (Marilyn and Yvonne) talked about how one understands God's call.

"I think," said Yvonne, "that Marilyn began to feel that call on her life in the midst of all those pieces. She decided to go to seminary and get her degree. It was the movement of a major moment in her life."

14. On Pluralism

The Marilyn Adams Moore Social Prophet Award is named in honor of Marilyn, who was an ordained woman of faith and courage and served the United Church of Christ for over twenty years in mobilizing justice ministries in racial and ethnic groups.

My main interest now [1982] is with the issue of pluralism. My concern is that as the UCC calls for diversity, they do not use that as a screen for what is really racism and sexism.

Because of the Coordinating Center for Women (CCW) and prior to that the Task Force and Advisory Commission, women have been made aware and sensitive to the issues and they will not let talk of pluralism screen reality. More power is there too because women are in the majority. Therefore, my concern is more in concern with racism.

I think the church should realize it didn't really talk about pluralism until the reality of having to share power with the Asians and the Hispanics (as it perceived it had shared with the Black constitutions) became threatening. It was at the time these asked to be recognized as bringing gifts to the church and asked to share in resources of the church that the UCC decided it needed to talk about pluralism.

I think if the UCC is truly about what we say, 'that they may all be one,' then we should be honest about what we really mean concerning pluralism. People do not really want to share power, but it is mind boggling that we think power is ours to give. Power that we conceive as ours is really nothing. Power is of God.

– The Reverend Marilyn Adams Moore

15. So What about You?

- Marilyn Adams Moore was a good listener. She did not judge people.

What is the connection between being a good listener and not judging?

How do you feel when you have been in the presence of a good listener?

How do you feel when in the presence of a judging person?

When you listen to someone, how do you avoid being judgmental?

When is it most tempting for you to judge another person?

- Marilyn “lived through her faith.”

What do those words mean to you? How do you live through your faith?

- Those were years that women needed a male to open professional doors. Marilyn found that sometimes men were a help and sometimes they were a hindrance.

How did they help?

How did they hinder?

How has opening doors changed now that women are on their own?

Where do we still need to grow?

- Marilyn said: “I made many excuses as I asked myself the question, do you remain a homemaker, or do you go out and do this job?”

How would you answer these questions today?

Why are they still true questions?

- When considering ordination, Marilyn wrestled with two questions: Does one remain a strong laywoman or become clergy?

What pros and cons would you have offered for this question then? Now?

- These days when men and women are looking at alternative, authorized ministries, Marilyn’s question is being revisited: How can one best encourage others to see the strong gifts of the laity?”

How would you respond to this question?

16. Church Family Project

Think about the life-wisdom that Marilyn as a mother passed on to her daughters. What life learning has your mother/father passed on to you through word, through presence, through actions?

Write an introduction of one or both parents and share it with one other person in your youth group or other group.

17. Still Curious?

To learn more about the Wilmington 10, go to

1. “Wilmington 10 at <http://www.soc-ucc.org/Wilmington10.htm>.
2. “Benjamín Chávez’ Mother Here for Wilmington 10” by Fred Hines. The Baltimore African-American. March 14, 1978 at <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2205&dat=19780314&id=B5slAAAIBA&sjid=VPUFAAAAIBA&pg=991,1457941>.
3. “Wilmington 10 lawyers begin their legal battle to obtain new hearing” by Lyle Denniston. Washington Star-News, February 5, 1977 at <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1454&dat=19770205&id=1rgsAAAIBA&sjid=HRMEAAAIBA&pg=1306,1073402>.
4. “Last of the Wilmington 10: The Rev. Ben Chávez serves 17-year prison sentence while earning Duke’ University master’s degree” by Alex Poinsett in Ebony, June 1979, pp. 65-72 at http://books.google.com/books?id=sItfPJ3ZtdQC&pg=PA65&lpg=PA65&dq=Wilmington+10&source=bl&ots=5XS5nlhJAo&sig=BWJpAr9JFlqNsHu5M7GdLpSjBLo&hl=en&ei=ol-yS-vgM5OmsgPds7yOAO&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CAgQ6AEwATge#v=onepage&q=Wilmington%2010&f=false

To learn more about Marie Hill, go to

1. “Marie Hill Execution Is Halted.” The Times-News, Raleigh (UPI). December 13, 1969 at <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1665&dat=19691213&id=ASAAAAAIBA&sjid=PSQEAAAIBA&pg=5547,6798214>.
2. “Capital Punishment Foes Say Death Verdict Given Because Girl is a Negro” in Florence Times-Tricities Daily. Raleigh, NC (AP) January 6, 1970 at <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=2PsrAAAIBA&sjid=kcYEAAAIBA&pg=3362,989347&hl=en>.

3. “Execution is Not Likely for Marie Hill, Age 17.” The Dispatch. June 29, 1971 at <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1734&dat=19700107&id=WYobAAAAIBAJ&sjid=UVEEAAAAIBAJ&pg=6626,580321> and “Marie Hill Wins Right to Live” by Bob Boyd. The Charlotte Observer. June 29, 1971 at http://www.fergusonstein.com/pressDetail.php?pressId=11&KeepThis=true&TB_iframe=true&height=400&width=600.
4. State v. Hill, 183 SE 2d 97 (1971). STATE of North Carolina v. Marie Hill. No. 100. Supreme Court of North Carolina. September 7, 1971 at http://scholar.google.com/scholar_case?case=9735248837576358409.
5. Charlotte North Carolina Attorney – Work Accident Injury Lawyer at <http://www.fergusonstein.com/index.php?sectionId=4&subId=7&pos=0>.

¹ From “A Journey to Ordination” ... Rev. Marilyn Adams Moore” in *Common Lot*. June 1982. All words attributed to Marilyn Adams Moore are from this source.

² The chapter for the Rev. Davida Crabtree is found in *Antoinette Brown Women: Finding Voice* on the Women’s Page at <http://www.ucc.org/women/finding.html>.

³ Read about the Rev. Dr. Yvonne Delk in *Antoinette Brown Women: Finding Voice* on the Women’s Page at <http://www.ucc.org/women/finding.html>.

Dallas (Dee) A. Brauninger. *Antoinette Brown Women: Finding Voice*, September 2009