

‘Delivering’ Despite Censure?

Barry’s ‘State of Ward 8’ Promises Redemption

BY VIRGINIA AVNIEL SPATZ

With the DC Council censure of Ward 8 Councilmember Marion Barry just hours old, Matthews Memorial Baptist Church hosted the “State of Ward 8.” Civic information was available downstairs, with economic development plans, options in park improvements and a model of the new design for Washington Highlands Library on display; citizens were asked for input. Upstairs, in the sanctuary, however, a Christian service was offered.

The March 2 event portrayed “Ward 8” as a conglomeration of its councilmember and residents.

“We all fall short,” Bishop C. Matthew Hudson said, identifying Barry with the larger, fallible, human congregation and preaching that the current state of failure and sin can be overcome with divine assistance and an improved self-image.

Ward 8 had been “last” in citywide resources. It had been criticized and unfairly accused. It got no respect, with only God to “see the best.”

“God does his best work when it looks like we’re down,” Hudson declared in his opening remarks, concluding the evening with: “Don’t talk about Southeast. You’re talking about yourself.”

In between, Barry encouraged everyone to consider his “full story, not just three of four pages,” and he advocated for residents to employ their full potential: “We’ve got brainpower over here. We’re not trifling.”

Dancers and choirs provided a consistent message of Christian redemption. Several participants, not standing to praise the Lord when encouraged to do so, left early. Mid-

way through the service, pastors were invited to “anoint” Barry in what appeared to be a powerful experience for Christians but left others puzzled.

“I’m a Muslim, and I don’t understand what this is supposed to mean,” said Aquarius Vann-Ghasri, DC Housing Authority family commissioner, during the event. In addition, she asked, “I wonder what happened to separation of church and state?”

“That’s the part that won’t



be in the newspaper,” Hudson announced, following the anointing. “That’s what pastors do,” he said, in comparison with the censure vote. “The council did what they do.”

Turning for a moment to a more secular stance, the bishop asked those present to “stand up if you ever got something – a job, a reference, a promotion – from



COUNTERCLOCKWISE FROM TOP

1. LouAnn Greene, of Dancing with a Purpose Ministries, performs “He Saw the Best in Me.” (not shown: Faye Johnson and Pat Waller)
 2. Bishop C. Matthew Hudson, senior pastor of Matthews Memorial Baptist Church (left), with Bishop Glen A. Staples, pastor of Temple of Praise.
 3. Barry with his chief of staff, Brenda Richardson, who faces allegations related to the censure vote.
 4. Ward 8 Councilmember Marion Barry with staff and supporters at “State of Ward 8” service, March 2.
- Photos by Andrew Lightman



Marion Barry.” Roughly three-fourths of those present stood.

Also in the sanctuary were Ward 7 Councilmember Yvette Alexander; At-Large Councilmember Michael Brown, who has taken over the committee chairmanship Barry lost; developers; and representatives of the DC Housing Authority as well as a number of public housing residents’ councils.

“It was a powerful, prayerful evening,” said Mary Cuthbert of ANC 8C, summing up the evening.

ANC 8A Opts for Business

“If I want to go to church, I can do that on a Sunday or another day,” said Anthony Muhammad, chair of ANC 8A, which held its regularly scheduled meeting on March 2. “The people’s business needs to go on. We had our meeting scheduled a whole year ago. We already know what the state of the ward is – a statement is made, no questions and no comments are allowed ... really, it’s just a church service.”

“It would have been better for them to bring a list of who is hiring in Ward 8,” Muhammad continues. Like Barry, Muhammad sees a disconnect between the ward’s high unemployment and the level of construction in the area. “Billions of dollars are being spent, and people who live here are still unemployed – don’t tell me everyone here is unqualified to hold a flag, sweep a street, direct traffic ... But statistics continue to tell me that unemployment is highest in the region.”

During his “State of Ward 8” message, Barry invited unemployed residents to meet him “over at the One Stop Unemployment Center on Naylor Road – we’re gonna make them give us jobs.” Barry’s office did not respond to a request for a report on this gathering.

Supporters Lament Ward 8’s Voice

“Barbara Jordan once said, ‘If we promise as public officials we must deliver.’ Marion Barry is delivering every day,” the councilmember declared, near the end of his “State of Ward 8” address.

“He’s like us, like Ward 8, he never gives up. You can knock him down, but he gets back up,” said environmen-

tal activist Jacquelyn Ward, who credits Barry with improvements to Oxon Run Park. “I am angry that the council took the word of someone who shouldn’t be trusted.”

“I’m elated,” said Absalom Jordan (ANC 8D03) following the event. “Marion apologized before the council, recognizing that he did something wrong. Censuring was overkill, and it opened a Pandora’s Box for other councilmembers.”

Jordan explains that he worked with Marion Barry to establish the District’s Commission on Poverty only to see the current mayor “sabotage it,” adding: “Marion Barry’s the only hope we have. We’re still at the bottom.”

“I think this event cleared the air,” said William Lockridge, local activist and Ward 8 representative to the State Board of Education. “What happens to Marion Barry happens to us. He was our drum major for housing ... Now, we don’t have a voice. The council didn’t consider the impact on citizens.”

Fenty and the Bible Omitted

On March 2, Barry did not read many portions of his written remarks that directly attacked Mayor Adrian Fenty. Nor did he read this comparison to the biblical Joseph.

“He rose in ranks as a servant ... but when making the decision to do the right thing, instead of falling into temptation, he was lied on and put into prison ... [then eventually] rose to second in command of the whole region. Soon, the very people who put him in the pit needed him for survival.

“Ward 8, regardless of how insignificant, misunderstood, underestimated, mistreated you feel, remember that we do not and will not stay in the pit! The same boy that was thrown in the pit by his brothers (who were only jealous of his gifts and talents) possessed the very potential that landed him second in command. I want you to know that it will be by the very blood, sweat and tears of this ward, which will ensure the sustainability of Washington, DC. I see it, I know it, and the rest of the city knows it as well.” ★

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