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St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Spring Valley dedicates restored stained glass window

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Spring Valley - A restored stained-glass window at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Spring Valley was dedicated yesterday in honor of the late Dr. Charles Lawrence II and his wife, Dr. Margaret Morgan Lawrence.

When Lawrence, 91, saw the window inscription, "faithful witness to justice, peace and love," her eyes filled with tears. "It's wonderful to be able to look at a window dedicated to you," she said. But, "The honor doesn't belong to me. This honor belongs to God and his love."

The Rev. Angela Boatright, pastor of St. Paul's, welcomed guests and called Lawrence, "St. Paul's unofficial mother."

Cynthia Smallwood, president of the Episcopal Church Women, said the church was happy to take on the labor of love and to honor the Lawrences, affectionately known by the congregation as "the doctors." She praised the couple's trailblazing spirit and commitment to youth education and mental health, and referred to the graceful, slight figure smiling throughout the ceremony as "Ma Margaret."

"We love you and thank you for everything," Smallwood said.

During the 50 plus years they devoted to St. Paul's, the Lawrences focused on issues close to their hearts such as establishing the Dr. Charles Lawrence Scholarship, awarded each year to graduating high school seniors from the congregation.

Sara Lawrence Lightfoot, one of three Lawrence children to grow up at St. Paul's, said it was an important and joyful moment for the whole family.

"They brought the life of the whole world to the church," she said, explaining her parents' desire to work on issues of race and peace.

Carol Williams said the Lawrences were the first people she met when she came to the church more than 20 years ago.

"They have broken several barriers for our people," she said.

Margaret Morgan Lawrence was among the first African-American women to graduate from Cornell University, as well as Columbia University's program in psychiatry. And although she continued to work at Harlem Hospital until her retirement, the couple moved their family out of New York City to build their home in Skyview Acres, an integrated housing community founded in Pomona in 1946.

They were also the first African-American family to attend St. Paul's, and they were a driving force, according to R. Clinton Taplin, in challenging church members to become involved in the community.

Taplin said he and Margaret Lawrence were active in the mental health movement in the 1970s and noted that she helped to develop the Rockland County Organization for Mentally Ill Children.

Charles Lawrence, a distinguished sociologist and professor at Brooklyn College, served for years as a school board member and was among the highest-ranking laymen in the Episcopal Church.

The couple's daughter, the Rev. Paula Lawrence Wehmiller, gave the sermon. As she described her childhood, Wehmiller made reference to picketing segregated lunch counters at Woolworth's, Rosa Parks on the bus and protesters singing "We Shall Overcome."

She said the Lawrence children were fed a steady diet of nonviolence hymns as lullabies, instruction in peace and justice activism and a fearlessness about racial hatred.

"Living in this imperfect world requires us to disarm our hearts," she said, offering a new beatitude: "Blessed are those who sing a new song."

Restoring the church window, one of 13 surrounding the small sanctuary, cost almost \$4,500.

It is a simple image of an anchor framed in blue, a fitting way for a congregation, whose benches are now filled to capacity with families from the West Indies, Africa, Latin America and Europe, to recognize the family members who worked hard to tether their life's work to the rock of justice.
