

ONFAITH

BY JIM MERRITT
Special to Newsday

Black History Month, which began Feb. 1, is celebrated throughout Long Island in schools and at town halls, in lectures, films and art exhibitions — and in houses of worship. This week’s clergy discuss how their congregations are marking 401 years of the African American experience.

The Rev. Jaye Brooks,
Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock, Manhasset



Jaye Brooks



William F. Brisotti



Henrietta Scott Fullard

minority communities. St. Martin de Porres, a 17th-century Peruvian of African and Spanish parentage, is our adopted parish patron saint, attesting to the complexities of our black parishioners, with their deep roots in the southern United States, Harlem, Africa, Haiti, the Caribbean, Latin America and elsewhere.

The Rev. Henrietta Scott Fullard
Presiding elder (retired), Long Island District, African Methodist Episcopal Churches

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock in Manhasset honors Black History this month with a free four-session Freedom School that invites participants to explore the 400-year of black lives in America. Based on materials from The New York Times 1619 Project, the Freedom School will teach the 1619 origin of American slavery and its effects to this day. Topics include capitalism and slavery; consequences for the American health care system; structural racism on Long Island; and ownership of Native Americans during the slavery era. Journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones conceived and directed the 1619 Project, unveiled in August 2019. She saw the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in America as an opportunity to consider what slavery has meant for our nation’s development. Essays in the project take a modern phenomenon, like rush-hour traffic, and trace each to its roots in slavery.

At Shelter Rock, respect for every human’s inherent worth and a commitment to lifelong learning prompted this exploration into the project’s remarkable cache of history and analysis. As part of a faith tradition that encourages its members to work for justice as they

continue to learn and grow, Shelter Rock intentionally offers learning opportunities that examine assumptions around race and power. It can be difficult for white Americans to make room for the discomfort that can arise in these conversations, but having them anyway is part of the congregation’s vision to create a loving religious community, encourage spiritual growth, and build a more just and joyful world.

The Rev. William F. Brisotti,
Pastor, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Roman Catholic Church, Wyandanch

How our parish honors Black History Month reflects who we are and what we do throughout the year. Black history is part of our history, as Catholics, as humans and as citizens of the United States. Our parish has regularly scheduled Sunday Masses with African-American Gospel music and in

Haitian Creole. We support and participate in the annual February diocesan Black Catholic Mass, held jointly with the ministries of the Diocese of Rockville Centre and of our mother Diocese of Brooklyn.

We honor the long tradition of black Catholics in our parish, diocese, nation and world, and our parish’s legacy of credible advocacy and many decades of collaborative service within the minority community in Wyandanch, and in Suffolk County and beyond. Several not-for-profit agencies serving specific social needs affecting people of color were born because of our parish’s efforts.

Our Gerald J. Ryan Outreach provides daily for the immediate needs of individuals and families and a summer camp for local children, and our multicultural parish Roundtable for the Common Good brings Catholic social teaching to bear on current issues inordinately affecting black and other

ASKING THE CLERGY

Honoring Black History Month

Black History Month is a very significant period in which to gain insight into the lives and struggles of African Americans past and present. It’s a time to recall the memories of past events and to take note of issues that still suppress the upward mobility of black Americans.

Our congregations will have moments of celebration that include remembering the lives, service, contributions and sacrifices of black Americans. Church members will share the individual stories of our history at showings of such films and videos as “Selma” and “12 Years a Slave.” The screenings will be followed by brief discussions of what has changed and what still needs to change to make our lives better today.

Churches will have community outreaches to address homelessness, unemployment, incarceration, needs of the elderly, education and inequality. Members will be given the opportunity to use their skills and resources to minister to the least of God’s people. Those who still have needs will be supported by the church and its ministries. The missionaries will provide support to black communities that still struggle with impoverishment. The adult ministry will provide a sacred space for black youth to come to when they need guidance. The church will continue to be the space where freedom in all areas must begin.