



Wisconsin Gospellers build spirit-filled relationships with New York Conference

by Lori Bocher, for the Wisconsin Gospellers

The Wisconsin Gospellers, a state-wide gospel choir of the Wisconsin Conference UCC, traveled to New York City July 28 to August 5 to sing with and learn from members of *Inspirational Voices*, the New York Conference's new gospel choir. The learning came in many forms and on many levels.

Gospellers' founder, Rev. Fritz West, and music director Dr. Martin Ulrich, in collaboration with Rev. Carolyn C. Blair and Rev. Dr. Ruby Wilson of Queens, NY, initiated this partnership. The New York Conference wants to start a transatlantic partnership like the one between the Gospellers and the West End Gospel Singers of Eberswalde, Germany. While the New Yorkers learned a bit about organizing a conference-wide choir, the 22 Wisconsinites received many spirit-filled lessons from their African-American hosts. Both groups experienced how passionate music and the love of Christ connects people across cultural differences and stereotypes.



Wisconsin Gospellers outside of Grace Congregational UCC in Harlem.



Workshop being led by the Rev. Eugene R. Palmore of The Riverside Church.

The two choirs gathered for a daylong workshop on Saturday, participated in a joint concert at St. Albans UCC Sunday afternoon, enjoyed a soul food lunch on Wednesday, and participated in a farewell party on Friday night. The Wisconsin Gospellers additionally



Sisters Rev. Carolyn Blair (left) and the Rev. Dr. Ruby Wilson shared childhood memories in Harlem.

sang at a worship service on Sunday morning at Safe Haven UCC in Queens, at a Wednesday night service at The Riverside Church, and at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine on Friday morning. Dr. Wilson led a walking tour of Harlem and a visit to a Brooklyn urban garden. There was also time to see the sights, including the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, and the African Burial Ground National Monument in the heart of Manhattan.

The Gospellers were led by two members of the First Congregational UCC in Waukesha: Kimberly Redding, chair of the leadership team; and Mark Schmitt, interim musical director.

The Wisconsin Gospellers will kick off their 2017-18 program year with a September retreat (details to be determined). All interested singers are welcome. To learn more about this retreat and the Gospellers in general, visit their web site at: www.wisconsingospellers.org.