

Melissa Harris-Perry to join faculty

By Katie Neal



Melissa Harris-Perry

MSNBC television host, award-winning scholar and Wake Forest University alumna Melissa Harris-Perry ('94) will return this summer to her alma mater as a chaired professor.

Host of the popular MSNBC show "Melissa Harris-Perry," she joins Wake Forest's Politics and International Affairs department from Tulane University, where she has served as a political science professor since 2011.

"My love affair with Wake Forest began when I was 16, so having the opportunity to return is thrilling beyond measure," said Harris-Perry. "Wake Forest taught me the joys of learning, the responsibilities of citizenship, and the endurance of friendship. I welcome the challenge of joining this demanding and nurturing academic environment."

Known for her creative and dynamic teaching style, Harris-Perry brings practical political and relevant cultural experiences to the classroom.

Harris-Perry talked with students in Politics and international Affairs Professor Kathy Smith's class in 2012.

"Melissa Harris-Perry is one of the nation's foremost intellectuals publicly exploring—and thoughtfully influencing—the intersections of politics, race, gender, religion and culture," said Wake Forest Provost Rogan Kersh. "We are delighted that she has chosen to come home to Wake Forest and help ignite in our students the passion she has for contemporary political issues and social justice."

Harris-Perry has been named a Presidential Chair, an endowed position that recognizes and supports exceptional faculty who embody Wake Forest's teacher-scholar ideal. She is the second Presidential Chair honoree, joining Michele Gillespie of Wake Forest's History Department.

Wake Forest Magazine Features

Harris-Perry is founding director of the Anna Julia Cooper Project on Gender, Race, and Politics in the South. Named for the foundational black feminist intellectual, activist, and educator of the early 20th century, the Anna Julia Cooper Project supports related programs, courses and research and will move with Harris-Perry to Wake Forest.

"I am most honored to have an opportunity to bring Anna Julia Cooper home to North Carolina," said Harris-Perry. "Establishing a research center in Cooper's name at Wake Forest University will preserve her legacy of black feminist scholarship that transcends the traditional boundaries between academy and community."

Harris-Perry is also an award-winning author. Her first book, "Barbershops, Bibles, and BET: Everyday Talk and Black Political Thought," won the 2005 W. E. B. Du Bois Book Award from the National Conference of Black Political Scientists and 2005 Best Book Award from the Race and Ethnic Politics Section of the American Political Science Association. Her most recent book, "Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America" argues that persistent harmful stereotypes—invisible to many but painfully familiar to black women—profoundly shape black women's political engagement, contribute to policies that treat them unfairly, and make it difficult for black women to assert their rights in the political arena.

Having also previously served on the faculties of the University of Chicago and Princeton University, her academic research is inspired by a desire to investigate the challenges facing contemporary black Americans and to better understand the multiple, creative ways that African Americans respond to these challenges.



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Harris-Perry regularly provides expert commentary on U.S. elections, racial issues, religious questions and gender concerns for a variety of media outlets, and she will continue to host her weekend MSNBC program. Additionally, she plans to maintain her scholarly research agenda and teach an array of innovative courses based on a principle of engaged scholarship aimed at providing students with opportunities that extend beyond the classroom.

Harris-Perry received her B.A. in English with a minor in politics from Wake Forest, her Ph.D. in political science from Duke University, and an honorary doctorate from Meadville Lombard Theological School. She also studied theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York.



Three Sisters at Bethlehem Baptist Church Survive Cancer

By John Raye



It is the most feared word in the English language, and nothing shifts the mood or mental disposition of a person quicker than a diagnosis of cancer. Cancer scares people. It also kills people.

But everyone faced with a cancer diagnosis do not die from the disease. However, the cancer survival rate is often overshadowed by the sinister nature and high death rate caused by cancer. Thus, many people tend to focus on the death rate instead of the survival rate, mainly because a cancer diagnosis, in the minds of many, carries an automatic death sentence.

Bethlehem, like most churches, has its share of cancer survivors. But perhaps few can match a certain reality or count among its members, three biological sisters who have been screened, diagnosed, treated and beaten the so-called, "Big C"

Cancer, like any life-threatening disease, is no respecter of person. It strikes church goers and non-church goers alike, even multiple members of the same family, the oldest as well as the youngest.

At Bethlehem, three biological sisters, Joann Agnew, Helen Mitchell and Yvonne Wiley, share an unlikely and an unwelcome honor; all three are breast cancer survivors, and all three have been members of the same church since, "birth or all our lives," says JoAnn Agnew, the oldest of the three sisters, a retired hospital employee, and a 17 year breast cancer survivor.

JoAnn was the first one to be diagnosed. Helen, often lovingly referred to as "the baby" and retired from R.J. Reynolds, was the second sister to be diagnosed. She is a 14 year survivor. Yvonne, the second oldest of the three sisters and retired from the Winston-Salem Transit Authority, is a 5 year survivor.

Bethlehem Baptist Church, under the leadership of its charismatic senior pastor, the Rev Dwight Hash and first lady, Constance Hash, has been their "rock," their home-away from home.

"I believe I must have been in kindergarten when I started going to Bethlehem," said JoAnn, the oldest sister. Yvonne, I think, was about a year old and Helen was just being born, and so all three of us have been here every since," she said.

Even though Helen is the youngest of the three, she was the second one to be diagnosed with breast cancer, while the middle sister, Yvonne was the last one to get the bad news.

"It's highly unusual to have three members of the same family, all sisters, come down with the same disease, breast cancer. We're glad they are still with us, still among the living. Personally, this is very inspiring to me," said Hash, whose now celebrating his eleventh year at Bethlehem and 41st year in ministry.

"God's grace can take us through some very difficult times. What we see with these three examples is nothing but the miracle healing powers of God. We've seen families lose loved ones before. We've seen people die from the disease. My father, for example was 79 when he died from prostate cancer. But in all of my years in ministry, I've never seen a situation like this, like where three biological sisters all come down with the same disease, and then survive," he said. "But the love of God, and the power of God, can change everything and anything" said Hash.

"I believe in the Lord, but I thought I was not going to make it. I was so sure that I went home, wrote my obituary and started to plan my own funeral," said JoAnn, who suffered another horrendous setback when her husband of 29 years, David Agnew, passed away due to complications from heart disease and diabetes.

"Friends, family members and our church family were very supportive, very helpful," JoAnn said. Prayer? Yes indeed! A lot of people prayed for us and with us. Yes, prayer changes things".

Middle sister, Yvonne, now a five years survivor, said she knew what to expect when she was diagnosed. "It was frightening, being told that I had cancer, especially after seeing what my sisters had gone through. But I saw what they did, how they dealt with it, so I knew what to expect," she said. "Plus our church family was always there for us".

But cancer, which is no respecter of person, didn't stop with these three biological sisters. Three years ago, Yvonne's daughter, Lashaunda was diagnosed with breast cancer. JoAnn's daughter, Davanna went in for the annual screening and her test came back positive. "At first, I was very afraid and worried because my test results were positive and my cousin's results, Lashaunda, was negative. But I know God is bringing her through, just like the blessing bestowed upon my mother and her sisters," she said.

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