
Spent Summers 2011

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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"How I Spent My Summer Vacation." That's the "'theme essay' assigned to returning students all over the country at this time of year. Imagine you hear computer keys clicking away even as you read this! I confess I almost said, "'Hear those lead pencils scribbling on sheets of paper across the land.' Oh my how things have changed! But this conventional theme returns like autumn leaves. And why not? Let's yield to convention and submit ourselves to an end-of-summer ritual!

How I spent my summer? I finally made it to Africa! As a sixty year-old African American I was beginning to worry that I was retrograde in completing my "'bucket list' of "'places to visit before you die.' This seemed especially disappointing for an Emory professor surrounded by so many study abroad opportunities. Finally, the perfect trip emerged when some colleagues and graduate students organized "African Pilgrimages Inc." (Google that!). In addition to educational and cultural resources for field work and research, API provides "'spiritual journeys' for seminarians and others seekers. Irresistible for me also, I don't mind telling you, was the fact that this summer's trip to Ghana, West Africa, included my wife as a native Ghanaian and a fellow pilgrim!

How we spent our summer? "'On pilgrimage:' it's a phrase that recalls the medieval author, Chaucer, and his classic chronicle, "Canterbury Tales." It's a series of stories told among thirty common folk as they travel on pilgrimage to the Cathedral shrine at Canterbury, England. Similarly a dozen of us made pilgrimage this summer to sacred locales of the Ashanti people of West Africa. Our journey included the heritage sites of ancient kings and queen mothers, notorious slave castles, and yes, churches and seminaries (even an Anglican seminary). Our base camp was a Christian retreat center high in the hills above the capitol city, Accra.

How we spent our summer? One spiritual journey included an audience with a senior family priestess of an African traditional religion, highlighted by her hundred year-old hands blessing us with grace and benediction. Another highlight was finding ourselves in the musty library of the "'grand old man' of African American scholarship and civil rights activism, W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963). Knowing that he taught here at Atlanta University in the 1890s, we had an "'inner sanctum' experience connecting to one of our most venerable ancestors!

Have you spent your 2011 summer? Maybe you're still spending it as you read these words. "'It's not over till it's over,' says the proverbial wisdom. Of course, time's short to get with the program! With this exhortation I remind us of one of our most beloved hymns *Awake, awake to love and work*, and that poignant verse,

To give and give, and give again /
What God hath given thee;
To spend thyself nor count the cost /
To serve right gloriously
The God Who gave all worlds that are /
And all that are to be.

"To spend thyself nor count the cost," Surely to "spend ourselves' in the days and weeks ahead we must have also "spent our summers' in renewal and rejuvenation! But if not yet, then do so now, dear reader, in order that" in the title words of this hymn we may again, "Awake, awake to love and work!"

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