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**When Home is a World Away**

At first, nothing about [Stillman College](https://stillman.edu/) reminded Johnykqua [Jon-e-kwa] Bevans and Rayondre [Ray-on-dray] (Ray) Roberts of their home on the tropical island of Grand Bahama: not Alabama, not the food, not their classmates and not the as-yet unfamiliar Presbyterian tradition in which the college is steeped.

But then there was the choir.

Stillman’s nationally-renowned concert choir — and the college’s president, Dr. Cynthia Warrick — were powerful draws, inviting Johnykqua and Ray to transcend the many differences between their contrasting cultures to claim the joy and promise of the music of their shared Christian heritage.

Stillman College, situated in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, was founded in 1876 by Presbyterians led by the Rev. Dr. Charles Allen Stillman, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Tuscaloosa, to become a training school for African American ministers. Today, with its expanded mandate and mission, the college is “committed to fostering academic excellence, to providing opportunities for diverse populations, and to maintaining a strong tradition of preparing students for leadership and service by fostering experiential learning and community engagement designed to equip and empower Stillman’s students and its constituents.”

Our gifts to the [Christmas Joy Offering](https://specialofferings.pcusa.org/offering/christmas-joy/) help Stillman provide scholarships to its gifted and promising students.

Johnykqua said that she became even more grateful to the PC(USA) after Hurricane Dorian hit Grand Bahama late in the summer of 2019, devastating their island home. Both students lost family members in the disaster while they were away at school. They were embraced and supported by their classmates, faculty, staff and administration until they could return home to be with family, which the college made possible for them to do over Christmas.

When the college president became aware of the devastation affecting these students’ families, she contacted the Presbyterian Mission Agency. The agency responded with additional financial assistance to help cover costs not included in the students’ scholarships. This assistance from PC(USA) has enabled Johnykqua and Ray to mature as young adults in the safety of the college as their families in Grand Bahama work to recover their stability after a first hit by the hurricane, then hit again by the pandemic.

“Thank you to the Presbyterian Church for coming to our aid,” said Johnykqua.

Now both students are looking forward to the future. Their dreams are now more than possible thanks to the gifts of generous Presbyterians.

“I think a lot of people may not realize how many lives they can affect just by their support,” Ray said. “It’s a simple fact when they give students a scholarship, especially those students who are really in need, it’s the best thing that could happen to them. It changes their lives.”

Yes, indeed — our gifts can help change lives. And when we all do a little, it adds up to a lot.

***Let us pray:***

*God of expanding grace, open the doors to relationships that grow and ministries that connect in new places and in new ways. May we expand, not ourselves, but our sense of community.* ***Amen****.*