



NPDFF
NATIONAL POLICE DEFENSE FOUNDATION



THE REVEREND BETTY NEAL - 1931-2018



Police Foundation Executive Director Joe Occhipinti, Reverend Betty Neal, and Detective Steven McDonald at a 1998 event

The Earthly Mission of the Reverend Betty Neal has now been fulfilled.

Born to a middle-class family in Sumter, South Carolina, Betty Neal's first career was in Nursing. A Feminist before the word was popularized, Betty Neal always said that anything a man could do, a woman could do just as well – if not better! Thus, Betty embarked into a profession dominated by men – that of a Protestant Preacher. Neal was Ordained in 1975.

As a Minister, “Reverend Betty,” as she was affectionately called, was a controversial figure. Bible in hand, Neal would approach drug dealers on the streets of New York City and brazenly challenge them to consider the personal consequences of their criminal deeds, both short-term and long-term.

In 1993 Reverend Neal founded “Ministers of Harlem, USA,” a non-profit organization that facilitated interaction between the residents of Harlem and the Police Officers and Firefighters who served that community.

In 1995 Neal became the first African-American female Chaplain of the New York City Police Department. In 1997 Neal became the first African-American female Honorary Commissioner of the New York City Fire Department. In 1998 Neal became a Chaplain for the National Police Defense Foundation. Events hosted by Ministers of Harlem were very popular.; Reverend Betty herself would provide much of the home-cooked food for such events, including Southern cuisine favorites fried chicken, pecan pie, and pigs feet. In March, 2000, Ministers of Harlem honored Lt. John Patrick Quinn with the unveiling of his bronze Bust at the 28th Precinct Stationhouse. Lt. Quinn served in Harlem for 27 years without ever once having to discharge his service revolver.

The events of 9/11 presented Rev. Betty with the greatest challenge of her lifetime; Ministering to the family and friends of the 343 Firefighters and 23 Police Officers murdered on that day. Reverend Neal knew many of these victims personally. One was Police Officer John W. Perry. At 2 a. m. on the morning of 9/11, Officer Perry phoned Betty, telling her that he could not sleep and was anxious about how his life was going to change that day; Perry was taking an early retirement without a full Pension in order to pursue his interests in acting and the legal profession. As a young man, Perry was not religious. In his final years, Perry began to explore various religions, including Judaism. Reverend Neal always included Rabbis in her programs and it was she Officer Perry reached out to just a few hours before he would die a hero's death. Perry was at Police Headquarters in Manhattan submitting his retirement paperwork when he heard the sound of the first hijacked airliner crashing into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. Officer Perry raced to the scene, saving the lives of many he helped to evacuate. He was last seen alive helping an injured woman out of the South Tower when the building collapsed. Reverend Betty was the right person at the right place and time to Minister to the survivors of 9/11. She honored in public events those whom she knew personally, such as John Perry, and those she did not know. In keeping with her Feminist Agenda, one event, “The She-Roes of 9/11,” honored Yamel Merino, an Emergency Medical Technician, Moria Smith of the NYPD, and Port Authority Police Department Captain Kathy Mazza, all of whom died while rescuing others on 9/11. It was a quick-thinking Mazza who used her service revolver to shoot out floor-to-ceiling windows in a Trade Center Tower Lobby, instantly and dramatically increasing the available exit routes for those evacuating to safety. Mazza herself stayed behind, assisting those in need until she died a “She-Roe's” death.

In her final years in retirement, Reverend Betty endured the physical suffering that is a tenant to her Faith. A fall broke her knee, resulting in a lengthy stay in a nursing facility. One day during a snowstorm, then-Police Commissioner Ray Kelly braved the elements to pay her a visit. The cops at Harlem's 28th Precinct regularly looked after her. Daughter Robin helped her when she was afflicted by a brain tumor, which was removed, with a lengthy healing process afterwards. A few years later, the tumor came back, with Reverend Betty and her daughter again enduring this long and difficult process. Throughout her final ordeals, Reverend Betty Neal was sustained by her Faith. She had proclaimed decades ago that God had chosen her to champion those who on a daily basis risk their lives to protect the young and old, the rich and poor, the sober and the drug-addicted; the Police Officers and Firefighters of America. Reverend Betty Jane Neal was 86 years young when she passed on May 9, 2018. She is survived by her daughter, a brother, 3 grandchildren, 7 great-grandchildren, and numerous nieces, nephews, extended family members, and those members of law enforcement and firefighting and others who considered her “family.”

Reverend Betty's body was interred in her native South Carolina.

by J. R. de Szigethy
e-writer10021@aol.com