To begin the 40th Anniversary Commemoration weekend, attendees poured into North Carolina A&T’s Academic Classroom Building and filled its auditorium to listen to a reading of “Greensboro - A Requiem” by Emily Mann from the McCarter Theater at Princeton University. The readers of the play included Greensboro Massacre survivors and their friends, former WVO/CWP members, social justice and community activists, students and professors, local faith leaders, a few professional actors, residents of Greensboro, and people from across the country. Each audience member was given their own script and was able to follow along as the events before, after, and on November 3rd, 1979 were recounted in vivid detail. Following the reading, Emily Mann, the playwright, Floris Cauce Weston, widow of Cesar Cauce, Reverend Nelson Johnson, survivor of the Greensboro Massacre, and Jovane Hairston, student intern at Beloved Community Center from North Carolina A&T, spoke on a panel which reflected on the play and answered questions from the audience concerning the increasingly important role of young people in building the movement and the new strategies used by today’s community organizers. The panel was moderated by Dr. Arwin Smallwood, Chairperson of the Department of History and Political Science at North Carolina A&T State University, which sponsored and hosted several commemoration activities. The night was an immersive and emotional experience, one in which no one audience member left the same as they arrived.
The following morning, hundreds arrived at Bennett College’s campus to the sound of Cakalak Thunder’s beating drums for a day of remembrance, celebration, and (re)teaching. President Suzanne Walsh of Bennett College welcomed the guests to the campus and spoke on the importance of the 40th Anniversary Commemoration. Reverend Nelson Johnson and Joyce Johnson followed, welcoming the attendees and opening the day with two videos. The first was a firm call-to-action from Reverend Dr. William Barber II, Co-Chair of the Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. The second was a short, but moving documentary created by videographers Laura Seel and Gary Todd for the 40th Anniversary of the Greensboro Massacre. The film was narrated by the survivors of 1979, each describing the impact that day had on the rest of their lives. As the film closed, six of the Survivors of the Greensboro Massacre, Joyce Johnson, Signe Waller, Marty Nathan, Nelson Johnson, Floris Cauce, and Willena passionately sang, “I Feel Like Going On!” Many audience members were moved to tears. Following the documentary, Attorney Flint Taylor, one of the lead attorneys in the Fred Hampton suit, Reverend Canon Naomi Tutu of The Cathedral of All Souls, Asheville, NC and daughter of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Ash-lee Henderson, Co-Director of the Highlander Research & Education Center, Reverend Dr. Starsky Wilson, president and CEO of the Deaconess Foundation and board chair for the National Committee of Responsive Philanthropy, and Dr. Marty Nathan, widow of Dr. Michael Nathan, spoke on an inter-generational panel about framing the nature of movement-building today and lessons to be pulled from the Greensboro Massacre. The panelists also answered questions from audience members, including longtime friend and classmate of Reverend Nelson Johnson, William Hubbard, and Beloved Community Center intern and Bennett College senior, Abigail Mosley.
After lunch, Fruit of Labor Singing Ensemble performed several songs, both original pieces and covers, dedicated to the CWP 5. Then, the conference attendees spread themselves across Bennett’s campus to participate in a diverse selection of workshops and panels. The conversations were led by massacre survivors, religious leaders, attorneys, young organizers, environmental activists, artists, and leaders of community organizations. Panel discussions spanned a wide range of issues related to building the movement today. The topics covered points like youth organizing & inter-generational solidarity, faith-based organizing, race & gender equity, immigration justice, cultural work & the arts, and climate change.
Contra-Tiempo, a bold, multi-lingual Los Angeles-based dance company, affirms that their vision is to create, through the transformative power of dance, communities where all people are awakened to a sense of themselves as artists and social change agents who move through the world with compassion and confidence. Much like the communities in which they perform, Contra-Tiempo is itself a tapestry of professional dancers, artists, immigrants, educators, activists, organizers, and movers of all types. A signature of their performances is the inclusion of spontaneous audience participation that is, without failure, both electrifying and uplifting for all those assembled.

Contra-Tiempo was co-founded by Greensboro native and former member of the E. Gwynn Dancers at N.C. A&T, Ana Maria Alvarez, and her younger brother, Cesar Alvarez. Ana describes the five killed as “uncles and aunts” in that ever-flowing river navigated by those who strive for dignity and justice for all people. Tonight’s performance “joyUS justUS” is described by the company as a “powerful tribute to the legacy of the five incredible people who were so tragically lost that day, as well as a recognition of the persistence and strength of the people who survived and have continued to struggle for justice and for the truth to be told. We hope this work can help create a deeper community dialogue about some of the hard truths we need to face as Americans around race and violence and injustice.”
On Sunday, church service was held at Faith Community Church at 10 AM. The pews were filled, and many chairs were added to the end of each row to accommodate the growing congregation. After praise and worship, Reverend Nelson Johnson gave a powerful message on the “universal substance” which connects all humankind and compels us all to love one another and treat each other with justice and dignity. Reverend Wesley Morris, lead pastor, followed with an equally moving message. He spoke on doubt, and how a “touch of doubt” within us about things unseen allows God to fill us with assurance. Immediately after service, a trail of cars led by the church leaders traveled to Maplewood Cemetery, where dozens gathered to commemorate the CWP 5. Red roses were presented by friends and family of Cauce, Smith, Sampson, Nathan, and Waller. After stopping by the state historical marker of the Greensboro Massacre, the group traveled back to Faith Community for a reception.

Sunday evening, the group reconvened one last time at Shiloh Baptist Church for an interfaith worship service of healing. The attendees were welcomed by the Citadel of Praise Church & Campus Ministry, led by Reverend Gregory Drumwright. The featured speaker was Reverend J. Herbert Nelson, Stated Clerk of the general assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA. His message highlighted the role of faith communities in today’s quest for economic, racial, environmental, and social transformation. The service marked the end of a special, stirring, and inspiring weekend.