



# FEBRUARY CIRCUIT

VOLUME 2/NUMBER 2

The West Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church

*Lift every voice and sing,  
Till earth and heaven ring,  
Ring with the harmonies of liberty;  
Let our rejoicing rise  
High as the listening skies,  
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.*



*Simpson Memorial UMC 150th Celebration  
October 2016*

# A Black History Month Message from Bishop Steiner Ball

As we celebrate Black History Month. There are many directions my mind takes. I think about what I have learned from many, many persons whose skin color is different than my own. I think about gifts of friendships, people with whom I have shared life, where honest conversations took place; where truths were shared, fears addressed, actions taken, joys celebrated. I think about how I have enjoyed learning about different cultures, languages, traditions, and histories. I think about how African American supervisors and colleagues trusted in me and gave me opportunities without which I would probably not be a bishop today.

There is no doubt my life has been enriched by relationships I have had with a wide variety of persons who have cultural, racial, and ethnic histories much different than my own. I am grateful for these relationships and I am honored by them. Through these relationships, I have developed an appreciation for how history reveals and gives context for identity. History reveals hopes and dreams, not just for individuals but for communities and nations. History reveals pain and joy. Through an examination of history and through remembering historical events and movements, we can learn, not just about the past, but what we need to pay attention to as we move into the future. So, when I think of history in this way, I am reminded that celebrating and learning about black history is important to all of us, no matter what our race, as we seek the common good, as we seek to be more of the beloved community Christ calls us to be.

As I think of the most recent events where violence has been visited upon people of color in this country, events that are now part of black history, and not just black history, but American history, the importance of studying and learning black history strikes a more urgent note. The study of history can help us to see people as people instead of seeing people as objects. To see people as people instead of as objects changes our relationship toward that person, it alters our behavior.

As followers of Christ, we believe that all people are created in the image of God, and are therefore not objects, not things, but part of the human community. Studying both black history and

Christian Scripture, calls those of us who identify as Christ followers to take an active and prayerful part in ending all expressions of racism and hatred by building healthy, respectful relationships that recognize the sacred value of all people. Additionally, this study calls us to participate together in acts of justice and peace.

In this month where we celebrate and are challenged to learn about black history, I mourn the nightmare of violence that has most recently been visited on this world and I pray and hope that we, the Body of Christ, the Church, can and will stem the stream of nightmares by sharing more powerfully God's dream!

History reminds us of the danger that comes with allowing nightmares to be shared over and over again. When we allow and even promote stories of violence, racism, vengeance, and hopelessness we add to an old and noisy form of air pollution.

Above all this noise pollution, acts of violence, and acts of racism we, followers of Christ, need to sound anew – stronger, insistent notes of hope!

History tells us that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a dreamer and this history along with sacred history calls us to be dreamers too! We must be dreamers, holy dreamers, God dreamers. This world desperately needs dreamers who will allow God to speak to us in our dreams, both during the day and in our sleep. More importantly, we must free our good dreams, put them to work, expand the knowledge and existence of "Beloved Community" and work for the common good. We must not keep these good and holy dreams to ourselves. We must let good dreams, sacred dreams become as prevalent and pervasive as the nightmares and actions that others are bringing forth. We need more dreams and fewer nightmares! Both dreams and nightmares provoke action – history illustrates this. I hope your study and my study of black history and scripture would move us toward God's action of re-creation, transformation, redemption, forgiveness, and new life!

Peace and Blessings,

Sandra Steiner Ball

We invite you to use the following liturgy throughout February to celebrate Black History Month  
By Rev. Krysta Rexrode Wolfe

The call of God is a call to action. God says to his body, the Church:

**The time is now!**

When, O Lord, shall we remember where we have been?

**The time is now!**

When, O Lord, shall we confess how we have been hurt and how we have hurt others?

**The time is now!**

When, O Lord, shall we rise up from memory and create new hope?

**The time is now!**

When, O Lord, shall our differences be a testament to a broad and holy vision and our disagreements a source of growth?

**The time is now!**

When, O Lord, shall we face the realities of danger in our quickly changing neighborhoods with the fearlessness of perfect love?

**The time is now!**

When, O Lord, shall we embrace life-giving change with reverence and unity?

**The time is now!**

When, O Lord, shall we seek connection and proclaim we are bound together?

**The time is now!**

When, O Lord, shall your people cry out for justice and equity?

**The time is now!**

When, O Lord, shall we know your glory; when, O Lord, shall we see your face; when, O Lord, will you call us to a homecoming of love and mercy?

**The time is now and, together, we are the people! Amen.**

# I Am

By Royce Lyden

I AM...  
A CHILD OF GOD  
CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF THE ALMIGHTY  
WOMAN  
BROWN  
THE OLDEST CHILD OF THE FAMILY  
COMPASSIONATE  
AN OLD SOUL  
A PERSON WHO LOVES TO LEARN  
AN EXPLORER  
A NATURE LOVER  
IN LOVE WITH JOHN WESLEY  
A PERSON WHO LOVES PEOPLE  
A PERSON WHO CELEBRATES DIVERSITY  
A FREE SPIRIT  
A WILD CHILD  
A HISTORY BUFF  
A LOVING MOTHER,  
I WANT TO BE...  
LOVED FOR WHO I AM  
MORE LIKE JESUS  
RESPECTED

I am always grateful for an opportunity to provide a glimpse into a world that may not be familiar to you. I have been United Methodist throughout my life. I grew up in a church full of people who struggled and fought for everything they wanted to accomplish. With them, my early years in the church was a time of leadership formation. I was not aware that I was growing as a leader while it happened, but the church is at its best when it nourishes individuals and finds room at the table for all. My church building sits about a quarter of a mile from what was once a historically Black High School at a time when schools were segregated. The church played a supportive role to this school by serving lunches, providing Bible study and hosting social events.

In my childhood, going to church on Sunday was a special time to reverence God and to respect one another. We dressed in our Sunday best which would include polished shoes, pressed blouses, skirts and our best socks until we were old enough to wear hosiery. On high holy days, we would also wear gloves and hats. Sometimes, my mother would even sew matching outfits for me and my siblings. I was proud to wear the outfits my mother carefully sewed and crafted for me. I recall sitting in Church, swinging my legs and asking God “do you see me? Do you know that I am chewing gum in church?”

I have shared all of this to suggest that my story is probably no different than yours (well, maybe slightly different). However, telling our stories helps us to see the importance of knowing our neighbors. If you don't know your neighbor, then you cannot possibly feel empathy and compassion for them. I am sure that various details of my story are much different than your story. Yet we must all try to expand our horizons and include people in our circles who are different. We should take time throughout each year to engage in conversations and to fellowship with people of other cultures and traditions. I am hopeful that one day we will get there, but getting there requires intentional efforts to be diverse in every way. I challenge you to look for ways in which you are intentionally inclusive and diverse in your thinking. Here are a few questions

you can ask yourself when sharing or presenting a perspective:

*Are my images diverse in color, gender, and age?*

*Is my language inviting and not exclusive?*

*Look at your news stories, your artwork, your photographs, and your creative work. Are they inclusive? Are you an encourager?*

*Are you celebrating difference all year or just during those special times?*



*Trinity UMC, Fairmont, WV*

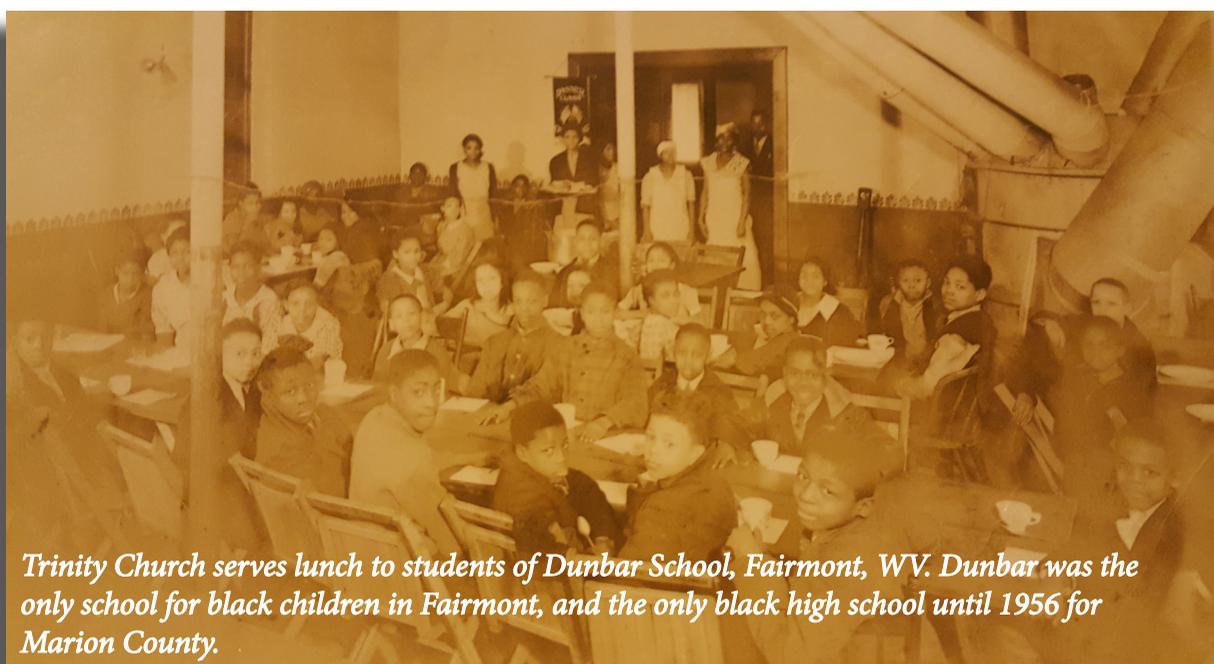
The African American congregations in the WV Annual Conference are always present and contributing to the work of God; however, you may not always choose to see us but we are here even when we are not celebrated in thought word or deed. We are a rich, capable people who are not defined by physical attributes and the labels that have been affixed to us. Every day we walk in two worlds. We are constantly required to shape-shift and adapt; therefore, everyday can be a challenge.

How you react to a challenge makes all the difference. Be an encourager, take a risk. For several recent years, our charge has included an Adult Class as part of our Vacation Bible School. This year our subject was race relations. This subject offered an attempt to have meaningful and engaging conversations to help ease emotions and racial tensions. We were blessed to use a race relations curriculum written by a young West Virginian: Connor Kenaston. I am proud to say that our Adult Vacation Bible School class was a successful experiment that will continue. We have men, women, Protestant, Catholic, Mormon, Baptist, Pentecostal, homeless, and just about any other label you can affix to people, including United Methodist.

I was asked to share with you about myself, but it has never been my intention or desire as a leader to bring attention to myself. My goal is to inspire hope and to challenge each of you to do something different and to step outside of your comfort zone. I challenge you to find the Hidden Figures in your community.

I have been blessed to serve in many capacities within the Church. My service began at an early age and, as a teen, I started serving beyond the local church. I have had some remarkable moments in my service that were truly God-inspired and I have been blessed by the Connection. One of my favorite opportunities was to lead the Episcopal Interviews of the Northeastern Jurisdiction this summer. We elected two African American Women Bishops. The World is smaller than we think and we are all connected. The Church connects who I am to who you are and to what we are becoming by the grace of God. The beautiful thing about being United Methodist is the Blessed Connection.

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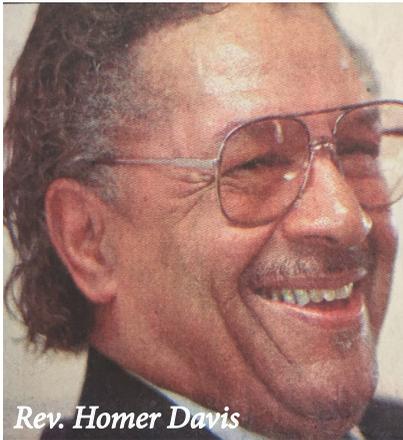


*Trinity Church serves lunch to students of Dunbar School, Fairmont, WV. Dunbar was the only school for black children in Fairmont, and the only black high school until 1956 for Marion County.*

# Rev. Homer Davis:

## Our Champion for Diversity, Equity and Race Relations

By Felica Wooten Williams, PhD



Rev. Homer Davis

Rev. Homer Davis is a man who needs no introduction in the West Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church. Generally described as an outstanding preacher, teacher, leader and friend, Rev. Davis

literally stands out in a crowd. When you see him, you immediately recognize him as a true servant of God. When he speaks, his distinguished voice marks him as one who carries God's voice to the church, the community, and the world. This is the case whether he's in the pulpit, at the table of grace or sitting casually in a chair with family and friends. As I sat there with him on a cold and rainy Saturday afternoon, we watched the Georgetown Hoyas race around the basketball court to beat the University Connecticut by a narrow margin of 71 to 69 and I thought about the varied maneuvers that Rev. Davis must have made in becoming the tower of strength that he is today. I continued to ponder this notion and decided to ask some of his long-term colleagues about the ministry, the work and the legacy of this man: Rev. Homer Davis.

### **THE MAN**

**Felica Wooten Williams (FWW):** How would you describe Rev. Homer Davis? What should everyone know about his personality and his character?

**Bishop William Boyd Grove (WBG):** Homer Davis is a moral and spiritual giant. Homer's work challenges us, encourages us and holds us accountable on issues of full inclusion in ministry in our conference. Mary Lou and I consider him and his late wife Pearl to be dear personal friends.

**William H. Wilson (WHW):** Homer Davis has always been the model for me of taking up the challenge, and being honest and blunt to challenge any system that oppresses, discriminates, and does not respect the rights of the poor and marginalized.

**John F. Lacaria (JFL):** Homer is an excellent preacher, advisor, and leader. We have spent many years working together in this conference. My mother, Ann Lacaria, and Pearl Davis were good friends. During the time that I volunteered in the tutoring program that worked out of Simpson Memorial UMC, I would often run into Pearl who always had very kind words to share and send to my mother; the memories of their relationship, formed through UMW and Church Women United, is precious to me. Everyone needs to know that Homer is an avid golfer. I got to vicariously know Rev. Homer Davis as golfer. He brought the full force of ministry to the game of golf, and it is no wonder that some consider the game a sacred institution.

**FWW:** That reminds me of something that that Rev. Bill Deel once said as he thought about his friend. He said, "Homer was my DS when I was at First UMC in South Charleston and he was Vice Chair of CFA when I was Conference Treasurer. He also beat me like a drum when playing golf."

### **THE MINISTRY**

**FWW:** What are your most poignant memories of his ministry?

**WHW:** As I was challenged by the truth expressed by Rev. Homer Davis over the years, I have been also inspired by the pastoral spirit he exemplifies. During my first appointment after seminary 1976-1982 I continued to be influenced, and challenged as a United Methodist pastor by the leadership and learnings from Homer Davis.

Hearing him in presentations, and sermons, and in various meetings challenged me to confront my experience of white privilege, subtle habits of personal racism & prejudice, as well as encouragement to be bold and courageous in confronting the institutional racism in the Church.

**JFL:** Homer was my DS, and I served on the district Committee on Ordained Ministry near the end of his superintendency. Together we examined the call and capacity of people pursuing ministry. Homer brought a depth of knowledge and vision of the future that helped guide us on a path that valued inclusion and diversity. He also advised me wisely when, as director of youth ministries for the conference, we sought to address the lack of diversity in conference youth events.

### ***THE WORKER***

**FWW:** How would you describe his work in the WV Conference?

**WBG:** I became Presiding Bishop of the WV Conference in September of 1980. Homer Davis was a member of the Conference staff when I arrived. Two years later, in 1982, when I named four new District Superintendents, among them were Homer Davis an African American, and Ellen Carter, the first woman to be named to the bishop's cabinet in WV. I do not think he was the first African American superintendent but I am not sure. I think Ramsey Bridges was a DS but I am not sure. If not Homer was the first. I appointed him to the Charleston [now Midland South] district.

He had a distinguished ministry in government related civil rights work before coming onto the conference staff and cabinet. That record is listed in his bio in the Conference Journal. As Homer came on to the cabinet, we were at work on a program to yoke African American Churches to white churches, and appointing African American pastors to those charges. This was to achieve two purposes; 1] to give leadership and support to small black churches, and 2] to help white churches to have the experience of

having a black pastor. We recruited black pastors from beyond the conference to serve these charges. Nat Turner Lacey was one who was recruited in this initiative. Homer was the primary leader of this effort within the cabinet and within the conference. He was a very effective superintendent. His relationship with [white] cabinet colleagues was superb. We had a very close and deeply spiritual cabinet relationship in those years.

**WHW:** Rev. Homer Davis is a significant leader in the Annual Conference as conference staff (1979-1982) and District Superintendent (1982-1988) during the episcopacy of Bishop William Boyd Grove.

I was a Student Pastor between 1968-1970 when I became aware of the appointment of Rev. Homer Davis as Minister of Reconciliation for the West Virginia Annual Conference of the new United Methodist Church. The General Conference mandated reconciliation in its theme – “A New Church for a New World.” The General Conference established The United Methodist Fund for Reconciliation which was to resource programming for dealing with alienation in church and society. The Fund to be raised in Annual Conferences challenged the new United Methodist Church to resource for social change, assist poor and minority people toward an achievement in self-determination, to make funds available for churches in low income areas (Conference Journal, 1970, pp. 223-228).

Rev. Homer Davis worked full-time in this effort and I realized that over the years I have been formed, informed and influenced by the leadership he gave in those years. As a young and new minister, beginning my life calling I was challenged and learned from him.

Homer worked tirelessly during that appointment to implement the concepts of the Fund for Reconciliation and challenging the structures of the new Church to raise the apportioned goal for the West Virginia Annual Conference of \$400,000. His efforts and the work of the conference leadership saw pledges of \$376,000.

The Fund for Reconciliation raised in West Virginia Annual Conference \$174,000. Ministries were funded in seventeen major projects in West Virginia and our conference contribution to the General Church fund for national projects.

He shared clearly with the Annual Conference session in 1970 these words – “after one year’s concerted effort to implement this purpose (The Fund for Reconciliation), it has become painfully apparent that new ministries do violence to old concepts, beliefs, and habits. We are not yet . . . a new creation; the old has (not) passed away, behold the new has (not) come.” This, despite the fact that “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. . .” (Annual Conference Journal, 1970, page 236).

**JFL:** My earliest memories are from his Civil Rights work in the late 60s and early 70s. I was a student at West Virginia Wesleyan College. My father, an accountant with Howell and Paterno, was the Conference Treasurer, and together with others like Ramsey Bridges, they would address matters of Civil Rights and racism at Annual Conference. One moment stands out where my father was challenged by Homer about matters of systemic racism and prejudice. My father stated that he was not prejudiced but Homer countered that this was not possible in light of the society that shaped us all. It was certainly not pleasant to see my father challenged, but Homer was stalwart, and fair. Watching on as the dialogue continued, I learned a bit more about race and self-examination as a member of the majority culture.

### **THE LEGACY**

**FWW:** How did his work influence ministry today and for future generations of Methodists?

**WHW:** When the Annual Conference gathered in a Special Session in September 1980 under the leadership of newly assigned Bishop William Boyd Grove, Homer was serving as Associate Director, Conference Council on Ministries. An Ethnic Minority Local Church Task Force report had been tabled at the regular session in

June 1980. Significant to the report to the Special Session was the challenge of Homer Davis in his report regarding open itineracy. Homer reminded the conference that the General Conference had established “Developing and Strengthening the Ethnic Minority Local Church” as the missional priority for the 1981-1984 quadrennium. He told the Annual Conference Special Session in Charleston in September of 1980, “If the West Virginia Conference is to respond to that priority in faith, there must be a radical re-structuring of its agenda, a reassessment of its missionary thrust, and the adoption of . . . a plan to intentionally effectuate open itineracy in the appointment system (Conference Journal, 1980, p. 352).”

### **CONCLUSION**

Clearly, Rev. Homer H. Davis has touched so many lives throughout his non-stop stellar career. He continues his work at Simpson Memorial United Methodist Church in Charleston where he started his faith journey at the age of eleven (circa 1934). In his time of reflection, JF Lacaria said, “Rev. Homer H. Davis is a preacher among preachers who approached his work with passion and bravery.” His concerns for diversity, equity, and race relations remain relevant today.

Thomasina Stewart summed it well when she observed, “Homer loves his family, he’s a critical thinker, and a very good preacher who loves The United Methodist Church (particularly Simpson). He has a good sense of humor and he doesn’t mince words when he has something to say. He is intellectually gifted and he takes time for prayerful thought before responding to questions or concerns. He seems to be well-respected by his peers. And yes, he is still handsome.” We are blessed to have Homer as our friend, colleague, and servant of Christ. Give thanks to God for Rev. Homer H. Davis.

# John Stewart United Methodist Summer Academy 2016

*By Dr. William White*

Almost one in four West Virginia children live in a household that does not have sufficient access to food. If not for the meals provided at their schools, these children would not have a nutritious meal daily. Additionally, many of our children are under achieving academically and will not graduate from high school, college or career ready. In fact, many will drop out of school by the eighth grade.

As a member of the West Virginia Board of Education, I am concerned about the condition many of our children live in all over the state. It is more disturbing to me to see these challenges with families in my own city, Bluefield. John Stewart United Methodist Church has always been a church that takes action to be of service to our neighbors in time of need. Our church



membership has consistently been well educated, many members are in the field of education at every level. We are seen as a respected community resource. So, I worked with our pastor, Rev. James Reed and educators within our church to devise a summer school program that would help close the achievement gap and provide two meals a day to all children in our city.

We presented our plan to the Administrative Council which consisted of a six week academic program that provided breakfast and lunch. We saw this effort as a means of ministering to God's children in need within our community.

We were able to recruit five certified teachers from Bluefield, West Virginia and Bluefield, Virginia. We had a male teacher's aide who was approved by the school systems in Cabell County, Kanawha County and Mercer County. He served as a role model and helped with discipline. We also trained aids for each class room to work under the certified teachers. A special education teacher pulled out students who needed one-on-one instruction. Only one teacher and one two teacher's aides were members of John Stewart. The remainder of the academic staff was from the community. However, members of John Stewart provided clerical services; food services and clean up. Dr. William M. White, served as Executive Director for the Academy.

We had a certified food handler volunteer who prepared the meals and supervised the meal service. Many parent volunteers helped in preparing and serving the food. John Stewart's music director who is Chair of the Education Department at Bluefield College came in twice to read to our children in costume. CASE West Virginia (Community Action of South Eastern West Virginia) provided a meal and facilitated a workshop on bullying. All students were taught first aid by a certified teacher and were provided with a first aid kit donated by Bluefield Regional Medical Center.

The instructional materials and supplies were purchases with a grant from CoRR. The United States Department of Agriculture provided the reimbursement for meals through the West Virginia Department of Education's Child Nutrition Program. All the teachers and aides were volunteers. However, we did provide a \$500 stipend for our Certified Food Handler and the Assistant to the Director who was the male teacher's aide.

The total enrollment was 55 students divided into four classes with an average daily attendance of 25-30 students. The last day we had a picnic. The attendance on the final day was 45 students. Our students represented grades K-10. Classes taught were Mathematics, Science, Language Arts, Cursive Writing and Reading.



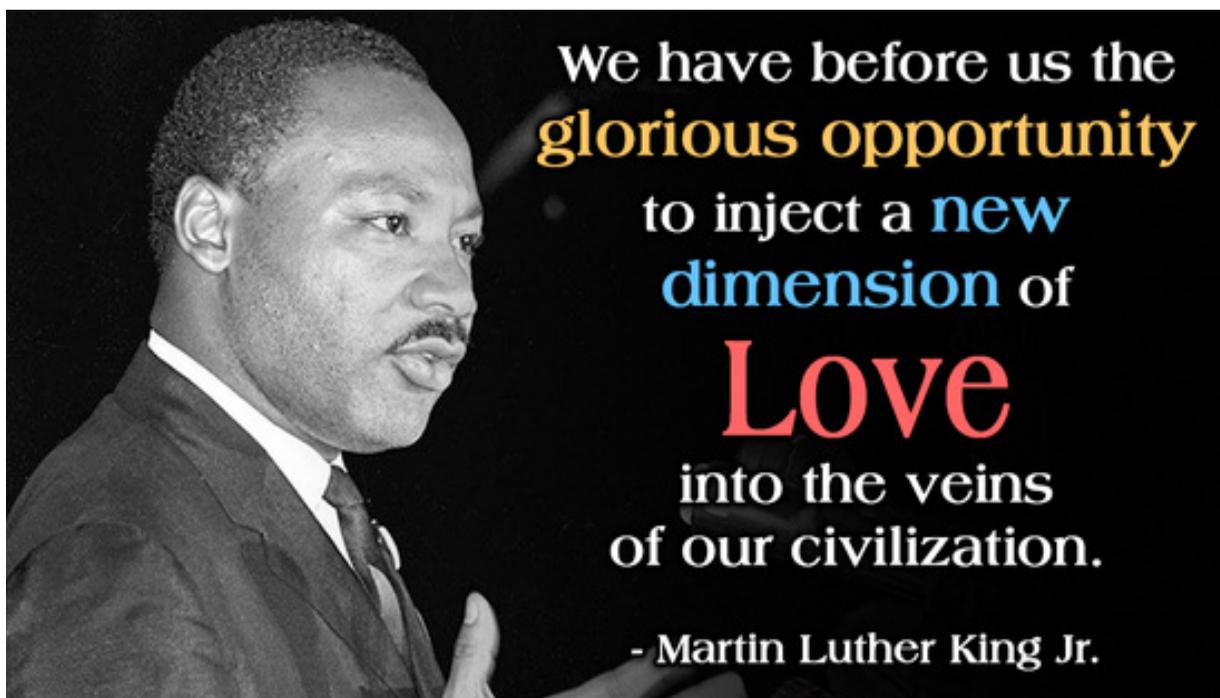
Physical education was provided in one of the church parking lots when the weather permitted. We were very pleased with our attendance and registration for our first year.

Most of our students were below their grade level academically. However, we have received many comments from teachers, parents and guardians that children who had been held back or performed poorly last year are making As, Bs and Cs this year. One of our boys who had behavioral problems and was held back last year is behaving well and earning As, Bs. And Cs and his behavioral problems are non-existent.

Finally, we speak with teachers and parents who report that many of their students clearly have improved self-esteem.

Several of the families of children we served occasionally attend our Sunday worship services. Truly God worked through our church, volunteers, along with the federal and state government to serve his children and their families. We will be offering a similar program in 2017!

*Dr. White can be reached at [wwhite@yourblackparachute.com](mailto:wwhite@yourblackparachute.com).*



# Reaching Millennials at Main Street UMC Ronceverte

By Loretta Young

The millennials made a request. After an Administrative Board meeting, a few of the millennials at Main Street UMC in Ronceverte WV said the church needed new and more lively music to keep them in the church and to attract new members. Their request was shared with and endorsed by the board and it became one of the congregation's goals. The folks began to pray for a music ministry and the group of millennials agreed to form a choir.

The choir rehearses twice each week, beginning and ending with prayer. Each rehearsal is a Spirit-filled time among the choir members as people share their challenges and celebrations. Acceptance is a keyword in describing the nature of the choir. Members feel free to share the best and worst of their lives without fear of judgment. The choir has grown to nine members including a bass guitarist. Using the principles taught by Rev. Junius Dotson during the 2015 School of Congregational Development in Indiana, Main Street UMC has found a way to attract new worshippers and keep millennials engaged in worship and the work of the church. Dotson is a noted teacher, preacher, and consultant. Dotson joined United Methodist Church Discipleship as General Secretary on July 1, 2016 (see [umcdiscipleship.org](http://umcdiscipleship.org)). Thanks be to God!

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## 150 Years of Faithful Service at Simpson Memorial UMC Charleston

By Felica Wooten-Williams, PhD

“For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you!” Leviticus 25:12 was the theme of the 150th Anniversary celebration of Simpson Memorial UMC, Charleston in 2016. The celebration included a Praisefest in September along with a variety of offerings and events held in October such as a concert by the Martin Luther King, Jr. Male Chorus; a banquet with keynote speaker, retired Bishop Earnest S. Lyght (and Mrs. Eleanor Lyght); a Girl Scout Reunion; and Everybody's Birthday celebration. The celebration of 150 years of faithful service culminated with a special guest speaker, Rev. Dr. Victor Davis along with two choirs from Columbus, Ohio. Doctor Davis is a prominent alumnus of United Theological Seminary in Dayton, OH. In celebration and praise of the blessed Trinity, Simpsonites shared their gifts and talents with members of other congregations through various events, revivals, concerts, meetings, workshops, conferences and seminars. A time capsule commemorating the 150th Anniversary was dedicated and buried at the end of the year. In all things, we give God thanks as we Celebrate in the name of Jesus Christ!



Felica is pastor of Simpson Memorial UMC and can be reached at [fwilliams@wvumc.org](mailto:fwilliams@wvumc.org).

# Born Out of Success: After-School Tutoring Project at John Stewart UMC in Bluefield

From its beginning in 1888, John Stewart United Methodist Church has always placed a high emphasis on community. Throughout the years, there has been an emphasis on civic responsibility, civil rights, child development, youth, family, and education. During the period referred to by many members as the “golden era” John Stewart had approximately 500 members. Today membership is 90.

John Stewart United Methodist Church is committed to revitalization. We have begun to beautify our facilities and add programs to attract new members, while serving our ever changing demographics. Our history has prepared us for this challenge. We are focusing on Afrocentric worship to a multicultural membership, which reflects the diversity of surrounding communities.

John Stewart has decided that education is a natural place to begin serving the community based on our

history and current membership. We had a very successful six week Summer School Academy this summer serving 55 students from K-9. We offered math, science, language arts, cursive writing and reading, taught by certified teachers. We partnered with the State Department of Education to offer breakfast and lunch daily. Currently, we are working with the public school system to offer after-school tutoring supported by Bluefield College and Bluefield State College. Our challenge is transporting the children to the church from their schools.

We are working with other organizations throughout the State of West Virginia to accomplish our goals. We have a lot of work to do, but we are up for the challenge.

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In the preparation for the February Monthly Circuit we were reminded of how blessed the West Virginia conference is by our African American congregations! Over and over again we were introduced to our faithful sisters and brothers in Christ and churches through precious stories.

But, truth be told, it was a challenge to track down photos and written histories for some of our churches. We discovered that a very small percentage of our 1,100 churches communicate electronically through a website, Facebook, even email.

If you are part of a congregation, large or small, that would like to explore new ways to share the stories of your faith community, please contact your WVUMC Communications team at [wvumc@wvumc.org](mailto:wvumc@wvumc.org). We'd like to walk alongside you so that you may more effectively share your stories of God's love, mercy and grace with folks near and far away.

There are also many fine resources for churches available from the General Church. For news stories and articles about the United Methodist Church visit [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org). For worship resources and information to help grow your church visit [www.umcdiscipleship.org](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org). And for information from the General Commission on Race and Religion, visit [www.gcorr.org](http://www.gcorr.org).

Remember that we are all part of God's overarching story of redemption and hope. We look forward to sharing the journey with you as we move through 2017. Thank you for reading our Monthly Circuit, and be sure to visit [wvumc.org](http://wvumc.org) to stay up to date with news and stories from your West Virginia Annual Conference.

In Christ, together,  
Your Conference Communications Team

# The Board of Ordained Ministry

By Sharletta Green

God continues to bless the West Virginia Annual Conference with candidates equipped with amazing gifts. As chair of the Board of Ordained Ministry (BOOM), it is my desire to encourage candidates and their gifts. We often lament being a small conference or sometimes struggle with the fact that we have not been the top conference of choice by seminary students based on geography, being in Appalachia, not paying top salaries, etc. Yet, what we have not done well is tell our story. We are a small conference indeed, nestled in the majestic hills of West Virginia and Garrett County Maryland. We are a conference that feels like family. We are a mission field in need of missionaries to love, care for, offer hope and inspire new vision for our churches in this season of our journey.

In this season, I want to offer leadership that generates a culture of care and support. I have found that people offer their best in spaces of great support, great expectation, accountability, and in open spaces that allow their gifts to flow. It is my desire as a leader in this season to do all I can to create an environment that is bathed in prayer and offers a space to explore the things God has for us as we share in the work of preparing a new generation of clergy. I have come to walk along-side, to ask questions that will unearth hidden treasures, to challenge and to encourage the leadership of the board and the clergy we serve so that which we seek becomes a reality. We are looking for gifted men and women of God who have heard the call “whom shall we send” and have responded, “Lord, here am I, send me.” We seek people who are creative, biblically sound, spiritually sound, open to change and willing to listen for the Holy Spirit’s leading in ministry.

The Board of Ordained Ministry has been perceived as a gatekeeper when it comes to ordination and as a group of clergy and laity ready to give candidates

a hard time. While going through the provisional process in another conference, I felt like I was being hazed. This experience made me ask different questions about what would be helpful to those desiring to share their gifts with the church in ministry. How could Boards of Ordained Ministry make the experience one that helps provisional elders and deacons hone their skills and discover more about their gifts to better serve the church?



*Sharletta Green, Chair of BOOM,  
and Martha Hill, Chair of Justice and Advocacy*

The core responsibility of the BOOM is the credentialing of clergy – elder, deacon, and local pastors – and helping to guide those responding to their call to ministry through the processes of licensed pastoral ministry, commissioned provisional membership, elected associate membership and ordained full membership in the annual conference. The board is responsible for assessing the qualifications of those seeking to be pastors in our churches. The full explanation of the responsibilities of the BOOM is found in Paragraphs 635 and 301-370 of the 2016 Book of Discipline as it pertains to the ordination process.

After serving as a board member and now as the chair, I see my role as caring for all the pastors from the beginning of their call throughout their service. It is important that aspiring clergy know that they are cared about, supported, and encouraged not only as they work toward provisional membership, associate membership or full membership, but also throughout their careers as clergy. It is important for clergy who have been faithfully serving to know that they have the support of the BOOM. In addition, we have the task of caring for licensed local pastors and those serving churches. Keeping this in mind, I desire to help clergy be their best by caring for members of the board and making sure we offer the best to our clergy.

I hope that by encouraging clergy to always pursue spiritual renewal, they will learn to better honor Sabbath both personally and corporately. We must encourage clergy to participate in Continuing Education events that will aid them in walking the journey with those entrusted to their care. It is imperative that we make resources available to clergy to help them personally and professionally from their entry into service to retirement.

Good leadership is key to growth in any initiative and to lasting impressions in the faith communities we serve. As the new chair

of the Board of Ordained Ministry, I know that the work I do and the leadership I offer is important for the West Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church. I pray that as I listen and work with the members of the executive committee and with the full board, we will see passionate spiritual leadership increase throughout the Conference through our care, support and dedication to live more fully into the task of BOOM.

*Sharletta is the pastor of New Martinsville UMC and can be reached at [sharlettag@hotmail.com](mailto:sharlettag@hotmail.com).*

## ExploreCalling

Each person feels God's call in a different way: during a communion service, a mission trip, or in everyday activities and conversations with friends. However the invitation comes, you have to decide how you will answer. Learn more about how to discern God's call in your life and what steps to take if you are called by visiting [www.explorecalling.org](http://www.explorecalling.org).

Or talk to:

- Your local pastor
- Your district superintendent
- Bonnie MacDonald  
([bmacdonald@wvumc.org](mailto:bmacdonald@wvumc.org))

# Rev. Harry A. Coleman: A Message from the Heart

By Felica Wooten Williams, PhD

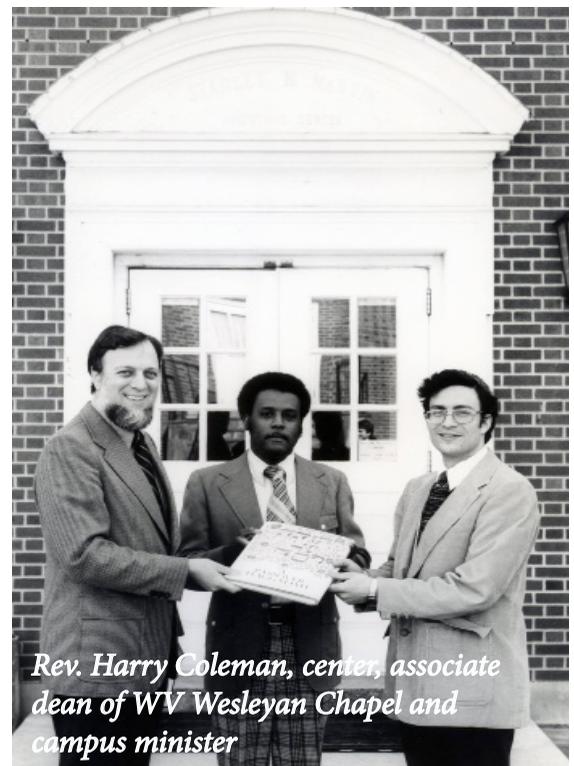
When Rev. Harry Alexander Coleman preaches, the congregation will hear a message from the heart. Rev. Coleman's calling is to teach people what it means to be a Christian. His ministry emphasizes how to be a follower of Christ not only on Sunday morning, but throughout life.

As a youngster, Rev. Coleman learned from one of West Virginia's finest leaders. Rev. Dr. Ramsey Bridges was Rev. Coleman's mentor when he participated in an internship program for two summers. Dr. Bridges was the first African American District Superintendent in the WV Conference and he pastored Cross Lanes UMC. Dr. Bridges taught Harry how to be in ministry with local congregations. Noting the caveat that he transferred to the South Indiana Conference in 1977 where his official record remains, Rev. Coleman's ministry began at a time when the segregated Central Jurisdiction existed; thus, Rev. Harry Alexander Coleman was commissioned to the work of a provisional elder in 1957 and ordained in 1960 amid overt racial division in the Methodist Church.

Rev. Coleman's first appointment was Logan Memorial in Parkersburg in 1960. He describes Logan as a loving congregation that had an excellent choir. One man who loved Logan Church and who would regularly bring food to him represents one example of the love that he experienced there as a young man starting in ministry. The members made contributions to community. The appointment to Logan helped strengthen him in terms of his ministry and his ongoing faith. He would not ask the people at Logan to do anything that he wouldn't do. The people were eager to serve and, at that time, Logan was part of the Washington Conference. While at Logan, he also served an African American church in Paden City. The tiny church had five people...two that he would pick them up and the others would meet them at the place of worship.

Rev. Coleman was appointed to Ebenezer in Huntington WV and Johnson Mission in 1962. In Huntington, mostly the people belonged to social organizations. Members of the congregation were nice and one family would bring a pie for him to Sunday evening worship. He drove seven miles outside of Huntington on Thursdays for Bible study in an old school building that had been converted to the sanctuary.

Next, he served John Stewart in Bluefield beginning in 1965. At that time, John Stewart had a daycare center but it was not organized to support a church. The church had some professional people in the congregation. As he reminisced, he said that the members of the church were ready to be in ministry. John Stewart had a strong unit of United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men, a choir, and Sunday School.



*Rev. Harry Coleman, center, associate dean of WV Wesleyan Chapel and campus minister*

While at John Stewart, Rev. Coleman also served Metropolitan Methodist Church in Gary. Prior to that, he had never really experienced a coal mining town. He was intrigued by mining town phenomena such as cutting script and the company store, a “pounding,” and pound parties. He recalls that an elderly woman who couldn’t get to church would always give him something like a dozen eggs when he visited to share a Bible lesson and Holy Communion. He enjoyed teaching Bible study at Metropolitan. Had a church and community worker who helped.

In 1966, Rev. Coleman moved Simpson in Charleston. It was a good appointment; however, he said that he was never able to launch a youth group. He enjoyed the choirs at Simpson and they purchased a new parsonage. He really appreciated what he was able to do at Simpson. It was a larger congregation with many members who were willing to work. His reflections on Simpson prompted him to say, “I’m not a hooper. I suppose hooping may help the speaker to vent emotions. Sometimes hooping and shouting might be necessary but my messages were to encourage them to be a light in the community.”

Then Harry went to West Virginia Wesleyan College (WVWC) in 1974 as the Associate Dean of the Chapel. He taught at WVWC and at Morris Harvey College in the sociology department and worked with the student organizations. One student said to him, “I wish that you were my father.” My job was to keep my door open for the students. Though some faculty and staff came to worship on Sunday morning, he never had much of a connection with faculty or the administration.

“Some would look in the other direction rather than to speak with me” he said. His two sons were the only African American students in the school system there and they had friendships that helped them to overcome that situation. Meanwhile, Rev. Coleman taught courses such as African American Studies and The Black Man in America.

Rev. Coleman did what he could to help them to understand what it was like to be African American; yet, African American students had difficulty at WVWC. Among his better students were Loretta Young, Ron and Don Pitts, and Rev. Dr. Vance Ross. He was honored that some of his students named their children after him (e.g., Bryant Coleman Ross and another student named their daughter Alexandria in honor of Rev. Coleman). While at WVWC, he enjoyed working with the student group. And, he enjoyed the soul food dinners. He said, “I was there for 3 years. Then I decided to move on.”

Harry went to Morristown, TN to attend a conference. While there, he made some significant connections. In 1974, the Indiana Bishop invited him to be the pastor of University Church in Indianapolis. Rev. Coleman transferred to the South Indiana Conference in 1977. He served University Church for 14 years and had 500 members with a stratified membership. He enjoyed highly organized ministry along with a Youth Choir, Men's Choir, and a Chancel Choir.

The church had a strong group of United Methodist Women which traveled to events with 20 or 25 members and they paid for him to attend various convocations. It was the largest of the African American congregations in the South Indiana Conference.

Rev. Coleman observed that he never had a clique in any of the churches that he served.

He was appointed to serve as District Superintendent of the Indiana West District in 1991. Among the congregations under his supervision were two or three African American congregations including University Church. In 1994, Rev. Coleman retired and returned to the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia to be near his siblings, nieces, and nephews. All of his siblings were very supportive of his ministry. Rev. Coleman has three sons, four grandchildren.

Thinking of his home among the hills of West Virginia where it all started, Rev. Coleman said, “But when you say yes to God, it becomes the most radical moment of your life... it changes your life.” In his youth, someone took him to church and “from that first time in church, I knew.”

He knew about his calling at a very young age. He recalls, “Pastor Charles Edward Johnson helped me to understand my calling. Every door that I attempted to go through was closed, but I was able to go to college and to seminary.” He preached in his quiet manner as he elaborated on the ways in which the Church and the Word of God helps us to understand God’s love for us and that we are to love. Then he talked about 2 Corinthians ... newness of life...and concluded, “I looked at my feet and they looked new...” He went on to rejoice about the wonderful change that he experienced long ago when he first decided to follow Jesus.

He officially retired 23 years ago following a fruitful career. After retiring, he became a substitute teacher for a while. Yes, he retired but he never stopped proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ because he continues to enjoy filling pulpits. Rev. Coleman is 87 years old and he remains actively involved in the community. He is living the dream with his family and friends in Keyser, West Newport, and Waldon. He enjoys being around people who love to sing.

Rev. Coleman said that he has two concerns about the future of The United Methodist Church. First, we are still struggling with racism and sexism. African Americans can go to other denominations and be well-received. In general, minorities can worship in other Methodist congregations but we have not settled this business of racism in the life of the Methodist Church.

Second, the church is more impacted by culture than it is by Christ. He said, “The church is God’s voice to the community and not the community’s voice to God.” Yet, people would rather invest their time and money in social organizations than in the Church. As

a result, most congregations are not growing. This is a serious concern for African American congregations in our Conference.

While churches face substantial challenges, Rev. Coleman offers optimistic advice for new pastors. “I encourage them to learn what it means to love people, to love your congregation. Visit among the people, especially sick and shut-ins and spend time with children. Never ask the people to do anything that you wouldn’t do yourself. Be available to them. Don’t do two or three messages in one sermons. Again, love your church members. Your relationship is a love relationship with God.” Rev. Harry Alexander Coleman’s life continues to deliver a message of love at this pivotal time in The United Methodist Church.

*Felicia is the pastor of Simpson Memorial UMC and can be reached at [fwilliams@wvumc.org](mailto:fwilliams@wvumc.org).*

## Oral History And You

The African American Methodist Heritage Center (AAMHC) is establishing an oral history library to recover and preserve the stories of African American lay and clergy Methodists who were active beyond the local church during the period of the Central Jurisdiction and its subsequent merger with the geographical jurisdictions.

We stand on the shoulders of those men, women and youth who worked during that era. We are the heirs of their perseverance, ingenuity, strategies, commitment and faith.

AAMHC needs from you information about those leaders such as conference staff, district superintendents, general agency staff and members, youth staff, etc. because we want to interview them while they are willing and able to share their perspectives. These “founts of wisdom” are in each jurisdiction and probably in each annual conference.

Remember, when an elder passes, a library perishes. Please contact Carol Travis, Executive Assistant, and provide the names, addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of persons who should be included in this collection of information. You may reach Carol at the telephone number and e-mail address below.

Share your legacy with the United Methodist Church through

The African American Methodist Heritage Center  
36 Madison Avenue • PO Box 127 • Madison, NJ 07940  
(973) 408-3862

# Hidden Figures: The Katherine Johnson Story

By Rev. Deborah Coble

How you experience a movie can vary greatly depending on who you watch it with. I had the privilege of watching the movie, *Hidden Figures* with two ladies who grew up in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, the hometown of Katherine Coleman Goble Johnson, the main character in the film. The movie is set in the era of Project Mercury, the first human spaceflight program of the United States; John F. Kennedy; the Cold War; and Martin Luther King, Jr. — a season in our country's history that was ripe with possibility but also rife with tension.

I met Sara Carter and Carolyn Bond, members of St. James United Methodist Church, in the lobby of the historic Lewis Theater in downtown Lewisburg, four days before *Hidden Figures* was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Picture. We were joined by Rev. Shari Stilgenbauer, pastor of St. James, Eakle Chapel and Emmanuel United Methodist Churches in White Sulphur Springs and Shari's husband, Rev. David Stilgenbauer, pastor of Ronceverte UMC.

To West Virginians the film, which chronicles the contributions of African-American women to the NASA space program as mathematicians, or human computers, is already a winner. Three times during the screening applause broke out, a fitting tribute to a film that reminds us that many heroic lives go unnoticed.

After the film, as we shared impressions of the movie and a late supper at a local restaurant, I was

fascinated when Sara and Carolyn reminisced about the days they knew Miss Katherine as a friend and neighbor.

Right from the start Sara and Carolyn wanted to set the record straight. "I have no idea where they filmed that first part of the movie. That didn't look like White Sulphur Springs," and Miss Katherine grew up in town, just down from the church," they shared. "But she definitely was known for counting

her steps [as depicted in the opening of the film]. She knew exactly how many steps it was from her house down Church Street to St. James Methodist church," Carolyn said.

The Coleman family is remembered by the African-American community of White Sulphur Springs as a nice family. "They were calm, sweet people. Miss Katherine went away to school as did her sister, Miss Margaret. Miss Margaret came back to teach school. Miss Margaret also played piano in our church." Later, when Katherine and her girls would visit her mom during the summer, she attended worship

at St. James and visited with friends and neighbors. "I had no idea she did all of those things [depicted in the movie]. She never said anything about working with the space program," Carolyn said, "but she did always ask us how we were doing in school."

Education was very important to the Coleman family. Katherine and Margaret's parents made sacrifices so their girls could go to Charleston to complete high school.



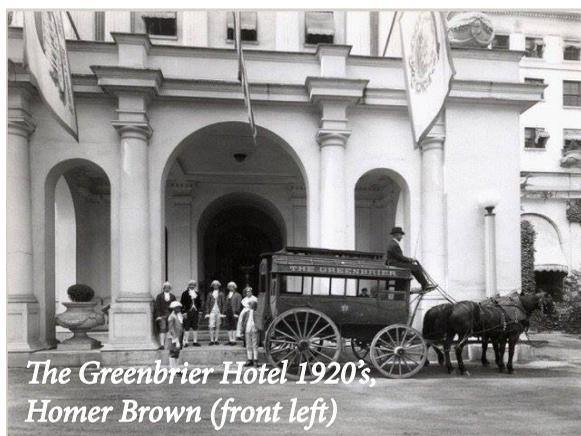
“Mr. Coleman worked at the Greenbrier Resort and as a custodian at the library so that Katherine could go away to high school.” She graduated from high school at the age of 14 and from West Virginia State University with a degree in math at the age of 18. Later on, she graduated from West Virginia University with a master’s degree. She went on to calculate the analytic geometry for the trajectory and re-entry for Alan Shepherd’s historic first flight to space, John Glenn’s orbit of earth and the Apollo and Space Shuttle projects.

Katherine Johnson’s contributions were relatively unheralded until November when, at the age of 96, she was awarded the Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama. A book about the African-American women of the

space program and the film, *Hidden Figures*, soon followed. Now she’s getting recognition back home. Carolyn explained: “I heard that White Sulphur

Springs is going to rename the public library for Katharine Johnson.” “And put a sign up along the highway,” Sara chimed in. “White Sulphur Springs has never named anything for a black person,” Sara added.

In the mid 1920’s, when Katherine Campbell was a child, most African-American children finished their education after 8th grade and went on to work. A contemporary of Miss Katherine, Homer Brown, Carolyn’s father, went to work at the age of 11 or 12 at The Greenbrier Hotel as a page. Later, as a teenager, he switched to the night shift so that he could work toward his high school diploma. He graduated from high school when he was 23 years old and worked at the Greenbrier until he was in his 70’s.



By 1954 many communities in West Virginia were integrated. But this was not the case in White Sulphur Springs. This article by Harry W. Ernest, staff writer for *The Gazette* is dated September 19, 1954, tells the story of integration in the Greenbrier County schools: <http://www.wvculture.org/history/africanamericans/schoolintegration004.html>

Protests delayed integration in Greenbrier County. At White Sulphur Springs High School, crudely-painted signs read: “No Negroes Wanted in Our Schools.”

Some 300 of 440 White Sulphur students struck on Monday. Negro children were threatened with bodily harm if they returned to “white” classrooms. So Greenbrier’s Board of Education called off partial integration and ordered all students back to the schools they attended last year.

Supt. Trent refused to interfere. “. . . At the present time boards of education are free to act,” he said. “I shall take no action.”

Carolyn was a young child at the time, but vividly remembers the protests. “I was told by my daddy to stay away from downtown. I remember riding my little tricycle that direction, so that

I could visit a local police officer who worked on the bridge, he always had candy for the children. But I remember seeing the angry faces down that way, and I just couldn’t understand why they would be so angry.” Years later she’d see faces that she remembered and ask her father why they were so angry.



*Deloris Mattox, Colonel James Johnson, Joylette Johnson, and Katherine Johnson enjoying fellowship at St. James UMC.*

Sara, a generation older than Carolyn, worked at the Greenbrier as a parlor maid. She remembers the outrageous costume they were required to wear: “we were dressed up like Aunt Jemima, complete with the big hoop earrings, red handkerchief over our hair and hoop dresses and apron. Finally, a group of us got tired of wearing the getup so we went to human resources, and we asked if we could stop. They agreed to let us wear something more modern.” “I have no complaints about The Greenbrier because they gave a lot of people a job and the ability to buy a home,” Sara went on to say.

Carolyn went on to graduate from high school in an integrated White Sulphur Springs and on to college. She worked her entire career as a speech therapist at a local elementary school. While the unrest over integration is now history, it took a toll on the community: “Our grown children all live elsewhere now.”

Set in Virginia, *Hidden Figures* doesn't shy away from the issues that our country was wrestling with in the segregated south. A second round of applause from the audience during the film occurred when Al Harrison, a character representing an engineer and director of the Space Task Force, played by Kevin Costner, removed the Colored Ladies Rest Room sign. “We've come a long

way. I'm so glad my children didn't have to go through what we had to go through,” Carolyn shared. She then added almost off handedly; “I don't know that we ever had a restaurant we could go to – not when I was growing up in White Sulphur Springs.”

“I don't think it's all settled and done,” Pastor David Stilgenbauer reflected as our time together was drawing to a close. “I wonder how many people think it's all over and done with?” Sara injected; “I'm glad they made the movie, there are ones who don't know what we went through. I told my daughter to go see it.”

Shari Stilgenbauer, pastor of St. James United Methodist Church, spoke for us all when she said; “it was an honor to watch the movie highlighting Miss Katherine's accomplishments with Carolyn and Sara, two of our church members who knew her and attended church with her family.” Pastor Shari added; “the movie opened my eyes to the importance of the stories that are shared by the church and our communities.”

*Hidden Figures* is based on a book by the same name which is based on the true story of Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughn and Mary Jackson. All three of the women were brilliant mathematicians and scientists who paved the way for women today. The film was produced by Pharrell Williams, who also wrote the soundtrack. His interest in making the film was to tell what he calls “sticky stories.” Williams shared in a January 13th *Billboard Magazine* article: “A lot of people walk away [from the film] saying, ‘I can't believe I didn't know that story. That should be part of textbook history.’ To us, that's the special sauce right there.”

<http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/7655221/pharrell-williams-hidden-figures-interview>



Movies such as *Hidden Figures*, *Selma*, *The Butler*, *The Help*, and others allow opportunities for meaningful dialogue with one another. We are blessed to have 16 traditionally African-American churches across the Annual Conference. As we move through 2017 it is our hope that United Methodists across West Virginia will seek people who have had different life experiences to share a cup of coffee or a meal and especially watch a movie such as *Hidden Figures* together and then talk about it. We have included some guidelines for thoughtful conversations and listening on pages 32-33.

In the meanwhile, run — don't walk — to your local theater to see *Hidden Figures*. As West Virginians, we have much to be proud of. Miss Katherine Coleman Goble Johnson is one heroine who is finally receiving her due. That we can also claim her as someone whose first faith home was the United Methodist Church is surely 'special sauce.'

*Deborah is the Director of Communications for the West Virginia Conference. She can be reached at [dcoble@wvumc.org](mailto:dcoble@wvumc.org).*

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## The Importance of Story

“While Black History Month becomes an opportunity to celebrate African-American Heritage, it risks becoming nothing more than tokenism if the stories and struggles of people of this heritage are not part of the common story.

While Black History Month becomes an opportunity to celebrate African-American Heritage, it risks becoming nothing more than tokenism if the stories and struggles of people of this heritage are not part of the common story. Using stories, hymns, quotes, and so on from the Black Experience throughout the year gives the congregation a fuller appreciation for a people with a rich heritage and helps to break down racial barriers.” (Bishop Dr. Tracy Smith Malone, East Ohio Conference)

To this end, we offer the histories and photos of our West Virginia Conference traditionally African American churches on the following pages. We encourage you to reach out to our sister congregations; worship together, share fellowship with one another and learn each other's stories. This is the way that truly leads to peace and understanding.

To read more of Bishop Malone's thoughts about Black History Month visit: [www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/truth-by-heart](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/truth-by-heart)

# African American Congregations

## in the West Virginia Conference

### Asbury United Methodist Church, Moorefield, Potomac Highlands District



Asbury United Methodist Church in Moorefield, WV originated as Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church in the 1870s. In November of 1887, the first building was situated on land that the trustees purchased. The congregation experienced spiritual growth through class meetings, prayer meetings and revivals. The trustees and members of Asbury worked with various ministers for the spiritual growth of the community despite being in a very old building. In October of 1921, Asbury's leaders pledged to build a new place of worship on the same site. The old building was torn down and services were held in the Community Hall until the present building was partially completed. The new church building was made possible by a lot of hard work, unselfish giving by Asbury members and

large donations from other community members. The current building was dedicated in 1926. Nearly 50 years later, Asbury became a member of the West Virginia Conference, Romney District and Moorefield Charge. Asbury United Methodist Church has celebrated God's grace through worship, special programs, inspirational services known as the Four Nights for God, community involvement, special concerts of sacred music, mission work in Jamaica, Sunday School, youth groups, an active unit of United Methodist Women, and joint Bible Schools, baptisms, professions of faith, congregational reaffirmations of faith, prayer blanket ministry, assisting the local food pantry, supporting Burlington Children's Home in various ways, donate supplies to schools, and assisting terminally ill people. Asbury has learned to embrace change and the promises of God.

### Court Street United Methodist Church, Welch, Southern District

Early in the 20th century, a small group of people gathered to organize the Methodist Episcopal Church (now known as The Court Street United Methodist Church) in Welch, McDowell County, West Virginia. For a few years, the small congregation shared a place of worship with the Baptist congregation in the community, alternating Sundays for worship services. On May 26, 1911, a deed was made and signed between the Welch Land Improvement Company and the trustees of the Church for a parcel of land on which to erect a church building. This lot, situated high on the hillside above Court Street, was purchased for the sum of thirty dollars (\$30.00).

In 1914, the congregation moved into the new church home in the steep terrain in the heart of McDowell County. Other families were added to the church membership roster. In a few years, more families joined the congregation with each person making valuable contributions of time and service to support the growing church and Sunday School.



The congregation at Court Street United Methodist Church has experienced and celebrated God's love, mercy and grace in many ways. By grace, Court Street UMC has enjoyed the leadership of many gifted pastors who faithfully attended to the spiritual disposition of church members and friends in the surrounding communities. Court Street UMC also witnessed grace in action with lay leadership gains in the Methodist Men, the Women's Society of Christian Service (WSCS) and youth groups. These lay leaders won outstanding awards for participating in the local church and in conference activities while in the East Tennessee Conference.

## Ebenezer United Methodist Church, Huntington, Western District



The Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Church was established between 1871 and 1874 (different sources have varying dates) and later was renamed the Ebenezer United Methodist Church. The first church was located near Sixteenth Street and Eighth Avenue in an area that was beginning to serve as one of the centers of the black community in the new city.” In Huntington, Ebenezer UMC enjoys a history of dedicated service to the community. Within the West Virginia Conference, it is known for establishing Ebenezer Community Outreach Center which provides preschool, summer and after-school programs, clothing, school supplies, family-enrichment programs, help to mothers of newborns, and mentors children through Girl Scouts and 4-H. Research reveals that Ebenezer was also instrumental in establishing a medical clinic. “The clinic was originally established in 1986 by Ebenezer United Methodist Church as a missionary outpost. In 2003, it moved to Douglass Centre, the former all-black Douglass High School on 10th Avenue to offer a wide range of free health care services to those in need.”

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## Janes United Methodist Church, Keyser, Potomac Highlands District

Janes United Methodist Church, Keyser, West Virginia, had its beginning in 1873 in a structure known as the hospital building, on the bank of the Potomac River where the Patchett Woolen Mill once stood. It was accessible by a narrow path which led from Main Street. Planning for Janes Memorial Church began in 1874. Meetings were held in various homes until, through unwavering faith and untiring labors, dedicated leaders completed the building. Located on the corner of Church and Piedmont Streets, the house of worship was erected on property acquired by Trustees on October 10, 1875 and named in honor of Bishop Edmund Storer Janes (1807-1876).



The congregation grew rapidly in the early years, reaching a glorious spiritual and moral climax in 1908.

In 1923, the building needed repairs and refurbishing. The congregation raised \$1500 for the renovation project. New floors were laid, new plastering was done, and beautiful new stained glass windows were installed. Various donors' and honorees' names are still visible on the windows. Note that one window was contributed by the pupils of Lincoln Elementary School during an era of non-integrated education in Keyser. The windows still grace the edifice. The completion of this project made Janes one of the most beautiful small churches in the Conference. Janes Church celebrated the Centennial Anniversary during the week of May 30 through June 5, 1976 with special music. In addition, members have shared days filled with worship services, and church-related events, surrounded by loving pastors, extended family and friends. The ministries at Janes Church brought drama productions, choirs, a Ladies Aide Committee, tent revivals, and a multitude of other activities to the congregation and the local community.

Unity in purpose and ministry established a sense of belonging to something beautiful and powerful in the lives of choir members. At Janes, gifts can be expressed and offered back to God in praise and thanksgiving. The unity of the congregation is enriched through the diversity, as all who enter are embraced with acceptance, love, and as family with open hearts and arms. A diverse congregation, Janes UMC embraces all who wish to worship!

Janes has a small group of young children who regularly attend. Janes offers spiritual formation to its young children's group and strongly believe “We offer them Hope!” The Janes congregation is committed to offering love, encouragement, and guidance to the young children in the congregation, as well as the young adults who attend. With a renewed vision to teach the children to have a strong faith in God through Jesus Christ and to have faith in themselves, the congregation is prepared to embrace each other and the community, in love and hope. Without that commitment to a renewed vision, the children might not have a church in which to worship in the future. At Janes Church, the disciple-making vision remains strong. The Holy task ahead is to continue being a vital congregation and a beacon of hope to the African American community in the Keyser, WV area. Steadfast and unwavering faith received through worship services, prayer, and Bible reading, as well as personal Christian growth, has brought this congregation a long way. Since its inception in 1873, Janes United Methodist Church has played a vital role in the community by sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed; by caring for the needy; and by making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

## John Stewart United Methodist Church, Bluefield, Southern District



John Stewart United Methodist Church was organized in 1888 as The Bluefield Church with 12 members; the same year the territory of Virginia, now the East Tennessee Conference became a part of the Washington Conference. By 1897 the membership had grown to 97. The church met in several different locations in the downtown area until purchasing a building on what is now Raleigh Street. The property on Raleigh Street was sold and building began on the lots on Jones Street where John Stewart is located today. When the congregation moved into the new edifice in 1922, it was the best equipped church building for Blacks in the State of West Virginia. The church included an incredible sanctuary for worship, class rooms, office, library, kitchen and an assembly hall.

In 1919, the Methodist Church had celebrated the Centenary of Methodist home missionary endeavors, lead by African American missionary John Stewart. He spent much of his time with the Wyandott Indians in Northern Ohio. He became a household name in the Methodist Church throughout America. The Bluefield congregation and pastor wanted to create a lasting tribute to John Stewart and thus named their church John Stewart Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church. The cornerstone of the church bears the name of the great missionary to the Wyandott Indians.

For years, John Stewart was one of the leading churches in the East Tennessee Conference. The church hosted the Annual Conference in 1922, 1942, 1950 and 1957. John Stewart joined the West Virginia Conference in 1965, transferring from the former Central District Washington Conference.

John Stewart has always placed a high emphasis on community. Throughout the years, there has been an emphasis on civic responsibility, civil rights, child development, youth, family, and education. During the period referred to by many members as the “golden era” John Stewart had approximately 500 members. Today membership is 90.



## John Wesley United Methodist Church, Lewisburg, Greenbrier District

On May 19, 1939, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the Methodist Protestant Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church joined to form the Methodist Church creating five regional jurisdictions. In addition, the Central Jurisdiction was established to include all the black conferences. The Central Jurisdiction was opposed by most blacks because it was written into the church's Constitution and it was segregated. Dr. Ramsey Bridges was one of many black leaders who labored in the Central Jurisdiction. He was District Superintendent of the Charleston District of the Washington Annual Conference in the Central Jurisdiction.

In April, 1968, at Dallas, Texas, the Methodist Church united with the Evangelical United Brethren to form the United Methodist Church. The new Constitution did not provide for the Central Jurisdiction. Black conferences were transferred into the regional jurisdictions. By 1974, all Black conferences had merged with the white conferences. The present membership of John Wesley United Methodist Church includes the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of people who worshiped in the “slave gallery.”



## Jones United Methodist Church, Morgantown, MonValley District

The history of Jones United Methodist church began in 1869. A bishop told the Methodist Episcopal Church on Pleasant Street that former slaves and whites were not to worship together. Shortly after that point, the Jones African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church was established on Chestnut Street. The church survived a separation two years later. The church was involved in educational and cultural programs for the African American community, mirroring these emphases of the AME church during the period. Jones continued at the Chestnut Street location for nearly a century.



Fast-forwarding 100 years, the congregation desired something more which led to the purchase of a house with a sizable yard on Green Street in the Greenmont neighborhood of the town in 1966. In the first year, the plan was to build a new sanctuary on the lot that would be powered by solar panels, a plan developed by parishioner. After raising funds for a period, ground was broken in 1980 on the new sanctuary. Due to inadequate funding, the new addition took some time; the sanctuary was completed and finally opened in 1988. Jones UMC has provided outreach to the greater Morgantown community over its history, currently providing meeting space for two different support groups and affordable counseling services, as well as reaching out through Scott's Run Settlement House and through a well-attended Vacation Bible School that feeds the children both spiritually and nutritionally; the congregation's members are fed spiritually by the annual event and are quite proud of the event. Jones UMC continues to serve the spiritual needs of all who enter the sanctuary, regardless of their appearance.

## Logan Memorial United Methodist Church, Parkersburg, Little Kanawha District



Logan Memorial United Methodist Church, located on the corner of Sixth and Ann Streets in Parkersburg, started as a Methodist Episcopal congregation in 1866. A wealthy business owner purchased property and donated it to the congregation on December 20, 1871. In less than 20 years, they began a construction project. They completed the new brick structure and dedicated it on February 13, 1892, naming it the Henry Logan Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church.

“By 1915, the membership of the church had grown to 170, and in 1916, stained glass windows were installed in the sanctuary. Over the next 70 years, the church continued as a black congregation. In 1968, two major changes took place within the church. A new pastor arrived, Rev. Margaret Marshall, a white woman, who embraced the history and culture of the church. At the same time, the congregation was open to all races, which continues today. Also, during that time period, the Methodists and Evangelical United Brethren churches merged, and has been known as Logan Memorial United Methodist Church. The declares itself as one welcoming people of all colors, ethnic groups, and sexual preferences.” Logan Memorial United Methodist Church celebrated 150 years of fellowship in December of 2016. To commemorate this occasion, the congregation enjoyed an evening of Christmas music.

## Main Street United Methodist Church, Ronceverte, Greenbrier District



The Black Methodist Church was first started in the late 1870's in the office of the Bowman Lumber Company, located on the upper Island Park of Ronceverte, West Virginia. When Trinity Methodist Church in Ronceverte moved, a committee from the Black Methodist Church started negotiations with the Washington Conference and the Trinity Church. The cost of purchasing the old church on Main Street was \$3,000.

In 1919, a church committee was established to raise funds for the purchase of the church. The church members planned a celebration to commemorate the landing of the African slaves at Jamestown in 1719. The celebration began with a long parade. Included in the parade was a wagon, pulled by oxen, carrying people that had been slaves. Harry Lacy drove one

of the first FWD Standard Oil trucks in the parade. A large tent was erected on the brick yard grounds and visitors from Hinton, Alderson, White Sulphur, Lewisburg and other neighboring communities attended. Guest speakers were from Chicago, Illinois and local areas. Dinner was served, followed by a community sing. The highlight of the day was the burning of the mortgage for the purchase of our church building.

From 1880 to 1926, Main Street Methodist Church remained in the Washington Conference of the Central Jurisdiction. In 1920, the corner stone for the Main Street Methodist Church was laid. In 1965, due to the transition period, most Black Methodist churches in West Virginia became a part of the West Virginia Conference. In 1968, the Evangelical United Brethren and the Methodist Conference merged to become the United Methodist Church of the West Virginia Annual Conference. Consequently, Main Street Methodist Church became known as Main Street United Methodist Church in 1968. Thirty-seven ministers have served the congregation in its one hundred thirty-six years.

## Mt. Pisgah United Methodist Church, Romney, Potomac Highlands District

Mt. Pisgah began with worship services as early as 1853. While property deeds were conveyed to Mt. Pisgah in 1869 and 1882, the church was built in 1886. Mt. Pisgah has maintained and made many improvements to the property. Mt. Pisgah implemented plans to upgrade the exterior with vinyl siding beginning on October 18, 1985. In the early 1990s, a heating system was donated and installed. A dining hall and bathrooms were added in 1998. Subsequent renovation plans included a tree removal project and a roof replacement. Mt. Pisgah has shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ and served as a vital witness of God's grace in the surrounding community. The congregation experienced spiritual growth under the leadership of numerous pastors. The ministries of Mt. Pisgah changed lives through worship services, baptisms, Holy Communion, Bible study, the celebration of marriage, and events. By faith, Mt. Pisgah weathered the storms of life bearing witness that with Christ, all things are possible.



## St. James United Methodist Church, White Sulphur Springs, Greenbrier District

St. James United Methodist Church began in 1876 meeting in an old schoolhouse as St. James Methodist Episcopal Church. The building was a commissary used by workmen who built the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad to White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. After worshipping there for five years, the congregation sent a committee to ask the White Sulphur Company to sell the land on which to erect a building. The committee raised six or seven hundred dollars for the new building and purchased the plot of ground across the railroad near the present station. This building established the first church of Methodism in White Sulphur Springs and the church was ready for use in 1881.

In 1920, St. James began plans to erect a modern building. With the land and \$7,000 to clear all indebtedness, the present structure was erected in 1923. The St. James Methodist Episcopal Church became St. James United Methodist Church in 1965, becoming a member of the West Virginia Conference.



St. James is a small membership church. This faithful few keeps faith in God and the Lord Jesus Christ that the church will be revitalized with new members will want to be a part of God's church and community. The members of St. James are determined to keep recruiting disciples to carry out the Lord's work.

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## St. Paul United Methodist Church, Williamsport, Potomac Highlands District



The African American Methodist congregation located at Williamsport in Grant County, have held services at least since 1872, initially in a log structure known as Waugh Chapel located near the bottom of the hill where the present church structure known as Christ Church is situated. Christ Church, a sandstone structure with horse-hair plaster interior, was constructed in 1869 for the Methodist Episcopal Church South; however, political changes in the valley following the Civil War diminished that congregation and in 1906, Trustees of the Waugh Chapel Church, purchased Christ Church along with the surrounding 2.3 acres for the sum of \$350.00, renaming the church St. Paul. St Paul is the State's only extant example of a sandstone church. It was following that purchase that a porch was added to the structure.

As was common to the three area African American Methodist churches located at Williamsport, Moorefield, Petersburg, annual all-day Camp Meetings were held at each church during the summer months. Two worship services (morning and afternoon) were held with guest ministers, special choirs, soloists, music and an enormous picnic lunch. Family members who had relocated and local people from as far as 50 miles away would return to celebrate their heritage.

In 1978, when the Grant County Board of Education decided to demolish the former segregated "Colored School," the St. Paul Trustees, all of whom had attended the school, arranged to move the frame school building, which was constructed in the 1800's using wooden pegs, to the Church lot for use as a church hall. To preserve the original construction, the building was sawn in half and set on a new foundation behind the Chapel.

Over the years the St. Paul church family has worked to preserve the original integrity of church structure by repointing the sandstone exterior and re-plastering the interior. The hardwood floors, pews and oil lighting fixtures are also original to the building. The congregation of St. Paul remains committed to providing a welcome place to worship.

## St. Stephens United Methodist Church, Charleston, Midland South District



St. Stephens United Methodist Church is situated in the Coal Branch Heights area of Charleston, WV. The church began as a mission project in a largely unchurched neighborhood where the population approximated 50% white and 50% black with several mixed unions. Decisions about offering a ministry in the neighborhood were based on data collected from the white population. It should be noted that many people, black or white, were not initially receptive to the outsiders coming into the community to start a new church. On September 1, 1948, the West Virginia Conference recognized and established the charge on Coal Branch. The newly created charge was named St. Stephens Methodist Church. Records from the Charleston District Conference in 1949 specify “St. Stephens will be a modest little church

in the Coal Branch Community serving 67 families” which neglected half of the community. When the building had not been constructed in 1950, many people became discouraged and lost interest in the project. After a rocky start, the project finally began to form in 1953. However, repeated attempts to start as a white congregation failed and one attempt to start as a black congregation also failed under the segregated church model. In retrospect, it failed in part because the outside organizers disrespected the culture of the community.

In 1968 and 1969, a true cross-section of the population gathered at the table of grace, black and white together but still as an outpost coordinated by a ministry team from another church. By the fall of 1969 the average Sunday School and worship attendance was 50, a sharp increase from the segregated era. Much of the gap was bridged by one African American male resident of Coal Branch Heights who became the community’s patriarch and the St. Stephens church family began to find its own path. He bridged the gap by networking with the ministries at Christ Church UMC and thereby became St. Stephens’ envoy who lived the importance of being in ministry with people in contrast to ministering to people. He also participated in the ministry at Simpson Memorial UMC and established connections with other congregations in the parish. He became the lay leader that Coal Branch Heights needed to usher them into Spirit-filled praise, true worship and a closer walk with God at St. Stephens United Methodist Church. Hence, putting the “united” in the church became St. Stephens’ epiphany, the climactic moment of revelation, change, and insight: the people needed to worship God together.

So, when people challenge St. Stephens as an African American congregation, remind them that the real birth of the congregation happened when the true nature of the community was reflected in the congregation. To this day, St. Stephens United Methodist Church remains true to the community’s DNA as a faith community, indeed a “light on a hill,” where ALL people are accepted.

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*Special thanks to Felica Wooten-Williams and Loretta Young for compiling the information and histories.*

*Special thanks to Brett Miller and Conference Archives for the church photos in this issue.*

## Simpson Memorial United Methodist Church, Charleston, Midland South District

Simpson Memorial United Methodist Church, historically known as the Simpson Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church, originated in Charleston, West Virginia. The Washington Conference (Black) of the Methodist Church was organized in 1864, one year before the Simpson group began worship services and there is no record that Simpson had an organized congregation before 1865. The Washington Conference sent Simpson its first minister in 1866 and the congregation continued to worship in the church basement of Asbury. Around 1869 the congregation moved into a building on Quarrier Street near Capitol Street. By 1870, the congregation had grown in sufficient numbers to erect a church home. Thus, the church officials purchased a lot near the corner of Quarrier and Dickinson Streets and built the first church building, a frame structure.



In January 1887, this structure, the third church home of Simpson was destroyed by fire. The reconstruction of a stately edifice began immediately on the same site and was completed in 1888, becoming one of the most outstanding Black Churches in the state and in the Washington Conference. In 1888 the church was officially named Simpson Methodist Episcopal Church in honor of Bishop Simpson.

Simpson Memorial United Methodist Church stands as a landmark to a significant era in Charleston and the Kanawha Valley. In the first half of this century, an abundant African-American population occupied the neighborhood surrounding this church building. Businesses that successfully supplied the needs of this community were housed nearby: pharmacies, grocery stores, hair salons, funeral homes, schools and other churches. Most of these institutions exist no more. Simpson Memorial is a tangible reminder of those prosperous times between 1914 and 1941.

Simpson Memorial Church survived the era of change within the community and within Methodism. On June 9, 1965, Simpson was among the congregations that transferred from the Washington Conference to the West Virginia Conference. It remains a vital congregation in the West Virginia Conference. In 2016, Simpson celebrated its 150 years of faithful service. Simpson glorified the Lord throughout 2016 with a revival, an Anniversary Banquet, concerts, special guest speakers, picnics, a Praisefest, and more. Indeed, 2016 was a year of jubilee and a time of holy conferencing at Simpson.

## Warren United Methodist Church, Grafton, Mon Valley District



Warren United Methodist Church is an African American Congregation. The church organized and acquired land for the place of worship on August 2, 1884. The Church was named for Bishop Warren of the Washington Annual Conference.

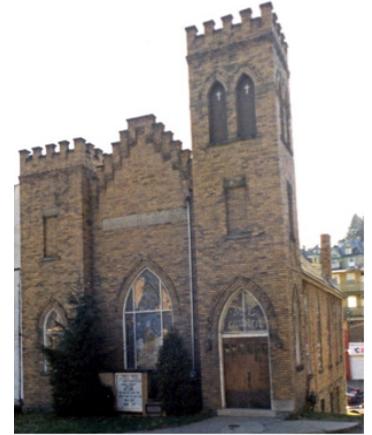
The women's unit at Warren UMC had its beginnings in the Warren Episcopal Church in 1885 with the Women's Home Mission, the Ladies Aid Society and the Willing Workers Club. Warren has the distinction of having organized the first women's society of Christian Service in The Charleston District of the former Washington Conference on October 22, 1940.

In 1939, the church's name changed from Methodist Episcopal Church to Methodist Church. In 1964, after the dissolution of the Central Jurisdiction (an all-Black Jurisdiction) which the Washington Annual Conference and the Charleston District were a part of, Warren Methodist Church became a member of the Northeastern Jurisdiction, West Virginia Annual Conference, Fairmont District. Since 1968, it has been Warren United Methodist Church. Renovations in 1968 included repairing the basement floor, replacing windows and updating the sanctuary. The Church was renovated again in 1981. A Consecrating Service was held October 17, 1981.

Warren United Methodist Church celebrated 100 years of existence on August 24 and 25, 1985. The 100th anniversary theme was looking ahead with hope. The 100th anniversary encouraged the congregation to look towards the future of church. Warren Church has a lot of potential as a unique hub of opportunity for the African American residents in Grafton. Warren United Methodist Church is thankful for the heritage of faith, service, worship and fellowship.

## Trinity Unity Methodist Church, Fairmont, MonValley District

In 1869, four years after the Emancipation Proclamation, the John Wesley Methodist Episcopal Church for Negroes was organized in Fairmont, West Virginia. The church was located on Monroe Street at the site of the former Jones Chapel, where Negroes had worshiped as early as 1865. In 1911, the congregation constructed a new sanctuary at the present location on Cleveland Avenue, and the church was renamed Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church. The cornerstone of the present church edifice was laid during ceremonies on July 30, 1911 with Meridian Lodge No. 34, A.F. and A.M. The present church building, one of three Methodist Episcopal churches constructed in Fairmont in 1911, was dedicated on Sunday, October 10, 1911.



Following the unification of the three largest branches of Methodism, during the period between 1939 and 1965, the name of the church became Trinity Methodist Church (deleting Episcopal), with membership in the Central Jurisdiction, the Washington Conference, and the Charleston (WV) District. In 1964, the Washington Conference was abolished and Trinity became a member of the Northeastern Jurisdiction, West Virginia Conference, and Fairmont District. During that period, the parsonage at 11 Spence Street was sold. A parsonage (112 High Street) was purchased and some renovations made. In 1968, the church name was changed to Trinity United Methodist Church to reflect the uniting of the Evangelical United Brethren denomination with the Methodist denomination. In 1977, the church sanctuary was remodeled, with new carpet and pews being installed. In 1983, new light fixtures were installed and the vestibule was remodeled.

Since its organization in 1869, Trinity has been an important voice in the community and in the life of the Christian church. In 1978, Trinity received recognition for its leadership and contributions when it was named a Co-Church of the year by the WVUM Conference. In 1979, Trinity organized and hosted the reunion of the abolished Washington Conference Board of Education. It was a glorious occasion. Trinity continues to be concerned and involved in the struggles against hunger, racism, economic oppression, spiritual depression, educational deprivation, political apathy, defeatist attitudes, and poor self-esteem. The present-day members and worshipers, through the examples of former members, remain dedicated to the Christian vision held by those Charter members and by all of those who have called Trinity their Church home.

These are interesting times in which we live, and we remain anchored deep in God's love and care. We face the future with a clarity of vision, with confidence that we can and shall work, tirelessly and deliberately, for God's Kingdom, with faith and trust in our God "who hast brought us thus far on our way." Trinity boldly accepts the challenge of the future, with the strength of the past to push us on!

## Waldon United Methodist Church, Piedmont, Potomac Highlands District



In January 1888, Trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church bought land for the church for \$150. They built a one-room wooden building on the Water Street lot. The deed stated the property would be "used, kept and maintained as a place of worship," and so it has. The church was in the Washington Conference that had been created in 1864 for African American churches.

Waldon was a part of the Central Jurisdiction, created with the 1939 merger, until the 1968 merger when it became a part of the West Virginia Conference. In 1980 it became a part of the Piedmont Charge with Trinity Church across town. Over the years, bathrooms, a kitchen, porch and entrance areas were added. Since then the church has been updated with painting, paneling, heating and cooling systems, new pews, a communion table, piano, and an outside sign.

A mini park is adjacent to Waldon Church. It provides area for numerous activities. The pavilion on that spot is the setting for many gatherings throughout the year. The Waldon Cemetery, adjacent to Philos Cemetery in Westernport, MD, was purchased about the same time as the church property. It was a wilderness, but through the labor of many people it was revived and is today a very presentable burial ground. Since becoming part of a charge with Trinity Church across town, the congregation has been served by several pastors.

# Racial Justice Conversations Guide

*Provided by General Commission on Religion and Race*

*Are you seeking ways to engage others in difficult, but important, conversations—such as the topic of white privilege and/or racial inequality? The following resources are intended to help get you started and create building blocks for additional work.*

## Suggested Opening Prayer

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears, it is indeed YOU that have brought us thus far. As we gather together to discuss important, but difficult, challenges such as white privilege and racial inequality, make us mindful of the gift of life in spite of the hate present in the world.

Remind us of the goodness of people in spite of the sins that we commit against one another—sins that come from brokenness and our own inability to see you reflected in each another. Forgive us, God, for the ways in which we have been complicit in creating anything other than the Beloved Community. Make us ever mindful to do the work of justice and be a body of peace in this world—a world ripped apart by conflict, war, famine, violence, guns, racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, ageism, genocide, poverty, and privilege.

This, THIS is a new day you have given us. May we begin again and recommit ourselves to removing barriers where we find them—on state houses and in prisons, on mountaintops and in classrooms, on continents and in churches.

We pray to you on this day and all the days ahead to keep us forever in the path.

Amen. – Adapted from a prayer created by Rev. Amy Stapleton

## Scripture Lesson

Luke 10:30-37 (The Parable of the Good Samaritan)

This parable is packed with invisible truths of our lives.

- How do we identify the ‘neighbor’ in our own lives?
- How do personal prejudices or cultural norms determine the actions we take?
- How can we relate this parable to stories in our present culture?
- How can we encourage a response of hospitality to all in and outside of our churches and communities?

## Questions for Reflection

- Why is it important for white people to talk to one another about racial inequality and unearned privilege?
- How does the Holy Bible address racial/ethnic/cultural differences in biblical times? (Who was privileged and who was “the other” in the Old and New Testaments?)
- What teachings of Jesus might be helpful to recall as we discuss our own white privilege?
- Everyone has a story shared journey. What has shaped and informed your sense of difference and understandings of race?
- Where can we identify signs of hope as we begin to recognize the presence of God—and our very selves—in those whom we deny equal access?

## Next Steps

- Provide participants with pieces of paper and pens. Invite them to write down at least one way in which they will commit to working toward racial healing, justice, and racial equality. Ask everyone to place his or her commitment statements in a shared container or the middle of the table.
- Ask the group to join in a prayer over these personal commitments.
- Invite everyone to reflect on what they discovered during this journey toward truth and wholeness
- Establish a time to reconvene and build upon the work that was created today.

### Suggested Ground Rules

#### Do No Harm

- ✓ Think before you speak.
- ✓ Beware of judging yourself and others harshly and unfairly.

#### Do Good

- ✓ Own your thoughts and beliefs by using “I” statements.
- ✓ Listen with a compassionate and curious heart to others especially when their experience and views are different.

#### Stay in Love with God

- ✓ Pray for one another and this gathering.
- ✓ Be faithful in word and deed to your commitment to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

For additional resources, visit:

[www.gcorr.org](http://www.gcorr.org)



*By Mike Hickox*

Because of an amazing initiative of the Methodist Church's communication agency, TRAFCO, in 1965, and of United Methodist Communications in 1968, much of the history of the 1960s has been preserved in the words and voices of so many who made that history.

In 1968, UMCom found Del Shields, a jazz disc jockey, and made him host of the "Night Call" radio program, which was aired live, five nights a week, on stations across the country. Shields was also president of the Black radio announcers organization. The reel-to-reel tapes were found, just four or five years ago, in a back room at the United Methodist General Commission on Archives and History in Madison, New Jersey.

I have digitized GCAH tapes for almost ten years, and audio for many other faith groups as well. The process continues, and GCAH sends me eight more tapes every month to add to the collection. When I'm done digitizing, it will all be given to GCAH – the digital files, the database, and the website – for them to preserve and continue to make available.

In the meantime, all 1,025+ audio programs can be heard, at no cost and with no signup, on [SoundTheology.org](http://SoundTheology.org). I continue to digitize tapes to save the voices of the mainline church. The preponderance of the programs are Methodist and United Methodist, although many other faith groups are also well represented.

The significance of the collection during Black History Month is that both Civil Rights and Methodist Church figures are prominent in the SoundTheology collection. This website page focuses specifically on programs in this area: [soundtheology.org/civil-rights](http://soundtheology.org/civil-rights).

It is a great privilege to save these audio programs from the inevitable failure of audio tapes. It is an honor to make it all available for students and others to hear.

SoundTheology.org creates no revenue. It is specifically and only a way to allow this historic audio to benefit current and future generations. It is fascinating to hear important people in the history of the church and the nation speak their minds at the time they were dealing with significant issues.

For a complete history, read Mike's full article on the Conference Website.

Mike is the communication director at the Society of St. Andrew national office in Virginia can be reached at [mike@hickox.us](mailto:mike@hickox.us).

# CALENDAR

**Conference Event Highlights** - The role of the Conference Calendar is to share the event and business of conference level agencies and ministries.

## March

- 10-11** John Wesley's Understanding of Salvation (John XXIII)
- 11** MonValley Lay Servant Academy
- 16-19** United Methodist Women Spiritual Growth Retreat
- 17-19** Course of Study
- 31-1** Reaching New People (Grace)

## April

- 21-22** Reaching New People (Warwood)
- 29-May 6** Pastoral Ministry Licensing School

For full details and event locations, visit the conference calendar online at [wvumc.org/events](http://wvumc.org/events)

## We Remember

- Patricia James** died Thursday, November 3, 2016.
- Christopher Mace** died Saturday, November 5, 2016.
- Freda Auvil** died Friday, November 25, 2016.
- Mildred Altizer**, died Friday, December 2, 2016.
- Jonas Johnson** died Sunday, December 19, 2016.
- Millard "Gene" Kirby** died Tuesday, January 17, 2017.

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## 2017 Celebration of Mission Events



*An opportunity for all persons and churches to present the fruits of their faith, labors and commitment to support of our United Methodist Mission Projects, Church and Community Ministries and Volunteers in Mission.*

For a complete description of each Conference Mission Project, read the December Circuit:

<https://issuu.com/wvumc/docs/decembermag>

[www.wvumc.org/COME](http://www.wvumc.org/COME)