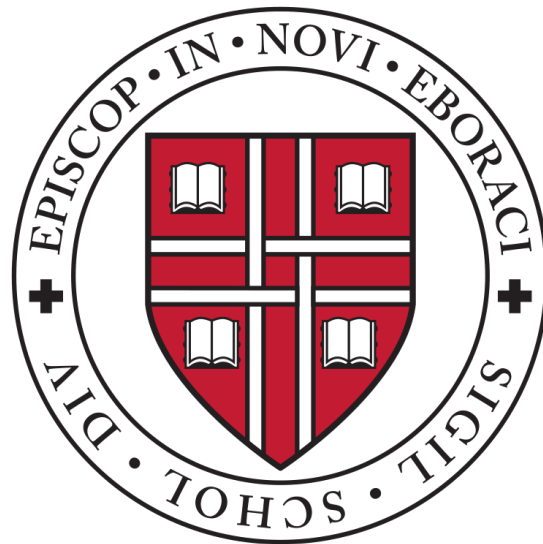


Honoring Ceremony of
RUBY NELL SALES '98
AND "PASSING OF THE TORCH"
COMMISSIONING



Episcopal Divinity School

*A seminary reimagined for a
changing church and world*

Friday, May 29, 2026

ST. JOHN'S CHAPEL

99 Brattle St, Cambridge, MA 02138

Concerning the Service

This evening's Honoring Ceremony of Ruby Nell Sales '98 and "Passing of the Torch" Commissioning is a historic event and sacred invitation for generations of leaders to come together to commit to the building of social justice movements for today that reclaim our humanity and restore our relationships with God, each other, and all of creation. We honor the work of Dr. Ruby Nell Sales, whose life's calling has been that of a Freedom Fighter and nurturer of intergenerational community and human compassion. This service is an intentional act of holy remembering and sacred transmission. The ceremony will feature a formal commissioning ritual, in which the Very Rev. Lydia Kelsey Bucklin, President and Dean of Episcopal Divinity School, will invite leaders of every generation to carry the freedom flame of Dr. Ruby Nell Sales and her fellow Freedom Fighters, as we commit to working for justice across the country.

About Episcopal Divinity School (EDS)

EDS is a seminary reimagined for a changing church and world. Grounded in the liberating love of Jesus, EDS offers leaders opportunities for critical theological reflection on pressing issues of the day and skills for leadership in their communities. From the Passing of the Torch ceremony to the annual Kellogg Lecture, from our intensive classes to drop-in webinars, our offerings encourage deep reflection and build capacity for creative forms of justice-oriented leadership.

We would like to offer sincere thanks to Dr. Ruby Nell Sales, Ms. Cheryl Blankenship, Ms. Nancy Talbot, Ms. Irma Weeks, and the EDS Staff for their support in coordinating, planning, and supporting this event.

Processional Music

Dr. Melanie Hill

Dr. Melanie Hill is a professor of Global Racial Justice and American Literature at Rutgers University, an author, and classically-trained Gospel Soul Violinist.

Freedom Song

Dr. Ana Hernández '05

Dr. Ana Hernández is a gifted composer, arranger, multi-instrumentalist, and workshop facilitator, especially in the arenas of sacred music, chant, and liturgy.

Woke Up This Morning With My Mind Stayed on Freedom

by Reverend Robert Wesby

Woke up this morning with my mind stayed on freedom x 3
Hallelu, hallelu, hallelujah.

I'm walking and talking with my mind stayed on freedom x 3
Hallelu, hallelu, hallelujah.

Walk, walk, walk, walk...
Talk, talk, talk, talk...

Ain't no harm to keep your mind stayed on freedom x3
Hallelu, hallelu, hallelujah.

The Opening Prayers

The Rev. Dr. Kenneth Dukes and Mr. Yusuf Salaam, Esq.

The Rev. Dr. Dukes is Senior Pastor of Holly Grove Baptist Church in Jemison Alabama (Ruby's hometown) and a dedicated Civil Rights Leader who participated in the Shelby v. Holder case in 2013. Rev. Dukes is currently active in city government and the state NAACP.

Mr. Yusuf Salaam, Esq. is a civil rights attorney, served as the first Muslim State Representative in Alabama, former Selma City Council President Pro Tem, and brother of Ruby Sales.

The Welcome and Opening Words

The Very Rev. Lydia Kelsey Bucklin '15, is President and Dean of Episcopal Divinity School (EDS) and the Rt. Rev. Matthew Heyd is Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of New York and Chair of the Board of Trustees for EDS.

Reading & Musical Reflection

The Rev. Michelle Armster

The Rev. Michelle Armster is Executive Director for Mennonite Central Committee Central States and Chair of SpiritHouse Project Board. Rev. Armster is an expert in restorative justice and conflict transformation who integrates song and drama into her ministerial work.

“My World Was Black: An Ode and Memorial to My Freedom
Loving Ancestors Whose Voices I Hear In My Head Everyday”

by Dr. Ruby Sales '98

Reflections

Mr. Ujjayyi Lifeflower, Esq.

A former Electrical Engineer, Attorney, and Vice President for Intellectual Property at Hughes Electronics, Ujjayyi Lifeflower is Ruby Sales' brother, and presently teaches yoga and spiritual practice.

The Rev. Traci D. Blackmon

A renowned public theologian and former White House advisor under President Obama, Rev. Blackmon is the founder of Faith Out-Loud!, an ecosystem dedicated to global justice and communal thriving.

Ms. Carol Jenkins

An Emmy-winning news anchor and host of Black America on CUNY TV, Carol Jenkins is a pioneering journalist and the Founding President of The Women's Media Center and former President/CEO and current Board Chair Emerita of the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment) Coalition.

The Rev. Dr. Malik JoDavid Sales

The Rev. Dr. Sales is an ordained itinerant elder in the AME church and earned a PhD in Systematic Theology. The Rev. Dr. Sales serves as the pastor of Brookins AME Church and is a professor at St. Mary's College of California.

The Rev. Dr. Iva E. Carruthers

General Secretary Emerita of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, the Rev. Dr. Carruthers is a distinguished sociologist and theologian who has influenced national policy on technology and social justice.

Musical Reflection

Ms. Bettie Mae Fikes

Bettie Mae Fikes, known as "The Voice of Selma," is a celebrated icon of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. A founding member of the Selma Free Voices, she performed extensively with the SNCC Freedom Singers and later established a successful career as a prominent blues and gospel vocalist.

Announcement of Upcoming EDS Fellowship

The Rev. Canon Kelly Brown Douglas, PhD and the Rev. Brandon T. Crowley, PhD

The Rev. Canon Kelly Brown Douglas, PhD is Canon Theologian at the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine as well as the Washington National Cathedral, Former Dean of Episcopal Divinity School, and incoming EDS Distinguished Scholar. The Rev. Brandon T. Crowley, PhD serves as Director of Theological Education at Episcopal Divinity School and Senior Pastor of the Historic Myrtle Baptist Church.

Announcement of Commissioned Artwork

Ms. Gale Fulton Ross

A modern master of painting, portraiture, and sculpture, Gale Fulton Ross has spent over fifty years as a prolific artist and passionate voice of the Black experience in America.

PASSING OF THE TORCH

The Rev. Dr. Susan K. Smith with the Very Rev. Lydia Kelsey Bucklin '15

An ordained minister and an activist, Rev. Susan is currently the Director of Clergy and Leadership Development for the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, the founder of Crazy Faith Ministries, and has worked with the Poor People's Campaign in Ohio as a tri-chair.

Litany: You Have Called Us By Name

Leader In the beginning was God, who created everything that had been created. We are all included in God's masterpiece.

People **From the beginning, God purposely created with diversity in mind; God's world would be one that showed God's majesty and creative genius.**

Leader God did not create with a hierarchy of relevance or importance in mind. In all species of life, including humans, God insisted that there be differences, so that the beauty of the expanse of God's holiness would be obvious to everyone.

People **From the beginning, God created with diversity in mind. God's world would be one that showed God's majesty and creative genius.**

Leader Because God created us, God loved us all, but God knew that we, God's beloved children, would struggle against evil thrown our way by powers and principalities and so God reassured us. God said, "When you pass through the waters I will be with you, and when you pass through the rivers, they shall not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

People **God said, "Do not fear. I have summoned you by name."**

Leader God's calling us by name gave us dignity and a fierce demand that we be treated with dignity.

People **God said, "Do not fear. I have called you by name."**

Leader And so God's people, created with different colors of skin, grades of hair, and body types, despite living in different climates and members of different cultures, began to co-exist, and in their co-existence, began to notice the differences of others. They made decisions about each other that did not come from God. To God, we were all precious; to some of God's children, some of us were inhuman and unworthy of respect.

People **God said, "Do not fear. I have called you by name."**

Leader As some humans dehumanized other humans, some rose up, strengthened by the beauty of holiness that God put in us all, and said, "No!"

People **God said, "Do not fear. I have called you by name."**

Leader By name, they worked and fought. Their names were Ida B. Wells Barnett, Frederick Douglass, WEB Dubois, Bobby Seale, Thurgood Marshall, Rosa Parks, Claudette Colvin, Angela Davis, Richard Morrisroe, Vincent Harding, Rosemarie Freeney Harding, Dorothy Cotton, Ruby Sales.

People **God said, “Do not fear; I have called you by name.**

Leader Their names were Jonathan Daniels, John Lewis, CT Vivian, Walter White, Fannie Lou Hamer, Clarence A. Bacote, Toni Morrison, Langston Hughes, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcom X, JoAnn Bland, Amelia Boynton, Isaac Woodard, Mary McLeod Bethune, Medgar Evers, Diane Nash, Ella Baker, Viola Luizzo, and Gloria Richardson.

People **God said, “Do not fear; I have called you by name.**

Leader We praise God for creating us – diverse yet with a commonality about us. We praise God for putting within us all a fire for justice and dignity that no oppression has been able to quell or kill. We praise God that even now, as the forces of white supremacy are rising up, working as hard as they can to steal our rights and our determination to have full citizenship, we know that they are no match for You, who created us all.

People: **God said, “Do not fear. I have called you by name.**

Leader The elder activists who have not made their transition are still on the battlefield of injustice. They are not afraid; they know you have called them by name.

People **God said, “Do not fear. I have called you by name,” and we thank You for that!**

Leader As we pass through the waters, as we face raging rivers of injustice, racism, sexism, heterosexism, and all opposition to us reaching the Promised Land of liberty and justice for all, as we walk through the fires of hatred, we will remember, God, as all who have passed before us had to remember, that we are anointed and protected.

People **We are all your children. You will be with us. You have called us by name. Amen.**

Laying on of Hands and Commissioning of Younger Leaders

The Very Rev. Lydia Kelsey Bucklin '15 will call each Younger Leader by name to come forward for the laying on of hands and commissioning.

Commissioning the Body out into the World

Please rise in body or in spirit.

The Rev. Jamar A. Boyd, II, the Rev. Mariama White-Hammond, and the Very Rev. Lydia Kelsey Bucklin '15

The Rev. Jamar A. Boyd, II is the pastor of Kenwood United Church of Christ in Chicago and as an Associate at the MacArthur Foundation. His work sits at the intersection of faith, philanthropy, and systemic justice.

The founding pastor of New Roots AME Church and former Chief of Environment for the City of Boston, Rev. Mariama White-Hammond is a celebrated advocate for ecological justice, youth engagement, and intersectional social activism.

Closing Song of Justice: *We Shall Overcome*

Dr. Ana Hernández '05

We shall overcome
We shall overcome
We shall overcome, some day
Oh, deep in my heart,
I do believe
We shall overcome, some day.

We'll walk hand in hand/We shall live in peace/We shall all be free/We are not afraid

Benediction

The Very Rev. Lydia Kelsey Bucklin '15



DR. RUBY NELL SALES '98

Black Folk Theologian, Historian, Activist, Social Critic, and Educator

Ruby Nell Sales '98, looks at her work as a calling rather than a career. She answered the call to social justice as a teenager at Tuskegee Institute where she joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and worked on voter registration in Lowndes County, Alabama.'

Sales received a B.A. degree from Manhattanville College and attended graduate school at Princeton University. Sales received a Master of Divinity degree from the Episcopal Divinity School where she was an Absalom Jones Scholar. While there, she developed a reputation as a preacher and has preached at churches and cathedrals around the nation. After divinity school, she founded and still directs a national nonprofit organization, the SpiritHouse Project.

As a social justice activist, Sales' work is cited in several books, journal articles and films such as Taylor Branch's *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years 1965-68*; *Broken Ground: A Film on Race Relations in the South*; Dan Rather's *American Dream Segment*; and *Blood Brother: Jonathan Daniels and His Sacrifice for Civil Rights* by Rich and Sandra Neil Wallace. Sales was one of the founders of *SAGE Magazine: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women*. As a social critic, Sales has published works in several journals, newspapers and magazines and is a frequent guest on Sirius XM Radio's *Inside the Issues* with Dr. Wilmer Leon. Sales was keynote speaker at a gathering of nationally renown theologians to discuss "Public Theology Reimagined" hosted by and later broadcast on the NPR program, *On Being* with Krista Tippett. In 2022, Sales was spotlighted in the exhibit, "Who Is Queen?," by Adam Pendleton at both the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum in New York City. Additionally, Sales is a subject in Sam Pollard's newly released film (2022), *Lowndes County: The Road to Black Power*.

Sales has received numerous awards and honors. She was selected and honored as a Veteran of Hope by Vincent G. Harding in 2004 and taught a class with him at Morehouse College on "After the March on Washington" in 2012. She continues to write and observe on Movement History. Sales became a national HistoryMaker (www.HistoryMaker.com) in 2009. In August 2013, Sales was awarded the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference Living Legacies Civil Rights Recognition Award. In 2014, she was inducted into the Morehouse College Martin Luther King Jr. Board of Preachers and became a recipient of the Beautiful Are Their Feet Award from the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference. In May 2015, Sales received an Honorary Doctorate Degree from West Chester University in Pennsylvania. Sales was honored with the national Martin Luther King, Jr. Peace Award from the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) at their centennial celebration in November 2015. An oral history of Sales is housed at the Library of Congress, and she was selected as one of fifty African Americans from the Civil Rights Movement to be spotlighted in the Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC which opened September 2016. Sales was also one of the honorees of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) spotlighted at the opening of the new

National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration in April 2018 in Montgomery, Alabama. In February 2019, TED.com released Sales' TED Talk entitled, "How we can start to heal the pain of racial division."

Sales has made the struggle for racial justice one of the centerpieces of her work through the SpiritHouse Project. Since 2007, she has worked to expose the state sanctioned deaths of African Americans by White police, security guards and vigilantes by compiling a national database on these events; offering spiritual, financial and organizational support to families; and by exposing these activities through church and community meetings, forums, and press conferences around the nation. In fall 2014, she co-sponsored a Teach In / Preach In with the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Eden Seminary and Christ the King Church in St. Louis, Missouri in response to the police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. During the spring of 2015, she organized a Teach-In in Philadelphia which exposed the Means and Tools of Oppression that plague most communities of color. In March 2016, Sales and SpiritHouse Project organized a national Day of Action in Washington, DC entitled, *Stop the War on Our Children*, during which women from around the nation gathered to acknowledge young victims of state sanctioned violence with a silent procession from the White House to the US Capitol, a public hearing hosted by Dr. Wilmer Leon, and the delivery of caskets containing the names of victims to key Senate, House and Supreme Court leadership. In the summer of 2020, Sales was a guest on the podcast, *The Way of Love*, with the Most Rev. Michael Curry, former Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. Her message was entitled "Going Where It Hurts." During 2021, Sales led a Lenten Bible Study with clergy and lay people of the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania entitled "Bread for the Journey" and a training for racial justice with clergy and lay people of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern California. In May 2025, Sales received the Audre Lorde Wisdom Award from the National Black Justice Collective to honor her exceptional contributions to community and unwavering commitment to advancing liberation and freedom.

Recognizing a need to nurture the hope that still resides in young people as well as to revive an intergenerational community and human compassion, in 2016 the SpiritHouse Project introduced Hope Zones.™ They are alternative learning spaces designed to strengthen the hope, courage, reason and will of young people to individually and collectively stand up for themselves with dignity, clarity and nonviolent persistence. Hope Zones™ are sanctuary sites of learning, intergenerational connection and community formation which offer diverse communities an opportunity to work toward the common goal of advancing democracy and non-violence. Funded by the Duke Endowment, she worked to develop Racial Justice Cafes in North and South Carolina.

Sales continues to speak with community groups as well as teach and preach at colleges, universities, churches and cathedrals around the United States. For an in-depth understanding of Sales' worldview, listen to her interview with Krista Tippett, "Where Does It Hurt," and her TedTalk.

PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS



Lydia Kelsey Bucklin

The Very Rev. Lydia Kelsey Bucklin is President and Dean of the Episcopal Divinity School. Before joining EDS, Bucklin was Canon to the Ordinary in the Episcopal Diocese of Northern Michigan (2018-2024). She also served as Missioner to two Mutual Ministry congregations in the diocese. Previously, she spent eleven years in the Episcopal Diocese of Iowa, focusing on Children, Youth, and Young Adult Ministry, Communications, Congregational Development, and New Leadership Development (2007-2018).

Ordained as an Episcopal priest in 2015, Bucklin holds a master's degree in ministry from Episcopal Divinity School (2015) and a master's degree in social work with a specialization in Social Policy & Evaluation and Community and Social Systems. She was a Seeds Project Fellow for Faithful Innovation at Luther Seminary (2021-2022).

Bucklin has consulted with congregations and leadership across the Episcopal Church in areas of redevelopment, collaborative ministry, and emerging church, including the dioceses of Alaska, Southern Virginia, Navajoland, Massachusetts, the Gathering of Leaders, and Episcopal Church Foundation.

Rev. Bucklin is deeply committed to justice-oriented theology and collaborative ecclesiology. Her leadership is characterized by a strong emphasis on community engagement, reparations and healing with Indigenous communities, and social justice advocacy, reflecting her belief in honoring each individual's gifts in ministry. She lives in Northern Michigan with her spouse Brandon who teaches at Northern Michigan University and their children Isla (14) and Corson (10).

Melanie Hill

Melanie R. Hill is Assistant Professor of American Literature in the Department of English at Rutgers University, Newark, with specializations in African American Literature, Music, and Womanist Theology. Dr. Hill received her Ph.D. in English Literature with two graduate certificates in Africana Studies and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from the University of Pennsylvania, a Master's degree from the University of Pennsylvania, a second Master's degree in Literature from George Mason University, and a B.A. in English with a minor in Spanish from the University of Virginia.

Dr. Hill's new book, *Colored Women Sittin' on High: Womanist Sermonic Practice in Literature and Music* (UNC Press) explores the literary and musicological histories of Black women preachers. Dr. Hill is also a classically-trained, professional Gospel Soul violinist who has performed in concert at the White House on two occasions under the Obama administration and for the Papal Mass of the late Pope Francis.

Ana Hernández

Ana Hernández is a composer, recording artist, song and retreat leader, activist, and facilitator creating tunes to help us to be present as we build loving and just community through skillful action. She teaches chanting as a spiritual practice, to bind us together and strengthen community ties across cultural differences. Her focus is on racial justice as deep inner work, while her activism is grounded in contemplative practice presence.

Ana believes deeply that there is a leader in every chair and that God welcomes absolutely everybody. The author of the soon-to-be-released print collection *Hope My Hope: Songs of Ana Hernandez* (augsburgfortress.org), and *The Sacred Art of Chant: Preparing to Practice* (SkylightPaths/Turner, 2005).

Ana's albums may be heard on Apple Music, Subvert, and all the socials. Search for Ana Hernandez, *Banquet of Love*, *Sending You Light*, *The Miserable Offenders: God Help U; Keepin' the Baby Awake*; *HARC: Inside Chants*; *Blessed By Light* (with Ruth Cunningham), and *Eternal Spirit* (w/ Sr. Helena Marie, chs), and *An Unexpected Christmas*, with the Virginia Girls Choir.

Her songs and chants are published in Lutheran, Episcopal, Mennonite, Unitarian Universalist, and United Church of Canada hymnals.

For more info and schedule: www.anahernandez.org To hear about all the things, visit: patreon.com/anahernandez

Kenneth E. Dukes

Rev. Dr. Kenneth Dukes is a faithful servant of God, devoted husband, loving father, pastor, and community leader. A lifelong resident of Montevallo, Alabama, he and his wife, Mari Dukes, are the proud parents of four children: Eboni, Elissha, Donnie, and Erin. He currently serves as Senior Pastor of Holly Grove Baptist Church in Jemison, Alabama, where he is committed to preaching the Gospel, strengthening families, and encouraging God's people through sound teaching and compassionate leadership.

Rev. Dr. Dukes has been blessed to serve in many areas of ministry and leadership. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Pastoral Studies from Birmingham Baptist Bible College in 2008, a Bachelor of Advanced Theology in 2012, and a Doctor of Divinity in 2023. In 2008, he was appointed Dean of the Shelby Extension of Birmingham Baptist Bible College. Beyond the pulpit, he has faithfully served his community through civic and civil rights leadership, including service on the Montevallo City Council and as President of the Shelby County Branch of the NAACP. For more than 30 years, he has remained committed to uplifting others and advancing justice throughout Alabama. Rev. Dr. Dukes stands firmly on the belief, "We Serve God by Serving People."

Yusuf Salaam

Yusuf Abdus Salaam, the brother of Ruby Sales, was born Joseph Arthur Sales to Rev. Sgt. Joe Sales and Ms. Willie Mae Sales Griffin at Ft. Benning hospital in Ft. Benning, GA. He entered public school in 1954, the year of *Brown v. the Board of Education*. He graduated the year of Black Power in 1966 from Carver High School where he was President of the student body.

Yusuf enrolled at the University of GA in the Fall of 1966 and graduated with an AB in History and a minor in Black Studies. During his tenure at UGA, he organized the first Black Student Union and Students for a Democratic Society. He had a tremendous impact on campus life at the university. While there, he also met and later married his wife of 55 years, the Honorable Khayriyyah Salaam. He and his wife Khayriyyah have five children.

In 1968, Yusuf was selected at 20 years old to become a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, IL. Later that year, he was featured in an article in the *New York Times* by Charlayne Hunter Gault. Yusuf enrolled at the University of Miami Law School where he became chairman and president of the National Black Law Students Association.

Additionally, he was the first student of color to receive the book award for the highest achievement in Constitutional Law. He pursued further graduate studies at the University of Wisconsin Law School where he received an LLM and served as the Associate Dean. Yusuf was appointed an Associate Professor of Law at the Syracuse University College of Law in NY. Thereafter, he worked as Visiting Professor of Law at the Thurgood Marshall College of Law at Southern University in Houston, TX. In 1984, Yusuf was hired as the Staff Attorney for Legal Aid, and he and his family moved to Selma, AL.

Yusuf has been a legal practitioner in historic Selma, AL to the present. In recognition of his work, Yusuf received the MLK Community Service Award and founded the Selma Islamic Center. Salaam served on the City Council and served as Mayor Pro Tem of the city from 1992 – 2000. In this capacity, he helped organize the Jonathan Daniels Community Development Corporation which brought in \$120 million in resources to the city.

In 2002, he was elected and served as the first Muslim to be in the AL State Senate. Yusuf retired from electoral politics in 2010. He continues his work on behalf of the communities and peoples of Alabama as a commentator, a community organizer, and an interfaith community leader. He worked closely with John Lewis to start the organization, Faith and Politics. In 2021, he initiated the John Robert Lewis Black Belt Development Corporation. Their program envisions a new model of socio-spiritual development from Phenix City, Alabama to the Mississippi state line in a movement to revitalize the AL Blackbelt. His journey reflects a continuous life of service!

Matthew Heyd

The Rt. Rev Matthew Heyd was installed as the seventeenth bishop of New York on Saturday, Feb 10, 2024. Bishop Heyd's ministry is focused on the renewal of the church for the healing of the world through the congregations, chaplaincies, and schools of the Diocese of New York. Together, the Diocese is re-weaving its pastoral fabric around its local communities, re-structuring to care for clergy and support congregations. The Holy Spirit moves at ground level. The Diocese has also organized and spoken out in support of immigration and LGBTQ+ rights. It is a sanctuary diocese, providing safety, belonging, and freedom across its local communities.

Bishop Heyd is chair of the Board of Trustees for Episcopal Divinity School. In addition to serving on the EDS Board, he has also served as chair of the Board of the Absalom Jones Center for Racial Healing in Atlanta.

Prior to his election as bishop, Bishop Heyd served for ten years as the tenth rector of Church of the Heavenly Rest in New York City, which was consecrated in 1868 to be a community for reconciliation and peace. As rector, he engaged with the congregation and staff to create a “bigger table” of deep belonging and wide invitation. Bishop Heyd also served as director of Faith in Action at Trinity Church Wall Street where he was the third director of the global Trinity Grants Program. He expanded volunteer engagement with opportunities for children in New York City, New Orleans, Haiti, Panama, and Burundi. He helped launch Episcopal Charities in the Diocese of New York. He supported the development of the Episcopal Service Corps and served as chief operating officer of a national nonprofit connecting students and teachers in schools to service opportunities. He served as the founding board chair of the Community Learning School initiative in New York City — a collaboration of business, labor, and the

faith community to strengthen public schools. He was board president of the Consortium of Endowed Episcopal Parishes, now The Episcopal Parish Network. Bishop Heyd led a successful funding campaign on behalf of Presiding Bishop Michael Curry for reconciliation with the Episcopal Church in Cuba. He also worked with the family of Martin Luther King Jr. on a program to help students celebrate the King National Holiday with service.

Bishop Heyd grew up in Charlotte, NC where he graduated from Providence Day School. He was a Morehead Scholar and student body president at the University of North Carolina. Bishop Heyd holds a Master of Arts in religion summa cum laude from Yale University and a Master of Sacred Theology from The General Theological Seminary.

Bishop Heyd is married to Ann Thornton, who is Vice Provost and University Librarian at Columbia University. They have an eighteen-year old daughter and a fourteen-year-old son. Bishop Heyd likes to read and run and has completed five marathons.

Michelle Armster

Michelle E. Armster serves as the Chair of the Spirit House Project Board and the Executive Director of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Central States, where she has dedicated over 20 years of transformative service. Throughout her tenure with MCC, she has held several influential leadership roles, including Director of the Mennonite Conciliation Service (MCS) and Co-Director of the Office on Justice and Peacebuilding. In these capacities, she has provided comprehensive resourcing, consulting, and training to churches, agencies, and communities, equipping them with the tools needed to navigate conflict and pursue healing. Her work has made a lasting impact across faith communities and civic organizations alike.

Michelle brings a deep and multifaceted expertise to every space she enters. She has accumulated extensive training and hands-on experience in mediation, facilitation, conciliation, restorative justice, arbitration, victim/offender mediation, anti-racism work, and alternatives to violence. This breadth of knowledge reflects her unwavering commitment to building just and peaceful communities, and she is widely regarded as a trusted voice in conflict transformation and restorative practices at both the local and national levels.

Her leadership extends well beyond her professional roles. Michelle holds a Master of Divinity from Lancaster Theological Seminary (2007) and is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Ministry (D.Min.) at Berkeley School of Theology, where she continues to deepen her theological and practical foundations. She has served her community with great faithfulness in pastoral ministry, including 4½ years as co-pastor of St. Andrew United Church of Christ and 2 years as Associate Pastor for Community Outreach at Blossom Hill Mennonite Church, both in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Her commitment to service is further reflected in her board involvement with the Lancaster YWCA, SpiritHouse, Inc., the Lancaster Mediation Center, and the Lancaster NAACP. She currently serves as the Presiding Elder of The Council of Elders (TCOE) for Sedgwick County (Wichita, KS).

Michelle is equally a creative soul whose artistry enriches every dimension of her life and work. She has written and performed powerful, dramatic, and musical pieces that bring to life the lived experiences of 19th-century African American women who were icons of religious and social liberation — honoring their legacies while speaking truth to the present. With a love of creative writing, acting, and singing, Michelle believes that art and justice are not separate callings but deeply intertwined expressions of the same spirit.

Ujjayyi Lifeflower (Michael Sales)

Ujjayyi (Michael) is the 4th of 5 Sales siblings and Ruby Sales' brother. A lifelong prodigious reader, he graduated from Carver High School in 1968 as valedictorian, winning a full scholarship to the University of Notre Dame in Electrical Engineering. After graduation, he became the first Black engineer with Georgia Power Company in 1972. After finishing law school in 1977, with honors from the University of Miami, he integrated the law department of Duke Power Company. Following successive jobs as a patent attorney, he finished his career as VP for Intellectual Property with Hughes Electronics/DIRECTV in 2004.

Ujjayyi grew up Baptist; and later read the Quran extensively. In 1988 he committed to Nichiren Buddhism as propagated by Soka Gakkai for his daily spiritual practice. Yoga followed in 2003, and by the time he left law practice, Ujjayyi had become proficient in these disciplines as well as herbology.

On his birthday in 2013 he realized his identity as Ujjayyi Lifeflower and has dedicated himself to life-to-life teaching of chanting, yoga and assisting others with the assurance Life Will Flower. His teaching is unique in quickly bringing the practitioner into a state of "NOT" through chanting in their very first session. This allows awareness of the Life in them to predominate. Practice in this manner twice a day makes this awareness habitual, then natural. No theology or scripture is used.

Traci D. Blackmon

Rev. Traci D. Blackmon (Preacher, Public Theologian, Justice Advocate) is the Founder and Lead Catalyst of Faith Out-Loud! - a faith-based ecosystem seeded by the gospel, and rooted in Black Church tradition, to co-labor beneath God's intention for a world where all creation thrives. Whether featured in major publications, preaching in pulpits; protesting injustice, or proclaiming in the public square, Rev. Blackmon's assignment remains the same: to co-labor with the beloved community beneath God's intention for a world where all creation thrives.

Rev. Blackmon served with President Obama's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships for the White House and The Parliament of World Religions, as well as several national boards. She has spoken before international audiences from the Carter Center to the Pontifical Council at the Vatican, and is the recipient of numerous awards and recognitions, including the 33rd class of the Morehouse College Board of Preachers.

Carol Jenkins

Carol Jenkins is an Emmy Award-winning television journalist, author and advocate for equality. As a pioneering reporter, anchor and host, she broke through many barriers to women and people of color in American media, including co-hosting one of the industry's first daily talk shows, Straight Talk, and one of the premiere public affairs programs dedicated to Black Americans, Positively Black. Her equality work includes leadership in the founding of two national women's organizations, The Women's Media Center and the ERA Coalition, as well as the non-profit communications project to end US child poverty, The Invisible Americans Podcast.

Carol is currently the founding host of the award-winning interview program Black America, now in its 11th season of conversations on the City University of New York's television station. The program won a 2025 national Telly Award as Best Interview Program for its interview with filmmaker Spike Lee. She also produced and anchored Black America's two award winning documentaries. More Than a Building: A Dream Come True, the PBS-aired opening of the Smithsonian African American Museum; and the Telly award winning Conscience of America, on the Birmingham Civil Rights Monument established by President Obama. The centerpiece of that historic district is the A.G. Gaston Motel, built by her uncle, which served as headquarters for Martin Luther King, Jr during his momentous desegregation efforts there. Carol is the co-author with her daughter Elizabeth Hines of an award-winning biography of her uncle, Black Titan: A.G. Gaston and the Making of a Black American Millionaire.

Carol had a twenty-five-year career as one of New York City's leading anchors and correspondents at WNBC-TV. Her work included coverage of the historic release of Nelson Mandela from a South African prison, as well as U.S. presidential and New York City politics. After her active years as a reporter, she served as founding president of the Women's Media Center, created by Gloria Steinem, Jane Fonda and Robin Morgan to combat the absence of women as subjects and leaders in the media. While there she created the Progressive Women's Voices project which continues to shape leaders in politics, advocacy and the media. Each year a WMC Carol Jenkins award is given to a woman demonstrating the "powerful and visible" mantra of WMC.

For nearly a decade Carol has worked to amend the U.S. Constitution in roles as both Board Chair and President and CEO of the ERA Coalition. In January of 2025 President Biden declared the ERA "the law of the land," giving the ERA Coalition a major victory. While President and CEO of the ERA Coalition, comprised of some 300 national and local organizations, she testified before the US House Committee on Oversight and Reform about the impoverishment of women and children in America in the absence of an ERA. In May of 2025 she was honored as Chair Emerita of the ERA Coalition.

Among her ongoing projects, Carol is co-founder and co-host of the non-profit media project, now in its fifth season, The Invisible Americans Podcast, raising awareness of the nearly 13 million children in the United States who live in poverty. Among her other commitments, she serves as a board member of the US board of Amref Health Africa, the continent's largest African health organization, serving more than 35 countries.

Among the honors she has recently received—the Forbes Magazine Fifty Over Fifty Impact Award, the Vanguard Award from the Shabazz Center, and Distinguished Alumna Awards from Boston University and New York University. Recent profiles include a NewsDay retrospective, "From Anchor to Activist," a half hour dedicated to her media career and activism on A Slice of New York on CUNY TV and an update on her projects in The New York Amsterdam News.

Carol Jenkins lives in New York City near her two adult children and three grandchildren. She credits her commitment to the pursuit of equality to her Alabama family and birthplace. The family's Lowndes County farm, where she spent her early life, was later the third stopover for the historic 1965 Selma to Montgomery march led by Martin Luther King, Jr and John Lewis. The march led to the Voting Rights Act, often called the most effective civil rights legislation passed by Congress.

JoDavid Sales

Rev. Dr. Malik JoDavid Sales, nephew of Ruby Sales, is a native of Huntsville, AL and a product of St. John AME Church. While attending Xavier University of Louisiana, he accepted his call into the ministry. He graduated Magna cum Laude from Xavier with a B.A. in Theology. After undergrad, Rev. Sales attended Harvard Divinity School, where he earned a Master of Theological Studies. Finally, he concluded his educational preparation at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA, where he earned his Ph.D. in Philosophical and Systematic Theology in 2012. In 2020, he was appointed to the pastoral charge of Brookins AME Church, Oakland. A dynamic preacher and teacher, Pastor Sales seeks to inform, encourage, challenge, and invite folks to an encounter with God in Christ amid the precarity and resiliency of everyday life.

Additionally, Dr. Sales teaches in the Theology and Religious Studies Department of St. Mary's College in Moraga, CA and guest lectures and presents in various settings. Rev. JoDavid recently received a 2024 Compelling Preacher Award from the AMEC Department of Research's "Power of a Wholistic Church Conference." Dr. Sales has also collaborated with Salvation and Social Justice and was honored to serve on the AMEC Council of Bishops Criminal Justice Task Force. Additionally, he continues to serve the AME Church at the conference and district level in various capacities.

Dr. Sales has self-published a novel, published an essay in the edited volume *The Re-Emergence of Liberation Theologies*, loves to blog on www.scifitheologian.com, has contributed as a columnist for *The Christian Recorder*, and continues to write and release music under the artist's name "Jolowmight x Cervantes." He is married to his college sweetheart, Dr. Keedra Sales, and they have two daughters, aka "The Blossom Sisters."

Iva Carruthers

Rev. Dr. Iva E. Carruthers is affiliate faculty member at McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, and co-founder and CEO/General Secretary Emerita of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference (SDPC). She also served as executive director of the Black Theology Project and president of Urban Outreach Foundation. Dr. Carruthers holds a PhD from Northwestern University in sociology and a Master of Theological Studies from Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary. She did post-doctoral studies at the University of Chicago and University of Illinois. She is Professor Emerita and former chairperson of the Sociology Department at Northeastern Illinois University. Founding president of Nexus Unlimited, an information technology firm, she served on the U.S. Presidential Task Force on the Internet and Instructional Technology.

Dr. Carruthers has authored and edited numerous publications in the areas of sociology, technology and theology. She is an esteemed "History Maker," her portrait was unveiled and hangs in the Morehouse School of Religion Chapel. In 2025 she was officially enstooled as Developmental Queen Mother of Cape Coast, Ghana.

Bettie Mae Fikes

Miss Bettie Mae Fikes is a powerful vocalist, storyteller, and civil rights activist whose voice has inspired audiences for decades. Known for her soulful, heartfelt performances, she began singing publicly at an early age and developed a unique ability to connect deeply with listeners through music and testimony. Her warm spirit, humor, and passion for life shine through every song she sings.

A native of Selma, Alabama, Bettie Mae Fikes became widely known as the “Voice of Selma” for her work during the Civil Rights Movement, performing alongside leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rev. Jesse Jackson. She has traveled throughout the country and internationally, sharing messages of hope, justice, faith, and love through music. Whether on stage or in everyday life, Bettie Mae Fikes leaves a lasting impact on all who experience her extraordinary gifts.

Kelly Brown Douglas

The Rev. Canon Kelly Brown Douglas, PhD, is currently Visiting Professor of Theology at Harvard Divinity School. From 2017 to 2023, she was Dean of the Episcopal Divinity School at Union Theological Seminary and Professor of Theology. She was named the Bill and Judith Moyers Chair in Theology at Union in November 2019 where she is now Dean emeritus. She served as Interim President of Episcopal Divinity School from 2023-24. During the 2023 fall term, she served as Honorary Professor of Global Theology at Emmanuel Theological College in Liverpool, England.

Ordained as an Episcopal priest in 1983, Douglas currently serves as the Canon Theologian at Washington National Cathedral, Washington DC, The Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, New York, NY and Anglican Communion Canon at the Newcastle Cathedral in Newcastle, England.

Prior to Episcopal Divinity School at Union Theological Seminary, she served as Professor of Religion at Goucher College where she held the Susan D. Morgan Professorship of Religion and is now Professor Emeritus. Before Goucher, she was Associate Professor of Theology at Howard University School of Divinity (1987-2001) and Assistant Professor of Religion at Edward Waters College (1986-87). Douglas holds a master’s degree in theology and a PhD in systematic theology from Union.

Douglas is the author of many articles and several books including the 2023 Grawemeyer Award winning book, *Resurrection Hope: A Future Where Black Lives Matter*. Her academic work has focused on womanist theology, racial justice issues as well as sexuality and the Black church. Her current research interest involves expanding the moral imaginary in fostering a more just future.

Douglas proudly serves on the New York City Homeless Coalition Board and the Public Religion and Research Institute Board.

Gale Fulton Ross

Gale Fulton Ross is an internationally influenced artist whose career has spanned more than sixty years. Born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1947, her work reflects a rich blend of themes, emotions, memories, and social realities shaped by the world around her. A passionate voice for the Black experience in America, she has devoted her life to creating art that is both deeply personal and universally resonant.

Her artistic ambitions developed early under the influence of her father, Herman Fulton Jr., whose affectionate nickname for her — “Baby Artist” — later became the title of a PBS documentary. Herman, an unsung creative pioneer in the early days of industrial design, inspired his daughter’s imagination through his concept for the Cadillac “fin” while working as a body and fender man at a small Cadillac and Oldsmobile dealership in Malden, Massachusetts. Though his design was recognized, credit was ultimately given to the Design Department of General Motors in Detroit. The frustration and sorrow of those who helped shape American culture while being erased from its history became a lasting undercurrent in Gale Fulton Ross’s work. She took on the role of “Freedom Fighter” at the easel. Her work developed and was born in the 1960’s struggle for Civil Rights.

Choosing experience over formal academic training, Fulton Ross studied with artists throughout France, China, Italy, Africa, and Germany, developing a unique visual language all her own. From figurative and abstract works to sculpture and portraiture, she has evolved from apprentice to modern master, producing a prolific and powerful body of work that continues to expand without limits. She also drew inspiration from influential artists such as Augusta Savage, Gwen Knight, Edmonia Lewis, Charles White, Samella Lewis, Elizabeth Catlett, Romare Bearden, and Jacob Lawrence. Her works can now be found in museums, universities, and private collections throughout the United States.

As her artistic reputation steadily grew, so too did her commitment to supporting other artists. She became an active mentor, arts advocate, and founder of an art foundation dedicated to advancing the careers of mid-career artists. Currently working from her studio in Sarasota, FL she recently completed ten years as Artist in Residence at the Studio Channel Islands Art Center in Camarillo, California.

“Artists labor for the preservation of the human spirit. In a time when so much seems bent on dismantling the very soul of mankind, the artist’s purpose is to protect it, to nourish it, and to remind the world that compassion, creativity, and courage still have a place among us.” -Gale Fulton Ross

Susan K. Smith

The Rev. Dr. Susan K. Smith, the founder of Crazy Faith Ministries in Columbus, Ohio, was formerly the senior pastor of Advent United Church of Christ, where she served for 22 years. She graduated from Occidental College in 1976, where she earned her BA in English literature, and is a 1986 graduate of Yale Divinity School, where she earned her M.Div. She earned her D. Min. from United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, studying under the late Rev. Drs. Samuel Proctor and Charles E. Booth.

Smith now serves as the Director of Clergy and Lay Leadership Resource Development for the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Inc. (SDPC). She also serves as a co-chair of the Minority Outreach Subcommittee of the Nonpartisan Ohio Voter Outreach Committee (NOVOC). A former reporter, Rev. Smith worked for newspapers in Baltimore and Texas before entering seminary. She also served as an associate producer for WJZ News, as an on-air news reporter for WEAA, the radio station affiliated with Morgan State University in Baltimore, and as a talk show host for "Columbus Today," a locally heard radio program in Columbus, and as an on-air political commentator for a news magazine television program, also produced in Columbus.

Following graduation from Yale Divinity School, where she served as the first woman to be president of the student body, Dr. Smith served as associate minister at Trinity United Church of Christ, studying under the Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A Wright, Jr. She served at Trinity for three years before accepting the call to be pastor at Advent UCC. While pastor of Advent United Church of Christ, Rev. Smith concentrated on teaching her members that church is something you do. In addition to outreach ministries to the city's economically dispossessed, Rev. Smith's ministry concentrated on empowering urban youth through an annual summer arts program, which used the arts to instill confidence in those youth who participated. Through arts immersion and concentration as well on reading, writing and math, the camp was successful in helping participating youth to perform better academically during the school year. The church also operated its first Children's Defense Fund Freedom School in 2012, serving 50 children from throughout the city of Columbus. Rev. Smith also served as minister of music at her church for 20 years, as she also served as pastor, producing what some have called a "professional choir" which, in addition to singing in Africa, was invited to sing for professional productions including a promotional performance of "The Lion King," "The Chocolate Nutcracker," and with country singer Lyle Lovett.

Rev. Smith is a past co-president of BREAD, (Building Responsibility, Equity and Dignity), a multi-racial, multi-ethnic social justice organization comprised of over 50 different religious denominations in the city of Columbus. Under her leadership, the organization was instrumental in getting the Ohio Legislature to sign into law a measure which prevented pay day lenders from charging its clients exorbitant interest rates. She was invited to be a presenter in the Oxford Roundtable, an event held at Oxford University in England, where she presented a paper on the tension in America between the United States Constitution and the Holy Bible. She is a past member of the Board of Directors of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Inc., a social justice ministry which seeks to empower churches and ministers in urban settings to deal with the problems they face through training, resource development and acquisition, and changing of public policy and is now the secretary of that board. When the SDPC held hearings after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in Washington, D.C., Houston and New Orleans, Rev. Smith served as lead commissioner. Those hearings resulted in a published report entitled, "The Breach," which was presented to the Congressional Black Caucus. In addition, she was instrumental in completing a report for SDPC on the phenomenon of mass incarceration in the United States, recording the testimony of people and families affected by it in selected cities in different regions of the country. She was recently appointed to the Board of Directors for the League of Women Voters - Ohio, and the Ohio State University Interfaith Council. She served as one of the initial tri-chairs representing Ohio in the Poor

People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival and was the past co-president of the Ohio Religious Coalition for Reproductive Rights. Late in 2017, she organized a Silent March for Justice in the city of Columbus, which attracted over 500 people from the state of Ohio.

Most recently, she was named the first Gordon G. Cosby Seasoned Voices Fellow by the SpiritHouse Project, an organization which has been on the forefront for social justice for decades. She and the founder/director of SpiritHouse, Ruby Sales, worked on a project to expose the extrajudicial murders of black people in the United States for the purpose of sensitizing people on the pervasiveness of the problem and also to encourage citizens to challenge the controversial "stand your ground" laws and police policies which allow these suspicious deaths to go unchallenged. She has made presentations at conferences across the country, including the Sojourners Summit in Washington, DC. and at the Transatlantic Roundtable on Race and Religion. Most recently, she presented a paper at Chautauqua on the failure of the Constitution and the Bible to end racism and was interviewed by veteran journalist Bill Moyers about the subject. She was also the recipient of the Clergy of the Year Award given by Faith in Public Life in Ohio in 2018. The winner of the Wolcott Preaching Prize while at Yale, she has preached nationally and internationally and was recently inducted into the Martin Luther King Jr. College of Ministers and Laity.

Rev. Smith's non-profit, "Crazy Faith Ministries", (www.crazyfaithministries.org) aims to unpack and teach the concept of faith in a way which will empower people and enable them to reach far beyond what they believed themselves able to do. She has also formed a "Freedom Choir, devoted to teaching the message of justice through music. She is the author of eight books, *Carla and Annie*, *From Calvary to Victory*, *Forgive WHO?* and, *Crazy Faith: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives*, and *The Book of Jeremiah: The Life and Ministry the work and ministry of Jeremiah Wright*. Her most recent book, *Rest for the Justice-Seeking Soul*, was published by Whitaker House and was released in November 2019. Her latest book, *With Liberty and Justice for Some: The Bible, the Constitution, and Racism in the United States* was released in October, 2020, and earned two awards: the 2021 Independent Press Award in the "Cultural and Social Issues" category and the 2020 Benjamin Franklin Award from the Independent Book Publishing Association (IBPA). She has been regular contributor to *The Dallas Examiner* and *The Wilmington Journal*, and her work has appeared in *The Washington Post* and *The Huffington Post*. She also has her own blog, "Candid Observations," which concentrates on the intersection of race, politics and religion, and distributes a "Tuesday Meditation" to people nationally and internationally.

Rev. Smith is the mother of two grown children, Caroline, a certified music therapist, and a son, Charles, who is writing and performing music in Ohio.

Jamar A. Boyd

Rev. Jamar A. Boyd, II is a multi-disciplinary leader based in Chicago, where he serves as the 17th pastor of Kenwood United Church of Christ and as the Associate in the Office of the President at the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. His work sits at the intersection of faith, philanthropy, and systemic justice, drawing on previous experience as the Senior Manager of Organizational Impact for the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference and

organizing roles with the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy. A seasoned advocate, he previously led the Georgia State Conference NAACP Youth & College Division and was recognized with the inaugural “Charles & Adrienne White Student Activism Award.”

Rev. Boyd’s academic background includes a Master of Divinity from The Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University and a Bachelor of Science from Georgia Southern University. His ministry journey, which began in Georgia and continued through Virginia, has been defined by pastoral leadership and a commitment to youth development. He is a prolific writer and contributor to publications such as Sojourners Magazine and Baptist News Global, and is the co-editor of the forthcoming Routledge Press book, *Complicit No More: Truth, Justice, and the Awakening of Black Faith Communities*.

Beyond the pulpit and the foundation, Rev. Boyd serves on the Board of Directors for The Oikos Institute for Social Impact and the Hyde Park & Kenwood Interfaith Council. As a former fellow of the Aspen Institute’s Racial Justice & Religion Collective, he continues to consult on Black theological education, advocating for the redistribution of capital and the strengthening of community-anchored legacy institutions.

Mariama White-Hammond

Rev. Mariama White-Hammond is an advocate for ecological and social justice, youth engagement, and Spirit-filled organizing. She is the founding pastor of New Roots AME Church in Dorchester, MA. New Roots is a community reimagining what church can be. The congregation draws from the rich spiritual tradition of the Black church while standing firm in its belief that through the power of Jesus they can graft new roots onto an established tradition. In these times where divisions are high they are standing firm in the belief that we are called to be “on Earth as it is in heaven.” So they are a multi-racial, multi-class, affirming community that is welcoming folks who have been hurt by the church, building deep relationships, working for justice and jubilee in a broken world.

Rev. Mariama’s work extends beyond the church as she is active in secular and interfaith justice efforts. In particular, she uses an intersectional lens in her ecological work, challenging folks to see the connections between immigration and climate change or the relationship between intergenerational tensions and gender justice. Her longtime activism and community engagement has earned her numerous accolades, including the Barr Fellowship, the Celtics Heroes Among Us award, The Roxbury Founders Day Award, and the Boston NAACP Image award. Furthermore, she has been recognized as one of the Grist 50 Fixers for 2019 and one of Sojourners’ 11 Women Shaping the Church.

From April 2021 - April 2024, Rev. Mariama served as the Chief of Environment, Energy, and Open Space for the City of Boston. In this role, she was responsible for enhancing environmental justice and quality of life in Boston by protecting air, water, climate, food and land resources, as well as preserving and improving the integrity of Boston’s architectural and historic resources. Much of her current environmental work is focused on the ocean and she is currently working on a book about the spiritual dimensions of her scuba diving titled - *Divine Diving: Sacred Lessons from Under the Sea*.

YOUNGER LEADERS

Aundreia Alexander

Rev. Aundreia Alexander, Esq. is an activist, consultant and theologian in the public square. She is the Founder of Redemption Songs Ministries, LLC working with organizations, governmental entities and corporations on creating and implementing policies, procedures and practices with a racial equity lens. Rev. Alexander is an ordained minister with the American Baptist Churches, USA. She received both her B.S. in Accountancy and J.D. degrees from the University of Missouri in Columbia and a M.Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey.

Liam Barr

The Rev. Liam Barr is an Episcopal priest primarily serving the Spanish-speaking community of Holy Innocents' Episcopal Church in Henderson, North Carolina. A graduate of Davidson College, he majored in Religious Studies, where he wrote his senior thesis on the life, theology, and spirituality of Jonathan Daniels. He earned a Master of Divinity in 2024, with a concentration in Latinx Ministry, from Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Texas. His faith has been shaped by immigrant, Latino, and Anglo Episcopal communities across South Carolina, North Carolina, Texas, Costa Rica, and Ecuador. Liam has served as an immigration shelter chaplain in Texas, worked alongside immigrant rights organizations, and now works with the Diocese of North Carolina to support its immigration response efforts. Through these roles and relationships, he remains grounded in and bears witness to the liberating, loving, and life-giving *acompañamiento* of Jesus of Nazareth.

Traci D. Blackmon

See bio in the "Program Participants" section above.

Odessa Dawn Stephens Bowman

Dawn Bowman has worked in the Spiritual Healing Arts for over 20 years. She holds a Bachelor's degree from Parsons School of Design where she took her love of beauty and the arts into the spa and wellness industry. She had a career as a Spa Director leading several top resorts in the country. She is a licensed massage therapist trained in many modalities including Chinese Medicine, Restorative Yoga, and End of Life Doula Care. Aside from working with private clients, Dawn has been working with the Presbytery of the Redwoods and First Presbyterian Church of St. Helena for 4 years where she finds great joy supporting their mission work. She is also an active member of the National End-of-Life Doula Alliance. Dawn resides in Napa Valley, California, and Bend, Oregon, where she lives with her husband and small dog.

Jamar A. Boyd

See bio in the "Program Participants" section above.

Kwame Brown

Kwame Brown, nephew of Ruby Sales, is a dedicated educational leader and longstanding community pillar for over 20 years. He has consistently demonstrated a commitment to service, student success, and academic excellence. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Recreation Administration from Savannah State College, a Master of Education in Special Education from Grand Canyon University, and an Education Specialist (Ed.S.) degree from Regents University. He has also completed advanced doctoral coursework toward a Doctor of Education with an emphasis in Special Education. In addition to his academic achievements, he serves as a middle school head football coach, girls flag football head coach, and head soccer coach, and he is a former athletic director. His professional journey reflects a strong foundation in leadership, specialized instruction, and a passion for supporting diverse learners while making a lasting impact in both the school and the community.

LaTricia Brown

LaTricia and Ismail Brown (nephew of Ruby Sales) celebrate 16 years of marriage in Pooler, Georgia, where they reside with their children Lundyn (13), Adonis (9), and Zahid (4). Their eldest, Jaylin (21), resides in Columbus, Georgia. Ismail's unwavering support and dedication to his family have provided the foundation for LaTricia to pursue her deep civic passions. The couple met while Ismail was attending the illustrious HBCU, Savannah State University, and LaTricia was earning her BFA in Fashion Design at the adjacent Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD).

Prior to making history as the youngest Black woman elected to the Chatham County Board of Elections, LaTricia leveraged her community partnerships and connections to Savannah State University to orchestrate the city's first Rip the Runway fashion show. Featuring several major artists, the event did more than just provide a massive platform for emerging designers—it beautifully blended her family's love of music, fashion, and civic duty, culminating in a successful voter registration drive at its conclusion.

LaTricia was recognized with the prestigious SCAD Outstanding Alumni in Community Service Award. Driven by a need for equitable local resources, LaTricia organized the first-ever Rally for Diversity and Inclusion in Pooler. Her fierce advocacy has only grown since; she has served on the Pooler Juneteenth Celebration Committee for the past four years, regularly attends city council meetings, and leads peaceful protests and marches to encourage thoughtful development and amplify marginalized voices. LaTricia has proudly served on the Chatham County Board of Elections for the last four years, including a two-year tenure as the Board's Vice Chair. Further solidifying her commitment to leadership, she recently won her bid for reelection in the May 19th Georgia Primary. She also actively serves as the 1st Vice Chair for the Democratic Party of Chatham County.

On the creative front, LaTricia is the visionary founder of Trish B. Stylin' Design. Her agency was rated Best of Georgia for 2023, 2024, and 2025 by the Georgia Business Journal, and reached a monumental milestone this past fall by debuting a stunning collection at Paris Fashion Week. In recognition of her extraordinary dual-career success, LaTricia was recently selected as one of Georgia Trend's "40 Under 40," an annual list honoring high-achieving

young leaders making significant impacts across the state's business, political, and nonprofit sectors. She was also named a Who's Who in America honoree. As the inaugural President of the SCAD Black Alumni Coalition, a former Greater Savannah Black Chamber of Commerce Board Member, and an Operation Kid Forward Board Member.

Nyla Brown

Nyla Camille Brown, the great-niece of Ruby Sales is a 22-year-old self-taught professional artist inspired by life's most beautiful creations that God has placed upon this earth. Her paintings have flourished through various exhibitions, including the Columbus Artist Guild Exhibits, The Lagrange Art Museum, and currently The Bo Bartlett Center.

While in the midst of always creating, Nyla also manages her studies for a Digital Art and Design/Illustration degree at Grand Canyon University, where she is currently on the Dean's List. Leveraging these impactful abilities in design and illustration, she was given the opportunity to illustrate her first children's book, titled Little Black Boy, which has reached many young readers.

After showcasing her talent, many art collectors sought to commission her work, spreading the love of beautiful and relatable pieces through their homes and loved ones. She is happy to be able to reach that burning flame of passion for creativity that pleases the eye among her community!

Randy Callender

The Rev. Randy Kyle Callender is a Philadelphia native with deep roots in Barbados and a lifelong passion for The Episcopal Church. He held youth leadership roles in the Union of Black Episcopalians, earned a BA in Communications and an MDiv from Episcopal Divinity School. Randy made history as the first African American male priest to be ordained in the Diocese of Pennsylvania in twenty-five years.

Following twelve years as Rector of St. Philip's in Annapolis, MD he was called in 2024 to serve as the Canon for Mission in the Diocese of Maryland. His ministry focuses on youth, racial reconciliation, and societal healing, evidenced by his work with the Episcopal Youth Event and the One America Movement.

Randy sees his ministry as a calling to build relationships and create a welcoming space for all in God's Beloved Community. He is married to Katya and is the proud father of two children, Jaivyn and Soraya.

Devon J. Crawford

The Rev. Devon Jerome Crawford serves as the 18th Senior Pastor of Historic Third Baptist Church of San Francisco — the oldest African American Baptist congregation west of the Rocky Mountains — a global village committed to transforming the world through radical love, prophetic witness, and beloved community. Before his call to San Francisco, Rev. Crawford served as the inaugural National Executive Director of the Multifaith Initiative to End Mass Incarceration (Multifaith EMI), a national effort founded by U.S. Senator Raphael

Warnock and based at Historic Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, which unites diverse faith leaders to confront the crisis of mass incarceration through strategic advocacy, nonviolent direct action training, and coalition building. Concurrently, he served as Campus Minister at Morehouse College's Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel, where he worked closely with his mentor, Dean Lawrence Edward Carter, Sr.

Rev. Crawford previously served as the inaugural Staff Director of the William Monroe Trotter Collaborative for Social Justice at the Harvard Kennedy School, working alongside Professor Cornell William Brooks to guide research and strategic campaigns for racial equity, voting rights, public safety reform, and reparations — including engaging eight U.S. and U.K. cities in public safety redesign in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. He has also served as a Wyatt-Lucy Fellow of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, where he helped develop civic engagement and criminal justice reform resources for faith communities across the country. His career has been defined by the convergence of theology, public policy, and grassroots organizing: from civil disobedience in Mobile, Alabama, to a national voter mobilization campaign with Chance the Rapper, to co-founding the People's Consortium for Human and Civil Rights and leading the 112-mile March Against White Supremacy from Charlottesville to Washington, D.C. His ministry and public witness place him squarely in the tradition of those, like Ruby Sales, who have never separated the demands of the gospel from the struggle for justice.

A proud son of Birmingham, Alabama, Rev. Crawford was baptized at New Pilgrim Baptist Church, licensed to preach at Sixth Avenue Baptist Church, and ordained at Historic Myrtle Baptist Church in Massachusetts. A Morehouse College honors graduate and MLK Scholar, earned his Masters degree from the University of Chicago Divinity School and is pursuing doctoral studies at Boston University School of Theology. He is the beloved son of Deborah and Jerome Crawford, brother to Danielle Elizabeth Crawford Banks, and uncle to Desoleil S. Banks.

Brandon Thomas Crowley

The Reverend Brandon Thomas Crowley, PhD, is the Director of Theological Education at Episcopal Divinity School. A pastor, scholar, author, and public intellectual, Rev. Dr. Crowley's work bridges the academy, the church, and the public square. His research explores Black religions, theology, homiletics, ecclesiology, and social ethics from the late 19th through the early 21st centuries.

Since 2009, Dr. Crowley has served as Senior Pastor of the Historic Myrtle Baptist Church in Newton, Massachusetts, a congregation founded by formerly enslaved Africans during Reconstruction and widely known for its inclusive ministry and commitment to social justice. Alongside his pastoral leadership, Dr. Crowley is also a Lecturer in Ministry Studies at Harvard Divinity School and Visiting Professor and Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Exeter. His debut book, *Queering Black Churches: Dismantling Heteronormativity in African American Congregations*, was published by Oxford University Press in 2024.

An ordained minister in the Progressive National Baptist Convention and licensed in the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., Dr. Crowley holds degrees from Morehouse College, Harvard University, and Boston University. His scholarly and professional engagements include membership in the Society for the Study of Black Religion, service on the Council of Religious Practitioners and Scholars at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., and editorial work with the Lexington Press Series on Approaches to Religion and Theology and The Global Journal of Black Sexuality and Gender Studies. He also serves as President of the Harvard Divinity School Alumni Council and is a member of the Greater Boston Salvation Army Advisory Board, as well as the Community Benefits and Needs Assessment Committees at Newton-Wellesley Hospital.

Avi Edelman

Avi Edelman is a social justice educator who creates environments of warmth and empathy for transformational dialogue about the forces that shape how we see the world and how the world sees us. For fifteen years, he has organized immersive journeys for youth and adults to learn the history of the Southern Freedom Movement, meet movement elders, and engage deeply with difficult questions about racial justice, solidarity, and reconciliation. He founded Two Pockets Dialogue, which works with individuals and organizations across the country to pursue justice, build spaces of trust and understanding, and foster a culture of dialogue. His work includes programming on identity and oppression, antiracism, disability justice, LGBTQ liberation, challenging antisemitism, and exploring whiteness. He previously worked at Columbia University and was awarded the “Outstanding Teaching About Disability Award” at Columbia’s inaugural disability affinity graduation.

Aquarius Gilmer

Aquarius D. Gilmer is a public theologian, corporate strategist, health policy expert, and people leader whose work sits at the intersection of life sciences, faith, health equity, and partnership-led impact. He has built a career focused on prioritizing Black women, shaping policy and alliances, strengthening cross-sector relationships, and enabling organizations to deliver meaningful outcomes for communities disproportionately impacted by some of the world’s most stigmatized diseases.

For the past 20 years Aquarius has worked in collaboration with communities around the world most impacted by HIV. From being a Chaplain at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta, GA to working in Region III of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to living in Mozambique, Aquarius has worked to translate, draft, advance and implement health policies that expand access to HIV treatment and prevention modalities and interventions through innovative cross-sectorial partnerships.

A son of North Carolina, graduate of Tuskegee University and Emory University’s Candler School of Theology, Aquarius’ worldview is rooted in the Old Time Religion bestowed to him from his grandmothers and great aunts who reared him with love and embodied the teachings of Jesus. It is from this conviction Aquarius works to be an interlocker among government, philanthropic, and non-profit interests with people and Jesus at the center of his decision-making. When he isn’t working, he hosts communal dinners to strengthen the bonds among community members, listening at the feet of elders or serving the Oakland - greater Bay Area communities.

Cassandra Gould

The Reverend Dr. Cassandra Gould, originally from Demopolis, Alabama, is a prominent faith leader, community organizer, and political strategist. Recognized for her active role in civic life as the “Pastor in the Public Square,” she currently serves as the National Political Director for the Faith in Action National Network, based in Washington, D.C. An itinerant elder within the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Dr. Gould previously served as a senior pastor in Missouri for more than ten years, where she successfully oversaw a debt-free building and relocation project. She is presently a member of the staff at Metropolitan A.M.E. Church.

During her tenure in Missouri as the Director of Missouri Faith Voices, Dr. Gould orchestrated one of the most significant voter engagement initiatives in the state’s history, contributing to legislative successes such as Medicaid expansion, minimum wage increases, and prosecutorial reform. Her dedication to voting rights has been documented in the publication *Rigged: The Voter Suppression Playbook* and featured on Ben Chavis’ *Chronicles*. Recently honored by *Sojourners* as one of ten women influential in shaping the Church in 2026, she remains committed to a Womanist framework that empowers faith communities to seek justice and collective liberation.

In addition to her role as a frequent columnist and podcast contributor, Dr. Gould serves as an adjunct professor at Memphis Theological Seminary and Eden Theological Seminary. She is the founder of *In the Public Square*, a coalition dedicated to equipping Black faith leaders and community members to build and protect Black political power and to respond in times of communal crisis.

Lisa Sharon Harper

Theoethicist, writer, speaker and consultant, Lisa Sharon Harper is the founding president of Freedom Road Consulting, LLC. She is the author of acclaimed books, *Fortune: How Race Broke My Family And The World--And How To Repair It All* and *The Very Good Gospel* and playwright of the award-winning play, *An’ Push da Wind Down*. Lisa is host of the popular live *Kitchen Table Conversations Podcast* on Substack where her column, “The Truth Is...” is a bestseller. She is earning her PhD in womanist theo-ethics at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam and serves as Affiliate Faculty at St. Stephen’s University in Canada.

elena elizabeth hendrick

elena elizabeth hendrick is a transformational facilitator with a deep commitment to the work of justice and liberation. Her work is grounded in the practices of accompaniment and nonviolent resistance, the reshaping of relationships rooted in dignity, solidarity and love, personal and collective healing, and the creation of cultures of peace. elena is the co-founder of the *Escuela Kairos para la Formaciòn* (The Kairos School for Formation) which was based in Nicaragua, with co-partners in the U.S.

Melanie Hill

See bio in the “Program Participants” section above.

Langley Hoyt

Rev. Langley Hoyt is a PCUSA minister and hospital chaplain at WakeMed Hospital in Raleigh, North Carolina where she accompanies patients, families, and staff on the Neuro, Rehab, and Behavioral Health units. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Davidson College and a Master of Divinity from Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Langley was a Jonathan Daniels and Samuel Younge Fellow at the SpiritHouse Project and personal assistant to Ruby Sales in 2020-2021 supporting the workshopping of a new social gospel for the 21st century. Drawing on a background in community advocacy, public policy, and communal spiritual formation, Langley is dedicated to supporting spiritual caregivers through co-creation and empowerment. She looks forward to beginning her Certified Educator Candidate training at Duke University Hospital this fall, where she will continue clinical chaplaincy work while training to become a chaplain educator.

Adriane Jemmott

Adriane Jemmott, Esq., is a seasoned legal professional with over 25 years of experience in family and juvenile law, and a long-time Howard County resident whose family moved from Barbados. A dedicated advocate for civil and human rights, she has spent her adult life in movements supporting democratic ideals, including serving as a Child Welfare and Juvenile/Education Advocate and, most recently, as a volunteer Ohana Mentor at Wilde Lake High School, putting her experience to use for the community that raised her. Her commitment to justice includes serving as past Chair of Legal Redress for the Maryland NAACP, a role in which she testified on “driving while black” legislation and was involved in negotiating consent decrees against the Maryland State Police. She is an active member of the Howard County Democratic Central Committee, dedicated to working for her clients as a “Gideon” lawyer.

Kendra Lara

Kendra Lara (she/her/ella) is a first-generation Black Dominican organizer, abolitionist, transformative justice practitioner, artist, mother, and movement leader whose work lives at the intersection of grief, imagination, and collective power. Raised and politically formed in Jamaica Plain, she comes out of a neighborhood with a deep legacy of grassroots organizing, from resisting the expansion of I-95 to building multiracial coalitions grounded in culture, creativity, and collective action. That lineage shaped her central question: what becomes possible when communities most impacted by harm are not just expected to endure, but trusted to lead, repair, and build what comes next?

First trained as a peer mediator at English High School, Kendra has spent more than 15 years practicing transformative justice, conflict transformation, and community-based accountability. She began organizing as a teenager, building citywide coalitions to fight for youth jobs, challenge inequities in Boston Public Schools, and call attention to systemic harm. Her organizing was further forged in the aftermath of community and state violence, including her work as one of the few women in Boston to serve as a Street Worker with StreetSafe Boston and as a founding member of Boston’s Black Lives Matter chapter after the police murder of Michael Brown. Across grassroots organizing, philanthropy, and government, she has carried an ethos rooted in care, accountability, and collective liberation, including as Co-Executive Director of the Resist Foundation and as the first person of color elected to represent Boston City Council District 6.

Kendra has harnessed her lived and professional experience to steward infrastructure for a more just world. She is the founder of A Bigger We Consulting, a practice helping justice-centered organizations align their internal structures with their external missions. As a writer and editor, she curates daughterwork, a publication exploring Black lineage and transformation, and is developing The Estuary Projects, a 10-part installation series honoring the Black women lost to violence in 1979 and the radical feminist world-building of the Combahee River Collective. Kendra studied Radical Pedagogy at Goddard College and is a dual degree candidate at Harvard Extension School. Today, she serves as Director of Sustainable Development at the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, where she helps steward one of the most historic and prolific community land trusts in the country.

Carolyn Shadid Lewis

Carolyn Shadid Lewis is an artist, filmmaker, and educator whose work tells personal stories of belonging. She draws inspiration from her family's military history and her Irish and Lebanese ancestry. Carolyn's Christian faith informs her artistic practice and her work in the community.

Her current film, "InterGeneration", brought a diverse group of Boston teens and elders together during the pandemic for storytelling and animation. The film is a visualization of the beloved community. It shows the multicultural fabric of Boston with participants from Haiti, Cape Verde, Trinidad, Guatemala, Portugal, and Ireland. The film also includes Robert Peters, a Wampanoag artist and painter, and African American leaders in the community, such as the pediatrician and A.M.E. pastor, Rev. Gloria White-Hammond. "The InterGeneration Lab" is a broader project inspired by the film. The program connects people who otherwise might not connect across divides of age, culture, and belief. Using the film as a conversation starter, participants relate to each other with storytelling activities and collaborative artmaking.

As an active Episcopalian, Carolyn led a project in 2021 with the Episcopal Diocese of Boston bringing Ruby Sales to the Church of the Advent to speak on the anniversary of Jonathan Daniel's death. Ruby's life, work, and witness and her intergenerational mentorship of many people embodies the work that Jonathan Daniels described in his writing as the "living gospel." Carolyn has been blessed to be one of Ruby's mentees.

In the spirit of ecumenicalism, Carolyn is also a member of New Roots A.M.E. in Dorchester, MA, an integrated church led by Rev. Mariama White-Hammond. New Roots seeks to live out the Biblical concept of "Jubilee" in the book of Leviticus. One of their initiatives is Jubilee House, a partnership with the Episcopal organization, Creche. Jubilee House is a black-led, multicultural intentional living community in Uphams Corner, Dorchester. Inspired by the early church, it will be a haven of mutual care, accessibility, and environmental stewardship made affordable for low-income residents and immigrants. It will be a physical manifestation of the beloved community.

Samantha Master

Samantha Master is a Black queer feminist organizer, oral historian and educator born and based in Baltimore, MD with deep Afro-Chesapeake roots. Sam has organized at the intersections of Black liberation, reproductive and LGBTQ justice movements for almost two decades and has been published in several publications including *TheRoot*, *TheGrio*, and *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*. She was also featured in the award-winning film, *The New Black*. From 2017-2019, Sam co-led #FreeBlackMamasDMV, a bail out coalition dedicated to decarcerating Black moms and caretakers and reuniting them with their families and their communities. Currently, Sam serves as a trainer for the Midwest Academy, a direct action organizing training and capacity building institution for grassroots organizers. She's deeply committed to building local power with working class Black people in Baltimore through her political home, Organizing Black. Sam loves her political home, Organizing Black. When she's not reading, writing, and freedomdreaming, you can find her in the kitchen cooking up ways to feed the bellies, spirit and soul of her community in Baltimore, MD.

Tanya Nixon-Silberg

Tanya Nixon-Silberg (she/her) is a Black mother, artist, educator and school librarian based in Boston whose work weaves together story, stitch, and social imagination. She is the founder of Little Uprisings, a collaborative and liberative racial justice education consultancy for children and their caregiving allies. For over a decade, Tanya has used art, literature, music and play to guide young people in understanding that racism is systemic while helping them recognize their own agency and power to create change. She has worked with youth and communities across Greater Boston including collaborations with United Way, Boston Public Library, Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Boston Public Schools, Design Studio for Social Intervention, Brookline Public Schools, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, and Artists For Humanity. She has also been recognized by the City of Boston and received a "Modeling Equity" award for her work with Little Uprisings.

This year, Tanya has found bliss in her worlds colliding. She is currently an artist-in-residence for the Racial Reconciliation and Healing Project, a school librarian within Boston Public Schools, the producer and performer of a full length puppetry adaptation of *Like One of the Family* by Alice Childress, while parenting a delightful 13 year old who is becoming a fierce advocate in his school. She continues to imagine and build spaces where creativity and care make liberation feel both possible and present.

Iona Smith Nze '99

Rev. A. Iona Smith Nze '99 is an Itinerant Elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), a graduate of EDS, a community leader, a Lilly Foundation awardee, a historymaker and a scholar. Her extensive body of work includes being President of the African Methodist Ministers' Alliance (AMMA) for three years, which represents the United Methodists (UM), Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME), AME Zion, and AME church traditions. Additionally, she served congregations in Western New York, Delaware, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

As a local Activist and Clergy Leader, Rev. Smith Nze testified at the State Capitol representing Faith Acts for Education, concerning increased public education funding. Their efforts netted an additional \$170 million in 2026. She is an active member of the Bridgeport Inter-Denominational Ministerial Alliance and serves as Historiographer, and a member of Congregations for A New Connecticut (CONNECT), and as Vice- Chair for Evangelism for CityFest 2023, in southwest Connecticut, and as a General Conference delegate.

Smith Nze is a resident of New Haven, Connecticut and the eldest of three daughters; she is not only devoted to her family but proud of their deep-rooted presence in Maryland's AME history. She gives credit to her forward-thinking parents for a Boston upbringing, and she thanks God for the opportunity to have already had the greatest job on earth: to have been Mom to the late John Ikechukwu Nze, Jr. At the time of his death, he was a Junior at Wilberforce University.

Dálida Rocha

Dálida Rocha is a proud African immigrant from Cabo Verde, a devoted mother of three, a woman of faith, and a visionary leader whose work is grounded in justice, dignity, and community.

She currently serves as Executive Director of Neighbor to Neighbor, where she is deeply committed to building people-powered movements and advancing equity across Massachusetts and beyond. Dálida comes to this role from Renew U.S., where she helped lead national efforts in coalition building, policy development, and electoral organizing to win transformative change in climate, racial, and economic justice.

A steadfast and courageous advocate for immigrant communities, in 2025 Dálida launched the LUCE defense hotline in Massachusetts—an initiative rooted in compassion and justice, dedicated to protecting immigrant families from dehumanizing treatment and ensuring they are met with dignity, support, and care. In January 2024, Dálida was appointed to the Massachusetts Board of Education. Guided by her faith and a deep belief in the power of collective action, she continues to lead with purpose, uplifting communities and helping to build a future where all families can thrive.

Anya Rous

Rous is an Emmy- award winning film producer and president and co-founder of Multitude Films in Brooklyn, NY, an independent production company dedicated to telling stories by and about under-represented communities. She worked closely with Sam Pollard and Geeta Gandbhir on the production of Lowndes County: Road to Black Power in which Ruby is prominently showcased. Her work was honored at the Sundance Film Festival. Ms. Rous has a 2 year old daughter named Vida Liba Ruby Rous.

Carlin Rushing

Carlin Rushing is a Black, Southern, daughter, sister, and lover of the Black women's literary tradition, Black church hymns, and eastern North Carolina sunsets. She graduated from Spelman College with a degree in Philosophy and continued her education at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, where she earned a Master of Divinity degree along with certificates from the Kelly Miller Smith Institute on Black Church Studies and the Carpenter Program

in Religion, Gender, and Sexuality. Currently, Carlin serves as Co-Director of Southerners on New Ground (SONG), a political home and kinship network working toward LGBTQ liberation and the largest LGBTQ grassroots community organizing formation in the South.

Before joining the SONG staff, Carlin balanced local community organizing with academic work at both Vanderbilt University and Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. At Fisk University, she coordinated an HIV/AIDS intervention and research program and served as an adjunct professor at both American Baptist College and Fisk University, teaching courses on social justice, literature, and gender studies.

Carlin is committed to continuing the legacy of Black educators and farmers in the rural South.

JoDavid Sales

See bio in the “Program Participants” section above.

Meka Sales

Meka Sales is a compassionate advocate, strategist, and community leader dedicated to advancing conditions that allow children, families, and communities to thrive. Trained as a health educator, Meka currently serves as Director of Special Initiatives at The Duke Endowment, the largest private foundation in the Southeast, headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Meka’s work includes overseeing multi-year, place-based investments, supporting grassroots community efforts, partnering with mission-aligned nonprofit organizations, and collaborating with cross-sector stakeholders to influence systems and statewide policy to drive sustainable community change. She currently directs the Endowment’s place-based early childhood improvement initiative in Guilford County, an innovative body of work built to improve childhood outcomes for all children prenatally through age 8. In this role, Meka developed strategy, managed a network of community nonprofits and activists and oversaw the creation of new data analytics technology used to support the effort across thousands of recipients across the county.

Beyond her professional roles, Meka is an active civic leader who contributes her time and expertise to community-based organizations and serves as a representative of the philanthropic sector on the North Carolina Task Force for Child Care and Early Education, convened by Governor Josh Stein. Meka is a member of the New Generation of African-American Philanthropists and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Speech Communications from Syracuse University and a Master of Science in Health Fitness Management from American University. She resides in Charlotte, North Carolina, with her husband, Michael T. Sales, Ruby’s nephew, and her daughter, Macey Sales.

Keedra Sales McNeill

Dr. Keedra (Sales) McNeill currently serves as the Regional Medical Director for Physician Recruitment Services at The Permanente Medical Group, Inc., the largest physician owned and physician-led medical group in the country. In this role, she collaborates with her team to engage top talent to join the 10,000-physician multispecialty medical group located in Northern and Central California. She has implemented modern strategies aimed at attracting the next generation of physicians to join and provide care for over 4.6 million

Kaiser Permanente members. Utilizing input from current physicians and prospective candidates, she has bolstered the team's digital marketing strategy to ensure the medical group remains highly competitive in a candidates' market. She facilitates regular trainings for her team and physician leaders centered around utilizing network contacts to connect with potential hires, strengthening brand recognition, mitigating unconscious bias in hiring, and optimizing the applicant interview experience. She has also prioritized strategic efforts at intentional outreach for underrepresented in medicine (URM) physicians.

In addition to her administrative role, Dr. McNeill is a dedicated primary care pediatrician who has been practicing with The Permanente Medical Group for over 17 years. Her clinical areas of interest include preventative medicine, mental health initiatives, community collaboration, and health equity for pediatric and adult patient populations. She previously held formal leadership positions in each of these clinical areas prior to starting her current role. Keedra is married to JoDavid Sales, Ruby's nephew, and they have two daughters.

Kimberleigh Smith

Kimberleigh Joy Smith, MPA (she/her), a graduate of Indiana University and New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, has spent more than two decades advancing health equity and social justice, with a focus on BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and low-income communities. She serves currently as Executive Vice President of Public Policy and Communications at Callen-Lorde Community Health Center in New York, a national leader in LGBTQ healthcare, where she leads efforts to shape policy, expand access to care, and strengthen community health systems. Kimberleigh has served on numerous boards, advisory bodies and coalitions in the HIV and LGBTQ healthcare space, and she is recognized for her leadership in advocacy, coalition-building, and public service. Kimberleigh strives to carry forward a legacy of movement-building rooted in courage, compassion, and collective care—honoring those who have led the way while helping to shape what comes next. Kimberleigh and her wife and partner of 32 years live in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn with their young adult son.

Stephanie Spellers '04

The Rev. Canon Dr. Stephanie Spellers '04 is one of The Episcopal Church's leading thinkers around 21st-century ministry and mission. The author of several books, she recently wrapped nearly a decade as canon to The Episcopal Church's Presiding Bishop Michael Curry.

Spellers previously served as chaplain to the Episcopal House of Bishops, directed evangelism and reconciliation at General Theological Seminary, and led church vitality efforts in the Diocese of Long Island. Her professional ministry began in 2005 at St. Paul's Cathedral-Boston, where she founded The Crossing, a ground-breaking church that weaves Episcopal tradition together with voices from the margins. Before that, she was an award-winning religion journalist.

Spellers earned master's degrees from both Harvard Divinity School and Episcopal Divinity School. She received an honorary doctorate from the General Theological Seminary. A native of Kentucky, she is passionate about helping people to fall in love with God and get free.

Tory Stephens

Tory Stephens is a justice-driven storyteller, network weaver, and emerging leader working at the intersection of climate, culture, and narrative power. He co-founded and leads a climate fiction initiative that has surfaced a new generation of storytellers and produced two anthologies: *Afterglow: Climate Fiction for Future Ancestors* and *Metamorphosis: Climate Fiction for a Better Future*. Tory's work is rooted in a belief that stories are not peripheral to justice — they are essential to it. He builds strategic partnerships with grassroots organizations, amplifies voices from under-resourced communities, and continues to advocate for resource justice in regions like the Deep South through his work with the Deep South Solidarity Fund.

Before climate, Tory came up through health justice and movement-building, mobilizing resources for Medicare, Medicaid, and the Affordable Care Act. That foundation — organizing, advocacy, community — runs through everything he does. He is also a co-creator of Thrushes' Hermitage, a spiritual retreat for eco-writers grounded in beginner's mind, forest bathing, and the liberating power of imagination. It is in that spirit that he receives this commissioning: to carry theologies of belonging, resilience, and creative resistance into his work for the long haul.

Irma Weeks

Irma Weeks is a native New Yorker who was born and raised in The Bronx. She began her career working with children and families, which led her to pursue an Associate's degree in Early Childhood Education. After working for some time in a special education school for young children, her passion for child development resulted in a Bachelors in Interdisciplinary Studies with a Concentration in Disabilities Studies. Her background has informed the transitional and organizational skills she now brings to SpiritHouse Project. Irma has served Freedom Road LLC as a Logistics Coordinator on the Est. 1619 Pilgrimage, the Administrative Assistant for the Freedom Road Institute, and has supported various organizations in a variety of valuable ways. Irma serves as the Director of Programs and Activities for SpiritHouse Project and works under the direction of Director Ruby Sales. Collaborating with Ms. Sales and her team on various projects has been life changing and profoundly rewarding. She lives with her husband and high school sweetheart, loves to be in nature, is a forever student, and enjoys the simple things in life. June Weeks is a native New Yorker and has had the pleasure of knowing Dr. Sales over the last few years. He is a nature lover and even bigger animal lover.

Mariama White-Hammond

See bio in the "Program Participants" section above.

SPECIAL GUESTS OF RUBY NELL SALES

Khadija Abukari

Khadija immigrated to the United States from Ghana as a child, carrying with her the hopes of building a better future. Over the years, she learned the value of resilience, hard work, and compassion through the challenges of adapting to a new country while staying connected to her roots. As she grew older, those experiences shaped her desire to care for others, leading her toward a career in nursing. While raising two children, she earned her LPN certification and continued pushing forward in her education, determined to create opportunities not only for herself, but for her family as well. She is now less than a year away from earning her RN credential through the extended system of University of Pittsburgh.

For Khadija, nursing is more than a profession—it is a calling. Inspired by the healthcare challenges faced by many underserved families, she dreams of continuing her education to earn a doctorate in nursing with a specialization in cardiology. Her goal is to combine advanced medical knowledge with compassion and advocacy to improve healthcare access for people of lesser means. Through perseverance, faith, and dedication, Khadija hopes to make a lasting difference in the lives of others while serving as an example to her children and community.

Carol Lynn Bell

Carol Lynn Bell grew up in the great Lehigh Valley as part of a blue-collar family. Gifted with great curiosity that has never waned, she is an avid reader and learner. Like many of the women in her family, she went to college, which in her case allowed her to transcend some of the limitations that managed to hold her MAGA kin. She holds a Master's degree in Social Work, and spent over four decades as a clinician, specializing in dually diagnosed services. She is a trained yoga teacher and has developed innovative techniques for integrating body work into psychotherapy.

Over the last two decades, she has been the primary bread winner in her family, allowing her husband Jom to pursue unpaid political organizing work. Since her retirement in 2022 she has joined him in their expanding efforts to fight fascism and uplift a politics that leads with love. Together they are pursuing a vision for Neponset House, converting their two-family home into an intentional, land-based community. They hope that Neponset House can be the urban hub of the FVN in the northeast. There are already several rural projects established in western MA, the Albany, NY area, and midcoast ME. These projects are all in different stages of development, but the throughline is to attract and develop spiritually grounded, deeply committed activists/organizers who embrace nonviolence while co-creating the gift/solidarity economy. Important shared praxes focus on stopping harm (through direct nvcd action, e.g. fighting fossil fuel infrastructure expansion, evictions, etc.), building beloved community that centers collective liberation, all while steadfastly remaining open to spiritual transformation. We're thinking of Cantic Farm as the most advanced model - a place rooted in the Catholic Worker tradition as well as Joanna Macy's Buddhist insights, where revolutionary love is on display.

Cheryl Blankenship

Cheryl Smith Blankenship was raised in Denmark, SC and completed most of her higher education in California. During her life, she moved many times and, as a result, has many culturally and regionally diverse experiences to draw upon.

Cheryl was born in the Harlem and spent most summers during her youth with relatives in Harlem and Jamaica, NY. During the rest of the year, she lived and attended segregated schools in Denmark, SC, growing up on the campuses of two HBCU's - S. C. Area Trade School (now known as Denmark Tech), which was the first vocational college for African Americans in SC, and Voorhees College, one of three Episcopal supported HBCU's. Cheryl's father, Timothy Smith, was a member of the first faculty at SCATS, teaching tailoring to African Americans throughout SC and other southern states. Her mother was an elementary school teacher. During high school, Cheryl was part of the movement to integrate Five and Dime Stores. She was the first African American to work 'downtown' in her community. Cheryl graduated as the valedictorian of her class in 1968, a year when colleges across the country were integrating their student populations. She became one of twenty Black students to enroll at Mills College, a prestigious women's college on the West coast. Cheryl received a B.A. in Psychology from Mills College, an M.S. in Educational Administration from Pepperdine University, and is ABD for an EdD in Administration, Training, and Policy Studies from Boston University.

It was in Cambridge, MA that Cheryl met Ruby Sales. As a cradle Episcopalian, Cheryl journeyed with Ruby through her confirmation by Bishop Barbara Harris and the completion of her MDiv degree at EDS.

Cheryl has over 50 years of work experience in the areas of higher education, fiscal management, and consulting. Through her various positions, she supported individuals, communities and organizations to achieve their financial goals. Her body of work includes philanthropy, financial and grants management, assessments of institutional and organizational systems, program planning, customer relations, and organizational strategy and image. She previously worked in the federal government as a Senior Advisor for Learn and Serve America programs and as Senior Program Officer for AmeriCorps programs at the Corporation of National and Community Service. She also worked for a number of colleges and universities including MIT, the Los Angeles College of Chiropractic, and Mills College. She served as Associate Bursar for Student Services, Director of Financial Aid, and Director of Student Affairs. She consulted with the United Nations, the Department of Education, the Corporation for National and Community Service and Marga, Inc. Cheryl currently provides management support to SpiritHouse Project, a grassroots national 501(c)3 founded by Ruby Sales. Cheryl is a long time sojourner with Ruby Sales.

Annie Brown

Dr. Annie Woodley Brown is a retired professor from Howard University School of Social Work. She graduated valedictorian from Peabody High School in 1961. In 1965, she graduated magna cum laude with a BA degree in sociology from Dillard University in New Orleans, Louisiana. She earned a master's degree in social work (MSW) from the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. After a twenty-year career in social work practice in the area of adolescent mental health, her last job being that of clinical director of a program of emotionally and behaviorally disordered youth, Dr. Brown returned to school and earned a doctorate degree from Howard University School of Social Work in 1992, and joined the faculty there in 1993.

Dr. Brown's tenure at Howard University included in addition to teaching, a stint as assistant dean for student affairs, chair of the 2020 accreditation committee, and chair of the Direct Practice Sequence. She served on university-wide and school committees.

Her research, teaching, and publications are in the areas of child welfare, adolescent mental health, social welfare history and domestic violence. She also helped to establish the School of Social Work's student learning experience in South Africa.

Dr. Brown is an active member of Episcopal Church of the Ascension in Silver Spring, where she has served on the vestry, served on the vestry as senior warden, served as a delegate to the Diocesan convention on numerous occasions and in 2015 served as a delegate to the General Convention of the Episcopal Church. She founded and leads a "Conversations on Race" ministry and is very involved in the Church's outreach efforts in the community.

Dr. Brown is the oldest of nine children all of whom attended college-eight graduated from college, and some other of her siblings also hold advanced degrees. She was married to Robert D. Brown, Jr. a metallurgical engineer who worked for the U.S Bureau of Mines and the US Geological Survey and died in 2024 after 54 years of marriage.

Ismail Brown

Ismail "Ish" Brown is a dedicated leader, accomplished manager, and devoted family man whose life is defined by a deep commitment to community, entrepreneurship, and personal purpose. His journey of leadership took root during his time at Savannah State University, which he attended from 1999 to 2005. Driven by a desire to uplift others and foster campus community, Ismail helped co-found Achievers of Today and Tomorrow at the university. This early dedication to brotherhood and excellence was further solidified in March of 2001, when he pledged to Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., establishing a lifelong foundation of leadership and achievement.

While pursuing his education at Savannah State, Ismail made a pivotal, life-changing decision to pause his academic journey to focus on his highest priority: raising his son. It was during these foundational university years that he also met his future wife and lifelong partner, LaTricia. Together, they built a strong family foundation that eventually brought them to Pooler, Georgia, where they have resided for two decades. Over the years, Ismail has balanced a thriving professional life with the rewarding, fast-paced responsibilities of raising their four children, consistently serving as the rock of support for his family's civic, creative, and professional pursuits.

Professionally, Ismail is recognized for his exceptional leadership and operational expertise in corporate management. He dedicated eleven years to Verizon Wireless, where his sharp business acumen and natural ability to guide teams led to an eight-year tenure as a manager. Known for championing impactful initiatives, Ismail was a driving force behind the Your Voice Matters program, an innovative initiative that connected frontline perspectives directly with corporate stakeholders via FaceTime. His robust management portfolio also includes three successful years as a manager at TitleMax and two years leading operations at GameStop, proving his versatile ability to drive growth and manage high-performing teams across diverse retail and financial sectors.

In addition to his corporate achievements, Ismail is a passionate entrepreneur with a talent for culinary business operations. Channeling his skills into the food and wellness industry, he founded and operates Del-Ish, a successful meal preparation business. Combining organization, high-level execution, and a commitment to quality service, Del-Ish reflects his innovative mindset and ability to turn a structural vision into a tangible, thriving enterprise that serves the community.

Today, Ismail stands as a dynamic professional and pillar of his family. Whether managing complex business operations, mentoring others through his fraternity and community connections, or managing the busy schedules and developmental milestones of a household of four children, he approaches life with a distinct blend of dedication and effortless authenticity. Besides his wife LaTricia—an award-winning designer and county official—Ismail continues to craft a legacy of hard work, unconditional family support, and purposeful leadership in coastal Georgia. He is a nephew of Ruby Sales.

Tammie Brown

Ms. Tammie Brown is a high school Visual Arts teacher for the Muscogee County School District at the historic William H. Spencer High School in Columbus, Georgia. With over eight years of experience in art education, she inspires students through creative exploration and hands-on learning experiences. Ms. Brown specializes in mixed media and culturally responsive art projects that help students connect art to history, culture, and personal identity. Her teaching emphasizes creativity, self-expression, and critical thinking, encouraging students to discover and develop their unique artistic voices. She is passionate about sharing the value of art education with the community through events both inside and outside the school setting.

Ms. Brown earned her Master's degree in Art Education from Columbus State University and holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Savannah College of Art and Design in Savannah, Georgia. While attending SCAD, she double majored in Illustration and Graphic Design, strengthening her foundation in both traditional and digital arts. Following graduation, Ms. Brown worked for nearly eight years at Total System Services, a Fortune 500 company, where she served as a lead graphic designer in the Marketing Department. Her professional design experience continues to influence and enrich her classroom instruction and creative approach to teaching.

Outside of her professional career, Ms. Brown is a devoted wife and mother who values family, creativity, and community. She and her husband, Kwame Brown, Ruby Sales' nephew, are the proud parents of three beautiful and intelligent children: Nyla, Jada, and Isaiah Brown. Together, they support and encourage one another's growth, education, and creativity, making family an important source of inspiration in Ms. Brown's life and work.

Jada Brown, the daughter of Tammie and Kwame Brown and the grandniece of Ruby Sales, is a University of Georgia student majoring in Special Education (General Curriculum). She was the Class of 2024 valedictorian at William H. Spencer High School where she won awards and honors such as the Courier Kids Award, the T. Hiram Standley Award, Page One Nominee for General Scholarship, CTAE Student of the Year award, and Nominee for Marketing National Honors Society. Her prolific academic achievements continue at UGA where she is a straight A student.

Betsy Crenshaw

Betsy Crenshaw is a lifelong learner, librarian, and musician whose work reflects a deep commitment to knowledge, creativity, and community. Together with Kimberleigh Smith, they share a dedication to service and justice.

Betsy holds a BS (Radio TV Film) and an MLIS (Library Science) both from The University of Texas at Austin and a MS in Urban Studies from Long Island University. She has spent her career at New York Public Library and CUNY (City University of New York) working primarily as a reference and instruction librarian. At the public library, she also worked as a prison librarian, as a programming librarian, and in Project Access which provides services for people with disabilities. She is grateful for all of these experiences and the opportunities for growth that they have afforded her.

Donna Gorjon

Donna Gorjon dedicated her professional life to empowering children with speech, language, and learning challenges through compassion, cultural connection, and advocacy. As a retired Speech Language Pathologist with the Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland, she devoted decades to helping children become confident communicators in a world that is not always understanding or accepting their needs.

Her lifelong vision extended beyond the traditional classroom. Donna founded the "Sunset Studio" initiative in Mexico, creating opportunities for children in less developed neighborhoods to develop lifelong communication, language, and social interaction skills in a nurturing and culturally rich environment. Her work reflected a deep belief that communication is fundamental to dignity, confidence, education, and human connection.

Throughout her career, Donna was recognized within Montgomery County Public Schools for integrating the spirit and traditions of Mexican culture into educational experiences for children in the United States, fostering cultural appreciation, inclusion, and global understanding among students and families.

Donna also served as a founding member of the Black MCPS Speech Language Pathologists group, an organization dedicated to supporting the speech and language needs of children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Through advocacy, mentorship, and leadership, she worked to ensure that all children — regardless of background — had access to equitable communication support and educational opportunity.

Her legacy is reflected not only in professional accomplishments, but in the countless children, families, and colleagues whose lives were strengthened by her warmth, vision, cultural awareness, and unwavering commitment to helping every child find their voice.

Thyonne Gordon

Dr. Thyonne Gordon is a nationally recognized leader in human and organizational development, known for guiding institutions and communities through complex transformation with clarity, strategy, and purpose. She currently serves as Interim President of Pacifica Graduate Institute, where she is leading the organization through a period of significant transition - aligning academic vision, strengthening operational infrastructure and advancing a sustainable path forward.

With a Ph.D. in Human and Organizational Development, Dr. Gordon's work sits at the intersection of leadership, culture, and systems change. She brings a practitioner's lens to change management—centering people, process, and performance to drive meaningful and lasting outcomes. Across her career, she has scaled organizations, restructured teams, and implemented strategies that stabilize operations while positioning institutions for long-term growth. As the founder of Beyond Story Strategies, she developed the S.T.O.R.Y. Accelerator™, a methodology that integrates narrative with strategic execution to support leaders and organizations in navigating change and unlocking new opportunities. Her leadership experience includes serving as Executive Director of A Place Called Home and CoachArt, where she expanded programs, increased revenue, and strengthened community impact.

Dr. Gordon is also an Emmy-nominated producer and the creator of the docu-series Finding the Black Blue Zone: The Black Longevity Code, which explores health, resilience, and longevity in Black communities—reflecting her commitment to bridging research, storytelling, and real-world application. Whether leading institutions or engaging global audiences, Dr. Gordon brings a grounded, human-centered approach to transformation which helps organizations not only adapt to change but evolve through it. Dr. Gordon believes you can bloom where you're planted and grow. She is the proud mother of Matthia Bethany Sales. You can reach her at: doctg@beyondstory.com

Gloria White-Hammond

Gloria E. White-Hammond, MD, MDIV, is Co-Pastor of Bethel AME Church in Boston. A retired pediatrician, she devoted nearly 30 years to clinical care before focusing on ministry and humanitarian leadership. She co-founded My Sister's Keeper, a faith-based, women-led organization advancing social justice and empowering women and girls in conflict zones. In 2015, she was appointed Swartz Resident Practitioner in Ministry Studies at Harvard Divinity School and co-directed the "Spirituality and Healing in Medicine" course at Harvard Medical School for a decade.

Rev Dr. White-Hammond earned degrees from Boston University, Tufts University School of Medicine, and Harvard Divinity School. Dr. White-Hammond has received numerous community awards and honorary degrees and serves in key leadership roles, including trustee emeritus of Tufts University and Brigham and Women's Hospital.

Ray Hammond

Pastor Ray Hammond was born and raised in Philadelphia, PA, the eldest son of a Baptist preacher and a schoolteacher. He was educated in the public schools of Philadelphia and went on to graduate from Harvard College and Harvard Medical School. He completed his surgical residency at the New England Deaconess Hospital (Boston, MA) and joined the Emergency Medicine staff at the Cape Cod Hospital (Hyannis, MA). Pastor Hammond accepted the call to the preaching ministry in 1976 and completed his Master of Arts degree in the Study of Religion (Christian and Medical Ethics) at Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in 1982. In 1988 he was called, along with his wife Gloria, to be the co-founder and pastor of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Boston.

Pastor Hammond has a long history of involvement with youth and community activities. He is Board Chair of the Bethel Institute for Community Development, the Free for All Fund, and the Roxbury Community College Foundation. He is a Board Member of BMATen Point, Boston Green Ribbon Commission, the Boston Opportunity Agenda, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, and the Yawkey Foundation. He is a former chairman of the Boston Foundation. He continues to work in local and district youth activities in the AME Church.

Pastor Hammond is the author of several papers and articles on a range of issues including academic achievement, diversity, and violence prevention. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and is also the recipient of numerous honors including honorary doctorates from Boston University, Cambridge College, University of Massachusetts – Boston, Lesley College, Northeastern University, Boston College, Emmanuel College, Notre Dame University, AME University (Monrovia, Liberia), William James College and New England Law Boston. He is the proud husband of the Rev. Dr. Gloria White-Hammond (a pediatrician and copastor to whom he has been happily married since 1973); the blessed father of two daughters, Mariama and Adiya, and a son-in-law, Turahn Dorsey; and the proud grandfather of Rynn. He counts as his greatest blessing the love of a God who has made it possible for him to accomplish and receive more than he could have ever thought or imagined

Sharon Lawrence Harper

Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner and Mental Health Advocate, Sharon Lee Harper, got her start as the church outreach coordinator in the new SNCC office in Philadelphia in 1966. She was trained by Stokely Carmichael, James Forman and Diane Nash, among others. She later earned her BS in Nursing from the University of Pennsylvania and her MS in Psychiatric Nursing as a graduate of the first class of Psychiatric Nurses at Columbia University. An expert in Mental Health within under-resourced communities, Sharon specializes in depression, addiction, and resilience strategies in Black women and serves as a team member of The Consortium, the first mental health agency in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania with a board of directors elected by the community itself, guaranteeing the first of its kind community input. Sharon is currently writing her first book, a novel.

Benjamin Herold

Benjamin Herold is an award-winning journalist whose work has appeared in Education Week, NPR, PBS NewsHour, Huffington Post, and WHY-Philadelphia. His writing blends reportage, archival and historical research, memoir, and the unfiltered voices of subject

collaborators into sweeping nonfiction narratives. Herold's first book, *DISILLUSIONED: Five Families and the Unraveling of America's Suburbs* (Penguin Press, 2024) was hailed by critics as "engrossing" (New York Times Book Review), "beautifully layered" (New Republic), and "astonishingly important" (the Atlantic). His multimedia reporting on America's public schools for print, web, radio, and television was recognized by the Education Writers Association with first-place awards for investigative reporting and feature writing, and in 2013 EWA named Herold the top education beat reporter in the nation. Now working as an independent author, Herold is pursuing writing as a form of Quaker ministry, shedding the pretense of journalistic neutrality and authority in favor of collaborations in which he bears witness to, cares for, and actively supports the work of those with whom he writes.

Current projects-in-progress include *The Philadelphia Dreamkeepers Project*, undertaken in collaboration with the Center for Black Educator Development and researchers from Morgan State and Temple universities; *Every Day Is Starting Over*, undertaken in collaboration with the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Marygrove Community Association in Northwest Detroit; and *A Watershed Surrounds Us*, undertaken in collaboration with muralist, scholar, water protector, and fishing guide Autumn Harry of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe in what is now known as northern Nevada. In addition to his writing, Herold is an adjunct professor, teaching courses on racial identity development in schools and ecological models for understanding how interlocking systems impact the lives and opportunities of urban children and families. He also works as a recruiter for the Spencer Education Journalism Fellowship at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. He previously worked as a dishwasher, janitor, waiter, researcher, independent documentary filmmaker, and community organizer on behalf of non-profit organizations dedicated to ending sexual and family violence.

Herold has a Master's degree in Urban Education from Temple University in Philadelphia, where he lives with his two daughters, two dogs, and stubborn hope that the 76ers will one day win another NBA championship. Learn more at www.benjaminherold.com.

Geri Hines

Geraldine S. Hines is a retired Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. Justice Hines began her judicial career in 2000, as a judge on the Superior Court where she served for 12 years before being appointed to the Appeals Court in 2013. Governor Deval Patrick appointed her to the state's highest court in 2014. At the time of her appointment, she was the first African American woman to serve on the Court in its three hundred- and twenty-two-year history. While on the SJC, Justice Hines authored two important decisions in the area of criminal law. In *Commonwealth v. Warren* reported at 475 Mass. 530 (2016), the opinion recognized that a black man's flight from the police in Boston "might just as easily be motivated by the desire to void the recurring indignity of being racially profiled as by the desire to hide criminal activity." The opinion in *Commonwealth v. Brangan*, 477 Mass 691 (2017) fundamentally changed the bail procedure in Massachusetts, ruling that a judge must consider a defendant's financial circumstances in setting bail. Upon her retirement from the bench, Justice Hines was named the Rappaport Distinguished Visiting Professor at Boston College Law School in 2018. Presently, she is the Huber Distinguished Visiting Professor at Boston College Law School where she teaches a course, "Race, Policing and the Constitution."

Justice Hines graduated from Tougaloo College in Mississippi in 1968, and from the University of Wisconsin Law School in 1971. She has been a member of the Massachusetts Bar for more than 50 years. Prior to her judicial tenure, Justice Hines' practice was concentrated on criminal defense and civil rights litigation in both the Massachusetts state courts and the federal court. She served as cooperating counsel with the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights and the ACLU of Massachusetts. As a trial lawyer, Justice Hines represented criminal defendants in murder cases and other major felonies. Her civil rights practice focused on the litigation of police misconduct and employment discrimination claims. In addition to her practice, Justice Hines was an adjunct faculty member at Northeastern University School of Law where she taught in Criminal Advocacy Clinic for more than 20 years and later taught Criminal Trial Practice for 10 years after her appointment to the bench. Over the course of her legal and judicial career, Justice Hines contributed to dozens of continuing legal education programs as a panelist and author on a broad range of topics in criminal and civil rights law.

Justice Hines has been actively involved in international human rights. She was a founding member of Lawyers Against Apartheid and an active member and Vice Chair of the Massachusetts Citizens Against the Death Penalty as a member of a joint National Conference of Black Lawyers/National Lawyers Guild delegation investigating allegations of human rights abuses in Kuwait in the aftermath of the first Gulf War in 1992. In 1991, she served as an election observer in the referendum on Eritrean independence and as an observer in South Africa's first multi-racial election in 1994. In 2010, she accepted an invitation from the International Judicial Academy to participate in its international law program in The Hague, Netherlands where the attendees observed trials involving war crimes in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda at the International Criminal Court.

Margaret Rosenberry Hood

Peg Rosenberry had a long career in national advocacy for environmental justice and national service. Following her graduate work at Cornell University in environmental education and national resource management, she managed the education component of the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), a precursor to the national service programs supported under the H. W. Bush, Clinton, W. Bush and Obama administrations.

After a two-year sojourn as a teacher in Saudi Arabia with her husband, she resumed her work in environmental justice at the Human Environment Center, an organization formed to address issues that disproportionately affect minorities and economically dispossessed communities, to promote minority involvement in the environmental movement, and to encourage minority youth to pursue careers in national resource management and environmental justice. As director of the Human Environment Center, she established minority internship programs with the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service to introduce students to potential careers in natural resource management fields in an effort to integrate and bring minority perspectives to those fields.

She served concurrently as executive director of the Human Environment Center and the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps, an association of state and local conservation and service corps programs many of whom employed minority youth in conservation work. As founding director of the Association of Service and Conservation Corps, she worked with a coalition of national organizations to promote national service programs and secure passage of national service legislation. She advised Members of

Congress on environmental issues affecting poor and minority communities and on various elements of national service and effective approaches to national service. During this period, she was a member of Senator Barbara Mikulski's advisory group on youth service and education programs. Upon passage of the National and Community Service Act under President Clinton, she held key positions at the Corporation for National Service which administers the national service programs, including AmeriCorps, Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). She served a key role in the start-up of the AmeriCorps program, working with governors' offices and state leaders to establish the state commissions required under the law. She also served as Senior Advisor to the Chief Operating Officer and Director of Grants Management where she managed \$650 million in federal national service grant funds.

Michael Hood

Michael Hood joined the Peace Corps after he received a B.A. in history from the University of Washington in Seattle. Chad, Central Africa became his home for two years. He lived near Lake Chad in a small village in the Sahara Desert training camels to pull a small plow to help the local farmers cultivate larger wheat fields.

He also served as an English teacher in Algeria and Saudi Arabia as well as a Junior High Social Studies teacher in Baltimore City Public Schools. Michael received an M.A. degree in International Affairs from Columbia University and then began his career with the United States Department of the Interior as an international water resources development specialist. His portfolio included water resource technical assistance in the Middle East and a large part of the African continent. He secured funding for these projects from international donor agencies such as USAID, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The projects mainly focused on helping developing countries establish systems for water conservation, wastewater re-use, and water recycling in addition to helping local farmers with irrigation system improvements. Michael worked on the development of the water section in establishment of the Oslo Peace Accords and assisted in development of conflict resolution workshops addressing on-going conflicts of the riparian states of the Nile River and the Lake Malawi Basin conflicts between Malawi, Tanzania and Mozambique.

In retirement he volunteers with the Montgomery County, Maryland Literacy Council which provides free English language classes for immigrants in the county. He also volunteers at the Manna Food Center which provides food for people in need in Montgomery County.

Marilyn Mackel

Marilyn Mackel has enjoyed a diverse career rooted in a lifetime of activism. Born in Natchez, Mississippi, to activist parents, she learned early the importance of service. Her father served on the National Board of the NAACP during the Brown v. Board of Education era, and her mother was a dedicated teacher and community organizer. After moving to Chicago, Marilyn attended Bennett College for Women, where she served as Student Government President and was active in the sit-in movement. She earned a BA in Sociology in 1965, followed by a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice from John Jay College in 1971 and a JD from Georgetown University in 1976.

Marilyn's professional journey includes roles as a social worker, probation officer, and Professor of Law and Public Administration. In California, she practiced business and real estate litigation before transitioning to the judiciary. She served as a Referee and later as a Commissioner for the Los Angeles County Superior Court, retiring in 2011. Throughout her career, she has been a prolific writer and a dedicated mentor, receiving numerous awards from organizations such as the NAACP and the Los Angeles County Bar Association. More recently, Marilyn received the SitIn Participant Award from the International Civil Rights Center and Museum.

In retirement, Marilyn remains a devoted advocate for her community. Residing in Marin City, she served on the Marin County Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Commission and is a former board member of the Marin City Community Development Corporation and the California Youth Connection (CYC). She is also a founding emeritus board member of the Black AIDS Institute. Currently, she focuses her efforts on supporting her alma mater, Bennett College, the Gateways Music Festival and working to prevent the gentrification of Marin City, the historically Black Community where she resides.

James Olivier Michel

James O. Michel, aka Jom, is an aspiring wise elder, committed, in his final chapters, to advancing collective liberation with every fiber of his being. He works to stop harm, build beloved community, and support spiritual transformation. He is grateful to have met a kindred spirit in Ruby Sales, albeit late in life, and appreciates collaborating with her to bring a case to the US Supreme Court challenging the seditious behavior of President elect DJT.

Born at the mid-point of the 20th Century, he had the good fortune to come of age during the 1960's, when movements for civil rights, women's liberation, and anti-war were winning, and the moral arc of the universe indeed seemed to be bending towards justice. During this time, he began to develop an anti-capitalist analysis, based on first inklings that the United State government didn't really work for the people, and that mass movements were needed to effect change. He studied psychology and religion, trained and worked as a clinician, but early in his career shifted to public policy work, striving to improve systems of care.

With his wife Carol Bell, Jom moved to Boston in the mid-80's. While raising a family and working in the mental health/addiction space, they have dedicated their lives to community building. Their three sons are all Boston Public School graduates, so they assumed multiple volunteer roles in parent councils. Jom has been active in youth and adult sports programs for four decades as a coach, official and administrator. Both have been leaders at their Unitarian Universalist church, organizing religious education programs, social justice work, community support systems. More recently they have joined a young AME church, and a Buddhist sangha.

Alarmed as he read about the climate crisis, Jom re-engaged with community organizing in the 21st Century. With beloved comrades he was central to organizing Resist the Pipeline, which conducted a sustained non-violent grassroots campaign to stop the construction of a fracked gas pipeline entering the city of Boston. He then founded the Boston Clean Energy Coalition (BCEC), whose mission was to advocate for a just transition from fossil fuels to renewables at the city administration/city council level. BCEC has since morphed into the Boston Green New Deal Coalition. He is steering team member of the Crane Ledge Woods Coalition, which has been working for years to prevent the destruction of 14 acres of urban tree canopy to make way for a car-centric, gentrifying development in southwest Boston. He

is the President of the new Community Land Trust which is stewarding 'orphan' parcels along the Neponset River. He is also on the board of the Neponset River Watershed Association (NepWRA), where he is involved in citizen oversight of EPA Superfund remediation work.

Currently he is a member of two national networks. The Fierce Vulnerability Network (FVN) seeks to work at the intersection of climate resistance and racial healing. Under the FVN banner he organized multiple groups from the northeast to travel to Anishinaabe territory (northern MN) to take action to stop Enbridge Corporation's Line 3 tar sands pipeline. FVN also organizes groups to provide work weeks, i.e. free labor, to help develop BIPOC-led land based intentional communities. The Solidaire Network seeks to promote wealth redistribution, uplifting a politics of repair and collective healing. Our motto is: we support BIPOC-led movements like we want them to win! For both national networks, Jom is working to create integrated northeast hubs.

Amelie Ratliff

Amelie Ratliff, born in 1950 in a wealthy white suburb of Birmingham, Alabama, grew up steeped in privilege and segregation. Plagued by the contradictions between what she learned in her Episcopal church and what she saw and experienced in the world she was navigating, she went to seminary to better understand justice, God, and belief. She calls those seminary years the most formative of her life as she lived in community with others asking the same questions. Her focus on Black, Civil Rights, and Southern history as well as Ethics and Social Justice movements helped her make sense of her upbringing in Alabama.

She moved to Boston where she served as a campus minister and then shifted focus to consulting and fundraising for small progressive organizations, many based in the South. Along the way she became connected to the Highlander Research and Education Center, serving on the board for six years and as co-chair for three. She brought leaders of Southern Black and Immigrant organizations to Boston to raise money, increase their visibility, and gain new long-term donors. She's most proud of having created and led a ten-day tour for Northeastern folks to the South, starting at Highlander, meeting Civil Rights foot soldiers and leaders as well as the leaders of today who are carrying on the fight for justice. Along with exposure to Civil Rights museums and famous sights and experiences like walking across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, the tour included a Sunday service at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham and a challenging tour of Angola Penitentiary in Louisiana.

Though retired now, she continues her fundraising and donor education work. Ruby Sales has long been a hero as has Jonathan Daniels, and she is pleased to join in honoring Ms. Sales.

Pearl T. Robinson

Professor of Political Science and International Relations at Tufts University, in 2025, Pearl Robinson was identified as a Trailblazing Female Scholar in Comparative Politics. A past President of the African Studies Association and a recipient of its Distinguished Africanist award, she is a member of the Council of Foreign Relations and a former Director of Tufts University's undergraduate International Relations Program. Her previous board service includes Oxfam-America, TransAfrica, the African Studies Association, and the National Council of Negro Women's International Division. The author of more than 40 articles and book chapters, she has also produced a short film titled "Mama Kyota," which is a Hausa language documentary about Islam and Female empowerment among the Tidjaniyya in Niger. Robinson is presently writing an intellectual biography of Ralph Bunche, the first person of Color to win a Nobel Prize.

Jamie Sails

Jamie Sails was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, to Karen Sails and the late James Sails, Ruby Sales' eldest brother. A graduate of North Central High School, Jamie was selected as the school's 1999 commencement speaker. She later attended North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro, North Carolina, where she graduated in 2004 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering. Jamie began her professional career as a Rehabilitation Engineer for the State of Georgia, where she designed custom assistive technology devices and provided technology solutions for differently abled individuals to support their vocational and independent living goals. Her dedication and excellence in service earned her recognition from the Touch the Future Conference with the Excellence in Assistive Technology Award.

Through her professional and personal experiences, Jamie developed a deep passion for serving others and strengthening her community. As a resident of the Atlanta, Georgia area, she is actively involved in ministry and outreach through Ben Hill United Methodist Church. Jamie works closely with foster children, the unhoused population, at-risk youth, and is an advocate for the prevention of human trafficking. She maintains memberships in several professional and civic organizations, including the National Society of Black Engineers, Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America, and the NAACP.

In addition to her community involvement, Jamie enjoys expressing her creativity through writing, spoken word, baking, and music. She values faith, family, and building meaningful connections, and remains committed to using her talents, compassion, and leadership to positively impact the lives of others. Jamie is a niece of Ruby Sales.

Karen Sails

Karen Sails is a lifelong resident of Indianapolis, Indiana, and a proud graduate of the Indianapolis Public Schools system. She graduated from Shortridge High School in 1965 before earning a Bachelor of Science degree from Knoxville College in 1970. During her undergraduate studies, she was selected for a prestigious student teaching program at Harvard University. This unique initiative paired highly qualified master teachers with beginning educators to implement innovative, hands-on instruction in schools throughout the Roxbury and Newton, Massachusetts communities.

Committed to educational excellence and leadership, Ms. Sails later earned a Master's degree in Educational Leadership from Butler University in 1979. After more than 40 years of dedicated service, she retired from Indianapolis Public Schools in 2013. Throughout her distinguished career, Ms. Sails served as a classroom teacher for grades 1-12, Supervisor of Student Teachers, Teacher Mentor, and District Literacy Instructional Coach. One of the defining moments of her career came in 1989 when she was selected as a Founding Teacher of Cold Spring Academic Academy. The school became known for fostering a welcoming and diverse learning environment where cultural and socioeconomic differences were celebrated and students were inspired to become lifelong learners.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Ms. Sails has remained deeply committed to community service and civic engagement. She has maintained more than 50 years of active membership in Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and is also involved with Phi Delta Kappa, Indianapolis Urban League, Girl Scouts of Central Indiana, and Barnes United Methodist Church.

Family remains at the center of Ms. Sails' life. She treasures time spent traveling and creating lasting memories with her loved ones. In celebration of her upcoming 80th birthday, her family plans a special visit to the studio of the Today show. Ms. Sails is the proud mother of two adult daughters, Kimberli and Jamie, and a devoted "Nana" to her granddaughter, Jocelyn. She is also the widow of James Sails, the oldest brother of Ruby Sales.

Malcolm and Rachael Sales

Together, Malcolm and Pivotal (Rachael) Sales are the parents of twelve children, seven of whom are college graduates and attendees. They are the co-owners of Healing Waters Christian Academy (a homeschool network) and Tranzlation Global (a software solutions company). They are graduates of Morehouse and Spelman Colleges, where they met an unmentionable number of years ago.

When this powerhouse couple is not out leaping tall buildings in a single bound, their Clark Kent accomplishments are as follows:

Mr. Malcolm Sales is the CEO and founder of Tranzlation Global, a for-profit, limited liability corporation (LLC) located in Atlanta, GA, providing secure software solutions in global health and finance to consumers, local/state/federal government, and academic institutions. He has over 25 years in the IT industry, healthcare IT, finance, and human resources. Upon graduating cum laude from Morehouse College, he accepted a position at General Mills in Minnesota, but left after a year, returning to Atlanta to handle responsibilities as a young father.

Ms. "Pivotal" R. Sales is an educator and a Christian advocate for social justice. She is a writer, news/entertainment reporter, and a social commentator. (Pivotal is the host of Pivotal Times, a social news commentary.) After graduating as salutatorian at Spelman, she enrolled in Stanford University's doctoral program, but left early with a Master's degree, answering the call to ministry.

Upon unexpectedly returning to Atlanta, the two friends reconnected, dedicated their lives to Christ, fell in love and married. They started a family soon after, allowing God to determine the number of children they would have. So, no, you did not misread the introduction. They share the joy and the weight of parenting twelve children and keeping a family connected to God and each other in a digitally driven world. They are affectionately known as the Sales 12.

Matthia Sales

Matthia Bethany Sales, Ruby Sales' niece, is a native of Los Angeles, CA. Born of Thyonne Gordon and Michael Sales she attended Windward High School in Mar Vista, CA. She spent 2 years studying at Howard University and 2 years at the University of La Verne where she ultimately earned her Bachelors in Accounting.

She is currently living in Atlanta, GA working as an Accountant at Topline Business Management while studying for her CPA license.

Michael T. Sales

Mike, Ruby Sales nephew, is an award winning artist who has been recognized for excellence in writing and design. He was a founding member of NASCAR Digital Media, starting their digital design team and leading the effort to modernize NASCAR.com. He currently leads design strategy at Duke Energy, helping them modernize their IT products with human centered design and artificial intelligence.

As a writer, he has written for Charlotte Magazine, and Medium, focusing on hip hop, race and gender. In the Eisner award winning anthology “Black Comics: Politics of Race and Representation”, Mike examined the way Black independent publishers use social media to engage with their audiences. And in 2026, he contributed to another anthology, called “Hip Hop and Comics.” His story, “Masked Marauders”, connected his love for masked superheroes with the way Black men often develop emotional facades to cover personal trauma and shame.

His latest project is a graphic novel called “Disturbin’ The Peace”, about a young woman who is a single mom and a superhero. The book sold out in just ten days and was recently nominated for 5 Glyph Awards, including Best Writer and Story of the Year.

Nancy Talbot

As the daughter of a South Asian scholar and diplomat, Nancy lived in India and Greece and traveled extensively throughout Asia, the Middle East, and Europe during her childhood and adolescence. These experiences gave her a deep appreciation and respect for different world cultures and peoples. At the University of Michigan, she majored in Anthropology and spent her last semester on an archaeological excavation in southern Iran.

Upon receiving a Master of Social Work in Community Organizing, Management, and Planning from Boston University, Nancy served as Executive Director of a social service/ community organizing agency in the only racially integrated public housing development in Boston at the time. She volunteered the agency to become a site of the Boston Community Schools for an educational program that allowed residents to receive a high school degree rather than a GED. Ruby Sales arrived as the teacher and taught the most creative classes Nancy had ever encountered in her work. Nancy encouraged a resident to develop a year round food and clothing cooperative which significantly benefitted the community. When the Boston Housing Authority came under receivership, this development was selected for a showcase redevelopment project. Nancy worked closely with the Tenant Council as the third voice/entity along with the Housing Authority and the Developer to plan the redevelopment.

After moving to Washington, D.C., she joined the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority as the Director of Community Relations, the department that provided social services to public housing residents and worked closely with the tenants’ organization. During these years, Nancy helped design innovative programs such as an alternative learning center and a youth radio station, WJAM, where young people learned not only the technical skills of running a radio station but the skills of writing and presenting news and stories over the airwaves. She brought in organizations such as the Urban League to work with residents to enable them to buy a home or to start a business. During her years in public housing, she developed an abiding commitment to social justice and human transformation.

After the National Community Service Act passed, Nancy joined the Corporation for National and Community Service believing that young people would benefit greatly from taking a year to serve in programs throughout the U.S. that could impact the environment, education, and existing social programs as well as upbuild communities that suffered from neglect. She managed national in-person peer grant reviews for AmeriCorps and Learn and Serve America and worked with staff across the programs to finalize grant recommendations to the Board. Since the Corporation had merged the older VISTA and Senior Volunteer programs with the new programs created under the National Community Service Act, there were fourteen sets of grant review criteria used in this one federal agency. Nancy led the Board's mandate to create one set of criteria for all national service grant applications – a challenge since the various programs had different requirements and emphases.

At the age of 55, Nancy left to attend seminary and graduated from Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York with a Master of Divinity specializing in racial justice. At age 60, Nancy was ordained in the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament into a specialized ministry at Bellevue Hospital. There she met weekly with patients in psychiatric, prison, and adolescent units as well as with methadone patients and patients with chronic health conditions to discuss what spirituality meant to them and how it related to or could help with their illnesses or addictions.

Turning her attention to the Church, Nancy became the Interim Stated Clerk for the City of New York Presbytery, an elected ecclesial position that interpreted the Church's Constitution to congregants, pastors and the presbytery as well as engaged in managing judicial processes when conflicts emerged. She was elected as the Synod of the Northeast Stated Clerk which comprises the eight states in the Northeast from New York and New Jersey to Maine with 967 churches where she served for twelve years. Nancy continues to focus on the Church's need to promote social justice in daily living consistent with written Church documents and how we can live harmonious lives without perpetuating systemic personal harm against each other. Additionally, she serves on the Board of SpiritHouse Project.

Cheryl Taylor

Dr. Taylor is a respected community health champion, researcher and member of the American Academy of Nursing. She consistently mentors nursing and health professions' students and faculty from all levels to strengthen the health care workforce and improve their capacity for leadership in eliminating health disparities nationwide.

Taylor led REACH 2010: At the Heart of New Orleans Coalition as its Principal Investigator for seven years 2000 – 2007. At the Heart of New Orleans Coalition was an African-American CBPR CVD intervention research study funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Dr. Taylor's previous research contributed to the first generation studies on homelessness Congressional Record – Senate Vol. 136, no. 39, 5738, June 5, 1990. In 1989 Dr. Taylor also developed and published a taxonomy on homelessness and six senses of home. She served as the only nurse on NIH's National Library of Medicine (NLM) Long Range Planning Sub-Committee for public health and clinical systems (2006–2016) and represents SUBR on the NIH/NLM Environmental Health Information Partnership,

<https://sis.nlm.nih.gov/outreach/enhip.html>.

Dr. Taylor served as commissioner on the Katrina National Justice Commission of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference. Winner of a National League for Nursing Nurse Educator of the Year Award and recipient of the D.J. Pesut Spirit of Real Reward from the International Honors Society of Nursing, she also served as a member of the COVID-19 National Bioethics Commission. Her leadership, breadth, depth and reach spans across social justice and health care disciplinary boundaries and includes innovations inside and outside of academia.

Taylor, a student development expert, an innovative academic administrator, faculty mentor and master teacher, was elected by the National Student Nurses Association to serve as their NLN Consultant for five terms. She also holds the prestigious title of NSNA honorary member. The National Student Nurses Association represents 60,000 nursing students nationwide, nsna.org. She was selected by the students at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa for the Autherine Lucy Foster Award.

Dr. Cheryl Taylor earned her bachelor's degree from Dillard University in New Orleans in 1977, Master's Degree in Nursing from Washington, Seattle 1980, and her PhD in Nursing from Texas Woman's University 1986. However, she attributes her fearlessness and advocacy for justice and human rights to the mentoring she received from her role model, Ruby N. Sales.

Shirley Thornton

Dr. Shirley Thornton is a distinguished scholar, educator, administrator, and author with a career spanning over five decades. She holds a Doctorate of Education from the University of San Francisco, as well as degrees in Biological Sciences and Counseling from San Francisco State University. Dr. Thornton is also a retired Colonel in the U.S. Army Reserves, having graduated from the Command and General Staff College.

Her extensive leadership experience includes serving as Deputy Superintendent for the California Department of Education, Director of San Francisco Public Housing, and Area Superintendent for the San Francisco Unified School District. In the private sector, she served as Senior Vice President and National Director of the America's Schools Program. Her academic career includes tenured and adjunct roles at California State University, Sacramento, and she recently retired from the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Education in 2023.

As the owner of Thornton Educational Services, Dr. Thornton specializes in assisting school districts to provide quality education for at-risk students. She is the author of "Transforming Schools: Finding Success For Students At Risk Through Systemic Change," a practical guide for improving school performance. Dr Thornton was elected to and served on the Sausalito Marin City School Board for sixteen (16) years, and currently serves on the Sausalito Marin City Sanitation Board. She is an active member of the San Francisco Alumni Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, and an active Rotarian.

A staunch advocate for educational equity and excellence, Dr. Thornton emphasizes rigorous standards and comprehensive accountability. Her professional motto is: "Let us use the knowledge we have, to gain the knowledge we need, to do the job we must for all children."

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