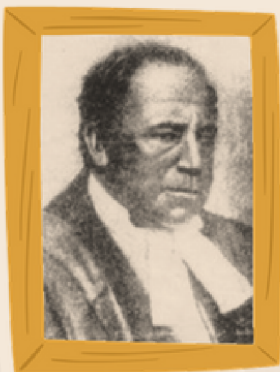




LUTHERANS IN BLACK HISTORY

BLACK HISTORY MONTH EXHIBITION

Commemorating notable
Black Lutherans
who shaped history in our
church, community
and beyond



TLC Racial Justice Ministry, 2024
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church - Lansdale PA

ABOUT BLACK HISTORY MONTH

African American Historian Carter G. Woodson initiated Negro History Week on Feb. 7, 1926. He wanted to encompass the birthdays of two great Americans who played a prominent role in shaping Black history, Abraham Lincoln (Feb. 12) and Frederick Douglass (Feb. 14). Black educators and Black United Students at Kent State University first proposed Black History Month in February 1969.

President Gerald Ford recognized Black History Month in 1976 during the celebration of the U.S. Bicentennial. In 1986, Congress designated February 1986 as "National Black (Afro-American) History Month."

In 1986, President Reagan proclaimed that "the foremost purpose of Black History Month is to make all Americans aware of the struggle for freedom and equal opportunity." Since 1996, Presidents have issued annual proclamations for Black History Month.

LUTHERANS IN BLACK HISTORY

On Palm Sunday, 1669, a Lutheran pastor in Albany, New York, baptized into his congregation an African-American man, who was given the name, Emmanuel.

African-American Lutherans have been in this country for more than 350 years, longer than many European immigrants whom we generally think of as being Lutheran.

- Mark Granquist, Associate Professor of Church History at Luther Seminary, St. Paul

Read more about the history of Blacks in the Lutheran church here →



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REV. JEHU JONES



**FIRST BLACK LUTHERAN PASTOR
IN NORTH AMERICA**

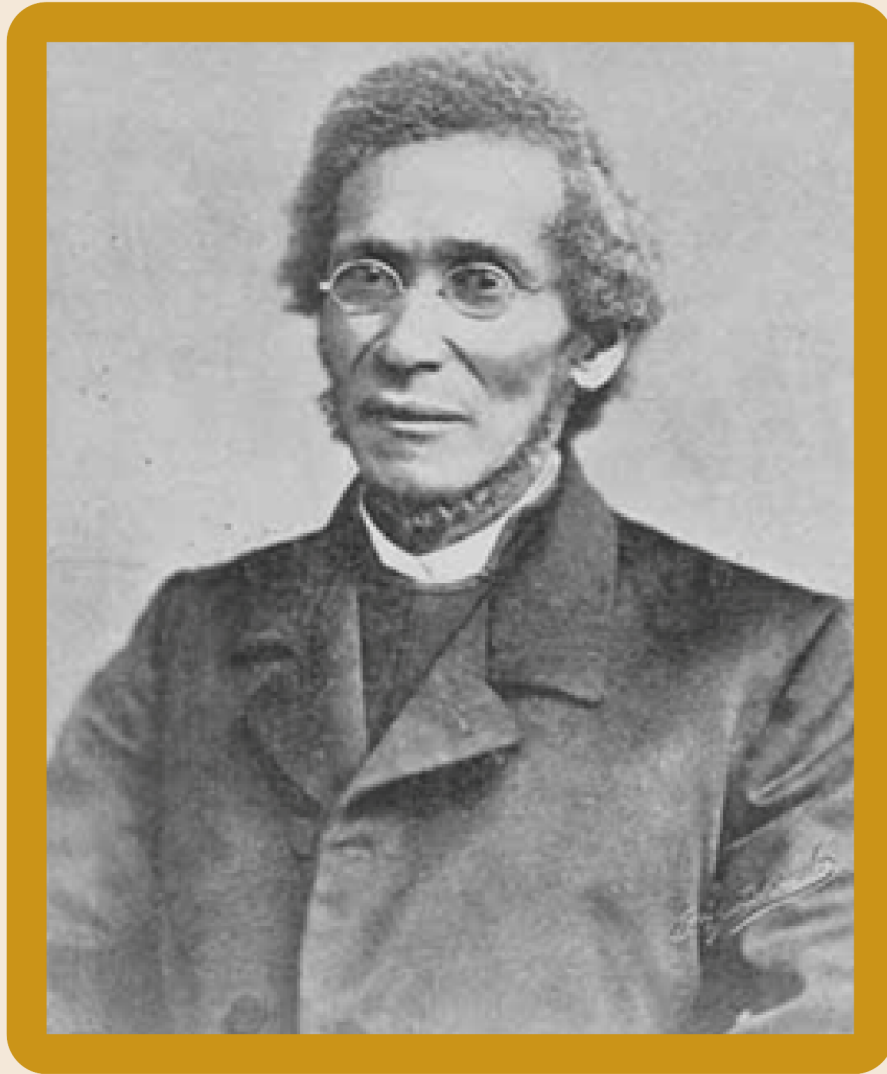
Born in Charleston, SC, to enslaved parents, **Jehu Jones, Jr.** (1796-1852) became the first Black Lutheran pastor in North America. Encouraged by his pastor, the Rev. John Bachman, he traveled to New York in 1832 to be ordained by the New York Synod.

For a time, he worked with formerly enslaved people in Liberia. Upon returning to Charleston, he was briefly jailed for violating a law prohibiting the immigration of free Blacks. In 1833 he moved to Philadelphia where Lutheran leaders there appointed him to “work with colored people under the direction of our ministers.”

Jones decided to build a church on two lots he secured on Quince St. in Philadelphia. His first members in 1834 were about 20 impoverished Blacks. The members of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church managed to pay about 40 percent of the costs at the building’s dedication in 1836, but the rest of the needed funds couldn’t be secured. In 1839 the building was sold at a sheriff’s auction. Jones continued to serve the congregation until 1851. He died the following year.

Note: The undercroft of the building and the church’s cornerstone remain today at 310 South Quince Street, near the Walnut Street Theater in Philadelphia, in a building occupied by the Mask and Wig Club of the University of Pennsylvania.

REV. DANIEL ALEXANDER PAYNE



**LUTHERAN PASTOR AND SCHOLAR,
BISHOP IN THE AME CHURCH,
COLLEGE PRESIDENT**

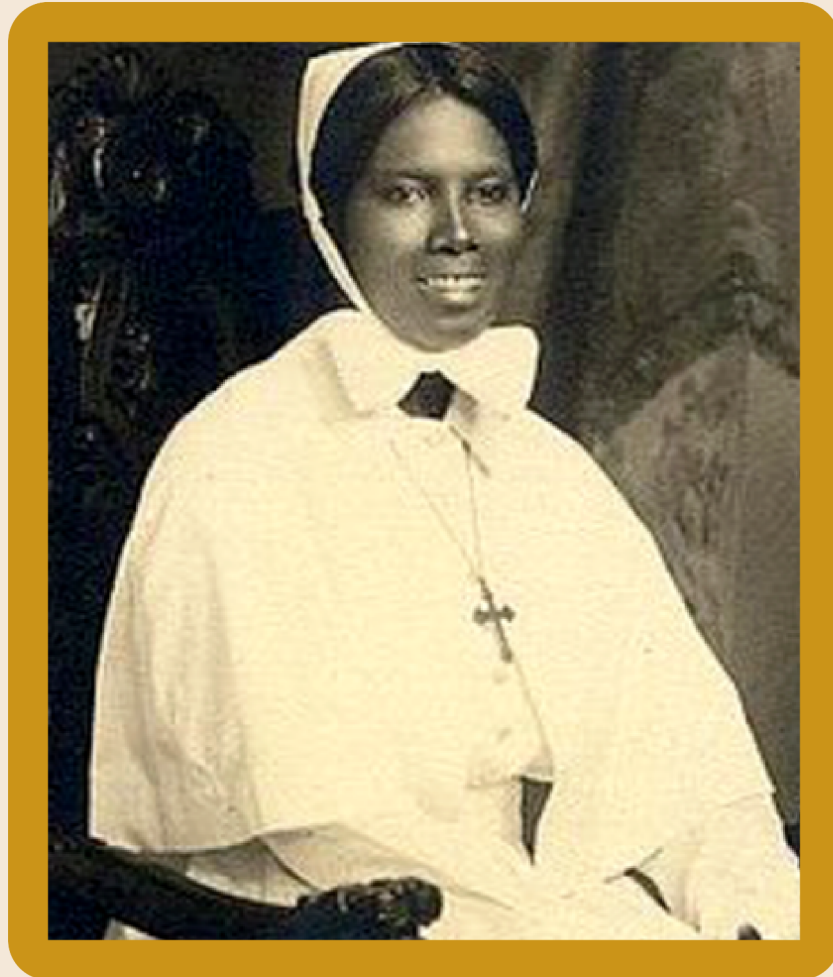
Rev. Daniel Alexander Payne (1811-1893) was a significant figure in African American Christian history and a notable educator. He was born free in a Methodist household in Charleston, SC, was schooled there until the age of 18 when he opened a school for Blacks in the city which remained open until the state passed a law that prohibited teaching Black people (either free or enslaved) to read.

In 1835, he sailed to New York seeking to continue his education in the North. He was accepted at Gettysburg Seminary, graduated and was ordained in the Lutheran church. He eventually affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church where he became a highly influential bishop of the denomination and then president of Wilberforce University, an HBCU* in Ohio.

Payne's work in education and theology had a profound impact on religious practices and was influential even beyond the AME Church, affecting other traditions including the Lutheran denomination. His leadership and focus on education helped shape the course of African American religious and educational history in the 19th century.

*Historic Black Colleges and Universities

DEACONESS EMMA FRANCIS



FIRST BLACK LUTHERAN DEACONESS
IN NORTH AMERICA

Deaconess Emma Francis (1875-1945) was born in St. Kitts, Virgin Islands and became a trailblazing Lutheran Deaconess*, the first of African descent in North America and the West Indies. Her commitment to church service began early, and after teacher training in Antigua, she went to Germany to pursue deaconess work. Initially considered for missionary roles in Cameroon and Sudan, she was instead directed to an orphanage in Fredericksted, St. Croix, Virgin Islands.

In 1922, after the U.S. acquisition of the Virgin Islands, Francis moved to Philadelphia, where she was consecrated a Deaconess on Pentecost. She then served in Harlem, New York, at the Transfiguration Lutheran Church, leveraging her multilingual skills to aid newcomers. Notably, Francis saved and donated a substantial sum to support church activities in the West Indies and New York.

Sister Emma returned to St. Croix in 1927, dedicating many years to the Ebenezer orphanage. Her life's work is remembered through the Queen Louise Home for Children, which includes "Sister Emma Cottage," serving children and young adults with severe disabilities.

* Deaconesses are now rostered leaders of the ELCA, designated as Ministers of Word and Service and all now referred to with the title of "Deacon".

ROSA JINSEY YOUNG



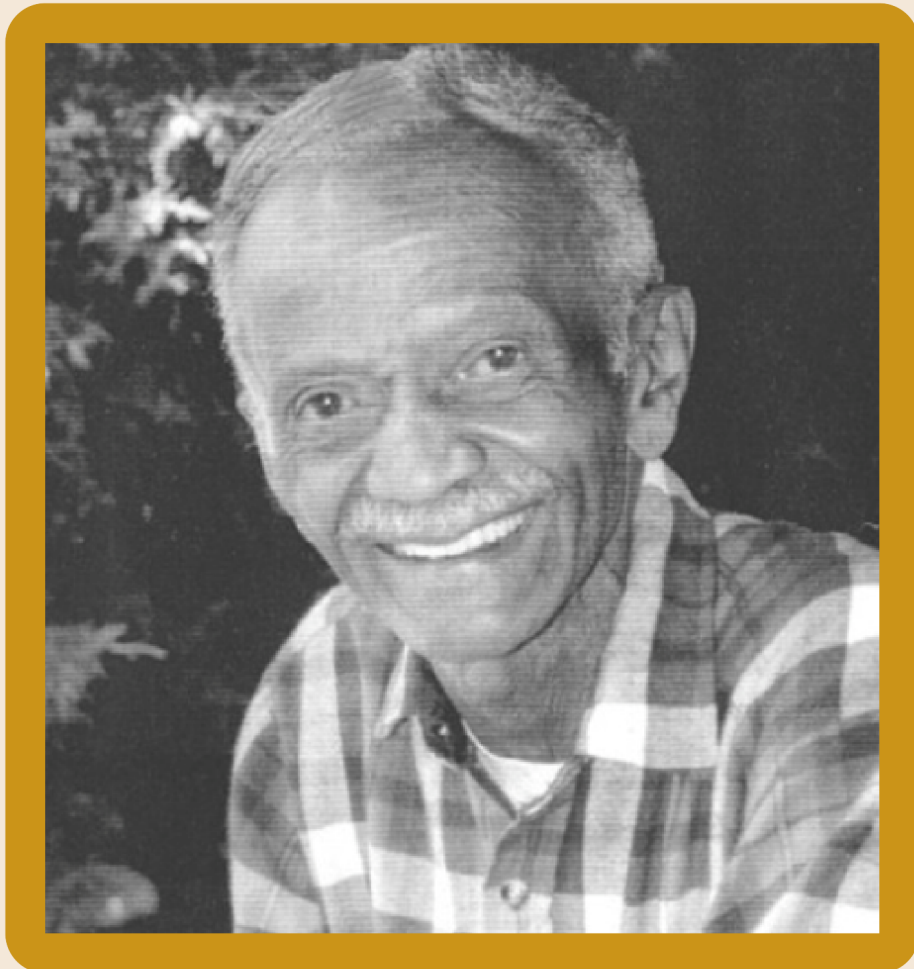
THE MOTHER OF BLACK LUTHERANISM
IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH

Rosa Jinsey Young, (1890-1971) born in Rosebud, Alabama, is celebrated as the "Mother of Black Lutheranism in the American South." She was a valedictorian at Daniel Payne College in Selma, Alabama, in 1909.

Young founded the Rosebud Literary and Industrial School in 1912, which faced challenges during the boll weevil crisis in 1914. She sought and received assistance from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, leading to the establishment of the first Black Lutheran congregation and school in Wilcox County and the Black Belt in 1916. Young's efforts were instrumental in the development of several Lutheran schools and congregations in Alabama. She also served as a faculty member of Alabama Lutheran Academy and College, influencing the foundation of Concordia College in 1922.

Her work in education and religion significantly impacted the Lutheran mission in Alabama, earning her an honorary doctorate from Concordia Theological Seminary in 1961. Rosa Young passed away on June 30, 1971, leaving a lasting legacy in the realm of education and religion.

CHESTER COMMODORE



**INFLUENTIAL POLITICAL CARTOONIST
OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA**

Chester Commodore (1914-2004) was one of the most important African-American political cartoonists of the twentieth century. When he was asked in 1981 where he got his ideas from, he didn't hesitate – "I take dictation," the artist smiled. "My ideas come from God."

Commodore worked mostly for the *Chicago Defender*, a newspaper which serves a primarily Black audience. His insightful perspective on life in the Black community, the denial of civil rights and other injustices suffered by African Americans became increasingly influential on public opinion. As a result, other publications began to reprint his work. He won the Best Cartoon Award from the National Newspaper Publishers Association every year from 1972 to 1977 and was nominated several times for a Pulitzer Prize.

He once drew an image of President Nixon during his first term reading a book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* with the caption, "Slow Reader." The President asked for a copy of the cartoon.

Commodore was an active member of Christ the Mediator Lutheran Church in Chicago.

REV. LOUISA GROCE



OLDEST PERSON ORDAINED BY THE ELCA

In 1999 **Rev. Louisa Groce** (1918-2021) became the oldest person to be ordained by the ELCA at the age of 81 . She lived to the age of 102. A mother who successfully raised five children, she never wanted a big deal to be made about her age. "Anything I've been able to do is through the grace of God. I don't deserve attention like this. God gets all the credit."

Groce entered seminary after decades of service as a public school teacher, often working with challenging students. After ordination she served for 10 years as a pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Jersey City, NJ, before retiring.

GORHAM BLACK, JR.



**WAR HERO AND PENNSYLVANIA'S FIRST
SECRETARY FOR AGING**

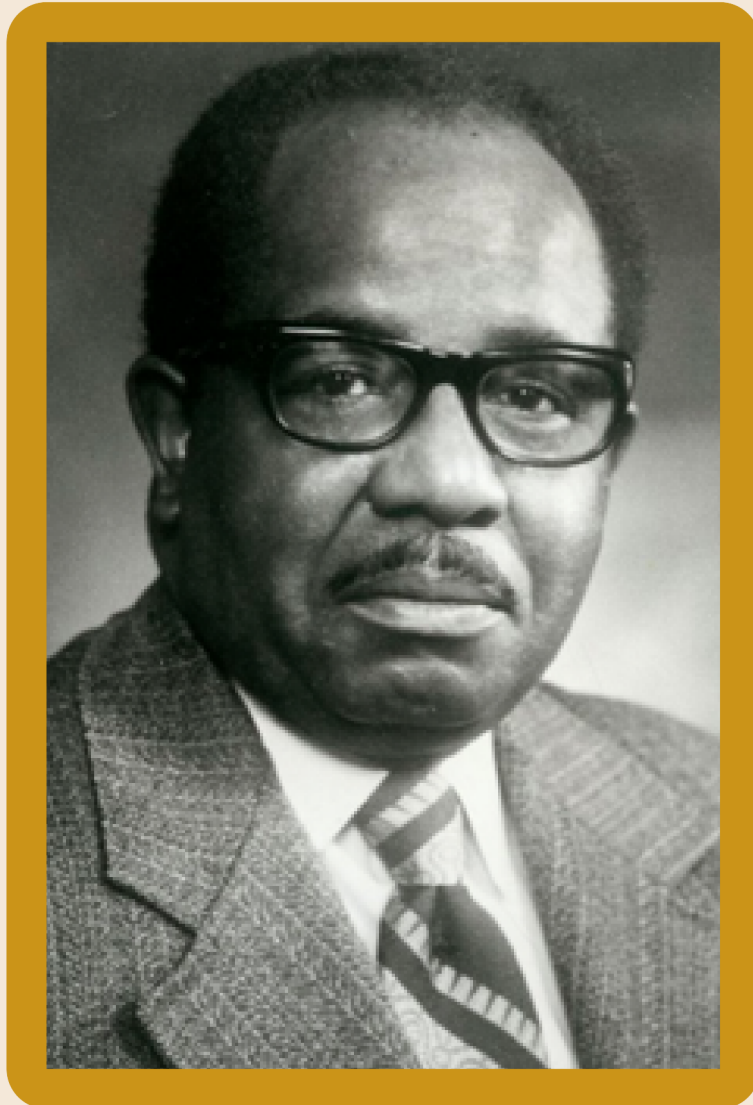
In 1980, **Gorham Black, Jr.** (1921-1993), a former Philadelphian, became the first secretary of Pennsylvania's new Department of Aging in the administration of Gov. Dick Thornburgh.

Black was a highly decorated U.S. Army veteran of WWII and the Korean conflict (including the Silver Star, Legion of Merit and Purple Heart). He once trained Liberian soldiers to polish their combat skills and eventually moved on to a senior position at the Pentagon. He then went on to stints in the corporate world and as Regional Director in the US Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

Black came to his new post back in Pennsylvania during the Thornburgh administration, determined to help seniors deal with inflation and proposed a plan to offer a discount initiative to seniors seeking goods and services. "Those of us who are Christians in government need to recognize that service to others is a priority," he said.

Black was active in the leadership of Messiah Lutheran Church in Harrisburg.

**BISHOP
NELSON TROUT**



FIRST BLACK LUTHERAN BISHOP

Rev. Dr. Nelson Trout (1921-1996), a pastor of the former American Lutheran Church*, became the Bishop of the ALC's South Pacific District in 1983, making him the first Lutheran Black bishop in a U.S. denomination.

Trout was known as a powerful preacher serving congregations in Wisconsin, Alabama and California. While in Montgomery, Alabama, he befriended Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.. Trout, once jokingly asking King how he (a Baptist) got the name, "Martin Luther". King responded asking Trout how *he* (a Black man) came to be a Lutheran.

He served many roles in the ALC including serving as director for urban evangelism. He was executive director of Lutheran Social Services in Ohio and became a professor and director for minority ministry studies at Trinity Lutheran Seminary. On June 17, 1983, Trout was elected Bishop of the South Pacific District of the American Lutheran Church. Following the denominational merger, he was named Bishop Emeritus of the Southwest California Synod of the ELCA.

*The American Lutheran Church (ALC) and the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), and Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC) merged in 1988 to form our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

SYLVIA PATE



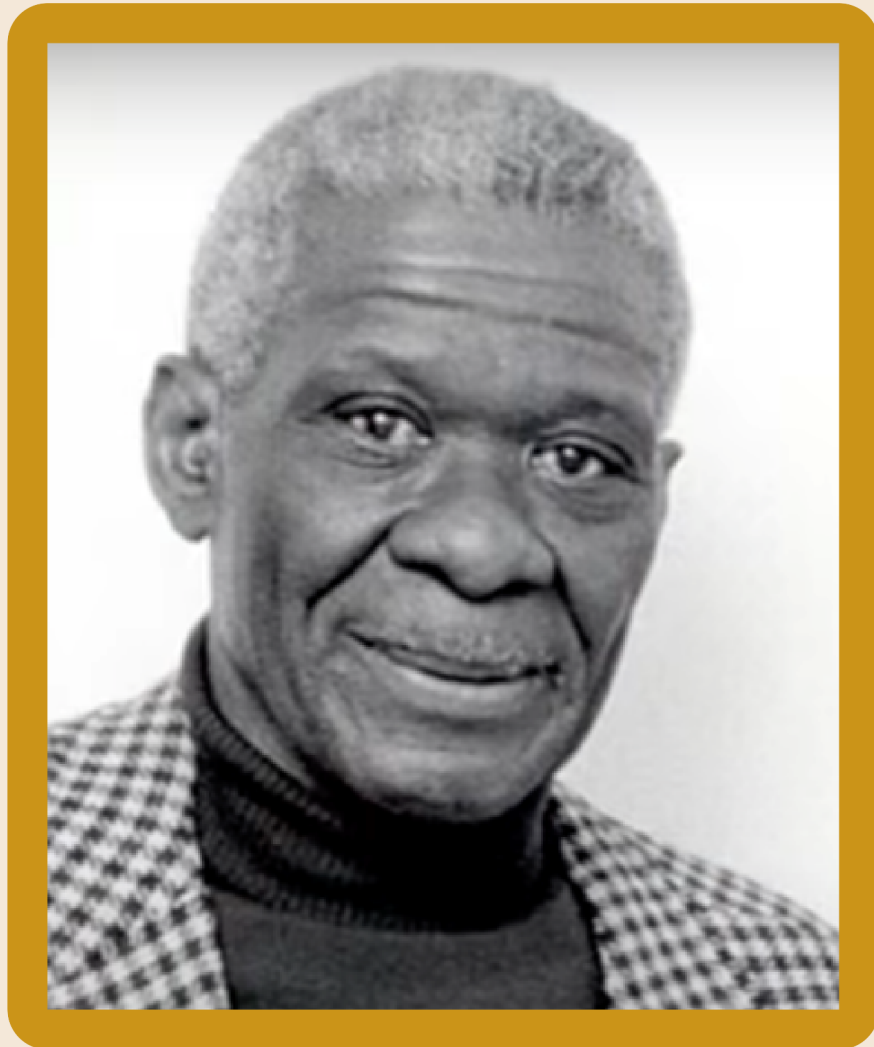
PIONEERING GOVERNMENT EXECUTIVE

In 1982, Ohio Lutheran **Sylvia Pate** (1932 - 2017) became a pioneering Pentagon executive. She was appointed the federal women's program manager for the U.S. Air Force, overseeing personnel issues involving 70,000 women civilians operating out of 125 bases around the world. "The Air Force isn't any better or worse about these things than any other business," Pate said. "There are the usual myths about women, and we try to sensitize male managers about their behavior and use of language."

While working at the Pentagon, she was influential in persuading all the branches of the Armed Services to honor Black History Month. She went on to serve as Director of Equal Employment Opportunity in the US Department of Education.

Pate said at the time she viewed the Church as no different from the Air Force in the challenges she was facing. "The only difference is that in the Air Force we can mandate change, and people either change or suffer the consequences. In the church we can't do that, but then, why should the church have to mandate? If people really believe they will respond - or else they are just playing at being Christians."

GROVER C. WRIGHT



CHAMPION OF DIVERSITY IN THE LCA AND
PHILADELPHIA COMMUNITY LEADER

Grover Wright (1933-2017) spearheaded a strategy for minority recruitment in the Lutheran Church in America, a predecessor body of today's Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. As a result of his efforts, we have many African Americans as rostered leaders in the church today.

Born in Alabama, Grover Wright grew up in a sharecropper home, the sixth of thirteen children. He worked 26 years as a railroad porter, traversing the country. In 1968 he decided to leave that work and became a lay associate in the Lutheran Church in America, active at both Christ and St. Peter's Lutheran Churches in Philadelphia. Wright was the president of the Black Lutheran Community Development Corporation in Philadelphia and was a notable member of the North Philadelphia Improvement Council and the Urban League of Philadelphia.

From 1972 until retiring in 1981, he was an executive with the Lutheran Church in America's Division for Professional Leadership, focusing on minority recruitment. The Grover and Irma Wright Scholarship at United Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia celebrates his contributions to the church.

REV. EARLEAN MILLER



FIRST BLACK FEMALE PASTOR OF THE
LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

In 1979 **Pastor Earlean Miller** (1935-2014) became the first African American woman to receive ordination in the Lutheran Church in America, the predecessor denomination to the current Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Raised in a Baptist home, she worked 20 years as a legal and executive secretary before being drawn to serve as a Lutheran pastor. She graduated from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and was ordained in 1979 at her home church, Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Gary, Ind.

Her first call was to Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Greensboro, NC, which she served from 1979 to 1984. She and other members of the congregation nurtured other women of color to become leaders in the church and the North Carolina Synod including Pastors Beverly Wallace, Brenda Bynum and CeCee Mills. In addition to her Greensboro Church assignment, Pastor Miller served churches in Chicago, Minneapolis, Columbus, OH and Robbins, IL.

ROBERT C. MAYNARD



TRAILBLAZING JOURNALIST

The son of immigrants from Barbados, **Robert Maynard** (1937-1993) dropped out of Brooklyn High School at the age of 16 to pursue a career in writing. He became friends with influential authors Langston Hughes and James Baldwin.

His career in journalism began in 1961 at the *York (PA) Gazette and Daily*. In 1965 he received a Nieman Fellowship to attend Harvard University and subsequently joined the *Washington Post* staff. He led efforts to desegregate newsrooms and inspire minority students to become journalists.

In 1979 he took over as editor of the *Oakland Tribune* and became the first African American to own a major metropolitan newspaper when he purchased it four years later. He became widely recognized for turning the paper around when it won a Pulitzer Prize in 1990.

A Lutheran, Maynard greatly valued community involvement. He taught at local high schools and regularly attended community forums. He helped many in need, including children of cocaine-addicted mothers and survivors of earthquakes and firestorms.

REV. WILL HERZFELD



FIRST BLACK BISHOP OF A NATIONAL
LUTHERAN DENOMINATION

In September 1984, the **Rev. Will Herzfeld** (1937-2002) became the first Black Bishop to preside over an American Lutheran denomination when he was elected to lead the 110,000-member Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC), a denomination that in four years would be part of the merger to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, of which Trinity is a part. Appointed at age 47 he readily recalled hateful language directed his way as a child. "My blackness is part of my competence," he once said. "There's something about being an African American. My background ethnically gives me a view from the underside of history."

In the early '60's, he was pastor of Christ Lutheran Church in Tuscaloosa, Alabama where he was involved in the organization of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), becoming a close associate of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

After the merger of the AELC into the ELCA, Herzfeld became Associate Executive Director of ELCA Global Missions where he was responsible for placing around 300 ELCA missionaries and volunteers throughout the world.

**REV. DR.
RUDOLPH
FEATHERSTONE**



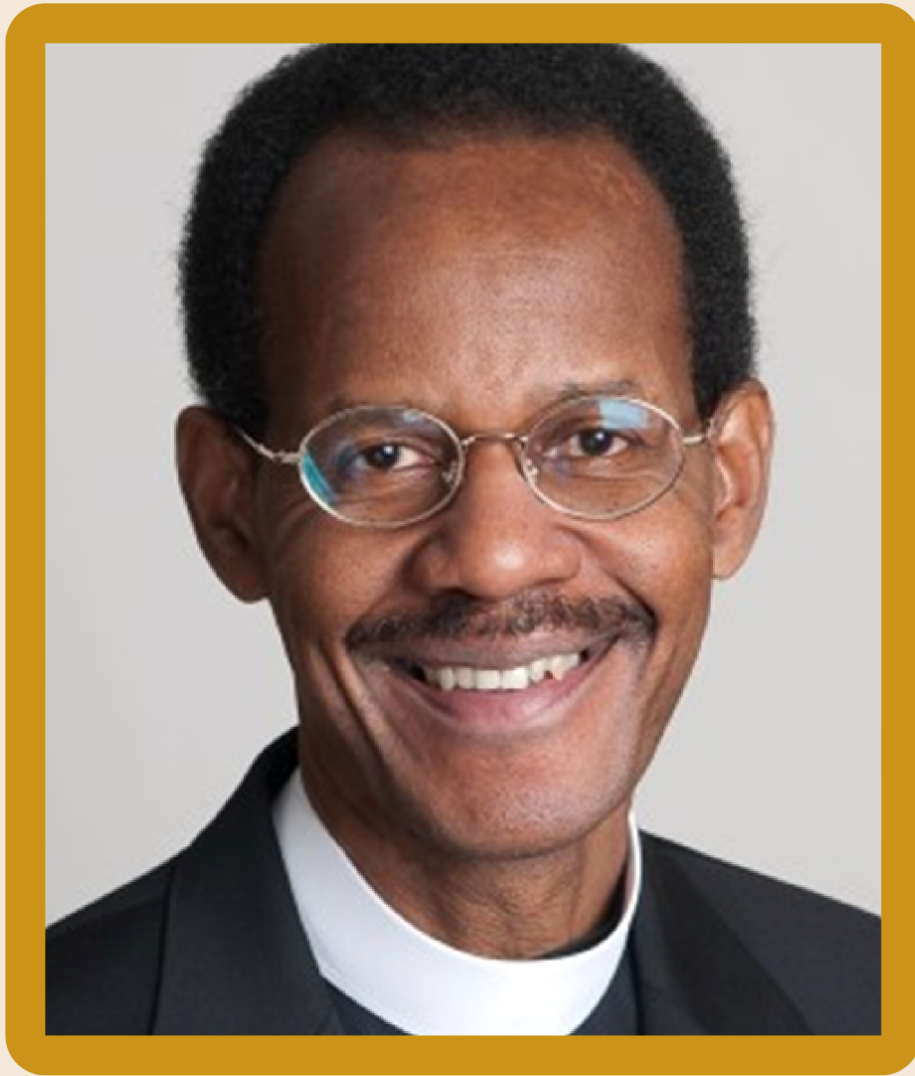
**FIRST BLACK GRADUATE OF GETTYSBURG
COLLEGE AND SEMINARY PROFESSOR**

Rev. Rudolph Featherstone (1938-) stands at the intersection of Lutheran theology, history and advocacy , the first African American to graduate from Gettysburg College.

Pastor Featherstone graduated from the Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary in 1960 and from Harvard Divinity School in 1972. His mission called him to be both a preacher and a teacher, serving as a pastor for 10 years in New York, Jamaica, and Michigan before entering Campus Ministry at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and eventually becoming a professor at Trinity Lutheran Seminary.

Featherstone was dedicated to advocacy throughout his career, especially for African American Lutherans. He was involved in the Conference of International Black Lutherans and has several publications and presentations, including his chapter in *Theology and the Black Experience: The Lutheran Heritage Interpreted by African and African-American Theologians*.

**THE REV. DR.
JAMES ECHOLS**



**FIRST BLACK LUTHERAN SEMINARY
PRESIDENT**

James K. Echols (1951-2018) was an influential African American scholar and first Black educator to serve as a dean and later as president of a Lutheran seminary. He received his Ph.D. in systematic theology from Yale University. He joined the faculty in 1982 of what was then known as The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia (now United Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia's East Mt. Airy) where he had completed his MDiv earlier in his career.

In 1997 he was appointed president of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, a post he held for 14 years. Echols was known as an expert on the history of American Christianity and the life of Dr. Martin Luther King and was often invited to speak around the world. In 2017 the Chicago Seminary honored him with a Doctor of Divinity Degree in recognition of more than 37 years of service to parish ministry, theological education and ecumenical and interfaith work.

He held an endowed chair in Christian-Muslim Studies and in Chicago helped to create the Center for Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice.

DR. ADDIE BUTLER



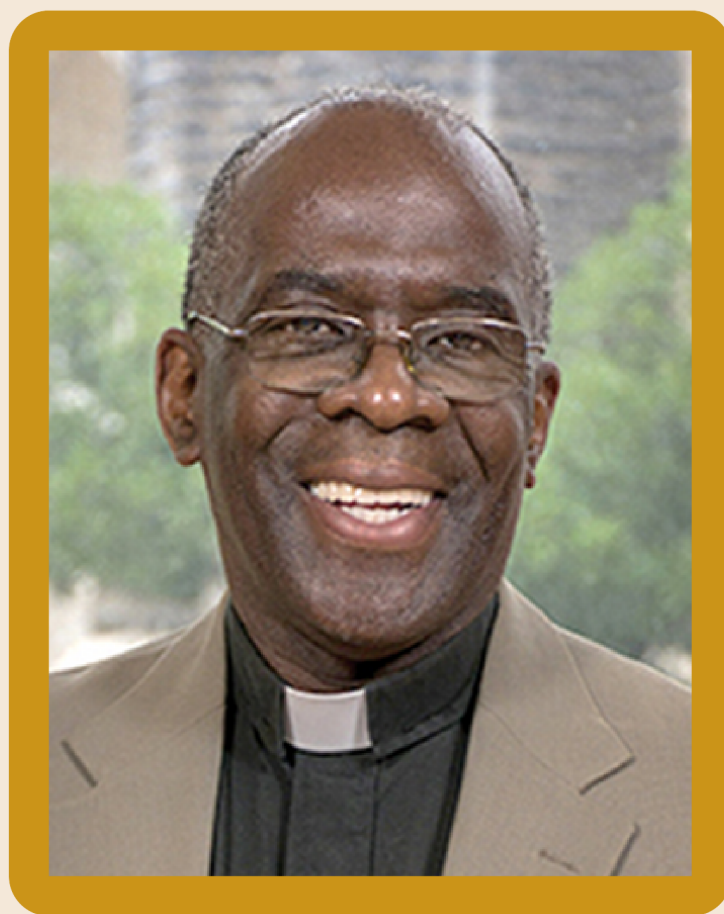
**FIRST BLACK WOMAN IN
ELCA NATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

Dr. Addie Butler (1946-) has held several key roles in the history of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. At the Churchwide Assembly in 1997 she was elected vice president of the denomination, becoming the first African American woman to hold the post. She held the position for six years. She has also served as vice president of our Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod and was part of the synod's Candidacy Committee.

Dr. Butler received her doctorate from Columbia University, was an administrator at the Community College of Philadelphia, and she has chaired the Board of Trustees of The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia (now United Lutheran Seminary).

Dr. Butler also served as President of the Philadelphia Chapter of the African Descent Lutheran Association. She once said she remained a part of the Lutheran Church "because it teaches we are saved by grace alone through faith alone. I resonated with that."

**THE REV. DR.
CHARLES R. LEONARD**



**PROFESSOR OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND
LONGEST TENURE* AS PASTOR IN OUR SYNOD**

**As pastor of the same church

Dr. Charles Leonard has served as the pastor of St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Philadelphia's West Oak Lane for more than 30 years, making him currently the longest serving pastor in any of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod's congregations.

Amazingly, he does double duty. He is United Lutheran Seminary's Professor of Practical Theology, Director of Contextual (Field Work) and Co-director of Worship Life. Early in his career he was a missionary in Surinam for the Lutheran Church in America. Dr. Leonard has had two close ties to Trinity.

Two decades ago, he co-led with Trinity Council member Mark Staples, a seminary colleague, a Bible study exchange involving St. Mark's and Trinity for several years. More recently during the pandemic he worked with Mark to lead a discussion group involving Trinity's Racial Justice Ministry Team and members of St. Mark's. He has been a visiting preacher at Trinity during a recent pulpit exchange involving him and Pastor Fritz Fowler. Dr. Leonard also convenes the Richard N. Stewart Black Lutheran History Project continuing the work of a late faculty colleague.

GLORIA ECHOLS



**COMMUNITY LEADER AND ADVOCATE FOR
LOW INCOME HOUSING IN LANSDALE**

Gloria Echols was born and raised Lutheran in South Carolina and spent her adult life in Southeastern Pennsylvania. She belonged for years to St. John Lutheran Church, Center Square. She sang in the choir and was a much sought after soloist beyond her home congregation. She performed the national anthem at the opening of the Republican National Convention in 2000.

Gloria was the executive director of Community Housing Services (CHS) in Lansdale from the time it was founded in 1983 until it was forced to close in 2013. She built an organization that was the model housing services provider in Montgomery County. At its height CHS occupied its own building on S. Broad St., owned a rooming house for formerly homeless single men, had several buildings with apartments for low-income women and families, and a staff that provided a full range of housing services from assistance with emergency shelter to finding long-term affordable housing.

Gloria was an important and respected voice in all local and county-wide discussions of housing issues.

**BISHOP
PATRICIA DAVENPORT**



**FIRST FEMALE BLACK
BISHOP IN THE ELCA**

On August 1, 2018, the **Bishop Patricia Davenport** (1954-) became the first female African American synod bishop to serve in the 3.8-million-member Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

With offices in Philadelphia's East Mt. Airy section, Bishop Davenport oversees the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, of which Trinity Lutheran Church is a part. The synod has 70,000 members who belong to 154 congregations.

Before becoming bishop, Davenport worked many years for the synod, including in clergy development and as Director for Evangelical Mission, responsible for helping congregations in our region thrive in a challenging landscape. In 2006, she founded Spirit and Truth Worship Center congregation in Yeadon, PA.

Bishop Davenport believes in making new disciples by offering information, education and inspiration that lead to transformation. She is a much sought-after speaker.

TLC RACIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY

Sparked by the the tragic death of George Floyd in May of 2020, a group of parents at Trinity Lutheran - Lansdale approached Deacon Karen Matthias-Long, director of Faith Formation at the time, asking for support in researching resources to educate their children at home about racial justice. A task force was quickly organized to response to this need, co-led by Meg Ehm and Mark Staples.

Inspired by the racial reckoning of the summer of 2020, that task force evolved into the Racial Justice Ministry, with a mission to educate ourselves and the congregation about the causes and effects of racism and to work on ways that we as people of faith can respond to address it. This **Black History Month display** is one such endeavor. We also periodically facilitate **book groups, meet-ups, and workshops** as well as **collaborations** with other local racial justice groups. The team organized visits to the **Charles Blockson Exhibition** of local Black history in Norristown. **"A Civil Rights Journey with Steve and Jean Godsall-Myers"** about their visits to important sites in Black history was published on TLC's Facebook page. Trinity's **Justice Through Music** program (led by Joe and Barb Devlin) raises donations to support Trenton Children's Chorus.

Currently active on the team are Dick Detwiler, Joe and Barb Devlin, Julie Kinzel (Convener), Steve and Jean Godsall-Myers, Mark and Lynn Staples, Julia Menzo, Norma Nish, Connor Watson, and John Wittenbraker.

JUSTICE THROUGH MUSIC

Justice Through Music and Trinity's financial support of Trenton's Children's Chorus is a way of paying it forward. Trinity pays a composer royalty for music we print in our bulletins and/or stream. But for much of the music from the Black spiritual tradition, it is not possible to pay this royalty because the music was often composed by unknown, sometimes enslaved African descendants. This program solicits donations in lieu of these royalties for unknown Black composers and directs them to the Trenton Children's Chorus. To date, **over \$3,600 has been donated** to this worthy cause.

By supporting a underserved children and their love and eagerness to learn and sing choral music, Trinity helps to address a history of injustice and further live its mission to embrace diversity and connect all generations to God's family.

The **Trenton Children's Chorus** engages underserved, eager children from kindergarten through high school in a program that supports their choral learning as well as their academic and social development.

JUSTICE THROUGH MUSIC

BENEFITS

TRENTON CHILDREN'S CHORUS



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Trinity's Racial Justice Ministry Team is grateful for resources made possible for this exhibit by the following:

- **Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod** and **North Carolina Synod** of the ELCA
- **Archives of the ELCA**
- **United Lutheran Seminary**
- *Living Lutheran*, the magazine of the ELCA
- **Richard N. Stewart History of Black Lutherans Project**, named for a late United Lutheran Seminary Professor