

PROFILES OF PIONEERING AME WOMEN IN MINISTRY

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1. **Early Preaching Women¹:**

- a. Jarena Lee (b. 1783): Her 1836 autobiography, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee: A Colored Lady Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel*, was reprinted in 1991 by the AMEC Sunday School Union/Legacy Publishing as the *Religious Experiences and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee: "A Preachin' Woman"*. See also Collier-Thomas, pp 44-46; Lincoln & Mamiya, pp. 279-80; Dodson, pp. 77-78, 90-91.
- b. Mrs. Sophie Murray of Philadelphia was an evangelist in the early years of the AMEC. She was known as the "first Evangelist" of Mother Bethel. (Dodson, p. 76)
- c. Harriett Felson Taylor traveled and preached in the Washington, D.C. area and was a preacher associated with Union Bethel Church. (Dodson, p. 56)
- d. Rachel Evans of the New Jersey Annual Conference was described as a "preacheress of no ordinary ability... who could rouse a congregation at any time and was better than her husband." (Dodson, p. 56).
- e. Zilpha Elaw c.1790-mid 19th c: she was an itinerant evangelist and a preaching partner of Jarena Lee; she was Methodist but not affiliated solely with the AMEC.² See also Collier-Thomas, pp. 46-47)
- f. Rebecca Cox Jackson (1795-1871): her brother was a local preacher at Bethel AMEC, Philadelphia. She was an itinerant preacher and strong advocate of Holiness. She critiqued the AME church and its leadership for their "carnality" and espoused celibacy. She later joined the Shakers who practiced religious celibacy. (Collier-Thomas, pp. 47-48) See also Lincoln & Mamiya, p. 280.

¹ Three primary reference sources: Jualynne E. Dodson, *Engendering Church: Women, Power and the AME Church*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2002); Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998); C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), Chapter 10, "The Pulpit and the Pew: The Black Church and Women", pp 274-308).

² Elaw, Zilpha. "Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labours of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw, an American Female of Colour; Together with Some Account of the Great Religious Revivals in America." (1846) in Williams L. Andrews, ed. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

- g. Pricilla Baltimore (b. 1801): she was instrumental in establishing the AMEC in St. Louis and the organizing meeting of St. Paul (the mother church of the 5th District) was held in her home. (Dodson, pp. 31-32)
- h. Harriett A. Baker (1829-1913): She was a licensed evangelist in the AMEC and in 1889 was appointed pastor of St. Paul's Church in Lebanon, PA – the first known female pastor. In 1900 she built and established Bethel Mission in Allentown, PA. (Collier-Thomas, pp. 4-5, 69-90. Three of Baker's sermons are included)
- i. Ruth R. Dennis: A licensed evangelist in the New York Annual Conference. (Collier-Thomas, pp. 5-4, 162-169. Two of Dennis' sermons are included)
- j. Amanda Berry Smith (1837-1915): She joined Bethel AMEC, Philadelphia in 1865 and became an evangelist in 1870.³ Her autobiography, *An Autobiography: the Story of the Lord's Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith, the colored Evangelist* (1893) is in Bert James Loewenberg and Ruth Bogin, eds. *Black Women In Nineteenth-Century American Life* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976) 143-173. Collier-Thomas mentions that the most detailed treatise on the belief in and practice of holiness among African Americans in the 19th c. appears in Smith's spiritual autobiography (*Daughters of Thunder*, p. 17, 48-53). See Dodson, pp. 78-79, 94; Lincoln & Mamiya, pp. 280-281.
- k. Lena Doolin-Mason joined the AME church in Hannibal, MO in 1872 and preached in nearly every state in the Union. (Dodson, pp. 79)
- l. Emily Calkins Stevens of Freehold County, NY, resisted her call to preach three times before responding. (Dodson, p. 79)
- m. Margaret Wilson⁴: raised in the AMEC in Baltimore, she later became a member of the Cape May AMEC and in April 1881 was by resolution officially recognized as an evangelist in the New Jersey Annual Conference. In 1882 she requested and was granted an appointment to pastor Haleyville Mission where she purchased land and a building. She attended the 1884 General Conference in Baltimore (along with Sarah Ann Hughes, Mrs. Williams of S. Carolina, Mrs. Cooper of Baltimore, Mrs. Palmer, Mrs. Hall and Mrs. Askins) when the licensing of women as local preachers was approved but women were restricted from serving as pastors. She was never ordained, and did not receive a pastoral appointment after 1885.
- n. Sarah Ann Hughes (1849-?): an evangelist in the N. Carolina Conference beginning in 1881, in 1882 she was listed on the conference roll as a licensed preacher and was

³ Dickerson, Dr. Dennis. "The Herstory of Women in Ministry of the African Methodist Episcopal Church" Foreword to *Religious Experiences and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee: "A Preachin' Woman"*, Nashville, Tennessee: AMEC Sunday School Union/Legacy Publishing, 1991, p. x.

⁴ Angell, Stephen Ward. "The Controversy Over Women's Ministry in the African Methodist Episcopal Church During the 1880's: The Case of Sarah Ann Hughes" in Judith Weisenfeld & Richard Newman, eds. *This Far By Faith: Readings in African-American Women's Religious Biography*. (New York: Routledge, 1996): 94-109.

appointed to pastor a church in Fayetteville, NC. Within a year she was transferred to Wilson's Mill where she began building the frame for a new building; and in 1883 she was appointed to Charlotte Mission (with 2 circuits, Matthew's Station and Monroe), but soon after the 1884 Annual Conference she relinquished the charge and by the 1885 Annual Conference the mission was no longer in existence.⁵ She was the first woman ordained in the AMEC – in the N. Carolina Annual Conference in November 1885 by Bishop Henry McNeal Turner but that action was reversed in 1887 and ratified by the 1888 General Conference. (Collier-Thomas, pp. 26-27; Dodson, pp. 94-95). Dr. Dennis Dickerson writes that Bishop Turner's successor, Bishop Jabaz P. Campbell, in 1887 removed Hughes' name from the list of Deacons because "her ordination was contrary to all law in our Church, therefore she is not a deacon."⁶ This is the last known record of her.

- o. Mary G. Evans: pastor of St. John AMEC in Indianapolis in early 1900's. In 1924 she received a doctor of divinity degree from Wilberforce University, the first black woman to do so. (Collier-Thomas, pp. 5, 33)
- p. Irmah L. Moore: became pastor of St. Paul AMEC, Cedarville, OH in 1936. (Collier-Thomas, p. 34)
- q. Martha Jayne Keys (born 1892): an evangelist and preacher since the 1906, of Louisville, KY, at 1936 General Conference, with support of WMS, introduced legislation seeking ordination as elders for women with 5 years' training at an accredited theological school but was voted down. (Collier-Thomas, pp. 34-35) She was trained at Payne Theological Seminary and in 1920 Bishop Archibald J. Carey appointed her to pastor a congregation in Clinton, KY.⁷
- r. Mrs. Anna Payton was a licensed evangelist at St. Paul, Des Moines and the 1935 minutes of the Northwestern Annual Conference credited her for having reestablished the AME mission at Valley Junction, Iowa.⁸
- s. Mrs. Lena L. Robinson spent at least 3 years at Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada where she met all mortgage payments promptly, had the church building painted, and maintained an active membership.⁹
- t. Rebecca M. Glover: In 1948 after General Conference, with continued pressure brought to bear by WMS, voted to ordain women as local deacons and Glover was ordained and

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Dickerson, p. xi.

⁷ *Ibid.* p.xi.

⁸ *Ib id*, p. xi.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. xi.

appointed assistant pastor of Metropolitan AMEC in Washington, D.C. (Collier-Thomas, p. 35)

- u. Rev. Martha V. Reed was called to preach in 1947, ordained a local deacon in the W. Tennessee Annual Conference in 1951, and received her first appointment. She was ordained a local elder in 1957 and an itinerant elder in 1971 by Bishop Carey Abraham Gibbs.¹⁰
- v. Rev. Carrie Thomas Hooper: born 4/17/1894 in Lake City, Florida, died 12/16/1996 in NY, NY. Ordained Itinerant Elder in New York Conference; Founder/Pastor of True Vine AMEC, NY, NY.¹¹
- w. Rev. Sirilda Belva Spicer: born 10/4/1984, died 9/14/1993 in Lincoln, Neb. Licensed to preach in Nebraska Conference; Pastor of Solomon Temple AME, Grand Island, Neb.; Assistant Pastor, Quinn Chapel AMEC, Lincoln, Neb. Teacher, Bureau of Indian Affairs Schools, Fort Thompson, S. Dakota.¹²
- x. Old Elizabeth (b. 1766): Dodson and other sources I have checked don't mention her as being in the AMEC. Her autobiography, *Memoirs of Old Elizabeth, A Colored Woman* (1863), refers to her parents being in the Methodist society (see also Collier-Thomas, pp. 41-42. One website cites her as AME but I don't think it is correct (<http://womenshistory.about.com/od/aframerwriters/p/elizabet/htm>). Her autobiography, is available for free downloading at www.gutenberg.org/files/178261/178261-h/178261-h.htm. There is a second version of her autobiography, *Elizabeth, A Colored Minister of the Gospel, born in Slavery*, published in 1889 by the Philadelphia Quakers among whom she spent her last years – see Bert James Loewenberg and Ruth Bogin, eds. *Black Women In Nineteenth-Century American Life* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976) 127-134.

2. **Candidates for the Episcopacy:**¹³

- Rev. Carrie Thomas Hooper (1st District)
- Rev. Elizabeth Scott (4th District) – 1992, 1996
- Rev. Gloria Barrett (3rd District)
- Bishop Carolyn Tyler Guidry (5th District) – 1996, 2000, 2004 (Elected 122nd Bishop, Indianapolis, IN, 2004)
- Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie (2nd District) – 2000 (Elected 117th Bishop, Cincinnati, OH, 2000)
- Rev. Linda Alford (6th District) – 2004

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. xii.

¹¹ Dickerson, Dr. Dennis C.. *The Annual Report of the Historiography to the General Board of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*. Hyatt-Orlanda, Kissimmee, Florida, June 16-17, 1997, p. 7.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 8.

¹³ The dates after their names indicate the General Conference(s) for which they were campaigning for election.

- Bishop Sarah Francis Davis (10th District) – 2004 (Elected 126th Bishop, Indianapolis, IN, 2004)
- Rev. Anne Lightner Fuller (2nd District) – 2008
- Rev. Debra Grant (6th District) – 2008
- Rev. Diane Burl (12th District) - 2008

3. Presiding Elders:¹⁴

NAME	YEAR	EP/DIS	APPOINTING BISHOP
Rev. Dorothy M.S. Morris (R)	1973	16 th	F.H. Talbot
Rev. Helen C. Patrick*	1976-80	16 th	F.H. Talbot
Rev. Cornelia Wright*	1983	3 rd	V.R. Anderson
Rev. Ernestine Ward*	1988	1 st	F.C. Cummings
Rev. Julia Ferguson*	1990	10 th	R.L. Pruitt
Rev. Esther Ntinda	1990	17 th	R.A. Chappelle
Rev. Ida W. Keener	1992	10 th	J.R. Bryant
Rev. Carolyn T. Guidry	1994-2004	5 th	V.R. Anderson
Rev. Alina K. Masehela	1994	19 th	C.G. Henning
Rev. Rosalyn Coleman	1996	7 th	J.H. Adams
Rev. Velma Hayden (R)	1996-2004	10 th	J.R. Bryant
Rev. Thelma Young (R)	1996-2005	11 th	F.C. Cummings
Rev. Adolphino Pholo*	1992-96	18 th	R.A. Chappelle
Rev. Barbara Boyd*	1997	8 th	R.A. Chappelle
Rev. Leomia Kelly (R)	1997-2005	11 th	F.C. Cummings
Rev. Ethel M. Bennett	1998	8 th	R.A. Chappelle
Rev. Evelyn G. Dunn	2000	2 nd	V.R. Anderson
Rev. Ella M. Smiley Samuels	2000	6 th	D.G.K. Ming
Rev. Donna Roberson	2002	5 th	J.R. Bryant

* Deceased (R)- Retired

Other Presiding Elder appointments made since the publication of the above list are¹⁵:

- P.E. Henrietta Scott Fullard – 1st District
- P.E. Shermella Garrett – 5th District
- P.E. Minnie Sarah Peddiny – 5th District
- P.E. Jacqueline D. Smith – 6th District
- P.E. Michele Goodloe – 8th District
- P.E. Letitia Williams Watford – 9th District
- P.E. Linda Martin – 13th District
- P.E. Etta Sherman – 14th District
- P.E. Elizabeth Siwela – 17th District

¹⁴ Dickerson, Dennis C., “The Female Presiding Elders of the African Methodist Episcopal Church”, *The A.M.E. Church Review*, Vol. CXVIII, No. 385 (January-March 2002): 11-29.

¹⁵ From roster of current female Presiding Elders developed by Rev. Sandra Smith Blair.

- P.E. Ada Mereyabona – 18th District
- P.E. Mapette Mokhosi – 18th District

Rev. Olive E. Moses was appointed Presiding Elder over the Provincial District in Freetown, Sierra Leone in 1992.¹⁶

4. Scholars:

- a. Rev. Dr. Jacquelyn Grant: born in Georgetown, SC (7th District) 12/19/48, she now resides in Atlanta, GA (6th District.). A graduate of Bennett College and Turner Theological Seminary, she earned her PhD in systematic theology at Union Theological Seminary, NY under the tutelage of Dr. James Cone, father of Black Theology. With her 1989 publication of her dissertation, *White Women's Christ, Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*, she is credited as the mother of Womanist Theology. She is Callaway Professor of Systematic Theology at the Interdenominational Theological Union in Atlanta where she is also the Founding Director of Black Women in Church and Society. She spearheaded efforts to bring women together to address the role and equality of women with a position paper on the status of women written for the 1976 General Conference, convening a meeting of the female ministers at the General Conference to voice concerns about representation in the governing processes and ministry of the AMEC, and leading a delegation to take these concerns before the Council of Bishops in 1977 at Atlantic City, NJ. This led to the formation of an Ad Hoc Committee on WIM, chaired by Dr. Grant, out of which grew a restructured Steering Committee in 1980, and the organizing of AME/WIM in 1986. Dr. Grant serves as Consultant to the AME/WIM Executive Board.¹⁷
- b. Rev. Dr. Leah Gaskin Fitchue, appointed in 2003 as the first female President of Payne Theological Seminary, Wilberforce, OH, is the first female to serve as President of a historically Black theological seminary. She earned a B.A. in Speech Pathology, a M.Div from Princeton Theological Seminary, and EdD in Administration, Planning and Social Policy from Harvard University.¹⁸

¹⁶ McKenzie, Vashti M. *Not Without A Struggle: Leadership Developmetn for African American Women In Ministry*. Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1996, p. 40

¹⁷ The HistoryMakers website, www.thehistorymakers.com, and unpublished paper “Herstory of Women in Ministry in African Methodism” by Rev. Sandra Smith Blair.

¹⁸ Payne Theological Seminary website, www.Payne.edu.