



Henry, Kenneth Sr. (1932-2010) Rev. Kenneth Earl Henry Sr., was born in Palestine, Texas, to Ophelia G. and Reverend Enoch W. Henry, Sr., on December 27, 1932. He graduated from Lincoln High School in Palestine and received degrees from Jarvis Christian College, Hawkins, Texas (BA); and Yale University, School of Divinity, New Haven, Connecticut (B. Div. and S.T.M.). He was married to Dr. Pearl L. Henry (nee Smith). Rev. Henry was Associate Professor of Church History at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC), Atlanta, Georgia, where he taught for more than 30 years, retiring in 2003 (awarded Professor Emeritus 2010).

He co-authored (along with Mark Ellingsen), a history of the ITC, in a publication titled, *Making Black Ecumenism Happen: The History of the Interdenominational Theological Center as a Paradigm for Christian Unity*. Atlanta, Georgia: ITC Press, 2008. He was a founding member of the Ray of Hope Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Decatur, Georgia. Reverend Henry was a guest lecturer and speaker at colleges, universities, churches and church conferences nationally and internationally.

Rev. Henry's accomplishments and honors include: ordained as a minister in the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ (1956), first African American to serve as First Vice Moderator of the Christian Church; active board member for several national-level church organizations (Council on Christian Unity, Division of Overseas Ministries, Campbell-Stone), inclusion in the *Encyclopedia of African American Culture and History*. Vol. 2, ed. Jack Salzman, David Lionel Smith, and Cornel West. 769-770. New York: Simon and Schuster Macmillan, 1996; and induction into the Jarvis Christian College Hall of Fame (1996).



Jeffries, Kathy Kathy Jeffries was very active in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) at all levels. She served on the General Board and the Administrative Committee of the Christian Church in the US and Canada. Kathy served as Vice-President of the International Christian Women's Fellowship Cabinet from 1998-2002. While Vice-President she represented ICWF on the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches and on the Common Council of Church Women United, USA. One of the more memorable events in Kathy's ministry with women was having the privilege of representing Church Women United in September of 2000 as a member of a delegation of churchwomen to North Korea sponsored by the Partnership with Korean Women task group of the National Council of Churches. Kathy also served on Tennessee region Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation teams. She was a Past President of Church Women United in Tennessee,

Treasurer of CWU in Nashville and a former member of the Board of Trustees of the National Convocation of the Christian Church. Kathy served on the Regional Board, Personnel Commission and Executive Committee of the Christian Church in Tennessee. She served for eight years on the Tennessee Christian Women's Fellowship Cabinet, (TCWF) four years as Director of Service and four years as President. Kathy was the first African-American to serve as President of the TCWF and was elected in October, 2002 to serve once again as President. Kathy Jeffries will be remembered for her joyous and gracious spirit. She was a source of encouragement and a blessing to the Body of Christ. She passed away in 2013.

We are grateful to God for the lives and legacies of these African American Disciples who have made a difference in our lives. This publication is the fourth in a series about Black Disciples who have or continue to make a difference in the life of our church.

*Preston Tayllor photograph
courtesy of Disciples of
Christ Historical Society*

Black Disciples Who Make A Difference #4

Black people have made an enormous contribution to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). This brochure contains a brief biography of African Americans whose lives are significant parts of our Christian life.



Bridges, Billye Pinkston Billye Bridges was an ordained minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). She served as director of Christian Education for Disciples Home Missions, 2003-2013. Previously, she served DHM as Director of Specialized Christian Education, primarily focusing on African American leaders and congregations and her portfolio specifically included: African American Christian Education; Black Family Ministry; African American Christian Education Network; Institute for African American Faith and Life (educational focus of the National Convocation); Biennial Pre-Convocation Christian Education Event; Leadership Development, Educational Resources, Consultations, Educational Workshops/Training, and Ministry with Congregations, Regions, Black Church Structures and Ecumenical Partners. A specialist in Secondary Education and Christian Education, she was called to DHM from Light of the World Christian Church (DOC), Indianapolis, Ind., where she had served previously as the Minister of Christian Education and Programs for eight years.

A veteran educator, she taught English, English Literature, and Gifted and Talented students in Indianapolis, Ind., and in Natchez, Miss. She was also employed as a Project Director, Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE), Indiana University Center on Philanthropy; and as an Educational Consultant, Community Leaders Allied for Superior Schools (CLASS), a local advocacy group.

Rev. Bridges earned a B.S., English Literature from Tougaloo College (MS); a M.S., Secondary Education from Indiana University (IN); a M.A., Christian Education from Christian Theological Seminary (IN); and a Master of Divinity from Christian Theological Seminary (IN).

Rev. Bridges served on DHM's Anti-Racism Team, Home Missions Advocate Editorial Team, Black Leadership Project and Black Ministers Retreat Committees. She is a dynamic keynoter for conferences, conventions, community and religious events. With a passion for "Excellence in Education", she is an anointed, inspirational and gifted preacher-teacher, possessing exceptional pastoral, administrative, organizational, leadership and team-building skills.



Thomas, Sybel Sybel Thomas served as a leader in general church and international leadership roles. She served as vice president of International Christian Women's Fellowship from 1978 – 1982. Sybel was also called to serve as President of the World CWF (now known as Global Women Connecting). Sybel Thomas was a member of the first moderator team at the first General Assembly of the newly restructured Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and thus also the first African American and first lay woman to serve as one of the moderators.. She also served as a former president of the National Convocation. Mrs. Thomas was an outstanding leader who had a love for the church and a special place in her heart for the women. She passed away June 2011.

She was a member of boards of the Pension Fund, Division of Overseas Ministries, Homeland Ministries, Eureka College, United Ministries in Higher Education, the United Christian Missionary Society, and the Executive Committee of the Disciples Peace Fellowship. She was a trustee of the Disciples Divinity House at the University of Chicago, served on the General Nominating Committee of the General Board. She also served on the executive committee of Church Women United. In 1998, Sybel was given the Liberation Award by the National Convocation. She was honored for being an "effective enabler of Disciples women."



Fields, Melvia Anderson Melvia Anderson Fields was born and reared in Bourbon County, Kentucky, which is near historic Cane Ridge. She is a writer, teacher, Women's Ministry leader, historian and inspiration. During her rich life, she has served as a Bible School teacher and youth director. She also has a passion for Disciples Women Ministry, serving in leadership in her local congregation, her region and within the Kentucky Christian Missionary Convention. She is the author of *Women On A Mission* which explores the lives and legacies of African American Disciples Women in history. Melvia Field's life is chronicled in the Disciples Women DVD Study Resource, "Women On A Mission" and is accompanied by a study guide and worship resources.

Ms. Fields co-authored *In Other Words-Stories of African American Involvement in the Early years of the Stone-Campbell Movement in Kentucky* with her daughter, the Rev. Sharon B. Fields.



Demus, James L. III (1953-2010) The Rev. James L. Demus III, a civil rights activist, outspoken community leader and pastor of Park Manor Christian Church, who fought against poverty and digital disparity, The Rev. Demus was one of the early members of Operation PUSH, now known as the Rainbow PUSH Coalition, the civil rights group founded by the Rev. Jesse Jackson in 1971. In the late 1970s, he traveled with Jackson, served as his adviser on youth issues and later assisted in Jackson's presidential run.

In 1985, the Rev. Demus became pastor of Park Manor Christian Church, building it into one of the largest African-American churches in the Disciples of Christ denomination. As leader of the South Side church for the last 25 years, the Rev. Demus spoke out on numerous issues including economic equality, increased funding for public schools and combating youth violence.

In recent years, he had become more active in his role as co-director of the Ministerial Alliance Against the Digital Divide (MAADD), a clergy-led group focused on improving technology and Internet access in low-income communities.

The Rev. Demus was born on the South Side and grew up in the hardscrabble Robert Taylor Homes. Though raised in public housing, he pulled himself out of poverty and received a bachelor's degree in education from Northern Illinois University in 1975.

He briefly worked as a teacher at Kenwood Academy in Hyde Park, but later followed his calling to the church and received a master's degree in divinity from McCormick Theological Seminary. After Operation PUSH was formed, the Rev. Demus joined the group and became Jackson's apprentice. In 1984, during a three-year stint as pastor of a Little Rock church, he was Arkansas state chairman of Jackson's presidential campaign.

The Rev. Demus was in the early 1990s considered by Jackson as a candidate to become PUSH's president. He helped organize the Nation of Islam's 1995 Million Man March in Washington. While some African-American leaders sought to distance themselves from the March, the Rev. Demus defended his support for the event, saying he favored religion over gangs and crime. He remained active in local, state and national politics, increasing voter registration in the African-American communities to help elect Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama. In 2003, the Rev. Demus and the Rev. Walter B. Johnson Jr., founded the Ministerial Alliance Against the Digital Divide. Since then, the organization has expanded to six states and advocates at the federal level for policies to empower underserved communities through technology.