ANNOUNCING THE TWENTY-NINTH ANNUAL

BLACK RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS GROUP CONSULTATION

MAKING IT PLAIN

Envisioning Freedom in These Yet To Be United States





HONORING

Rev. Dr. Marvin A. McMickle
President Emeritus of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School and Pastor Emeritus of Antioch Baptist Church of Cleveland, Ohio



AND HONORING POSTHUMOUSLY

Dr. Rachel E. Harding
Associate Professor Emeritus and Former Chair of the Department of Ethnic Studies at the University of Colorado Denver



Rev. Dr. Michael Joseph Brown
Former President of Payne Theological Seminary

COUNCIL OF GRIOTS

Rev. Dr. Obery M. Hendricks, Jr. | Columbia University

Rev. Dr. Pamela R. Lightsey | Meadville Lombard Theological School

Rev. Dr. Renita J. Weems | Gammon Theological Seminary

Rev. Dr. Jonathan L. Walton, moderator | Princeton Theological Seminary

Rev. Dr. Teresa Smallwood, moderator | United Lutheran Seminary

VANDERBILT Divinity School

Major funding provided by Vanderbilt Divinity School

HOST INSTITUTIONS AND CO-SPONSORS: Candler School of Theology at Emory University, Gammon Theological Seminary, Princeton Theological Seminary, and United Lutheran Seminary

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2026 • 7:00–9:00 P.M.

Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center, Centennial A

WELCOME TO THE 2026 BLACK RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS GROUP CONSULTATION

The guiding vision of the Black Religious Scholars Group (BRSG) is to sponsor consultations and speaking series for the edification of the liberating theology and witness of the Black Church tradition within the academy, church, and wider Black community. This vision originated during a session of the Black Theology Group during the 1996 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in New Orleans, La. Those in attendance realized that the discussion and work of Black religious scholars tend to be situated firmly within academic circles, causing us to lose sight of the goal of Black religion: libera- tion and human fulfillment in all areas of life.

We recognized that faithfulness to our call as religious scholars, preachers, and community activists requires relevant theological activity that is both committed and accessible to the larger African diasporan church and society. Our annual public forums across North America at welcoming congregations continue the process of exploring ways in which meaningful dialogue and partnership can occur between Black religious scholars and the larger Black community and its churches. It is for this purpose that we assemble consultations that consist of panels of distinguished representatives from the church, community, theological academy, and you, the gathered audience.

We hope that these consultations and the vision they embody will continue the tradition of organizing the church and community for the spiritual empowerment, human fulfillment, and social/economic uplift of Black folk. The BRSG is committed to facilitating these dialogues in the hope that they will contribute to the well-being and advancement of both our people and communities.

EXECUTIVE BOARD



Rev. Duane A. Belgrave Sr., Ph.D.
Rev. Dionne Boissiere
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Rev. Jacqui Thompson, D.Min.
Candace Laughinghouse, Ph.D.
Rev. Gina Stewart, Ph.D.

2026 BRSG DISTINGUISHED HONOREE

Rev. Dr. Marvin A. McMickle



Rev. Dr. Marvin A. McMickle earned his Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from Aurora University in 1970, Master of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary in 1973, and Doctor of Ministry from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1983. He completed his Ph.D. at Case Western Reserve University in 1998. He has also received honorary degrees from Aurora University and Payne Theological Seminary.

Dr. McMickle is a theologian, educator, preacher, and ordained Baptist minister whose work focuses on preaching, African American religious studies, and theological education. He served as the twelfth President of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School from 2011 to 2019 and is currently President Emeritus, Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program, and Professor of African American Religious Studies. Previously, he served as Professor of Homiletics at Ashland Theological Seminary and as pastor of Antioch Baptist Church in Cleveland, Ohio, from 1987 to 2011. He has also served as a Visiting Professor of Preaching at Yale Divinity School and as a member of Morehouse College's Martin Luther King, Jr. International Board of Preachers.

Dr. McMickle is the author of seventeen books and numerous articles in professional journals and magazines. His scholarship explores preaching, biblical interpretation, African American religious traditions, and the church's role in social transformation. His contributions have appeared in influential preaching resources and biblical commentaries, including Feasting on the Word and Preaching God's Transforming Justice. Through his writing, teaching, and ministry, Dr. McMickle has helped shape contemporary preaching and theological education, while preparing future generations of religious leaders for thoughtful and transformative ministry.

2026 BRSG DISTINGUISHED HONOREE

Dr. Rachel E. Harding



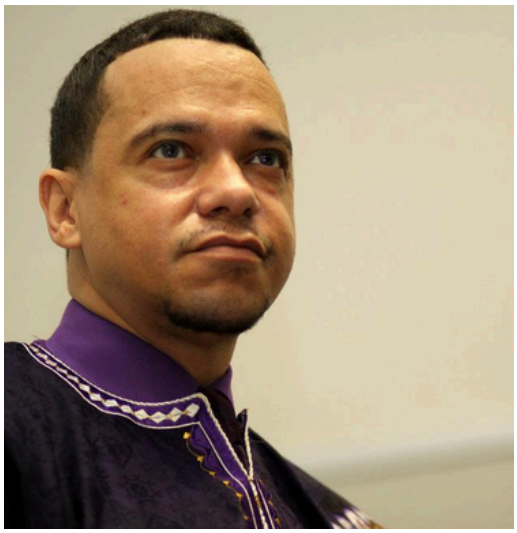
Dr. Rachel Harding earned her Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies and Master of Fine Arts in English and Creative Writing from Brown University. She received her Ph.D. in History from the University of Colorado Boulder.

Dr. Harding was a scholar, poet, educator, and activist whose interdisciplinary work explored Indigenous spiritual traditions, Afro-Atlantic religions, Candomblé, and Black liberation. She served as Associate Professor Emerita and former Chair of the Department of Ethnic Studies at the University of Colorado Denver, joining its faculty in 2008. Her teaching and research examined the intersections of religion, creativity, spirituality, and social justice. She also co-directed the Veterans of Hope Project, founded by her parents, civil rights leaders Vincent Harding and Rosemarie Freeney Harding, which preserves the connections between spirituality, culture, and democratic social movements. Dr. Harding passed away on May 25, 2026, in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, surrounded by family and her beloved Candomblé community, Terreiro do Cobre.

Dr. Harding's scholarship contributed significantly to Black historical studies, religious studies, and social justice scholarship. Her influential book, A Refuge in Thunder: Candomblé and Alternative Spaces of Blackness (Indiana University Press, 2000), examines Afro-Brazilian religious traditions and expressions of Black identity. Her second book, Remnants: A Memoir of Spirit, Activism and Mothering (Duke University Press, 2015), brings together her writings and those of her mother, exploring spirituality, compassion, and African American social justice organizing. Recognized by Duke University Press as one of its most influential books of the decade, Remnants reflects Dr. Harding's enduring commitment to scholarship, creativity, and community.

2026 BRSG DISTINGUISHED HONOREE

Rev. Dr. Michael Joseph Brown



Dr. Michael Joseph Brown was a distinguished biblical scholar, educator, pastor, and ordained elder in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. He began his studies in New Testament at Vanderbilt University, where he joined Omega Psi Phi Fraternity. He earned his Master of Divinity and Ph.D. from the University of Chicago and pursued additional studies in material culture at Columbia University.

A longtime member of the Society for the Study of Black Religion, Dr. Brown taught at Wabash College and served as Associate Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at Emory University's Candler School of Theology. He also directed graduate studies at Emory, mentoring emerging African American scholars, and later served as Director of Wabash College's Malcolm X Institute of Black Studies. In 2016, he became President of Payne Theological Seminary, where he strengthened the institution's financial standing, expanded academic programming, and increased its national and international presence.

Dr. Brown's scholarship advanced Black religion and African American biblical interpretation. His publications include What They Don't Tell You: A Survivor's Guide to Academic Biblical Studies (2000), The Lord's Prayer Through North African Eyes: A Window into Early Christianity (2004), Blackening of the Bible: The Aims of African American Biblical Scholarship (2004), and The Lord's Prayer and God's Vision for the World: Finding Your Purpose through Prayer (2014). Through his scholarship, mentorship, and ministry, Dr. Brown left a lasting legacy of theological excellence, intellectual curiosity, and commitment to the Black Church.

We've Come This Far by Faith
Black Gospel Standard

We've come this far by faith Leaning on the Lord; Trusting in God's Holy Word, God's never failed me yet.
Oh, can't turn around We've come this far by faith

Don't be discouraged with trouble in your life
God will bear your burdens
And move all misery and strife
That's why…

We've come this far by faith Leaning on the Lord; Trusting in God's Holy Word, God's never failed me yet.
Oh, can't turn around We've come this far by faith

J*ust the other day I heard a man say he didn't believe in God's Word;*
I can say God has made a way God's never failed me yet
Thank God….

We've come this far by faith Leaning on the Lord; Trusting in God's Holy Word, God's never failed me yet.
Oh, can't turn around We've come this far by faith.

Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing
Black National Anthem

Lift ev'ry voice and sing, 'til earth and heaven ring, Ring with the harmonies of liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise, high as the listening skies, Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us;
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on 'til victory is won.

Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod, Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat, have not our weary feet Come to the place for which our [elders] sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered;
We have come, treading our path thru the blood of the slaughtered;
Out from the gloomy past, 'til now we stand at last Where the [bright] gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears, Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way; Thou who hast by thy might led us into the light, Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met thee;
Lest our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget thee;
Shadowed beneath thy hand, may we forever stand, True to our God, true to our native land.

PROGRAM

Processional	**“We’ve Come This Far by Faith”**
Invocation and Prayer	**Dr. Candace Laughinghouse**
Call to Community	**Rev. Dr. Melanie Jones Quarles**
Welcome and Statement of Purpose	**Dr. Stacey Floyd-Thomas**
Institutional Greetings	
Introduction of Honorees and Moderator	**Dr. Juan Floyd-Thomas**
Honoree Tributes	**Rev. Dr. Forrest E. Harris, Sr.** **Dr. Iyanifa Ifasaanu Tracey E. Hucks** **Rev. Dr. Herbert R. Marbury**
Celebration in Song	

COUNCIL OF GRIOTS: A CALL AND RESPONSE

Rev. Dr. Teresa Smallwood
Rev. Dr. Obery M. Hendricks, Jr.
Rev. Dr. Pamela R. Lightsey
Rev. Dr. Renita J. Weems

COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

Offering & Remarks	
Celebration in Song	**“Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing”**

GRIOT'S CALL TO COMMUNITY

A Litany for Leaders Who Will Not Settle

Form inspired by Yolanda Pierce, "A Litany for Those Who Aren't Ready for Healing," and the interfaith call to worship led by Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis.

Call to Gather

All: We gather as a people of many callings and one memory: elders and students, pastors and scholars, organizers and practitioners, standing on the shoulders of ancestors whose labor made our possibilities.

Leader: We gather in a perilous hour, when Black history is erased, theological education is under attack, our institutions are threatened, and the democratic rights our ancestors fought for are being stripped away.

All: Yet we have not gathered to surrender, but to rise in faith, memory, and action.

Leader: Beloved, why have we gathered?

All: BECAUSE WE ARE OUR ANCESTORS' ANSWERED PRAYER!

Leader: And what does this hour require of us?

All: THAT WE LEAD, TEACH, AND RISE TOGETHER!

The Gift and Responsibility of Black Leadership

Leader: For the leaders who made a way where none existed, the women who carried communities, the elders who opened doors, and the ancestors who turned resistance into possibility.

All: We give thanks for the gift.

Leader: May we never mistake visibility for power or access for liberation, but share our gifts, mentor across generations, and make room for those who follow.

All: Keep us faithful to the gift.

GRIOT'S CALL TO COMMUNITY

The Call to Education and Democracy

Leader: We name the threats to our schools, seminaries, Black studies, and the students who answer a call to ministry only to inherit impossible costs.

All: Lord, have mercy. Teach us again what we were called to learn.

Leader: We reject the myths that democracy sustains itself, that freedom once won cannot be lost, and that the promise of justice has already been fulfilled.

All: Make us keepers of the promise not yet kept.

Leader: Let the Black Church remain a place of learning, a conscience for democracy, a sanctuary for the weary, and a gathering place for the work of liberation.

All: Give us courage to carry the work forward.

Our Collective Commitment

Leader: Let us build schools rooted in our communities, mentor across generations, tell the truth in our classrooms and pulpits, and practice democracy in our institutions and neighborhoods.

All: So shall it be.

Leader: When they tell us our history is too divisive to teach—
All: WE WILL TEACH IT ANYWAY!

Leader: When they close the doors of the schools we built—
All: WE WILL BUILD AGAIN!

Leader: When they tell us democracy was never meant for us—
All: WE WILL MAKE IT KEEP ITS PROMISE!

GRIOT'S CALL TO COMMUNITY

Elders: Let our memory become our mandate.
Pastors: Let our mandate become our ministry.
Scholars: Let our ministry become our method.
Students: Let our method become our movement.
Organizers: Let our movement become our freedom.
All: I am because you are! We will not abandon one another or the responsibility we share.

Prayer of Commitment

Leader: God of our weary years and our unwritten futures, where we have settled for survival—
All: Stir in us the will to thrive.

Leader: Where we have kept silent to preserve our place—
All: Give us the courage to speak.

Leader: Where our institutions fail and our democracy falters—
All: Make us builders, keepers, and voices of conscience. Never let us forget whose shoulders we stand on, nor whose children will stand on ours.

Sending

Leader: Are you ready to lead?
All: WE ARE READY!

Leader: Are you ready to teach what this hour demands?
All: WE ARE READY!

Leader: Are you ready to make democracy keep its promise?
All: WE ARE READY!

Leader: Then let us go and do the work.
All: AMEN, AND ASHE!

2026 COUNCIL OF GRIOTS

REV. DR. TERESA SMALLWOOD, MODERATOR



Dr. Teresa L. Smallwood is a distinguished theologian, legal scholar, educator, and academic leader whose work bridges public theology, social and racial justice, ethics, and higher education. Originally from Windsor, North Carolina, Dr. Smallwood's commitment to community, justice, and faith has shaped her career across legal practice, ministry, and theological education.

Dr. Smallwood earned a Bachelor of Arts in Speech Communications and Afro-American Studies from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a Juris Doctor from North Carolina Central University School of Law, and a Master of Divinity from Howard University School of Divinity. She completed her Ph.D. in Theology, Ethics, and Human Sciences at Chicago Theological Seminary in 2017. Before transitioning into theological education, she practiced law for more than two decades, working in legal aid, children's advocacy, prosecution, and private practice.

An ordained minister, Dr. Smallwood has served congregations across North Carolina, Washington, D.C., and Nashville, Tennessee. She has taught at several theological institutions and colleges and previously served as Postdoctoral Fellow and Associate Director of Vanderbilt Divinity School's Public Theology and Racial Justice Collaborative. She currently serves as Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs at United Lutheran Seminary, where she also holds the James Franklin Kelly and Hope Eyster Kelly Professorship of Public Theology.

Her scholarship explores race, religion, public life, political theology, and white Christian nationalism. Her publications include *Moved by the Spirit: Religion and the Movement for Black Lives*, co-edited with Emilie M. Townes and Christophe D. Ringer. Through her scholarship, ministry, and leadership, Dr. Smallwood works to shape theological education as a transformative force for justice, challenge, and meaningful social change.

REV. DR. PAMELA LIGHTSEY



The Rev. Dr. Pamela Lightsey joined MLTS in January 2018. Prior to her appointment, Dr. Lightsey served as Associate Dean of Community Life and Lifelong Learning, Clinical Assistant Professor of Contextual Theology and Practice at the Boston University School of Theology.

Dr. Lightsey brings a special mix of life experience and professional proficiency to the position. Following service in the US Army and work as a civil servant, she received her academic and theological training at Columbus State University (BS), Gammon Seminary of the Interdenominational Theological Center (M.Div.), and Garrett-Evangelical Theological School (PhD).

After ordination, she served first as a United Methodist congregational pastor and then as a theological school educator, scholar, and administrator. She continues to serve as UMC clergy — most recently as Interim Site Pastor at Urban Village Church - Hyde Park. Throughout her vocational life, she has been a leading social justice activist, working with local, national, and international organizations focusing primarily on the causes of peacemaking, racial justice, and LGBTQ rights. She currently serves as a member of the mayor of Chicago's LGBTQ Advisory Council.

Dr. Lightsey's publications include the book, Our Lives Matter: A Womanist Queer Theology (Wipf and Stock) and Transforming Service: Reflections of Student Service Professionals in Theological Education (Pickwick Publications).

2026 COUNCIL OF GRIOTS

REV. DR. OBERY M. HENDRICKS, JR.



Rev. Dr. Obery M. Hendricks, Jr. earned a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Rutgers University and a Master of Divinity with honors from Princeton Theological Seminary. He received his Master of Arts and Ph.D. in Religion from Princeton University, specializing in Religions of Late Antiquity.

Dr. Hendricks is an ordained elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, a theologian, and a lifelong social activist. His scholarship explores the intersections of religion, politics, biblical interpretation, and political economy, with particular attention to economic justice and social transformation. He has served as President of Payne Theological Seminary, Emeritus Professor of Biblical Interpretation at New York Theological Seminary, and Visiting Professor at Union Theological Seminary. He has also served as a Visiting Scholar at Columbia University in the Departments of Religion and African American and African Diasporic Studies. Through his teaching, lectures, media appearances, and public engagement, he contributes to national conversations about Christianity, politics, and justice.

Dr. Hendricks is an award-winning author whose work examines biblical interpretation, social justice, and Christianity's role in American political life. His publications include The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus' Teachings and How They Have Been Corrupted (2006), The Universe Bends Toward Justice: Radical Reflections on the Bible, the Church and the Body Politic (2011), Christians Against Christianity: How Right-Wing Evangelicals Are Destroying Our Nation and Our Faith (2021), and the novel Living Water (2003). He also co-authored Building Atlanta: How I Broke Through Segregation to Launch a Business Empire (2014). His scholarship has appeared in academic publications, professional journals, and media outlets.

REV. DR. RENITA J. WEEMS



Rev. Dr. Renita J. Weems earned her Bachelor of Arts from Wellesley College and Master of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary. In 1989, she received her Ph.D. in Old Testament Studies from Princeton, becoming the first African American woman to earn a doctorate in the field.

Dr. Weems is an ordained minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, biblical scholar, writer, and public intellectual. Her work explores biblical interpretation, womanism, race and religion, women in the church, and faith-based social justice. She has taught at Vanderbilt Divinity School, Spelman College, Howard University Divinity School, and Memphis Theological Seminary. In 2024, she served as Crump Visiting Professor and Black Religious Scholars Group Scholar-in-Residence at Seminary of the Southwest. She currently serves as Professor of Biblical Studies and Academic Dean at Gammon Theological Seminary in Atlanta. She was also the first African American woman to deliver Yale University's prestigious Lyman Beecher Lectures.

Dr. Weems is an accomplished author whose scholarship examines biblical interpretation, womanist theology, prophetic religion, and the experiences of Black women. Her award-winning book, Listening for God: A Minister's Journey Through Silence and Doubt, received the Religious Communicators' Council's 1999 Wilbur Award for excellence in communicating spiritual values. Her broader contributions include books, commentaries, and articles exploring womanist biblical scholarship, Black religious intellectuals, and women's leadership in theological education. Her recent work considers Black women intellectuals, representation in the academy, and the development of womanist biblical scholarship. She is currently writing a memoir reflecting on how the Civil Rights and women's movements shaped her faith, ministry, and commitment to social justice.

BRSG FOUNDERS & EXECUTIVE BOARD

DR. STACEY M. FLOYD-THOMAS



Dr. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas is the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Professor of Ethics and Society at Vanderbilt Divinity School, an ordained Baptist pastoral counselor, and co-founder and executive director of the Black Religious Scholars Group. She holds degrees from Vassar College, Emory University's Candler School of Theology, Temple University, and Tennessee State University, including a Ph.D. in Religion and Ethics and an M.B.A.

A distinguished womanist ethicist, Dr. Floyd-Thomas's scholarship and activism examine the intersections of religion, race, gender, power, and social justice, particularly how institutions shape marginalized communities and their identities. She is an award-winning educator and internationally sought-after lecturer who has taught and presented throughout the United States and abroad. A prolific author and editor, her publications include Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics, Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society, and Black Church Studies: An Introduction. She has also held leadership positions in several national academic organizations and edited scholarly book series advancing womanist ethics, Black religious studies, and social transformation.

REV. DR. JUAN M. FLOYD-THOMAS



Dr. Juan Floyd-Thomas is Associate Professor of African American Religious History at Vanderbilt University's Divinity School and Graduate Department of Religion. A co-founder and executive board member of the Black Religious Scholars Group since 1997, he has examined race, ethnicity, religion, and the African American Christian experience, particularly the intersections of religion, politics, economics, and popular culture.

An internationally recognized scholar, Dr. Floyd-Thomas has lectured at universities and seminaries throughout North America, South America, Europe, Asia, and West Africa. His expertise has been featured in media outlets including The Washington Post, Esquire, USA Today, NPR, and the Boston Globe. He currently serves as President of the Society for the Study of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion and Associate Editor of the American Academy of Religion's Reading Religion website.

His publications include Black Church Studies: An Introduction (2007), The Origins of Black Humanism (2008), Liberating Black Church History: Making It Plain (2014), The Altars Where We Worship (2016), Religion in the Age of Obama (2018), and Critical Race Theology: White Supremacy, American Christianity, and the Ongoing Culture Wars (2024). His work continues to advance scholarship on Black religious history and American Christianity.

BRSG FOUNDERS & EXECUTIVE BOARD

REV. DR. DUANE BELGRAVE SR.



Rev. Dr. Duane A. Belgrave Sr. is co-founder of the Black Religious Scholars Group. Dr. Belgrave is the co-owner of RankGen Consultants, LLC, an educational and community development consulting firm, and is an adjunct instructor at Biblical Seminary, Swarth- more College, and Eastern University, all located in the Greater Philadelphia area. He has engaged in community development work in Harlem, New York, and in community orga- nizing and community ministry in Chester, Pennsylvania. Dr. Belgrave is also an ordainedAmerican Baptist minister. He receiveda bachelor of business administration (B.B.A.) from BaruchCol- lege of the City University of New York (C.U.N.Y.), a master of divinity (M.Div.) from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a Ph.D. in theological studies from Emory University.

Dr. Belgrave has taught traditional and contemporary Western theologies and African, African Caribbean, and African American religious studies at Emory University's Candler School of Theology, Earlham College, EarlhamSchool of Religion, and New York Theological Seminary. His currentteaching and research involveecclesiology, missional theology, and public theology.

REV. DIONNE BOISSIERE



Rev. Dionne Boissière serves as chaplain of the Church Center for the United Nations (CCUN), becoming the first woman of African descent to hold the position. As chief steward, she oversees the Center's commitment to providing sacred space, worship, hospitality, and community services while fostering transformative education and dialogue that advance peace. Rev. Boissière earned her Master of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary in New York, where she served for more than a decade in development, alumni relations, community facilitation, and teaching. She is an associate minister at New Hope Baptist Church in Danbury, Connecticut, and an instructor at the Abyssinian Baptist Church Institute for Christian Education in Harlem and Mt. Sinai Baptist Church in Newark.

A committed advocate for women in ministry, Rev. Boissière has held leadership roles with local women's organizations and faith-based institutions, including serving as director of the Resource Center for Women in Ministry at New York Theological Seminary. She has also consulted with Woman Preach! Inc., an organization dedicated to empowering preachers to address issues of equity and justice. She is pursuing doctoral studies, with a focus on strengthening the connections between the church, academy, and society through relevant, holistic teaching and preaching.

REV. DR. TERESA FRY BROWN



Rev. Teresa L. Fry Brown, Ph.D., is Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and Bandy Professor of Preaching at Emory University's Candler School of Theology. She also serves as the fourteenth Historiographer of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, editor of the A.M.E. Review, Executive Director of Research and Scholarship, and President of the General Officers' Council.

Dr. Fry Brown earned her Ph.D. in Religious and Theological Studies from the Iliff School of Theology and the University of Denver, along with an M.Div. from Iliff and undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Central Missouri. An accomplished preacher, educator, and scholar, she has taught nationally and internationally and authored several books, including Delivering the Sermon, Can a Sister Get a Little Help?, and Weary Throats and New Song. She has received numerous honors, including the Emory-Williams Distinguished Teaching Award and the Turner Theological Seminary Lifetime Achievement Award. An ordained Itinerant Elder in the AME Church, she also serves at New Bethel AME Church in Lithonia, Georgia.

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REV. DR. MELANIE JONES QUARLES



Rev. Melanie C. Jones Quarles, Ph.D., is a womanist ethicist, preacher, and intellectual activist. She serves as Instructor of Ethics, Theology, and Culture and inaugural director of the Katie Geneva Cannon Center for Womanist Leadership at Union Presbyterian Seminary. She previously taught at several theological institutions, including Seminary of the Southwest, Brite Divinity School, and American Baptist College.

Her research explores womanist theological ethics, Black women's body politics, sacred texts, millennial faith, and Black aesthetics and popular culture. Her scholarship has been supported by fellowships from the Forum for Theological Exploration, Louisville Institute, and Wabash Center. She co-curates the #MillennialWomanism Digital Forum and co-founded The Millennial Womanism Project, which supports Black millennial women of faith and justice through intergenerational womanist dialogue. A third-generation ordained Baptist preacher, Dr. Quarles is an international lecturer, published scholar, and chair of the board of directors of the Daughters of the African Atlantic Fund.

REV. DR. JUSTIN R. LESTER



Rev. Dr. Justin R. Lester is the Pastor of Friendship Missionary Baptist Church in Vallejo, California. Dr. Lester grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and has Master's of Divinity from Vanderbilt University, Master's of Arts from Marquette University, and Doctorate in Ministry from Boston University with a dissertation entitled, Let's Play Church: Gamifying New England Black Church Revitalization where he utilizes the tenants of gaming culture to create a paradigm of cross-generational sustainable ministry. Beyond that, He is the author of *The Church of AI* where he engages in the ethical and theological implications of Artificial Intelligence and the local church.

Dr. Lester's time in ministry has proven fruitful with a track record of debt eradication, technological innovation, social media, church growth, multi-generational engagement, the establishment of discipleship ministries, prophetic engagement in the community, church renovation and more

REV. DR. FREDERICK D. HAYNES



Rev. Dr. Frederick D. Haynes III is a prophetic pastor, community leader, and social activist committed to preaching the gospel and confronting racial and economic injustice. For four decades, he has served as Senior Pastor of Friendship-West Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, growing its membership from fewer than 100 to more than 13,000.

Dr. Haynes earned a bachelor's degree in Religion and English from Bishop College, a Master of Divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a Doctor of Ministry from the Graduate Theological Foundation. His scholarship and ministry connect church growth with social justice.

A committed advocate for underserved communities, Dr. Haynes has challenged predatory lending, addressed economic inequality, and founded the THR!VE Intern and Leadership Program, creating opportunities for hundreds of young people. Under his leadership, Friendship-West has contributed more than $3 million to historically Black colleges and universities and scholarships. He has also served in leadership roles with the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, the Conference of National Black Churches, and Paul Quinn College. His ministry centers faith, justice, and community transformation.

BRSG FOUNDERS & EXECUTIVE BOARD

DR. AUNDREA MATTHEWS



Dr. Aundrea Matthews is a scholar, curator, and cultural arts professional who served as Cultural Arts and Entertainment Manager at the United States Military Academy at West Point. She earned her Ph.D. from Rice University in 2016, a Master of Theological Studies from Brite Divinity School, and graduate and undergraduate degrees from Texas Christian University.

At Rice, Dr. Matthews worked with the Center for Engaged Research and Collaborative Learning and taught humanities at Lone Star College. Her dissertation, "Quilting Faith: African American Quilts as Source Material for the Study of African American Religion," reflects her research on African American religion and cultural expression. She has curated more than ten art exhibitions in Houston and founded Rice's Hearts, Hands, and Heritage Quilt Exhibition. Her publications include Breaking Bread, Breaking Beats: Churches and Hip Hop, A Basic Guide to Key Issues, co-authored with the CERCL Collective, and a chapter on esotericism in African American religious experience with Dr. Margarita S. Guillory. She also supported the nationally recognized Religion and Hip Hop course at Rice.

REV. DR. DANTÉ QUICK



Rev. Danté R. Quick, Ph.D., is the fourth Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens in Somerset, New Jersey, where he began serving in 2022. His ministry centers on wellness and faith formation, equipping disciples to live into their spiritual identity. Previously, he served Friendship Missionary Baptist Church in California for more than a decade and New Liberation Presbyterian Church in San Francisco.

Dr. Quick holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science from Morehouse College, a Master of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary, and a Ph.D. in Philosophical and Systematic Theology, with a focus on African American Studies, from the Graduate Theological Union. His professional experience includes community development work with the Interdenominational Theological Center and public service in the offices of Mayor Marion Barry, Congressman John Lewis, and Governor Zell Miller. He has also served as a legislative representative for the Atlanta Board of Education and as Special Programs Administrator for the Fulton County District Attorney's Office.

REV. DR. JACQUELINE A. THOMPSON



Rev. Dr. Jacqueline A. Thompson is a transformational preacher and ministry leader serving as Senior Pastor of Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, California. Appointed in 2019, she became the first woman to lead the historic congregation. Previously, she served as Assistant Pastor at Allen Temple and Youth Minister at Shiloh Baptist Church.

Dr. Thompson earned a bachelor's degree in Political Economics from the University of California, Berkeley, a Master of Divinity from Howard University, and a Doctor of Ministry in African American Church Leadership from Fuller Theological Seminary. An accomplished preacher, educator, and author, she teaches in Public Theology and Preaching at Berkeley School of Theology and has contributed to The Women of Color Study Bible and Baptist Preaching: A Global Anthology. Her honors include the Nannie Helen Burroughs Award for Academic Excellence and the Henry G. Maynard Award for Excellence in Preaching and Ministry. In 2022, she was elected Second Vice President of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.

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DR. CANDACE LAUGHINGHOUSE



Dr. Candace M. Laughinghouse is a scholar, activist, and musician whose work centers on environmental justice and the intersections of human, animal, and environmental oppression. She holds a Ph.D. in Theological Ethics from Chicago Theological Seminary and degrees from the University of California, Berkeley, Candler School of Theology, and Duke Divinity School. She serves as Professor of Theology and Ethics at Gammon Theological Seminary.

Dr. Laughinghouse is active in community organizing, holding leadership roles with Black Workers for Justice and the North Carolina Environmental Justice Network. Her scholarship explores womanist ethics, environmental justice, race, memory, ethnomusicology, and the influence of Christian nationalism in Black Gospel music. She also contributes to the American Academy of Religion through committee service, including Womanist Approaches to Religion and Society. In addition to her academic and activist work, she serves as Director of Music at Davie Street Presbyterian Church, drawing on her musical roots in the Pentecostal tradition.

REV. DR. HOWARD JOHN WESLEY



Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley is Senior Pastor of the historic Alfred Street Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia, serving as its eighth pastor. Under his leadership, the congregation has grown to more than 10,000 members, with an emphasis on missions, education, and ministry to children and young adults. Known for preaching on social and political issues, his sermon “When the Verdict Hurts” is archived at the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Dr. Wesley’s commitment to justice extends beyond the pulpit. He led Alfred Street to become the first faith-based donor to the museum, contributing $1 million, and has organized protests against racial injustice. He earned degrees from Duke University, Boston University, and Northern Baptist Seminary and has pursued doctoral studies in African American Preaching and Sacred Rhetoric at Christian Theological Seminary. A nationally recognized preacher and speaker, he has received honors including the NAACP Chairman’s Award and the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Laurel Wreath Award.

REV. DR. HENRY P. DAVIS III



Rev. Dr. Henry Pinckney Davis III has preached the Gospel since 1982 and currently serves as Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church of Highland Park in Landover, Maryland, a position he has held since 2000. Previously, he pastored Second Canaan Baptist Church in Harlem, New York, and Community Baptist Church in Lakehurst, New Jersey. Under his leadership, First Baptist Highland Park has grown into a congregation of more than 3,000 members and over 80 ministries, offering worship, Christian education, community outreach, and support for people across generations.

A native of Wichita Falls, Texas, Dr. Davis earned a bachelor’s degree in English from Norfolk State University, a Master of Public Administration from Fairleigh Dickinson University, a Master of Divinity from New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and a Doctor of Ministry from United Theological Seminary. In recognition of his ministry and leadership, he was inducted into the Martin Luther King Jr. Board of Preachers at Morehouse College in 2007.

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Rev. Dr. Gina Stewart



Dr. Stewart holds degrees from the University of Memphis, Trevecca Nazarene University, Memphis Theological Seminary, and the Interdenominational Theological Center. She is pursuing a PhD in African American Preaching and Sacred Rhetoric at Christian Theological Seminary and holds honorary Doctor of Divinity degrees from Virginia Union University and Wayland Seminary.

A former president of the Lott Carey Foreign Missions Society, she currently serves as Chairwoman of the Religious Affairs Committee of the National NAACP Board of Directors. An internationally sought-after preacher and teacher, her sermons and scholarship have appeared in numerous publications, including The African American Pulpit and Black Practical Theology. Her many honors recognize her contributions to preaching, womanist theology, global missions, and community advocacy. Through her leadership, Dr. Stewart continues to equip the Church for faithful witness, compassionate ministry, and transformative justice.

GREETINGS FROM THE BRSG HEADQUARTERS

Vanderbilt Divinity School's Kelly Miller Smith Institute on Black Church Studies welcomes you to the twenty-sixth annual consultation of the Black Religious Scholars Group. Vanderbilt Divinity School is committed to a program of theological education that is open to and takes account of the religious pluralism in our world. Concretely, this commitment entails working for a more just and humane society as well as striving for theological inquiry and leadership in church and society that will help alleviate the social ills and injustice besetting individuals and groups. Thus, we are especially pleased that Vanderbilt's Kelly Miller Smith Institute serves as the BRSG headquarters to further this important work of promoting critical engagement in the academy, church, and society.

Since the emergence of the BRSG, the Kelly Miller Smith Institute has supported its distinct mission within the American Academy of Religion to advance Black and Womanist theological scholarship that bridges the academy and the Black churches in liberation praxis and social justice ministry. The work of the Kelly Miller Smith Institute brings together Black church communities and educational institutions, as partners with the Vanderbilt Divinity School, in order to study and research issues important to the practice of ministry in the Black church, and do all in its power to combat racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism while also equipping students with a critical and reflective understanding of Christian faith.

As a Divinity School committed to the work of both the academy and the church, we are excited about the BRSG vision of reigniting meaningful dialogue between Black religious scholars and the larger Black community as well as its churches both nationally and internationally. Please accept our best wishes for your twenty-fifth annual consultation.

Forrest E. Harris, Sr.
Director, The Kelly Miller Smith Institute on Black Church Studies
President, American Baptist College

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Greetings from the School of the Prophets

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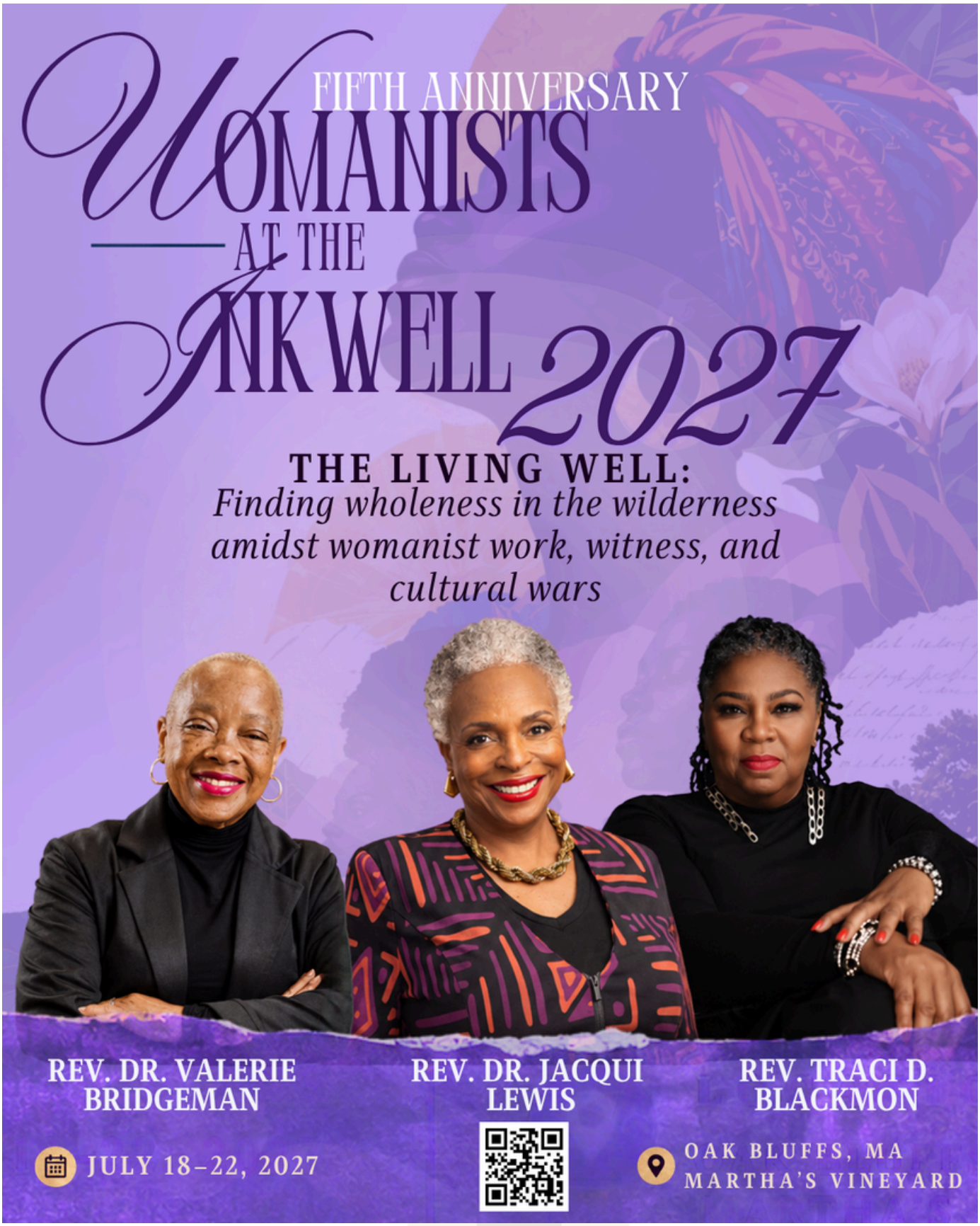
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