12th Annual Scholarship Concert

Love One Another

John 13: 34-35

Saturday - June 9, 2007 - 6:30 PM

Mt. Vernon Baptist Church

351 Joseph Avenue - Rochester, New York

AKOMA: A HERSTORICAL CHRONOLOGY

AKOMA is Rochester's African American Women's Gospel Choir whose Akan name means patience, endurance, consistency and faithfulness. AKOMA's adinkra symbol is the heart which indicates compassion, tenderness and charity.

After a debut performance in August of 1995 for Women Fest- a day-long celebration of the 75th Anniversary of Women's Right to vote-the group of thirty-five women decided to embrace a musical ministry that encompassed both their collective faith and their love for gospel music. Under the direction of Janet Rugless-Poles, executive music director; Cheryl Holloway, conductor/soloist; and Arlette Miller Smith, founder/executive director, the group adopted the name AKOMA because it symbolizes their African heritage while highlighting their strong spiritual roots, along with their desire to serve the Rochester community. In fact, more than 17 Rochester area churches are represented on AKOMA's current roster of more than 40 sister-members.

AKOMA, in its first year, was featured at numerous local programs and concerts. On June 22, 1996, AKOMA made her debut concert and established the Nona Patterson Chambers Scholarship in honor of her elder member and adopted choir mother. In the first year, Mother Nona's Scholarship was awarded to three recipients.

Since its inception year, AKOMA has been privileged to sing as the backup vocal group for Grammy Award winner Larnelle Harris, to appear on channel 13's "Many Voices, Many Visions" and to provide music for a program featuring Seattle poet Laureate Mona Lake Jones who wrote the poem, "A Room full of Sisters" which AKOMA has used as her introductory anthem. AKOMA also has been blessed to present a specially commissioned docudrama, "Stirring the Waters, Tending the Pots," at GeVa Theatre; provide music at programs honoring Bishop Desmond Tutu and United Methodist Bishop Violet Fisher; sing with the Penfield Symphony at several of their annual holiday concerts; participate in SUNY Plattsburgh's Gospel Concert; and sing at the Clarissa Street Festival.

In 2004, at the Strong Museum AKOMA participated in a major production titled, "From Struggle to Strength: Gospel Then and Now," in which the group chronicled in song the evolution of gospel music as a means of strength through the struggle for freedom. As a part of Strong Museum's, "Creating American Music," Series *Struggle* was written and arranged by AKOMA's executive director, Dr. Arlette Miller Smith with assistance from sister-member Ramona Moore.

During 2005-2006, AKOMA's ministry included the following engagements: the annual gospel concert for the Pennington-Moye VFW Post; the Penfield Symphony Annual Christmas Concert; the William Warfield Scholarship Concert; Memorial Art Gallery's & the Arts & Cultural Council's *Women's Voices: African American Gospel Singers Program* in honor of National Women's History Month (*Sacred Songs of the Sisterhood);* and the Alpha Phi Alpha 74th Eastern Regional Conference Sunday Worship Service.

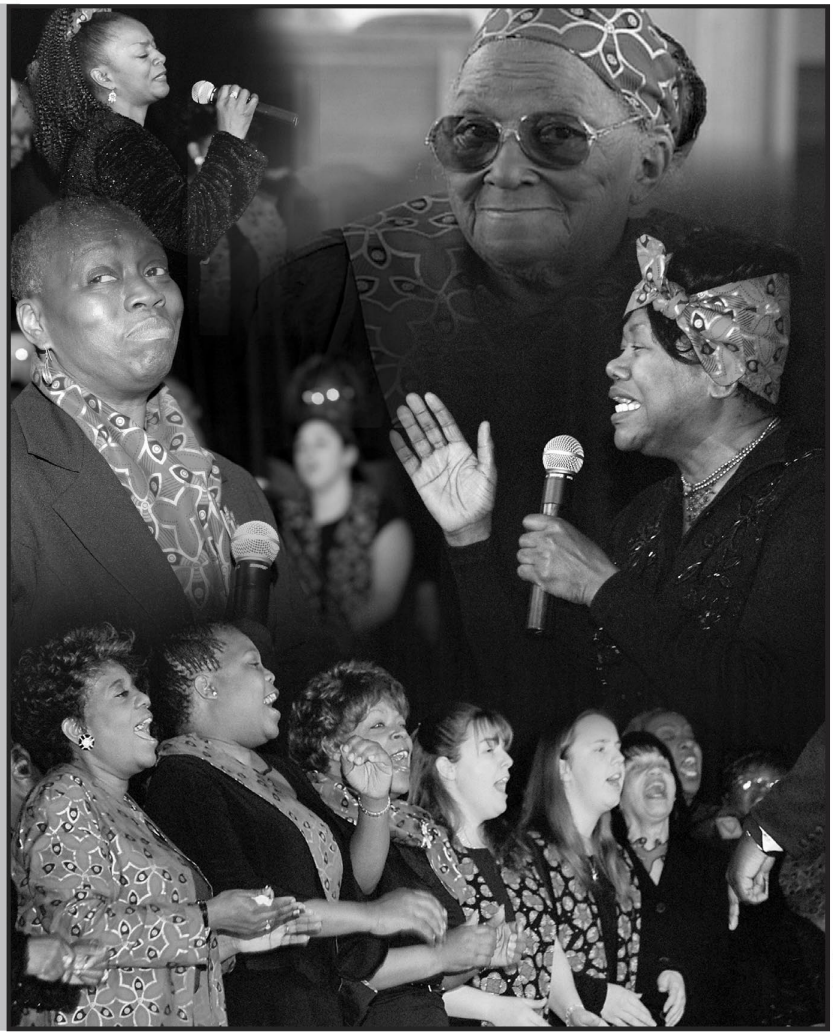
In 2006-2007, AKOMA's ministry schedule expanded with a number of new outreach venues including singing at St. John's Catholic Church in Brockport and at First Congregational United Church of Christ in Fairport. In February, the Sisters joined the Brothers of the Voices of Thunder in a combined concert. Even the summer of 2007 will be filled with AKOMA's music and cultural messages as she travels to Buffalo to provide a music ministry for the National Black Catholic Congress, in addition to two other summer engagements. The most significance change in the life of AKOMA during 2006-2007 was the home-going of three dedicated long-time members: Brenda Robinson, Martha Davis-Wilcox, and Sharon Williams. We know that as "Sisters on the Other Side," they have joined that eternal choir where their joyful voices fill heaven.

Since her very first concert, AKOMA has awarded almost sixty college-bound young women of African descent, the Nona Patterson Chambers Scholarship. AKOMA desires to continue her ministry of music, spoken word, and service to the community.

For concert or other bookings, please call AKOMA's voice mail at 234-6860; email us at akomagc@gmail.com; or visit our website at www.akoma.org.

It's a room full of sisters,
like jewels in a crown
Vanilla, cinnamon, and
dark chocolate brown
We are wearing black,
accented with gold
and nutmeg brown
And on top of our heads;
some of us are wearing
open crowns!
But, it's not about how
we fashionably appear
Our beauty is in
the values we revere
We are smart, articulate,
and well-read.
With all kinds of history
stored in our heads…

"A Room Full of Sisters"
By Mona Lake Jones
In the Color of Culture (1993)



Jim Hunter

CLOCKWISE---Mother Nona P. Chambers; Martha Davis Wilcox; AKOMA sings with St. John Fisher Gospel Choir at the college's annual MLK program; Maggie Moore-Holley; and Georgia Prescott.

AKOMA is Steeped in Song

By G. E. Thornhill

Black music is an influential force rooted in African-American culture. Music was pivotal to survival. From drums and chants used in African rituals seeking good hunting, fertile soil, abundant crops, healthy livestock and sexual fertility, to music used during slavery to plot escapes and transcend pain, to the old Negro spirituals that provided the strength as well as calm it took to get through the turbulent Jim Crow and civil rights era, sacred music continues to be an inspiring force for African Americans.

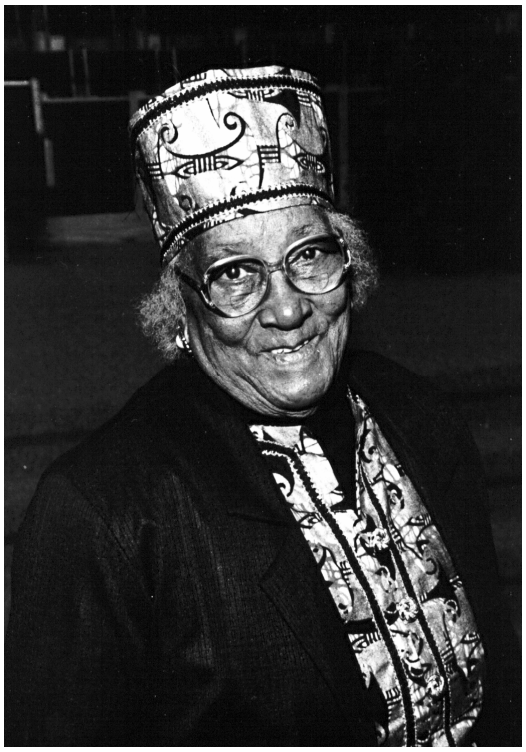
Within today's church community, the sacred songs and instrumental interpretations help black people transcend everyday kinds of stress associated with work and living, and provide encouragement to hold on just another day when a great change will come forth.

Through a ministry of song and the spoken word, AKOMA (ah-ko-ma), the Rochester, New York-based African-American women's gospel choir, utilizes its expressive voice to carry on these hallowed traditions.

Singing songs of praise steeped in the African-American spiritual tradition, AKOMA was first created in August 1995 when 35 African-American women gospel singers came together from 17 local churches to perform the final concert for the "WomanFest" celebration that marked the 75th anniversary of the 1920 passage of the 19th Amendment that gave some women the right to vote. (Black women had to wait another 40+ years before the 1964 Civil Rights Act guaranteed them full access to this most basic of civic and political liberties.)

While completing her doctoral degree in American Studies with a concentration in Women's Studies, co-founder and executive director Dr. Arlette Miller Smith documented AKOMA's "herstory" as the foundation for her dissertation, *Speaking the Song, Spreading the Word, Lifting the People: The Re-imagination of Community Through Vocal Music Activism*, in which she described the original formation of the choir. Dr. Miller Smith

Continued on page 11



If you plan for a year, sow a seed;
If you plan for a decade, plant a tree;
If you plan for a century,* educate *the people.
— Dr. Addie Mitchell

Nona Patterson Chambers Scholarship

The Nona Patterson Chambers Scholarship was named in honor of our AKOMA mother, Nona Patterson Chambers. Mother Nona's life exemplifies the meaning of the word AKOMA. She demonstrates patience, endurance, consistency and faithfulness. At 97, Mother Nona is our oldest and most beloved member. She has served as an example of what it really means to be a dedicated and humble Christian mother. Mother Nona received a third grade education but returned to school as an adult to complete her education. Her quiet manner, Christian beliefs, and steadfast loyalty to her family and choir make it fitting that this scholarship be named in her honor.

2007 Scholarship Recipients

Brittney Hills

Brittney Hills, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Donald Hills, will graduate from Gates Chili High School in June. She will enter Spelman College and begin her premedical studies. Her goal is to become a pediatrician and provide health care for low income families. New Life Fellowship is her church home.

Danielle Richardson

Danielle Richardson is the daughter of Mrs. Roxanne Wright. A senior at Northstar Christian Academy, she will attend Buffalo State College. Danielle is planning on a career in journalism. Her church home is Breath of Life Seventh Day Adventist Church.

Sherrita Wilkins

Sherrita Wilkins, daughter of Merice Wilkins, will graduate from Nazareth Academy. A member of God's House of Refuge she will stay in the area and attend Nazareth College. With Political Science and International Affairs as a major, her future plans include a career with the United Nations.

2006-2007 Scholarship Commission

Musette Castle - Chairperson

Ruth Anderson
Rita Mitchell
Louise Walker-McBride
Marguerite Lucas
Rose Stokes
Nancy Walters

2007 Scholarship Recipients

Brittney Hills
Danielle Richardson
Sherrita Wilkins

2006 Scholarship Recipients

Porsha Coaxm
Katrina Griffith
Alyshia Thomas

2005 Scholarship Recipients

Ashley Brass
Angelica Davis
Tiffany Ellis

2004 Scholarship Recipients

Krystal Crawford
Desiree Israel
Leslie Pierre-Philippe

2003 Scholarship Recipients

Kierstyn Blair
Kari McCree
Lauryn Minter

2002 Scholarship Recipients

Kekeria Achola Bitek
Porcia Nicole Hartzog
Tiffany Nicole Jackson
Tyra Victoria Kelly
Starr Celeste Myers
Nathalie Martin Pierre-Philippe
Angela Yvonne Stockdale
Yolanda Renee Uter

2001 Scholarship Recipients

Peta-Gae Andrade
Shemeka Davis
LaTia Dukes
Takara Gray
Aja Houston
Brandi Howard
Shakira Nelson
Natasha Nichole Stevens
Delora Nicole Turner
Kirkshinta Turnipseed
Uwem Udofa

2000 Scholarship Recipients

Tyanisha Brown
Margaret Neal Enis
Lindsey Green
Deidre Hill
Brandy Rosier
Sherell Scott
Leah Thompson
Re'shawna Turner
Naomi Woffard

1999 Scholarship Recipients

Johnique Ter'esa Billups
Erica Michelle Bryant
Kimberly Alecia Thurman
Sonia Elizabeth Uter

1998 Scholarship Recipients

La-Toya Dukes
Katrina Louise Jones
Tamisha N. Smith
Melody Terese Williams

1997 Scholarship Recipients

Tameka Avant
Danielle Gaston
Yuressa Hubbard
Rashida Moore

1996 Scholarship Recipients

April N. Anderson
Donnye Graham
Shalewa Hardaway

Love One Another

AKOMA's Twelfth Annual Scholarship Concert Programme

John 13: 34-35 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye **love one another;** as I have loved you, that ye also **love one another.** By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Saturday, June 9, 2007 - 6:30 pm
Mt. Vernon Baptist Church
Rochester, NY

♥♥♥ Praise, Prayer, Preparation ♥♥♥

Introit/Processional	**- Great God**	**Soloist: Regina Fowler**
Opening Prayer		**Rev. Robin Franklin**
Welcome		**Dr. Arlette Miller Smith**

♥♥♥ Selections Part I ♥♥♥

Selections	**- Love One Another**	**Soloist: Georgia Prescott**
	- Take Me to That Place	**Soloist: Gloria Wilson**
	- Because of Who You Are	**Soloist: Marcel Davis**

♥♥♥ Scholarship Tribute ♥♥♥

Scholarship Presentations	**Musette Castle**

♥♥♥ Offering ♥♥♥

♥♥♥ Selections Part II ♥♥♥

Remarks		**Rita Mitchell, President**
Selections	**- He Won't Let You Down**	**Soloist: Rose Stokes**
	- Ain't That Good News	
	- Come to Christ	**Speaker: Rev. Robin Franklin**

♥♥♥ In Memoriam ♥♥♥

Selections	**- I Shall Wear a Crown**	**Interpreter:**	**Evelyn Greenwade Boltwood**
	- Order My Steps	**Soloist:**	**Cheryl Holloway**
		Interpreter:	**Evelyn Greenwade Boltwood**

Invitation/Benediction	**Rev. Dr. Harmon Stockdale**

♥♥♥ Special Thanks to Rev. Dr. Harmon Stockdale, Sr. and the Mt. Vernon Family. ♥♥♥

In MEMORIAM

The Heart of AKOMA--- Sisters on the Other Side

We thank you for your continued dedication, patience, Endurance, consistency, and faithfulness to the sisterhood and AKOMA's ministry through Sacred Songs, Spoken Word and Service

…When great souls die,
After a period peace blooms,
Slowly and always
Irregularly. Spaces fill
With a kind of
Soothing electric vibration.
Our senses, restored, never
To be the same, whisper to us.
They existed. They existed.
We can be. Be and be
Better. For they existed.

Excerpt from "Ailey, Baldwin, Floyd, Killens, and Mayfield" by Maya Angelou

♥ Edna Mae Lattimore Rice
September 23, 1933 — December 29, 2000
Second Baptist Church-Mumford

♥ Brenda Denise Fields Robinson
December 16, 1951 — August 17, 2006
Second Baptist Church-Mumford

♥ Martha Davis-Wilcox
November 27, 1941 — January 13, 2007
Miracle Outreach Church of God

♥ Sharon Louise Hurst Williams
March 10, 1941 — April 16, 2007
Jefferson Avenue SDA Church

The sisters of AKOMA also acknowledge the passing of affiliate member Viola Kribich-Brown who was unable to participate in our ministry because of health-related reasons.

"Love One Another" Supporters

John 13: 34-35

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Janice Bell

(Continued on page 9)

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John 13: 34-35

(Continued from page 8)

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(Titan Multimedia Production)

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Art Smith

Public Relations

Joanne Gordon

Editor

Dr. Arlette Miller Smith

Ministry Through Music: An AKOMA Chronology

2007	**Love One Another***	**John 13: 34-35**
2006	**From Struggle to Strength: Sacred Songs of the Sisterhood**	**2 Corinthians 12:10**
2005	**...And With My Song Will I Praise Him**	**Psalm 28:7**
2004	**Let Everything That Hath Breath Praise The Lord**	**Psalms 150**
2003	**With My Whole Heart**	**Psalms 138:1**
2002	**Constant Blessings**	**Ephesians 1:3**
2001	**More Than Enough**	**Isaiah 12:2**
2000	**We Give You Praise**	**Psalms 63:3-4**
1999	**Better Than Blessed**	**Psalms 34:8-10**
1998	**Perpetual Praise**	**Psalms 34:1**
1997	**I Have Hope**	**Hosea 2:15**
1996	**Come Let Us Sing**	**Psalms 28:7**

*2007 Concert Song Credits

"Great God", "Take Me to That Place" & "Come to Christ"	CD - Reed's Temple Choir — "Keep on Making a Way"
"Love One Another"	CD - Gladys Knight & the Saints Unified Voices - "One Voice"
"Because of Who You Are"	CD - Vicki Yohe on WOW Gospel 2005
"He Won't Let You Down	Lamar Campbell
"Ain't That Good News" & "I Shall Wear a Crown"	Traditional
"Order My Steps"	CD - GMWA Women of Worship – "It's Our Time"

For the complete AKOMA Article, See About Time (Vol. XXXIV No. 3/about...time)

is Associate Provost/Dean of the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Diversity Programs at St. John Fisher College.

"It seemed as if the entire city was preparing for the 75th anniversary celebration of the women's right to vote and the events that led to the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920. The series of celebrations were grouped under the overall title '95/75.' WomanFest, the crowning event, took place on August 26, 1995. The day's schedule included music, arts and crafts, vendors, speeches and entertainment—all by women from every ethnic, racial, service and religious group that could be assembled throughout the day-long celebration," Miller-Smith wrote. "A gospel concert to be performed by a group of African-American women was suggested as the culminating activity for the festival; however, no such group of women singers existed in Rochester."

As a member of the entertainment planning committee who had contacts at a number of local churches, Miller Smith agreed to organize the closing gospel concert. "With less than two months before the festival was scheduled to take place, a call to participate was sent to local churches in Rochester's African-American community. Weekly rehearsals were held at the Church of the Covenant, located downtown. Songs for the concert were selected to reflect the history and culture of black women who lived, survived and thrived primarily during the nineteenth century."

Words in the first song were reflective: "It's good to go back to the old time way, good to go back to when we used to pray. It's good to go back, good to go back to the old time way." The haunting lyrics of another song seemed to reach back to the pain of chattel slavery: "I shall wear a crown; I shall wear a crown when it's all over; when it's all over; I shall see his face. I'm gonna put on my crown…when it's all over."

The history of black women's struggles and strength became evident through the songs as the concert's focus evolved. "Soon bits and pieces of that history crept into/underneath/between and within the words of the songs. With each rehearsal, the history of black women in America became fashioned and fixed within the lyrics of the songs. The concert's themes paid tribute to the strength of black women as practiced through their faith, family values and service to community," she explained.

"A plow was chosen to be a symbolic representation of past struggles and triumphs. Placed strategically on center stage before the voices of the chorus were heard, the concert was no longer simply about music; its meaning moved into rememory of melodies with a message about black women!"

Each woman in the chorus wore a swatch of African fabric to represent the Sankofa link to the past and present. "The quickly assembled community of sisters had begun its formation weeks before the rain sprinkled night of August 26, 1995 and by the night's end, the seed for their continuation had been planted, watered and fed by the spiritual cloud of sister witnesses who were members of herstorical choruses and the chroniclers of a proud legacy," stated Miller Smith.

After this debut performance, the women decided to embrace a musical ministry that encompassed both their collective faith and their love for gospel music. By October 1995, under the direction of Janet Rugless-Poles, executive music director; Cheryl Holloway, conductor/soloist; and Arlette Miller Smith, founder/executive director, the 30 founding members adopted

ABOVE, l-r: AKOMA's founder and executive director, Dr. Arlette Miller Smith; executive musical director, Karen Summers; and conductor Cheryl Holloway. Other officers are: Nancy Walters (president), Debra Bell (vice president), Ruth Anderson (secretary), Gloria Wilson (treasurer), Phyllis Griffin (chaplain), Georgia Prescott (parliamentarian), and Eunice White (historian). C. Sherie Hill is the other conductor.

the name AKOMA (ah-ko-ma) because it symbolizes their African heritage while highlighting their strong spiritual roots, along with their desire to serve the Rochester community.

AKOMA's West African Akan name means patience, endurance, consistency and faithfulness; its Andinkra symbol is the "heart," which indicates compassion, tenderness and charity.

"Along with that African-centered identity, we needed other linkages to our own multiple lives, roles and rituals. Because the group collectively was rooted and grounded primarily in the Christian tradition, our motto was taken from the Old Testament book of Psalms: 'And with my Song will I praise Him.' Those words from Psalms 28:7 have been the guiding principle for the group of gospel singers since our beginning in August 1995," Miller Smith indicated.

"Additionally having been introduced to the poetry of then Seattle poet laureate, Mona Lake Jones, her poem 'A Room Full of Sisters' [published in her 1993 poetry book, *In the Color of Culture,* quoted at the top, left page], was introduced to the group. The words to the poem spoke to the heart and to the spiritual soul of AKOMA. Soon 'Room' was adopted as the poetic voice of the sisterhood," she noted.

"AKOMA's attire is signature traditional, usually solid black or white clothing with an accent piece created from an African patterned fabric," said Joanne Gordon, co-chair of AKOMA's public relations committee. "Akoma currently has five African patterns. The members are very creative in the use of their fabric. Some have fashioned the material into beautiful crowns, wraps, jackets, shawls and blouses. Others have designed creative wearable art such as belts, earrings, collars, hairs pins and cuffs," Gordon added.

"The original fabric is cinnamon brown, black and gold, colors often associated with Mona Lake Jones' poetic piece, 'A Room Full of Sisters.' Other fabric colors include what we call wax, burgundy, blue (usually worn with white) and red. We selected several patterns of fabric swatches for members to vote on. The African accent pieces became the symbol that represented 'our (un)uniform,' as characterized by one member," Gordon concluded.

Still together 11 years later, AKOMA has maintained many of

AKOMA's 2007 Church Roll

Aenon Baptist
Pastor: James L. Cherry
Debra E. W. Bell

Baber AME
Pastor: Rev. Marlowe V. N. Washington
Robin Franklin

Bethel Christian Fellowship
Pastor: Rev. Ron A. Domina
Georgia Ann Prescott

Breath of Life SDA
Pastor: Pastor Cornelius Wesley
Deseree Bliss
Carolyn Butts
Evelyn Greenwade Boltwood
Cheryl Y. Johnson
Roxanne Wright

Bridge Builders Ministry
Pastors: Phil & Ruby Harlow
Phyllis Griffin

Church of Love Faith Center
Pastor: Bishop Gregory L. Parris
Dr. Arlette Miller Smith

Faith Hope and Charity Worship Center
Pastor: Elder John Crocker
Rosa L. Taylor-Payne

First Church of God
Pastor: Rev. Dr. Dwight Fowler
Marcelle Davis
Myrtle Day
Regina Fowler
Gloria McCullough

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Mary Wingo

Jefferson Avenue SDA
Pastor: Brian Carter
Valerie White-Whittick
Dorothy Wilson

Memorial AME Zion
Pastor: Rev. Dr. Kenneth Q. James
Eunice White
Nancy Walters

Mt. Vernon Baptist
Pastor: Dr. Harmon E. Stockdale
Cheryl Holloway
KaTrina Kimble
Rita Mitchell
Karen Summers

New Bethel CME
Pastor: Rev. Weldon G. Thomas
Julia Lawson
Anita Simpson
Gloria Wilson

Second Baptist - Mumford
Pastor: Rev. Dr. Charles A. Thurman
Marilyn Johnson
Marguerite B. Lucas
Shelley Rice
Arlene Williams

St. Luke/St. Simon's Cyrene
Pastor: Rev. Michael Hopkins
Ruth Anderson

St. Paul Holiness
Pastor: Rev. Abraham Parker
Kristy Jackson

The Father's House
Pastor: Pierre du Plessis
Kathy Damann

The Living Word
Pastor: Nathan McGill, Sr.
Clara Bennett
Louise Walker-McBride