

## AKOMA HERSTORY 2020-2023

We cannot change the past, but we can change our attitude toward it. Uproot guilt & plant forgiveness. Tear out arrogance & seed humility. Exchange LOVE for hate; [thereby, making the present comfortable & the future promising.] -Maya Angelou

### OVERVIEW

**AKOMA** is Rochester's African American Women's Gospel Choir whose West African Akan name means patience, endurance, consistency, and faithfulness. **AKOMA's** Adinkra symbol, the heart, indicates compassion, tenderness, and charity. **AKOMA's** vocal and spoken word ministry is rooted in the African American sacred song and oral traditions.

After a debut performance in August of 1995 for Woman 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 reflects their diverse faith traditions and love for gospel music. The group adopted the name **AKOMA** because it symbolizes their African heritage, spiritual roots, and desire to serve the Rochester community. Dr. David A. Anderson/Sankofa recommended the name **AKOMA**, based on research and knowledge of the group's mission. Twenty-one Rochester area churches currently are represented on **AKOMA's** 2023 roster of thirty-one members.

On June 22, 1996, **AKOMA** made her debut concert and established the Nona Patterson Chambers (NPC) Scholarship in honor of her elder member and adopted mother. Three recipients received the Mother Nona Scholarship in its first year. Since that time and including the ten 2023 recipients, **AKOMA** has awarded one hundred and sixty college-bound young African American women, a portion of the more than \$225,500 collected as a part of the NPC Scholarship Fund.

### 2020-2023 **AKOMA** Concert Year

During our twenty-fifth year (2020) **AKOMA's** concert plans were sidelined due to Covid 19. Our Executive Music Director, Gloria Brooks, kept us together by scheduling monthly Zoom rehearsals. We were pleased to offer a concert on Saturday October 08, 2022 on the Saint Bonaventure campus honoring Saint Francis. **Akoma** presented her belated twenty-fifth scholarship concert on Saturday October 22, 2022 at First Genesis Baptist Church. On December 7, 2022 the choir sang at the holiday luncheon for the Memorial Art Gallery Board of Directors. Temple Sinai Congregation invited **AKOMA** to participate in a program honoring Dr. Martin Luther King on January 13, 2023. (See **AKOMA.org** for complete herstory)

Since her 1995 inception year, **AKOMA** has been privileged to sing with Grammy Award winner Larnelle Harris; to appear on a number of local television shows; to provide music for a program featuring Seattle poet laureate Mona Lake Jones who wrote the poem, "A Room Full of Sisters" which **AKOMA** uses as her spoken word anthem; to provide the music for programs honoring Bishop Desmond Tutu; to sing with the Penfield Symphony at several of their annual holiday concerts; and to be featured at the National Black Catholic Congress Conference in Buffalo, New York. Early in her spiritual life, **AKOMA** also was blessed to present a commissioned docudrama, "Stirring the Waters, Tending the Pots," written by her founder, Arlette Miller Smith. "Stirring," a suffrage-related drama, was performed at Geva Theatre as a part of the 150th anniversary of the women's rights convention at Seneca Falls.

**AKOMA's** current Executive Music Director is Pastor Sherie Hill; the Scholarship Commission Chairwoman is Donna M. Jones; the President is Ruth Anderson. The Founder, Executive & Artistic Director is Dr. Arlette Miller Smith.

The herstory of **AKOMA's** evolution as an organization is the title of the unpublished dissertation: *Speaking the Song, Spreading the Word, Lifting the People---The Reimagination of Community Through Vocal Music Activism* (2005) by Dr. Arlette Miller Smith. Allison Thorp's 2016 dissertation, *Testify, Heal, Empower: A Phenomenological Investigation of Three Urban, socially Identified, Community Choirs*, includes the music, message, and ministry of **AKOMA**.

For **AKOMA** concert bookings, please email [akomagc@gmail.com](mailto:akomagc@gmail.com); visit our website at [www.akoma.org](http://www.akoma.org); "like" us on Facebook; and Twitter.

*And with my song... will I praise Him. (Ps. 28:7)*