

AKOMA HERSTORY 2023-2024

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-three Rochester area churches currently are represented on AKOMA's 2024 roster of thirty-eight 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 nine 2024 recipients, AKOMA has awarded one hundred and sixty-nine (169) college-bound young African American women, a portion of the more than \$263,000 collected as a part of the NPC Scholarship Fund.

2023-2024 AKOMA Concert Year

AKOMA's twenty-ninth concert year began with her participation in the church service at Memorial AME Zion Church celebrating the church's Beyond the Sanctuary programs. The sisters also sang at and hosted a SingAlong on December 19, 2023 for the Holiday program sponsored by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) for their members. The Black Heritage Committee asked AKOMA to sing on February 21, 2024, during a public program at Rochester City Hall. On March 2, 2024, the AKOMA sisters— along with her Voices of Thunder brothers —presented the annual City of Rochester's Gospel Heritage Concert at Mt. Vernon Baptist Church. In May, AKOMA was the first gospel choir invited to sing on the Main Stage at the Lilac Festival. The 2024 Concert year will end with Executive Music Director, Pastor C. Sherie Hill and the AKOMA sisters in concert on Saturday, June 8 at Mt. Olivet Church where they honor the 2024 NPC Scholars (Go to AKOMA.org for her 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 Carolyn Butts. 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; visit our website at www.akoma.org; "like" us on Facebook and Instagram.

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