

Celebrating the Life
Of
Rev. Dr. William Bobby McClain

Sunrise: May 19, 1938

Sunset: November 18, 2020



Saturday, December 5, 2020
2:00 p.m.

A Virtual Celebration
Reverend Dr. Ianther Marie Mills, Officiating
Senior Pastor, Asbury United Methodist Church

Obituary

William Bobby McClain was a pastor and professor who not only shaped the lives of the students he taught but also countless United Methodists and others across the world.

Bobby began preaching as a teenager in his hometown of Gadsden, Alabama, and met the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in Montgomery, Alabama. He returned to Alabama in 1962 after earning his bachelor's degree from Clark College in Atlanta and his master's degree from Boston University School of Theology. Back in Alabama, he worked with King and the civil rights movement while pastoring Haven Chapel Methodist Church in Anniston. In Anniston, he was the first African American to integrate the public library, and the city posted historical markers about him just a few years ago.

He later earned his doctorate from Boston University School of Theology, where he subsequently served on the Dean's Advisory Board and recently was recognized as one of its outstanding alumni. He pastored several prominent churches, including Union United Methodist Church in Boston and Tindley Temple United Methodist Church in Philadelphia. He was one of the original board members of Black Methodists for Church Renewal, the organized Black caucus of The United Methodist Church.

He launched and chaired the committee that produced the hymnal, Songs of Zion in 1981. The hymnal — featuring spirituals, Gospel music and songs from Black religious traditions — sold more than 2.5 million copies and changed the composition of Christian hymnals of every denomination. And he wrote Come Sunday: The Liturgy of Zion, The Preaching of Zion: The African American Church and the Bible and Black People in the Methodist Church: Whither Thou Goest.

Bobby will be best remembered for his impact on his students, according to the president of Wesley Theological Seminary. “What will be the legacy of Dr. William B. McClain?” seminary President David McAllister-Wilson said. “About 2 million biblically grounded, theologically sound, prophetically and pastorally infused sermons have been shaped by the teaching of Dr. McClain. After 34 years in the Wesley classroom, it is foremost his students who are his legacy. And they will rise up and call him blessed.” For 34 years McClain taught preaching and worship at Wesley Theological Seminary, where, in 1999, he was named to the Mary Elizabeth McGehee Joyce Chair in Preaching and Worship, the first fully endowed chair in the seminary's history. He continued as professor emeritus after retiring in 2013.

While living and pastoring in Boston between 1968 and 1978, he also taught at Boston College, Harvard University, Northeastern University and Emerson College. He later served as the first executive director of the Multi-Ethnic Center for Ministry at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey.

He is survived by his wife of 42 years, Jo Ann McClain, sons William Bobby McClain Jr. (Bira) and David McClain, two sisters, Dorothy and Juliet, four granddaughters, two great grandchildren, and several nieces, nephews and godchildren.

Order of Service

PRELUDE		Everett P. Williams, Jr.
THE WORD OF GRACE		Rev. Dr. Ianther Mills
GREETING		Rev. Dr. Ianther Mills
HYMN OF ASSURANCE		<i>“O Thou in Whose Presence”</i>
PRAYER OF COMFORT		Dr. James M. Shopshire, Sr.
OLD TESTAMENT	<i>Psalm 139</i>	Herbert Coleman
NEW TESTAMENT	<i>1 Corinthians 13</i>	Rev. Dr. Rebecca Iannicelli
GOSPEL LESSON	<i>Luke 4:1-4, 18-19</i>	Rev. Dr. Robin Dease
HYMN		<i>“Great Is Thy Faithfulness”</i>
TRIBUTE		Meaghan Hohl
OBITUARY		Rev. Dr. Chip Aldridge
THE MESSAGE		Rev. Dr. Reginald Lee
COMMENDATION		Rev. Dr. Cynthia Belt
HOLY COMMUNION		Bishop Woodie W. White
HYMN OF TRIUMPH		<i>“It Is Well With My Soul”</i>
BENEDICTION		Rev. Dr. Ianther Mills
POSTLUDE		Everett P. Williams, Jr.

Worship Participants

Bishop Woodie W. White, Retired United Methodist Bishop
Rev. Dr. Ianther Mills, Senior Pastor, Asbury United Methodist Church, Washington, DC
Rev. Dr. Chip Aldridge, Special Assistant to the President, Wesley Theological Seminary
Rev. Dr. Cynthia Belt, Senior Pastor, Harwood/Mt. Zion Charge
Herbert Coleman, Director of Retention and Student Success, Perkins School of Theology
Rev. Dr. Robin Dease, District Superintendent, South Carolina Conference
Meaghan Hohl, Goddaughter of Rev. Dr. William Bobby McClain
Rev. Dr. Rebecca Iannicelli, District Superintendent, Baltimore-Washington Conference
Rev. Dr. Reginald Lee, Congregational Specialist, South Carolina Conference/
Pastor, Mount Zion United Methodist Church, Florence, SC
Dr. James M. Shopshire, Sr., Professor Emeritus, Wesley Theological Seminary
Everett P. Williams, Jr., Director of Music, Asbury United Methodist Church, Washington, DC
Asbury Ensemble, Asbury United Methodist Church, Washington, DC

Acknowledgements

The family wishes to express their sincere appreciation to relatives and friends for the love, prayers, support, and many acts of kindness shown in the passing of our loved one. May God continue to bless you and keep each of you!

Inurnment

(Memorial Service and Inurnment to be announced)
Wesley Theological Seminary
4500 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20016