

# SECOND EPISCOPAL DISTRICT LAY ORGANIZATION

SIS. D. FAYE CONLEY

DIRECTOR OF LAY ACTIVITIES



Baltimore  
Conference



Washington  
Conference



Virginia  
Conference



Western North Carolina  
Conference



North Carolina  
Conference

## WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

**FOR MARCH 2025**

As we join the rest of the world in celebrating Women's History Month, the SEDLO will highlight the 5 women who have served the Second Episcopal District Lay Organization

as President, including: Dr. Paulette Coleman, the late Mrs. Gertrude Upperman, Mrs. Marcie W. White, Dr. Cellestine Cheeks and the late Mrs. Valerie Faith Gary Bell.

There are many women across the 2nd Episcopal District Lay Organization who have made a significant difference in the life of the SEDLO, serving on all levels of the AME Church. I encourage each Conference Lay Organization to highlight women who have made a difference in the life of the organization, including, and definitely not limited to:

Baltimore: the late Mrs. Beatrice Avery and Mrs. Alice Thrasher

Washington: the late Mrs. Vorheese D. B. Jamison, Mrs. Annette C. Jones, Mrs. Bernice Mungen and Mrs. Valerie Faith Gary Bell

Virginia: Mrs. Marcie W. White

North Carolina: the late Mrs. Myrtle Knox and Mrs. Florence Johnson Warren

Western North Carolina: the late Mrs. Gertrude Upperman and Mrs. O. M. Carr



**Dr. Paulette Coleman**  
**First Female President**  
**Second Episcopal District Lay Organization**

Dr. Paulette Coleman Former 2nd Episcopal District Lay President Paulette Coleman is a fourth generation AME, with her spiritual roots in Corpus Christi, Texas, the 10th Episcopal District. As a 12-year-old she committed her life to Christ and Christian service.

She has served on the local level as a trustee, steward, lay organization president, choir member, Sunday School teacher, organizer of New Life Ministries, Social Action Commission chair, facilitator of the Lee Chapel Literary Club. Dr. Coleman also served on the founding boards of two AME church-affiliated independent schools: Bethel Christian School (Baltimore, MD) and St. James Preparatory Academy (Newark, NJ).

Paulette was the first woman elected President of the Second Episcopal District Lay Organization. She presented workshops, seminars, and keynote addresses throughout the five conferences of the Second District and focused on assistance to smaller churches

At the connectional level she was elected Third Vice President Dr. Coleman developed and wrote the 1987, 1989, and 1991 editions of the lay study guide. Dr. Coleman was also the general editor for the 2004 supplement, the 2010 edition, and 2015 edition of the Lay Study Guide. From 2011 to 2012, Dr. Coleman was the co-chair of the centennial celebration of the Connectional Lay Organization and curated special events in Detroit, MI; Lusaka, Zambia; and Nashville, TN.

In 1992, Dr. Coleman was elected the twelfth editor of the AME Church Review, a scholarly religious journal, continuously published since 1884. She served in that position for eight years and retired following the merger of six departments into three.

A community leader and Certified Mediator, Dr. Coleman was appointed to state boards and commissions that empower women, girls, and their families and those that promote arts programs to transform lives and build communities. She was privileged to serve as the operations director to Dr. Dorothy I. Height for a delegation of 30 international women leaders to the UN Decade Conference for Women in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985. In 1995 she was accredited as a journalist to the UN Decade Conference for Women in Beijing, China.

Dr. Coleman received her BA from Fordham University (NYC) and her PhD. From MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). She has done additional graduate studies at universities in Great Britain and France.

Dr. Coleman's heart's desire is to live a life that honors God; uplifts humanity; and expands the ministry of the laity as directed by the Holy Spirit.

(Taken from an article from the CLO Office of the Historiographer)





**Gertrude Judd Upperman**  
**Former President**  
**Second Episcopal District Lay Organization**

Gertrude Judd Upperman joined Persimmon Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church at the age of 12 years and remained faithful until transitioning to eternal life at the age of 76 years April 2, 2023.

Gertrude was known for her love of the AME Church, especially the Lay Organization with stellar service as Past President of the Western North Carolina Conference Lay Organization and the Second Episcopal District Lay Organization.

She wore many hats and served her local church as Secretary of the Sunday School, Church Organist, Secretary of the Quarterly Conference, Secretary of Official Board, Usher, Church Announcer, Trustee, Steward, Stewardess, VBS Teacher. She loved people. Gertrude loved teaching and could quote the AME Discipline.

She was educated in the Greensboro City Schools and a 1965 graduate of James B. Dudley Senior High School. She was one of the first African American students to attend Guilford College earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology in 1969. She also received a Masters Degree in Sociology from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in 1972. Guilford College officials state,

“She was a trailblazing African-American student in the 1960s and a dedicated and influential alumni leader for Guilford for many years. Gertrude grew up two blocks away from campus. Her great-grandfather owned land along Dolley Madison Road, and he worked at the college, as did other members of her immediate and extended family. Her father owned a business in the community.

Gertrude was among Guilford’s first African-American students, having arrived only a year before James McCorkle '66 and Linda Moore Banks '66 became the College's first African-American graduates. She was a charter member of Brothers and Sisters in Blackness, the first Black student organization on campus. In service to the College, Gertrude was a member of the Alumni Association Board of Directors and was among the organizers of the Black Alumni of Guilford College (BAGC). She served on the Friends of the Library Board and took part in presidential search interviews.”

She was known in the community for work in various civic organizations. She was an active member of the Guilford College Alumni Board, New Garden Friends School Board of Trustees, Tarheel Triad Girl Scouts Council, NAACP, Young Democratic Women, Greensboro Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and the Greensboro Alumnae Delta Cultural Enrichment Center.

She was married to her beloved Lamont Williams Upperman July 25, 1976, mother of son Joseph Lionel Upperman. Gertrude loved and spoiled her grandson, Mehki Lionel Upperman!



**Marcie Watson White**  
**Former President**  
**Second Episcopal District Lay Organization**

As we celebrate Women’s History Month, we give thanks for the unwavering faith, dedication, and service of Sister Marcie W. White. Since 1947, when she became a member of Macedonia AME Church in Accomac, VA, she has walked faithfully in her calling, serving in various capacities with a heart devoted to God and His people. Now an affiliate member of St. James AME Church in Havre de Grace, MD, her commitment to the church remains steadfast.

Throughout the years, Sister Marcie has served as a Trustee, Steward, choir member, usher, Sunday School teacher, class leader, Church Clerk, Executive Aide, President of the Lay Organization, and delegate to both the Virginia Annual Conference and the General Conference. Her leadership and dedication have left an indelible mark on every role she has held.

In 1985, Sister Marcie was elected President of the Virginia Conference Lay Organization, serving until 1994. During her tenure, she spearheaded impactful workshops focused on “Teaching and Training,” financial stewardship, recruitment, and leadership development—initiatives that strengthened both clergy and laity alike. Under her leadership, membership grew, and the Lay Organization flourished.

In 1994, Sister Marcie was elected President of the Second Episcopal District Lay Organization, where she continued this great work until 2002, implementing additional workshops on health initiatives, church responsibilities, and the Electoral College process. Her commitment extended beyond the district, as she was elected to serve on the General Board and the Red Board, continuing her faithful service to the AME Church.

Sister Marcie’s leadership was never about titles but about transformation — empowering others to serve with wisdom, purpose, and devotion. Proverbs 31:31 reminds us, “Honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate”. Today, we honor Sister Marcie for her lifetime of service, for the countless lives she has touched, and for the example of faithfulness she has set for generations to come.





## **Dr. Cellestine Cheeks** **Former President** **Second Episcopal District Lay Organization**

### **AME Church and Connectional Lay Organization Involvement:**

- Delegate to the General Conference, AMEC, (1996, 2000, 2004, 2008);
- Attended several General Conferences as Observer;
- Host District President for 2007 Biennial Lay Convention, Washington, DC, Connectional Lay Organization (CLO), AMEC;
- Delegate to Biennial Lay Convention, Connectional Lay Organization (CLO), AMEC (1985 – 2007); Member, Constitution & By-Laws Committee, (CLO), AMEC, (1997, 1999); Chairperson, Resolution Committee. (CLO), AMEC, (1999);
- Chaplain, Association of African Methodist Episcopal Scouts (AAMES), (2021 – 2025);
- Website Developer, Association of African Methodist Episcopal Scouts (AAMES), (2023 – 2024).

### **AME Church, 2nd Episcopal District Lay Organization Involvement:**

- President, 2nd Episcopal District Lay Organization (2002 – 2006; 2006 – 2010);
- Host, 2007 Connectional Lay Organization, 30th Biennial Session, Washington, DC;
- First Vice President, 2nd Episcopal District Lay Organization, (1998 – 2002)
- Secretary, 2nd Episcopal District Lay Organization, (1994 – 1998);
- Secretary, 2nd Episcopal District Delegation to the 2000 General Conference;
- Active Participant in Annual and District conventions and meetings.

### **Community: Social & Civic Involvement:**

- President, Pennyton Estates Civic Association, Clinton, Maryland;
- Member Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority;
- Member, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, (NAACP);
- Member, National Urban League;
- Coordinator, Social Action Committee (Get-Out-The-Vote Initiative), EAME Church;
- Member, University of Illinois, National Alumni Association;
- Member, University of Pittsburgh, National Alumni Association;
- Member, Jackson State University, National Alumni Association;
- Board of Directors, KIDS College, Jackson State University

### **Local Church: Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church Involvement:**

- Current Member, Official Board, EAMEC;
- Current Member, Levitical Voices Choir, EAMEC;
- Current Team Leader, Finance Team, EAMEC;
- Chaplain, Church School Adult Class, EAMEC, (2020 – 2025);
- Church School Teacher, EAMEC, (1986 – 1995);
- President, Voices of Ebenezer (600 Voice Choir) (1990 – 1995);
- Administrative Assistant to Director of Church Music, Rev. Donald Vails (1989 – 1995);
- Department Head, Connectional Ministries (Lay, WMS & YPD) (2000 – 2007);
- President, Lay Organization (1996 – 2004);
- Advisor, Young Adult Lay Organization (1996 – 2004);
- Assistant Leader, Girl Scout Troop 1660, Girl Scouts USA (1989 – 2002);
- Co-Chair, Girl Scout/Boy Scouts Joint Eagle Scout & Gold Award Ceremony (2002);
- Pack Committee Chair, Boy Scout Troop 487, Boy Scouts of America (1990 – 1996);
- Chairperson, Social Action Committee, Lay Organization, (1994 – 1998);
- Chairperson, Information Technology Committee, EAMEC, (1996 – 2000).

### **AME Church, Washington Conference Lay Organization Involvement:**

- First Vice President, Washington Conference Lay Organization (WCLO), (1998 – 2000);
- Chaplain, Washington Conference Lay Organization (WCLO), (1996 – 1998);
- Chairperson, WCLO Ways & Means Committee, (1998 – 2002);
- Member, Constitution & By-laws Committee, WCLO, (1998 – 2000);
- Member, Recruitment & Reactivation Committee, WCLO, (1996 – 2000).

### **Professional Affiliation:**

- Professor Emerita, Towson University, College of Education, Department of Educational Technology & Literacy;
- American Association of College Educators (AAEC);
- Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education (SITE);
- Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AAEC);
- American Library Association: American Association of School Librarians (AASL).



**Valerie Faith Gary Bell**  
**Former President**  
**Second Episcopal District Lay Organization**

*Wife, Mother, Grandmother, Daughter, Sister, Niece, Cousin, Friend,  
Teacher, Mentor, Encourager, Trail Blazer, Servant Leader*

A fifth generation AME, and a member of the Lay Organization since 1974, Mrs. Valerie Faith Gary Bell was a native of the Second Episcopal District. She was the daughter of Mr. James and Rev. Vivian Gary. Her spiritual growth and development were inspired and nurtured by the members of Mt. Zion AME Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

From birth, Valerie was taught to strive for excellence, and in 1973 she made history as the first African American graduate of Old Dominion University School of Dental Hygiene in Virginia.

After successful careers with the United States Naval Academy and AT&T, Valerie stepped out on faith and began living her childhood dream as an African American entrepreneur. For over 25 years, she was the successful owner and stylist of two salons in the DC metropolitan area.

With a life dedicated to making a difference in the lives of others, in 1985 Valerie, her husband Donald, and two sons, Donald Bell, Jr. and Derrick, were founding members of First AME Church of Manassas, Virginia.

Valerie's service throughout African Methodism was recognized for her unwavering love for God, humankind, and being a catalyst for excellence. She served in many capacities at the Local, Conference, District and Connectional level.

In November 2010 she was elected to serve as President of the Second Episcopal District Lay Organization. On August 7, 2017, at the 35th Biennial Session of the Connectional Lay Organization, in Columbus, Ohio, she was elected as the 14th Connectional President and served until her death on February 4, 2020.

We Thank God for Valerie Faith Gary Bell's Life, Love, Legacy, Service, Witness and Contributions to the Body of Christ! She has laid her homage at the Master's feet and her Task has been Crowned!





**Penny S. Oliver**  
**Current President**  
**Second Episcopal District Lay Organization**

Sister Penny S. Oliver is a lifetime member of Springdale African Methodist Episcopal Church, Burlington, NC, where she currently serves as President of the Lillie Bessie Missionary Society. Certified in Christian Education from the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC), she served as the local Director of Christian Education.

She has served the AMEC on all levels, including being appointments to the General Board in 2018, the General Conference Commission in 2021 and the Second Episcopal District (SED) Community Development Corporation in 2019.

She is the Immediate Past President of the Western North Carolina Conference Lay Organization. While serving as Conference Lay President, she served as the SED Lay Chairperson for the "Mirroring" Project. She was appointed to the Connectional Lay Organization Proposed Legislation Committee where she served as Co-Chairperson.

In 2024, Sister Penny was elected as the SEDLO First Vice-President where her major responsibility was Membership. A few months later she became the SEDLO President upon the resignation of President Matthew Douglas.

Her community involvement includes serving on the Board of Directors of Habitat for Humanity for Alamance County and she was recently appointed as an At-Large Member of the Alamance County NAACP.

Sister Penny is a retired Financial Aid Consultant at College, Greensboro, NC and is presently employed as the Financial Aid Counselor at Alamance Community College.

She received an Associate Degree in Business Administration from Alamance Community College, Haw River, NC and a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Ethics and Management from John Wesley College in High Point, NC.

She has one son, Nick Watkins and two grandchildren, Katie and Jasmine.

Her favorite Scripture is Psalm 34 and her favorite Gospel Song is Nobody Greater...I searched all over, couldn't find nobody...I looked high and low, still couldn't find nobody...Nobody greater...Nobody greater...Nobody greater than you!