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Media Contact: Deidre Booker McLeod

(312) 285-3283 | deidrebmcleod@gmail.com

Historic Lula B. Sherman United Methodist Church Presents 18th Annual HBCU Experience featuring the World-Renowned Fisk University Choir

Beloved Evanston tradition returns October 16th for an evening of gospel music honoring HBCU legacy, faith, and scholarship.

EVANSTON, IL. — The Historic Lula B. Sherman United Methodist Church will present its 18th Annual HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) Experience, featuring the world-renowned Fisk University Choir, Friday, October 16, 2026, at First United Methodist Church, 516 Church St. Evanston, IL. Doors open at 6:30 pm, and the concert begins at 7:00 pm.

This annual musical experience celebrates faith, excellence, the joy of song, and the rich musical legacy of a HBCU— an institution that has long been the center of musical excellence, from Negro spirituals to gospel and beyond. Guests will enjoy an unforgettable evening of uplifting gospel music performed by the acclaimed Fisk University Choir. The event supports Fisk University scholars and helps fund initiatives that strengthen the North Shore community.

Early Bird tickets are \$40 through September 21, 2026, \$50 thereafter. “I Support HBCU” T-shirts are also available for \$25 & up based on size. Tickets and T-shirts can be purchased electronically bit.ly/LBSHBCUExperience.

2026 Lula B. Sherman Isibani Awards

The evening will also celebrate this year's Lula B. Sherman Isibani Award recipients. Isibani, the Zulu word for “beacon” or “lamp,” honors those who have made extraordinary contributions to the community and culture — beacons of light who have led the way and made others' lives better, just as Mrs. Sherman did when she founded the church in 1922.

Lula B. Sherman Community Service Award: *Honors individuals who demonstrate exceptional commitment to community service.*

Janet Alexander Davis has been treasured by generations of Evanston leaders at multiple organizations. She is receiving this award because her commitment to community service has spanned six decades and shows no sign of slowing. In 2023 Mrs. Alexander Davis was honored with a street segment designated in her name: Janet Alexander Davis Way. Mrs. Alexander Davis marched in the sixties to protest lynchings and other violence perpetrated against African Americans. Sixty years later she continues to fight for justice working with a variety of local agencies: The Moran Center, Citizens Greener Evanston as an Environmental Justice Committee member; Evanston Human Relations Commission-board of directors; Evanston United Neighbors; Evanston Youth Initiative (founding member); Habitat for Humanity (to name a few).

Hon. Judge Lionel Jean Baptiste has devoted decades to justice, civic leadership, and community service. He is receiving this award because his service to Evanston has never stayed confined to one role or one chapter of his career. A former three-term alderman of Evanston's Second Ward and the first Haitian American sworn in as an Illinois judge, he has championed youth opportunity, minority-business participation, reparations, and the Haitian community while serving as a lecturer, advocate, mentor, and trusted resource to generations of leaders. Hon. Jean

Baptiste recently celebrated 50 years of marriage with his wife, Lenore, and is a proud father whose example continues to stand tall in Evanston and beyond.

Marty and Donna Long Stewardship Award: *Honors exemplary community stewards who have positively impacted the lives of others.*

Rev. Eileen Wiviott serves as Senior Minister of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Evanston. She is receiving this award because she has never confined ministry to her own sanctuary. Rev. Eileen serves as a trustee of Interfaith Action of Evanston. She helps coordinate the Evanston Interfaith Clergy and Leaders. She serves as chaplain to the students at Meadville Lombard, tending the formation of ministers she will likely never serve alongside. That is the pattern Marty and Donna Long modeled, and it is the reason this award carries their names: they gave what they had to a community larger than themselves and expected nothing back.

Steve Hagerty and *his wife, Lisa Altenbernd*, have called Evanston home for more than 20 years, raising their two children while generously contributing their time, leadership, and resources to the community. They are receiving this award because two decades of quiet investment in Evanston have added up to something the whole community has felt. Steve, Evanston's former mayor, and Lisa, a former chair of the Evanston Community Foundation Board, have supported numerous organizations and causes benefiting people across Evanston's neighborhoods and cultures. Their philanthropy, civic leadership, and enduring investment in the well-being of others exemplify true community stewardship.

Venita E. Fields Business Leadership Award: *Honors business leaders who have shown outstanding acumen and leadership in the field.*

Trina Haley McMillan, Senior Vice President and Chief Information Officer of the National Restaurant Association, is being recognized for pairing technical acumen with character. While she has an extensive information technology leadership background, the part of her record that speaks loudest to this congregation is the part she has never been paid much to do: for roughly two decades, she has also taught finance and diversity management as an adjunct professor at Elmhurst University, putting her stated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion into practice.

John Otis Whitmore Education Award: *Honors recipients who embody the values and spirit of his tireless efforts and selfless dedication to positive impact in the community.*

The Fulce Family, Helen ("Kitty"), Clarence (posthumously) and daughter, Tracy, have demonstrated a tireless, selfless dedication to education that defined John Otis Whitmore's legacy. They are receiving this award because, across three lives and two generations, they have made education in Evanston a family calling rather than a job. Kitty is a lifelong Evanston resident, retiring as a K-8 educator with a master's degree in Reading and Behavioral Disorders. Husband Clarence, a 33-year retired veteran of the Evanston Police Department, educated young boys and girls on the court as a coach for the FAAM basketball league. His love for the children and his insistence on commitment and discipline positively impacted thousands of children in the Evanston Community. Sadly, he passed away on September 1, 2025. Daughter Tracy is a Distinguished Professor of Business at Oakton College, and a co-founder of a Board Leadership Training Program. The program is designed to educate its participants on the fundamentals of board governance. She hopes to diversify Board service pipelines in Evanston to help create a more just, vibrant and equitable community.

Delano O'Banion Arts Excellence Award: *Honors those who have made enduring contributions in the arts.*

Jeffrey Hardy embodies Lula B. Sherman's mission of Christ, Culture, Connection through more than three decades of Christian service in the ministry of music. He is receiving this award because his contribution to the arts spans as many forms as he has embraced. Over the past 32 years he has served as Minister of Music for Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church, and for the past 12 of those years at Lula B. Sherman United Methodist Church, both in Evanston, IL. Throughout that time, Jeff has devoted himself to music education, teaching music in Chicago Public Schools and as a private instructor, while building a career as a skilled musician on organ, piano, and guitar and contributing to recording projects with local artists. As a tenor and songwriter, he continues to explore music as

artistic expression, spiritual connection, and community building, bringing together musicianship, education, creativity, and a deep commitment to serving others through the gift of music.

About Fisk University Choir

Originally known as the Mozart Society, the Fisk University Choir was established in 1879 by Adam K. Spence, first principal of the Fisk School. The purpose of the ensemble was to assist the Jubilee Singers during their heavy touring season.

The University Choir is a mixed chorus, the oldest organization of its kind in Tennessee. In past years the University Choir was featured frequently on national radio broadcasts, and it continues to provide music for the University Chapel services, an annual Christmas Carol service, a concert in connection with the annual arts festival, and occasional performance tours. Membership is open to all interested students.

Today under the leadership of Music Director Dr. Christopher A. Duke, the Fisk University Choir remains the oldest college choir in the state of Tennessee and strives to continue its legacy of fine music. The Fisk University Choir cultivates a diverse repertoire, and its members become acquainted with a wide range of choral music genres including Hymns, Spirituals, Gospel, Classical and Anthems.

About Tradition

This cherished HBCU annual concert began with longtime church member Mildred Parker and her daughter, Tramaine Parker — a Fisk student who has since become an international gospel singer — who opened the church to host the choir's meal after their journey from Nashville. What began as an act of hospitality has grown into a beloved Evanston tradition. One night. One choir. One unforgettable experience!

About the Historic Lula B. Sherman United Methodist Church

For more than a century, the church has stood as a beacon of faith, heritage, and community impact. Founded in 1922 by a visionary African American leader, it is more than a place of worship — it is a living legacy. Its historic building stands as a landmark and testament to courage, perseverance, and the power of faith-filled vision.

Sherman UMC proudly holds the distinction of being the only historically African American United Methodist congregation on the North Shore founded by a Black woman — a story rooted in bold faith and sustained by generations of resilience.

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