



Press Release

Almeda Wright to lead 2021 Cummings Conversations at MC

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 12, 2021

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[Rev. Dr. Almeda Wright](#), associate professor of religious education at Yale Divinity School, will be this year's guest speaker for "The Margaret M. Cummings Conversations on Faith, Learning and Service," held April 12-13 at Maryville College.

The theme for this year's lecture series is "Unlikely Radicals: Stories of Faith, Calling, and Educating for Social Change."

Two virtual lectures, held via Zoom, are scheduled for Mon., April 12 at 6:30 p.m. and Tues., April 13 at 1 p.m. Both presentations are free and open to the public. Zoom links can be found on the Maryville College website. Wright also will meet with Maryville College students and members of the College's Board of Church Visitors during her virtual visit to campus.

"As we consider the role of faith in public life at this current moment, this series of lectures invites you to look back, to consider the lives of some *unlikely radicals*," Wright said. "We will focus on leaders who were called to respond not to just one particular justice issue, but to live lives of faith and service – committing to effect change with and on behalf of their communities and world.

"In particular, we will look closely at two lesser known figures from the U.S. Civil Rights era: Septima Poinsette Clark and James Lawson," Wright continued. "They serve as an entrée point into a conversation about faith in public life and how everyday citizens are educated in ways that inspires them to a lifelong commitment to social change. Clark and Lawson are both examples of spiritually inspired teaching and organizing that initially was overlooked, but that we are coming to see as essential to any successful social change. As we explore more of who they were as people of faith and how their faith informed their commitments to social change, we will also engage what teach us about how we might integrate faith and public in our contemporary times."

Wright's research focuses on African American religion, womanist spirituality, adolescent spiritual development, and the intersections of religion and public life. She is

currently finishing a larger project on activist-educators that outlines the radical dimensions of African American religion and education throughout the 20th century.

Wright's publications include: *The Spiritual Lives of Young African Americans* (Oxford University Press, July 2017); a coedited book with Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World*; an issue of *Religions Journal*; and various articles in scholarly journals. She has also contributed to several edited volumes, including *Albert Cleage, Jr. and the Black Madonna and Child* (Palgrave 2016); *Faith Forward: A Dialogue on Children, Youth and a New Kind of Christianity* (Woodlake 2013); *Adoptive Youth Ministry* (Baker Academic 2016); and introductory essays for the *Common English Bible-Student Edition*.

Wright is an ordained minister of the American Baptist Churches and has served on the ministerial staff of various churches. She also is a sought-after lecturer, delivering addresses at universities and organizations around the globe.

About Cummings Conversations

“The Margaret M. Cummings Conversations on Faith, Learning and Service,” or “The Cummings Conversations,” honors Margaret Cummings, who taught Bible and religious education at Maryville College for 29 years. The annual lecture series was formerly known as February Meetings, which have been held annually at the College since 1877 and have offered the College and local community an opportunity to come together to consider questions of faith and responsible living in the world. The new name for the series was unveiled in March 2019.

In years past, guest speakers and special music have been highlights of the condensed lecture series, which is open to all members of the College community, people in the area, and visitors, including the College's Board of Church Visitors. Past speakers have included Dr. Lucia Hulsether, author and religious studies professor at Skidmore College; Dr. Todne Thomas, a sociocultural anthropologist and professor; Dr. Laura Hartman, author and professor; Katherine Paterson, author of numerous books, including *Bridge to Terabithia*; Jeanne Bishop, criminal defense attorney, activist and author; Canon David Porter, director of reconciliation for the Archbishop of Canterbury; Randal Jelks, professor, clergyman and writer; Derek Webb, Christian singer/songwriter; and Rev. Al Staggs, minister, actor and comedian.

“The Cummings Conversations offers the college and the wider community a chance to gather around important issues in our world and their connection to questions of faith, meaning and value,” said the Rev. Dr. Anne McKee, campus minister. “This year, while we can't be together in person, we will gather virtually and consider faith development in youth and young adults, through the lens of the stories of two leaders whose work for justice was rooted in and sustained by their faith. At a time when churches and individuals are wondering how to live with courage in a hurting world, I am confident that Dr. Wright will help spark creativity and hope.”

For more information about MC's Cummings Conversations, please contact McKee at anne.mckee@maryvillecollege.edu.

Maryville College is a nationally-ranked institution of higher learning and one of America's oldest colleges. For more than 200 years, we've educated students to be giving citizens and gifted leaders, to study everything, so that they are prepared for anything — to address any problem, engage with any audience and launch successful careers right away. Located in Maryville, Tennessee, between the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the

city of Knoxville, Maryville College offers nearly 1,200 students from around the world both the beauty of a rural setting and the advantages of an urban center, as well as more than 60 majors, seven pre-professional programs and career preparation from their first day on campus to their last. Today, our 10,000 alumni are living life strong of mind and brave of heart and are prepared, in the words of our Presbyterian founder, to “do good on the largest possible scale.”