



Ella Jo Baker Human Rights Award

"We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes."

Ella Jo Baker

The **Ella Jo Baker Human Rights Award** is an honor granted for the exemplary and distinctive contributions of one who has inspired, challenged and expanded the African American faith community's capacity to witness and engage in our traditions of prophetic ministry and justice campaigns. The **Ella Jo Baker Human Rights Award** signifies and affirms the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference's belief that civil, economic, health, education and political rights are global human entitlements for which the African American faith community must uphold. The **Ella Jo Baker Human Rights Award** was established to acknowledge, honor and celebrate the work and impact someone has made on behalf of the marginalized and "least of these;" and, in the spirit of Ella Baker, with excellence, humility and sacrifice.

Previous awardees include **Atty. Michelle Alexander** (2013), **Danny Glover** (2014), **Congresswoman Barbara Lee** (2015), **Diane Nash** (2016), **Atty. Fania Davis** (2019) and **Atty. Bryan Stevenson** (2019).

The **Ella Baker Human Rights Award** will be given as often as the Board of Trustees deems. Awardees will be nominated and selected by the Board of Trustees and will be recognized at the annual SDPC.

You are welcome to submit a nominee for consideration to:

Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Inc.

4533 So. Lake Park

Chicago, Illinois 60653

admin@sdpconference.info or 773 548 –6699 fax

The deadline for submissions is June 15, 2019.



Ella Jo Baker was born on December 13, 1903, in Norfolk, Virginia. She developed a sense for social justice early in her life. As a girl growing up in North Carolina, Baker listened to her grandmother tell stories about slave revolts. As a slave, her grandmother had been whipped for refusing to marry a man chosen for her by the slave owner.

Baker studied at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina. As a student she challenged school policies that she thought were unfair. After graduating in 1927 as class valedictorian, she moved to New York City and began joining social activist organizations. In 1930, she joined the Young Negroes Cooperative League, whose purpose was to develop black economic power through collective planning. She also involved herself with several women's organizations. She was committed to economic justice for all people and once said, "People cannot be free until there is enough work in this land to give everybody a job."

Ella Baker began her involvement with the NAACP in 1940. She worked as a field secretary and then served as director of branches from 1943 until 1946. Inspired by the historic bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955, Baker co-founded the organization In Friendship to raise money to fight against Jim Crow Laws in the deep South.

In 1957, Baker moved to Atlanta to help organize Martin Luther King's new organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). She also ran a voter registration campaign called the Crusade for Citizenship.

On February 1, 1960, a group of black college students from North Carolina A&T University refused to leave a Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina where they had been denied service. Baker left the SCLC after the Greensboro sit-ins. She wanted to assist the new student activists because she viewed young, emerging activists as a resource and an asset to the movement. Miss Baker organized a meeting at Shaw University for the student leaders of the sit-ins in April 1960. From that meeting, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee – SNCC – was born.

Adopting the Gandhian theory of nonviolent direct action, SNCC members joined with activists from the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) to organize the 1961 Freedom Rides. In 1964 SNCC helped create Freedom Summer, an effort to focus national attention on Mississippi's racism and to register black voters. With Ella Baker's guidance and encouragement, SNCC became one of the foremost advocates for human rights in the country. Ella Baker once said, "This may only be a dream of mine, but I think it can be made real." Her influence was reflected in the nickname she acquired: "Fundu," a Swahili word meaning a person who teaches a craft to the next generation. Baker continued to be a respected and influential leader in the fight for human and civil rights until her death on December 13, 1986, her 83rd birthday.

[excerpt from the Ella Baker Human Rights Center website]