Black and Lutheran

Black and Lutheran History on line!

For immediate release

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PHILADELPHIA, PA (April 16, 2026) – A web site celebrating the contributions of Black and Lutheran leaders from the 1800s to today went live today at: https://www.blackandlutheran.com .

The site, featuring short biographies, stories and essays, is the culmination of work begun decades ago by the Rev. Dr. Richard Nelson Stewart, a seminary professor in Philadelphia. "Rich" took to heart a mission to use his skills in communications to document the history of Black and Lutheran leaders who were part of the church he loved so their stories could live on.

Grover C. Wright, Jr., a former Pullman porter turned recruiter of gifted Black leaders to study for rostered ministry, persuaded Stewart he was meant to do this work.

Stewart served the faculty and students at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, now part of United Lutheran Seminary. He taught in the areas of parish administration and media for three decades beginning in 1989.

The Black and Lutheran Project, generously funded by the Louisville institute, has a timeline platform that Rich envisioned that would make easily accessible to students, scholars and history buffs information about Black leaders they wanted to learn about. Well-documented on the site are both struggles and accomplishments that deserve continuing notice.

Rich himself recorded, often in the company of his spouse, Dawn, at least 40 interviews with a wide variety of historic figures. The site includes the recordings as well as repurposed background and information reflecting the stories of hundreds. Stewart was bringing his research to life gradually as time permitted until he tragically fell ill with brain cancer, dying in November 2022.

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Grieving his loss, friends, his spouse, Dawn, and Black scholars decided to form a succession planning group to complete his work. The scholars have included Dr. Charles Leonard, convener; Dr. James Thomas, Dr. Richard Perry, Dr. Nelson Strobert, Dr. Joseph Donnella and Dr. Beverly Wallace. Many of them have contributed essays to the site.

Dawn is a vital part of the initiative. John Kahler adds essential technical support. Journalist and writer, Mark A. Staples, a friend of Rich's over four decades, lends his presence and encouragement.

Mark and Dawn have assembled a glossary of data of some 400 stories about Black leaders and activities from church periodicals with a particular focus on the decades of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. With the support of the succession planners, Mark has assembled a simple windowsill display focusing on the lives of 36 African American church leaders, both rostered and laity. The display, designed in Canva by John Wittenbraker, is featured on the site and is a work in progress. It has been widely distributed.

"What isn't recorded can be lost," explains Convener Charles Leonard. "In a polarizing time like ours, some seem determined to ignore or expunge from our collective history certain aspects of that history. The Black and Lutheran Project aims to preserve a part of American history that is an underpinning of our collective culture."

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