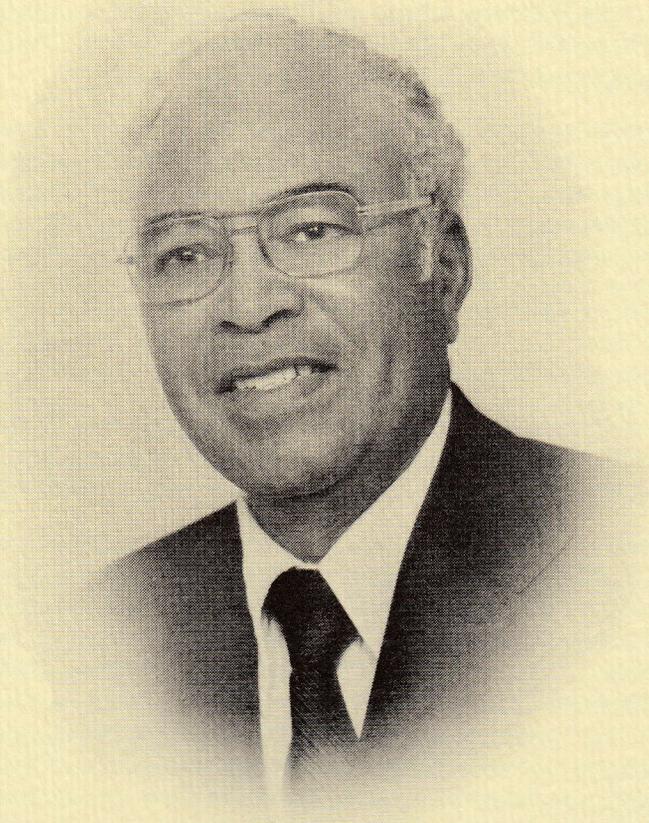


*Order of Worship
A Witness of The Resurrection*



The Reverend Doctor Elo Leon Henderson

*Thursday, February 8, 1990
1:00 P. M.*

*University Church
Johnson C. Smith University
Charlotte, North Carolina*

Obituary

1908

1990

"One of John Brown's biographers referred to him as 'God's Angry Man.' "An equally apt allusion to ELO HENDERSON would be "God's Persistent Man" or "God's Undaunted Man." "His life and ministry reveal a robust faith translated into triumphant action. In the early years, the odds were great and prospects dim...resources meager and options were few. The way toward his childhood dreams seemed hopelessly blocked. Yet, he felt something beyond that would not let him go and something within that whispered day after day, 'hold on!'"

Elo, born March 29, 1908 in Shelton, South Carolina, grew up in Newberry County, one of fourteen children of the late Reverend Elijah Thomas Henderson and Essie Elizabeth Parr Henderson. His father was a minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and his mother was a Baptist.

He attended a one-teacher, one-classroom school which often consisted of more than 150 children. At an early age, he graduated from what was called the fifth grade, and he could barely read or write. The closest high school to his home was 25 miles away, and Newberry County provided buses for white children only.

When Elo was seventeen, his father was able to spare him from the farm, and he went to work. At the age of 20, Elo went to Harbison Institute, and the Dean said to him that he regretted that he did not have anything below the fifth grade in which to assign him. In 1939, Elo graduated from Johnson C. Smith University with a B.S. degree; in 1942, he was awarded the B.D. degree from Johnson C. Smith Seminary. Graduation from the seminary opened the way to a ministry that touched every aspect of life in the churches in which he worked and the community in which he lived.

In 1942, Elo was elected pastor of Ben Salem and Lloyd Presbyterian Churches. In 1943, he became organizing minister of Grier Heights Presbyterian Church. His faith in Jesus Christ and his faith in people empowered him to mobilize the Grier Heights congregation to erect a debt-free building.

In 1955, Elo was elected Executive of the Synod of Catawba. He was the first Black Synod Executive in the history of the United Presbyterian Church. With the restructuring of the United Presbyterian Church in 1973, he became the Associate Executive of the Synod of the Piedmont and the Executive of the Catawba Inter-Presbytery Program Agency.

The character of Elo Henderson's ministry in the church and the community is documented by many far-reaching accomplishments, including 100 citizens in a demand for a new school plant in the Grier Heights Community; organizing the Charlotte Frontier's Association, which was responsible for the first Black city bus drivers in Charlotte, and the first Blacks to receive jobs at Southern Bell above the level of janitors and maids; organizing the Charlotte Opportunities Industrialization Center, which trained hundreds of people; leading a delegation of more than 100 to petition the 180th (1968) General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in support of a program which resulted in the establishment of Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary at the Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia; leading a delegation to petition the 182nd (1970) General Assembly to support a Design to Liberate the Oppressed, initiating the United Presbyterian "Funds for Self-Development of people"; organizing the Catawba Economic Development Association and Progress Association for Economic Development for the purpose of lifting the social, educational and economic level of minority people; responding to an integrated bus load of young people from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania who came to Elm City, North Carolina to paint a church (the Ku Klux Klan gave them orders not to let the sun rise on them within the state of North Carolina). Elo, in defiance of the Klan, immediately led an integrated group to Elm City and painted this church. Ten houses stand in the Greenville Community today, four of which were sold to families who were unable to make a down payment. These houses stand as a symbol for one of many efforts Elo made to lessen the severe problems besetting Black people inside and outside the Church. Sharon Manor Apartments, an integrated housing development in Charlotte, was Dr. Henderson's last leadership accomplishment.

In all this, Dr. Elo Leon Henderson kept his mind on the pulse of the Church; and under his administration, the Black ministers for the first time in the history of the United Presbyterian Church received a decent salary. Four new churches were organized and built, 34 churches were demolished and modern churches built, and 38 churches were merged.

Prior to this retirement, the United Presbyterian Church appointed Elo to lead a 64-member tour to Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Egypt and Switzerland. This was the crowning journey of his ministry. As a young child, his grandfather Elo, held him in his lap and told him, "someday, you will see my homeland."

Those who share the sorrow of their loss are: his daughter, Sula Henderson-Page and son-in-law, William F. Page of Charlotte, North Carolina; two brothers, Henry Henderson, Los Angeles, California and Roy Eugene Henderson, Huntersville, North Carolina; sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, nieces, nephews; and a host of other relatives and friends.