

**THE RUTH CARTER AUXILIARY:
WOMEN'S SUPPORT FOR PEOPLES COMMUNITY CENTER
IN NEW ORLEANS¹**

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The Ruth Carter Auxiliary is an organization of African-American women who have provided support for the work of Peoples Community Center (PCC). Located in Central City, which is among the most dangerous and poorest areas of New Orleans, PCC excelled at early childhood education and provided vital services to its neighborhood throughout the twentieth century.

It began as a mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC). As Social Gospel practitioners, Methodist women established settlement houses and community centers (sometimes called institutional churches) across the U.S. at the turn of the twentieth century. PCC was founded as an institutional church in 1922, but its worshipping congregation was administratively separated from the community center in 1925 because the newly-established Community Chest (a forerunner of United Way) would not fund work of individual congregations. In the 1930s, PCC operated a “nursery, a free employment service, a kindergarten, a free children’s clinic, a welfare bureau with case work, a Boy Scout troop, and an adult education and recreation program.”²

In 1939, a shameful compromise took place to help broker the reunification of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS)—which had broken off from the MEC before the Civil War—with the MEC to form The Methodist Church. White congregations were grouped into geographic jurisdictions, but all African-American congregations in the country were put into the segregated Central Jurisdiction. Thus, in Louisiana, there were two overlapping conferences: Louisiana Conference A and its white members belonged to its geographic jurisdiction and Louisiana Conference B and its black members belonged to the Central Jurisdiction. Even after these two conferences merged in 1971, white congregations in Louisiana tended to support St. Mark’s, a center in the French Quarter founded by MECS women, leaving black congregations to provide most of the support for PCC.³

PCC was still accomplishing much-needed work. In 1964, its budget

¹ Adapted from a paper delivered at the Southern Historical Association, November 12, 2017, Dallas, TX.

² Walter N. Vernon, *Becoming One People: A History of Louisiana Methodism* (Bossier City, LA: Commission on Archives and History, Louisiana Conference, 1987), 203.

³ Ellen Blue, *St. Mark’s and the Social Gospel: Methodist Women and Civil Rights in New Orleans, 1895-1965* (Knoxville: U Tennessee P, 2011).

was \$44,000. A report in the Woman's Society of Christian Service's twenty-fifth anniversary booklet said that "a full and varied program for children, youth and adults is offered." The day nursery "operated on a year-round basis, caring for children of working mothers." There were 75 children in the nursery, 85 in kindergarten and 46 in the primary school.⁴

In 1979, local African-American women created an auxiliary which they named for Ruth G. Carter, about whom almost nothing has been published. There were active members of the auxiliary from all of the African-American United Methodist Church (UMC) congregations in the area and a handful of white congregations. The Ruth G. Carter Auxiliary's work is undocumented. Their records were destroyed in Katrina. Archival material about the center exists at Dillard University and Centenary College, but Ruth Carter and the auxiliary are this article's topics.

The Bowens

Ruth Carter was the foster daughter of Dr. John Wesley Edward Bowen, Sr., a president of Methodism's Gammon Theological Seminary. She was raised on Gammon's campus in Atlanta. Her foster father was born into slavery in New Orleans in 1855. His parents purchased the family's freedom while he was very young. Bowen was in the first graduating class at New Orleans University, founded by the MEC during Reconstruction and later folded into Dillard. He earned a Ph.D. at Boston University, only the second African American ever to earn a Ph.D.⁵

Hired at Gammon in 1893, Bowen was an MEC clergyman with a wonderful voice. He was famed for eloquence.⁶ At the 1895 Cotton Exposition, Booker T. Washington delivered the "Atlanta Compromise" speech that denied blacks' desire for social equality. Bowen spoke at the Exposition during a three-day "Negro conference" he helped organize, making the opposite argument. He insisted that African Americans must have equal opportunity for higher education. He foresaw an era where black arts, academics and businesses would foster a new culture.⁷ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., credits Bowen's speech with leading "directly to the 'New Negro' and the

⁴ Woman's Society of Christian Service and Wesleyan Service Guild, "Twenty-fifth Anniversary, 1940-1965: Woman's Society of Christian Service and Wesleyan Service Guild, Louisiana Conference," 9. Pamphlet in the Louisiana United Methodist Women collection, Centenary College of Louisiana Archives and Special Collections.

⁵ Brian Gann, "Bowen, John Wesley Edward (1855-1933)," *Black Past*, accessed January 6, 2017, <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/bowen-john-wesley-edward-1855-1933>.

⁶ Anneke Helen Stasson, "Bowen, John Wesley Edward (1855-1933): Educator and Theologian," *Boston University History of Missiology*, accessed January 7, 2017, <http://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/a-c/bowen-john-wesley-edward-1855-1933/>; Gann, "Bowen, John Wesley Edward."

⁷ Annabella Jean-Laurent, "At the Cusp Between Post-Civil War Reconstruction and the Early Struggle for Civil Rights: The Atlanta Negro Building at the Cotton States and International Exposition," accessed January 8, 2017, <http://www.negrobldgcompetition.com/the-negro-building/>.

Harlem Renaissance.”⁸

In 1906, a race riot occurred in Atlanta after “local newspapers reported four (unsubstantiated) assaults on white women.” Three black people were killed, and many more injured. Bowen “offered Gammon’s campus as a place of refuge” for blacks, and as a result, he was beaten and arrested.⁹ Ruth Carter would have been about 15 years old at that time, so this must have been formative for her.

Bowens’s son, J. W. E. Bowen, Jr., was married to Margaret Davis Bowen. Margaret Bowen was elected the first president of the Central Jurisdiction’s Women’s Society of Christian Service (WSCS), a women’s organization created at the 1939 merger. She served two terms, 1940-1948.¹⁰ Margaret Bowen had earned bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees in education from the University of Cincinnati. She “possessed considerable administrative skill, having been National Basileus of *Alpha Kappa Alpha* Sorority.”¹¹ J. W. E. Bowen, Jr., was elected a bishop in 1948 after four years as editor of the *Central Christian Advocate*.¹² At that time, Margaret was principal of Gilbert Academy, an important secondary school for black students in New Orleans founded by the MEC.

Ruth Grisette Carter

Ruth was born Ruth Grisette in Shreveport around 1891.¹³ She went to Atlanta “at an early age” to be “raised as the foster daughter” of the senior Bowens.¹⁴ It was her intellectual promise that caused the family’s pastor in Shreveport—a place where academic opportunities for gifted black girls would have been severely limited—to arrange her move.¹⁵ Dr. Margaret Bowen and Ruth Carter would have been sisters-in-law had Ruth been formally adopted. Their family connection was significant for the WSCS.

Carter was on the task force that organized the WSCS in the newly

⁸ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black,” *Representations* 24 (August, 1988), cited in Jean-Laurent, “At the Cusp.”

⁹ Boston University School of Theology, “John Wesley Edward Bowen (1855),” *A People’s History of the School of Theology*, accessed January 7, 2017, <http://www.bu.edu/sth-history/prophets/john-wesley-edward-bowen-1885/>.

¹⁰ Ruth G. Carter, Willa Curry, Mai H. Gray, Thelma McCallum, and Emma Wilson Strother, Theresa Hoover, and Mary Lou Van Buren, *To a Higher Glory: The Growth and Development of Black Women Organized for Mission in the Methodist Church, 1940-1968* (no location: Women’s Division of the United Methodist Church, n.d.), 108.

¹¹ Carter et al, *To a Higher Glory*, 26; Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, “9th Supreme Basileus Dr. Margaret D. Bowen 1936-1939,” accessed February 28, 2017, http://aka1908.com/centennial/pdf/presidents_pdf.pdf.

¹² Vernon, *Becoming One People*, 187-188.

¹³ My guess as to her birth date is based on information from Margaret Washington, interview by the author, February 6, 2017, New Orleans, LA.

¹⁴ “Carter, Ruth (Mrs. George),” obituary, *Journal of the Louisiana Conference of the United Methodist Church*, 1982, 165, accessed January 6, 2017, <http://www.la-umc.org/obituary/1547392>; Carter, et al, *To a Higher Glory*, 59.

¹⁵ Margaret Washington, interview by the author, February 6, 2017, New Orleans, LA.

formed Central Jurisdiction.¹⁶ At the first meeting, two concerns prevailed: “building fellowship among Central Jurisdiction women and electing black women to the Board of Missions.” The gathering was said to be “the first time in history that black women from the North, South, East and West, had come together in the Methodist Church. Many of us were strangers to each other, but during our stay in St. Louis we became acquainted and formed lasting friendships.”¹⁷

Margaret Bowen was elected the first jurisdictional president. She had already been elected WSCS president in Louisiana Conference B; as she gave up that position, Ruth Carter stepped into it. “The Conference trippedled [*sic*] its membership and pledge to missions under the presidency of Mrs. Carter. The pledge increased from \$500 to \$1,600.” Carter placed great emphasis on training leaders and nearly all the officers attended the jurisdiction-wide School of Christian Mission at Gulfside Assembly in Waveland, Mississippi. When they returned home, they held training for all the local officers and passed along what they had learned. This was a strategy that other African-American women’s groups diligently employed.¹⁸ Perhaps because they were intentionally included in leadership training, “an unusual number of young women joined the Society and Guild and served in various capacities on the Conference, district and local levels.” They held many of the conference level offices and “did a marvelous job.” Carter did not complete her term because she was “elected Member of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church and the Woman’s Division.”¹⁹

During Margaret’s first term as jurisdictional president, Ruth served as Secretary of Youth Work.²⁰ As Margaret’s second term ended (and her husband became bishop), Ruth was elected to follow her and served two terms (1948-1956).²¹ As mentioned before, white jurisdictions were clustered geographically, but the Central Jurisdiction covered all or parts of 39 states. Expenses for traveling to meetings in the Central Jurisdiction could be prohibitive, and the huge area made functioning more difficult. Fortunately, Ruth, like Margaret, was up to the challenge.

In office, Mrs. Carter was noted for her organizational ability, her lyrical annual reports and her commitment to ecumenism. During her presidency, Central Jurisdiction women increased their participation in United Church Women (now Church Women United) and their interest in the World and National Council of

¹⁶ “Carter, Ruth (Mrs. George),” obituary.

¹⁷ Mrs. G. W. Charlton, “A Century of Commitment, Go Ye Therefore: Celebrating 100 Years of Service, 1879-1979,” 16. Booklet in the Louisiana United Methodist Women collection, Centenary College of Louisiana Archives and Special Collections.

¹⁸ Ellen Blue, “‘Yes, We Are Everywhere’: Thirty Years with the Women for Progressive Action, Lower Ninth Ward,” *Methodist History* 52.1 (October, 2013): 4-18.

¹⁹ Woman’s Society of Christian Service (WSCS), Louisiana Conference B, “Woman’s Society of Christian Service, Louisiana Conference,” (n.p.: Woman’s Society of Christian Service, 1971). Booklet in the Louisiana United Methodist Women collection, Centenary College of Louisiana Archives and Special Collections.

²⁰ Carter, et al, *To a Higher Glory*, 108.

²¹ Carter, et al, *To a Higher Glory*, 109-111.

Churches. Mrs. Carter served as Secretary of Promotion of the jurisdiction for two quadrennia after her two terms as president.²²

At that point, she was nominated to the presidency again, but declined. Those “who knew her well” gave her the nickname, “The Woman’s Society of Christian Service,” because she was so well-versed in the bylaws. She was overwhelmingly elected to serve on the executive committee “as a Back Log,” so her knowledge would not be wasted.²³

Ruth Carter’s Married Life

After graduating from Clark University (founded by the MEC), Ruth married Rev. George Carter. She moved with him to pastorates in California-Arizona and Delaware before they returned to Louisiana.²⁴ Ruth did graduate study in social work at Columbia University and Louisiana State University and received her master’s degree at Tulane University.²⁵ She was affiliated with Charity Hospital in New Orleans, where she arranged services for black New Orleanians.²⁶ By 1948, she was a social worker at Peoples Community Center, where her husband was superintendent.

Though George Carter was born in Pecan Grove, a village south of Houma, Louisiana, to educated parents, the school there unfortunately only went through sixth grade. He was sent to New Orleans to attend private school, but eventually his parents could not pay the tuition. Carter went to work for a wealthy family who sent him to Methodist-affiliated New Orleans University where he received a bachelor’s degree. He enrolled in Gammon Seminary; one can assume that he met Ruth on the campus. After receiving his divinity degree, he became a minister. “He was a tall, stately man. He carried that demeanor wherever he was.”²⁷

George Carter wrote that after serving for “a long while” at PCC, he “sought a scholarship” that enabled him to attend Boston University School of Theology. He graduated with a master’s in sacred theology in 1950 and was appointed superintendent of the Browning Home and Mather Academy in South Carolina, founded by the Woman’s Home Missionary Society as a school for people who had been enslaved and their descendants. He wrote, “Mrs. Carter and I came with eagerness and with consecrated hearts to further this essential work, which extends its services throughout America and even to the isles of the sea. A study of this high school is underway . . . There were problems, but we have surmounted some difficulties and are pressing

²² Carter, et al, *To a Higher Glory*, 59.

²³ WSCS, Louisiana Conference B, “Woman’s Society of Christian Service, Louisiana Conference.”

²⁴ “Carter, Ruth (Mrs. George),” obituary. Clark University was later renamed Clark College, and later merged into Clark Atlanta University.

²⁵ Carter, et al, *To a Higher Glory*, 59; Margaret Washington, interview by the author, February 6, 2017, New Orleans, LA.

²⁶ An auxiliary member told me Carter did the work that allowed her to have her baby at Charity. Katherine Fields, personal communication, January 25, 2017, New Orleans, LA.

²⁷ Margaret Washington, interview by the author, February 6, 2017, New Orleans, LA.

forward . . . under the guidance of our Father.” He continued, “All the courses I have taken are a source of inspiration. My whole course in social ethics reaches out into this community and touches the staff with whom I work. The whole scope of my life has been changed and enlarged”²⁸ He also wrote about personal changes:

When I reached the university I saw that it would mean tremendous adjustments in many phases of my life. I liked Boston, the city of changing leaves, snow, beautiful music, great churches, and cultural opportunities. I was in a sense carried away by the mental releases brought to me, opening whole new fields of thought and techniques. In my studies I was happy over many discoveries.

Given Ruth’s respect for education and religious commitment, it seems inevitable that she would have benefitted intellectually from her husband’s studies.

After they returned to New Orleans, he served as a District Superintendent. He was highly regarded; for instance, at the 1956 jurisdictional conference, he was elected secretary. He and Ruth were what today would be called a “power couple.”

Her Later Life

George died during the 1965-1966 conference year.²⁹ First Street Methodist Church was George’s last pastorate, and Ruth continued as a member there. She chaired the Council on Ministries and “with her sagacious mind counseled the young ministers that elevated to the Pastoral ministry of the church [H]er constant words of wisdom were, ‘Get as much additional training as you can to be fully prepared to serve in the United Methodist Church in the future.’”³⁰

Margaret Washington had extensive contact with Ruth Carter after Washington graduated from Dillard in 1968. As Carter had provided housing for a student in the past, arrangements were made for the new graduate to live with her because Washington’s parents in north Louisiana did not want her to live alone. Washington became a clinical instructor at Flint-Goodridge Hospital, a medical school and nurses’ training school for African Americans which operated from 1896 to 1983. Affiliated with New Orleans University, it was later folded into Dillard. Ruth Carter and Margaret Washington continued to share housing even after Washington married, until her first child was born.³¹

Church people who knew her would often ask how she could live with Carter given her strong personality, but “we just had a kindred spirit” Washington said. “She was a born leader. She was extremely knowledgeable, and she was a take-charge person! She could get people to say yes

²⁸ George W. Carter, “My Crusade Scholarship,” *Methodist Woman* 13 (February, 1953): 9.

²⁹ “In Memoriam,” Official Journal, Louisiana Annual Conference, The Methodist Church, Central Jurisdiction,” (Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1966), 94.

³⁰ “Carter, Ruth (Mrs. George),” obituary.

³¹ Margaret Washington, interview by the author, February 6, 2017, New Orleans, LA.

when they'd say no to anyone else. She was a mover and a shaker!" Within the B conference, "she was one of the power brokers. She led women to do things that were outside of their comfort zone. Mrs. Carter was ahead of her time." After integration, "People still expected her to be a leader, and she fulfilled that very effectively."

Washington reflected, "I think I picked up on some of these characteristics—maybe too much." Leadership skills she learned from Carter have been a continuing gift for United Methodism, as she was a primary force behind the post-Katrina merger of Grace UMC and First UMC, creating the thriving, multi-racial First Grace congregation on Canal Street. With Washington as a major lay leader, First Grace took a prophetic stand about removal of Confederate monuments and serves as sanctuary for undocumented immigrants.³²

Washington said that because the Carters had served churches around the conference, they knew most black ministers and worked to prepare them for integration. Carter was active with the ministers' wives group. She was "a mentor for many young ladies as they became affiliated with women's groups."³³

Even inside her house, "she would have makeup on. She was always ready to greet her public, no matter who it was—the mailman or whoever. And she always kept her hair perfectly groomed and jet black." As for dress, Washington said, "She had a little low pump. She always wore a coordinating scarf around her neck. It was to keep the makeup off her dress." Whenever she went out, "She always had gloves. She was 'Miss Priss'—a perfect lady. And she credited that to the Bowen family; with them, you had to have a certain demeanor and appearance."

Washington said Carter's life "was a model as to how we should conduct ourselves as Christian women. That spilled over in her work at Head Start. I don't think anyone who worked with her was ever unaware that she was a Christian woman who happened to have a job in a secular setting." Washington meant that Carter was "able to bridge the gap with people from different strata, because the kids that she cared for in the Head Start program were extremely poor, and on the street, they would run up and hug her and were delighted to see her. She didn't let class or social level keep her from interacting with anybody, but she maintained her poise and dignity."³⁴ Carter's obituary said, "She was able to transcend color and related to each person in a spirit of love and understanding."³⁵

Ruth had one daughter, Carol, born in 1925. Carol graduated from Bennett College, a historically black, Methodist college for women.³⁶ Like

³² Ellen Blue, *In Case of Katrina: Reinventing Church in Post-Katrina New Orleans* (Eugene: Cascade, 2016).

³³ Margaret Washington, interview by the author, February 6, 2017, New Orleans, LA.

³⁴ Margaret Washington, interview by the author, February 6, 2017, New Orleans, LA.

³⁵ "Carter, Ruth (Mrs. George)," obituary.

³⁶ Julia Moore, member at Camphor UMC, telephone conversation with the author, 2 December 2016.

her mother, she became a social worker. Ruth lived in Houston with her for the last few years of her life. Ruth died on New Year's Day, 1982. She was probably 90 or 91 years old. As Carol had no children, Ruth has no surviving descendants.³⁷

Ruth Carter's Legacy

Those interested in Methodist history can be grateful that Ruth did what she could to preserve the history of the Central Jurisdiction's women. She chaired the Historical Committee of the WSCS in Louisiana Conference B which compiled a booklet of its history when the A and B merger neared. Composed of all presidents and past presidents, that committee chose to title the booklet "Woman's Society of Christian Service, Louisiana Conference," rather than using "Conference B." The foreword begins, "Here is the story of the Mission work of the organized women of the Louisiana Conference Woman's Society of Christian Service of the Methodist Church from 1940-1971." Considering how frequently white units printed material listing themselves as the WSCS without specifying "Conference A," it seems appropriate that the Central Jurisdiction women chose this wording for their final publication.³⁸

Along with a level of historical erasure by white women, black women were often left out of the historical record by black men. Bishop James Thomas's *Methodism's Racial Dilemma: The Story of the Central Jurisdiction* does not even mention the women's organization. The advocacy of black and white women's organizations for integration in the new UMC is not addressed. A quote from a bishop's speech to the final jurisdictional gathering includes Mary McLeod Bethune's name on a list of famous black people to whom the current leaders might be compared, and a white WSCS staff member who spoke at General Conference regarding the jurisdiction's abolition is quoted. Otherwise, no women's names are included.³⁹

Fortunately, Carter was also a member of the five-person "Task Group on the History of the Central Jurisdiction Women's Organization." They produced a book, *To a Higher Glory: The Growth and Development of Black Women Organized for Mission in the Methodist Church, 1940-1968*, and since Carter served as a president, two paragraphs were devoted to her life.⁴⁰ Though that is not much information about Carter, one must be grateful for the material they preserved about the women's work overall.

³⁷ "Carter, Ruth (Mrs. George)," obituary; Margaret Washington, interview by the author, February 6, 2017, New Orleans, LA.

³⁸ WSCS, Louisiana Conference B, "Woman's Society of Christian Service, Louisiana Conference."

³⁹ James S. Thomas, *Methodism's Racial Dilemma: The Story of the Central Jurisdiction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992).

⁴⁰ Carter, et al., *To a Higher Glory*, 59.

The Auxiliary as Legacy

In 1992, Marva Mitchell became director of Peoples Community Center.⁴¹ Mitchell was a pastor with years of banking experience. Her expertise was a gift because PCC had been troubled with administrative and financial crises. The board, rather than the director, oversaw finances, and between the auxiliary's formation in 1979 and Katrina in 2005, eight different Center boards were dissolved and reconstructed. The auxiliary offered stability, operating under only three presidents during those years, Edmonia Rouselle, Irene Reed, and June Sanchez. Most members have been United Methodists, but other denominations have always been represented. Most were teachers, some were nurses or other professionals, and some were homemakers. One member, Dorothy Mae Taylor from Mt. Zion UMC, became the first African American woman elected to the Louisiana legislature and was later on the city council. Mitchell said, "Whatever it was that we needed, all I had to do was pick up the phone."⁴²

At the turn of the twenty-first century, June Sanchez was elected auxiliary president. She had joined as a representative of United Methodist Women when she was district president in the 1990s. Sanchez had the respect of community and church, along with decades of experience in leadership. Since 1974, she has been president of several women's organizations which played important roles in the Lower Ninth Ward. My research on them appeared in *Methodist History* in 2013.⁴³

In 2002, the board decided to lease the Center's building to Head Start. However, the Center continued to operate other projects, such as after-school tutoring and a feeding program which was established to serve children but soon evolved to feed families. "We had a capacity of 100 children, but with after-school tutorials and summer camps, in any given year, we served close to 200 kids," Mitchell said. Sanchez noted, "People from that area were really interested in the center because it helped the parents, especially single parents. The children came and that had the parents of those children supporting the projects that went on."

From 1979 until Katrina, the auxiliary furnished educational resources and recreational and service equipment to PCC. Mitchell said, "If children needed cognitive skill toys or bicycles or if air conditioners or freezers went out, they bought them. They purchased every item that the center could not afford. They helped with summer camp tuition and camp fees."⁴⁴ Sanchez recalled, "One of the last things we purchased was five televisions for the children so that each area would have its own television."⁴⁵

For thirty years, the auxiliary's primary fund-raiser has been an annual

⁴¹ In 1992, she was also appointed as pastor at Felicity UMC. In 2002, she retired on paper, but remained in both jobs.

⁴² Marva Mitchell, interview by the author, February 8, 2017, New Orleans, LA.

⁴³ Ellen Blue, "Yes, We Are Everywhere."

⁴⁴ Marva Mitchell, interview by the author, February 8, 2017, New Orleans, LA.

⁴⁵ June Sanchez, telephone interview with the author, February 15, 2017.

concert by the Dillard University Concert Choir which always nets several thousand dollars. This came about through the influence of member Laura Goods, an instructor at Flint-Goodridge, a Dillard graduate, and a friend of the choir's director. They move the locale among various churches to raise awareness of their work. Program advertisements supplement ticket sales.

The 2016 program lists fifty-two active auxiliary members.⁴⁶ This means they were paid up with their annual dues of \$12. Women can purchase a life membership for \$100 but are nevertheless expected to continue paying annual dues. What they receive for \$100 is a program listing.⁴⁷

After Katrina, Peoples Community Center closed for several years. The building was used by the Louisiana Conference's disaster relief agency to house volunteers. When that need diminished, part of the property was deeded to the conference and part was deeded to Peoples United Methodist Church. Luke's House, a free clinic founded after Katrina by Rayne and Mt. Zion UMCs, moved into the conference-owned space. The space given to Peoples UMC was used by Apex, an innovative ministry with teenagers at risk for gang activity and early violent death.⁴⁸ However, early in 2017 the congregation (not the auxiliary) asked Apex to leave, and Apex now operates in a former school leased from the Catholic archdiocese.

The Amanzi Project replaced Apex. In Zulu, "amanzi" means "water." Washing machines were installed to help single mothers, who can use them for free. The auxiliary buys detergent and laundry supplies. The auxiliary also purchases diapers and children's clothes. "We're very proud to be able to do what we're doing, and we enjoy what we're doing," Sanchez said.⁴⁹

The auxiliary is attempting to perpetuate itself by bringing in younger women. However, as is the case with other African-American women's organizations, the Katrina diaspora has impeded recruitment. The future of PCC and the Ruth Carter Auxiliary are both in question at this point.

Conclusion

These stories are stories of education, ranging from Ruth Carter's foster father, Dr. Bowen, Sr., the second African American to receive a Ph.D., to pre-schoolers learning their ABCs at Peoples Community Center. Ruth Carter was a bridge, transmitting lifeways she received from the Bowens to the boys and girls who would become leaders in churches, in schools, in the Civil Rights Movement, in the Women's Movement, in politics, and in society at large.

One writer noted, "Bowen's voice, though historically-constrained, continues to find resonance in the ears of those who struggle to make a more

⁴⁶ Ruth Carter Auxiliary, Program for the Dillard University Concert Choir concert, March 6, 2016. Copy in possession of the author.

⁴⁷ June Sanchez, telephone interview with the author, February 15, 2017.

⁴⁸ Ellen Blue, *In Case of Katrina*.

⁴⁹ June Sanchez, telephone interview with the author, February 15, 2017.

equitable society.”⁵⁰ It does, and not the least through the work of auxiliary president June Sanchez.

Sanchez was in the last graduating class at Gilbert Academy where Margaret Bowen was Principal, a position she held when Sanchez was a student. Many African-American professionals came from the ranks of this Methodist secondary school, including Ambassador Andrew Young. Sanchez went on to Dillard, where she was one of six seniors selected for a Ford Foundation fellowship that sent them to Harvard for master’s degrees. Sanchez studied early childhood education. When asked what she considered the greatest achievement in her life, she said it was being the first person in her family to earn a college degree, because “once one person opens the door, others can go through it.”⁵¹

Founding schools for marginalized people has been a traditional Methodist endeavor since the time of John Wesley. In the United States, had the church not dedicated itself to the education of formerly enslaved people (who had been forbidden by law to learn to read) and of their descendants, there would have been no opportunities for them to acquire an education. This is the case with regard to all levels of instruction, from the fundamentals of pre-school learning to work at the doctoral level.

Later, it would have been easy to let those institutions die even though there was continued need for them. This story of Ruth Carter Auxiliary members faithfully paying dues of \$12 a year—\$1 a month—to help create an excellent pre-school experience for toddlers in Central City is worth telling. So is the story of Ruth Carter herself, who left her family so she could go to school and later gave back immensely through her career and through the WSCS. The stories of individuals like Marva Mitchell and June Sanchez, lift up the commitment and vision of countless other churchwomen who through their organizational work have seen to it that members of subsequent generations had access to education and the better life that it engenders.

⁵⁰ Boston University School of Theology, “John Wesley Edward Bowen (1855).”

⁵¹ Ellen Blue, “Yes, We Are Everywhere,” 7.