



## Cynthia A. Wilson Honored as Fellow by The Hymn Society

Rev. Dr. Cynthia A. Wilson was recognized as a Fellow of The Hymn Society at its Centennial Conference in Washington, DC. This award is the highest honor given by the organization and is to be presented in recognition of her musical leadership in the local church, contributions to hymnody and sacred songs, innovative pedagogy in liturgy and music, her philanthropic commitment to contextual musics, and global acclaim as a recording and concert artist.

The founder of the Junius B. Dotson Institute for Music and Worship in the Black Church and Beyond, Wilson has been named as Director of this exciting new enterprise. Most recently, she served as Executive Director for Worship Resources and Director of Liturgical Resources at Discipleship Ministries, a general agency of The United Methodist Church from 2017 until 2022. Prior to joining the staff of Discipleship Ministries, she served as Assistant Vice-President of Student Life and Dean of Students at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. Wilson is an ordained Deacon in The United Methodist Church and holds a Bachelor of Arts in music education from Dillard University in New Orleans, a Master of Sacred Music from Southern Methodist University/Perkins School of Theology, and a Doctor of Philosophy in liturgical studies from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary with a dissertation entitled, “The Incarnational Nature of Congregational Song: A Deeper Level of Performance.”

Ruth Duck, FHS, describes Wilson as an “enlivener of song” which she comes by honestly having grown up in a musical family with five brothers who were central to the music experience heard in their local church pastored by their father, the late Rev. Eli Wilson, and featured on a weekly radio program in her native New Orleans, Louisiana. In addition to her passion for music, Wilson is a powerful preacher, faithful intercessor, innovative educator, and inspiring mentor who embodies the spirit of Pentecost in a myriad of ways.

Wilson was a member of the national task force that produced *Songs of Zion*, a worship resource consisting of spirituals, hymns, and gospel songs, offering historical accounts of the rich legacy born within the Black Church. Out of that project, she recorded *New Songs of Zion*, a project that embodies musical elements of the past and present while forecasting the future. In 2005, she co-chaired, with the late William McClain, the task force that produced a second songbook and worship resource, *Zion Still Sings! For Every Generation*. These resources can be found in bookstores across the United States and abroad as they continue to enrich twenty-first-century worship for many generations, cultures, and denominations.

Wilson has contributed to The Hymn Society in a variety of capacities with a term on the Executive Committee, offering written work to *The Hymn*, presenting at the Center for Congregational Song launch in 2017, co-chairing the 2020 Annual

Conference, participating in the “100 Years of Song” series, and serving as preacher for the opening worship at this year’s 2022 Annual Conference.

Notably, she performed a benefit concert at Carnegie Hall and has shared the stage with dynamic leaders and artists such as Richard Smallwood, Edwin Hawkins (“Oh, happy day”), Patti LaBelle, Shirley Caesar, Donald Lawrence, Cissy Houston, the legendary Lionel Hampton, the late Rev. James Cleveland, and Nancy Wilson. While serving on the faculty at Fort Worth Conservatory of Performing Arts, she taught and mentored the dynamic Kirk Franklin, and in Detroit, Michigan, she mentored the award-winning contemporary gospel artist, Byron Cage.

In 1998, she was named Best Female Vocalist at the Gospel Choice Awards in Atlanta, Georgia. Her work in the documentary film, *Reflect, Reclaim, Rejoice: Preserving the Gift of Black Sacred Music*, narrated by Academy Award-nominated Alfre Woodard, won an Emmy in 2015. Wilson served as the first female and first African American director of music at the 2000 and 2004 General Conferences of The United Methodist Church, and as guest soloist and song leader for the Methodist World Council in 2013 at Washington National Cathedral.

Her international tours include North America, South America, Australia, Africa, Asia, and Europe. These tours included several festivals of music and re-recording concerts in Argentina, Brazil, and Denmark. She offered Spirit-filled concerts for the World Council of Churches in Brighton, England, and Seoul, Korea.

Wilson’s life’s work and contagious energy in both spirit and song challenge us to live beyond the “temple of our own familiar” in ways we likely never thought possible. She personifies a remarkable gift, creating un-expected cultural connections through acts of praise, worship, and communal life. This twenty-first-century song enlivener continues to teach and live the old African dictum: “The Spirit will not descend without a song.”

*This information was prepared by Brittney D. Stephan and is provided for release by J. Michael McMahon, Executive Director of The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada, 5 Thomas Circle, NW, 4th floor, Washington, DC 20005-4153. For more information, please contact Dr. McMahon at [mike@thehymnsociety.org](mailto:mike@thehymnsociety.org) or 800-843-8966.*

*Founded in 1922, The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada is an ecumenical organization of people who are passionate about hymns and congregational song. The Hymn Society community, open to all, is made up of scholars, church musicians, poets, composers, choir directors, choir members, clergy, worship planners, song leaders, music publishers, music educators, and people who love to sing. We believe that the holy act of singing together shapes faith, heals brokenness, transforms lives, and renews peace. Our mission, therefore, is to encourage, promote, and enliven congregational song.*