



Telling Our Stories

250 Years of United Methodism
in the New York Area

1766-2016 www.nyac.com/250years



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Advocate for Social Justice and the First African-American Bishop in the UMC

1918-2002

Roy C. Nichols

Bishop Roy Nichols is remembered as a dedicated advocate for social justice and a compassionate leader within The United Methodist Church.

Born on the East Coast, Nichols moved to California in 1941 to attend the Pacific School of Religion. In the then-conservative city of Berkeley he was the founding pastor of two racially-integrated churches. He became involved in local politics in the late 1950s as president of the local NAACP and in 1961 won a seat on the Berkeley School Board, where he worked for school desegregation.

In 1964 he was invited to pastor Salem Methodist Church in Harlem, from which he was elected the first African-American bishop of the newly-formed UMC in 1968. During his many years in the ministry he hosted radio programs, authored books, and served in many leadership positions within the larger denomination. In the words of long-time friend and former parishioner Mary Lee Widener:

“He was a pastor in the old-fashioned sense. He understood human needs. He was clearly a leader and a developer of leaders. He counseled you, supported you, loved you through it all.”

For Discussion

- Bishop Nichols was deeply involved in local politics during his years in California. What responsibilities do you feel pastors have to the larger community?
- What did Bishop Nichols bring to the United Methodist episcopacy when he was elected in 1968? What are the gifts, characteristics, and skills that we expect from our United Methodist bishops?

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