



**Telling Our Stories**  
250 Years of United Methodism  
in the New York Area

1766-2016    [www.nyac.com/250years](http://www.nyac.com/250years)



## *First Woman District and Conference Lay Leader*

**1933-2010**

# Shirley I. Parris

Shirley Parris was born in Barbados, West Indies and was deeply involved in the life of Dalkeith Methodist Church, where she was a Sunday School teacher and felt a call to lay ministry. She attended United Theological College in Jamaica, West Indies, pursuing Deaconess Orders, but emigrated to the United States before being ordained.

She found a church home at Union UMC in Brooklyn, NY in 1964, serving on many church, district and conference boards, eventually becoming the first woman District Lay Leader in 1978 and the first woman Conference Lay Leader in 1984. Many in the NYAC also remember her gracious and patient work navigating challenging issues as the Chair of Legislative Section 3 (Ministries of Advocacy) for many years.

Parris was elected a delegate from NYAC to the General and Jurisdictional Conferences six times and led the delegation twice. She also served the general church in many capacities, serving commissions, committees, and associations.

Shirley loved preaching and singing hymns, and was a popular Bible study and workshop leader. She prayed daily for people and situations on her prayer list, which she updated constantly! Her humor and unapologetic love of God were well-known.

### *For Discussion*

- Shirley Parris was the first lay person in whose honor a yearly award was instituted by the NYAC. What lay persons or clergy do you know whose service and devotion might make them a candidate for this award?
- Parris exemplified the connective strengths of the UMC through her district and conference level activities. How could you follow her example and get more involved beyond the local church?

**New York Annual Conference**  
Commission on Archives and History  
C. Wesley Christman Archives  
[archives@nyac.com](mailto:archives@nyac.com) - 914-615-2241