

# Drum Major For Justice Award Honoree

## The Reverend Dr. Flora Wilson Bridges



The Reverend Dr. Flora Wilson Bridges, a native of Bainbridge, Georgia, was brought up on Chicago's historic Southside. She matriculated in the city's public schools until graduating from Waller High School (later renamed as the Lincoln Park High School) on Chicago's near Northside. She went on to graduate from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, with an undergraduate degree in Communications from the College of Journalism and Communications, a Master of Arts in Religion from Yale Divinity School, and a Ph.D. in Religion from Vanderbilt University. Her ministry has been a bi-vocational one of serving as both a pastor and professor of Religion.

Dr. Bridges was first ordained to ministry in the Grace Baptist Church of Mount Vernon, New York--a church dually aligned with the National Baptist Convention, U.S. A., Inc. and the American Baptist Churches. She served this large and historic congregation as the first woman licensed and ordained in an African-American church in New York's Westchester County while on staff as the full-time Minister of Administration. Later Dr. Bridges received privilege of call in the United Church of Christ serving as the organizing pastor of the Amistad United Church of Christ in Marietta, Georgia, and afterwards the organizing pastor of the Grace Community Church in Gadsden, Alabama.

While in the South in Nashville, Tennessee completing a doctorate in Religion, Dr. Bridges was the Interim Dean of the Chapel at Fisk University. Her vocation at Fisk led to a call to become the first woman Dean of the Chapel at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. After ten years Dr. Bridges left Spelman to become a professor at Seattle University--a premier Jesuit and Catholic university in Seattle, Washington-- in the Graduate School of Theology and Ministry. She was the first woman of color tenured at STM and the first Spehar-Halligan Professor of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Dialogue. While in the Seattle Presbytery, she was also called to be the pastor of the Madrona Presbyterian Church.

In the New York City Presbytery, Dr. Bridges served for two years as the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn. She currently serves as the pastor of the historic Rendall Memorial Presbyterian Church in central Harlem. She has completed a residency for certification at NYU-Lutheran (recently reorganized to become a part of New York University Medical Center) as a chaplain. While in New York, Dr. Bridges continues to be bi-vocational serving as an adjunct professor teaching courses in Homiletics and supervising seminarians in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) from New York Theological Seminary.

She has served as the Chairperson on the Committee on Ministry and as member at large on the General Cabinet of the New York City Presbytery. Currently, Dr. Bridges serves as the President of the New York City Chapter of the National Black Presbyterian Caucus (NBPC), a member-at-large on REAC (Racial Equity Advocacy Committee), and as REAC's liaison to ACWC (Advocacy Committee Women's Concerns).

The ministry of Dr. Bridges has always been characterized by a concern for justice for women, African-Americans and inclusivity for all of God's people; especially the marginalized, disinherited, and the poorest of the poor. This includes years of teaching and advocacy for environmental justice. In New York City she currently serves as an Administrator for the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and housed the city's first Bed Stabilization (a seven night a week shelter for those who are in the population of the street homeless) at Rendall.