

Narrator: Welcome to *UMC.org Profiles*, where, each month, we share the spiritual journey of a United Methodist. This month on *UMC.org Profiles*, Lina McCord, former executive director of the Black College Fund, shares her story.

The daughter of a preacher, Lina recalls her memories of the old Central Jurisdiction and the segregation she experienced growing up in the south. One of the first black employees hired at the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, Lina helped pioneer the Black College Fund intern program, which is now named in tribute to her, for her many years of service.

Lina: My father served at several churches and we moved several times, all of 'em being very, very small churches. I always felt very loved and cared for not only by our family but our members...

But there came a point in which we...my mother decided we're going to buy a home and we're going to stay one place until the children finish high school. And that was Kingsport, Tennessee.

So at a very early period in my life I was singing, I was taking up collection and I was ushering, singing in the choir and playing piano. All of us played just enough to get a hymn going for service.

I do remember the Central Jurisdiction very well and know that the church was divided into geographical jurisdiction except for Central Jurisdiction and that meant that those people were scattered around all over. But even with that they managed to know each other and

support each other and know people who could do certain kinds of things and called upon the capabilities of those people.

We just grew up in a segregated society. That was a given. And I also said I didn't know how much that was true because I think my father and my mother shielded us from a lot. But we also lived in areas where it was given that...but we were able to have contact with the other race. They were as giving and loving as they could be under the circumstances. I think they always looked at us being poor.

Black church is hard to support a church. And my dad did any kind of menial work to keep his family going and kept us.... I never felt deprived. I knew after I got out that there was a lot more that I didn't have. But you don't miss what you don't have.

I got a degree in business administration. I went to Morristown for two years and that's a very cute story. I always say that we...my father wanted us to go to college. Morristown was not very far from Kingsport, my home. And we had...there were two of us in college at the same time, my older brother and I. And we went there because he, my father, he'd get us two for the price of one. One would go.... He paid for one and the other went for...went for free, so to speak. But we always had jobs after school. And then I went from there to Tennessee State in Nashville.

... Dr. Thomas, who is now a retired bishop in the church, called me one day and asked me if I would consider coming to work at the Board of Higher Education. And I said, Yeah, sure I will. I didn't know

anything about that or what that entailed at the moment, but I did know that that was a good place.

And that was in 1959, I believe.

I don't know...remember now how many employees they had, but there were four of us, four blacks working there. Bishop Thomas and Bishop Dixon, who were both ministers and the two secretaries, worked there—four of us. And it was interesting to be there. And we had all kind of facilities at that board to accommodate Black folks who came to Nashville. ...

You never felt segregated as long as you were in the building. But when you had to step outside of that building, you could feel it.

The funds for Black colleges has come down through the years, certain amounts have been allotted by the church for Black colleges and we were responsible...it was allotted, but we had to raise the money. And we did that through what we called Race Relations Sunday. It was second Sunday in February.

See, the Black College Fund did not come in until '72, I believe. When they were planning for this they knew that we had to get more money for our institutions than we were receiving.

So they had a two-year period what they called Negro College Advance, preparing for the Black College Fund.

Prior to that, certain schools had certain annual conferences that they cultivated on their own with our help. We had to help them to change over from these annual conferences and work as a unit, all of them, in supporting and going into annual conferences to work, which kind of led up to the idea of having the student itineration.

So when we got the council of presidents together and organizing the thing, you're gonna have to give up specific annual conference. But you're gonna have to work as a team and be assigned to work in certain annual conference, but promote 12 institutions rather than a single institution. And I think that was a success. So the Black College Fund.

And in our discussion we talked about the young people in these college, people in the church that didn't know the colleges other than by name, some of know where the locations, but never knew the students.

They didn't know enough about them to give. I have always felt that if you want to give to something, you have to know what it is and what it's all about.

We also said, They will see you. They will begin to know the kind of students that attend these colleges and get some indication as to what they're giving for. So we asked these two young women to come and we sat down and talked with them about that. And the excitement that they knew, it was unbelievable. They were so excited. "I'm going some place I have never been before."

I said, I can provide a scholarship out of our budget to give to each one, you know, for each one for their summer's work and we would pay their expenses to the first location. And each church would pay their expenses to the next location and feed them and house them and that sort of thing all the way around for that ten weeks that they were out there. They came back in such glowing praise of their experiences. People had never seen a Black person before. And here they were having a Black person in their church and speaking.

You know, one girl said, I went into that home and there was this little girl and she would not come near me. She was afraid of me. She'd never seen anything that looked like me. And she told the mother, she said, "Leave her alone. She'll be fine." And all of a sudden she said, "Why don't we sit here and play with your toys, tell stories." She said, "Maybe I'll polish your fingernails," and used things that she had. And by the time she was ready to leave, that girl was in tears. You know, "Why are you leaving?" You know, "I need to have you here all the time." But that was the beginning.

They gained a lot. They had experiences that otherwise they would have never had. Plus the fact that they got money to send them on to school the next year. And then the persons who received them at annual conferences or wherever they met in their local churches, they were delighted to see people. You know, they just didn't have in their minds that there were people like this out there. They were themselves, friendly and anxious to do that, and excited about where they were, accepted those people where they were and they accepted them where they were. That was, I thought, a great thing.

It has never been about me. It's been about the colleges and the students who attend them. And if anybody looked back and they said, "Did you know Lina McCord? Oh, yeah. I knew her. She was over the Black College Fund. She was...kind of came up under the rule that you do unto others as you would have them do unto you." And I'm very grateful for that experience because sometimes I question it, and my mother told me that, Don't worry about why you're doing it, but do it because it's right to do. I would like for people to remember me as a person who was very concerned and who is concerned about Black higher education.

Narrator: Our thanks to Ms. McCord for sharing her faith story with us. Join us next month, when we sit down with Janette Carter, the daughter of country music pioneers A.P. and Sara Carter.

This month's profile was produced by Matt Carlisle; interview by Kathy Gilbert; the editor was Phil Arnold. I'm Hilly Hicks and *Profiles* was brought to you by UMC.org, the official Web site of The United Methodist Church, and a ministry United Methodist Communications.