



Citation

Yvette Flunder

Doctor of Divinity, *honoris causa*

As a child in San Francisco, you witnessed the charismatic preaching of your maternal grandfather. The artistic whoop, the thunderous cadenced preaching accented by a proficient organist. A third-generation preacher, many of your roots are in the Church of God in Christ but your ministry has expanded much farther and broader than your COGIC upbringing. You have become deeply rooted as a radically inclusive advocate for justice and love of all people, most especially those within the LGBTQ community.

In the 1980s, after several years of self-imposed exile from the church you accepted an invitation from then Pastor Walter Hawkins to preach at Love Center Church in East Oakland, California. That experience and the church's more liberating theology of salvation and relationship with God was as you have said, "cool water on your soul." One of the gifts you brought the church was your phenomenal voice. Bishop Hawkins invited you to sing with the church's Love Center Choir. Black communities across the nation became acquainted first with your voice which could be heard during the early Sunday morning hours by way of gospel radio stations or "record players" in Black homes across the nation. Working with Walter Hawkins on the Love Alive Three album, you were the lead vocalist on, *I Love You Lord* and you worked with such artists as Daryl Coley and Shirley Miller, the lead vocalist of the commercial recording *Oh Happy Day* and of hits such as *I Must Go On*; the woman who would become her wife. You and Mother Miller have been together as loving partners 35 years this month.

Your ministry is not only in voice but most especially in administration. You've done this for well over 30 years by responding to a "call to blend proclamation, worship and action." Beginning in 1986, as the epidemic HIV/AIDS spread across the LGBT community, there you were, caring for and loving those affected. In November 1991, you founded City of Refuge, now a United Church of Christ congregation. In 1999 you established The Fellowship. In 2003, with a ministry that was growing into a multi-denominational coalition you were consecrated Presiding Bishop of the Fellowship. Now The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries has over 100 churches and faith-based organizations expanding across the United States, into Mexico, three countries in Africa and most recently Asia. Your ministry was truly a place of refuge.

In 2005, a year after having been branded a heretic for preaching a theology of universal salvation, you welcomed Bishop Carlton Pearson into your pulpit where he preached about the Gospel of Full Inclusion. Pearson who had for years denounced homosexuality found himself surrounded by LGBTQ persons who welcomed and loved him. You followed his preaching by washing his feet, a move he called, "one of the holiest moments of my life." Pearson is now on the adjunct pastors staff of All Souls Unitarian Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Other renowned preachers have been blessed by your ministry including one recently consecrated as bishop, the Rev. William Barber, co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign.

As your ministry has grown, so also your care of those affected by HIV/AIDS. You developed an HIV/AIDS training curriculum. Under the leadership of former Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher and Dr. Eric Goosby, you developed and HIV/AIDS education campaign. You worked with the Gates Foundation to develop HIV testing campaigns for South African leaders. You served as a consultant to the Centers for Disease Control and the Congressional Black Caucus Health Brain Trust. You developed and implemented an HIV Treatment Adherence program in San Francisco focusing on the Transgender community. Not going it alone, you and your staff opened the Hazard-Ashley House and Walker House in Oakland and the Restoration House in San Francisco through the Ark of Refuge, Inc, (now called YA Flunder Foundation) a non-profit agency that provided housing, direct services, education and training for persons affected by HIV/AIDS. When called upon by President Barack Obama, you agreed to serve on his HIV/HepC Prevention Council. And then, in December 2014 you went to the White House as keynote speaker in observation of the 26th Anniversary of World AIDS Day.

Notwithstanding these great works, you are a published author of several works including your manuscript *Where the Edge Gathers: A Theology and Homiletics of Radical Inclusion*. In 2014, you concluded nearly a decade of service as a Trustee of Pacific School of Religion and you currently serve on Starr King's Board of Trustees and DEMOS (a think tank that works to reduce political, economic and racial inequality through research and legislation). You teach as adjunct professor at PSR and lecture at schools of theology across the country.

Through your works you have turned the COGIC mantra – “You can't join in you've got to be born in” – on its head for you understand and you are teaching us, that when it comes to social justice the work is not a matter of lineage or pedigree but of joining in with you heart and soul.

President Barker, I am honored to present Rev. Dr. Yvette Flunder for the degree, **Doctor of Divinity**, *honoris causa*.

Pamela Lightsey, Ph.D.
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