

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Joseph Evans

PERSON

Evans, Joseph H. B. (Joseph Henry B.), 1915-

Alternative Names: Reverend Joseph Evans;

Life Dates: August 15, 1915-April 12, 2008

Place of Birth: Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA

Residence: Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts

Occupations: Pastor

Biographical Note

Reverend Joseph H. Evans, D.D., held the distinction of being the first and only African American to hold the positions of both Secretary and President of a mainline church denomination in the United States. Between 1967 and 1983, he was the national secretary of the United Church of Christ (UCC). Upon the sudden death of UCC president, Robert Moss, in 1976, Evans was named the third president of the UCC. He filled this position for one year, 1976 to 1977, and then returned to the secretariat position.

Evans was born on August 15, 1915 in Kalamazoo, Michigan. The son of Etta Hill, a teacher, and Charles A. Evans, a postal worker, Evans grew up in Chicago and graduated from Englewood High School in 1933. During his youth, he was an active member of the Church of the Good Shepherd. In 1939, he received an A.B. degree from Western Michigan University and in 1942, a Masters of Divinity from Yale University's Divinity School. He was ordained into the UCC that same year.

Following a brief period as the leader of a church mission serving immigrants from Barbados in Brooklyn, New York, Evans served as the pastor of Grace Congregational Church in Harlem, New York from 1942 to 1946. At Grace Congregational, he met Harriette Clark whom he married in 1944. From 1946 to 1947, he served as the Associate General Secretary for the Connecticut Council of Churches, where he ministered to migrant tobacco farm workers and youth. In 1947, he was called to Mount Zion Church in Cleveland, Ohio, to serve as pastor until 1953. Then, he was called to his home church in Chicago to lead the Church of the Good Shepherd. While there, he earned his Doctorate of Divinity from the Chicago Theological Seminary. From 1960 to 1964, he served as president of the Urban League of Chicago. After serving fourteen years as pastor of the Church of the Good Shepherd, Evans was appointed secretary of

the UCC. In 1983, Evans retired from the UCC but remained an active pastor for another five years, serving as interim pastor at churches in Columbus, Ohio; Chicago, Illinois; Portland, Maine; Amherst, New Hampshire; and Norwell, Massachusetts.

Evans passed away on April 12, 2008 at the age of 92. He is survived by his wife, Harriette, and their three daughters, Lesley, Harriette, and Barbara.

Evans was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on August 10, 2005.

Related Entries

Willard Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

McCosh Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Lewis Institute [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Western Michigan University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Yale Divinity School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Englewood High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Grace Congregational Church [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1942 to 1946]

Pastor

Connecticut Council of Churches [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1946 to 1947]

Assistant General Secretary

Mt. Zion Church [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1947 to 1953]

Pastor

Church of the Good Shepherd [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1953 to 1967]

Pastor

United Church of Christ [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1967 to 1983]

Secretary

United Church of Christ [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1976 to 1977]

President

Chicago Urban League [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

President