

## ***Exploring the Spiritual Heritage of Lincoln University: A Soul Shaping and Soul Saving Legacy***

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*I want to live a legacy life. I want to live a legacy life  
I am intentional about being relational. I am participating in a concert of care  
Advancing in Character, Leadership and Service  
Living the Legacy Life, I am worth it. I want to live a legacy life*

A historical keystone<sup>1</sup>sits in the rear of the Mary Dod Brown Memorial Chapel pulpit. It bears the 1856 date and an inscription which reads, “The night is far spent, the day is at hand;” This verse from Paul’s letter to the Romans, continues: “Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.” Set in the larger context of practical advice based on theological imperatives, these verses courageously issue a challenge to consider the present moment as rife with opportunity, and the charge to meet those opportunities with courage and an **enlightened perspective**. These twin concepts, once embedded in the foundation of the buildings of Lincoln University, continue to be the cornerstone of its spiritual life, and as such guide the spiritual mission of the office of the Chaplaincy. **Through its programs and services, which are interdisciplinary and culturally relevant, the University chapel continues to honor the spiritual heritage of the university by engaging students in meaningful spiritual growth.**

### THE PRAYING ROCK

II have heard stories about this inscription and the keystone on which it is found. It was first placed in Ashmun Hall, the first building of Ashmun Institute. In 1954, when Ashmun Hall was demolished, this keystone was then moved to its permanent home in the LU chapel (Bond, 244, 293). It was hewn from a valuable stone known as “the praying rock,” so called because on it, Lincoln University’s founder, Rev. John Miller Dickey, prayed daily for his parishioners and for his ministry. It was also the rock on which Lincoln’s first student, John Ralston Amos, young man of African descent, prayed daily for the fulfillment of his heart’s desire to enter the ministry. Dickey, who tutored Amos, realized that to accomplish this dream, **Amos needed a theological education**. When Amos applied to the Princeton University, the local Presbyterian Seminary, however, and was denied because of his race, Dickey established Ashman Institute for the broader purpose of providing an education to all youths of African descent. It was dedicated on December 31, 1856. Thus were the prayers of both men, uttered on the praying rock, instrumental in the creation of an institution—Ashmun Institute, now The Lincoln University, PA.

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<sup>1</sup> The keystone is a rectangular stone marker used as a marker and as the cornerstone of a building. See Display A.



Display 1. The Keystone (cornerstone) in Mary Dod Brown Chapel

The civil rights movement brought with it an era reflecting large shifts in American culture and also college campuses. Previously excluded communities like African Americans began enter o arrive on American Colleges in significant numbers. Several notable campus chaplains such as Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman at Boston University, Rev. Dr. George Buttrick and Rev. Peter Gomes at Harvard, and Rev. William Sloane Coffin at Yale preached against societal “isms” encouraging students not only to get a higher education but be of service and work for social justice and change. Dr. Lucy Forster-Smith explained, “These ecclesiastical *catalysts for integral change, these towering prophets spoke in pulpits from within the academy. Ironically, their voices articulated a rationale for clear cutting of much of the forest from which they emerged. As the twentieth century concluded, these prophets grew quiet through death or retirement. Much of the work they urged was moving forward—but would their like ever be seen again?*”

This study researches the Lincoln University chaplaincy and discusses what were the expectations that merited the commencement and the expectations for the position of chaplain meeting the ever changing student populace and religious diversity on campus.

The Lincoln University chapel inherited a long legacy that informed the tradition of inspiring African American students to advance in excellence from 1854 until 1955 upon the closing of the seminary. Founder John Miller Dickey served as the first spiritual leader on campus. Until 1955, seminary presidents presided over daily chapel services attended by the entire study body. From 1900 to 1930 “all students were required to attend daily prayer and public services in the chapel on the Lords day”, (Lincoln University Catalogue, 1908-09). In the 1930’s, The Ashmun Church was found by the Presbytery of Chester as a home church for students during their college life. This was an organized Presbyterian church on campus that required membership of all students open to all denominations. Students were responsible to bring letters of admission to the

church denomination and were released from the “church” on campus upon their graduation from the University (LU University Herald page 19, 1930).

The mission began with John Ralston Amos. Amos was a young black man from Oxford, Pennsylvania tutored by Reverend John Miller Dickey. Dickey realized that Amos could not complete his desire to work in ministry unless he went to theology school. After he applied to the Princeton University, the local Presbyterian Seminary, Amos was denied because he was black. Dickey then decided to establish the Ashmun Institute. The Ashmun Institute was dedicated December 31, 1856. The first three students to attend were John Amos, his brother, Thomas and Armistead Miller, the son of a missionary to Liberia. In 1859, all three men graduated and sailed to Africa May of 1859 to begin their missionary work.

This was an example of what was considered to represent the initial mission of betterment for blacks in America as shared with the Presbyterian Church. The Presbytery of New Castle generally held to the thinking of the Colonization Society. Simply put, the thinking was that colored men would be trained in the Presbyterian denomination and take Christianity to Africa by being missionaries and teachers, thus facilitating the colonization of blacks back to Africa.

In 1866, The Ashmun Institute was renamed Lincoln University in honor of Abraham Lincoln. While the United States was still reeling from the Civil War, the objective for Lincoln’s founding was about training missionaries to serve in Africa. However, over the next 100 years men would embrace a new thinking and thus encounter a number of challenges and changes. The Presbyterian Church was only interested in newly freed blacks to train them to be missionaries and ultimately encourage all blacks to return to Africa to help “Christianize” the nation. This conflict is what led to the separation of the Presbyterian Church and Lincoln.

### **Lincoln University First Black President & the First HBCU Black Chaplaincy**

In 1945 Horace Man Bond assumes the presidency of Lincoln. In 1955 the Lincoln University established a chaplaincy with the first chaplain Samuel Govan Stevens. He served over 20 years. The chaplaincy at Lincoln University has been a historic campus oasis featuring a pulpit of distinguished preachers and outstanding local, national, and world leaders as a part of empowering programs and services. While providing for the education of black students, the institution also hosted lectures and groups dedicated to the abolition of slavery in the United States. The college attracted highly talented students from numerous states, especially during the long decades of legal segregation in the South and students from around the world. In 1952, Lincoln University admitted female students. Over the course of time, these amendments would necessitate changes in religious life program. Lincoln University started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Lincoln University has been committed to providing inter-disciplinary and socially relevant programs for students pursuing while maintaining a spiritual environment.

Lincoln University is the oldest Historically black college and university in American Higher education, for now and the foreseen future, it to retain its ground in human inquiry while bring together recently developed and developing in that draws from and advance understanding of ethics, the creative process and the problems and possibilities of institutional and social change. In the throes of great transitions, Lincoln University Chaplaincy program has been playing a pivotal role in preserving the spiritual ethos during those changes.

According to the Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, “The Religious Life Program promotes student learning and development that is purposeful and holistic. The programs encourage: intellectual growth, effective communication, realistic self-appraisal, enhanced self-esteem, clarified values, career choices, leadership development and productive lifestyles, and appreciation of diversity, spiritual awareness, and achievement of personal and educational goals.”

The shift of Lincoln’s mission adapts to assist not only “colored men” but extends into the 20<sup>th</sup> century helping to uplift women and a diversity of Lincoln graduates. During the 1960’s Harold Gunn was hired as intern President and his daughter Susan Pevar shared her memories of the Mary Dod Memorial Chapel. The chapel was a central part of the campus. Aside for weekly vespers, she explained how it was a cultural arts center where a number of historical giants came to share their musical and intellectual gifts.

### **Shaped to Serve as Chaplain in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Today, The Lincoln University chaplaincy is an art ensemble for the betterment of the students. This is an art form I am still learning. As I serve, I am being shaped eo become chaplain. The role requires a provocative theological frame work, astute cultural critic, and an interpreter who speaks in a prophetic voice. These are critical times and it crucial to keep learning how to best serve students while they are making some of the most important decisions that will determine their future and discern their values.

As campus pastor, the campus is my office. It is my privilege and passion to be a servant-leader to teach, preach, counsel, pray, and offer referrals -- tending to the duties associated with religious life. This work requires that one immerse themselves within the campus and community culture of the Lincoln University student. Most come from a diversity of backgrounds and different places that span from the tri-state area of New Jersey, New York and Philadelphia to California and across the globe. College age students can have a disdain for a pastor especially during this time. It can be assumed that pastors place themselves on pedestal. Yet, I have learned the key to effectively connect with this generation is to understand their values. This culture has a passion for honesty must spill over in to the chapel congregation and campus. It is imperative to model what you want others to do. If you want people to be transparent with their struggles and pursue growth, then it is the very thing you must model to them.

**AND EPISTEMOLOGY & ETHIC TO HELP STUDENTS SEE THEMSELVES AS GOD DOES**

Preaching to this culture is also another opportunity to learn. It should be an opportunity to share the Word of God to share timely, eternal transcendent truths. Karl Barth is said to have said: "We must hold the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other." As a cultural critic and astute and look, listen and learn from the media to address their concerns and be in their environment positively influence them. I want to preach to convey revelation that protects one from adopting a negatively distorted self-image, reject false comparisons and prevent one from becoming infected with that same kind of bigotry that we've struggled against for centuries. It honors to our unique experience as African Americans and our identity reflective of Black consciousness and cultural heritage and expression.

Students are not afraid to be confronted by biblical truths and embrace the values from these biblical stories which encourage them to practice good character. I strive to make connections in my messages through biblical precepts, principals and patterns: God's Word proved an adequate and authentic framework in which to view ourselves and understand our cultural history. Carl Ellis advised that theology should be approached through two view points. Epistemology is about what we know about God and ethics as to how we should obey and relate to God through our character. In order for out theology to be truly balanced, we must cultivate our knowledge of God and His Word and practice obedience to God and His word in every area of our lives.

Epistemology also involves the expression of our history and concerned with what we should know about God. African American theology was developed under the challenge of oppressive slavery and racism. However, African Americans developed a remarkable creative ability to convey transforming truths in the bible into oral tradition of preaching, singing and teaching and in their living. As Ellis embraces this is a theological dynamic is fully African American, having its historical cultural application in the black experience, yet it is firmly rooted in the emergence of a theological perspective in any people group requires two main ingredients: a life situation and a biblical truth.

Now when I say biblical truth it does not necessarily mean the bible in its present text. For example, during slavery African Americans were not allowed to access to the Bible because we weren't allowed to read. However, it is evident that we developed a remarkable ability to transform basic truths in the bible into oral tradition. Therefore, what developed in our experience was an oral tradition that carried much of the biblical truth that sustained us for many years. As Carl Ellis maintains that the core of African American culture is a soul dynamic that formed in the context of white oppression and black resistance. This soul dynamic is the combination of two components:

1. A Theological dynamic- The oral tradition that emerged from the African American church experience. It captures nuggets of biblical truth in powerful phases and mental images formed from life experiences.
2. A cultural dynamic- Expressing of Conscientiousness that emerge from the root of our human experience where the image of God cannot be suppressed.

God intends for us to worship him in our culture. The bible is meant to be applied to us; it is not meant to be looked at from a distance. Therefore, African American theology is a legitimate expression of the biblical message. The theological dynamic is fully African American, having its historical cultural application in the black experience, yet it is firmly rooted in the universal truth of the Word of God which speaks to every cultural and historical situation.

The chapel reflects the Lincoln University soul and spirit. T. Scott Daniels also maintains that every church has its own special collective spirit. He further explains that “The spirit” emerges from a congregation which is formed by a unique combination of human action, institutional history and cultural influence. The corporate spirit that emerges in every church captures the hopes, fears, and horizons of imagination for a congregation. Again the spirit is more than the collection of individual attitudes; it is shaped by leaders of the past, but is also shaped by contemporaries today. It is formed in the context of national and local churches, but it is also interpret those same cultures. It lives in the stories that are told in public gatherings and into the stories that are whispered in secret hallways (Page 29, Daniels). Daniel further shares that it is everything from everything from the buildings, to the people and songs. He surmises it is collective, and yet it dwells within the hearts of individuals. Therefore, it requires pragmatic plans of actions, but it requires insights and strategies. The chapel continues to be up front and center working to make connections in the chapel, congregant and on campus, community and culture.

### **What Good Do I Owe as Lincoln University Chaplain?**

Pastor William Curtis said that every leader is required to ask not only why he or she serves but also who do we serve? What is the good that we owe? Leaders cannot just compartmentalize their assistance, but leadership has to be a calculated approach. Decisions should be grounded in research. He then argued it is unethical to attempt to design a “one size fits all” response concerning the help we will give for those in need of assistance.

William H. Williamson, dean of the Chapel at Duke University said, “Values must not be ‘clarified,’ they must be debated, judged, exemplified, demonstrated and tested before the young if they are to be embraced and inculcated in the young.” (Williamson, 2000). Today, the chaplain’s work not only occurs in countless languages of different beliefs and cultures; often well beyond those of the chaplain’s formation. “Skills and trust are required; neither the faint-hearted nor the easily daunted is likely to be an effective guide.” My quest at Lincoln is to inspire students in “Living a Legacy Life.” I encourage Lincoln students to personally join in supporting the mission of Lincoln University being: intentional about being relational; participating in a concert of care; and advancing the Lincoln Legacy through character, leadership and service.

We share an array of services for students that require thematic planning and also highlights a mixed type of worship experience that includes liturgies, hymns, praise and

worship all to create inroads with the college student generation.’ In the spirit of what the chapel has always been at Lincoln, it remains a major part of the campus activities. Within the chapel worshipping experience, we use the spoken word, drama, dance, and visual arts to present biblical truths and engage in prayer.

Arts are the centerpiece of how we express our faith. We have a dance team of fifteen female dancers who use a variety of musical styles to express feelings, ideas, and various aspects of faith. We also have the Gospel Choir of approximately 50 students which sings hymns, gospel songs, a praise and worship team of about ten students who share the praise and worship ballads, we have a group of about twelve leadership development team members that assist in reading scripture and facilitating worship. We have a drama ministry, campus and community outreach and all of these are organizations are student led. We also have the media and marketing team which design power points, flyers, and bulletins that are used on campus and in worship. Worship services use each of these student initiatives to create a multi faceted worship experience. Students still observe midnight and midday prayer as a praying rock at Lincoln.

H. Thomas explained that Historically Black colleges and Universities (HBCUs) disproportionately carry the burden of having to justify their role in academe more so than other special mission institutions. Thomas further explained while a panoply of diverse institutional types are recognized for their unique missions or niches in the education of differing groups of students, a contentious and inconsistent reputation for Black colleges persists (Brown & Freeman, 2002; Brown, Ricard, & Donahoo, 2004; Fleming, 1984; Garibaldi, 1991). Today, Black colleges still face the task of having to justify their relevance within the larger higher education system. Black colleges are incessantly misunderstood and the benefits of attending them often go unnoticed by the general public (Willie, 1994).

HBCUs continue to operate on a “family model” where faculty and staff act as surrogate “parents to nurture and support their students, many whom they perceive as their own “kids” (Hirt, Stravhorn, Amelink, & Bennette. 2006). With a “critical mass” of supportive networks and services, Black students attending HBCUs tend to fare well in higher education, some Black HBCU graduates assume highly prestigious occupations (Strayhorn, 2008a) and other evidence suggests that they graduate higher than their same race peers at Predominately White Institutions (Carter and Wilson, 1993).

As Lemuel W. Watson still resolves, “The biggest challenges for us as educators; however is to get Black students to understand their history so they can fulfill their destiny.” It is this spirit that also aided in the founding of Lincoln University that would be the oldest degree granting HBCU institution which started to train ministers to serve in the Presbyterian Church. The University Chapel leads in the tradition of the Christian heritage of Lincoln University but also work to expands these theme of spirituality is biblical worldview that is central to the cultural expressions found in the African Diaspora.

### **A Soul Shaping and Soul Saving Commission**

I want to join in this “ecclesiastical *catalysts as a prophet preaching in a pulpit from within the academy. I consider this a soul saving and soul shaping commission. I want to work at*

*building both the epistemology and ethic and realize the mission of Lincoln University for students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.* My quest in life is to creatively inspire excellence, to preach prophetically, to encourage people to re-think the possibility of the future, to bring hope and healing, peace and justice and to lead in motivating others transform this present world into the Kingdom of God.

## Resources

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### **RESOURCES**

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