Black History in the Mennonite Church

1920: Virginia Mennonite Conference debates allowing blacks in church. They are allowed with caution.

1927: James and Rowena Lark first contact with Mennonites at Rocky Ridge Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va.

1933: Lancaster Colored Mission established. Renamed South Christian Street Mennonite Church in Lancaster, Pa.


1938: Seventh Street Mission established in Reading, Pa. Renamed Buttonwood Mennonite Church in 1940.

1940: 35th Street Mennonite Mission established in Los Angeles, Ca.

1943: Roberta Webb becomes the first African American person to join a Mennonite church in the U.S.

1945: Dearborn Street Mission established in Chicago, Ill., to provide academic counseling, promote Christian Community Relations, and Sanctuaries. First African American Missionary to the Philippines.

1946: James H. Lark ordained as first African American Mennonite minister at Bethel Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va.

1948: Gladstone Mennonite Church in Philadelphia, Pa., is renamed as Thornhill Mennonite Church.

1957: Community Mennonite Church established in Markham, Ill.

1958: Bethesda Mennonite Church founded in St. Louis, Missouri.

1959: General Conference Mennonites: A Christian Declaration on Race Relations. Lancaster Conference Statement on Racism. Elmer Neufeld (Executive Secretary of the MCC Peace Section) and Howard John Funk (Executive Secretary of the MCC Women's Missionary and Service Commission) in Chicago for a National Conference on Race Relations in 1958.


1963: "Old" Mennonite Church moderator John R. Mumaw sends a telegram to President John F. Kennedy on behalf of the Committee on Economic and Social Relations and the MCC Peace Section, expressing the church's concern for the Civil Rights Movement. Education learning tours to the south were common during the late 1960s.


1965: Tony Brown becomes the first African American student at Central Christian High School in Fort Wayne, Ind., and the first African American to graduate at the school in 1966.


1978: Mennonite Board of Missions renamed Seventh Avenue Mennonite Church.

1989: At a joint assembly in Normal, Ill., the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Brethren Church of Canada adopt a statement of their commitment to racial justice and equality.

1992: Goshen College alum Zenebe Abebe ('75) was hired as Vice President for Multicultural Development. In 1993, Abebe helped launch GC's annual Martin Luther King Jr. Study Day. In 1994, Abebe was called to be the first African American to serve as faculty member in the School of Social Work.

1993: Stanley Green called to be president of Mennonite Board of Missions. In 2001 he is called to be president of Mennonite World Conference.

1994: John Powell returns to employment at MBM as a consultant for Evangelism and Church Development.

1997: Dwight McFadden, Jr., begins service as the first African American Mennonite moderator in the (old) Mennonite Church.


2000: Horace McMillon begins as pastor at Community Mennonite Church in Chicago, Ill.

2001: B. Elaine Bryant, pastor at Englewood Mennonite Church in Chicago, Ill., elected as a member of the Mennonite Church USA Board of Directors. In 2005, she is called to be the first African American to serve as executive secretary of Mennonite Women's Organizations.


2009: Glen Guyton joins Mennonite Church USA staff as director of intercultural relations.

2018: Glen Guyton installed as the first African American moderator from across the church, sometimes with white allies, to explore the ways that power, privilege, and whiteness have shaped all of the church's interactions with the broader community. He was ordained as a prison chaplain by the Ohio Mennonite Conference in 1968.

2019: Shannon Dycus began as dean of the school of education at Eastern Mennonite University. She is the first African American dean at the university.