

## African American Leaders in the PC(USA)

# Benjamin Johnson Anderson



Benjamin Johnson Anderson was born on December 17, 1918, in Birmingham, Alabama. He learned early in his youth that a career in ministry was possible by watching his grandfather serve as pastor of 16th Street Baptist Church, one of the largest African American congregations in the South. Benjamin attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, where he served as president of his senior class, was a member of student council, and was the recipient of the Anna Courtney Archer prize for being the "Ideal Moorehouse Man." After graduating in 1939, he enrolled at Andover Newton Theological Seminary in Massachusetts, graduating in 1942, and Boston University, graduating in 1943. That same year, Benjamin was ordained by the Presbytery of Boston. He remained in the city for his first posting to Gloucester Presbyterian Church. On August 3, 1945, Benjamin married Louise Gaillard, a Spelman College graduate. A year after they were wed, the Andersons were appointed as missionaries to China by the Board of Foreign Missions. Louise gave birth to the first of their two daughters while stationed overseas. However, their time in China was short-lived, as Benjamin answered a call to serve back home only two years later.

He was installed as pastor of Witherspoon Presbyterian Church in Princeton, New Jersey, in 1948, where he led the charge to racially integrate his congregation and was appointed president of Princeton's Pastor Association. Outside of the church, Benjamin poured his heart into the community of Princeton. Passionate about equal housing opportunity, he spearheaded efforts to build Princeton's first integrated housing project. A supporter of the labor movement, Benjamin assisted Princetonian restaurant and hotel workers in their fight to unionize.

In 1964, Benjamin made history as the first African American chaplain at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. He held this position for three years before moving to Philadelphia to serve as the Executive Director at the West Philadelphia Interchurch Community Ministry in 1967. Benjamin resumed his place behind the pulpit two years later, accepting a call at Richardson Memorial Church in Philadelphia and serving as president of the local chapter of Black Presbyterians United. He became moderator of the Presbytery of Philadelphia in 1972.



The Rev. and Mrs. B. J. Anderson receive their commissions as missionaries to China.

In 1978, Benjamin transferred to Belle-Terrace Presbyterian Church in Augusta, Georgia, a predominantly Black congregation, where he took up the duty of Stated Supply. Because of his influence in this role, the congregation's membership increased and they began to meet their financial obligations to creditors and the Georgia Presbytery. A year later, Belle-Terrace happily installed him as pastor. Benjamin's time at Belle-Terrace helped to revolutionize the church: They were able to triple their annual budget, complete expensive renovations including paving the parking lot and installing new carpets, and pay off their debt on the land. After a career that spanned over 40 years, serving at all levels of the church, both at home and abroad, Rev. Benjamin Johnson Anderson retired from ministry in 1985.



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