

Selected Events in the Life of Curtis West Harris

1945

- Student at Virginia Union University in Richmond, VA

1946

- **February 20:** Married Ruth Jones of Hopewell, VA

1950

- Elected president of the Hopewell chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

1954

- Served as president of the Carter G. Woodson School Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in Hopewell; Dr. Harris and the association were involved in recruiting Black teachers for Woodson

1956

- **July 13:** Licensed as a minister at Union Baptist Church, Hopewell, VA by Dr. G. W. King, Pastor
- Became Worshipful Master of Shiloh Masonic Lodge #33 (Prince Hall Affiliated) in Hopewell
- Became a member of the Grand United Order of Moses, Inc. - Hopewell No. 674; later elected president

1959

- **April 15:** Ordained as a minister at Union Baptist Church, Hopewell, VA by Dr. G. W. King, Pastor
- Called to pastor at First Baptist Church, Bermuda Hundred in Chesterfield, VA

1960

- Resigned as a janitor at Allied Chemical in Hopewell to pursue his career in the gospel ministry
- Organized the Hopewell Improvement Association, an affiliate of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and was elected vice president
- Arrested along with 75 others and sentenced to 60 days in jail for staging a sit-in at the segregated Georges' Drugstore in Hopewell---the charge was trespassing; Dr. Harris was arrested 13 times for civil disobedience
- Led a protest against the segregated swimming pool and cemetery in Hopewell---the swimming pool was closed and later filled in and cemented

1961

- Became a member of the National Board of SCLC while Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was president; and accepted Dr. King's nonviolent approach to fight racial and social injustice with the use passive resistance
- Cited for contempt by the Boatwright Committee of the Virginia General Assembly for not revealing the names of other SCLC members nor responding to the questions asked by the committee
- Called to pastor at the Union Baptist Church in Hopewell, VA and the Gilfield Baptist Church in Ivor, VA

1962

- **March 29:** Dr. King along with more than 100 Virginia ministers and laymen accompanied Dr. Harris to his contempt trial in Hopewell

1963

- Elected president of the Virginia State Unit of SCLC, and served until 1998
- Became Worthy Patron in the Lily of the Valley Chapter #44 of the Order of Eastern Star

(Prince Hall Affiliated) in Hopewell

- Led a march against discrimination and was arrested in Danville, VA---the charge was inciting people to riot
- **Summer:** Dr. Harris' two sons, Curtis, Jr. and Kenneth, integrated Hopewell City Public Schools as the first Black students to attend Hopewell High School
- **August 28:** Marched with Dr. King in the March on Washington and witnessed the delivery of the "I Have A Dream" speech that inspired the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act--- and was accompanied by his sons, Curtis, Jr. and Kenneth
- **September 24 - 27:** As president of the VA State Unit of SCLC, hosted the Seventh Annual SCLC Conference at Virginia Union University in Richmond, VA

1964

- **May 10:** Announced his candidacy for a seat on the Hopewell City Council
- Became the director of the Virginia Council on Human Relations

1965

- **March 7 - 25:** Marched with Dr. King from Selma to Montgomery (a 54 mile trek) in support of the passing of the 1965 Voting Rights Act; acted as a human shield for Dr. King during the march
- **July 2 - 3:** The VA State Unit of SCLC hosted its first annual convention in Petersburg, VA with Dr. King as the keynote speaker

1966

- **August:** A confrontation with the Ku Klux Klan on the steps of Hopewell's city hall during a peaceful demonstration led by Rev. Harris to prevent the building of a landfill in the Black community

1967

- Cross erected in Rev. Harris' yard, but it did not burn
- A bottle bomb thrown through the picture window of Dr. Harris' home, and through the window of his restaurant, Harris' Snack Bar---neither bomb exploded
- Sent a telegram to Gov. Mills E. Godwin requesting protection after three terrorist attacks on his home

1968

- Assisted with the coordination of the Poor People's Campaign in Washington D.C. as a means of uniting people who have a common plight, regardless of race
- Promoted a self-help program, with the support of SCLC, in the Wye area of Waverly, VA; the Wye was an impoverished Black area with no water, no gas, no indoor toilets, makeshift electrical lines, and many illiterate residents
- Selected to serve on the Virginia Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights which addressed the federal role in the desegregation of public schools
- **April 4:** Dr. King assassinated in Memphis, TN
- **April 9:** Attended Dr. King's funeral in Atlanta, GA

1969

- Testified before a Congressional Committee on Hunger in Virginia
- Arrested after being beaten in Suffolk, VA during a protest demonstration
- Resigned as pastor of First Baptist Church, Bermuda Hundred in Chesterfield, VA after 10 years of service
- President of the Hopewell Ministerial Association

1971

- *Outstanding Citizenship Award* (Virginia Council on Social Welfare)
- *Citizen of the Year Award* (Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Delta Omega Chapter)
- *Outstanding Services and Deeds to Mankind* (Gilfield Baptist Church, Ivor, VA)

- *Outstanding Services Rendered* (Union Baptist Church, Hopewell, VA)
- *Man of the Year Award* (National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women, Petersburg, VA Chapter)

1972

- Awarded an *Honorary Doctor of Divinity* degree from the Virginia University of Lynchburg, Lynchburg, VA

1978

- *Dedicated Service Award* (President, Board of Visitors, and Faculty of Virginia State University)
- Parade Marshall for the Hopewell Christmas parade

1979

- Reorganized the Virginia State Unit of the SCLC
- **August 14 - 17:** Hosted the 22nd National SCLC Convention at New Calvary Baptist Church in Norfolk, VA

1981

- *Rosa Parks Award* (SCLC, National Board)
- *Inspirational Award* (SCLC, Virginia State Unit)
- A member of the board of directors for The Community Action Program for Reading, Inc. in Hopewell, VA funded by Reading is Fundamental (RIF), Inc., a national non-profit organization designed to motivate students to read by making inexpensive books available to children

1982

- *Centennial Community Recognition Award* (SCLC, Virginia State Unit)
- *Certificate of Appreciation* (Floyd E. Kellam High School, Virginia Beach, VA)
- *Community Spirit Award* (Tabernacle Baptist Church, Petersburg, VA)
- *Citizen of the Year* (Petersburg Consistory #144, 32 "833" Masons)

1983

- *Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Service Award* (SCLC, Virginia State Unit)
- *Alumni Award* (Carter G. Woodson High School Alumni, Hopewell, VA)
- Forced Hopewell to replace its longstanding at-large system for electing city council members with a ward system
- Awarded an *Honorary Doctor of Law* degree from the Virginia University of Lynchburg, Lynchburg, VA

1984

- *Recognition of Excellence* (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development)
- *Majestic Leader Award* (The Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention, Landover, MD)

1986

- Elected to the Hopewell City Council after seven attempts due to the establishment of a ward system

1987

- Led a march in Colonial Heights, VA against discrimination

1989

- *Outstanding Achievement Award* (Citizens of Hopewell)

1990

- Marched on Ft. Lee against discriminatory practices in employment
- *Support of Children Award* (Hopewell School Board)
- **August 6:** As president of the Virginia State Unit of SCLC hosted the 33rd National SCLC Convention in Richmond, VA

1992

- *Unmatched Determination Award* (SCLC, National Board)

- *Martin Luther King, Jr. Legacy Award* (Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity)
- *Appreciation Award* (SCLC, Emporia/Greenville Chapter)

1994

- Elected vice mayor of Hopewell
- Resigned as pastor of Gilfield Baptist Church, Ivor, VA after 33 years of service

1995

- *Certificate of Service* (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights)
- *Lifetime Service to Fellowmen Award* (Surry County Citizens Forum)

1996

- Filed complaint with the TRADOC, the command center for Ft. Lee, and identified the discrimination as an example of "what's going on in the United States Army" across the nation

1998

- **July 7:** Sworn in as the first Black mayor of the City of Hopewell, VA
- *The "Real Dream" Award* (Martin Luther King, Jr. Family Life Institute)
- Resigned as president of the Virginia State Unit of SCLC

2000

- **February 2:** *American Century Award* (The Washington Times Foundation)
- **April:** Released the report, *Unequal Justice: African Americans in the Virginia Criminal Justice System*, as a member of the Virginia Advisory Committee to the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights

2001

- Selected to be one of Dominion's *Strong Men & Women: Excellence in Leadership*

2002

- Commissioned Paul DiPasquale to work with the Martin Luther King Foundation of Hopewell, VA to design and produce a bronze monument in honor of Dr. King's historic civil rights visit to the Hopewell courthouse on March 29, 1962

2003

- **February 27:** Interviewed by Brian Ward for the University of Florida Oral History Program for the Southern Regional Council Project
- **March 20:** Interviewed by Media Consultants Global, Inc. of Richmond to be included in the Voices of Freedom, the videotaped oral histories of leaders in the Civil Rights Movement in VA; the oral histories are a part of the Virginia Commonwealth University Digital Library

2004

- **April:** Ceremony to unveil the completed bronze statue erected to Dr. King in Ashford Plaza in front of the courthouse in downtown Hopewell; Martin Luther King III attended the ceremony
- **July 10:** Honored on his 80th birthday at the Marriott in Richmond during which the superintendent of Hopewell Public Schools announced that the Carter G. Woodson Middle School Library would be dedicated to and named for Dr. Harris

2005

- Elected National Vice President of the National SCLC
- **March:** Attended the 40th anniversary celebration of the 1965 Selma to Montgomery March in Alabama

2006

- Secured a \$3000 grant from the R.G. Reynolds Foundation to support a National SCLC membership drive

2007

- **February 20:** *Public Life Unveiled*, a program sponsored by Hopewell Public Schools, to reveal

a showcase in the Curtis W. Harris, Sr. Library in Carter G. Woodson Middle School; the showcase highlighted the public life of Rev. Harris

- Marched against a proposed ethanol factory being built in Hopewell, VA; protest was supported by the National SCLC with the presence of its president, Charles K. Steele, Jr.
- **December 16:** Retired as pastor of Union Baptist Church after 46 years of service; Gov. Timothy Kaine was keynote speaker for the retirement banquet, and Rev. Stephen Hewlett officiated the service where Rev. Harris delivered his final sermon

2008

- **April 25 & 26:** Attended the *Civil Rights, Civil Duties in the Pursuit of Family, Happiness & Peace Conference and Prayer Breakfast* at Howard University in Washington D.C.

2009

- **May:** The C. W. Harris Empowerment Center (CWHEC), a non-profit organization, was established to spread the love of God and to meet human need through a series of free workshops on various topics
- **July 25:** CWHEC hosted an empowerment workshop entitled *Know Your Rights on the Job* with Herbert Brown, director of the Norfolk office of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, as expert guest
- **September 11:** The Dr. Curtis W. Harris Solidarity Lunch opens the 19th annual *Southeast Community Day Parade and Festival* in Newport News, VA; festivities were organized and implemented by Andrew Shannon
- **September 19:** CWHEC hosted an empowerment workshop entitled *Know Your Rights-Part II* with Rudy McCullom, a Richmond attorney, as expert guest
- **November 7:** CWHEC hosted an empowerment workshop for teenagers entitled *Why Go To College* with an expert panel that included Karen D. Harris, Lavern Myrick-Simms, and Rex Patterson

2010

- **May 4:** Reelected to the Hopewell City Council after 24 years in office

2011

- **January 22:** Lauded during the *Unity Ride and Rally*, organized by Andrew Shannon, that began in Newport News, VA and concluded in Hopewell
- **January 21 & 22:** Virginia General Assembly passed a resolution commending Rev. Harris as one Virginia's most celebrated religious, social, civic, and political leaders
- **May 22:** Ruth Jones Harris, Rev. Harris' wife, passed away after 65 years of marriage
- **July 23:** *Dr. Curtis W. Harris and Ruth Jones Harris Day: Feeding 5000 and Community Celebration* organized by Andrew Shannon honored Dr. Harris and his late wife, Ruth
- **September:** Henry McCoy of Petersburg, James Moore of Hopewell and Iris Walker of Hopewell added to the CWHEC Board of Directors; Dr. Harris remains president of the non-profit organization and Joanne Lucas became secretary-treasurer

2012

- **January 19:** Attended the 2012 *Strong Black Men/Women* festivities at the Marriott in Richmond
- **January 24:** Attended President Obama's State of the Union Address in Washington D.C. on an invitation from Senator Mark Warner (D-VA)
- **February 4:** CWHEC hosted an empowerment workshop entitled *Felony Disfranchisement: Regaining the Right to Vote* with Rick Newman, the Hopewell Commonwealth's Attorney, and Theodore Hawkins, a convicted felon who regained his voting rights, as expert guests
- **February 25 & 26:** Honored at Black History Month programs in Petersburg and Dinwiddie, VA
- **March 1:** Retired from the Hopewell City Council after 26 years of service

- **July 1:** Celebrated his 88th birthday in the home of his son/daughter-in-law, Kenneth/Renate, with family and friends
- **July 27:** Honored by the Bethany Baptist Association and Allied Bodies at Good Shepherd Baptist Church in Petersburg, VA for 45 years of service to the organization in the roles of secretary, Vice Moderator, Moderator, and Executive Director
- **September:** Dr. Harris dissolves, CWHEC, his non-profit organization

2013

- **January 30:** Attended the 2013 *Strong Men and Women in Virginia History* festivities at the Marriott in Richmond accompanied by Mrs. Iris Walker, a family friend
- **May 17:** Attended the graduation of his daughter, Joanne, who received her PhD from Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, VA
- **May 21:** Attended the May Day Assembly at Hopewell High School to observe the giving of the 2013 Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Foundation, Inc. Scholarship
- **July 1:** Celebrated his 89th birthday with family and friends
- **July 6:** Attended the *Wyche, Jones, Tharpe Family Reunion* (Ruth's family) in Hopewell, VA
- **August 28:** Attended the *Let Freedom Ring Ceremony* on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the *1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom* accompanied by his son, Michael, and his grandsons, Bodie and Loc
- **November 17:** Attended the celebration of the *150th Anniversary of the Gilfield Baptist Church* in Ivor, VA where he pastored for 33 years (1961 to 1994); he was accompanied by his daughter, Joanne

2014

- **January 2:** The papers and other historical materials of Curtis and Ruth Harris were donated to the Earl Gregg Swem Library at The College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, VA by their children
- **February 5:** Attended the 2014 *Strong Men and Women in Virginia History* festivities at the Marriott in Richmond accompanied by Mrs. Iris Walker, a family friend
- **February 6-13:** Was given a Facebook tribute by his son, Michael, in a series entitled: "DR. CURTIS W. HARRIS, SR.: MY Father, MY Hero, MY Friend," in celebration of Black History Month
- **February 11:** The Hopewell City Council voted to rename Terminal Street, Rev. C. W. Harris Street; for 57 years, Curtis and Ruth Harris lived at 209 Terminal Street, a street in Hopewell which now bears his name; the council also voted to rename Booker Street (which intersects Terminal), Ruth Harris Way in honor of Curtis' late wife, Ruth
- **June 15:** The *Street Sign Ceremony* hosted by the Hopewell City Council was held at Union Baptist Church to pay tribute to Rev. Dr. Curtis W. Harris and his late wife, Dr. Ruth J. Harris; Herbert Bragg, Hopewell's Director of Intergovernmental and Public Affairs was master of ceremony, music was rendered by the Harris Connection Singers and statements were made by Dr. Anthony Nutt, Union Baptist pastor, Mayor Michael Bujakowski, Vice Mayor Jasmine Guy, City Manager Michael Haley, Councilor Brenda Pelham, Councilor Jackie Shonak, State Senator Henry Marsh and Dr. Joanne Lucas, Rev. Harris' daughter; letters were read from Governor Terry McAuliffe, U.S. Senator Mark Warner and U.S. Senator Timothy Kaine; and the ceremony concluded with unveiling the new street signs followed by refreshments in the church fellowship hall
- **July 1:** Celebrated his 90th birthday with family and friends

2015

- **January 19:** Spoke at Brighter Living Assisted Living where he is a resident for the celebration of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day; shared memories of the 50 mile march from Selma to Montgomery for voting rights in 1965

- **March 4:** Highlighted at the Radio One Incorporated *Virginia Legends Luncheon* held in the Virginia War Memorial located at 621 S. Belvidere Street, Richmond, VA 23220 to educate students and the community about Dr. Harris' work of paving the way for a better education system, justice system and civil rights for all people.
- **June 20:** The Harris Connection hosted a *Father's Day Celebration* at the Hampton Inn in Hopewell, VA with food catered by Mr. B's; the celebration paid tribute to Dr. Harris and all of the daddies in the family
- **July 1:** Celebrated his 91st birthday with family and friends

2016

- **January 20:** Presented the *Lifetime Leadership Award* by the Children's Home of Virginia Baptist, Inc.
- **July 1:** Celebrated his 92nd birthday with family and friends
- **August 13:** Attended the *Wyche, Jones, Tharpe "Throw Back Picnic"* (Ruth's Family) at Hadad's Lake in Henrico, VA
- **November 24:** Celebrated Thanksgiving with his family at The Crossings at Ironbridge in Chester, VA where he is a resident; the festive occasion was planned and implemented by his grandchildren, Dee and Crystal

2017

- **February 25:** Attended "*It's A Family Affair*" at Union Baptist Church in celebration of Black History Month the church's 100th Anniversary, and the Flames of Glory reunited to render the music
- **December 10:** Dr. Harris, 93, was granted his wings at approximately 11:10 p.m. in his room at The Crossings at Ironbridge in Chester, VA
- **December 16:** Dr. Harris laid in repose at Carter G. Woodson Middle School in Hopewell, in front of the library named for him, from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- **December 18:** Dr. Harris' life was honored in a homegoing service at First Baptist Church, Hopewell; Chaplain (COL) James Palmer, Jr. officiated and delivered a moving eulogy; music was rendered by the Union Baptist Church Choir, Hopewell; his daughter, Mrs. Karen Bradford, sang a spectacular rendition of Dr. Harris' favorite Negro spiritual, "If I Can Help Somebody;" acknowledgements were expressed by Rev. W. Darrell Boggs, Mr. Jerrail Brown, Bishop Tyrone Harper, Mrs. Jackie Shornak, Senator Rosalyn Dance, Rev. William Keen, Rev. Dr. Ruby Moore, Lt. Col. R. Michelle Pritchett (daughter), and Dr. Joanne Lucas (daughter); the video tribute, "Curtis Harris: A Man About Town" was shared; to conclude the homegoing, Dr. Harris' casket was gently lifted onto a horse-driven, uncovered hearse; his funeral procession made a trek down Route 10 in Hopewell to 209 Rev. C. W. Harris Street where Dr. Harris resided for more than 60 years; Dr. Harris' final resting place is at Appomattox Cemetery on 703 N. 21st Avenue in Hopewell

If I can help somebody as I pass along, then my living shall not be in vain.