

Black History Month Profile

Rosa J Young

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Dr. Rosa J Young 1890-1971

Rosa J. Young, the first African-American woman to receive a doctorate from the Concordia University System, is often referred to as “the mother of Black Lutheranism.” Born in the tiny farm community of Rosebud, Alabama in 1890, Rosa was exceptionally bright and excelled in school. After sixth grade, her parents sent her to Payne University, a school that had recently been created by the African Methodist Episcopal

Church to serve the black community. There, she received her teaching certificate and passed the state exams.

She then taught at various African-American schools across Alabama as a traveling teacher. In 1912, she returned to Rosebud. At the time, African American children who were not allowed to attend public schools. With the encouragement of both blacks and whites, Rosa Young opened a school to provide basic education and religious instruction to the African-American children of her community. The Rosebud Literary and Industrial School in the town of Rosebud became the first Lutheran parochial school in Alabama. The Rosebud Literary and Industrial School started with Ms. Young and seven students its first year, but by the start of the third year, it had grown to 215 students, and several additional teachers.

Funds were in short supply to keep the thriving school open. Dr. Young wrote to Booker T. Washington to ask for help. He replied that he had no funds to send her, but for her to contact the Lutheran Church (Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod) headquartered in St. Louis, which she did. The Lutherans were already involved in ministry to the African-American community, having started missions and parochial schools in Arkansas, North Carolina, and Louisiana. They were very interested in the work Young had done and agreed to take over the school. They appointed Nils Bakke as supervisor, and appointing Rosa Young as





an adviser and teacher. The Lutherans were able to infuse much needed financial support as well as new desks, new textbooks and other materials needed to make the school a center of quality education. Word of the school's success attracted other communities to inquire about starting churches and schools in their areas. Young and Baake visited these communities and helped start 20 churches and 30 Lutheran schools in that area of Alabama.

With additional help from the LCMS, Young founded the Alabama Lutheran Academy, now Concordia College at Selma, Alabama, to train black missionaries and teachers. She served on its faculty from 1946 to 1961. That year, she was awarded an honorary doctorate (LL.D.) from Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Illinois.

