**Ernestine Martin Benning (1928-2016)**



Ernestine Martin Benning was a longtime employee of Antioch College, and for several decades served as the volunteer secretary and administrative assistant of Central Chapel AME Church, Yellow Springs.  Born in the Rhodes Chapel Community of Greenville, Kentucky, Ernestine Martin was the second of seventeen children born to Herbert Martin and Beatrice Tutt Martin.  She was raised on a farm, Martin Acres, Inc that is still owned by her siblings, and in her youth joined the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Rhodes Chapel where she sang in the choir and taught youth Sunday school.  She was a 1947 graduate of Drakesboro High School, and continued her education at Tennessee State University, in Nashville, Tennessee, studying Business Administration. In Nashvilleshe was employed as a waitress and also worked in a tomato packing plant.

Ernestine Martin moved to Ohio in 1953 and worked at several jobs before finding work as a secretary at Wilberforce University. In November of 1954, she began work at Antioch College as a chemistry stockroom clerk, but was soon hired to fill a secretary position for James Corwin who was Dean of Science at Antioch College. Ernestine’s thirst for learning and competency were her motivation for attending many work related training and related classes. Being abreast of current information and procedures also insured her tenure at Antioch. Ernestine’s people skills and caring attitude enabled her to have positive interactions with college administrators, faculty, and students. She retired in 1992 as an administrative assistant in the Master’s program.

In the early 1950s Ernestine Martin met Charles W. Benning, a native of Yellow Springs, who was employed at Wright Patterson Air Force Base. They were soon married and the couple joined Central Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) in 1956 during Dr. Gilbert H. Jones ministry of the church. After the church secretary, Rachel Hull Dawson became ill, Ernestine voluntarily assumed the part-time church secretary duties and later became Administrative Assistant for the church. In this capacity she did whatever needed to be done, had a no nonsense attitude and was always prompt. Family and church members called her our “Earth Angel” because she was present where and whenever there is a need.

During her tenure, Ernestine mentored 22 young ministers many of whom were first-time appointments to lead Central Chapel.  During their assignments, in many respects, she really was their supervisor. She helped newly assigned ministers with church financial matters, supporting management of congregational boards and coordinated secretarial support for staff meetings. Ernestine contacted and scheduled reputable contractors once maintenance needs had been identified. She was particularly helpful to Rev. H. Mason Brown (1969-1974) whose management skills served the church very well as the new Central Chapel Church was being constructed in the early 1970. During the 50th Anniversary Celebration for Ernestine in 2006, former pastor (1986-1991) Rev. John S. Gaitawe, said, “Ernestine is the best secretary he has had during his pastoral years.” Ernestine during the planning and construction of the Central Chapel Education and Family Life Center, a fellowship hall addition to the church that was built during the tenure of Rev. John E. Freeman (1992-2007).

During Rev. John Freeman’s 15 years as pastor of Central Chapel, the Martin-Benning and Freeman families developed a special relationship. Pastor John sought her advice regarding difficult church matters because Ernestine was straightforward. Ernestine told him she would help a good pastor to realize his maximum potential. She always spoke to him as a parent. Indeed, Rev. Freeman officiated funeral services for her deceased Martin family members and the Freeman family attended one of the Martin Family Reunions.

Ernestine Martin Benning passed away on June 1, 2016 after a long illness. She was survived by her husband of 62 years, Charles Benning, sons Vernon W. Hines, III and Danny Benning, sisters and brother: Unita, Naomi, Barbara, Howitt and Shirley. She was preceded in death by her son Ronald “Butch” Benning.

*Sources: Alyce Earl-Jenkins. “Ernestine Martin-Benning,” Yellow Springs News, June 2, 2016; “Homegoing Celebration, Earnestine Martin Benning”*