



# We Are Called

## The Campaign for Yale Divinity School

### Black Church Studies

Encompassing diverse sites of resilience, hope, and empowerment, the Black Church has for centuries played a vital role in the social and spiritual life of the United States. Today, in the face of ongoing challenges to racial equality and justice, the evolving Black Church remains central to the strength of the African American experience, providing safe spaces for worship, support, and activism.

As part of ongoing efforts to expand service to all churches within an ecumenical framework—and to cultivate a more inclusive environment at Yale Divinity School—we established a Certificate in Black Church Studies in 2017. This program supports inquiry and engagement with African American churches and other Christian communities throughout the African Diaspora. Offering opportunities for critical reflection and practice among emerging and existing leaders in the Black Church and the broader community, the program is ideal for students who wish to respond to the needs of marginalized communities and to serve in historically Black congregations.

Yale Divinity School aims to be a beacon for this profound commitment and work. With foundational philanthropic gifts, YDS will strive to become the preeminent center for Black Church Studies in the United States. The goal is to raise gifts totaling \$3 million, an endowment for Black Church Studies that will fund the faculty, staff, and programming



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“The Black Church is rooted in the tradition of countercultural prophetic witness. This kind of witness is more necessary than ever, given the increasing rise of American Christian nationalism and its pernicious tentacles that threaten every sphere of society. Your investment in the Black Church Studies Certificate Program at YDS will enable students to focus on those Black Church traditions that have helped create a more just society, as they also creatively reimagine how to utilize those resources today, within and beyond the Black Church.”

- The Rev. Joanne Browne Jennings, Director of Black Church Studies

necessary to create a leading program. With your help, we know we can realize our ambitions and callings for humanity.



Black Church Studies Graduation Celebration, 2024

Black Church Studies at YDS is led by Rev. Joanne Browne Jennings, lecturer in clinical pastoral education. A native of Pembroke, Bermuda, Rev. Jennings is a widely educated and accomplished scholar with degrees in law, social work, and divinity. Among her endeavors, Rev. Jennings has developed a unique counseling practice with a special focus on pastors. She has worked with a variety of organizations and educational institutions, including Duke Divinity School. She has also preached, taught, and facilitated in Bermuda, the West Indies, Canada, and South Africa.

Rev. Jennings' approach to Black Church Studies at YDS is expansive and student-centered: "Historically, the Black church has always married faith and social justice. But the Black Church has never been a monolithic experience: the people and practices have always been diverse and decentralized. So, our students need exposure and opportunity beyond the four walls of any institution. Whatever denomination they're going to be in, they need to really get out there to imagine what the future looks like, what the church must become."

Black Church Studies at YDS is part of a competitive landscape in which the history and funding for programs at peers like Emory, Duke, and Harvard surpass our own. But we have keen interest among YDS faculty to move forward, and this work aligns with our historic commitments to theological education, the preparation of religious leaders, and social justice.

With successful fundraising, Black Church Studies at YDS may include the following:

- More financial support for the students pursuing the Black Church Studies Certificate, many of whom currently work while attending YDS. Not working would allow students more time for active learning, the process of discernment, and deeper connection to Black Church communities, fellow students, and faculty.
- Creation of regular pilgrimages, bridge programs, and retreats for certificate students and friends. Programming would include local dialogues and international experiences across the African diaspora. Exploring differences and finding commonplaces across the divides are crucial to understanding—and are often best done by being present with and learning from other cultures and people. Social justice concerns, such as the experiences of immigrants and those facing homelessness and food insecurity, must be understood in context.
- An enhanced office structure and administrative support. This would allow BCS at YDS to (1) better assist students, (2) pursue additional collaborative opportunities in the larger Yale and New Haven communities, and (3) promote and leverage the strength of Black Church Studies, as well as the unprecedented presence of nine full-time Black professors on the YDS faculty.

Endowments for key Black Church Studies programs and initiatives at YDS will provide sustainable and enduring support, supplying the necessary funds for leadership, teaching, research, and travel activities year after year.

These opportunities, in addition to the existing colloquium and supervised ministry, are crucial to deeper understanding and to moving Black Church Studies forward. Some of these programs have been piloted, but they do not currently have sustainable sources of funding.



2022 YDS Parks-King Lecture: “From Where We Stand: Envisioning the Future of Black Theology” with panelists (l-r) **Willie James Jennings**, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Systematic Theology and Africana Studies; **Alisha Lola Jones** '07 M.Div., Associate Professor in the Faculty of Music, University of Cambridge; **Keri Day** '04 M.A.R., Elmer G. Homrighausen Professor of Constructive Theology and African American Religion, Princeton Theological Seminary; and **Jeremy L. Williams** '16 M.Div., Assistant Professor of New Testament, Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University



### To Learn More

*For Humanity* is Yale’s most ambitious fundraising campaign yet, guided by a mission to improve the world for future generations.

For more information about how you can support the Black Church Studies Program at Yale Divinity School, please contact:

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