

WHO WAS VAL MURPHY?

In 1988, APCE established a scholarship in honor of E. Valeria Murphy, an African American educator from Baltimore and Chicago. It remains the only named scholarship APCE promotes and supports.

You might ask, “Why Val Murphy?”

Edrena Valeria Murphy (1902-1987) was born in New Orleans, LA and raised by her grandmother in Brazil, IN after the death of her mother when she was thirteen months old. Murphy attended public schools there before heading to DePauw University in Greencastle, IN for her college education. She majored in Latin and religious education and was a founding member of the Religious Education club. When she graduated in 1926, she was one of the first Black alumnae of the school. Some accounts say Murphy immediately sought employment in church work without success. She secured teaching appointments at two HBCUs: Roger Williams University in Nashville, TN and the Presbyterian-affiliated Swift Memorial College in Rogersville, TN.

In 1934, Murphy moved to Baltimore, MD, where she taught at the Baltimore Junior College meeting in Douglass High School and directed the East Baltimore Cooperative Nursery School. Murphy was also involved in the Presbytery of Baltimore’s efforts to organize a congregation in the Cherry Hill neighborhood. In 1947, Casper Glenn became the founding pastor of Cherry Hill Community Presbyterian Church, with Murphy serving as Director of Christian Education. She was the first professionally trained educator to serve on the staff of a Black parish in the United Presbyterian Church.

In 1963, Chicago beckoned, and Murphy became Director of Christian Education at Grace Presbyterian Church (which merged into Sixth-Grace Presbyterian Church in 1969). She officially retired as a professional Christian educator in 1974 in her early seventies but continued to attend local Christian education conferences and never missed the Association of Partners in Christian Education (APCE) Annual Events. She served on the Governing Cabinet of APCE and was in the first class of APCE Life Members in 1978.

In addition to the scholarship program, APCE has named an offering in her honor – the Val Murphy Offering – established in 1987, after her death. Both the E. Val Murphy Scholarship Program and the Val Murphy Offering continue to this day to help fund attendance at the APCE Annual Event.

During her lifetime, Murphy worked as an educator, church worker, community organizer, and advocate for Christian education. Her passion for teaching and sharing the faith impacted many lives – both in the Black communities she served daily and in national Christian Education circles more generally. She was a pioneer and trailblazer.

***DePauw University and the Presbyterian Historical Society contributed to this article.