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Anacostia Community Museum's 25th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Program Features the First Woman AME Bishop

The Vocal Jazz Ensemble Afro Blue Will Perform

The Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum presents Vashti Murphy McKenzie, the first female bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, as the featured speaker for the museum's 25th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Program Thursday, Jan. 21, at 7 p.m. Bishop McKenzie will address the topic "Defining Moments: Maximizing Life's Milestones" at Baird Auditorium in the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History at 10th Street and Constitution Avenue N.W.

The event includes a performance by Afro Blue, Howard University's premier vocal jazz ensemble. Admission is free, but seating is limited. To obtain more information or make reservations, the public may e-mail acmrsvp@si.edu or call (202) 633-4875.

"We annually feature an individual whose life or work is an exemplar of Dr. King's philosophy," said Camille Giraud Akeju, director of the Anacostia Community Museum. "Like King, Bishop McKenzie broke down barriers. But in achieving this position in what has been traditionally the province of men in the hallowed halls of the AME Church, she did so not because of her gender but through the content of her character and the significance of her work."

McKenzie is the 117th elected and consecrated bishop of the AME Church. Her historic election in 2000 represents the first time in the more than 200-year history of the AME Church that a woman has obtained this level of office. In 2004, she again made history by becoming the first woman president of the Council of Bishops, the titular head of the denomination; she was the highest-ranking woman in the predominately black Methodist denominations. She also became the first woman to serve as chair of the General Conference Commission of the AME Church, which plans and orchestrates the denomination's worldwide quadrennial conference.

President Barack Obama appointed McKenzie to the Advisory Council of the White House Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. The bishop has been recognized by *Ebony Magazine* as among the “Top 150 Most Influential and Powerful Blacks in America.” She is also a member of the board of trustees at Payne Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, and the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta.

From 2000 to 2004, McKenzie was the chief Episcopal servant of the 18th Episcopal District in Southeast Africa, which is composed of Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana and Mozambique. Before becoming a bishop she was the pastor of the historic Payne Memorial AME Church in Baltimore for 10 years.

The author of four books on spiritual growth and leadership development for women, McKenzie holds a bachelor’s degree from the University of Maryland, College Park; a master of divinity degree from Howard University School of Divinity; and a doctor of ministry degree from United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. She also has received numerous honorary doctorates.

McKenzie is the granddaughter of Vashti Turley Murphy, one of the founders of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. Her great-grandfather, John H. Murphy, started the *Afro-American Newspaper* in 1892, and she is a former journalist and electronic broadcaster. The founding president and organizer of the Collective Banking Group of Baltimore, McKenzie is the National Chaplain for Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. and is a member of NAACP, the Links Inc. and the Coalition of 100 Black Women.

Voted 2009 “Best College Jazz Choir” by *DownBeat Magazine*, Afro Blue has performed with well-known musicians, including Geri Allen, Ron Carter, Jimmy Cobb, Nnenna Freelon, Billy Taylor and Marvin Hamlisch. The group was formed at Howard University in 2002 by Connaitre Miller and has been featured at many prestigious venues in the Washington, D.C., area and in Bermuda.

The program will be followed by a question-and-answer session. Two of McKenzie’s books and two of Afro Blue CDs will be available for sale and signing.

The Anacostia Community Museum was opened in southeast Washington in 1967 as the nation’s first federally funded neighborhood museum. Renamed in 2006, it has expanded its focus beyond African American culture to documenting, interpreting and collecting objects related to the impact of historical and contemporary social issues on communities. For more information, the public may call (202) 633-4820, (202) 633-1000 or (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Web site: anacostia.si.edu.

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Note to Editor: Images for publicity may be obtained by calling (202) 633-4876.