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A Legacy of Achievement: Scholarship Fund Encourages United Methodist Students

By David P. Atkins

The extraordinary life of Judge Leah B. McCartney continues to touch and inspire new generations through the Judge Leah B. McCartney Scholarship Fund. Created as a memorial by her husband, the late Reverend Victor A. McCartney, the scholarship fund currently provides two \$1,500 awards annually to aspiring undergraduate students. The Fund is administered by the [Missouri United Methodist Foundation](#).



Leah B. McCartney.

The scholarship is a particularly fitting tribute to one for whom education was of central importance and who achieved such educational distinction. Born Leah Brock in 1911 in Ellisville, Mississippi, she attended Sumner High School in St. Louis, Missouri. Leah subsequently enrolled in Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri, where she received her Bachelor of Science degree in education in 1938. After many years as a teacher, she enrolled in The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., graduating with an LLB degree in 1954.

In 1968, Mrs. McCartney became the first African-American woman to earn a law degree from The George Washington University School of Law. While working full-time, she graduated in three years with the highest grade point average in her third-year class.

Mrs. McCartney became the first female municipal judge of record in Missouri, a distinction for which the Missouri Senate commended her. While serving as municipal judge in Kinloch, Mrs. McCartney commuted between St. Louis and Tulsa, Oklahoma, where she taught law at the University of Tulsa. Of all her achievements, however, Mrs. McCartney was most proud of an award she received from the residents of Kinloch thanking her for the steps she took to improve their community while municipal judge.



Jon Gray,
McCartney Scholar.

Another milestone occurred in 1977 when Judge McCartney became the first African-American to serve on the Missouri Public Service Commission. At the time of her death in 1984, Judge McCartney was serving on the board of directors for the Missouri United Methodist Foundation.

Desiring to remember his wife Leah in perpetuity, Reverend McCartney established the scholarship fund in her name at the Missouri United Methodist Foundation on Memorial Day, 1989. The Foundation, with offices in Chesterfield, solicits applications from students annually.

Judge McCartney lived a life of accomplishment, service and faith. She epitomized those American ideals of life-long learning and perseverance that have built a great nation, and her pioneering spirit crossed barriers of gender and race at a pivotal time in our history. We join in giving thanks for her life and her legacy to the future.

LEAVE A LEGACY® wishes to thank the [Missouri United Methodist Foundation](#) for sharing this story.