

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Bishop Philip R. Cousin, Sr.

PERSON

Cousin, Philip Robert, 1933-

Alternative Names: Bishop Philip R. Cousin, Sr.; Reverend Philip R. Cousin;

Life Dates: March 26, 1933-

Place of Birth: Pittston, Pennsylvania, USA

Residence: Bolingbrook, IL

Occupations: Bishop;

Biographical Note

Bishop Philip Robert Cousin, Sr., was born on March 26, 1933, in Pittston, Pennsylvania, to Mary Lena (Johns) Cousin and Reverend Sylvester Alvin Cousin. He graduated from Roosevelt High School in West Palm Beach, Florida, and went on to receive his B.A. degree in philosophy and English from Central State University, in Wilberforce, Ohio, in 1953, his Master of Divinity degree from the Boston University School of Theology, in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1956, and his Doctor of Ministry degree as an MLK Fellow in black church studies from Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, in Rochester, New York, in 1975. He also studied at the Boston University School of Education (now Boston University Wheelock College of Education and Human Development) and the Educational Administration Program at the University of Texas at Austin.

In 1956, Cousin joined as pastor St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church in Danville, Virginia. In 1958, he was reassigned to Trinity AME Church in Norfolk, Virginia. He became president of Kittrell College, in Kittrell, North Carolina, in 1960, serving until 1965, when he became pastor of St. Joseph AME Church in Durham, North Carolina. In 1967, he established a curriculum for black church studies at Duke University Divinity School and began lecturing at Southeastern Theological Seminary, in Wake Forest, North Carolina, and at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He was consecrated the 96th bishop of the AME Church in 1976, serving the Ninth, Eleventh, First, and Fourth Episcopal Districts until his retirement, in 2008. In 1982, he was appointed first vice president of the National Council of Churches, becoming president the following year and serving until 1988, and reading the Protestant position paper at a 1987 meeting with Pope John Paul II. On November 4, 2008, he led the opening prayer for Barack Obama's presidential election victory speech, in Chicago, Illinois. He also has pastored Allen Temple AME Church in Riviera Beach, Florida.

Cousin has served as a second lieutenant, infantry (reserves), in the U.S. Armed Services; a delegate to the 1968 Democratic National Convention, in Chicago, Illinois; a trustee of Lincoln Hospital, in Durham, North Carolina; chairman of the Durham Human Relations Commission; a member of the Durham County Board of Social Services and of the Durham County Board of Education; and a member of the national board of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

Cousin has received honorary doctorates from Kittrell College and from Payne Theological Seminary, in Wilberforce, Ohio, among other institutions. He also has been the recipient of several honors and awards, including the Kellogg Fellowship in Junior College Administration and the Keeper of the Flame award. He has twice been named one of the “100 Most Influential Black Americans” by Ebony magazine.

Cousin and his wife, Margaret Joan (Grier) Cousin, live in Bolingbrook, Illinois. They have five sons: Philip, Jr., Steven, David, Michael, and Joseph, all of whom serve as ministers in the AME Church.

Bishop Philip Robert Cousin, Jr., was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on October 6, 2021.

Related Entries

Central State University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B.A.

Boston University School of Theology [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Master of Divinity

Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Doctor of Ministry

University of Texas at Austin [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Roosevelt Middle School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

St. Joseph AME Church [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1965 to 1976?]

Pastor

Allen Temple AME Church [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Pastor

St. Paul AME Church [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Pastor

Trinity AME Church [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from ? to ?]

Pastor

Kittrell College [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1960 to 1965]

President

Duke University Divinity School [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1967 to 1979]

Instructor

Southeastern Theological Seminary, Wake Forest University [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1967? to ?]

Lecturer

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1967? to ?]

Lecturer

African Methodist Episcopal Church [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1955 to ?]

Itinerant Elder

African Methodist Episcopal Church [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1976 to 2008]

Bishop

National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America
[EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1982 to 1983]

First Vice President

National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America
[EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1983 to 1988]

President

32 Degree Freemasonry [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Mason

Alpha Phi Alpha [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Member

Sigma Pi Phi [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Member

ROTC [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Second Lietenant

Democratic National Convention [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Delegate

Southern Christian Leadership Conference [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board Member

NAACP [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board Member

Edward Waters College [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Chairman

Garrett Evangelical Seminary [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Trustee