GEMS OF WISDOM

from Black Leaders of New Thought
Black leaders have been integral to the growth and development of the New Thought spiritual movement. Although the early organizations—Unity and Religious Science—were founded by white leaders, newer incarnations are largely the work of African-American ministers.

A single booklet cannot begin to name or honor them all. Black History Month is becoming a larger celebration each year among the branches of New Thought, and more leaders will be featured as awareness and gratitude for their work grows.

New Thought is based on ancient spiritual teachings that emphasize the divine within every person and the creative power of thought. Each minister or teacher tends to have a signature saying, a particular gem of wisdom for which they are remembered.

In this booklet, we have assembled some of those gems. Some are historical and others are from today’s thinkers and teachers. Many have overcome prejudice and setbacks to carry on their spiritual work. All have inspired the practical use of spiritual principles to bring about healings, financial restoration, deeper love, and better living for so many.

We honor them in Black History Month and every month.

Your Friends in Unity
Branches of New Thought

These are the primary New Thought organizations you will read about in this booklet, and there are others.

Unity, 1889
Founders: Charles and Myrtle Fillmore
Headquarters: Unity Village, Missouri
(near Kansas City)
Unity.org

Religious Science, 1927
Founder: Ernest Holmes
Headquarters: Golden, Colorado (near Denver)
Now called Centers for Spiritual Living
CSL.org

Universal Foundation for Better Living, 1974
Founder: Rev. Dr. Johnnie Coleman
Headquarters: Miami, Florida
UFBL.org

Unity Urban Ministerial School, 1979
Founder: Rev. Ruth Mosley
Headquarters: Detroit, Michigan
UUMS.org

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The Legacy of Johnnie Coleman

It Works If You Work It

By Rev. Charline Manuel
Rev. Dr. Johnnie Colemon arrived in a limousine. She walked into the Church of Today in Warren, Michigan, looking proud, self-assured, elegant, and confident.

She was to be our guest speaker that Sunday, and I thought, “Whoever this lady is, she must have an awesome message.”

Nothing prepared me for the soul-stirring, uplifting, mind-expanding message she delivered with authority. I recognized authority. On that day, I heard it, I saw it, I felt it. Rev. Dr. Johnnie Colemon spoke as one having authority.

She was easy to listen to. Her message was clear, relatable, and down to earth. She seemed to be speaking especially to me and delivered the words that grabbed my attention: *It works if you work it!*

I had heard Johnnie Colemon’s story about breaking the barrier of segregation at Unity Village in the 1950s. She was the first African-American student to be allowed to live on Unity grounds, but only after she threatened to leave the ministerial program.

Ordained by Unity, she went on to success and acclaim, establishing Christ Universal Temple in Chicago in 1956 then creating a new organization within New Thought called the Universal Foundation for Better Living (UFBL) in 1974. Working with Rev. Mary Tumpkin in Miami, Florida, she also created the Johnnie Colemon Theological Seminary for UFBL.

Celebrating Black History Month would be incomplete without remembering Johnnie Colemon for her impact and contributions.

Not only because of her long list of service and community involvement.

Not only because she overcame racial and social roadblocks.

Not only because of the hundreds of thousands of lives she touched and changed with her bold and dynamic messages, providing clear, practical, inspirational instructions.

Not only because she was the first African-American president of the Association of Unity Churches.

Not only because of all the major accomplishments she demonstrated as an example of a life well-lived.

But because every person who stays on the Unity grounds stands on her shoulders. Her courageous act of love and service left a legacy for all.
Every person who aspires to live the message of oneness must embrace the ideal of diversity and inclusion which we, who love New Thought teachings, must continue to build upon and strive for in service to future generations.

Today we talk about diversity and inclusion. Johnnie Colemon set it in motion for the Unity movement and anchored a work that is still under construction. She taught by example—that exclusion blocks equal distribution of opportunity for those who bear gifts, talents, and hearts for making the world a better place.

And finally, for every person who has wondered how to use the Truth taught in New Thought so they can live a life that is high-quality and divine. They, too, stand on the shoulders of Rev. Dr. Johnnie Colemon. Her words ring true and powerful to this day: It works if you work it!

This stuff, if you work it, will work. It will heal your body. It will make your pocketbooks GET FAT with a whole lot of hundred-dollar bills. It is the kind of stuff that will bring you peace of mind, harmony in your home and in your world, the kind of stuff that will get stirred up inside of you and radiate to all with whom you come in contact ...

A fuller version of this article appears at unity.org/articles/colemon.

Rev. Charline Manuel served 22 years at the pulpit and now is CEO of One Accord Strategies, Inc., facilitating retreats, training, and enrichment for church and nonprofit boards. She is the author of seven books.

—Rev. Dr. Johnnie Colemon