

Reaves, Jean Manuel (1930–2013)

PRUDENCE LABEACH POLLARD, AND LELA GOODING

Prudence LaBeach Pollard, Ph.D., serves as the vice president for Research and Faculty Development at Oakwood University, Huntsville, Alabama. She is married to Dr. Leslie N. Pollard, president of Oakwood University.

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Jean Manuel Reaves was a pastor's wife, educator, musician, and first lady of Oakwood College when her husband, Benjamin Reaves, served as president from 1985 to 1996.

Jean Manuel was born on August 4, 1930, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, to Bruce and Lucille Manuel. Her father died when she was young, and her mother began working to support Jean and her younger brother Bruce. The children attended Dunbar Elementary and Booker T. Washington High School in Tulsa. In her teenage years Jean was baptized and became an ardent member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. With a determined spirit Jean attended Oakwood College after graduating from high school.¹

Jean met and married her lifetime love, Benjamin Reaves, while she was a student at Oakwood, and obtained her Bachelor of Science degree in 1955. Her husband, a native New Yorker, received his bachelor's degree in theology in the same year and was called to ministry in the Lake Region Conference. To their union were born three children, Terrilyn; Benjamin, Jr.; and Pamela.²

As a pastor's wife, Reaves was dedicated, patient, loving, and diligent. Her calm, caring disposition positively impacted all those with whom she interacted. She began teaching for the Lake Region Conference in 1966 while supporting her husband's active ministry. Her husband and children were her priority, but she managed to take classes at various institutions of higher learning: Malcolm X College, Chicago State University, and Andrews University. Her husband, while ministering, also pursued a career in higher education, and this led to his being called from the Lake Region Conference to the Religion Department at Oakwood College in 1977.³

At Oakwood Jean was able to pursue her love for teaching when she became an instructor for home economics from 1977 to 1982. Her student teaching assistant was Prudence LaBeach, who would become the wife of Leslie Pollard, Oakwood University's eleventh president.⁴ While teaching at Oakwood, Reaves obtained her master's degree in education from Alabama A&M University in 1980, and she continued higher education as she pursued PhD studies at Ohio State University.⁵

In 1985 Benjamin Reaves was asked to assume the presidency of Oakwood College. Despite a demanding schedule as first lady, Jean Reaves continued teaching and achieved the rank of associate professor.⁶ Her service proved advantageous in the Home Economics Department, later renamed Human Environmental Sciences, where she taught fashion merchandising, interior design, consumer economics, and home management.⁷ Meanwhile, her many leadership activities included hosting the inaugural Leadership Development Conference for spouses of the Presidents' Council of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) during Reaves' tenure as the president of the council of UNCF presidents.⁸

In 1997 Jean and Benjamin Reaves followed the will of God by moving to Florida after his presidential term. There Jean continued to influence many lives through her mentoring and caring. She also created a worthy student scholarship fund at Oakwood University. On December 17, 2013, God allowed Jean Manuel Reaves to rest after a gracious, productive life.⁹

Jean Manuel Reaves contributed her time and love toward education and spreading the gospel. Her wisdom, love, and support to her husband, family, students, and congregations proved valuable to all around her. Many former students speak gratefully of her mentorship as she directed them to be the best that they could be. To assist students



Jean Manuel Reaves
Photo courtesy of Oakwood University Archives.

in their endeavors to receive higher education, Reaves left behind the Jean Reaves Scholarship Endowment Fund. Many of Reaves' former students and others donate to this scholarship.

SOURCES

"Biography of Mrs. Jean Reaves, Associate Professor in Family and Consumer Sciences." Oakwood University Archives.

Davis, Ruth F. "Human Environmental Sciences: New Name for Home Economics Department." Oakwood University Archives.

"First Lady Jean Reaves." Oakwood University Archives.

"Jean Manuel Reaves obituary." Oakwood University Archives.

"Jean Reaves." Oakwood University Archives.

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1. "Jean Manuel Reaves obituary," Oakwood University Archives. See also "Biography of Mrs. Jean Reaves, Associate Professor in Family and Consumer Sciences," Oakwood University Archives.?
2. "Jean Manuel Reaves obituary." See also "Jean Reaves," Oakwood University Archives.?
3. Ibid. See also "Biography of Mrs. Jean Reaves, Associate Professor in Family and Consumer Sciences."?
4. Prudence LaBeach Pollard, personal knowledge.?
5. "Jean Manuel Reaves obituary." See also "Biography of Mrs. Jean Reaves, Associate Professor in Family and Consumer Sciences."?
6. Ibid. See also "First Lady Jean Reaves," Oakwood University Archives.?
7. Ruth F. Davis, "Human Environmental Sciences: New Name for Home Economics Department," Oakwood University Archives.?
8. Pollard.?
9. "Jean Manuel Reaves obituary."?

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