

Bland, Frank Leon

(1908–1975)

DEWITT S. WILLIAMS, AND ADRIANNA JOI LEWIS

DeWitt S. Williams, Ed.D. (Indiana University) lives in Maryland after 46 years of denominational service. He pastored in Oklahoma, served as a missionary in the Congo (Departmental and Field President), and Burundi/Rwanda (President, Central African Union). He served 12 years in the General Conference as Associate Director in both the Communications and Health and Temperance Departments. His last service was Director of NAD Health Ministries (1990-2010). He authored nine books and numerous articles.

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Photo courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives.

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[[+bio]]

Frank L. Bland was a pastor-evangelist and administrator who served as a conference treasurer, conference president, and General Conference vice president.

Frank was born in Newellton, Louisiana, on January 9, 1908. His mother, Catherine Monroe, died while he was still very young, leaving Frank in the care of his older brother, Louis H. Bland, who became an Adventist minister in 1917. Frank attended church schools in Vicksburg, Mississippi, and in Memphis, Tennessee, before attending Oakwood Academy and Oakwood Junior College (later Oakwood University), in Huntsville, Alabama, from 1926-1931.

While at Oakwood, Frank was a member of the quartet which traveled with president Joseph L. Tucker to raise funds for the school. He was also very active in the student strike (or, "the holiday") that eventually prompted appointment of the school's first Black administrators and a predominantly-Black faculty.¹ During the Fall week of prayer in 1926 at Oakwood, conducted by J. H. Laurence, Frank was converted and baptized. After completing the ministerial course at Oakwood in 1931, he was teacher and principal at a church school in New Orleans (1932-1934) and served as a Bible worker during summer evangelistic campaigns. He also took further studies at Dillard University (Straight College at the time) in New Orleans from 1932-1933.²

Frank married Alga L. Bailey on June 28, 1934, in Atlanta, with John G. Thomas performing the ceremony. Alga graduated from Oakwood College in 1924, became a school teacher, and attended the Boston Conservatory of Music. During the year following their marriage (1934-1935) the couple worked with Elder Thomas in many evangelistic campaigns throughout the Southern Union. On many of the handbills Alga was referred to as "a sweet singer in Israel."³

In 1935 Frank was called to pastoral-evangelistic ministry in the North Carolina Conference. He was ordained to gospel ministry on May 7, 1938, in Raleigh with H. E. Lysinger, J. K. Jones and P. M. Boyd officiating. Later that year Elder Bland transferred to the Alabama-Mississippi Conference for another four years as pastor-evangelist. In 1942 the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference called him to pastor the large Ebenezer Church in Philadelphia.

During these years Bland earned the distinction of quickly paying off the debt owed on church buildings. In November 1945, he was elected secretary-treasurer of the Allegheny Conference and held that responsibility for three years.⁴

Elder Bland served in administrative leadership positions for the remainder of his ministry. After more than a decade (1948-1959) as president of the Central States Conference, with headquarters in Kansas City, Kansas, he served three years (1959-1962) as president of the South Central Conference, with headquarters in Nashville, Tennessee. He was called in 1962 to serve as associate secretary of the General Conference Regional Department (previously the North American Colored Department).⁵

At the 1966 General Conference session in Detroit, Elder Bland was elected as a general vice president of the world church, becoming the second African American to hold this office. His duties included chairing the boards of Oakwood College and Riverside Hospital in Nashville.⁶

Frank L. Bland retired in 1973 after more than 40 years of denominational service. He and Alga moved to Altadena, California, where he passed away on September 10, 1975, at age 67.⁷ Alga married Vincent L. Roberts, former treasurer of the Southwestern Union Conference, in 1987, and survived him as well by a few months, going to her rest on August 11, 1996, in Keene, Texas.⁸

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NOTES

1. Charles Edward Dudley, Sr. *Thou Who Hath Brought Us . . .* (Teach Services, 1997), 237.
2. Frank Leon Bland Biographical Information Blank, December 8, 1962, Secretariat Missionary Files, Record 114877, RG 21, GCA.
3. "The Oakwood News," *Southern Union Worker*, June 26, 1924, 3; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* for 1925; Bland Biographical Information Blank, December 8, 1962, GCA. "Colored Notes," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, July 27, 1933, 10.

4. Bland Biographical Information Blank, December 8, 1962, GCA; "Raleigh Colored Church Dedication Services," *Southern Tidings*, December 25, 1935, 3; M. V. Campbell, "Introducing a New President," *Central Union Reaper*, December 21, 1948, 1.
 5. Bland Biographical Information Blank, December 8, 1962, GCA.
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 7. "Frank Leon Bland obituary."
 8. DeWitt S. Williams, "Roberts, Vincent Lorain (1913-1996)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, December 5, 2022, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=IIIH>; Richard Peterson, "Alga Louise Bailey Bland Roberts obituary," *Southwestern Union Record*, October 1996, 11.
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