



National Association of Pastoral Musicians

May 15, 2024

Press Release: NPM Renames Scholarship Fund to Honor Pastoral Musician

The National Association of Pastoral Musicians (NPM) will honor Valerie Lee Jeter-McKenzie, an NPM member and leader for over 30 years, by renaming its program scholarship to the Valerie Lee Jeter-McKenzie Program Scholarship. Valerie passed away suddenly on February 13, 2024. Valerie provided insight, leadership, prayer, and friendship to the Association in her over 30 years of membership. During that time, she held various roles, serving as Chair of the (former) African American Interest Group and member of the Cultural Diversity Forum. She presented at several NPM conventions on topics such as liturgy, sacraments, liturgical music, and inculturation. She was a member of the NPM Board of Directors since 2020 and was recently re-elected into a second term.

The loving wife of Brian McKenzie, Valerie was the oldest of three siblings. She is survived by her brothers Lawrence Anthony (Melissa) and Michael Patrick, her son Ryan Christopher, and grandsons Amir and Qishon. Valerie was a devoted mother and grandmother and was always willing to help others in any way she could. She valued service to God, loved ones, friends, and others throughout her journey.

Valerie was a busy musician since first grade, when her mother insisted that she start piano lessons. By fifth grade, teacher Sr. Miriam Gerard had invited her to begin playing for Friday Masses, and she accompanied liturgy ever since. A wife, mother, and grandmother, she taught theology (including the history of Black Catholics) at Rosemont College in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania, while also giving private piano lessons, and was the Music Director at St. Vincent De Paul Parish in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for more than thirty years.

NPM Board member and fellow colleague Christopher Ferraro reflects on his many interactions with Valerie, and her impact to the Association: “As a member of the Board, Valerie sought to make NPM an organization where all members could be seen and heard. She advocated that the liturgy ought to reflect the lived experience of the people gathered at prayer. Her presence will certainly be missed but we rejoice in knowing that she is praising God and advocating for us in the heavenly liturgy.”

The NPM Board of Directors and Jennifer Kluge, Executive Director of NPM, has agreed to rename the Association’s program scholarship to honor Valerie’s work in ministry. The program scholarship, which has been in existence for several years assists



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pastoral musicians with limited financial resources in taking advantage of opportunities for continuing formation. It most frequently supports members who wish to attend the NPM National Convention, including the 47th Annual Convention in Kansas City, Missouri, July 8-11, 2024. Jennifer Kluge explains that the decision to rename the Program Scholarship in honor of Valerie is something well-aligned with her mission: “Valerie believed that everyone had a place within NPM, regardless of their financial situation. Honoring her memory with the renaming of our Program Scholarship Fund, will allow NPM to include pastoral musicians to participate in programming today and for the future.”

Applications for the Valerie Lee Jeter-McKenzie Program Scholarship will be received through June 1, 2024, and donations toward the fund are being accepted immediately.

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Related links:

NPM Website: www.npm.org

2024 Convention Information: bit.ly/NPM2024Convention

Donate to the Valerie Lee Jeter-McKenzie Program Scholarship: www.npm.org/donate