



CICELY HARRIS  
Chairperson

SHATIC MITCHELL  
District Manager

# CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD 10  
215 West 125th Street, 4th Floor  
New York, NY 10027  
T: 212-749-3105 F: 212-662-4215

## MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD 10 RESOLUTION

### Bishop William Yancy Bell, Sr. Place Street Co-Naming

RESOLUTION: To support the street co-naming on the southeast corner of West 131st Street and Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard as “Bishop William Yancy Bell, Sr. Place”.

WHEREAS: Bishop William Yancy Bell, Sr. and the Williams Institutional Christian Methodist Episcopal Church have been a part of the history of Harlem for more than a century. Founded by the late Reverend Bell, the church had its formal opening on December 5, 1919 in a small rented room in the Lafayette Theater with twelve members.

WHEREAS: The budding congregation soon outgrew the small, rented room, and on January 20, 1920, under the leadership of Rev. Bell, they moved to their new home located on Seventh Avenue and West 131<sup>st</sup> Street across from the Lafayette Theater. Reverend Bell continued pastoring the Williams Institutional Christian Methodist Episcopal Church until 1928, at which time the congregation numbered more than 1,200 individuals.

WHEREAS: Bishop Bell was born in Memphis, Tennessee on February 23, 1887 to John and Cordelia Bell. He joined the church in 1898, and received his Bachelors of Arts degree from Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee in 1907. In 1915 he received both a Master of Arts degree from Northwestern University and a Bachelor of Divinity from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. He was ordained a deacon in 1912 and married Annabell Compton in 1913; they had three children.

WHEREAS: Following his graduation from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, he was ordained Elder and assigned to the New Hope CME Church in Evanston, Illinois. From 1916 to 1917 he was a professor of classical languages at Lane College. From 1918 to 1919 he was a Chaplain in the U.S. Army. In 1919 he founded the Williams Institutional CME Church, which was named after the Church’s senior Bishop Robert S. Williams, in Harlem, New York to meet the needs of African-Americans migrating north from the southern United States. The church covered a full city block, and he remained pastor there for nine years.

WHEREAS: Under Bishop Bell’s direction, the church served the Harlem community through civic, educational, arts, and social services. In 1953, Mrs. Captolia Dent Newborn, then Director of Christian Education for the Church, stated: “All the problems of health and social pathology are the people’s problem of daily living about which the Church must be concerned. Without a



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better foundation in the material conditions of life, it is not possible to build moral character nor a spiritual fellowship.”

WHEREAS: Significant historical speeches and rallies at Williams Institutional CME Church include the September and October 1955 rallies of over 21,000 people held at the church to protest the acquittal of Emmett Till’s assassins, to which Mamie Bradley, the mother of Emmett Till, attended both rallies; in September 1958 when the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King spoke at the church to fundraise for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, two days before being stabbed in the chest at a book signing at Blumstein’s Department Store; and in December 1964 when Fannie Lou Hamer and Malcolm X spoke at the church in support of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party’s upcoming congressional challenge, where Ms. Famer first spoke her famous quotation, “I’m Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired.”

WHEREAS: For over 100 years the Williams Institutional CME Church has worked tirelessly to improve the Harlem community through health education, leadership training, and spiritual empowerment, which have helped to empower the Harlem community to become change agents within their own community.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Manhattan Community Board 10 wishes to remember Bishop William Yancy Bell, Sr. by formally requesting that the New York City Council and the Mayor of New York City enact legislation to support the co-naming of the southeast corner of West 131st Street and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard on May 4, 2021 by a vote of **28 Yes;** 0 No; 0 Abstentions; and 0 Recusals