

# UCC ROOTS

## *Remembering our History*

---

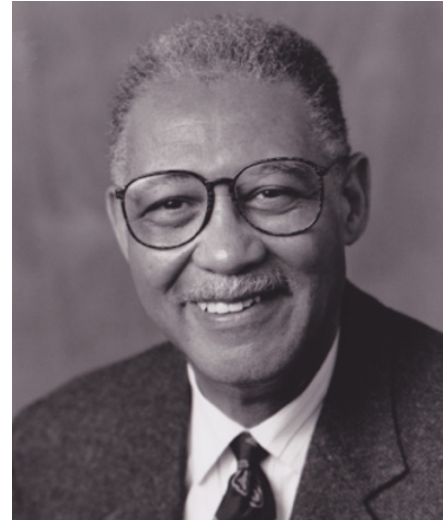
June 2020

### **“Building Bridges, Sustaining a Legacy”**

As thousands of American pioneers spread West on the frontier in the 1800s there was great need for pastoral leadership in churches. Congregationalists were committed to justice and inspired by an ecumenical spirit. They joined others to form seminaries to prepare clergy leaders.

Seminaries developed curricula to address the political and racial issues of the nation, through the lens of faith. They combined rigorous classroom study with active engagement in the public square. By the 20th century clergy had become key civic leaders, building and sustaining bridges of justice and mercy in troubling times.

Kenneth B. Smith, Sr. (1931-2008) was a key African American leader. Born in Montclair New Jersey, Smith graduated from Virginia Union University and Bethany Theological Seminary. He began his ministry in Chicago in 1954 as the Associate Pastor at the Congregational Church of Park Manor; he later became the organizing Pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in 1961; and he eventually served as Senior Pastor of The Church of the Good Shepherd in 1968.



In 1984, Smith was called to become the tenth president of Chicago Theological Seminary, serving until 1998. CTS had been founded in 1855 and carried on the historical commitments of Congregationalists. Smith upheld that legacy and strengthened the seminary’s ecumenical and programmatic connections with church and community. He formed a new and diverse faculty -- upholding his vision of “enlightened, theologically trained leadership.”

Kenneth B. Smith Sr. “was able to successfully navigate and connect three critical sectors in the public square including the church, the academy, and the civic-business sector. He was a beloved pastor, scholar, and community builder.” He knew how to build bridges. Furthermore, because his leadership coincided with the founding of the United Church of Christ in 1957, his work as an important African American leader enriched the diversity and strengthened the witness of the United Church of Christ.

*Contributor: Julia M. Speller*

Sign up at [www.ucc.org/ucc\\_roots\\_sign\\_up](http://www.ucc.org/ucc_roots_sign_up)