

## **UNsung HEROINES 2023**

**St. Ann & the Holy Trinity Church and Pro-Cathedral**



### **Gloria Ford Gilmer (1928-2021), Mathematician, Educator, Pioneer in Ethnomathematics**

Gloria Ford Gilmer was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1928. She was an American mathematician and educator who earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics from Morgan State University, a Master of Arts in Mathematics from the University of Pennsylvania, and a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction from Marquette University.

Gloria Gilmer became the first African-American to teach high school math in the Milwaukee Public Schools. She had moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1957, where she met her future husband. She was the first African-American on the math faculty at Milwaukee Area Technical College and the first African-American lecturer in the math department at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She also taught at six historically black colleges.

Gloria Gilmer was a pioneer in the field of ethnomathematics, which is the study of the relationship between mathematics and culture. It is often associated with cultures without written expression – "the mathematics which is practiced among identifiable cultural groups." (Wikipedia.) The term refers to a broad cluster of ideas ranging from distinct numerical and mathematical systems to multicultural mathematics education. An

example would be the math of hair braiding, where certain patterns/designs are formed. The goal of ethnomathematics is to contribute both to the understanding of culture and the understanding of mathematics and to appreciate the connection between the two.

Other firsts include Gloria Gilmer's being the first African-American woman on the board of governors of the Mathematical Association of America (1980-1982) and the first African-American woman to publish a non-PhD thesis and to have her research papers displayed in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress. Gloria Gilmer had numerous accomplishments throughout her life. She passed away in August of 2021 at the age of 93.

*Submitted by Winifred N. Murdaugh*