

New children's book highlights 'Father of Gospel Music'

by [Jim Patterson](#) in the [April 22, 2020](#) issue



(Courtesy image)

Disbelief is often the response Carole Boston Weatherford gets from children about her books featuring notable African Americans.

"Kids just can't believe that our nation allowed those kinds of injustices to visit upon so many people," said Weatherford, a poet who has written children's books on Fannie Lou Hamer, Harriet Tubman, Lena Horne, and others.

"I want them to be appalled," she said. "I want them to be shocked that [slavery and racial discrimination] happened, but I also want them to be inspired that my subjects overcame those injustices . . . and persisted in reaching their potential and in

making contributions to their communities and to larger society.”

Weatherford, who grew up as a United Methodist and was married for twentysome years to a UM minister, considers it a mission to help correct the dearth of books about African Americans she experienced growing up.

“There were hardly any,” she said.

Her latest subject is Charles A. Tindley, a Methodist Episcopal clergyman sometimes called “the father of gospel music” or “the prince of preachers.” He was pastor of East Calvary Methodist Church in Philadelphia—now named Tindley Temple United Methodist Church—from 1902 to 1933.

His hymn “I’ll Overcome Someday” was one source for the civil rights anthem “We Shall Overcome.” He wrote other gospel music standards as well, such as “(Take Your Burden to the Lord and) Leave It There,” “Stand by Me,” and “What Are They Doing in Heaven?”

Tindley, born in 1851, was the son of a slave father and a free mother who died young. He received no formal schooling as a child, instead being hired out as a field hand. He taught himself to read from newspaper clippings by the light of glowing pine knots.

Pursuing whatever education he could afford—night schools and correspondence courses, mostly—while working to support himself, he relocated to Philadelphia with his wife, Daisy, and worked as a custodian in East Calvary Methodist Church. From there, he progressed to being the pastor of the very same church.

In *By and By: Charles Albert Tindley, the Father of Gospel Music*, illustrated by Bryan Collier, Tindley’s incredible rise is told in lilting verse by Weatherford.

The illustrations mix collage and watercolor painting. Collier has illustrated many children’s books about African Americans, including Rosa Parks, Langston Hughes, Martin Luther King Jr., Thurgood Marshall, and contemporary musician Trombone Shorty.

As a child, Collier used to play in an abandoned Pocomoke City, Maryland, church named for Tindley. It has since been torn down. Tindley was born in Berlin, Maryland, about 30 miles north of Pocomoke City.

“Every year, they do Tindley Day in Maryland as well as in Philadelphia,” he said. “So I had known about it and had been at the celebration picnics on Tindley Day.”

No matter how much historical context Weatherford shares when talking to children about her books, she says many are “confused” and ask the same questions: “Did it really happen?” “Who made those stupid rules?” “Why did white people treat black people so badly?”

“They’re constantly trying to figure out how they should respond to history and also to injustices they see in their own lives,” she said. “Bullying in school, how do I respond to that? So kids are learning to navigate situations, and they are forming their own values.

“I do hope that my books play some role in shaping their values and help them form their own system of justice.” —Methodist News Service