Born in Darlington County on April 17, 1911, Newman was the son of the Reverend Melton C. Newman and Charlotte Elizabeth Morris. He attended Williamsburg County public schools and Claflin College and was ordained in the United Methodist Church (UMC) in 1931. Three years later he received his bachelor of arts degree from Clark College in Atlanta, then earned his divinity degree from Gammon Theological Seminary in Atlanta in 1937.

While serving as a student pastor in Georgia, Newman met Anne Pauline Hinton of Covington, Georgia. They married on April 27, 1937, and later had one child, Emily Morris DeQuincey.

Throughout his varied and distinguished career, Newman thought of himself primarily as a minister, and it was in this role that he made his most significant contributions to South Carolina. For some forty years, he served UMC churches in Georgia and South Carolina and held key positions with the UMC’s South Carolina Conference and its General Conference. As a member of the UMC Merger Committee in the 1970s, he played a major role in bringing an end to segregated congregations.

Early in his ministry, Newman identified the struggle for racial equality as a matter of the spirit, as well as a social and political concern, and he developed a preaching style that linked morality with practicality, especially in reference to race relations. Vernon Jordan, a protégé who later became a national civil rights leader, remarked that he always listened carefully whenever Newman prayed, because he “always felt that when I. D. Newman was praying, God was listening. He seemed to have a direct line.” Newman himself noted that every aspect of his career was simply an “extension of ministry.”

In 1943 Newman assumed a key position in the emerging Civil Rights Movement when he helped organize the Orangeburg branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Thereafter, he contributed to the NAACP in a variety of capacities, including service as South Carolina field director from 1960 to 1969, the most critical period in the civil rights struggle. Newman was a gentle, self-effacing man, patient and slow to anger, who preferred diplomacy over confrontation. A tenacious advocate for simple justice in race relations, he also believed in non-violent protest as the most effective means for achieving the goal. His quiet dignity and appeals to reason won him the confidence, and ultimately the support, of key white political and economic leaders. In effect, Newman served both as chief strategist for the protest movement and as chief negotiator at the conference table, becoming the “unofficial
liaison” between African Americans and the white power structure. Alone among the Deep South states, South Carolina dismantled its structure of legalized segregation with a minimum of violence, in large measure because of his leadership and dedication to peaceful change.

Inevitably, Newman became an important player in the state’s changing political fortunes. In the 1940s, he participated peripherally in founding the Progressive Democratic Party, an effort to change the racial policies of the regular Democratic Party. Although Newman had long been a staunch Republican, by 1958 he concluded that the state Republican Party no longer had a place for him and other African Americans and he switched his allegiance to the Democrats. Moving quickly into his new party’s inner circles, he became a trusted confidant of such state leaders as Senator Ernest Hollings and Governors Robert McNair and John West, as well as a delegate to several Democratic national conventions.

Extending his personal ministry into the lives of ordinary people, Newman worked to improve the condition of blacks and whites in rural South Carolina. Housing, medical care, the environment, aging, vocational education, and social services in general were among the concerns for which both state and private agencies sought his counsel. In recognition of his contributions, the National Institute on Social Work in Rural Areas in 1982 named him “Rural Citizen of the Year.” Honorary degrees from state colleges and universities further acknowledged his achievements, and the University of South Carolina established a chaired professorship in Social Work in his honor.

On October 25, 1983, Newman became the first African American since 1887 to serve in the state Senate. His election and the cordial reception he received from his fellow senators, all of them white, testified symbolically to the extraordinary influence he exerted on South Carolina’s social and political development in the twentieth century. Newman served with distinction on several Senate committees, until ill health forced him to resign his seat on July 31, 1985. He died in Columbia on October 21, 1985, and was buried in Greenlawn Memorial Gardens.


