



On May 17, 2013, 8:00 pm, the Houston Forward Times will honor many of the Greater Houston area's visionary pastors, as they present their 2nd Annual 2013 Visionary Pastor's Awards at the George R. Brown Convention Center, in the General Assembly Theater.

The theme for this year's celebration is "Our Faith.....Our Voice.....Our Future."

Influential Black pastors in Houston will once again be honored by the Houston Forward Times, the Largest Black-Owned Independently Published Newspaper in the South, at this black-tie event sponsored by Wells Fargo, Music World Gospel, CWA, the City of Houston, Councilman Larry Green, Radio One, The Law Office of Waverly R. Nolley and Associates, KTSU 90.9 FM, H.E.B., Houston Community College, Texas Business Alliance and The Wilson Group.

The Visionary Pastors' honorees are Pastor Kirbyjon Caldwell, Windsor Village United Methodist Church; Pastor Samuel Compton, Sr., Mt. Canaan Missionary Baptist Church; Pastor Edwin Davis, Galilee Missionary Baptist Church; Pastor Reginald Devaughn, Silverlake Church; Pastor Terrence Johnson, Higher Dimension Church; Bishop Rufus Kyles, Jr., Evangelist Temple Church of God in Christ; Pastor Ed Montgomery, Abundant Life Cathedral; Pastor Gregg Patrick, Southwest Community Church; Pastor Michael Pender, Fallbrook Church; and Pastor Byron Stevenson, The Fort Bend Church.

The Pastors being inducted into the Hall of Fame are Dr. Thomas Freeman, Mt. Horem Baptist Church; Dr. William "Bill" Lawson, Pastor Emeritus, Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church; and Pastor Floyd Nathaniel Williams, Sr., Antioch Missionary Baptist Church.

The event is being chaired by Dr. John Stanford, Jr. and the Honorary Chairs are Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee and Congressman Al Green.

The Black church and the Black press must come together to right the wrongs in our communities and be the voice for the voiceless and for our youth.

OUR FAITH

Richard Allen was born into slavery in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on February 14, 1760. At the age of 17, Allen converted to Methodism after hearing a White Methodist preacher rail against slavery. His owner eventually converted to Methodism as well and allowed Allen and his brother to purchase their freedom for \$2,000 each in 1783.

Allen soon became a member of St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church, where he became an assistant minister and conducted prayer meetings for the Black parishioners. Although Blacks and Whites worshiped together at the church, Allen became frustrated with the limitations that the church placed on him and other Black parishioners. In 1787, Allen left the church and that same year, along with the Reverend Absalom Jones, Allen helped found the Free African Society, a non-denominational religious mutual-aid society dedicated to helping the black community.

In 1794, Allen and 10 other Black Methodists founded the Bethel Church, a Black Episcopal meeting, in an old blacksmith's shop. Allen became the first African-American to be ordained in the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Bethel Church became known as "Mother Bethel" because in 1816, with support from representatives from other Black Methodist churches, Bethel Church birthed the first national black church in the United States, the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, and Allen became its first bishop.

Helped by his wife, Sarah, Allen helped to hide escaped slaves. The basement of the Bethel Church was a stop on the "Underground Railroad" for blacks fleeing slavery.

His understanding of the power of the Black dollar and of an economic boycott, led Allen to form

the Free Produce Society in 1830, where members would only purchase products from businesses or people who used non-slave labor. His passion for equality and fairness inspired him to vehemently speak out against slavery. Allen's life's work and his writings were the primary influence for future Civil Rights leaders such as Black abolitionist Frederick Douglass and activist Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Allen died in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on March 26, 1831. Today, the AME Church boasts more than 2.5 million members.

OUR VOICE

Ida B. Wells was born a slave in 1862 in Holly Springs, Mississippi. Both of her parents knew how to read, so they taught her how to read at an early age. Growing up around political activists gave Wells a sense of hope about the hope and future possibilities for former slaves in American society. After both of her parents and her infant brother died unexpectedly when she was 16 years old, she had to take on the responsibility of raising her five younger brothers and sisters.

While in Memphis, she had become accustomed to riding the train in whatever seat she chose, but in 1883 she sued the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad because they forbade her from sitting in the ladies coach. This incident sparked Wells to write an article about the experience, which became an instant success and helped influence her to change her career to become a journalist.

Wells continued to fight against injustices all throughout the South and decided to use the power of her pen to expose the motives behind the violence against Black people. As lynching had become one of the main strategic tools to terrorize Blacks in the South, Wells wrote about lynching and began to expose it, becoming the focal point of her crusade for justice.

When three of her male friends, who were successful businessmen, were lynched on the pretext of a crime they did not commit, Wells wrote about the situation with a clarity and forcefulness that riveted the attention of both Blacks and Whites. She advocated for both an economic boycott and a mass exodus, and traveled through the United States and England, writing and speaking about lynching and the government's refusal to intervene to stop it. This so

enraged her enemies that they burned her presses, and put a price on her head, threatening her life if she returned to the South. She remained in exile for almost forty years.

Eventually, Wells purchased partial interest in a black newspaper, the Memphis Free Speech and Headlight (later renamed Free Speech), and became its editor. Wells did not shy away from controversy in the pages of Free Speech. A turning point in her career occurred when she wrote an article that was very critical of Memphis's separate but not-so-equal schools. The anonymous piece described the rundown buildings and teachers who had received little more education than their students. Such revelations did not sit well with members of the local Board of Education. Along with everyone else who had heard of Free Speech, they knew that Wells was the one who had written the article. The uproar cost Wells her teaching job.

Wells earned enough money to purchase a half-share of Free Speech and under her leadership the circulation increased from 1,500 to 4,000. Readers relied on Free Speech to tackle the most controversial subjects, even when that meant speaking out against African-Americans as well as Whites. When Wells received word that her friend Tom Moss, the father of her goddaughter, had been lynched, she quickly came to the realization that lynching's were not being used to punish criminals, but was being used to enforce White supremacy. Moss's only crime was that he was successfully competing with a white grocer, and for this he and his partners were murdered. In a series of deeply scathing editorials in Free Speech, she urged African-Americans to boycott Memphis's new streetcar line and move out west if possible.

African-Americans listened to Wells and began leaving Memphis by the hundreds. Two pastors of large Black churches took their entire congregations to Oklahoma, and others soon followed. Those who stayed behind boycotted White businesses, creating financial hardships for commercial establishments as well as for the public transportation system. The city's papers attempted to dissuade Blacks from leaving by reporting on the hostile American Indians and dangerous diseases awaiting them out west. To counter their claims, Wells spent three weeks traveling in Oklahoma. Upon her return she published a firsthand account of the actual conditions. Fast becoming a target for angry white men and women, she was advised by friends to ease up on her editorials. Instead, Wells decided to carry a pistol.

Wells continued her advocacy work until she died in Chicago on March 25, 1931, at the age of 68.

OUR FUTURE

According to the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, conducted by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, African-Americans are among the most likely to report a formal religious affiliation, with fully 87% of African-Americans describing themselves as belonging to one religious group or another.

While the U.S. is generally considered a highly religious nation, African-Americans are markedly more religious on a variety of measures than the U.S. population as a whole, including level of affiliation with a religion, attendance at religious services, frequency of prayer and religion's importance in life.

On each of the measures concerning religion, African-Americans stand out as the most religiously committed racial or ethnic group in the nation, but when it comes to younger African-Americans, they are more likely than their older counterparts to report being unaffiliated with a religion. Roughly 20% of African-Americans under the age of 30 are unaffiliated with any religion, compared to just 7% of African-Americans who are age 65 and older.

In order for the future generations of leaders to embrace religion and a sense of hope, they must first be in tune with reading and understanding how to use their voice. Social media and technology has given younger people an opportunity to gather information and be expressive in a new, unique way. The importance of the Black press and newspapers is still significant when it comes to spreading news by us, for us and about us.

Young people still have to learn their true history and not solely rely on blogs, social media and Internet web sites for facts and their information. That takes an active community, which includes the Black church and the Black press.

“OUR FAITH....OUR VOICE.....OUR FUTURE”

Dr. King stated that “our lives begin to end, the day we become silent about the things that matter.”

The power of the Black voice has and continues to make a difference in our world.

The public is invited to the 2013 Visionary Pastor's Awards, where individual tickets are available for \$25.00 & \$50.00; VIP tickets are 100.00. For tickets, call the Houston Forward Times Newspaper, 713-526-4727, or purchase tickets online at www.forwardtimesonline.com. If you need any further information, please contact Judy Foston at 1-866-922-2544 or jfoston@fostoninternational.com.

The hosts of the show are KPRC-TV Ch. 2 news reporter Courtney Gilmore and legendary radio icon Wash Allen. The musical director of the show is V. Michael McKay, who is a two-time Dove Award winner and is inducted into the Gospel Hall of Fame. Confirmed performers are legendary national gospel recording artist Dorothy Norwood; 2012 Grammy Award & Stellar Award winner and Music World Gospel artist Le'Andria Johnson; BET Sunday Best Winner Joshua Rogers; Carnel Davis & Incorporated To Praise; violinist Omar Lopez; and musical guest Endurance.

Proceeds from this Houston Forward Times Signature Event are benefitting the Julius and Lenora Carter Scholarship and Youth Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization.