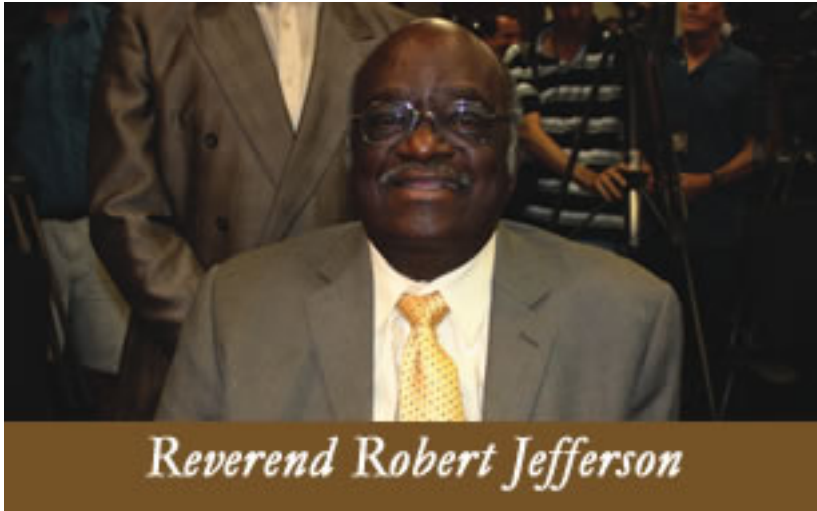


The Rev. Robert Jefferson, longtime community voice, dies at 70

Written by Houston Chronicle
Thursday, 28 June 2012 00:00

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The Rev. Robert Jefferson, a champion for underdogs in Houston's criminal justice system, schools and communities, died Thursday. He was 70.

Jefferson served as the founding pastor of Cullen Missionary Baptist Church and was a leader of Houston's Ministers Against Crime, a group whose 160 or so members work to address inequities and civil rights issues across the city.

In recent months, the Louisiana native spoke out against the videotaped police beating of Chad Holley, a teenage burglary suspect. He also criticized sending indigent defendants to county jail for long periods before allowing them to contest their charges in court.

"He had a real passion to fight for those who could not fight for themselves and speak for those who didn't have a voice to speak for themselves," said the Rev. D.Z. Cofield, senior pastor of Good Hope Missionary Baptist Church.

Jefferson was ordained in Houston in 1976 and founded Cullen Missionary Baptist Church in 1977. That same year, Houston ministers united after the drowning of Joe Campos Torres, a Vietnam veteran who was handcuffed and thrown into Buffalo Bayou by Houston police officers.

Jefferson served as projects coordinator of the ministers' group and was among those who returned their city-issued identification badges in May after Houston officials prohibited the

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group from speaking out against them.

"I quit because I'm going to be free to say what God tells me to do," he recently told the Chronicle.

He served on the Houston Independent School District board in 1994 after then-member Rod Paige was hired as district superintendent. He lost a bid for re-election but continued to advocate for the community.

Friends said he helped to redevelop South Acres, the neighborhood surrounding his church, advocating for affordable housing, youth mentors and other services.

"Bishop Robert Jefferson, our pastor, will surely be missed, but we know he was always about his Father's business going after things to make life better for others," said the Rev. Joseph Ellison, associate minister at Cullen Missionary Baptist.

Jefferson attended a recent HISD board meeting to lobby for academic improvements at schools in his neighborhood.

Unlike some activists, Jefferson was sensible and level-headed - able to reach people of all backgrounds, friends said.

"Sometimes we're our own worst enemy," said James Douglas, a longtime friend, a vice president at Texas Southern University and counsel for the local NAACP.

"He had the ability to talk to everybody and to get them to understand the plight of people who were not as fortunate," Douglas said. "The Houston community is going to miss him greatly."

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Jefferson had tremendous compassion and commitment to the community, especially its children, said the Rev. F.N. Williams Sr., founder of Ministers Against Crime.

He was my legs. He was my voice. He was a friend. I really lost a friend," the 83-year-old Antioch Missionary Baptist Church pastor said.

Jefferson is survived by four daughters - Lola Denise Jefferson, Vanessa Jefferson Auguillard, Lisa Jefferson and Robertine Jefferson, all of Houston - and by his wife of two years, Myrtle Lewis Jefferson.

Services will be held at Cullen Missionary Baptist Church, 13233 Cullen Blvd, Houston, Texas 77047, Body will lie in state Friday, June 29, 2012, 12:00pm - 7:00pm, Memorial Service 7:00pm - 9:00pm

Homegoing services Saturday, June 30, 2012, 11:00am

Source: By Jennifer Radcliffe, Houston Chronicle