



Council of Bishops

The United Methodist Church



For Immediate Release
Saturday, March 28, 2020

Bishops mourn Rev. Lowery, beloved pastor and Dean of Civil Rights Movement

Rev. Dr. Joseph E. Lowery, a retired minister in The United Methodist Church and is an activist in the American civil rights movement, died Friday, March 27, 2020. He served as the third president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference from 1978-1998, after Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King and his immediate successor, Rev. Dr. Ralph David Abernathy, and participated in most of the major activities of the African-American Civil Rights Movement of the '60s.

On behalf of the Council of Bishops, Bishop Woodie White offers the following reflection about Rev. Lowery.

Rev. Joseph Echols Lowery was a too little valued treasure of The United Methodist Church. His death last night at his home in Atlanta, GA, brought to an end one of the most celebrated and respected United Methodist clergyman in America.

He is considered the Dean of the Civil Rights Movement. He was respected for his long and distinguished service as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the organization first headed by, Martin Luther King, Jr. Like King, Rev. Lowery was an apostle of nonviolent direct action as a method of opposing war, violence, racism, and every form of injustice.

Rev. Lowery became my mentor, confidant, and friend. My retirement to the Atlanta area afforded us the opportunity to become even closer as we both settled into old age. We ate fried catfish together on Friday!

I was honored when he selected me to become president of the Mission Board of the organization he founded in Atlanta, *The Joseph and Evelyn Lowery Institute for Justice and Human Rights*. One of its main programs is exposing youth and young people to the principle of nonviolent.

As a member of the General Commission on Religion and Race (1968-1972), Rev. Lowery played a pivotal role as he met with merger committees of the annual conferences in the Central, Southeastern, and South Central Jurisdictions as they created new, racially inclusive annual conferences. His keen insight, tough negotiation style, sprinkled with timely humor, and persistent demand for justice and fairness, proved to be invaluable as the members worked together.

While Rev. Joseph Lowery was, without question, an important figure in the Civil Rights Movement, it may be less well known by many that his greatest love was being a pastor. He traveled the world, sat with world leaders but he remained a local pastor. Each week he preached to a congregation. He baptized infants, counselled the trouble, and married couples. He was a forceful and eloquent preacher.

Nothing gave him more personal satisfaction than preaching to a congregation and being a pastor. Yet he impacted the world and helped to reform society.

A giant has left us, but not before making us better, more loving, and more committed to justice for all God's people. One of his popular sayings was, "We must learn to turn to each other, and not on each other!"

Bishop Woodie W. White, retired
Atlanta, GA

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Media Contact: *Rev. Dr. Maidstone Mulenga*
Director of Communications – Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church
mmulenga@umc-cob.org
202-748-5172
www.unitedmethodistbishops.org