



Department of Civil Rights

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Equal Opportunities Division
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REV. JAMES C. WRIGHT 1926-1995

Rev. Wright was a native of Camden, South Carolina where he graduated from Mather Academy. His teachers at Mather were role models who "dared to make a difference." They fought against and resisted every vestige of segregation and discrimination.

Wright took that philosophy with him to Virginia Union University and became involved in the Virginia civil and human rights movement. After completing his pre-theological training at Union, he studied philosophy and theology at Payne A.M.E. Theological Seminary and Wilberforce University. Rev. Wright was the pastor of churches in Ohio and South Carolina before coming to Wisconsin in 1960.

He continued his education at the UW-Madison earning a degree in psychology. He became a "Ford Fellow" and did graduate work in community relations at the Urban Training Center of Chicago.

In the early 1960's Rev. Wright and his wife Jacqueline constructed Jackie and Jimmy's Beauty and Barbershop, becoming minority business owners shortly after moving to Madison.

Rev. Wright was a civil rights pioneer in Madison. He worked during the 1960's to bring about the adoption of the City of Madison's Equal Opportunities Ordinance. Rev. Wright served as a member of the Equal Opportunities Commission prior to his appointment as Executive Director for the Equal Opportunities Commission. He retired in 1992 after 24 years of dedicated service to the City of Madison. During his years with the City he spearheaded the drafting of the City's first affirmative action ordinance and developed a complaint resolution process for the Equal Opportunities Commission that provided a make whole remedy for victims of discrimination. Under his leadership the Equal Opportunities Ordinance was recognized as one of the most comprehensive pieces of civil rights legislation in the country.

Rev. Wright served as an associate minister at Mt. Zion Baptist Church under the late Rev. Joe E. Dawson from 1960 until 1984. He also served as guest minister and interim minister throughout the Midwest including Immanuel Baptist Church, Beloit Wisconsin. He was a member of many professional, civil and human rights organizations: Founder and past president of the National Institute for Employment Equity; President of the Madison Association of American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin; the National Association of Human Rights Workers; the International Personnel Managers Association; the NAACP; founding member of the Gamma Gamma Gamma Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.; and founding member of the Madison Urban League.

Rev. Wright was the recipient of many awards, including: Citizen of the Year by the Madison Newspaper Guild, 1966; U. S. Civil Service Commission Executive, 1970; the City of Madison's Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Humanitarian Award, 1978; the Madison Branch of the NAACP's Unsung Hero Award in the early 1980's; and Ebony Expressions Distinguished Man Award, 1995.

From 1990 until his death, Rev. Wright served as full time pastor of the Mt. Zion Baptist Church, the largest African American church in Dane County.