



## James Bethea

September 15, 1933 - March 1, 2026

On the warm and beautiful winter evening of March 1, 2026, JAMES “POP” BETHEA,

JR. peacefully transitioned to his heavenly home at the tender age of 92 years and 5.5 months.

Pop was born on September 15, 1933 in the Carmichael Township of Dillon, South Carolina

to Hester Jannie Corbett Bethea and James Douglas Bethea. Pop is the last of his thirteen

siblings (e.g. Clyde, Lawrence, Gary, John Douglas, Franklin, Eutha Mae, Corene, Gordon

Avery, Rosa Jane, Geneva, Jannie, Joseph, and Josephine). The last four siblings James (Pop)

and Jannie were twins as were Joseph and Josephine.

Pop received his education in the Rosenwald Oak Grove school in Dillon, South Carolina.

Rosenwald Schools were early 20th Century schools built across 15 Southern states

between 1917 and 1938. The schools were funded by Julius Rosenwald, a Jewish-American

philanthropist who was also part owner of Sears, Roebuck and Company. The schools were

designed by Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute to improve Black education and literacy during the Jim Crow era in the United States. The schools were typically two-rooms wood-framed structures largely found in the segregated South. By 1928, one third of the rural South's Black children were served by these schools; particularly those emanating from hamlets, unincorporated areas, and/or townships. After the 1954 Supreme Court ruling declared segregation unconstitutional, many Rosenwald Schools became obsolete.

At an early age, like many in the segregated South, Pop soon journeyed north to Baltimore, Maryland. Here, he gained employment at Amicci's, an Italian restaurant in Little Italy. He worked as a bank courier, and was responsible for ensuring proceeds from the restaurant were safely transferred to the local bank for processing. It was at the Amicci's Restaurant that he met and fell in love with Margarine "Kitty" Wilson who surprisingly hailed from Cheraw, South Carolina. Inevitably, they were married in 1952, and to this union, three children (James, Albert and Darlene) were born. They purchased their first and only home in West Baltimore and resided there for greater than 60 years. After acquiring their home, Pop was heavily involved with local community association activities and neighborhood beautification

projects. He was also instrumental in transporting his children and others in the community to the movies, roller skating, concerts, sporting events, and swimming.

Pop was determined to provide for his family and ensure that they thrived. He worked as a longshoreman (Stevedore) in Baltimore for most of his adult life. He was a strong advocate for unions and served as shop steward and president of Local 333 for many years, while being an active member of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA), and the Steamship Trade Association (STA). In addition to the ILA and Amicci's Restaurant, he was also previously employed at Baltimore City Department of Public Works in Sanitation, and at Flynn and Emerick Steel Company.

Pop was a faithful member of First Apostolic Faith Church for more than forty years under the tutelage of Bishop Cornelius Showell, Sr. Pastor. He served as a deacon for many years and performed myriad roles at the church until late in life. Even when his health was failing, he contributed mightily to the growth and progress of First Apostolic. He constantly mentored young people in the community and church, while always providing words of encouragement. He served as the president of the Men's Department. Additionally, he was

the designated driver for the “Senior Wednesday” lunch and prayer group, and transported members for day trips and to myriad church services throughout Baltimore and District of Columbia.

Pop loved telling stories of family and his youth. He was a hilarious storyteller with a booming voice, and his laughs were infectious. When telling a story, particularly a long winder - he would start chuckling before he could complete the story, but you would start laughing not just because of the story; but because of his preemptive laughter. We all enjoyed him telling us about growing up in South Carolina, and the many adventures he experienced.

I remember him telling us that he and one of his older cousins decided to drive to New Jersey on a whim, but they got lost somewhere in Virginia which delayed the trip. He said the car was already in poor condition before departing South Carolina, and by the time they got on the New Jersey Turnpike, parts of the floor board in the footwell of the car that had rusted, started to collapse. He said that at one point, all he could see was black asphalt on the Jersey Turnpike as they made their way to Newark. He spoke about how they continued the journey, but he had to prop his knees up on the dash fearing his feet would fall out of the car. And he is telling us this while he is laughing uproariously. He did say,

however, that they ultimately arrived in Newark safely, but the laughter generated by his stories as always insane.

Pop was a beautiful soul. Some of you may not know he had a great love for gardening. He truly loved preparing the beds and planting flowers. The rear patio and front porch to their home were always alive with a rainbow of colors from spring to fall. As soon as the weather warmed, Pop was off to buy flowers for planting, and the colorful canopies of the containers were a satisfying sight to behold. He and Mom loved sitting on the porch and admiring their labor and the beautiful blooms. They both shared a love for nature that was evidenced throughout their home. Pop was a lover of flowers, and he often purchased flowers for Mom, Darlene, and Brenda.

Pop was an avid Orioles fan, and he was his happiest when he and his son Lonnie would go to Orioles Stadium for a game. He would wear his Oriole's cap, team colors, and be fully engaged in the game. He would talk incessantly throughout the game about what was happening on the field, while simultaneously assessing the players, manager, and umpire. During his younger years, Pop played organized baseball with local community teams in

Druid Hill Park, Cherry Hill, and Fairfield, and he was good at it.

Pop was a rabid Raven's fan. During football season, he would call you before the game to discuss the probabilities of a win or lost, and the potential impact of injuries that might threatened a win. After the game, he would call again to discuss and analyze each quarter of the game. He would identify active players and their overall performance; identify the play that should have occurred; call out the coach for poor clock management; admonish a player for reading a play poorly; and, criticize the referee for failing to determine appropriate possession after a fumble. Further, Lamar Jackson could do no wrong on the field, and the defensive line was hyped up - on the regular. Pop loved football. And yes Bishop, Pop also complained about the length of church services on game day. Just so you know. As Pop aged, and his sight started to fail, we would sit in the tv room and provide a play-by-play description of players on the field, outcome of play, and the score, so he could continue to enjoy the game. And yes, he would be decked out in our beloved purple and black - always with the Raven's cap.

Many of you know that Pop was a foodie and possessed a ravenous appetite, and he could also

cook, although Mom would prepare most of the meals. But Pop had a routine of going to his children's homes (Lonnie or Darlene) to eat again. He had a voracious appetite. Pop also maintained several food connections at First Apostolic. You know who you are. Often, when he would be providing security or just working at the church, we would ride through just to chat, and we would observe kitchen staff from the church hall making bee lines to Pop's truck to feed him with whatever they had prepared for the day. It was not unusual to have them approach Pop with a plate of food, a huge sandwich, dessert, or a take home bag. It was as if he had access to his own personal all-day drive-thru restaurant. The practice was so pervasive, that Mom instructed me to write a letter to the church to ask them to stop feeding him down here – needless to say, Pop nor the church complied.

The most important love Pop had in life was his love of God and family. He always demonstrated kindness, love, support, patience and understanding. His love for family was unparalleled. He was a protective father who ensured his children were well mannered, educated and employed. But he also invested quality time with his grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces, nephews, neighbors, and friends. Being present and being a provider was just a part of his nature.

We each have memories of Pop working a full day at the port, and coming home to pack up the car, and head out to visit family members with Mom, Lonnie, Al and Darlene in tow.

They would travel to South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, New York, New Jersey, and Virginia.

Their travels were always full of adventure, food, laughs and lots of fun.

Recreationally, Pop

always found time for fishing, baseball, football, travel, and barbeques. Pop had a big heart

and would assist anyone in need. He was loved--and we were loved. As a family, we are left

with a truckload of great memories to sustain us during this transition, but our family has lost

a major anchor - a giant of a man. We are grateful for his amazing life and his regenerative

legacy. He will be missed. We miss him already. We pray that the Ancestors will gently guide

Pop home.

He leaves to cherish his memory, a loving daughter Ms. Darlene Bethea; a devoted daughter-in-

law, Dr. Brenda Pridgen; one grandson, Mr. Darryl Anthony Bethea; one granddaughter,

Ms. Nikita Moore; two great grandsons, DeShon Wison and Ethan James Bethea. He also

leaves a host of nieces and nephews; great nieces and nephews; and great-great nieces and

nephews, cousins, and friends, etc. Additionally, Pop maintained lifelong friendships with

Mr. and Mrs. Major Evans and Mr. Stacy Tinner and their families. Pop is predeceased by his late wife Margarine Bethea. They were married for seventy-one years prior to her death in 2023. It was a joy to watch their partnership over the years. In addition, he is predeceased by his two sons: Mr. Albert Bethea and Lt. James E. Bethea.

# Cemetery Details

## Arbutus Memorial Park Cemetery

1101 Sulphur Spring Road  
Baltimore, MD 21227

# Previous Events

## Wake

MAR 10. 10:30 AM - 11:30 AM (ET)

First Apostolic Faith Church  
27 S Caroline St  
Baltimore, MD 21231  
(410) 327-1181

## Celebration of life

MAR 10. 11:30 AM (ET)

1st Apostolic Faith Church  
27 S. Caroline Street  
Baltimore, MD

# Tribute Wall

GG

“ To the family and love ones 🌺 My sincere condolences 🕊️🌺🕊️

*From Dr. Gary T. Goodwin, LCPC*

**Gary Goodwin** - March 10 at 11:54 PM

MT

“ Margarine T. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of James Bethea.

**Margarine T.** - March 10 at 11:38 AM

DP

“ May the Ancestors gently guide Pop home.  
He will be missed.



**Dr. Brenda Pridgen** - March 09 at 05:06 PM

TF

“ The Frayer Family purchased the Divine Peace Bouquet for the family of James Bethea.



**The Frayer Family** - March 06 at 09:00 AM

EC

“ Ernest-Queen Lewis Cola.SC lit a candle in memory of James Bethea



Ernest-Queen Lewis Cola.SC - March 04 at 07:41 PM

ES

“ Ernest-Queen Lewis Columbia SC lit a candle in memory of James Bethea



Ernest-Queen Lewis Columbia SC - March 04 at 07:24 PM



“ We the March Family and Staff wish to extend our deepest and heartfelt sympathy in the passing of your loved one. Our prayers go out to you and your family in your time of loss. We know and understand that you have received many expressions of love and we will continue to lift you up in prayer. May the memories you cherish of brighter and happier days help to ease your sorrow and comfort you always.

March Funeral Homes - March 04 at 01:38 PM