

In Loving Memory

JANUARY 23, 1934 - SEPTEMBER 23, 2025



Thelma L. Yates

Saturday, October 11, 2025 * 11 AM

NEW ST. PAUL TABERNACLE

CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST

15340 SOUTHFIELD DRIVE * DETROIT, MI 48223

BISHOP Zachary Hicks, Host Pastor



THE LIFE OF AN EXTRAORDINARY WOMAN

No other title quite fits Thelma L. Yates. A woman who truly led a life that embodied the mantra of Live ● Love ● Laugh. Born in Memphis, TN, on January 23, 1934, to Ray and Lucille Edwards, Thelma Lee Edwards was the 2nd daughter and 5th child of 13 siblings. Thelma's siblings were, Willie Roy, Ray, Annie Mae, Ernest, Earl, Era, Brenda, Sheridan (Maxine), Chars, George, Ron and Janice. During her youth, they would say that their sister was responsible, bossy, and protective. 'She said what she meant, and meant what she said.' They also saw her as the most giving, loving, and supportive of anyone they knew. Thelma took on a most valued trait of her mother Lucille, she loved to prepare meals for her family, and gained a reputation as the best cook around.

Thelma's early education began at Hyde Park Elementary School. She was baptized at the early age of 12 while attending Springdale Baptist Church. She attended Douglas High School, and had to leave early in support of her mother and her siblings. She began working at Buckeye Cotton Oil Co., as a factory floor cleaner, where her father was employed as a factory worker.

During her youth, Thelma also worked as a babysitter, at a cleaners, as well as at a dress shop. The dress shop job was so significant to her that not only did she earn income for her family in an environment she enjoyed, but she also developed an incredible sense of fashion style that would become a reputation staple. Her style over the years was classic, timeless, daring, inspiring, fun, and influential. She lived to showcase her high-fashion, uniquely designed outfits for her glamorous birthday events and annual Mother's Day Senior Cruise events.

Thelma met Thomas E. Yates, Sr., at a movie theater while in the 7th grade. They dated throughout their time at Douglas High School, where he was a member of the football team. Thomas joined the Army in January 1950, and he and Thelma had their first of four children, welcoming Thomas Edward Yates, Jr., on November 11th, 1950. After their marriage on February 13, 1951, they would have three more children together, Toney Cortez on 9/6/1954, Anthony Wayne on 8/15/1958 and Michael Jerome on 9/5/1959.

Thelma and Thomas permanently separated in 1959, the same year of her relocation to Chicago, IL, with her four sons. She was supported by her siblings, Ray and Annie, as well as her father, Ray Edwards during her transition from Memphis to Chicago. Thelma had a very close relationship with her father, she was a 'Daddy's Girl', and he provided significant support during the early part of her relocation until she became employed at a Pharmacy store.

Thelma met Allan Brewer, a Chicago Police Officer and entrepreneur, in 1960 at 'The Clean up, Paint up, Fix up' Parade, while holding her baby son Michael. In 1961, Allan asked for her hand in marriage, but she was not ready; however, they welcomed his first son, Allan Brewer Yates, on 2/6/1963. That same year, Thelma embraced and loved on Allan's daughter, JoAnn, from a previous relationship, and maintained a mother-daughter bond for the rest of her life. On 7/9/1964, Allan and Thelma welcomed another son, Kenneth Fitzgerald Brewer, a name inspired by the late President John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

Allan and Thelma's relationship ended in 1968, the same year as her relocation to Detroit, MI, where she was again supported by her siblings, Annie and Ray. In Detroit, she would meet and become great friends with Pat Jones, best friends with JoAnn Robinson, and aunt to JoAnn's beautiful daughter Tracey. JoAnn would not only be Thelma's best friend, but she would later become her son Steven's Godmother. JoAnn was a trusted travel companion, served with her on an executive board of their senior apartment community, and served the Lord together.

Thelma met and dated the late Lonnie Henry for some time. Lonnie, who later took on a father role to her son Steven, asked her to marry him on multiple occasions, but she was not ready. After one break up, Thelma met and dated the late Jose A. James, with whom fathered her last and seventh son, Steven Lamont Yates, born on 11/21/1970. Led by the Holy Spirit, Thelma asked Jose for forgiveness on Steven not being in his life during Steven's formative years. Jose forgave her on the day he was introduced to his son 43 years later. The blessing to Thelma, Steven and Jose, is the great memories made with him (and his daughters), during the final two years of his life.

Thelma became close friends with Mildred Hammond, when they lived across from each other on Cheyenne St. in the early 1970's and 80's. Mildred is the mother of the renown artist Fred Hammond. Though Thelma knew the Lord, and baptized in her youth, it wasn't until Mildred influenced and inspired Thelma to invite Jesus into her life that she seriously considered a change to how she would live the rest of her life. On October 18, 1981, when Thelma's sister, Maxine, and her husband invited her to attend New St. Paul Tabernacle, COGIC, under Bishop P.A. Brooks, she gave her life to the Lord, to walk with Him fully, completely, and consistently for 44 years.

Thelma was a highly dedicated member of New St. Paul Tabernacle, COGIC, and started the "Bishop Troopers," a serving group for Bishop P. A. Brooks. Many of the 'Troopers', such as Ethel McTaw and Virginia Price not only loved Thelma's inspirational leadership, but kind, friendly and funny personality. They all would become very close friends for the rest of her life.

Thelma maintained a life-long commitment to her church. She served at the Ministerial Alliance Meetings and the Official Day Dinners for the Michigan Northeast Jurisdiction COGIC. She participated in the Annual Mid-Year Prayer Consecration, and she worked in Bishop P.A. Brooks' Executive Office as an Assistant. When the State church leadership saw Mother Yates, they excitedly knew she would have her famous vegetable harvest soup for them all to enjoy. She had a wonderful relationship with her late Pastor Bishop P.A. Brooks, and saw him as a surrogate father figure.

Thelma was always entrepreneurial in her thinking and activities such as having garage sales; Farmer's market-type booths for clothing resales, and coordinating candy tables for wedding receptions. She not only influenced, but invested in her son Steven to follow in her footsteps. In 1998, she became Steven's business partner and honorary CEO of HEROES International Trade, LLC., an Import/Export Business, and business training consultancy. During her visits to Georgia, Thelma would be invited to attend Steven's business classes and often was asked to speak to his class participants on her motivated passions to be her own boss.

Live, Love, Laugh: Thelma LIVED! She traveled around the country, out of the country, cruised the ocean and completed her bucket list in her late 80's, to fly in a helicopter. She gained a reputation that she was never at home, and if you wanted to know where she was, you would have to call her, text her or catch her posts on facebook.

Thelma Loved! Thelma showed love and kindness to all she came to know. Joyce King and Brenda Puckett, who were more than caregivers, saw her as a spiritual mother having a close view to how she loved on everyone, particularly, the special bond she had with 'God-Daughter's. There are three that deserve special mention. Tina Windom served a duo-role, Thelma's niece and God-Daughter. She gave Tina her name as a baby and today, Tina wears Thelma's 'T' embossed heart necklace. Thelma specially wanted her to have that to carry her 'heart' with her wherever she goes.

Stacy Barnes-Malone is such a loving God-daughter of Thelma's for over 35 years. Thelma has often referred to her as her first God-Daughter when speaking about her and her visit to Tulsa, OK, to be with her family. Stacy's mom, before her passing was close to Thelma and she wished for nothing more than for Thelma to be 'Mama Yates'... a surrogate mom for her baby girl. Similarly, Linda Kinnerly and Orodell Walker's mother, before her passing, specifically sought out Thelma and felt she would be perfect to be that special 'GodMom' to her adult children. Orodell, Linda and her daughter Dorethea, who called Thelma 'Grandma', have been blessed and a blessing to 'Mama Yates' for many years.

Kim Easley and sisters, Karen Elkins and Nina Favor, though Thelma's great-nieces, have always been akin to her as daughters. They not only took great care of Thelma's sister Annie Mae, in the twilight of her life, but immediately stepped up when Thelma's independence became compromised due to evolving health issues. Kim, in particular worked from Thelma's home, managed her medication and scheduled her doctor appointments, often relying on Karen when she was called into work. In fact, Kim was the person Thelma most relied upon and trusted for her care while relying on Nina for medical advice. Kim held her 'Auntie/Mom's' hand from the beginning of her health decline, till she saw her take her final breath. Kim, Karen and Nina was well loved along with her other niece/daughter Joyce, and her committed caregivers: Paris, MarCia, Balisa (NeNe), Brenda, April, Janice (JJ), Theresia and Kendra.

Thelma, also has loving God-sons who saw her as 'Mom'. Deron Pressley was her 'Black' SuperMan. When she had vehicle maintenance or an accident- Deron came to her rescue. If she had TV issues and can't watch Steve Harvey's family feud- Deron fixed it. He also installed life-saving home ring cams to monitor her for her safety. Next, she so loved Toi Cliatt that she had to have him officially adopted into the family. She brought the family together to adopt him into the Edwards-Mitchell bond through the African custom- 'Sand Ceremony'. The act was both a permanent bond between Toi and her family as her son, and a spiritual moment felt by all participants of the ceremony.

Thelma proclaimed and embraced her son Steven's Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., brothers as her 'SigmaSons'. Starting with Darnell Blackburn as the first 'SigmaSon', and Godson. She quickly came to appreciate the consistent financial support of the local Sigma Brothers, and those in Georgia, for her community activities. As the Faith Manor Council President, Thelma would host her signature event, a pre-Mother's Day Cruise on the Detroit Princess River Boat. Her SigmaSon's led the way providing donations that allowed over 50 seniors in over 3 years participate in the outings. Beyond the 'SigmaSon' moniker, Thelma considered Judge Kenneth King, Des Pennington, Scott Martin, Warren Galloway, Jr., and Tim Leach, like Darnell, a GodSon.

Thelma Laughed! Thelma's sense of humor was infectious, especially around her sister siblings Annie, Era, Brenda, Maxine, and Janice. No matter in their youthful days, midlife, or as seniors, the kid-at-heart in them always shined through in colorful funny antics, improptu singing, belly laughing, even in their playful arguing. The sisters were more than sisters, they were best friends that gave one another kindness, grace and loving memories to last a lifetime. One memory they all will love is Thelma having another sand ceremony, this time for sister JoAnn Terrell, welcoming her into their unique Edwards-Mitchell 'Sister Sorority'. She loved JoAnn and her husband Tommy as family.

Thelma loved and loved on all her brothers. She would often credit her brother Ray as being both a supportive big brother and protective father-figure. He may have been her closest brother as where ever city he relocated to, she soon would follow suit. She was very close to her brother Earl, whom they were one another's close confidant. Her brother Ernest motivated her to take no gruff from anyone. If Thelma was seen as showing confidence to do anything, Ernest had something to do with influencing that trait. Baby brothers Chars, George, and Ronnie were all akin to sons she looked after, and protected. They often looked forward to seeing their big sis, knowing she had her good food waiting for them. There was nothing she would not do for them. There was nothing they would not do for her.

Thelma had seven sons, and she truly loved all her sons and supported each as they grew into the men God called them to be. From supporting her late son Thomas Jr.'s business aspirations, her late son Toney's Trucking business, and her late son Allan's health journey, to Anthony and Michael's Army careers and Steven's business career- Thelma was always present in the lives of her children, including her late Godson, Samuel Bowe.

Thelma was preceded in death by her parents, Ray and Lucille Edwards, her brothers, Willie Roy Edwards, Ray Edwards, Ernest Edwards, and Earl Edwards, and her sisters, Annie Bell and Brenda Rogers. Also sons Thomas Yates, Jr., Toney Yates, and Allen Yates; grandchild Maleah Yates, her aunt Roena Horn, and best friend JoAnn Robinson.

Thelma leaves to cherish her memory her four sons: Anthony (Robyn), Michael, Kenneth, and Steven (Nicol), daughter JoAnn; siblings: Era, Maxine, Janice (Ray), JoAnn (Tommy), Chars (Diana), George (Evelyn), Ronald (Mandy). She was a doting grandmother to Toney, Kyle, Desmond, Vantoneyio, Sean, Anthonia, Aneisha, TaNeisha, Phernandez, Marvin (Nadev), Michael, Jr. (Natira), Monae, Chanell, Alena, Alisa, JaNia, Brooklynn, Tafforest, Monique and Laquita; 'Daughter/niece' Kim, Karen, Nina and Joyce; Godchildren Stacy, Linda, Orodell and Tia Johnson, as well as a host of great- and great-great-grand kids, nieces, nephews, cousins, SigmaSons and friends to celebrate her life and legacy.

Thelma L. Yates truly was 'An Extraordinary Woman'- that the New St. Paul Tabernacle COGIC family, will surely miss. May Thelma rest in heaven, and may her enduring and vibrant spirit flow freely among us.



ORDER OF SERVICE

Facilitator - Bishop Bruce King, Life Changing Ministries - Detroit, MI

Organ Prelude

Processional - Clergy and Family

Prayer - Elder, New St. Paul Tabernacle COGIC

Old Testament - Minister Canika Carothers (Ecclesiastes 3:1-4)

New Testament - Lady Joyce Edwards-King (daughter/niece) (I Corinthians 15:49-55)

Musical Selection - Brother Joshua Grekin

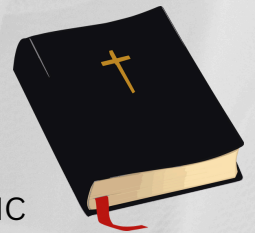
Song Selection - Sister Lorna Savage

Acknowledgement of Cards and Condolences and the Reading of Obituary -

Elder Linder Anderson

Reading of Proclamation - Evangelist Linda Butler

Song Selection - Sister Candace Butler



Special Remarks

Dr. Faithe S. Brooks, Administrator, New St. Paul Tabernacle COGIC

Judge Kenneth King, 36th District Court, Godson

Darnell BlackBurn, Crime and Safety Expert Reporter, WDIV, Local 4, Godson

Deron Pressley, Godson

Steven L. Yates, Son (and Kim Easley, Daughter/Niece)

Special Video Tribute

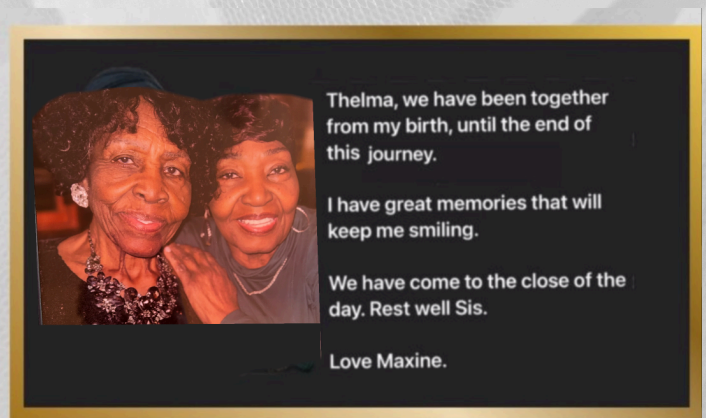
Musical Selection - Deon Yates (cousin)

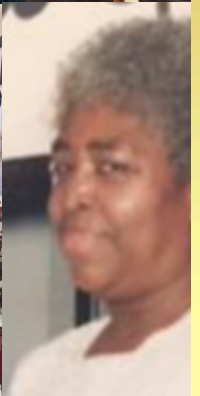
Song Selection - Kristy King (niece) (Safe In His Arms)

Eulogy - Pastor Robert F. Edwards, VP, Enrollment Services, Oakwood Univ., Huntsville, AL (nephew)

Words of Comfort - Bishop Zachary Hicks, Host Pastor

Recessional





Edwards-Mitchell Family



Thelma Yates Videos



"Forever In Our Hearts"



"A Life Well-Lived"

To My Mom

The love that you have
Shown me throughout the years
Is something that I cannot explain
But your love is a feeling that will
Always remain in my heart
You gave me a shoulder to cry on
Through good times and bad times
Your wisdom will always guide
Me through every step of my life
There will never be a mom
Like you and I thank you
For all that you do
You give me strength
when I am weak and gave
me confidence when
I felt like I could not speak
No matter how old I get
I will always be your little one
And our bond will never be undone
I love you Mom

PALLBEARERS

Judge Kenneth King
Deron Pressley
Des Pennington
Toi Cliatt
Scott Martin
Darnell Blackburn

HONORARY PALLBEARERS

Warren Galloway, Jr., Tim Leach
Michael Yates, Jr., DeSean McCullough
Kyle Yates, Desmond Yates, Trae Johnson
Vantoneyio Yates, Russell Jeter III, Bish. George Davis
Fred Hammond, Davey Hammond, Angelo Sykes, Sr.
Frazier Jones, Orodell Walker, The Sigma Sons
The Men of New St. Paul Tabernacle COGIC

FLOWER BEARERS

Friends and Family

INTERMENT

Grand Lawn Cemetery & Mausoleum
23501 Grand River Ave. | Detroit, MI

ARRANGEMENTS ENTRUSTED TO

James H. Cole Home for Funerals
16100 Schaefer Hwy
Detroit, MI 48235

REPASS

New St. Paul Tabernacle COGIC (Middlebrooks Hall)
15340 Bishop P.A. Brooks Drive
Detroit, MI 48223

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND APPRECIATION

With sincere appreciation, the family of the late Thelma Louise Yates wishes to thank our extended family and friends for their comforting messages, floral tributes, cards, visits, and other expressions of concern, which have been so evident in thought and deed at this time. Please keep our family in your prayers, and may God bless each of you. A more personal acknowledgement will be made at a later date.

Anthony W. Yates, Michael J. Yates, 1st, Kenneth F. Brewer, and Steven L. Yates

In Our Hearts

We thought of you today.
But that is nothing new.
We thought about you yesterday.
And days before that too.
We think of you in silence.
We often speak your name.
Now all we have are memories.
And your picture in a frame.
Your memory is our keepsake.
With which we'll never part.
God has you in his keeping.
We have you in our heart.
- Unknown

The Bible — Yah's Love Letter to His Sheep

(Dedicated to my mother)

Your words were clear—
"Keep Him on your mind at all times,
And I have learned that when I do,
He keeps me in perfect peace,
Through every storm and quiet hour,
His voice whispers still—
My peace I leave with you,
My peace I give unto you.
The Bible, Yah's love letter to His sheep,
Guides me beside still waters,
Restores my soul,
And reminds me of your faith and wisdom
Rooted in His everlasting Word.
From generation to generation,
May His truth dwell richly in our hearts,
As His Spirit leads us home.

Your Loving Son,
Anthony W. Yates

Psalms 133:1-2 (KJV 1611)

*"I'll never forget how
you walked with the
Lord and only asked
us to get God in our
life. The biggest lesson
you always expressed
to me was, walk by
faith, not by sight, put
it in God's hands!
That's when
everything ended
right. Thank you God
for a wonderful
Mother."*

Michael J. Yates – 1st