



Reverend Derek Anthony Terry: A Bridge of Grace

From Louisville's warmth to sacred pulpits high,
A seeker of justice beneath an open sky.
With chemistry's science and spirit's deep grace,
He widened the circle and welcomed each face.
A brother, a leader, whose voice crossed the land,
He offered a table, a welcoming hand.
From pages of history to stories of art,
He left his bright footprint in every heart.
Though shadows now linger and tears gently fall,
His legacy echoes in love for us all.
So hold to the memories, the laughter, the light—
A brilliant soul soaring into the night.



Acknowledgement of Gratitude

The family and loved ones of Reverend Derek Anthony Terry deeply appreciate the overwhelming outpouring of love, prayers, and support during this difficult time.

Seeing how profoundly Derek's life, faith, and fierce love touched others has been a tremendous source of comfort to us all. Thank you for every prayer, kind word, and tribute honoring his memory.

As we navigate this season of grief, let us hold fast to our cherished memories and find the strength together to gently exhale.



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In Loving Memory



JUNE 07, 1984 – AUGUST 08, 2026

REVEREND
Derek Anthony Terry

"He lived with an open heart, led with fierce grace,
and widened the table so that everyone knew they belonged."

In Loving Memory of

Reverend Derek Anthony Terry

June 7, 1984 – August 8, 2026

A Life Remembered

Reverend Derek Anthony Terry — beloved pastor of St. Peter's United Church of Christ and Executive Director of the Open and Affirming Coalition — departed this earthly plane on Saturday, August 8, 2026. He leaves behind a legacy of faith, courage, and love that reached far beyond the walls of any one church, and a community of family, friends, and congregants who are still learning how to say goodbye.

Early Life

Derek was born on June 7, 1984, in Louisville, Kentucky, the first of two children born to Gregory Scott Terry and Stacy Lynette (Dooley) Terry. He was raised in faith at Young's Chapel AME Church in Louisville, KY where the rhythms of Sunday worship and the warmth of church family shaped him long before he ever stood in a pulpit of his own. Derek was very active in the Young People's Department (YPD) and often reflected on fond memories of church activities like the Bible Bowl competitions and traveling to youth conferences. He was always an avid reader, a seeker of knowledge, and wise beyond his years. As a child he was always fascinated with history, social justice, teaching, and learning. He was proud to be the big brother to his sister, Danielle, a role he took very seriously while he still played and teased with her as most big brothers do.

Education

Derek attended Manual High School in Louisville before earning undergraduate and graduate degrees in Chemistry from the University of Louisville. He went on to pursue his theological training and earned a Master's in Divinity from the Louisville Theological Seminary, preparing himself for a lifetime devoted to ministry.

The Call to Ministry

At nineteen years old, Derek gave his life fully to Christ and ministry — a decision that would set the course for everything that followed. Given his youth, some questioned if this was the best decision for a young man his age, but his roles in the church all of his life instilled and compelled him to accept this call to the ministry. He began serving on the Board of Examiners in the fall of 2003, where he was elected class president among his fellow candidates for ministry, and was licensed to preach at Young's Chapel in Louisville, Kentucky. Rev. Strong was among the first to recognize and nurture the ministerial calling on Derek's life and had a profound effect on his social views and spiritual leadership. On September 13, 2006, Derek was ordained an Itinerant Deacon, and two years later, in September 2008, he was ordained an Itinerant Elder. His first church assignment was Shelton Chapel AME Church in Viola, KY, and he served as a Supplied Pastor at St. Paul AME Church in Owensboro, KY. He was later assigned to St. John AME Church in Louisville, KY, and under his leadership the name of the church changed to Community Empowerment Center to better reflect its role in serving and empowering the local community. In addition to serving in these roles, he was appointed to serve as Conference Secretary under Bishop Vasti Murphy McKenzie, and Bishop McKenzie served as a great spiritual mentor, sponsor, and friend to Rev. Terry through the years.

A Voice Beyond the Pulpit

Derek's ministry reached far beyond any single city or congregation. He became a leading voice for inclusion within the Church, serving first as President and later as Executive Director of the Open and Affirming Coalition of the United Church of Christ — work that opened doors and offered belonging to countless people who had once been told there was no place for them at the table. His story reached national audiences, including a 2015 appearance on Iyanla, Fix My Life and a feature with Great Big Story. He was also a published author, sharing his heart and his theology in God Loves Me & So Do I (2015) and The Shattered Ornament (2017), and lending his story to the Black and Queer Icons 2019 Calendar and the Black & Proud Rising Stars 2022 Calendar. In 2024, he contributed to the Vibrant Voices Coloring Book: Coloring the Stories of Black Visionaries — continuing his lifelong work of helping others see themselves reflected, seen, and affirmed.

Community Leadership

Derek's leadership extended well into the wider community. In Louisville he and his church, thanks to a grant from the National Fatherhood Initiative, founded and facilitated the Empowerment Fatherhood Initiative, a program designed to support the important role that fathers play in the lives of their children. Among his many honors and awards, one that he appreciated greatly was his honor to serve as keynote speaker in 2019 for the Cincinnati MLK Coalition celebration. He also participated in or led many initiatives to support food and lodging insecurity, elder services, and sustainability.

Family & the People He Loved

In addition to all his scholarly, spiritual, and leadership efforts, Derek was warm, funny, and a joy to all who knew and loved him. He was a thoughtful and loving son, a devoted brother and uncle, a caring and kind nephew and cousin, a supportive and fiercely protective partner and friend. He had a wonderful sense of humor, loved traveling, spent many, many hours in museums and enjoyed the arts and culture. He loved trivia and the search for answers, and anyone who knew him well would tease him, saying “Derek, you don't really know EVERYTHING!” (smile) He had several hobbies including drawing and painting, jewelry-making, using his science background to make scented lotions and candles, cooking, and canning. Holidays were a favorite time for him, and he loved coming home to spend them with family and friends, making several stops to visit, fellowship, deliver gifts and warm hugs. He would always say, “make sure to save me a plate!” (smile)

His Preaching, His Presence, His Legacy

Those who sat under Derek's preaching knew him as a pastor who knew how to use the Bible and biblical themes to preach and teach, weaving in themes of history, social justice, and the current state of the world. His sermons were designed to give us hope for the future and help us understand the frailty and the strength of the human experience. He was a master at storytelling, and used books, movies, and television to help his audiences relate to his sermons and spiritual lessons. The members of every church he pastored adored him as a minister and related to him as a friend. His magic way of engaging people and cultivating relationships was one of his greatest traits, and his memory and legacy will remain with all who knew him.

Preceded in Death

Derek was preceded in death by his grandmothers, Geneva Dooley and Rebecca Terry, and his grandfather, James Terry.

Left to Cherish His Memory

Derek leaves to cherish his memory his parents, Gregory and Stacy Terry; his sister, Danielle Hall (Terrence); his nieces, Makayla, Makenzie, and Maleia; his grandfather, Richard Dooley, Sr.; Uncles and Aunts, Richard Dooley Jr (Latonya) Latonya Johnson (Valentino Jr.) James Wilton Terry III (Anne) Roy Terry; Cousins: Shaun Terry (Amy) James Wilton Terry III, Cameron Dooley, Kalea Bernard (Jermaine) Courtney Devoe (GeoVonnice) Kania Johnson, Korey Johnson. Cacey Dooley O'Neal (Tyquan) Akoa Johnson, Céraiah O'Neal; His companion, Jordan Carter; his longtime friends Julian Collins, Diane, Katina, and Latoya Whitlock; and the members of St. Peter's United Church of Christ, whom he loved as his own.

In Closing

As we reflect on Derek's life and all he held dear, the coming days will be difficult as we try to live in a world without his physical presence. There are no words to describe the grief we are experiencing, so to hold on let us focus on the precious memories of the times we shared and the impact he had on all of us. To borrow from Whitney Houston's song, Exhale, “Sometimes you'll laugh, sometimes you'll cry. Life never tells us the whens or whys. But when you've got friends to wish you well, you'll find your point when...you will exhale.” Let us pray to be well and exhale.