

CELEBRATING A PURPOSEFUL LIFE



CELEBRATING A MISSION-FILLED LIFE

May 6, 1948-April 24, 2026

The Honorable Mary Jo Haywood

Saturday, the 2th of May 2026 | 3:00 PM
Open Door Church of Praise, Camilla, Georgia

Vision for Today's Program



Our family and I want you to leave this service today knowing and feeling exactly who our beloved Mary Jo Haywood is and was. She was a woman who lived with a fierce, intentional grace, believing that every life has a sacred assignment. She moved through this world as the living embodiment of the mandate from French philosopher, Frantz Fanon that “each generation must, out of relative obscurity, define its mission and fulfill it.” Whether she was leading a city, preserving history, or pouring her soul into her daughter, grandchildren, and family she was fulfilling a mission she refused to betray. She was a mother’s heart, a strategist’s mind, and a servant’s spirit.

We hope that today you feel the weight of her courage and the warmth of her love. As you go, may you carry her fire with you and be inspired to define and fulfill a mission of your own.

Chanta

Order of Service

At the request of Dr. Chanta Haywood, there will be no choir for this service. It's not as an absence, but to honor her mother's core belief in the power of one voice raised with courage and the strength of many voices joined in purpose. In that spirit, the congregation is invited to lift its voice in the hymns and spirituals Mary Jo loved. Today, the choir is all of us. Similarly, there will also be no spoken reflections. Instead, tributes from family, friends, neighbors, and loved ones are printed in this program so that the village Mary Jo loved can speak in many voices.

OPENING

EVANGELIST ROSA CHAPMAN

FAMILY PROCESSIONAL

SONG: THAT'S ALRIGHT (LONG AS I KNOW
THAT I'VE GOT A SEAT IN THE KINGDOM)

WELCOME

EVANGELIST ROSA CHAPMAN

OPENING HYMN- A CHARGE TO KEEP

TANYA ROSS THOMAS

OLD TESTAMENT READING: ESTHER 4:16

NEW TESTAMENT READING: MATTHEW 25: 34-40

PRAYER OF COMFORT

ORIGINAL PIANO TRIBUTE

LOGAN ROBERTS, GRANDSON

MUSICAL SELECTION: "AMAZING GRACE"

JORDAN ROBERTS, GRANDDAUGHTER

REFLECTION & TRIBUTE

DR. CHANTA HAYWOOD, DAUGHTER

OBITUARY READ SILENTLY

CONGREGATIONAL SELECTION

LED BY BISHOP JAMES BOLTON

GOSPEL RECORDING ARTIST

OLD TIME CHURCH MEDLEY

LED BY EVANGELIST ROSA CHAPMAN & CORNELIUS DRAKE

SERMON OF CELEBRATION

REVEREND ALONZO SMITH JR.

BROTHER OF DR. CHANTA HAYWOOD

SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

RECESSIONAL

SONG: LET EVERY BODY SAY AMEN

Old Testament Reading Esther 4:16

....and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.

New Testament Reading Matthew 25: 34-40

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

The Honorable Mary Jo Haywood: A Journey of Faith, Leadership, and Divine Destiny

The Honorable Mary Jo Haywood entered eternal rest on April 24, 2026, leaving behind a life distinguished by faith, perseverance, family, public service, advocacy, and history-making leadership.

Foundations of Faith and Early Leadership

Mary Jo was born in 1948 to Nathan "Jr." Haywood and Christine Wilson Haywood. As a child, she joined Oak Grove Missionary Baptist Church, the spiritual home that helped form her faith, values, and understanding of service. That foundation remained central throughout her life and was later reflected in her work as a Sunday School teacher, civic leader, advocate, and mayor. From an early age, Mary Jo gave evidence of the leader she would become. She did not simply attend school; she excelled. She served as class president, an early sign that others trusted her voice and recognized her capacity for leadership. She became Miss Camilla Consolidated High School, and in 1966, she graduated as valedictorian.

A Divine Calling

Mary Jo did not understand her life merely through the language of ambition or achievement. She understood it first as divine calling. When asked by her granddaughter, Jordan, during an interview for a high school documentary about her life to identify the prime movers of her journey, she explained that those influences "were defined before I was born by divine destiny." Her first compass was Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plan I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Strength Through Adversity

That conviction sustained her through difficult and demanding circumstances. While she was a freshman in college, her mother died suddenly. Only months after that devastating loss, Mary Jo gave birth to her only child, Dr. Chanta M. Haywood. She was called, while still young herself, to carry responsibilities of raising her daughter and her six orphaned siblings with the help of family and loved ones.

A Career of Service and Advocacy

In the years that followed, Mary Jo built a life grounded in work, service, and public purpose. Before joining Georgia Legal Services, she served as a teacher's aide with the Mitchell County School System. She later became a senior paralegal with the Georgia Legal Services Program and also worked as a self-employed paralegal, specializing in Social Security disability cases.

Her labor contributed to a historic milestone in her community. Working alongside her son-in-law, Attorney Gary Roberts, she served as his paralegal and played an instrumental role in the opening of his firm, Roberts and Giddings, the first Black law firm in Camilla.

Her voice extended beyond the courtroom, the classroom, and city chambers. She contributed to The Atlanta Journal-Constitution and frequently wrote editorials for local and regional newspapers, using the written word as another form of advocacy and public witness.

Civic Leadership and Political Strategy

Her civic and political life emerged from that same foundation. She held active leadership roles within the NAACP, including service as branch and district secretary, and became deeply involved in voter registration, educational campaigns, and legal actions aimed at advancing equity in city employment and public life.

During the Atlanta Child Murders investigation, she helped lead fundraising efforts in response to a tragedy that wounded Black families across Georgia and the nation. She also became a respected political strategist, offering insight and organizing skill to leaders including State Representative Winfred Dukes and U.S. Congressman Charles Hatcher. In 1988, she served as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention during the historic presidential campaign of Reverend Jesse Jackson.

Preserving History and Heritage

In Camilla, Mary Jo maintained a solo vigil for years to honor and remember the victims of the 1868 Camilla Massacre, refusing to allow their names, suffering, and historical significance to be forgotten. Among the causes especially dear to her was the effort to honor Georgia B. Williams, affectionately known as Miss Bea, the midwife who delivered more than 5,000 babies during a time when segregation and exclusion denied many Black women full access to hospital care. She served on the committee connected to the historic Georgia B. Williams Nursing Home and advocated for the preservation of Miss Bea's legacy.

Academic Perseverance

Through all of this, Mary Jo never abandoned her own dream of higher education, which came to fulfillment in 1995, when she earned her degree from Albany State University with honors, completing a journey that had stretched across twenty-eight years of responsibility, work, sacrifice, and persistence. That same year, her daughter received her Ph.D. from the University of California, San Diego. Mother and daughter laughed together about the wonder of it all and joked that, with both of them reaching such milestones, they ought to go to Disney World. It was more than a joke. It was the joy of two generations seeing sacrifice, study, and perseverance come to fruition at the same time.

Expanding the Reach of Service

Her public service continued to expand. She served on the Mitchell County Board of Education, the Mitchell County Board of Tax Assessors, the Executive Board of the Mitchell County NAACP, and the committee connected to the historic Georgia B. Williams Nursing Home. She was also active in organizations including the Camilla Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis International, and the O.E.S., while serving faithfully as a Sunday School teacher at Oak Grove Missionary Baptist Church.

In 2000, Mary Jo co-founded the Wil-Wood Foundation, Inc. with her daughter, Chanta, extending her commitment to creating pathways for young people in Camilla. Through that work, scholarships and opportunities were provided to local students, reflecting her belief that service must open doors for the next generation.

Awards and Recognition

Her life of service received significant recognition, though recognition was never the reason she served. In 2007, she was inducted into the Southern Rural Black Women's Hall of Fame. In 2008, she was recognized as a Georgia State Conference NAACP Woman of Distinction. She also received numerous service awards, including two Congressional Service Awards and recognition from Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and the Southeast Regional NAACP.

Historic Mayoralty

The leadership visible in her youth would later find its fullest public expression in elected office. On November 6, 2007, Mary Jo Haywood made history when she was elected the first woman and first African American mayor of Camilla, Georgia. She was sworn in on January 14, 2008, and served one full term from 2008 to 2012 with distinction. Her election marked a defining moment in the city's civic life and representation. Her tenure reflected her long-standing commitment to transparency, equity, accountability, and the conviction that government should serve all of its people.

Before, during, and after her time in office, Mayor Haywood remained a steadfast advocate for fairness. The City of Camilla later recognized that her efforts toward equality in city employment continued to shape the city's public life. In February 2024, the City dedicated and renamed its executive meeting chamber at City Hall in her honor, establishing the Honorable Mary Jo Haywood Council Chambers as a lasting tribute to her leadership and service.

Family and Legacy

Chanta was born to Mary Jo and the late Reverend Alonzo Smith Sr. From his later marriage to Alice Smith, she was blessed with paternal siblings Reverend Alonzo Smith Jr., Dr. Kimberley Smith, and Dr. Trevena Favors, whom Mary Jo adored. Through Chanta's marriage to Attorney Gary Roberts, Mary Jo became the proud grandmother of Jordan (27), Logan(24), and Kalen(21) Roberts, who were among the greatest joys of her life.

Matriarch and Devoted Friend

Her sense of duty extended far beyond public office. She embraced the sacred responsibility of legally raising her nephews and niece, Sedrick Hodge (Tracie), Adrian Haywood (Shantrell), Monique Haywood, and Carlus Haywood. She also held a wide and cherished place in the lives of her nieces and nephews, including Anthony Lumpkin, Buffy Lumpkin, Terrance "Gil" Lumpkin, Temeika "MiMi" Jenkins, Frizell Crump, William Haywood, Kelvin Haywood, Bridgett Bonaparte, Willie Bonaparte, Yolanda Bonaparte, Nicole Brimberry, Kasandra Robinson, Virgil Robinson, JaQuon Haywood, ShaQuanda Haywood, Ashanti Harrison, Aziah Haywood, and Kaleb Hodge; and her great-nieces and great-nephews, Joshua Haywood and Jiana Haywood. She also shared a special bond with her beloved goddaughter, Dr. Taneisha Knight and her mother, Keva Quimberly.

Mary Jo was richly blessed with friendships that sustained her across every season of life. She treasured the laughter, prayers, counsel, visits, and steady presence of many dear friends, including a beloved circle of confidants whose voices and words of love comforted her in her final days: Ruthie Caldwell, Johnnie Graham, Winnie Saunders, Yvonne Griffin, Rhunette Williford, Beverly Poon, Rachel Henderson, Willie Lockett, Jackie Bryant, Annie Lee Gilbert, Patricia Stubbs, Monty Sanders, Tony White, Winston Ross, Lillie Threats, Nyota Tucker, and James Bush. The family also lovingly acknowledges the many friends, classmates, church members, neighbors, and community members whose love for her was deep and enduring.

Those Who Went Before

As with many lives of depth and consequence, hers was marked by both love and loss. She was preceded in death by her parents, Nathan "Jr." Haywood and Christine Wilson Haywood; her brothers, Willie Haywood and Nathan Haywood; her sisters, Amber Kaye Haywood, Vivian Haywood Lumpkin, and Christy Ann Sanders; her father's oldest child, Willie Carol Arline; and her nephews, Anthony Lumpkin and Carlus Haywood.

Those Who Cherish Her Memory

She leaves to cherish her memory her daughter, Chanta ; her grandchildren, Jordan, Logan, and Kalen, and their father, Gary; her siblings, Rita Haywood and Cecil Haywood; her extended family; and all those who knew her as counselor, champion, strategist, writer, organizer, mayor, mother, grandmother, Auntie, and friend.

A Mission Fulfilled

To speak rightly of Mary Jo Haywood is to speak of a woman who lived with purpose and perseverance. She believed that God had a plan for her life, and by His grace she became what she was called to be. And if she could speak to those mourning her now, perhaps she would call each person to adhere to French philosopher, Frantz Fanon's admonition to define their own personal mission and to refuse to betray it. That was how she lived. That is what she leaves.

She was loved deeply. She served faithfully. She led courageously. And by the grace of God, she became what she was called to be.



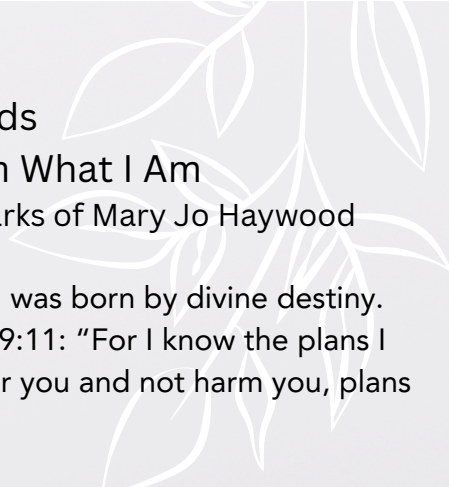
Voices of the Village
A Tribute to the Life and Legacy of Mary Jo Haywood

My mother, Mary Jo Haywood, spent her life listening to people, lifting people, guiding people, and making room for voices that deserved to be heard. For this program, I invited family, friends, neighbors, former students, civic partners, Sorors, and loved ones to share memories, stories, and lessons about what my mother meant to them.

Together, their tributes bear witness to the life she lived. Across family, friendship, faith, public service, scholarship, advocacy, and community, they describe a woman who served with humility, led with courage, gave with quiet generosity, stood for justice, and remained grounded in God. Their words make clear that my mother honored the work she believed she was called to do. She did not merely speak of purpose, grace, service, and faithfulness — she lived them. The voices of the village testify that she executed her mission.

Before we hear their witness, however, it is fitting that we first hear from her.





In Her Own Words

By the Grace of God, I Am What I Am

Adapted from the words and public remarks of Mary Jo Haywood

The prime movers of my life were defined before I was born by divine destiny. The first compass of my life is found in Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

God had a plan for me. All that I accomplished was part of that plan: graduating from high school, even though field work kept me from attending school full time; overcoming poverty; helping rear an orphaned family of eight after my mama suddenly died when I was a freshman in college; holding onto my dream of a college education through a twenty-five-year pursuit; building a decorated life of civic service; breaking barriers; working in the legal field as a self-employed paralegal; and becoming a trailblazer as my city's first Black mayor and first female mayor.

I acknowledge it with the words of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:10: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

By the grace of God, I am what I am. And part of that grace was, and continues to be, a magnificent and supportive family. I am what I am because of you. Supplementing my blood family has always been my courageous soul family, spiritual family, and family of supporters. I see you. I am what I am because of you.

When the Chambers at City Hall were named in my honor, I was grateful. But I also wanted to remind you all that the naming of the Chambers was not the end of the work for which we had labored over the years. There are still scales to be balanced. There are still wrongs to be righted. We must go forward with faith and with hope, encouraged by the knowledge that God has a plan for us. Let us continue to boldly work His plan, dressed in the full armor.

I thank God for putting me in position to be part of the work of His plan. I thank my family, my friends, my soul family, and all who have supported the work. By the grace of God, I am what I am. Let us continue to work God's plan.

Stroke of Truth:
A Reflection on a Moment With My Mom During Her Transition
Chanta Haywood

This black, broken stroke is a mark left by my mother's hand. I turned it into a piece of art. Once strong enough to lift a village, her hand trembled as it tried to convey a message trapped inside a brilliant brain that had suffered a stroke. Her mouth was occupied, her throat taken, her lips taped, her voice muffled by the huff, hiss, and heave of a machine.

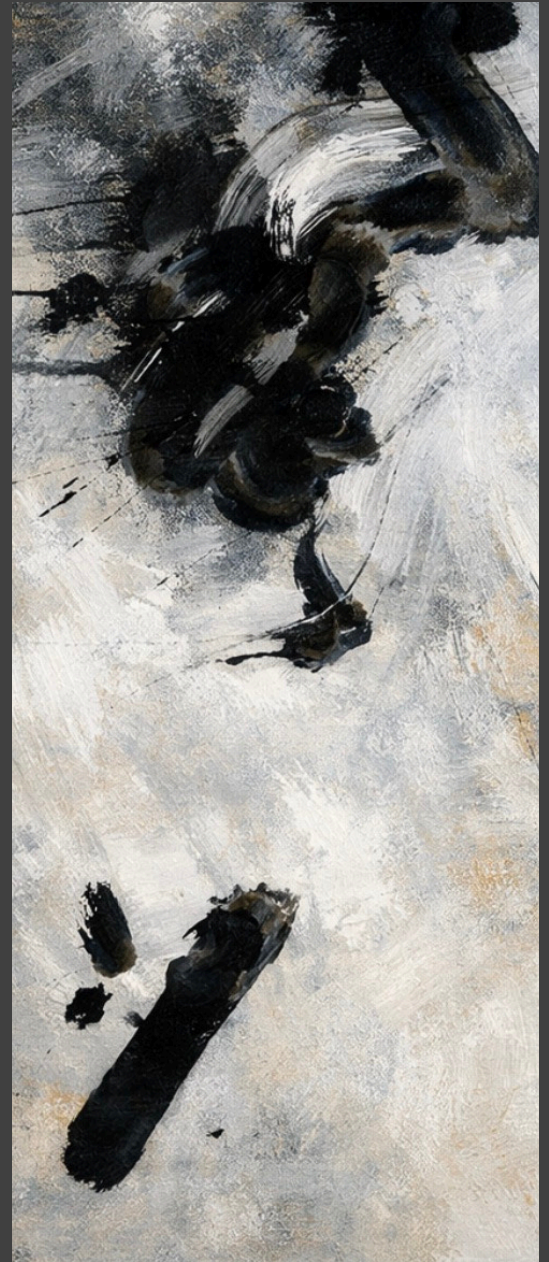
Yet she still had a message for me. I tried everything to catch it. I searched her eyes. I put one ear to her mouth. I even pressed the other to the loop of the tube, listening as if a word might ride the hiss of the machine and find its way to me. I saw her anguish and thought of the hand in her favorite painting, reaching upward for another, so I gave her something to hold: a marker. Then I gave her paper to press it onto.

What she left on that page was a stroke of truth. Even in its brokenness, it said she was still there. She was still trying. She was still speaking the only way she could. It was the brilliant mind of this strong woman searching for a way to bridge the distance between thought and word. Unfinished, it was still there on the page. And as her daughter, I took it as instruction.

This is my interpretation: My only child, do not let the huffing of the world take your throat, occupy your mouth, or tape your lips. Cross the distance however you must. If the mouth is taken, let the hand speak. Leave your mark. If it comes jagged or broken, let it be jagged or broken. Just let it come. Speak and write the truth.

Because this stroke, for all its brokenness, was not silence. It was effort. It was presence. It was a message.

And I hear you, Mama.



See You Later

A Message to My Soror Nana

Kalen Camille Roberts

I was young, in the middle of elementary school. My siblings and I were up in Camilla, visiting my Nana. As we were leaving, I said, "Bye, Nana!" Her demeanor became a bit more serious. She told me, vaguely along the lines of, "Do not say 'bye'. Say, 'See you later!'"

She did not like the term "bye." It was too finite. Too harsh. It was the last word her dad said to her before he was tragically killed in a car wreck. So to her, it indicated that we would never see each other again. I forever changed my vocabulary. I no longer wanted to say bye to anyone, especially to my Nana.

Thus, I will never say goodbye to the days spent watching Family Feud, laughing at nonsensical answers and talking about what we would do differently.

I will never say goodbye to our pre-basketball game ritual: texting each other predictions and analyses of how we thought our team would do against our opponent.

I will never say goodbye to the random encouraging text messages I would get, reminding me that I am brilliant and that I can do whatever I put my mind to.

I will not say goodbye, Nana. I say, "See you later."

KK



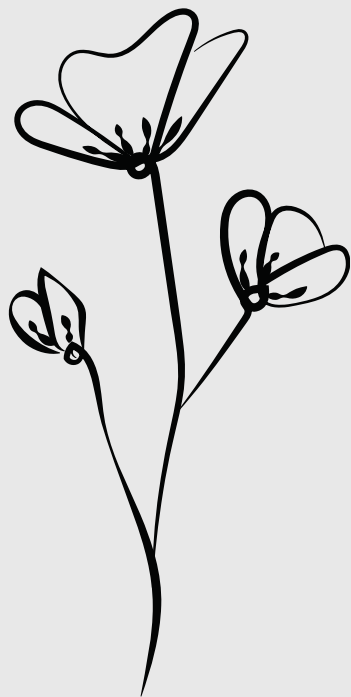
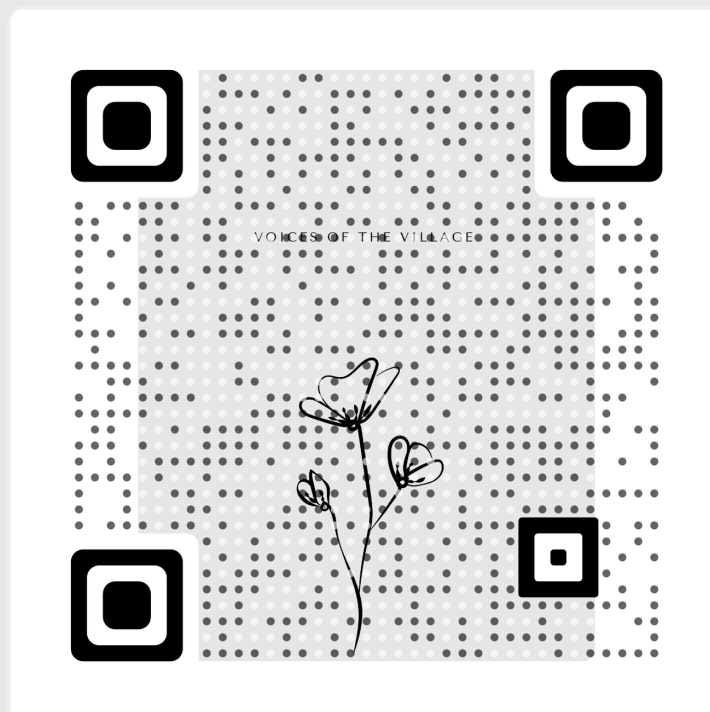
VOICES OF THE VILLAGE

*A Tribute to the Life and Legacy of Mary Jo Haywood
Compiled by Dr. Chanta M. Haywood*

Mary Jo Haywood spent her life listening to people, lifting people, guiding people, and making room for voices that deserved to be heard. In that same spirit, this program now invites those voices forward.

The reflections that follow in the QR code below come from family, friends, neighbors, civic partners, Sorors, and loved ones, each offering a personal testament to the life she lived and the impact she made. These are not just memories, but lived experiences shared by those who knew her, walked with her, and were shaped by her presence.

Together, their words bear witness to who she was. Across family, friendship, faith, public service, scholarship, advocacy, and community, they describe a woman who served with humility, led with courage, gave with quiet generosity, stood for justice, and remained grounded in God. Their testimonies make clear that Mary Jo Haywood honored the work she believed she was called to do.



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The Closing Note

These tributes are only a glimpse of the many lives my mother, Mary Jo Haywood, touched. Her voice, her service, her wisdom, and her love remain alive in the people she taught, protected, encouraged, challenged, and loved.

The village speaks because she first listened.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The family of Mary Jo Haywood extends our deepest gratitude for the love, prayers, calls, visits, food, flowers, donations, messages, and every expression of care shown to us during this difficult season.

Your kindness has strengthened us. Your presence has comforted us. Your words have reminded us that her life reached far beyond her family and touched a village, a community, and generations of people who loved and respected her.

We are especially grateful to the members of Open Door Church of Praise, Oak Grove Missionary Baptist Church, the Chamber of Commerce Arts Council, the Camilla community, family, friends, classmates, neighbors, public servants, former constituents, and all who have helped us honor her life and legacy with dignity, grace, and love.

Whether you sat with us, prayed for us, fed us, called us, remembered her, served in this celebration, or simply held us in your heart, please know that we are deeply thankful.

May God bless each of you for the care you have shown as we celebrate the life, service, faith, and enduring legacy of our beloved mother, grandmother, sister, aunt, friend, leader, and servant.



INTERMENT

Oak Grove Missionary Baptist
Church 7141 Pipeline Road,
Camilla, Georgia 31730

PALL BEARERS

Adrian Haywood
Sedrick Hodge
Logan Roberts
Joshua Haywood
Duriel Jackson
Jarold Jackson

FLOWER BEARERS

Class of 66
Class of 86
Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority,
Inc.



1 Corinthians 15:10:

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

The Honorable Mary Jo Haywood