

Celebrating THE LIFE OF **MERLE BATES GRIGGS**



NOVEMBER 7, 1936 - JULY 10, 2025



SATURDAY, JULY 26, 2025

Visitation: 9:00 AM
Service: 9:30 AM



East Mt. Zion Baptist Church
9990 Euclid Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44106

Rev. Dr. Brian A. Cash, Pastor



Order of Service



Officiant.....Rev. George Curry
Associate Minister, East Mt. Zion Baptist Church

Musical Prelude.....Todd Thompson

Processional.....Clergy, Deacons and Family
Family Visitation

Musical Selection.....April Johnson
"Safe In His Arms"

Scripture Reading

Old Testament.....Chris Bates

New Testament.....Rosalind Swain

Prayer.....Rev. George Curry

Resolutions & Acknowledgements.....Gwendolyn Brown

Obituary.....(Read Silently)

Remarks/Reflections.....2 Minutes Please

Musical Selection.....April Johnson
"Jesus Promised Me A Home Over There"

Eulogy.....Rev. Emmanuel Onunwor
Associate Minister, East Mt. Zion Baptist Church

Recessional.....Clergy & Family

Pallbearers

Richard Johnson
Christian Oakley

Prince Johnson
Tahir Everett

Curtis Oakley
Tristyn Everett

Honorary Pallbearers

Allen Pulphus

Ovunda Onunwor

Alfonso Onunwor

Flower Bearers

East Mt. Zion First Touch Ministry and Women's Ministry

Interment

Lakeview Cemetery
12316 Euclid Avenue - Cleveland, Ohio 44106



MERLE'S *Life* JOURNEY

Merle Bates was born on Saturday, November 7, 1936, in Washington, DC. Alice Martin Bates and Robert Edward Bates, Sr., lovingly welcomed their baby girl. Throughout her life, she was lovingly called Momo named by her first grandchild, Shay who wasn't able to pronounce "grandmom".

Merle grew up in the Northeast Kingman Park neighborhood of the Nation's Capital, with five siblings. She attended the nearby elementary and junior high schools and in 1952, she transferred to the newly built Spingarn High School. Her goal was to become a journalist, and in that pursuit, she was the Feature Editor of the school's paper, the Sentinel. She served as Section President, President of the Girls' League, Secretary of the Student Council, and member of the National Thespian Society. Merle was admired by teachers and neighbors who would comment on what a lovely young lady she was.

She volunteered at Freedmen's Hospital as a Candy Stripe girl. Popular among her peers, as well, Spingarn Senior High School selected her to be its inaugural May Queen in 1953. She crowned her successor weeks before receiving her diploma as a proud member of the school's first graduating class in 1954.

While enrolled as a part-time student at Georgetown University, she also worked full-time at the US Department of the Navy. In 1955, she left her hometown to attend Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. The only African American woman on the Women's Interdorm Council, Merle was elected Vice-President, organizing the Council's Homecoming activities, Honors Day Banquet, and sponsoring two annual formals. To further her career aspirations, she earned an associate degree in medical records at Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland, Ohio.

It was at Drake University that Merle met Donald Spangler. Following their wedding in Washington, DC, they settled in Cleveland, Ohio. From that union, they were blessed with two daughters and a son. Remaining in Cleveland when her first marriage ended, Merle raised her children alone. In 1972 she married Horace Griggs and that union was blessed with a baby girl who joined a big brother and two big sisters.

Merle accepted Christ in her childhood and was a member of Washington, DC's Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1978, she joined East Mount Zion Baptist Church, and on May 28, 1978, she was baptized by Pastor A. Charles Bowie. Merle attended Sunday School Class #3 and also weekly Bible Study. She was an active member of the Women's Ministry serving in the Hannah Samaritan Minnie Manuel Star in the East and Julia Rosanna Circles. For 25 years, Merle served faithfully as the president of the Courtesy Committee, where she dedicated herself to fostering a welcoming and friendly atmosphere for both members and visitors, ensuring that all felt genuinely welcomed and cared for. She also provided hospitality for the church's special guests. In 2020, she was honored by the church for her diligence and commitment to this ministry.

MERLE'S *Life* JOURNEY

When Merle retired from NEON, she served as a church office volunteer, and as a member of the Seniors' Ministry. Merle loved her church and she served with a gracious spirit, always presenting a friendly countenance and a warm presence. In addition to her service within the church, she was actively involved with AGAPE.

Her first job in Cleveland was with the Cuyahoga Democratic Party, where she served as Administrative Assistant; she later worked with the Urban League of Greater Cleveland. When the newly established community health center, NEON, opened, she was the first employee to be hired. After a stellar 44-year career as Medical Records Director, she earned a well-deserved retirement.

Merle shared her stylish fashion sense and modeling skills organizing and promoting fashion shows, as she served as President of the Forest City Volunteers in East Cleveland. She sat on the board of directors of Black Professionals Association Charitable Foundation.

East Cleveland was the proud home to the Spangler-Griggs family House. In recent years, she settled in Shaker Heights at Oliver House, where she enjoyed afternoon visits with friends in the lobby. Known as The Crew, ten women gathered each afternoon for fellowship, Bible study, and birthday celebrations, offering snacks to anyone who entered.

Merle loved to travel with her son, daughters, and others. Her travel was not limited to domestic places as she enjoyed trips abroad to France, enjoying the sites and museums of Paris, and to the United Kingdom, touring the historic colleges in Cambridge, Oliver Cromwell's Ely home, and the Ely Cathedral, and touring London.

Merle was preceded in death by her parents, Alice and Robert E. Bates, Sr., husband, Horace Griggs, and brother Martin Randolph (Randy) Bates. Her loved ones who will keep her in their memories include her children, Sherelle Spangler Oakley, Donnie Spangler (Carla), Nicole Spangler, and Amber Griggs Bright (Terrod); grandchildren Shanitra Spangler Everett, Curtis and Christian Oakley, Allen Pulphus, Richard Johnson, Alexandria Bright; Great-grandchildren: Tahir, Takara, Triana, and Tristyn Everett, Prince-Ryleigh, Royce, and Eliana Johnson; and a great-great granddaughter Gi'Anni Nimai Everett; siblings: Robert E. Bates, Jr., (Upper Marlboro, MD) Mary Bates-Washington, (Avondale Terrace, MD), Kenneth Bates (Dena), (Clinton, MD), and Christopher Bates (Lori), (Phoenix, AZ), sister-in-love Katherine Bates (Washington, DC); goddaughter: Andrea Pennington, M.D. (Detroit); and sister-friend Donna Powell (Chillum, MD). In addition to these loved ones, there remains a host of cousins, nieces, nephews, and many friends.

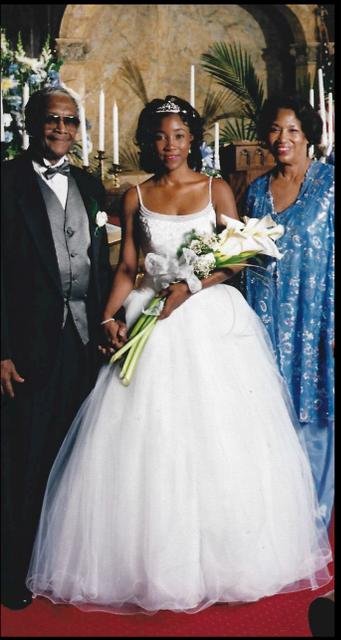
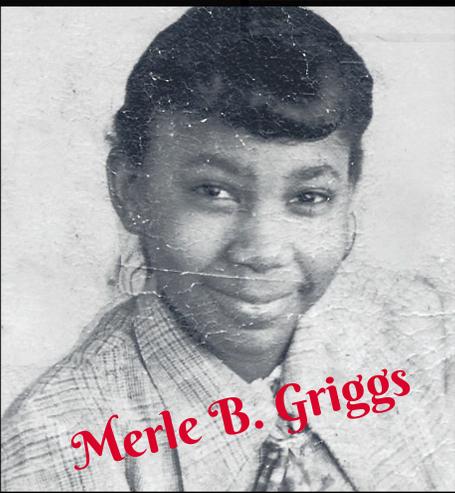
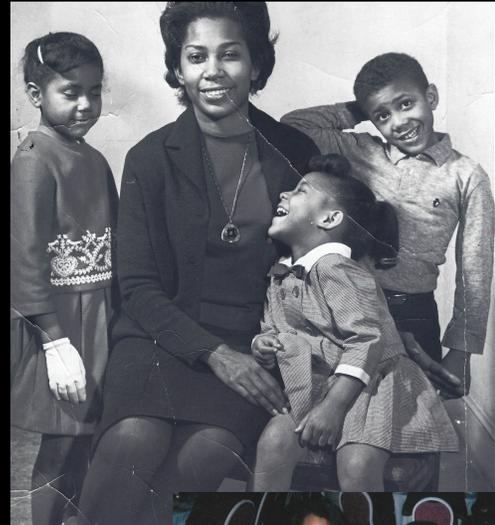


Lovingly Submitted
The Family





Alfred Johnson



Acknowledgements

The Spangler-Griggs family is grateful for the many calls, cards, prayers, and care given to our matriarch, Merle Bates Spangler-Griggs. We thank those who gently cared for her, Aaqila Al-Amin, Crystal Moore, and Freda Saleem, and extend our appreciation to the staff at Serenity Hospice for their professional care.

Repast

A repast for family and friends will be held immediately following burial service at Sa'Shay Event Center - 13124 Euclid Avenue - East Cleveland, Ohio 44112



**ARRANGEMENTS ENTRUSTED TO
WATSONS FUNERAL HOME
10913 Superior Ave . - Cleveland, OH 44106**

Program by Pamela Onunwor

A Tribute to Our **BELOVED MOTHER**

Our hearts are heavy as we say goodbye to our dear mother. She was a woman of grace, strength, and unwavering love—a true example of kindness and dedication.

Mom worked tirelessly to provide for her family. She carried the weight of the world on her shoulders, but never let us feel anything but love and security. Her hands were strong from hard work, yet gentle when we needed comfort. She taught us resilience, the value of honesty, and the power of faith.

Mom was a devoted Christian, She leaned on her faith in both joyful and difficult times. Her trust in God was her anchor, and she shared that strength with those around her. She always encouraged us to pursue our dreams, reminding us that with faith and perseverance, anything was possible.

Mom wanted the best for her children, and she gave the best of herself every single day. Her love was the kind that shaped us, held us together, and will stay with us forever.

Though our hearts are broken, we find comfort in knowing that she is now at peace, wrapped in the arms of the Lord she loved so dearly. We will carry her memory in everything we do and honor her by living with the same kindness, courage, and faith she showed us.

We love you, Mom—forever and always.
Sherelle, Donnie, Nicole, Amber

