

THE LIFE & LEGACY OF

Lydia Ruth Phillips Grays was born May 25, 1956 to the late Lucion Phillips and Eartha Mae Booker, in West Columbia, SC. She transitioned peacefully on Tuesday, April 28, 2026, surrounded by her devoted husband and loving daughters who carried her home to the Lord in prayer. Known to friends and family as Lynda, she lived a life dedicated to her faith and to her family. Lynda was also known for her beautiful singing voice, her loving heart, and her sharp wit. She was an outstanding mother, sister, grandmother, aunt, cherished confidant, and friend. Lynda matriculated through the Richland County School District, attending Lakeview Elementary and Columbia High School, where she was a member of the Sewing Club and enjoyed singing in the school choir. She graduated from Columbia High School in 1974.

Yet, just before graduating, she would meet and fall in love with a young soldier stationed at Fort Jackson in December of 1973 while working behind the lunch counter at Kress Five and Dime in Downtown Columbia. Lynda was united in holy matrimony to Deacon Dennis Earl Grays on September 14, 1974. Together they traveled, laughed, and worshiped in unbinding partnership for over fifty one remarkable years; building a loving family along the way. Lynda and Dennis danced nearly every day of those fifty one years and relished telling their love story to all who would listen. They could often be found “swinging out” on their deck with friends and family, or simply enjoying a good “two-step” in their living room by themselves. Either way, and for so many years, Lynda enjoyed the dance and filled every space with her signature laughter.

When asked what she dreamed of becoming most as a child, Lynda would respond, “I always wanted to be a mommy.” Lynda was an exceptional mother. She supported her three daughters through their many endeavors, shuttling them to practice and club meetings, attending band and orchestra recitals, opening nights of plays, and track meets. Later, helping them navigate their careers and parenthood. She raised her daughters to have a strong sense of self and was a fierce advocate of their joy. She raised them to seek Christ first in all things. Lynda loved her five grandchildren unconditionally and felt blessed that her daughters made her a grandmother. Following her mother’s passing, Lynda stepped into the role of matriarch, standing beside her sisters and brothers where their mother once had. She took tremendous pride in watching her younger siblings walk down the aisle, advising them, holding them to their mother’s standards, and being their trusted advisor and friend. She and her big sister grew up thick as thieves. She was, for all of her siblings, an absolute anchor. Lynda felt blessed that her siblings made her an aunt, and she loved her nieces and nephews beyond measure.

ORDER OF SERVICE

Prelude
Musician

Processional/Viewing
What a Friend We Have in Jesus
Clergy and Family

Selection
Down Through the Years
Mt. Pilgrim Baptist Church Combined Choir

Old Testament
Psalm 91: 1-4
Pulpit
New Testament
Thessalonians 4: 13-18
Sis. Elizabeth Bouldin
Prayer of Comfort
Reverend Abraham Salley
New Laurel Missionary Baptist Church

Selection
Just Tell Them When You Saw Me
I Was On My Way
Jubilee Choir

Poem
Tyler Lorinda Huggins, Eldest Grandchild

Selection
Sister Gerri Peay

Remarks
Deacon Eddie Nelson
Carol Rockett-Carr
Penny McConnell
Denise LaKimberly Grays Lyles

Special Acapella Tribute
Family

Selection
I am Free
Mt. Pilgrim Baptist Church Combined Choir

Words of Comfort
Reverend Rock E. Sims

Recessional
Somebody Prayed for Me

Postlude
Committal, Prayer, Benediction

Internment
Ft. Jackson National Cemetery
4170 Percival Rd, Columbia, SC 29229
1:00 PM



WHEN TOMORROW STARTS

Without Me!

When tomorrow starts without me
And I'm not here to see
If the sun should rise and find your eyes
Are filled with tears for me
I wish so much you wouldn't cry
The way you did today
While thinking of the many things
We didn't get to say
I know how much you love me
As much as I love you
And each time you think of me
I know you'll miss me too
But when tomorrow starts without me
Please try to understand
That an angel came and called my name
And took me by the hand
And said my place was ready
In Heaven far above
And that I'd have to leave behind
All those I dearly love
But when I walked through Heaven's gate
I felt so much at home
When God looked down and smiled at me
From His great golden throne
He said this is eternity
And all I promised you
Today your life on earth is past
But here it starts anew
I promise no tomorrow
For today will always last
And since each day's the same way
There's no longing for the past
So when tomorrow starts without me
Don't think we're far apart
For every time you think of me
I'm right here in your heart

Lynda loved fashion, beauty, home décor, and all the aspects of being a lady, which made her especially well-suited to working in retail for many years. Eventually, though, she would thrive as the Lead Switchboard Operator at Blue Cross/Blue Shield, retiring from BCBS in 2021 after thirty years of service. Lynda's faith journey started at a young age. She came to know Christ as a member of The House of Prayer in West Columbia, and she and Dennis would eventually marry there, in her childhood church. As she crossed the United States from Army base to Army base with her young family, Lynda stayed in constant service to the Lord. So dedicated to the Lord was Lynda that she and Dennis became founding members of Bible Way Baptist Church in Copperas Cove, TX, helping to establish a Christ-centered house of worship for their community. Eventually resettling in Columbia, Lynda followed her mother and siblings to Greater St. Luke Baptist Church. Then, with great joy, Lynda became a member of Mt. Pilgrim Baptist Church. She would call Mt. Pilgrim home until the day she passed. Once a member, Lynda dove right into leadership at Mt. Pilgrim, serving with distinction alongside her husband during her tenure.

She humbly served as Church Clerk, Secretary of the Women's Ministry. She eventually took on the role of President of the Women's Ministry. Deeply passionate about the word, Lynda was a dedicated Bible Study and Sunday School attendee. Before her passing, Lynda was settling into her newly minted role of Deaconess. But what Lynda enjoyed most was singing a joyful noise unto the Lord as a member of the Jubilee Choir. Lynda adored her church family, a fact she emphasized when she was named Guest Speaker for Mt. Pilgrim's Annual Women's Day. Lynda spoke on how her church family, in concert with her own family, covered her through many of her darkest hours, and that she was forever grateful for their constant prayer and encouragement. Lynda returned those acts of prayer and kindness to all who knew her, lending her spiritual ear and shoulder, serving as the chaplain for the Smith-Wiley Family Reunion Committee. She loved her family no matter the distance; she was always willing to pray for those in need. Lynda cherished things that held rich histories. She loved antiquing and retelling stories of her beloved mother, grandmother, and elders. She loved the old hymns and spirituals they sang and made sure to pass these songs down to younger generations of her family so that they might hold their ancestors' music and histories with care.

Lynda leaves a vast community of loved ones to celebrate her memory. She was a wife to her devoted husband, Deacon Dennis Earl Grays, mother to daughters, Donnie Lorinda Grays Huggins, Donnetta Lavinia Grays, and Denise Lakimberly Grays (Brandon) Lyles, baby sister to her loving sister Lois Smith, Lula Mae Wilson, Janie Lee Phillips, Racheleen Salley and brother Rev. Franklin (Sherfonia) and big sister to Ivan Lee Smith, Eartharene (Robert) Henry, Denise Ross, and Tasha Smith, grandmother to Tyler Lorinda Huggins, Dennis Michael Dottery, Christina Michelle Dottery, Brandon Nathan Lyles II, and Lynda Lee Lyles. Lynda is also remembered by a host of nieces, nephews, brothers and sisters in law, cousins, extended family and friends.

Pallbearers

Ivan Lee Smith
Eric Outley
Wendell Booker
Mcoy Bell
Cody Smith
James Floyd Jr.

HONONARY

Pallbearers

Brandon Lyles I
Dennis Dottery
Brandon Lyles II
Matthew Smith
Laten Smith
Johnathan Smith
Harrison Ross
Josh Smith

Floral Bearers

Tyler Lorinda Huggins
Lynda Lee Lyles
Christina Michelle Dottery
McKenzie Bell
Corliss Outley
Summera Smith

IN LOVING *Memory*



Lydia "Lynda" Grays

MAY 25, 1956 - APRIL 28, 2026

THURSDAY, MAY 7, 2026
10:30 AM

We, the family of Lydia Grays, wish to warmly thank you for your comforting words and genuine acts of kindness in our time of bereavement.

Expression of Gratitude



CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF SERVICE

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Johnathan P. Holley

PRESIDENT & DIRECTOR

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