

IN CELEBRATION OF AND
IN THANKSGIVING FOR

THE LIFE OF

Dr. W. James
“Jimmie”
Abbington, Jr.

April 15, 1960 - September 27, 2025

Saturday, October 4, 2025 | 2:00 PM

Friendship Baptist Church
80 Walnut Street, Atlanta, GA 65202

Co-officiants

Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Hale, Senior Pastor,
Ray of Hope Christian Church
Rev. Dr. Kelly Miller Smith, Jr., Pastor,
Friendship Baptist Church



Order of Service

Organ Prelude

Solemn Prelude on a Theme of Tomas Tallis

Gerald Finzi

Dr. Joyce Finch Johnson, organ
Professor Emerita of Music and College Organist, Spelman College

Give Me Jesus

arr. Eurydice Osterman

Will Buthod, organ
Minister of Music and Church Organist, Holy Trinity Parish; Director of Voices of Imani,
Emory University/Candler School of Theology

First Sonata for Organ
-Andantino
-Finale

Florence B. Price

Dr. Nathaniel Gumbs, organ
Director of Music and Organist,
The Riverside Church (New York City)

Processional

Invocation

Rev. Dr. Kelly Miller Smith, Jr.
Pastor, Friendship Baptist Church

Opening Hymn

Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah

CWM RHONDDA

1. Guide me, O Thou great Je - ho - vah, Pil - grim through this
2. O - pen now the crys - tal foun-tain, Whence the heal - ing
3. When I tread the verge of Jor - dan, Bid my anx - ious

bar - ren land; I am weak, but Thou art might - y;
stream doth flow; Let the fire and cloud - y pil - lar
fears sub - side; Bear me through the swel - ling cur - rent,

Hold me with Thy pow'r-ful hand; Bread of heav-en,
Lead me all my jour-ney through; Strong De-liv-'rer,
Land me safe on Ca-naan's side; Songs of prais-es,
Bread of heav-en, Feed me till I want no
strong De-liv-'rer, Be Thou still my strength and
songs of prais-es, I will ev-er give to
more, Feed me till I want no more.
shield, Be Thou still my strength and shield.
Thee, I will ev-er give to Thee.

Text: William Williams, 1717-1791; st. 1, tr. Peter Williams, 1722-1796
Tune: CWM RHONDDA, 8 7 8 7 8 77; John Hughes, 1873-1932

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Scripture Reading (Psalm 116)

Rev. Dr. Darryl Tookes
Minister & General Surgeon

Scripture Reading (1 Thess. 4:13-18)

Dr. Kevin Murriel
Pastor, Cascade United Methodist Church

Prayer of Comfort

Rev. Dr. Allison Henderson-Brooks
Assistant Dean of Students, Candler School of Theology, Emory University
Senior Pastor, Hill First Baptist Church, Athens, GA

Choral Prayer Response

Thank You For Hearing Our Prayer

Stephen Key

Music

I Was Glad

C. Hubert Parry

Reflection

Dr. Jonathan Strom
Dean, Candler School of Theology, Emory University

Reflection

Dr. Quinton H. Dixie
Interim Director, Office of Black Church Studies
Associate Research Professor, Duke Divinity School

Music

More Love To Thee: A Medley
Indra Thomas, soprano

arr. Joseph Joubert

Solo Tribute

Dr. John Paul McGee, piano
Assistant Chair, Berklee College of Music

Reflection

Bob Batastini
Retired Vice President & Senior Editor Emeritus, GIA Publications

Music

In Bright Mansions Above

arr. Roland Carter

Reflection

Dr. Uzee Brown
Professor Emeritus, Morehouse College

Music

My Father Watches Over Me
Joshua Troutman, tenor

arr. Leon Lewis

Family Tribute

Dr. Claressa Morton
Retired Vice President, Shenandoah University

Music

It Pays To Serve Jesus
Stephen Akin, tenor

arr. Nathan Carter

Reflection

Dr. Lisa M. Weaver
Interim Campus Pastor and Pastoral Theologian-in-Residence,
Belmont University

Solo

Byron Cage
Gospel Recording Artist

Eulogy

Bishop Samuel R. Moore
Full Gospel Assembly

Music

Fare Ye Well
Dr. Uzee Brown, baritone

arr. Wendell Whalum

The musical score for 'Fare Ye Well' is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). It features a treble and bass staff. The treble staff includes a 'Solo' section at the beginning, followed by an 'All:' section, and another 'Solo' section at the end. The lyrics are written below the treble staff, with five verses: 1. Fare ye well, 2. Pray on, 3. Live the life, 4. Sing on, 5. Praise His name. The bass staff provides a harmonic accompaniment, with a 'Solo' section at the end.

Solo: *All:* *Solo:*

1. Fare ye well, fare ye well, fare ye well,
2. Pray on, pray on, pray on,
3. Live the life, live the life, live the life,
4. Sing on, sing on, sing on,
5. Praise His name, praise His name, praise His name,

All: an - y -

fare ye well,
 pray on,
 live the life, if I nev - er, ev - er see you an - y -
 sing on,
 praise His name,
 an - y -

more.

fare ye well. Fare ye well, fare ye well, fare ye
 pray on. Pray on, pray on, pray
 more, live the life. Live the life, live the life, live the
 sing on. Sing on, sing on, sing
 praise His name. Praise His name, praise His name, praise His

more.

well:
 on:
 life: I'll meet you on the oth - er shore.
 on:
 name:

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Benediction

Bishop Samuel R. Moore

Recessional

I Shall Wear A Golden Crown
 Rylan Harris, tenor

Traditional Gospel / arr. Brandon Waddles

Postlude

Toccata from Symphony No. 5

Julian Goods, organ
 Organist, Hartford Memorial Church

Charles-Marie Widor



Wilbur James “Jimmie” Abbington, Jr.

Wilbur James “Jimmie” Abbington, Jr., a distinguished church musician, educator, and scholar whose influence on African American sacred music reached across generations, was born on April 15, 1960, to Wilbur and Daisy Ann Abbington, in Gary, West Virginia, a small U.S. steel coal-mining town that nurtured his earliest love for music and worship. In his own words, Gary was a community that “had very high standards for worship and music,” and it was there that his mother first introduced him to piano progressions at the age of five. That early training, together with the traditions of the Pentecostal church (into which he was baptized and saved at an early age) shaped a musician whose gifts quickly became undeniable.

Abbington often credited the late Dr. Wendell Phillips Whalum of Morehouse College as being his greatest mentor. After an initial start at West Virginia State College, Abbington transferred to Morehouse College, where under Whalum’s guidance he matured musically and spiritually. At Morehouse, he developed a passion for the organ and a commitment to excellence in worship that would define his career. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in 1983. During these years, Abbington served as organist at West Hunter Street Baptist Church under Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, and later as associate organist and choir director at Ebenezer Baptist Church, still shepherded by Rev. Martin Luther King, Sr. Abbington cherished Rev. King’s advice to embrace scholarship while never forgetting the roots of African American worship traditions. That grounding, coupled with Abbington’s studies, would shape a career devoted to bridging heritage and academic rigor.

Abbington pursued graduate studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, earning the Master of Music in 1995 and the Doctor of Musical Arts in 1999, where he studied with Marilyn Mason. While in Michigan, he also served as organist, choir director, and lay minister of music at Hartford Memorial Baptist Church in Detroit, where the Reverend Dr. Charles Adams encouraged him to deepen his theological foundation. Adams even arranged for Abbington to pursue independent study at Harvard, ensuring he integrated biblical and pastoral insight with his musical training.

His academic career was distinguished. He served as professor of music at Morgan State University (1998–2003), associate professor of music and director of the Concert Choir at Shaw University (2003–2006), and for nearly two decades as associate professor of church music and worship at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University (2006–2025). He also taught as adjunct professor of church music at Morehouse College and as visiting professor of Christian hymnody at Yale University’s Institute of Sacred Music.

In 2025, Abbington reached a pinnacle of recognition when Duke Divinity School appointed him the inaugural Joseph B. Bethea Professor of the Practice of Sacred Music and Black Church Studies. The endowed chair, established through a \$5 million gift from The Duke Endowment, was designed to strengthen Black Church studies and theological formation. Dean Edgardo Colón-Emeric hailed Abbington as “a wonderful addition to our faculty and the broader Duke community,” affirming his appointment as a landmark moment for both Duke and the wider church.

Beyond the classroom, Abbington was a prolific editor and author. His publications include *Let the Church Sing On! Reflections on Black Sacred Music* (2009), *Readings in African American Church Music and Worship* (2001), and *Let Mt. Zion Rejoice! Music in the African American Church* (2001). He co-authored worship resource volumes (*Waiting to Go!* 2002; *Going to Wait!* 2003), edited Wyatt Tee Walker’s *Spirits That Dwell in Deep Woods* (2003), and advanced organ repertoire through *King of Kings: Organ Music of Black Composers, Past and Present* (2008–2009). His discography includes *Use Me* (2008), *Beams of Heaven* (2006), and *How Excellent Is Thy Name* (2004), along with several collections drawn from the African American Heritage Hymnal.

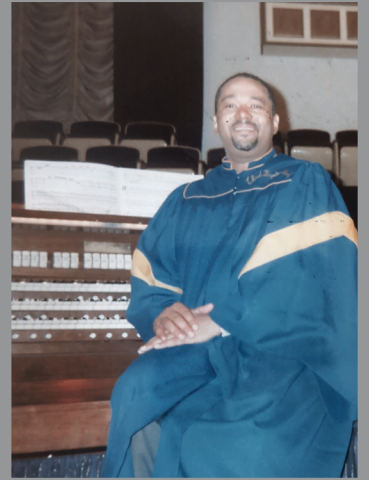
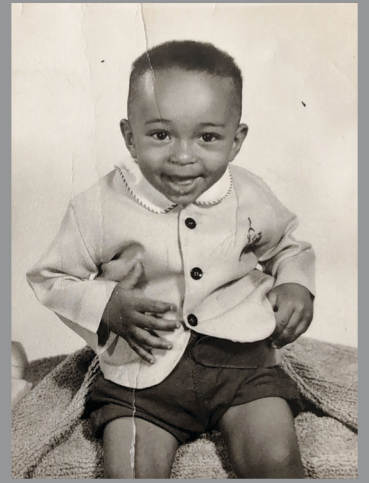
Abbington also served as Executive Editor of the African American Church Music Series at GIA Publications for more than 25 years, ensuring that the music of African American composers would find its rightful place in churches and concert halls. He was co-director of music for the Hampton University Ministers’ and Musicians’ Conference, where in 2010 the Choir Directors’-Organists’ Guild named their Church Music Academy in his honor. He also served as national director of music for both the Progressive National Baptist Convention and the NAACP, extending his reach across communities nationwide. He was the minister of music and church organist at Friendship Baptist from 2012–2025.

His scholarship and talents earned him recognition as a Fellow of The Hymn Society of the United States and Canada, the organization’s highest honor. He was only the second African American to ever receive this honor. His research and teaching—spanning African American sacred folk music, organ, choral repertoire, and ethnomusicology—have shaped the study and practice of worship for decades.

To students, colleagues, and congregations alike, Dr. Abbington was a teacher, mentor, and example of how music could both honor heritage and serve the living church. True to Rev. King’s charge, he never forgot how to play “Amazing Grace” in the way his community sang it. In that vein, he uniquely fused his Pentecostal roots into public performance and scholarship, and in recent years he conducted extensive research on the music of that church tradition.

His life’s work connected scholarship, tradition, and passion for sacred music and worship in service to God and God’s people. It was that unique blend that led to Abbington’s being highly sought-after as a guest director, organist, and clinician for many of the nation’s major church congregations and universities. He directed choirs in performance with both the Dallas and Detroit symphonies. Yet, Jimmie would still visit a small church and share his talents, and he did it with the same passion that he brought to major venues. As Kipling once wrote, Jimmie could walk with kings, but not lose the common touch.

Dr. Abbington’s legacy will live on in the countless lives he touched, the choirs he led, the hymns he preserved, and the students he inspired and mentored to connect music, theology, and worship.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The family of Dr. W. James "Jimmie" Abbington, Jr. is deeply grateful for the many thoughtful acts and expressions of care shown during our time of bereavement. Your prayers, calls, visits, and other kindnesses have brought us great comfort during this difficult season, and we will be forever grateful. Please continue to keep all who knew and loved Jimmie in your prayers. May God bless you.

HONORARY PALLBEARERS

Vinroy Brown
Dr. Tyrone Clinton
Omar Dickenson
Dr. Jason Max Ferdinand
Kevin Flowers
Julian Goods
Rev. Rylan Harris
Shaan Jacobs
Dr. Antwan Lofton
Isaac Moshay
Dr. Emorja Robertson
Dr. Braxton Shelley

INTERMENT

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