

COGIC Bishop W.L. Porter Dies

✖ **April 13, 2009** – Bishop Willie Lee Porter Sr., a veteran leader in the 6 million-member Church of God in Christ (COGIC) and one of the last bishops to have served with founder C.H. Mason, died Saturday in his home after battling congestive heart failure. He was 83.

Porter, bishop of the Tennessee Central Jurisdiction, had been in frail health for several years and suffered a heart attack in December while undergoing surgery after a fall on Christmas Day. He had remained hospitalized until late March, when he was released. His son Brandon Porter told *Charisma* he seemed to be in stable condition but suddenly stopped breathing the day before Easter.

Porter was the founding pastor of Greater Community Temple COGIC in Memphis and a former member of the denomination's general board, which is comprised of its senior leaders. He directed COGIC's public relations office for more than 30 years and helped coordinate its annual Holy Convocation during that time.

In 1981, Porter was appointed head of the Tennessee Central Jurisdiction, which has grown from 30 churches to 68 today, becoming the largest of the three jurisdictions in the state.

As superintendent of properties for COGIC, Porter helped coordinate Martin Luther King's visit to Mason Temple, where the civil rights leader gave his final speech the night before his assassination on April 4, 1968.

That year, Porter and other COGIC leaders, including late Presiding Bishop Gilbert Patterson, marched in support of Memphis sanitation workers, who went on strike when the mayor refused to grant them a pay raise. King had traveled to Memphis to help negotiate a settlement in the strike.

Born June 18, 1925, in Memphis, Porter accepted Christ while in his early 20s, walking down the aisle during a revival meeting still carrying heroine in his pocket.

Shortly after his salvation, W.L. Porter joined New Jerusalem COGIC in Memphis and later began preaching. In 1971 he established a day care center and the following year founded Greater Community, which became a central location for area residents to obtain a variety of social services, including food stamps and GED testing.

The church's building was paid for in full by Porter's brother, musician David Porter, who co-wrote R&B hits such as "Soul Man" and "Hold on I'm Comin'" with Isaac Hayes at Stax Records.

Brandon Porter, 50, now leads 4,000-member Greater Community, which has locations in Memphis, Jackson and Clarksville, Tenn. He is to be installed as leader of the Tennessee Central Jurisdiction in November.

Willie Porter is survived by his wife, Ida M. Porter; three sons, Willie Lee Jr., Dale and Brandon Porter; a daughter, Vivian Renita Porter; 14 grandchildren; five brothers and three sisters.

A public viewing will be held on Wednesday at Unity COGIC in Jackson, Tenn., followed by a jurisdictional memorial service Thursday at Greater Community and a funeral on Friday at Mason Temple COGIC in Memphis.