

# **COGIC Minister, Foster Mother to 1,000, Thelma Lee Battle Buckner, Dies at 89**

The former pastor emeritus of Gospel Temple Church of God in Christ, Thelma Lee Battle Buckner, died June 11 at age 89.

The congregation planned a series of events to honor her life and legacy as the “granny” of St. Paul, Minnesota, where she pastored for 15 years.

In honor of her love of music, the church performed a musical on June 23, and hosted both a “lie in state” on June 24 and a home-going service on June 25.

The daughter of a long line of revivalists, Buckner’s passion for music colored much of her ministry at Gospel Temple. She was a vocalist, pianist and leader, even though the church did not endorse women in leadership at the time, her son Dwight Buckner said.

She personally believed that men were to lead churches as well. But she sensed the Lord calling her to pastor Gospel Temple after her brother died, leaving the church without a leader.

“I said, ‘OK, Lord, I’ll speak whenever you want me to,’” Buckner said. “I refuse to let a rock talk in my place, so I’m going to serve the Lord, hallelujah.”

Speaking of her youth, Buckner recalled how faith was always a very vocal experience, especially among her Pentecostal family.

“There would be singing, shouting, clapping and jumping,” she wrote in her memoir in 2013. “Folks gave their lives to Christ from all that preaching, shouting, clapping and jumping.”

In addition to her musical ministry, she had a heart for neglected kids in the Twin Cities. She dedicated much of her time to caring for the children on the streets, founding a daycare and a camp to do so. She named her daycare the "Twins Daycare," as a way to supplement her family income as a working single mother. Her husband, with whom she had a strained relationship from the beginning, left her at age 29, after she had given birth to eight children.

"I'm just taking a moment to testify," Buckner told Gospel Temple after her husband left, according to her memoir. "Every day, the Lord makes a way."

She raised her eight children to work hard, be kind and have faith, Dwight Buckner told the Twin Cities Pioneer Press.

Her generosity in ensuring kids were raised in the faith didn't just apply to her kids.

"She literally saved my life because I was on the road to juvenile and getting into the system," Leon Matthews told the same outlet. "I'm sure I would've gotten into more trouble and went to prison, but she saved me from all that. She took me in like her own son and raised me."

Matthews was one of numerous children Buckner fostered, according to news reports. It is believed she fostered nearly 1,000 children during her lifetime, though the exact number has not been confirmed. She had taken in nearly half that number before the state certified her as a licensed foster care provider in 1972. In 1985, she bought a 100-year-old, nine-bedroom house in St. Paul so she would have more space to rear her "children."

Buckner's daughter Gwen shared a heartfelt message at the start of the church's celebration of her mother's life.

Another daughter, Aretta-Rie Johnson, recalled how her generous nature prevailed until the end of her life.

"She was just a giver, a servant and a leader," Johnson said. "I lost a mom, but you know, the community, the state, the region has lost a community pioneer."

Buckner is survived by her children, Gwen Onumah-Onikoro, Bessie Jean Manga, Jesse Buckner, Dwight Buckner, Patrick Buckner, Patricia Lacy-Aiken, Arthur Buckner and Aretta-Rie Johnson.

*Please join the Charisma News staff in praying for Buckner's family and all those affected by her loss. {eoa}*

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