

Allen Temple Baptist Church Mourns the Passing of Pastor Emeritus Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith Sr.



Oakland, California Sep 25, 2025 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - The Allen Temple Baptist Church announces with deep sorrow the passing of their Pastor Emeritus, Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith Sr., on Friday, September 19, 2025 at the age of 94. A towering pastor, prophetic preacher, prolific author, and tireless advocate for justice in Oakland and beyond, Dr. Smith faithfully shepherded Allen Temple for four decades, shaping the spiritual and civic landscape of Oakland and the nation.

He led Allen Temple as Senior Pastor for 40 years, growing the congregation from 500 to more than 4,500 members, expanding its campus to span a city block and across five housing complexes, developing ministries that served and advocated for the community, particularly residents of Deep East Oakland, and advocated for justice from City Council to the halls of Congress, the United Nations, and beyond. Dr. Smith was named Pastor Emeritus upon his retirement from Allen Temple in 2009.

Dr. Smith's influence reached far beyond Oakland. Twice named one of Ebony Magazine's "Most Influential Black Americans" and among its "15 Greatest Black Preachers," he lectured at Oxford University and Cambridge, and keynoted Baylor University's Conference on Black Preaching. He was Professor Emeritus of Preaching and Church Ministries at the Berkeley School of Theology, which established the J. Alfred Smith Sr. Endowed Chair of Theology in the Public Square in his honor.

Known for compassion and prophetic courage, Dr. Smith was described as "a towering prophetic figure whose profound vision, courageous witness, and deep love are legendary in our time." He served as the 12th President of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, and was a past President of American Baptist Churches of the West. Dr. Smith was also a member of the Academy of Homiletics, a brother of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., and a 33rd Degree Prince Hall Mason.

Dr. Jacqueline A. Thompson, Senior Pastor of Allen Temple Baptist Church, notes "Dr. J. Alfred Smith Sr. was more than our Pastor Emeritus; he was a national and international leader whose prophetic voice challenged injustice and whose tender care lifted communities. For over four decades, he faithfully shepherded Allen Temple Baptist Church, while his influence reached seminaries, pulpits, and movements across the globe. He stood with courage in the public square, taught with brilliance in the classroom, and preached with conviction from the pulpit. His legacy is found not only in the church he led, but in the countless leaders he mentored. While we mourn his passing, we rejoice that he has received eternal rest and that his legacy lives on."

He is survived by his wife, Reverend Bernestine Smith, his five children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, a host of relatives & friends, and a vast faith family.

Celebration of Life services will be held at Allen Temple Baptist Church, 8501 International Blvd., Oakland: *An Evening of Worship and Witness* on Thursday, October 9, 2025, at 6:00 PM (Lying in Repose: 2-5 PM), and *The Celebration of Life* on Friday, October 10, 2025, at 11:00 AM. Services will be livestreamed on Allen-Temple.org.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Center for Truth, Racial Healing, and Restorative Justice at Berkeley School of Theology.

Press wishing to attend the services should contact Rev. Charlotte Williams, Allen Temple Minister &

Director of Communications, at cwilliams@allen-temple.org or (510) 604-5242 for credentials and protocols.

Media Contact

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