

THE SACRAMENTO BEE

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Pastor Ephraim Williams reflects on almost 50 years of service to Sacramento

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JULY 28, 2020 05:00 AM , UPDATED JULY 29, 2020 10:12 AM



Pastor Dr. Ephraim Williams' office walls are covered in accolades. Plaques and diplomas spill over onto his desk, where tucked amid over 50 awards are photos of his family and a baseball cap that says "Jesus is my boss, Amen."

After nearly 50 years of preaching at St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church, Williams is retiring. But as he reflected on his long career at a retirement celebration outside St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church on Sunday, he credited a higher power for his numerous accomplishments.

"In all of these leadership positions, God has walked with me. And I want him to know I give him all the credit." Williams said, as church members scattered throughout the parking lot erupted in applause and honked their car horns.

Williams has long been a towering figure in Oak Park and the greater Sacramento community. After nearly half a century of leading St. Paul alongside his late wife Carrie Sue Williams, he leaves his post at the end of the month as the most senior tenured pastor in the Sacramento region.

His list of achievements is impressive in scope and scale; Williams has been invited to the White House to speak with President Bill Clinton and President Obama about how best to serve the Black community, recognized by the U.S. Senate, House of Representatives and California Legislative Black Caucus for his leadership, and has received an honorary degree from Sacramento State University, among many other honors.

But one could say his proudest achievements have been at St. Paul, which is irreversibly intertwined with his name and life's work. The church's membership has grown under Williams from a humble 100 when he took his post to over 2,400 today. The building has expanded, too, to nearly 118,000 square feet used for worshiping spaces, classrooms and a Family Life Center.

"He's been a father figure to many," longtime St. Paul attendee and incoming pastor Kenneth Reece said in an interview with The Sacramento Bee. "Not only just a pastor, but a father figure and mentor to hundreds of young men and women. His influence on their lives, our lives, has been a great impact."

In expanding the role of the church, Williams' impact has stretched far beyond the St. Paul community. Under his leadership, the church has grown to offer more than 65 programs and community initiatives, including health and fitness programs, reading and tutorial services, clothing giveaways, employment assistance and mentor programs for children. Classes on anger and grief management, parenting, financial literacy and home ownership are also available.

When reflecting on his legacy, Williams emphasized the impact he hoped to leave on seniors and young people in the community. One such person is Lisa Reece, a lifetime St. Paul attendee and wife of Pastor Reece. She spoke about the impact Williams had on her childhood, and how the programs he set in place allowed her to become the adult she is today, in an interview with The Bee.

‘One of the things that I admired most, coming up as a little girl, was that there were always programs in place. There were always things in place for children and youth to develop,’ she said. ‘I think about all the things I did in church that kept me active and involved in learning how to lead, and learning how to grow spiritually.’

On July 31, Williams will pass the helm to Pastor Reece as the new leader of St. Paul. Williams said he felt he was leaving the church in good hands. ‘Watch and observe how God is going to move the church to another level, under this pastor,’ Williams said in an interview with The Bee. ‘He’s going to do big things.’

While Reece certainly has large shoes to fill, he said he felt all the more confident to lead St. Paul with the foundation Williams has spent so many years building. ‘Pastor Williams has done a wonderful job laying a great foundation. And if I come in just working the plan that has already been in place, I think we’ll be fine,’ Reece said.

Even during retirement, Williams plans to continue to be an active community member, while making use of his newfound time to write a book.

‘I’ll always be here to help you,’ he told Reece in his closing remarks at Sunday’s ceremony. ‘I’m not going to get in his way unless I see he’s walking crooked,’ he joked, inspiring laughs from the crowd. ‘Thank you all very much,’ Williams said in closing at the Sunday ceremony. Then, as the music swelled and the crowd began to cheer, he broke out in song:

‘May the work I have done speak for me. When I am dead in my grave, and nothing can be said, may the work I have done speak for me. May the life I have lived speak for me. God bless you.’

