

# Obituary: William A. Lawson

May 15, 2024

**William A. Lawson**, longtime Houston pastor and civil rights leader, died May 14. He was 95. He was born on June 28, 1928, to William Lawson Sr. and Clarisse Riggs. They divorced when Lawson was a toddler, and he was adopted by his mother's second husband, Walter Cade. At that time, he gained three siblings—Walter Cade Jr., Catherine and Joe Williams.



In 1955, he moved to Houston with his late wife, Audrey, and a young daughter to serve as director of the Baptist Student Union at Texas Southern University. In 1962, he founded Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, where he served as pastor for 42 years. Upon his retirement in 2004, the congregation named him as pastor emeritus. Beyond the walls of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, Lawson helped change the face of Houston by leading the battle to desegregate the city. He joined the national civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr. by setting up a local office of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. King remained a close friend. Lawson and the late Rabbi Samuel Karff and the late Archbishop Joseph Fiorenza—dubbed the “Three Amigos”—worked together to tackle many of Houston’s major issues, including homelessness, racism and inequality, and they were instrumental in the creation of a public defender’s office. Lawson was preceded in death by his wife Audrey and son Eric. He is survived by daughters Melanie, Cheryl and Roxanne; two granddaughters; and two great-grandsons. A community service of celebration is scheduled at 6 p.m. on May 23 and a congregational service at 11 a.m. on May 24, both at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church in Houston.