

Rev. Dr. Thomas A. Wright, Sr., was Baptist preacher, social activist, civil rights leader, entrepreneur, educator, devoted father, husband, author, humble servant of God. From meager beginnings in Boynton Beach Florida, Thomas A. Wright, fifth son of a poor but proud farming family, fought adversity to obtain an education and answer the voice of the spirit that led him to a life of service to mankind. A man of wide ranging experiences, influences, and dedication, Reverend Wright had been at the forefront of equal rights, spiritual renewal, and community and business development in the South since the early 1950's.

Reverend Wright graduated from Florida Memorial College and the Howard University School of Divinity. In the 1950's he pastored St. Mary's Baptist Church in St. Augustine, Florida, where he was a leader in the civil rights movement, helping organize sit-ins, demonstrations, and boycotts to highlight the need for social justice and equality for African-Americans. His work caused friction among community members, cost his wife, Affie Mae Wright, her teaching job, and eventually caused Wright to seek a safer community for his family. After receiving several death threats, Reverend Wright joined by his devoted wife, Affie, and their four children, accepted the offer to become pastor of the Mount Carmel Baptist Church in Gainesville, Florida. He served Mount Carmel from 1962- 2006.

In the sixties shortly after coming to Gainesville, Wright served as President of the Alachua County Branch of the NAACP and continued the fight for equal rights. As President of the NAACP, he filed a school desegregation suit against the Alachua County School Board, naming his daughter, LaVon Wright (Bracy) as plaintiff. In 1965, LaVon Wright became the first African-American to graduate from Gainesville High School.

When his appeal to local government for affordable housing went unheeded, Wright led Mount Carmel Church in applying for financing from the federal government to build Gardenia Gardens, a 100-unit low income apartment development. He also helped found the first child-care center for black children in Gainesville in 1968.

In the 1970's he spearheaded effort for the Alavic Shopping Plaza, which showcased African-American businesses before it closed.

On August 10, 2002, Reverend Thomas A. Wright, joined the select company of three other African-Americans previously honored by the

University of Florida, with an honorary Doctor of Public Service Degree at the Summer Commencement.

Rev. Wright passed away on December 9, 2014, but his legacy continues to live on.