

In Memoriam: Rev. Alexander Isaiah Dunlap 1939-2012

Bruce Sutchar and Doug Burton

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After pastoring for 40 years in Chicago's African-Methodist Episcopal community, both at Mt. Olive and Carey Temple, civil- and religious rights activist Reverend Alexander Isaiah Dunlap passed away in his sleep on the morning of December 13, 2012, just nine days after his 83rd birthday. He will be mourned by many, including thousands of Unificationists, for his courageous religious leadership for 27 years during which time he championed compassion and fair treatment for the Unification Church. In 1987 Rev. Dunlap was jailed briefly for joining a sit-in demonstration at the *Chicago Tribune* to protest the hate language targeting Unificationists.

Funeral arrangements are as follows: Visitation - Thursday, December 20, 6-10 p.m. at AR Leak and Sons Funeral Home (7838 S Cottage Grove Ave., Chicago, Illinois, IL 60619). There will be a Wake, Friday, December 21, 9 a.m. at Grant Memorial AME Church (at 4017 S Drexel Blvd, Chicago, IL 60653). The funeral will follow at 10 a.m.

Throughout his 83 years, Rev. Dunlap endured attacks, accusations and threats as a result of standing up for righteousness and equality and staring prejudice, hatred and bigotry squarely in the face. He was born in 1939 in North Carolina and became a veteran of the Civil Rights movement in Danville, Virginia, where he was pastoring at the time that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was most active. He reportedly was jailed 40 times fighting for the rights of all people to be treated as equal under the laws of the United States as well as in the eyes of God. The 40th jailing, on Sept. 17, 1987, which resulted from protesting the *Chicago Tribune's* use of the word, "Moonie," took place on the very day that the United States was celebrating the 200th anniversary of the ratification of its Constitution.

Rev. Dunlap, along with Rev. Michael W. Jenkins, Rev. M.E. Sardon, Dr. Jakie Roberts and Rev. James Bevel were escorted out of the back of the Tribune building and arrested for misdemeanor trespass. Eventually, Rev. Ralph Abernathy came to town to testify, and the case was dropped, after the editor of the Tribune-, M. Stanton Cook, met with the ministers. The final result of the meeting was that the protest ended, the case against the demonstrators was dropped and the Tribune agreed to never use the pejorative word "Moonie" when referring to members of the Unification Church.

But Rev. Dunlap didn't stop there. He wrote a letter in June of this year protesting the use of the so-called M word in a proposed TV documentary. The following excerpt is from his letter to a production director of TLC TV network:

“I came to know Rev. Moon in the 1980’s when I was pastoring at Mt. Olive African Methodist Episcopal Church in Chicago. I became interested in the clergy association he had founded, because I felt that without knowing him or his Christian movement, people were trying to keep me away. I sensed there was the same spirit coming from these people as those who tried to keep black and white divided in our nation. I became involved with the interdenominational clergy work of Father Moon in Chicago and found the same spirit in that movement that I found with Dr. King’s. It was open and simply wanted to bring unity of all believers – bringing greater strength to their churches and denominations. I then understood what was going on. He was being opposed not for his good works or beliefs but because he wasn’t white. At that time, the clergy association was rapidly growing among the churches in Chicago and the Chicago Tribune wrote a headline using the term ‘Moonie.’ I told the associated pastors that this label is no different than the label used to demean all black people. I felt the searing pain and hatred when those filled with enmity said ‘Dunlap is a Moonie lover,’ or ‘Dunlap is a Moonie.’ I knew the term was used to separate and divide and promote hatred and fear.

“We marched on the *Chicago Tribune*, and I went to jail leading a sit in demonstration on the *Tribune* after the publisher wouldn’t meet us. When they saw who I and who the other pastors were, the *Tribune* dropped the charges, and we met the publisher, Mr. Stanton Cook. He was a good man, and through our dialogue he came to understand that this was not the name that those who work with Rev. Moon desire to be called. As a result, the *Tribune* dropped the use of the pejorative. *The New York Times*, Associated Press and all major media have dropped the use of this epithet knowing that it is ‘hate language.’”

As result of this letter, and the efforts of other pastors in the American Clergy Leadership Conference, the TLC changed its offensive title.

“Rev. Dunlap stood strong for Father and Mother Moon, fearlessly calling the clergy together to cry out that Rev. Moon was being persecuted in the same manner as Jesus did because he spoke the truth and said all races and religions should become one,” Rev. Michael Jenkins wrote to Unificationnews. Rev. Jenkins also observed that “Rev. Dunlap said that denominations were challenged by him because he refused to recognize the divisions man made and only honored the visions that God had proclaimed. He stood strong for Father Moon’s teaching on the family, saying that Rev. Moon, more than any other religious leader in history, taught and lived what Jesus taught: Love your enemies.”

Rev. Dunlap as a young Pastor (he liked the word “shepherd”) in Danville, Virginia headed the local Civil Rights efforts in that city. In this capacity, he hosted Dr. King in his own home as he had previously hosted Rev. Vernon Johns, who was Dr. King's predecessor at the Dexter Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama.

The fact that Rev. Dunlap never backed down, whether defending the civil rights of his African-American brothers and sisters, the rights of women or the rights of such persecuted minorities as the Unification Church, came as no surprise to anyone who really knew him.

He and his wife Margaret Lee from Atlanta were married for nearly 35 years and were the proud parents of four beautiful children. His oldest children, Michelle and Alex, each have an M.B.A. His daughter, Barbara, is a corporate lawyer, after having served as President of the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. His youngest son, Michael, and his wife Ophelia are both practicing dentists while Michael also serves as a Professor of Dentistry at the University of Illinois.

Rev. Dunlap, or “A.I.,” as he was known, used to joke that the only time his children would see him was on TV being arrested for his civil rights protesting.