IN LOVING Memory



Helen Valencia Wilson Thomas

SUNRISE OCTOBER 2,1955 | **SUNSET** OCTOBER 21,2026

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2026
AT 1:00 PM
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
105 COURTLAND ST NE
ATLANTA, GA 30303

REV. LAVERNE DIXON OFFICIATING

THE LIFE & LEGACY

Helen Valencia Wilson Thomas was born on October 2, 1935, in Greensboro, North Carolina, to Mr. Charles E. Wilson and the late Eleanor Cook, who preceded her in death.

In 1955, Valencia's parents made the decision to relocate to McDonough, Georgia, where the family resided for ten years. In 1960, at the age of 15, Valencia and her mother moved to Atlanta, Georgia, beginning a new chapter in their lives. They became members of First Church, where Valencia developed and maintained a lasting connection to her faith and church family.

Valencia attended Southwest High School in Atlanta, Georgia, and graduated in 1973. Shortly after graduation, she was diagnosed with myosarTic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a progressive disease with no known cure. Despite being given a prognosis of only five years to live, Valencia defied the odds and went on to live a remarkable life, reaching the age of 87. Her life became a testament to perseverance, faith, courage, and the strength of the human spirit.

Determined to pursue her educational and professional goals, Valencia attended Spelman College and earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology. She continued her education at Georgia State University, where she earned a Master of Education in Rehabilitation Counseling. Her commitment to helping others led her to a career with the Georgia Department of Labor. DEH Rehabilitation Office, where she faithfully served for 34 years.

In May 2014, she retired from her position, leaving behind a legacy of dedication, service, and accomplishment.

Valencia remained actively involved in her church throughout her life and served faithfully as a Deacon. Even while living with the challenges of ALS, illness, she continued to share her gifts and talents by writing numerous church newsletters. Her unwavering faith and commitment to service others reflected the depth of her character and her enduring love for her church family.

Valencia was married twice and lived a full and meaningful life. She traveled to other states and countries, embraced new experiences, and created memories that will forever be treasured by those who knew and loved her. She was an extraordinary woman whose determination, accomplishments, and enduring spirit inspired family, friends, colleagues, and all who had the privilege of knowing her.

Through the faced challenges that might have discouraged many, Valencia continued to move forward with strength and purpose. Her life was a powerful reminder that a diagnosis does not define a person, circumstances do not determine one's destiny, and the human spirit can accomplish remarkable things in the face of adversity. Her legacy will live on through the countless lives she touched, the work she accomplished, the faith she demonstrated, and the love she shared.

CONTINUED

Valencia leaves to cherish her loving memory her devoted father, Mr. Charles E. Wilson; and his wife, (Del), brother, Charles “Chuck” Wilson, Sister, Tamela Smith (Anthony), Nephews, Anthony Smith Jr and Jalen Smith; Niece, Tonesha Smith; Greatnieces, Myla Smith and Amelia Smith; and cousins, Carlos Townsend and Carla Townsend.

She also leaves a host of close and dear friends who held a special place in her heart: Phoebe Dawson, Iris Cleveland, Andrea Young, Emily Scarborough, Valarie Carter, Debra Michaels, Dehores Calloway, Barbara Kelly, Rev. Laverne Dixon, Patrise Perkins-Hooker, and Shelia Meador.

Her extended family includes her devoted caregivers, whose compassion, dedication, and loving support were invaluable: Majalai Wisdom, Stephanie Lee, Rasheia Fleming, Lateha Dawson, and Alesha Fleming, whom were with her until God called her home.

She will also be lovingly remembered by a host of other relatives, friends, church family members, former colleagues, and all whose lives were touched by her remarkable presence.

A Lasting Legacy

Valencia lived a life of courage, faith, devotion, service, and perseverance. Although ALS became a part of her journey, it never erased her accomplishments, experiences, relationships, and memories that made her life extraordinary.

Valencia’s journey was not defined by the years she was expected to live, but by the life she made of every year she was given. She leaves behind a legacy that will continue to inspire others to live with purpose, trust in their faith, persevere through adversity, and cherish the gift of life.

Valencia’s life was a testimony of strength, her faith was her foundation, and her legacy will live on forever in the hearts of those who loved her.

The Black Butterfly

FIRST CHURCH BLACK HISTORY MAKER. PRINTED IN 2019 WINTER ISSUE OF THE ILLINOIS INSIDER MAGAZINE AS A BLACK HISTORY DISABILITY WARRIOR. VALENCIA WILSON THOMAS HAS LIVED 40 YEARS BEYOND THE PREDICTED TIME OF HER DEMISE. DURING THE EXTRA YEARS OF HER EXISTENCE, SHE HAS FOCUSED ON ADVOCACY AND SERVICE IN THE EARLY 1980S. VALENCIA WAS ONE OF THE FIRST HIRES AT THE FIRST INDEPENDENT LIVING ILLINOIS CENTER IN GEORGIA, THE RESIDENT, I'M SORRY, THE ATLANTA CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING, CENTERS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING ARE NON-RESIDENTIAL ORGANIZATIONS GOVERNED AND STAFFED BY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES THAT OFFER A WIDE VARIETY OF SERVICES THAT PROMOTE EMPOWERMENT, INDEPENDENCE, AND PRODUCTIVITY OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION INTO THE MAINSTREAM OF SOCIETY.

VALENCIA WORKED TO ESTABLISH THE NINE CENTERS IN GEORGIA NOW. VALENCIA WAS CHAIRPERSON OF THE ATLANTA TASK FORCE ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES WHEN ANDREW YOUNG WAS MAYOR. TWO CRITICAL SEEDS WERE PLANTED THAT EVENTUALLY BORE FRUIT BECAUSE OF INTENSE ADVOCACY EFFORTS. THE DISABILITY AFFAIRS COORDINATOR POSITION FOR THE CITY OF ATLANTA WAS CREATED AND IN 1992 ADVOCATES HELPED PASS THE ATLANTA ORDINANCE THAT REQUIRES A ZERO-STEP ENTRANCE AND WIDE DOORS IN SOME NEW HOMES. THE SIMPLE REQUIREMENT MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR PEOPLE WHO USE WHEELCHAIRS TO VISIT THEIR NEIGHBORS.

A BELIEF THAT EACH CITIZEN SHOULD BE ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN EVERY ASPECT OF THEIR COMMUNITY PROPELLED VALENCIA INTO ACTION. SHE HAS BEEN A CONSULTANT ON PHYSICAL AND INFORMATION ACCESSIBILITY WITH MARTA, THE ATLANTA HOUSING AUTHORITY, HARTSFIELD JACKSON ATLANTA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, THE FOX THEATER, ATLANTA TECHNICAL COLLEGE, PHILIPS ARENA, AND THE GEORGIA AQUARIUM. VALENCIA HAS ALSO WORKED WITH HABITAT FOR HUMANITY, THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, THE 1996 OLYMPIC GAMES, AND THE 1996 PARALYMPIC GAMES, AND SHE WAS HONORED TO BE INVITED TO WASHINGTON, DC BY PRESIDENT GEORGE BUSH FOR THE SIGNING OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT. VALENCIA JOINED THE FIRST CHURCH BUILDING AND RENOVATION COMMITTEE BECAUSE SHE WANTED HER CHURCH TO BE WELCOMING TO ALL PEOPLE. SHE WANTED ACCESSIBILITY FEATURES TO BE INCORPORATED INTO THE DESIGN PLANS AND NOT BE CONSIDERED AS AN AFTERTHOUGHT. ACCESSIBILITY WAS BUILT INTO THE RENOVATION DISCREETLY AND WITH UNIVERSAL DESIGN ELEMENTS THAT ARE USABLE BY PEOPLE OF ALL AGES AND ABILITIES. VALENCIA ALSO WORKED WITH THE CHURCH TO ESTABLISH THE PRACTICE OF MAKING ELECTRONIC COPIES AVAILABLE OF DOCUMENTS PRODUCED.

(Featured in the 2019 Winter Issue of the IL Insider Magazine as a Black History Disability Warrior)

ORDER OF Service

Welcome and Invocation	Rev. LaVerne Dixon
Hymn Congregation	Going Up Yonder
Scripture Reading: Old and New Testament	Rev. Dr. Angela Dempsey Williams
Pastoral Prayer	Rev. LaVerne Dixon
Musical Selection	I can Only imagine - Shelia Wheat
Reflections	Iris Cleveland Carlos Townsend Majalai Wisdom Andrea Young
Obituary Reading	(Read Silently)
Musical Selection	Trey Clegg - Organist
Eulogy	Rev. Dr. Dwight D. Andrews
A Medley of Hymns	Trey Clegg - Organist
Acknowledgements	Patrise Perkins- Hooker
Benediction	Rev. Dr. Dwight D. Andrews




Georgia State University
Helen Valencia Wilson
Bachelor of Arts


Certificate of Appreciation
presented to
Valencia Thomas
In recognition of your important contribution to the ongoing fight against A.L.S and furthering its mission.
The many donors, clients and the added to the Walk to Endurance for Montgomery, Alabama, to provide inspiration to end thhese who choose to take a stand against limited.
Thank you for taking a stoned.


Southwest High School
Valencia Thomas
Diploma




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I Am Blessed, Really

But still, to look at me, you might try to guess.
How can she say she's really blessed?

I can't walk and I can't run,
but still I manage to get things done.
My fingers are curled and my hands are weak,
but still my appearance is cute and neat.

My speech is soft and a little slurred,
but still my words are strong and heard.

I hope through these words you are able
to see the blessings the good Lord has bestowed
on me.

But if you don't, there's one thing I'll do.
And that's to say a silent little prayer for you.

Valencia Wilson Thomas

9 • 2003



ELEGANT LADY

AS I GREW INTO WOMANHOOD
I WANTED TO BE MY BEST
I KNEW THE WORLD WAS WAITING
SO I STOOD AND PASSED THE TEST
I BROUGHT JOY AND LIVELIHOOD IN THE KIND OF LIFE
I LIVED
AS I GREW IN WISDOM
I WANTED TO GIVE FROM MY HEART
AS I WALKED THE PATH OF LIFE EACH DAY
I JUST WANTED TO LEAVE MY MARK



HAND IN HAND AND HEART TO HEART
NO LONGER FORCED BY TIME TO PART
THE QUIET EARTH IS LEFT BEHIND
AND PEACE AT LAST IS WHAT THEY FIND
A MOTHER'S LOVE THAT NEVER FADES
A DAUGHTER'S LAUGH THAT WARMS THE GLAZE
REUNITED IN THE LIGHT WHERE SHADOWS MELT
FROM ENDLESS NIGHTS
NO MORE GOODBYES
NO MORE TEARS TO WEEP
IN GENTLE GRACE
AND QUIET SLEEP
TOGETHER WALK THE GOLDEN SHORE
MOTHER AND DAUGHTER
HOME ONCE MORE

INTERMENT

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2026
WESTVIEW CEMETERY
1680 WESTVIEW DRIVE SOUTHWEST
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30310

PALL BEARERS
MEN'S FELLOWSHIP
FROM FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

FLOWER BEARERS
SERVETTES CLUB

FELLOWSHIP MEAL

PLEASE JOIN US FOLLOWING THE SERVICE AT FIRST CHURCH AS WE REMEMBER AND CELEBRATE THE REMARKABLE LIFE OF HELEN VALENCIA WILSON THOMAS.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

THE FAMILY OF HELEN VALENCIA WILSON THOMAS EXTENDS HEARTFELT THANKS FOR YOUR PRAYERS, VISITS, AND COMFORTING WORDS DURING THIS DIFFICULT TIME.

YOUR LOVE AND SUPPORT HAS BEEN A SOURCE OF STRENGTH AND COMFORT. WE ARE DEEPLY GRATEFUL TO EVERYONE WHO CAME TO HONOR HELEN VALENCIA WILSON THOMAS AND CELEBRATE HER REMARKABLE LIFE.

MAY GOD BLESS EACH OF YOU FOR YOUR KINDNESS, COMPASSION, AND THOUGHTFULNESS.

SERVICES ENTRUSTED TO
ALFONSO DAWSON MORTUARY, INC
3000 MLK JR DRIVE S.W.
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30331