

*Celebration of Life*  
*Matthew Jefferson*

February 16, 1924 ~ August 14, 2024



**Saturday, August 24, 2024**

**12:00PM**

***Myrtle Baptist Church***

21 Curve Street | West Newton, MA | 02465

*Reverend Brandon Thomas Crowley, PhD, Senior Pastor*

*Reverend Alicia Marie Johnson, Officiant*

# Obituary

## *Matthew Jefferson*

Matthew Jefferson, a beloved son, husband, father, grandfather, great grandfather and community leader, was a man of unwavering positivity, kindness and courage. His passion for community service was a beacon of hope for many. He was born on February 16, 1924, in Dale, South Carolina, and peacefully made his transition on August 14, 2024.

Matthew began his education in a one room schoolhouse that his parents helped to build and organize. With the encouragement and blessing of his family, at the age of 10, Matthew traveled unaccompanied by bus from South Carolina to Boston to live with his sister Mary to pursue a brighter future. He studied to be an electrician, graduating from Boston Trade School in June 1944, the only Black student in his cohort. Upon graduation he enlisted in the U.S. Navy.

While serving at Pearl Harbor, he and his fellow Black shipmates complained after being told that they would be employed as stevedores unloading ships rather than pursuing their chosen professions as they had been led to believe. Soon they gained the ear of a sympathetic white officer who took up their cause and they eventually prevailed allowing them to pursue the work they were trained to do. This simple act of speaking up was Matthew's entrée into the world of civil rights. Matthew eventually achieved the Electrician's Mate Third Class rank, and was awarded the World War II Victory Medal and the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal before being honorably discharged in 1946.

Before enlisting in the Navy Matthew met Lillie Belle Perry of Newton, MA at a party he was invited to by his best friend. According to Matthew, after the party they went to the corner shop to get something to drink, and the rest is history. On August 10, 1946, he married Lillie Belle the love of his life, at Myrtle Baptist Church in Newton. Matthew and Lillie made Newton their home where they raised their three children Richard, Paulette and Laurie. He was an active and involved father enthusiastically supporting his children and grandchildren in their chosen pursuits, and he and Lillie were a dynamic duo joining forces on countless community initiatives. They welcomed many students, family members, friends and others needing a place to call home into theirs over the years and treated all as family.

Matthew and Lillie believed in uplift through education. In 1975, the same year his son graduated from law school, Matthew received his Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Northeastern University, which he earned after completing several years of evening classes.

Throughout his life Matthew was employed at Bethlehem Steel Company-Hingham Shipyard as a welder during World War II and at General Motors (GM) Assembly Division plant in Framingham, MA as a maintenance electrician for nearly 30 years. While at GM he fought to increase the number of African Americans in supervisory positions. His efforts paid off as the company moved more people of color into those roles. He also supplemented his GM income by working as a self-employed electrician achieving master electrician status early in his career.

Continuing his efforts as a community civil rights leader, he participated in the March on Washington in 1963 potentially jeopardizing his job at GM. But that did not stop him. He continued his efforts for civil rights, marching in many protests throughout the greater Boston area and even participated in the Million Man March in 1995.

For several years, as the president of the South Middlesex Branch of the NAACP, he championed equality for people of color. Throughout the years he also served on the Newton Fair Housing Committee and co-led the Black Citizens of Newton organization.

Matthew's impact as a true community hero in the City of Newton was deeply felt. He was the first Black member of the Newton Board of Alderman, serving as Alderman-at-Large from Ward 3 for nearly 20 years and as Board president for six of those years. During his tenure he garnered a unanimous Board vote to condemn apartheid in South Africa and divest the city's pension fund of \$3.5 million. He also supported equity in education, employment, and economic development in the city and beyond. Other notable accomplishments include serving on the boards of Newton-Wellesley Hospital, Andover Newton Theological Seminary, Middlesex Community College and as a member of the Massachusetts Housing Finance Commission.

Matthew was a man of God. His work has indelibly inspired and uplifted the community. He was an active member of Myrtle Baptist Church as a Sunday School teacher, Trustee, Building Committee Chairperson and together with Lillie co-chairperson of Myrtle's 125th anniversary celebration. He was also a proud member of "Old Dudes" social group.

Matthew was an avid photographer and videographer documenting the lives of his family, friends, and community. He loved working with his hands, building and creating tools and furniture for his home. He was a ham radio operator connecting with people all over the world from his tiny "shack" just off his kitchen. Matthew loved music especially jazz and classical. You would often see him tapping his feet or humming to the music until the day he met the Lord.

May the joyful memories of Matthew Jefferson continue to bring warmth and inspiration to all he touched in his 100 years. He was a father figure, a role model, and a teacher and whether he was called Dad, Grampee, Uncle Jeff, Mr. J, Papa J, Papa, Matt, Matthew, or Jeff, he was loved, respected, and appreciated.

Matthew was preceded in death by his wife Lillie, parents Thomas Jefferson and Lydia (Fields) Jefferson, his siblings Samuel, Mary, Peter, James, Ferris, Lucy, Mildred, Ada, Gertrude and one other sibling who died in childbirth.

His loving spirit, a beacon of hope and joy, continues to live on through his children Richard Perry Jefferson (Helen), Paulette (Jefferson) Jones (Gerald), and Laurie (Jefferson) Nsiah-Jefferson; grandchildren Shelley Nicole Jefferson, Derron Lamont Jones, Sr., Jeremiah Fisher Jefferson (Michele), Ashley Bernard Jefferson (Emilie), Joseph Matthew Kwabena Nsiah (Alaina) and Tracie Marie Morrissey (Patrick); great grandchildren Isaiah (Ariana), Ivana (Whitney), Derron, Jr., Kiara, Matteo, Angelina, Calvin and a host of "adopted" children, friends, family and colleagues.

May his soul find eternal peace, knowing that he has left a legacy of activism, connection, and love.

**"Well done good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of the Lord." ~ Matthew 25:23**



# Order of Service

Prelude		Adam Littlejohn
Invocation		Reverend Simeon Olapade
Hymn of Comfort #181	<i>“Pass Me Not”</i>	Led by Christina DeVaughn
Prayer of Comfort		Reverend Wendy Miller Olapade
Musical Selection	<i>“Safe From Harm”</i>	Cyndi Dailey-Smith <i>Soloist</i>
Reading of Scriptures	Old Testament ~ Isaiah 58:6-9 New Testament ~ Romans 12	Deacon Helen Jefferson Howard Bratton
Reflections		The Grandchildren
Acknowledgements		
Church Resolution		Carmen Santos <i>Church Clerk</i>
Reading of the Obituary		Jocelyn Covington
Musical selection	<i>“If I Can Help Somebody”</i>	Jesse Banks <i>Soloist</i>
Eulogy		Reverend Alicia M. Johnson
Benediction		Reverend Peggy Kennedy
Recessional	<i>Jazz Medley</i>	



### **Pallbearers**

Ashley B. Jefferson

Derron L. Jones

Jeremiah F. Jefferson

Tracie M. Morrissey

Shelley N. Jefferson

J.M. Kwabena Nsiah

### **Acknowledgements**

The family would like to thank all the people who helped and supported us in the caregiving of our father over the past few years.

We would also like to thank our Myrtle family for their love; the doctors and staff at Newton-Wellesley Hospital and the staff at the Miriam Boyd Parlin Hospice Residence for the kind and caring way they supported our family during our father's last days.

### **Interment**

Newton Cemetery  
791 Walnut Street  
Newton Centre, MA 02459

### **Repast**

You are invited to join the family, following the interment, for a repast at Myrtle Baptist Church

### **Arrangements**

Burke & Blackington Funeral Home  
1479 Washington Street  
West Newton, MA 02465

*May His Memory Be A Blessing*

