

*"Precious in
the sight
of the Lord
is the death
of His saints."*

WARD D. SUMPTER

Ward D. Sumpter was born on December 24, 1935 in Hemingway, South Carolina to the late Ward and Celia Sumpter. He attended schools in Georgetown, South Carolina and later enrolled at Oakwood College, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theology in 1965. He was a successful Literature Evangelist and earned a full scholarship each summer to fund his college education. He also served two years in the United States Army as a medical specialist, and received an Honorable Discharge for his distinguished service and a Good Conduct Medal.

After graduating from college, he became a full-time Literature Evangelist, and because he showed great leadership skills, he was later asked to serve as an Associated Publishing Director for the South Atlantic Conference, under the mentoring of the late Elder Silas McClamb. He served in North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia for four years.

While working in South Atlantic, he met the love of his life, Mary Diane Merkersen, and they were united in holy matrimony on May 1, 1966. To this union were born a daughter, Shernanda, "Sherry," and son, Cedric.

Elder Sumpter's pastoral and educational journey began to expand. He was assigned a pastorate in the South Atlantic Conference in the Tallahassee, Florida, district. He later felt the need to continue his education and attended Andrews University Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan, and Loma Linda University School of Health, in California. After these pursuits, he returned to the Atlanta area to serve as pastor of the Atlanta-Boulevard district. The Lord blessed him bountifully in various evangelistic efforts, including the 1975 crusade where he baptized 250 souls, and founded the Atlanta-Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church. He served in the Atlanta area for more than five years, and then moved to the Tampa, Florida, district. There he pastored the Mt. Calvary, Town and County, and Clearwater Adventist churches. He also initiated and cultivated the newly-organized Progress Village Church.

His service throughout the South Atlantic and Southern Union conferences encompassed a number of assignments and ministries: in 1979, named Associate Evangelist, then Evangelist and later, Ministerial Director. In 1981, he was voted Southern Union Associate Executive Secretary, then voted Executive Secretary, a post he held until he retired in



2007, concluding 28 years of service to the Church. Elder Sumpter served under four Southern Union presidents: Elder Harold H. Schmidt, who led from 1965 to 1980; Elder Alvin C. McClure, from 1980 to 1990; Elder Malcolm D. Gordon, from 1990 to 2003, and Elder Gordon L. Retzer from 2003 to 2011. Elder Sumpter conducted evangelistic efforts during his years in the Southern Union, including a 1980 campaign in the South Atlantic Conference when he baptized 100 souls, and another campaign in 1982, where he baptized more than 100 souls in the South Central Conference.

He received his Doctorate of Divinity degree from Gulf Coast Seminary in Panama City, Florida in 1984, the Distinguished Presidential Award from Oakwood University, "Alumnus of the Year" award from the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) in 1995, and was listed in the International Who's Who of Professionals in 1996. He also received "Key to the City" proclamations from Birmingham, Alabama, and Thomasville, Georgia.

Elder Sumpter possessed a special interest in working with and helping young people. He unselfishly rendered financial assistance to hundreds of students by giving them scholarships to attend Adventist Church Schools and Oak-

wood University. He believed in investing his life in the lives of others, and several students can thank him personally for his moral and financial support.

Many did not know he also had a "green thumb," and grew bountiful harvests in his vegetable gardens. He was known to share his fresh produce goodies each week when he volunteered his time at the Atlanta Berean Outreach Ministry Center, which provides food and clothing to needy community families.

During the early morning hours of November 8, 2013, Elder Sumpter was called to his rest. Those who cherish lasting memories of his life and legacy are his loving and devoted wife of 47 years, Mary Diane Sumpter; daughter Shernanda (Berry) Peterson, and son Cedric Sumpter; grandchildren Brad and Trey Peterson, as well as Jimmy Walker, Sr., Mary Lee Sumpter, Thomas Sumpter, Peter Sumpter, James (Mary) Sumpter, Jimmy Walker, Jr., Nakhesa Stewart, Jonathan and Irene Walker, Dorian Brut, Jahleia Walker-Chieves, extended family members and a host of friends. The void he leaves is felt by many, but we are richer for knowing him. ▼