



## Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.

July 31, 1942 - September 28, 2016

\*\*\*\*\*NOTE: FULL OBITUARY BELOW\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\*IN LIEU OF FLOWERS: The family requests that contributions be directed to Crescendo Academy of Music/Aughtery and Dezzie Lipsey Minority Student Scholarship Fund, 359 South Kalamazoo Mall, Suite 12, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 49007. Donations can be accepted online at [crescendoacademy.com](http://crescendoacademy.com).

The first of ten siblings, Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr., was born in Ravine, Mississippi on July 31, 1942 to Hattie Ann Phillips Wilkerson and Bennie Will Wilkerson, Sr. Ben accepted Christ at an early age, singing his first gospel solo while traveling with his parents on what was known as the “Chittlin’ Circuit.”

The family (Ben and six siblings) relocated to Kalamazoo in 1954. While attending Kalamazoo Central High School, he excelled on both the wrestling and football teams, and upon graduation, enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. Ben served ten years in the Corps attaining the rank of Gunnery Sergeant (E-7). He completed two tours of duty in the Republic of Vietnam as a platoon commander with infantry units 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines, and 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines. Ben was wounded twice and survived the battle of Khe Sanh, one of the most costly in terms of human life. He always said he joined

the Marines to see the world; the war got in the way. Upon Honorable Discharge from the Corps, Ben lived in San Diego, CA and sang with the group "The Sounds of Amor," recording for TT&G Records, an affiliate of Motown Records.

Returning to Kalamazoo, Ben married Ikalean Johnson in 1977, and to this union one son was born – Aaron Lamar Wilkerson. A lover of the Motown sound, he formed a band and sang at Mr. President's Lounge and The Seven Seas, to rave reviews.

Ben was called to the ministry and ordained in 1985 as an Elder in the Church of God in Christ. He completed formal study and training at C. H. Mason Bible College. His ministry included reaching out to the poor and homeless in our community, a ministry he continued when moving to Chicago and serving as a Readjustment Counselor for the Veterans Resource Center. Ben was a graduate of the Cosmopolitan School of Business in Chicago where he earned an associate's degree in business management and marketing. He also graduated from the Law Program for Community Developers and Social Workers at John Marshall Law School in Chicago. Ben continued his education in the addictions colloquia program at Adler School of Professional Psychology and Psychiatry and at the University of Chicago School for Social Service Administration. During his time at the Resource Center, Ben offered group and family counseling, pre-release counseling at Cook County Correctional Facility, and pastoral counseling. In 2003, he received an award for excellence from the Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County for "an outstanding lifetime of contributions to the entire veteran community."

Preceding him in death are his mother and his father.

Ben leaves to celebrate his life Audrey, his loving and faithful wife of eight years, and son Aaron. Also surviving are two sisters; De Wilkerson and Lee

(Evert) Mitchell, of Kalamazoo; seven brothers; Andrew (Dawn) Wilkerson, R.J. (Anita) Wilkerson, and Pastor Jerry (Gloria) Wilkerson, all of Kalamazoo; John Wilkerson of Independence, MO; Arthur (Ronda) Wilkerson, of Phoenix, AZ; Bruce (Linda) Wilkerson and Victor Wilkerson, of Atlanta, GA; two sisters-in law Augusta Lipsey and Aurelia Lipsey of Kalamazoo; one brother-in-law Aubrey Lipsey of Kalamazoo; paternal aunts Ella Mae Williams of Toledo, OH and Pearl Curry of Brooklyn , NY, and a host of nieces, nephews, cousins and family friends. Ben, we love you and will miss you!

# Cemetery Details

## Fort Custer National Cemetery

15501 Dickman Road  
Augusta, MI

# Previous Events

## Visitation

OCT 2. 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM (ET)

Harper Funeral Home - Chapel  
521 Douglas Avenue  
Kalamazoo, MI

## A Service in Loving Memory

OCT 3. 10:00 AM (ET)

Fresh Fire A.M.E. Church  
2508 Gull Road  
Kalamazoo, MI

# Tribute Wall



“ Harper Funeral Home created a Tribute Video in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.



Harper Funeral Home - October 01, 2016 at 09:10 PM



A beautiful video documenting the life of Bennie Wilkerson.

Ikalean Wilkerson - October 02, 2016 at 07:08 AM



“ Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.

October 23, 2023 at 06:06 AM



“ Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.

October 06, 2023 at 10:42 AM



“ Abdul-R Rashid lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.



Abdul-R Rashid - October 11, 2016 at 10:26 PM

HW

“ *Helen Word lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.*



Helen Word - October 08, 2016 at 08:32 AM

HW

*So sorry for your loss, but heaven has gained a true soldier. Look to God who can comfort us all when we are going through our sorrows.*

Helen Word - October 08, 2016 at 08:41 AM

AR

*I just tonight [10/11] read about Bennie's passing, and I was sadden to hear about it. Bennie had a good soul, and he was a sincere brother. As teenagers to young men in our early 20's we always got along. As one grow in life and you go your separate ways, you can test the strength of a relationship when you reconnect with people you were tight with...that's how Bennie and I was. I knew some of the younger siblings of Bennie's, and I like them too! "May G-D bless Bennie to enter the paradise, bless him for all the good he has done, have mercy on his soul, forgive him of his sins".. Amin. -Robert Gaston*

Abdul-R Rashid - October 11, 2016 at 10:25 PM



“ *Karest Willis-Brown lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.*



Karest Willis-Brown - October 06, 2016 at 04:30 PM



“ *Aaron and his dad when Aaron a tyke for an outing with his dad.*

Ikaean Wilkerson - October 04, 2016 at 08:37 AM

EG

“ *Edith Gardner lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.*



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**edith gardner** - October 03, 2016 at 12:37 PM

RL

“ *Ranya Liu, Tianshu Liu, Ruomei Li purchased the Beautiful Dreams for the family of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr..*



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**Ranya Liu, Tianshu Liu, Ruomei Li** - October 02, 2016 at 11:04 AM

TC

“ *Sending love to the family and friends of Elder Bennie Wilkerson*



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**Tiffany Clark** - October 02, 2016 at 10:32 AM

SB

“ *RIP Bennie. Sylvester Boyd Jr. and Paulette Boyd, friends*

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**Sylvester Boyd** - October 02, 2016 at 10:30 AM

EC

“ *Edward Chapman lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.*



Edward Chapman - October 02, 2016 at 09:35 AM

EC

*Semper Fi, Staff Sergeant.....Godspeed.....*

Edward Chapman - October 02, 2016 at 09:36 AM

MB

“ *Michael And Barbara lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.*



Michael and Barbara - October 02, 2016 at 09:13 AM

JD

“ *Judie And Henderson Days lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.*



Judie and Henderson Days - October 01, 2016 at 07:27 PM

CG

“ *Cordell/Brenda Gardner lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.*



**Cordell/Brenda Gardner** - October 01, 2016 at 07:07 PM

CE

“ *Our condolences go out to the Wilkerson family. Our thoughts and prayers are with you during your time of bereavement...RL and Charmane Echols*

**Charmane Echols** - October 01, 2016 at 06:50 PM

BF

“ *Betty Ford lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.*



**Betty Ford** - October 01, 2016 at 04:55 PM

DF

“ *Dallas Boards And Family lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.*



**Dallas Boards and Family** - October 01, 2016 at 03:42 PM

PG

“ *Pauline Gardner lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.*



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**Pauline Gardner** - October 01, 2016 at 10:14 AM

JP

“ *James Phillips lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.*



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**James Phillips** - October 01, 2016 at 08:07 AM

JF

“ *James Phillips And Family lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.*



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**James Phillips and Family** - October 01, 2016 at 08:03 AM



“ 2 Timothy 4:7

*“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:”*

*To Audrey, Bennie's wife and Aaron, Bennie's son". I believe Bennie was a very*

*misunderstood man. Bennie was born with a serving heart. He serviced his parents all the days of their lives. He served his sisters and brothers with all he could and he served many friends and me with his heart of kindness and love. Bennie served in Vietnam not just once, but TWICE. He led a life of service to many Vietnam veterans and Irac veterans. Giving them counseling and support after the trauma called PTSD. He had experienced losses far greater than most of us can know. After his first experience in Vietnam, he came home to the backs of people including friends. He then reentered the Marines for a second tour of duty, spending nearly 8 years in service and receiving many metals of Honor and citations from the Marines. Metals that his wife Audrey and son Aaron can be proud. His family can also share his pride in a service to his country which was WELL DONE by the Marine's standards. Bennie was called " a Warrior " by the USMCR administrator, General C. Dunn.*

*Bennie had a kind and generous spirit, with his wife Audrey, he helped me when I was in a position whereas I couldn't help myself. He and Audrey shared with me kindness and mercy like you can't imagine. I feel as though they gave me a second chance at life. I say to many of you who Bennie turned to at the end of his life, I wish you had answered his call. Yes Bennie, you fought a good long and difficult fight and now you can rest.*



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**Ikalean Wilkerson** - October 01, 2016 at 05:29 AM

TF

“ Teresa Hughes And Family lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.



Teresa Hughes and Family - October 01, 2016 at 03:44 AM

AC

“ Amerriel Overton Cunningham lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.



Amerriel Overton Cunningham - September 30, 2016 at 11:00 PM

RL

“ Ramona Seaberry Lumpkin lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.



Ramona Seaberry Lumpkin - September 30, 2016 at 10:51 PM

AW

“ Andrew J Wilkerson lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.



Andrew J Wilkerson - September 30, 2016 at 09:50 PM



“ *R.I.P Uncle Ben you will be truly missed.  
Andre" WILKERSON*



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**DJstatusphere Dre** - September 30, 2016 at 08:21 PM

AS

“ *Alma Snell lit a candle in memory of Elder  
Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.*



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**Alma Snell** - September 30, 2016 at 08:07 PM

GM

“ *Gregory Moorehead lit a candle in memory of  
Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.*



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**Gregory Moorehead** - September 30, 2016 at 04:53 PM

HT

“ *Hazel Tellis lit a candle in memory of Elder  
Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.*



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**Hazel Tellis** - September 30, 2016 at 02:26 PM

HB

“ Hal & Janet Buchanan lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.



Hal & Janet Buchanan - September 30, 2016 at 01:33 PM

TA

“ Tammi lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.



Tammi - September 30, 2016 at 09:05 AM

TA

May you rest peacefully in Heaven "my friend"

Tammi - September 30, 2016 at 09:05 AM



Audrey and Aaron, no one can know of the long fight Bennie fought but you. He was a warrior in his heart and knew how to fight. He did, he fought and kept the faith until it was time for him to receive his reward for a life of service. Rest now Bennie...rest!

Ikalean Wilkerson - October 01, 2016 at 05:36 AM

HL

“ Helen Lee lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.



Helen Lee - September 30, 2016 at 07:18 AM

BF

“ Betty Ford lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.



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**Betty Ford** - September 29, 2016 at 11:58 PM

CW

“ Carolyn Walker lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.



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**Carolyn Walker** - September 29, 2016 at 09:27 PM

NB

“ Nancy Buchanan lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.



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**Nancy Buchanan** - September 29, 2016 at 08:25 PM

RW

“ Robert & Patricia Woodford lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.



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**Robert & Patricia Woodford** - September 29, 2016 at 06:10 PM

CB

“ Claudia Barbee lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.



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**Claudia Barbee** - September 29, 2016 at 03:47 PM

RW

“ R. J. & Anita Wilkerson lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.



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**R. J. & Anita Wilkerson** - September 29, 2016 at 11:51 AM

SW

“ Sonia Wilkerson lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.



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**Sonia Wilkerson** - September 29, 2016 at 11:25 AM

HB

“ Helen (Mills) Brooks lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.



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**Helen (Mills) Brooks** - September 29, 2016 at 11:15 AM

DB

“ *Dallas Blocker lit a candle in memory of Elder Bennie Will Wilkerson Jr.*



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**Dallas Blocker** - September 29, 2016 at 10:25 AM