



## Missionary Orlean Graves

September 8, 1921 - February 19, 2016

Missionary Orlean Graves was escorted to glory by angels early Friday morning, February 19, 2016. Orlean was born to the union of Mary Lou and Thomas Whitley on September 8, 1921 in Aberdeen, Mississippi. She was the third of eight children. She attended elementary school in Aberdeen, Mississippi.

Orlean married Walter Cunningham in 1945, and moved to Kalamazoo in 1951. To this union, seven children were born. After the death of Walter, she later met and married Robert Graves. They knew after a short courtship they would be united in holy matrimony. She often said, "I told my brothers I'm not asking you for permission, I'm telling you what I'm going to do!" She attended Galilee Baptist Church for many years under the late Pastor Mabry Gardner. She was employed at Borgess Hospital as a cook, and worked in various nursing homes perfecting her vocation. Orlean had a great business mind and knew how to get things done. She owned four homes, loved to sew and she made beautiful hats. She was a wonderful cook and baker, and sold a myriad of sweet potato pies.

Orlean loved the Lord and always had a desire to please God. She loved to hear the saints pray, and would often sit on her porch listening to them sing and pray. One day she decided to walk over and join them. Mother Givhan, Mother Jones, Mother Walker, and others, witnessed to her and in the words

of Paul asked her, "Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed?" She didn't understand what they were talking about so she told them, "you may have the pie, but I have a piece of it!" Their words pricked her heart and she began seeking God to learn His ways while continuing to pray. One day as she was speaking to God she said, "Lord, I don't know what they're talking about, but whatever it is I want it. The Holy Ghost fell on her that moment and she began speaking in tongues and received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Sister Graves began witnessing to her family telling them about the Holy Ghost experience she had with God. She was the matriarch of the family, and led them into holiness. One day she went to The Church of God Pentecostal (COGP) on Edwards Street with her mother, brothers, and sisters. When she stood to join the church, they all stood in unison with her and joined the church under the leadership of the late Bishop Lafayette W. Davis. She was a faithful member from that day in 1963 until her transition from earth to glory. She led more family and friends into COGP than anyone else in its history.

She was anointed and called to be a missionary and served as the women's supervisor, Sunday school teacher and superintendent, choir member, pastor's aid leader, and was on the pastor's anniversary committee. She was a leader in fund raising. Missionary Graves loved her family and church family! She was a true servant of God and helped many, many people. Bishop George Robinson gave her the name of "Warrior" because she was such a prayer warrior. In her latter years, she traveled back and forth to Chicago with her son to support him in the church ministry.

In 2008, she had a stroke and was unable to attend church and Sunday school as she desired, but the "warrior" continued to pray, read her Bible, and studied her Sunday school lesson religiously. She was so happy to attend church whenever her health would allow it. Her children supported and cared for her during her illness in her own home.

Missionary Graves was preceded in death by her parents; first husband

Walter Cunningham, and second husband Robert Graves; two sons, Walter, Jr. and Nathaniel Cunningham; two sisters, Donie Gunn and Doris Wallace; three brothers, Andrew, Willie T. and Jesse Whitley; a sister-in-law, Thelma Whitley, a brother-in-law, John Smith; and two sons-in-law, R.B, May and Lorenzo Singleton.

She leaves to cherish her memory, two sons, Herbert B. (Belendria) Cunningham, Coleman (Betty) Cunningham; three daughters, Joyce Cunningham, Elaine C. May, and Kathleen Taylor-Singleton all of Kalamazoo, MI; step-daughter, Gwen Jefferson of Detroit, MI; 12 grandchildren, Casondria and LaToia Cunningham of New York, NY, Aundria and Sydni Cunningham, Jyllian (James) Liggins, Eric Cunningham, Latasha May, Brysen May (her baby), Clinton, Kendrick and Marcus Taylor all of Kalamazoo, MI; Kimberly Redman of Detroit, MI; two step grandchildren; 10 great-grandchildren; and two step great-grandchildren, two sisters, Oneda Smith of Detroit, MI, and Ora Mae Kelly of Kalamazoo, MI; one brother-in-law, K.Z. Wallace, and two sisters-in-law, Ethel Whitley and Bernice Whitley of Kalamazoo, MI; Special friends, Sister Joyce Robinson, Mother Stella P. Davis, Elder James and Mssy. Mary Moore, and Bishop T.D. and Sister Quella Lockett; a host of nieces, nephews, church family and friends; special care-givers, Laura Sykes, Holly Grays, and nurse Connie Baker of Arcadia Homecare.

# Cemetery Details

## Fort Custer National Cemetery

15501 Dickman Road  
Augusta, MI

# Previous Events

## Visitation

FEB **26**. 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

Church of God Pentecostal  
2929 E Main St  
Kalamazoo, MI

## A Homegoing Celebration

FEB **27**. 12:00 PM (ET)

Faith Temple Church of God  
402 S. Westnedge Avenue  
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

# Tribute Wall



“ Harper Funeral Home created a Tribute Video in memory of  
Missionary Orlean Graves



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Harper Funeral Home - February 25, 2016 at 09:29 PM



“ Missionary Orlean Graves

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October 23, 2023 at 06:06 AM



“ Missionary Orlean Graves

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October 06, 2023 at 10:42 AM



“ Remenyi Williams lit a candle in memory of  
Missionary Orlean Graves



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Remenyi Williams - February 27, 2016 at 05:03 AM



“ May you RIH from Sylvester and Herberta and The Carver Family. To God be the glory for the good things he has done.



Sylvester carver - February 26, 2016 at 02:22 PM



“ 72 files added to the album Life Tributes



Harper Funeral Home - February 25, 2016 at 09:11 PM



“ Karest Willis-Brown lit a candle in memory of Missionary Orlean Graves



Karest Willis-Brown - February 25, 2016 at 06:08 PM

CA

“ I have many fond memories of Orlean when we worked together in the dietary department many years ago at a nursing home. I recall her being a woman of strong faith that was openly shared with others, always being kind, and carried herself with a gentle and loving presence. To this day when thinking of her I have pleasant memories and left such a meaningful impression on me in a positive way. Rest in Peace Orlean....

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**Cathy** - February 25, 2016 at 05:36 AM

AS

“ Alma Snell lit a candle in memory of Missionary Orlean Graves



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**Alma Snell** - February 24, 2016 at 08:20 PM

RW

“ Rj & Anita McKinney Wilkerson lit a candle in memory of Missionary Orlean Graves



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**Rj & Anita McKinney Wilkerson** - February 20, 2016 at 10:06 AM