

Black History September 2022

MELVIN E. BANKS

(October 15, 1934–February 13, 2021)

A Man with Vision and the Faith to See it Through

Dr. Melvin Eugene Banks, Sr. was born on October 15, 1934 in Birmingham, Alabama to the union of Jerry and Survilla Banks. Banks was the youngest of two children born to this union. Banks was raised in a blended household with his mother; Aunt, Zerlean Jackson; sister, Margaret Banks; and cousins, Gilbert Williams; Walter Williams; and Martye Jackson.



Banks was educated in the Birmingham Public School System, and graduated from Parker High School in 1952. In 1955, he graduated from Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. In 2008, he was named Alumnus of the Year.

While attending Moody Bible Institute, Banks attend church at South Side Gospel Chapel.

On November 5, 1955, Banks married Olive Perkins. They had three children, Melvin Eugene, Jr.; Patrice Janene; and Reginald Scott.

Banks then attended Wheaton College and earned his BA in Theology and MA in Biblical Studies. He was later awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Wheaton College and served as a board member of the institution. In June of 2021, Wheaton College named its Welcome Center after Banks.

After graduation, Banks was employed by Scripture Press Publications, Inc. He left Scripture Press with a blessing and a little financial backing that helped him and his wife start Urban Ministries, Inc. (UMI) in 1970. For the first twelve years, UMI operated out of the basement of their home on the South Side of Chicago.

Over the fifty years of leadership of Banks, UMI has grown to be the largest independent African American -owned and -operated religious publishing company in the nation.

Banks, LeRoy Yates, Sr., and Harvey Rollerson, Jr. established Westlawn Gospel Chapel on the west side of Chicago. Banks was also involved in the founding of Circle Y Ranch Bible Camp in Bangor, Michigan, in 1964. Banks was awarded the Kenneth N. Taylor Lifetime Achievement Award in 2017. He has also received many other commendations for his work.

Banks made his transition home on February 13, 2021.