

Rev. Joyce A. Barton Davis, 54, pastor, lawyer, Social Security appeals official

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SUN STAFF

The Rev. Joyce A. Barton Davis, who served as pastor of a church, maintained a legal practice and worked as a Social Security Administration appeals officer, died Oct. 20 of cancer at Johns Hopkins Hospital. The Locheam resident was 54.

At her death, Mrs. Davis had been pastor for 15 months at historic Melville Chapel United Methodist Church in Elkridge, founded in 1772.

"She was a wonderful lady. We're an all-white congregation, and she was a black, but she came in and took charge. She loved everyone, and we loved her in return," said Liz Heinbauch, a longtime parishioner.

"She was vibrant and a very elegant woman who could really preach the Gospel," she said.

"Her first Sunday here, she told us that this was what God had called her to do, and everything else in her life had prepared her for this moment," said Ed Head, lay leader and speaker at the church.

"Her sermons were very strong and direct in sense of Scripture, yet were simple to understand. She was a very forceful and demonstrative speaker. We are sorely going to miss her," he said.

Mrs. Davis was born Joyce A. Thomas and was raised the eldest of five children in Turners Station. After graduation from Dundalk Senior High School, she worked as a clerk for the Social Security Administration in Woodlawn while attending college.

She earned an associate's degree from the Community College of Baltimore and her bachelor's degree in 1979 from the University of Baltimore. She earned her law degree from the University of Maryland School of Law in 1984.

With the death of her parents, she assumed the role of raising her younger siblings.

"She made us stay in school and go on to college. She also helped us through financially difficult times. She had an awful lot of energy," said a sister, Harriet "Cookie" Johnson of Gwynn Oak.



Rev. Joyce A. Barton Davis served at an Elkridge church.

Admitted to the practice of law in Maryland, Pennsylvania and Washington, Mrs. Davis opened offices in York, Pa., and Baltimore. A solo practitioner, she specialized in family law, working with youngsters and battered women, and handled personal injury cases.

In a 1989 interview with the *York (Pa.) Daily Record*, she explained why she pursued a law career.

"I could relate to so many of the injustices that occur, and I'd find myself thinking, 'That's not right, that's not fair.' I thought I could make a difference," she said.

Michelle C. Kahan, a York attorney and longtime friend, described her as an "extremely giving and bright person. There are not many people like her in the world," she said.

"She was amazing. Even at the end of her life, she had time to listen and help," she said.

She began her spiritual journey at St. Matthews United Methodist Church in Turners Station, a place she continued to return to until her death.

In 1998, she earned her master's degree in divinity from Howard University Divinity School and was ordained a Methodist minister a year later.

"I answered the call late. Even though in retrospect I went around Robin Hood's barn to get there, the calling was probably in my heart [all] along," she told the *Howard County Times*.

She closed her York law office in the early 1990s but continued practicing law in Baltimore. She also at her death had completed 33 years of service with the SSA, where she was an appeals officer.

Mrs. Davis enjoyed traveling and cruising aboard steamships.

Her marriage to Garrett Barton ended in divorce. She was married in 1986 to James Davis, who survives her.

Services were held Thursday.

In addition to her husband and sister, survivors include a brother, Henry R. Thomas of Cochran; two other sisters, Beverly Gather of Baltimore and the Rev. Linda Thomas of Chicago; and three grandchildren. Her son, Brett T. Barton, died in July.