Rev. William H. Copeland Jr.

February 19, 1933 - September 12, 2023

For more than six decades, Pastor Copeland preached the Gospel and served the community. For 36 of those years, he was pastor of Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church in Kankakee, Illinois, where he sought by his love for the people to positively influence life in Kankakee, its surrounding communities and across the nation.

He was husband to Leola (Coley) Copeland for 67 years. To their union, two children were born: Kenneth Edward and Monica Rochelle. He was also father to Walter Klein (of Germany).

The son of farmers and grandson to a man born into slavery, William Henry Copeland Jr. was born February 19, 1933, to William Henry Copeland Sr. and Georgia Ann Wyatt Copeland in Piney Woods (Winn Parish), near the town of Dodson, Louisiana, the youngest of 14 children. He accepted Christ at an early age.

After completing high school in Winfield, Louisiana, he served in the U.S. Army. He was honorably discharged in 1955. Pastor Copeland accepted his call to the ministry and preached his first public sermon December 12, 1962, and was ordained April 5, 1964, at Metropolitan Baptist Church in Kansas City, Missouri. As a young minister at Metropolitan, Pastor Copeland served as the youth pastor and was also an assistant to the pastor from 1963 to 1967.

In February 1967, he was called to pastor the First Baptist Church of Elwood, Kansas. He served in Elwood for five years. Pastor Copeland accepted the pastorate of Morning Star in 1971 and moved to Kankakee in January 1972. He immediately went to work and set about building the church spiritually, starting several new ministries with an emphasis on Christian education.

A stalwart social and civil rights activist, Pastor Copeland reorganized the Kankakee County branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and served as its president. He has also served as president of the Northeast Side Ministerial Alliance. He led in the founding of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Foundation and was its first president; coordinated the Kankakee County Chapter of the Rainbow PUSH Coalition; spearheaded the creation of Citizens for Children's Rights to Education; served as chief advisor for the Young Ministers' Division of the National Baptist Convention U.S.A; and organized countless marches and efforts for social and economic justice and against gangs and violence.

Pastor Copeland also undertook the building of a new edifice to house the growing congregation. Under the tenure of Pastor Copeland, Morning Star erected a new building in 1976 at 570 N. Harrison Avenue. During his pastorate Morning Star grew to more than 1,500 active members.

Pastor Copeland earned a bachelor of science degree from Missouri Western University in St. Joseph, Missouri. He was later awarded an honorary Doctorate of Divinity degree from Morris College, Sumter, S.C. (1975) and McKinley Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi (1977).

Pastor Copeland received numerous national, community and civil service awards, including the Ebony Esteem Award for "Man of the Year," and "Most Outstanding Man in Religion." He was awarded hundreds of resolutions and

certificates of appreciation from presidents William J. Clinton, George Bush and Barack Obama and other city and state officials.

In 2008, Pastor Copeland retired as senior pastor of Morning Star after 36 years of service and became pastor emeritus. He did not retire from pastoring the community or from his primary calling to save souls.

He leaves to cherish his memory a loving wife of 67 years, Leola; two sons, Walter Klein (wife, Tina) and Dr. Kenneth Edward Copeland (wife, Starla); one daughter, Monica Rochelle Fountain (husband, John W. Fountain); seven grandchildren; one great-granddaughter; a host of nieces and nephews, innumerable sons and daughters in the Gospel and in the community beyond and the members of Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church.

Memorials may be made to the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Foundation of Kankakee for the Rev. William H. Copeland Jr. Scholarship.

Cemetery Details

Abraham Lincoln Cemetery

20953 W. Hoff Rd.
Elwood, IL 60421

Previous Events

Memorial Service

SEP **24**. 5:00 PM (CT)

College Church
200 University Avenue
Bourbonnais, IL 60901

Visitation

SEP **25**. 8:00 AM - 10:00 AM (CT)

Morning Star
570 N. Harrison
Kankakee, IL

Service

SEP **25**. 10:00 AM (CT)

Morning Star
570 N. Harrison
Kankakee, IL

Tribute Wall

LL

He Christened my daughter eventhough the church was against it, because I wasn't married. I was a very young teenager at the time. I'm grateful he was committed to the Word. My daughter is a RN and a Minister with her husband. She teaches bible-study. Her accomplishments would have made him proud. Proverbs 22:6

Linda L - February 02 at 03:36 PM

SF

Prayers and Condolences to the Copeland family 🕊️🌺

Samuels Family - October 03, 2023 at 01:44 PM

TF

The Family lit a candle in memory of William Copeland

The Love Family - September 26, 2023 at 10:09 PM

EC

Extending heartfelt condolences to the family.

Elayne Coffie - September 26, 2023 at 05:23 AM

SH

My condolences to the Copeland family. You will truly be missed my neighbor and friend. I'll miss seeing you walk by and always stopping and asking me how I'm doing. Thank you for the inspiration. Rest in peace

Sheila J Herrod - September 25, 2023 at 01:26 PM

MC

My sincerest condolences to the family.

M Cooper - September 25, 2023 at 10:18 AM

MM

Michael Rita Morris lit a candle in memory of William Copeland

Michael & Rita Morris - September 22, 2023 at 10:16 AM

KH

Our prayers and condolences to the family of Pastor Copeland 🙏

kevin & Cheryl Hawkins - September 21, 2023 at 11:04 PM

TL

Terry Lloyd lit a candle in memory of William Copeland

Terry Lloyd - September 21, 2023 at 03:15 PM

LH

My prayers and condolences to the family.

Lataira Harris - September 20, 2023 at 10:21 PM

CW

My deepest condolences and heartfelt sympathy are with "The Copeland Family". May the beautiful memories of your loved one live on forever in your hearts and spirits. Pastor Copeland touched so many lives (young & old); I am a living product of his leadership. His labor of love will live on for generations to come!

Carrie Washington - September 21, 2023 at 11:54 AM

AB

My Condolences to the family. I pray God will continue to strengthen the family during this time. 20 plus years ago I met Pastor Copeland, while visiting the Morning Star Baptist church.

Amanda Brooks - September 20, 2023 at 09:55 PM

MG

My condolences and prayers the Family of Pastor William H Copeland.

Mary Gant - September 20, 2023 at 08:11 PM

VD

Verlean Dunigan lit a candle in memory of William Copeland

Verlean Dunigan - September 19, 2023 at 07:38 PM

VD

My Prayers go out to the entire family 🙏

Verlean Dunigan - September 19, 2023 at 07:38 PM

EL

My deepest sympathy to the entire Copeland's Family. Emeritus Pastor Copeland was a great Shepherd to his Congregation. I learned so much about the Bible and God through his awesome teaching. He was a wise, kindhearted and compassionate man. I will forever miss and remember you, "Dad Copeland." Take your rest now, for you have been a good and faithful servant, love yearly dearly❤️💐🙏🙏

Ethel Lee - September 19, 2023 at 06:53 PM

CB

I hold the Memory precious that Pastor Copeland called me His Bootleg Preacher! Praying for and with You - Roscoe & Carolyn Butler

Carolyn Butler - September 19, 2023 at 03:46 PM

BR

My heartfelt condolences for his family and entire congregation.I met him years ago selling him cars and his referrals for those in need. I always the love in his eyes for people and needs and the love he promoted. I drive by the church he built..and see his folks walking to church on Sunday morning...what a great man and inspiration in and for kankakee county..He will be missed...yet not ever forgotten..my heart SENDS those he loved and those who loved him...a hug..we have been blessed.

Bonnie Raef - September 21, 2023 at 01:37 PM

PJ

Patricia Jamison sent a virtual gift in memory of William Copeland

Patricia Jamison - September 19, 2023 at 03:31 PM

JF

JOANN FORD-BOX lit a candle in memory of William Copeland

JOANN FORD-BOX - September 19, 2023 at 10:36 AM

PJ

Family, you are in our thoughts and prayers.

Pastor and Mrs. Robert Johnson - September 19, 2023 at 10:27 AM

LS

Lorraine Strickland lit a candle in memory of William Copeland

Lorraine Strickland - September 19, 2023 at 10:19 AM

AD

The last sermon I heard preached by Dr. Copeland was entitled "Evil is incapable of a perfect plan" on 12/14/14 this message helped me so that I still refer back to it today! Life well serve! RIP and my condolences to the family. Stay strong!

Arnita Dowdy-Boyd - September 19, 2023 at 04:09 AM

EE

My sincere prayers and condolences to the family, one thing that has always stayed with me that Pastor Copeland said, there's no such thing as common sense because if it was everybody would have it, and that is so true, I thank God for Pastor Copeland and having the opportunity to know him, you have fought a good fight now RIP

Eloise Edwards - September 19, 2023 at 02:26 AM

LS

Condolences to the family of Pastor Copeland an Iconic leader, Pastor,and Father to many. Rest on.

LaJuene Sommerville - September 18, 2023 at 10:08 PM

CW

My condolences to the family. Sending Prayers.

Cheryl Wilson - September 18, 2023 at 09:53 PM

MB

minnie brewster sent a virtual gift in memory of William Copeland

minnie brewer brewster - September 18, 2023 at 09:07 PM