

“May We Forever Stand:
Massachusetts Commemorates 400 Years of Black Resiliency”
Friday September 20, 2019 7:30p
Greater Framingham Community Church

LITANY OF THANKSGIVING FOR BLACK RESILIENCY IN MASSACHUSETTS

[Although Massachusetts was one of the first states to end slavery during the 1780s, it was also the first colony to establish slavery within its 1641 “Body of Liberties.”](#) Within this complex history, there is so much to celebrate of the power, practice, and persistence of Black Resiliency in Massachusetts.

As we begin, we acknowledge with humility the sacred ground under our feet, and that we are on the traditional lands of the Wampanoag people, proximate to both Nipmuck and Narragansett native lands. We honor the native people who have stewarded this land for generations and offer our respect to the elders past and present. [In many places](#), Native and African peoples found common cause in the march to freedom. We are especially mindful of elders like [Crispus Attucks](#), of Native and African decent, born here in Framingham in 1723, the first person killed in the Boston Massacre and later an icon of the abolitionist movement.

In the prayers that follow, we strive to honor the ancestors, those names carved into monuments and those names known to God alone. From every corner of Massachusetts, African Americans have tread a path through the blood of the slaughtered, stood firm, and marched forward. And in every corner of Massachusetts, the Black Church has been a beacon of hope and a way station in the storm.

Each petition will give thanks for black resiliency from a different region of Massachusetts, led by a pastor from that region. At the end of each petition, the church leader will say “May we forever stand” and you will respond **“True to our God, True to our native land.”**

Let us pray...

Holy One, in every generation, you have been our North star, guarding and guiding your people. Over 400 years, you never leave nor forsake us. In each generation, the bondage has changed. In each generation, you provided for us with faithful women and men who blazed a trail towards freedom. “May we forever stand,”

ALL: “True to our God, True to our native land.”

Boston: We pray for Boston. From this city, we see the signs of black agency and self-determination. We honor the children who rode bravely in busses to unfamiliar school districts, and the young adults who marched defiantly down Mass. Ave to protest police brutality. Bless this legacy of education and activism, the organizing of [Tent City](#) and [Mothers for Adequate Welfare](#). We honor black creativity in [Phillis Wheatley](#) of Old South Church, first published African American writer in North America. We pray for black home ownership, invoking the name of [Zipporah Potter Atkins](#), the first woman of African descent to purchase a house in Boston, in 1670. We call the name of [Sgt William Carney](#), the first black medal of honor recipient and all of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry who gathered at [Camp Meigs](#) in Readville, Boston. Grant to us, the faithfulness and tenacity of those first parishioners of the [African Meeting House](#). “May we forever stand,”

ALL: “True to our God, True to our native land.”

Cambridge and North: We pray for Cambridge and North. From these towns, we see the signs of black education and ingenuity. Cultivate in us the intellectual rigor of [Maria Baldwin](#), first black woman appointed as principal of a predominately white public school in Cambridge. We are humbled by those whose labor created the wealth that would endow [Harvard Law School](#), the school that would educate our first black President. Call forth [Belinda Sutton](#), formerly enslaved at the [Royall House and Slave Quarters](#) in Medford, who petitioned the [Massachusetts General Court](#) again and again for her back pay. We honor the ingenuity of [Jan Matzeliger](#) of Lynn, inventor of shoe lasting machine who left his fortune to North Congregational Church. We reclaim the black valor of [Prince Estabrook](#), who though enslaved, enlisted and fought in the Revolutionary War with the Lexington Militia. We praise the resourcefulness [Lucy Foster](#) of South Church in Andover, who in her freedom ran a tavern and a stop on the Underground Railroad. Grant us the courage of abolitionist fundraiser Dr. [Sarah Parker Remond](#) and oyster businessman [Prince Farmer of Salem](#) who risked their own safety to shelter those fleeing on the Underground Railroad.

“May we forever stand,”

ALL: “True to our God, True to our native land.”

The Cape and Islands: We pray for the Cape and the Islands. From these shores, we see the signs of black artistry and recreation. We honor Mrs. Anderson of Hyannis, who, discouraged from worshipping with neighboring white Christians, founded [Zion Union Chapel](#). We name “Ma” Harriet Grace, who pastored the church though rejected as a female pastor. For all the black domestic workers and immigrants who have found respite and refuge in black Cape churches, we give thanks. We rejoice in the life of [Captain Absalom Boston](#) of Nantucket and the all-black crew of the whaleship *Industry*, and the captain’s commitment to his African Baptist Church as a trustee. We praise You for the artists, entrepreneurs, and vacationers who found freedom in Provincetown and the [Inkwell](#) of Martha’s Vineyard. We remember [Senator Edward Brooke](#), first African American elected to the US Senate after Reconstruction, who ran a campaign office from his home on the Vineyard. We call forth [Dorothy West](#) of Oak Bluffs, the last living member of the Harlem Renaissance. Send the power of your Holy Spirit that blew through those old revival meetings, an integrated Christian Community at praise and at play. Grant to us the creativity and rest of those who found refuge in these places. “May we forever stand,”

ALL: “True to our God, True to our native land.”

New Bedford and South: We pray for the New Bedford and the South. From these ports and stations, we see the signs of black collaboration and vitality. We praise You for the thick network of the [Underground Railroad](#). We claim the remarkable resiliency of black New Bedford, a place so dedicated to collective liberation that, as [Frederick Douglass](#) made his home here, he praised the black community “determined to protect each other from the bloodthirsty kidnapper, at all hazards.” We hear the clarion call to protect one another in the sound of the [Liberty Bell](#), rung to warn of US marshals chasing those on the road to freedom. We marvel at the innovation of devout Quaker and Sea Captain [Paul Cuffe](#) of Westport, who envisioned a return to Africa. We taste the goodness of God and the practice of black hospitality in Bishop Charles Manuel "Sweet Daddy" Grace who arrived in New Bedford in 1903 on a ship called *Freedom* and the founding the first [United House of Prayer for All People](#), in West Wareham. We give thanks for soul food evangelism and shout bands. May we forever praise and “May we forever stand,”

ALL: “True to our God, True to our native land.”

Worcester and Central: We pray for Worcester and Central Massachusetts. From these hills, we see the signs of black hospitality and strength. We honor [Quock Walker](#) who sued for his own freedom, argued slavery was contrary to the Bible and the new Massachusetts Constitution, winning for himself and others. We lift up the ethnically diverse [Beaver Brook](#) neighborhood of Worcester and the black residents who lived side by side with many new immigrants. We cheer alongside the [Worcester Whirlwind](#), [Major Taylor](#), the first African-American world champion in cycling, who kept his faith and dignity, even as others would try to sabotage his victories. We praise You for the established black community of Worcester who helped set up a [Freedmens’ Office](#) for the newly emancipated. We aspire to open our hearts and homes like [Elizabeth Mowbray](#), president of the Colored Freedmen's Aid Society, who housed southern refugees in her Worcester home. God help us to build our own [Liberty Farm](#). “May we forever stand,”

ALL: “True to our God, True to our native land.”

Springfield and the Pioneer Valley : We pray for Springfield and the Pioneer Valley. From these mountain tops and city streets, we see the crossroads of black intersectionality and solidarity. We honor the ways black institutions shaped strategies of resistance in every fight for liberation. We give thanks for [Rev. William Apess](#) of Colrain, a black, Pequot Methodist preacher educated in schools for [African children](#), who ministered with the [Mashpee Indians](#) during the [Mashpee Revolt](#) in 1833. We honor the labor of [Sojourner Truth](#), who moved to Northampton in 1843 to join a communal farm and silk-factory, and her unwavering commitment to liberation as a black woman. We hold up the strategic collaboration of John Brown and [Thomas Thomas](#), as the emancipated Thomas housed the formerly enslaved and fleeing black kin in his Springfield restaurant. We claim the bedrock foundation of black faithfulness in this region, in the [Sanford Street Free Church](#) that lives on in St. John’s Congregational Church today. We admire the continuing care for black children in the historic ministry of [Camp Atwater](#) in North Brookfield. We aspire to the black philanthropy of real estate developer [Primus Mason](#) of Monson, who use his fortune to found Springfield’s first “Home for Aged Men.” When our feet are in two worlds, “May we forever stand,”

ALL: “True to our God, True to our native land.”

Pittsfield and the Berkshires: We pray for Pittsfield & the Berkshires. From these borders lands, we see the wide horizons of black integrity and independence. We revere the sacrifice of Elizabeth “[Mum Bett](#)” Freeman, who took the blow of the enslaver’s wrath to protect another woman, and then walked out the enslaver’s door in Sheffield. We applaud [Freeman's](#) ingenuity to use the [Massachusetts Constitution](#) to argue in court for her own freedom. We praise the community of Great Barrington that raised [W.E.B. DuBois](#) to become a scholar, speaker, and founder of the NAACP. We honor [Rev. Samuel Harrison](#) of Pittsfield, Congregational minister and chaplain to the 54th Massachusetts who demanded he receive the same pay as white colleagues. We marvel at the heights of astronaut [Stephanie Wilson](#) of Pittsfield, only the second African American woman in space. We feast on the beauty of [Jacob’s Pillow](#) in Beckett, first an Underground Railroad farmhouse station and then a venue for dance where [Asadata Dafora](#) premiered in the inaugural season. And from his writing shed in Great Barrington, we can hear the [James Weldon Johnson’s](#) words ring out. As we lift every voice, “May we forever stand,”

ALL: “True to our God, True to our native land.”

Naming the Saints: True to you, our God and true to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, we come humbly before you with the names of the unnamed. We remember the unnamed black men who stormed a Boston courthouse to free [Shadrach Minkins](#), the first escaped slave seized in New England under the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law. And we remember the names of our mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles, godparents and cousins, mentors and teachers.

We invite you to name aloud now those you hold dear, those saints of black resiliency across Massachusetts who paved the way for us:

Oh God, you who know every name even before we speak it, Receive all our gratitude and praise. May our names be named by those who come after us. As the day of judgment approaches, “May we forever stand,”

ALL: “True to our God, True to our native land.”

AMEN.

Led on Friday, Sept. 20, 2019 by: Rev. Carrington Moore (Massachusetts Council of Churches), Rev. Art Gordon (St. John Missionary Baptist Church, Boston, MA), Rev. Bernadette Hickman-Maynard (Bethel AME, Lynn, MA), Rev. Philomena Hare (The Federated Church of Hyannis, Hyannis, MA), Rev. Dr. John Page (TABCOM, Brockton, MA), Rev. Dr. Esau Vance (Mt. Olive Pentecostal Church, Worcester, MA), Rev. Catherine Cummings (Wesley UMC, Springfield, MA), Rev. Sloan Letman IV (Second Congregational Church, Pittsfield, MA), and Bishop Robert Brown (Zion Church Ministries, Everett, MA)



MASSACHUSETTS
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