

# Celebration of Life

In Loving Memory of Sammie Nell Irving Tollette

Tuesday, August 3, 2021  
Bullock Temple CME Church  
1513 South Park, Little Rock, AR 72202



Rev. Dion Broughton, Senior Pastor  
The Reverend Ronald Williams, Presiding Elder  
The Reverend Henry M. Williamson, Sr., Presiding Bishop

## Obituary

Sammie Nell Irving Tollette was born on May 10, 1928, to Wesley Irving and Dorothy Coleman Irving. She passed on July 26, 2021 and is preceded in death by her husband Sanford Bernard Tollette III, her parents and sister Eunice Irving Vault.

Survivors include her sons Sanford (Melinda "Binky") Irving Tollette IV and Frederick Wesley Tollette both of Little Rock; grandchildren Sanford James (Erica) Tollette V of Memphis, Christopher (ToyLetha) Irving Adams Tollette, Zoe Lynn Tollette, and Zia Rose Tollette all of Little Rock; great grandson Amir Tollette of Little Rock; cousin Saboor Salaam of Little Rock; cousin Dorothy Marie Jones of Dallas; Vanessa Lewis, her caregiver for the past four years; and many nieces, nephews, other relatives and friends who she considered family.

Her birthplace was Karnack, Texas, where the Coleman girls had the reputation of being the prettiest girls in Harrison County and where LadyBird Johnson's father owned a store and traded with Sammie's grandfather. Her grandparents were farmers, but her father was not interested in farming, so he saved his money and moved his family to Dallas when Sammie was 5 years old. She attended Mount Carmel Baptist Church and Lincoln High School. With prompting from her parents and her Aunt Daisy, Sammie decided to attend Wiley College in Marshall, Texas, graduating in 1949 with a BA in English--the first in her immediate family to attend college. One of her professors was Melvin B. Tolson, known for his role in leading the college's debate team to the national championship as portrayed in the movie The Great Debaters.

In 1949 Aunt Daisy encouraged Sammie to accept a teaching position at Stamps Training School where she met Sanford Bernard Tollette III, the science teacher and coach. They married soon after in 1951. They moved to Hope where she taught at Guernsey High School and where her son Sanford was born. They then moved to Harmony Grove near Camden where she taught English and where her second son Frederick was born. During summers she attended Indiana University in Bloomington and received her masters in library science. She was one of five Black students admitted to the program and the only one who finished. She served as English teacher at Townsend Park in Pine Bluff; librarian at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff; and English teacher and librarian at Smackover Training School. She continued her school librarian career at Camden High (1961-63), Booker Junior High (1963-82), and Dunbar Junior High (1982-95). Her work led to dedicated service beyond the school by serving as President of the Little Rock Teachers' Association for one year, as Treasurer of the Arkansas Education Association for four years (the first Black elected official to AEA), and as President of Arkansas Teachers Credit Union for ten years, resigning only a few months ago.

With the birth of her children and her husband's call to preach in the Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church, Sammie moved from Baptist to Methodist because she didn't want her children to have to choose. She worshipped in many CME churches before settling into Bullock Temple CME Church in Little Rock where she served many roles: 11 years as director of Christian education; 40 years in the Chancel Choir; and many years as the Trustee Board Secretary.

Sammie spent a lifetime encouraging others. She took time to gently advise and mentor young women in careers and service. She served as President and Charter Member of Top Ladies of Distinction, Inc., for four years, President of the Urban League Guild for one year, President of Beta Pi Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) sorority for four years, Ivy Foundation of Little Rock Board Member for over ten years, and Volunteer at the Clinton Presidential Library for eight years.

If you knew Sammie, you know her favorite colors: pink and green. Her sorority and the relationships within it were her lifeblood. On May 1, 2021, she reached the highest AKA award, becoming a Diamond Member for 75 years of active membership.

She was a faithful Christian, a loyal friend, and a loving wife, mother, grandmother, and great grandmother.

# Order of Service

## Sammie Nell Irving Tollette

May 10, 1928—July 26, 2021

Processional—Vaughn Davis, organist

Affirmation of Faith--Rev. Dion Broughton, Officiant

Congregation: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ His only Son, Our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day he rose from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

Hymn #109—"I Come to the Garden Alone"

The Lord's Prayer—Rev. Dion Broughton

Solo—Reba Gaines, "The Potter"

Scripture Readings

Old Testament—Rev. Dr. Laverne Bell-Tolliver

New Testament—Rev. Ryan Davis

Solo—Dorothy Ferguson, "Precious Lord"

Tributes, Resolutions and Acknowledgements

Marlon Biddle

Katrina Owoh

Sandy Becker

Binky Martin-Tollette

Sanford Tollette, IV

Solo—Belynda Jeffries, "My Soul's Been Anchored"

Eulogy—Rev. Dr. Logan Hampton, II, President, Lane College

Hymn #189—"It is Well with My Soul"

Recessional

## Acknowledgments

The family of the late Sammie Tollette would like to thank you for your kindness shown to our family by your prayers, telephone calls, cards, visits, food, gifts, and assistance during our time of bereavement. We are forever grateful for your love and support for Sammie Tollette and for us. May God bless you and keep you and give you peace.

The family would like to thank the caregivers of Keisha's Home Health for their round-the-clock care when it was needed and for treating her like royalty, and we are forever grateful for the love and care from Vanessa Lewis.

Memorial contributions may be made to the following or the charity of your choice:

Bullock Temple CME Youth Program, 1513 S Park St, Little Rock, AR 72202,

Joseph Pfeifer Kiwanis Camp, 5512 Ferndale Cutoff, Little Rock, AR 72223, or the

Janzen/Tollette Music Scholarship Fund, 525 Old Main, 1 University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR 72701.

## Active Pallbearers

Sanford Tollette, V  
Christopher Tollette  
Marque Mealing  
Raymond Faison

James Johnson  
Jarrett Davis  
Vince Miller  
Marlon Biddle

## Honorary Pallbearers

Joel Johnson  
John Talley  
Manuel Twillie  
Robert Currie  
Top Ladies of Distinction, Inc.  
Retired Educators of Little Rock

Virgil Miller  
Ed Coleman  
Chris Hamilton  
Louie Lewis  
Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.,  
Beta Pi Omega Chapter

## Interment

Arkansas State Veterans Cemetery  
1501 W Maryland Ave, North Little Rock, AR 72120

