Celebrating the Life & Legacy of Reverend Michael Joseph Brown, Ph.D.

OCTOBER 31, 1968 – DECEMBER 18, 2025

FRIDAY, JANUARY 9, 2026 11:30AM

Allen Temple
African Methodist Episcopal Church
7080 Reading Road Cincinnati, Ohio 45237
Rev. Dr. Alphonse Allen, Jr. Pastor

Celebrating the Life & Legacy of
Reverend Michael Joseph Brown, PhD

Bishop Stafford J. Wicker, Officiating

Prayer ✦ Rev. Dr. Keith Lawrence, Pastor First AME Church, Atlanta GA

Opening Hymn ✦ Blessed Assurance
Rev. Anthony Vinson, Dir. of Music & Worship, Saint John AME Church, Aurora, IL

Old Testament ✦ Psalm 46: 1-11 Rev. Dr. Kathleen M. Wright
New Testament ✦ Matthew 6:5-15 Rev. Dr. Elmer Martin

Family
Rev. Richard McCain, Sr. Pastor, Highland Road Church of Christ

Pastor
Bishop Clement W. Fugh (Ret.) African Methodist Episcopal Church

Payne Theological Seminary
Rev. Dr. Morn`e E. Meyer, Former International Resident Student
Rev. Betty Whitted Holley, PhD. Interim President

Connectional Lay Affiliate
Mr. Jerry Turner, 2nd Vice President

Mentor
Dr. Delores F. Brisbon, Convener of The Gift Collaborative Organization

Musical Selection

Colleague
Rev. Herbert R. Marbury, PhD, Vanderbilt University

Mentees
Mr. Kim King, Wabash College

Rev. Shively T. J. Smith, PhD, Boston University

Friends
Mr. Tony & Mrs. Paula Harris
Mr. Motoji & Mrs. Jamie Winburn

Acknowledgements ✦ Dr. Deborah Brown, Payne Theological Seminary

Musical Selection

Eulogy ✦ Bishop Henry Allen Belin, III,
Presiding Prelate, Fifteen Episcopal District

Recessional

Interment immediately following service
Vine Street Hill Cemetery
3701 Vine St. Cincinnati, OH 45220

Obituary for The Reverend Michael Joseph Brown, Ph.D.

On October 31, 1968, God sent a remarkable soul into the world in the person of The Rev. Dr. Michael Joseph Brown. Endowed with a keen intellect, a generous spirit, and a deep well of compassion, Michael lived a life marked by purpose, faith, and service.

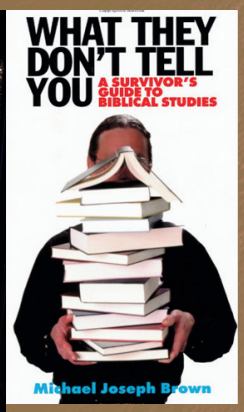
Dr. Brown was the rare academic who excelled as a pastor, a preacher of the Gospel, a theological educator of generations of students, an internationally renowned biblical scholar of the highest order, and a passionate public intellectual who modeled thoughtful resistance to injustice. Throughout his vocational life he served God as an elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the denominational tradition that he deeply loved and whose values and liberative impulses shaped his vocation, work, and commitments. After a life richly and faithfully lived, he transitioned from this earthly journey into eternal rest on December 18, 2025, leaving behind a legacy that will continue to shape hearts, minds, and institutions for generations to come.

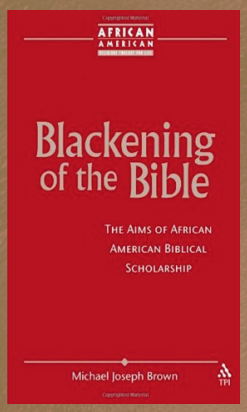
Born in Cincinnati, Ohio, young Michael's formative years were distinguished by an early love of learning and a profound devotion to God. He attended Withrow High School, where his musical gifts flourished as a trumpet player in the marching band. At just twelve years old, Michael answered his divine calling, preaching his first sermon at Greater St. Matthew AME Church, where his father served as pastor. Even then, his ministry was rooted in curiosity, conviction, and courage. While still young, he worked part-time at the public library, immersing himself in biblical history and theology—an experience that laid the foundation for a lifelong pursuit of scholarship and truth.

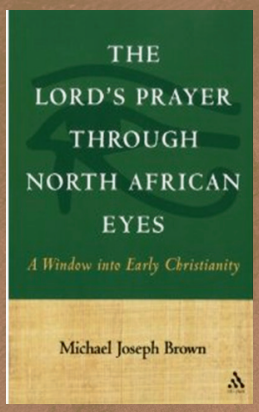
Michael began his formal studies in New Testament at Vanderbilt University where he earned the Bachelor of Arts. While at Vanderbilt, he became a member of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity. Throughout Michael's life, the fraternity's principles of Manhood, Scholarship, Perseverance, and Uplift shaped his highest ideals and deep commitments. He completed the M.Div. and Ph.D. at the University of Chicago, and pursued further studies on material culture at Columbia University. Dr. Brown honed his skills as an educator as an undergraduate professor at Wabash College, and later as Associate Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at Candler School of Theology at Emory University. While at Emory, he served as Director of Graduate Studies and mentored a cadre of African American scholars through the perils and pitfalls of earning the Ph.D. and advancing as a scholar of religion. After leaving Emory, his desire to develop young minds for relevant activism and conscious abolitionism in the 21st-century led him to serve as Director of the Malcolm X Institute of Black Studies at Wabash College.

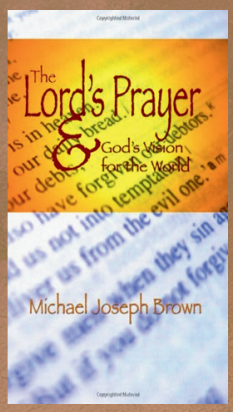
In 2016 Dr. Brown accepted the appointment as the 17th President of Payne Theological Seminary. Doing so fulfilled his longtime hope of serving the institution where his father studied to become an AME minister. Dr. Brown arrived at Payne with his highest hopes, revolutionary ideas about theological education, and a deep commitment to the legacy of African Methodism. He believed that every AME minister deserved the opportunity to pursue a Master of Divinity. So at a time when theological education as a whole faced economic headwinds, he fortified Payne's financial standing, expanded its program, and raised its regional profile to international standing with satellites across the United States and on the continent of Africa. He was always mindful that "the laborers are few," and so, while at Payne, he also offered leadership to Black theological education broadly by serving as president of The Gift Collaborative Organization, a powerful consortium of six Historically Black Theological Institutions (HBTI): Hood Theological Seminary, Payne Theological Seminary, Shaw School of Divinity, The Interdenominational Theological Center, The Samuel Dewitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union, and Howard School of Divinity. Through this collective, he worked to strengthen Black faith communities by drawing upon more than four centuries of Black religious wisdom to address contemporary challenges with faith-informed solutions. In each role, he was a tireless advocate for intellectual rigor, justice-centered theology, and the formation of leaders committed to equity, liberation, and service.

Dr. Brown's academic work reflected his enduring commitment to excellence in educating students and in pursuing the study of Black Religion. Born out of his concern that biblical studies had become arcane, and alienated students from its aims, rather than inviting them to value its work, Brown wrote What They Don't Tell You: A Survivor's Guide to Academic Biblical Studies (2000) to introduce students to the academic study of the Bible in ways that hold both faithful practice and intellectual integrity in creative theological tension. The Lord's Prayer Through North African Eyes: A Window into Early Christianity (2004) focuses scholarly attention on African receptions of Jesus' iconic prayer and asks what such readings might offer contemporary Christians. At his core, Brown was an African American biblical scholar. In Blackening of the Bible: The Aims of African American Biblical Scholarship (2004), Brown demonstrates his fundamental commitment to advancing the enterprise. Blackening appeared as a tour de force that theorized Black biblical studies. It offered judicious but constructive critiques and proposed new directions that decades since influences the works of younger scholars. In his The Lord's Prayer and God's Vision for the World: Finding Your Purpose through Prayer (2014), Brown brings to bear the insights of a seasoned pastor with the grounding of a disciplined scholar and returns to write for his first love, the Black Church.

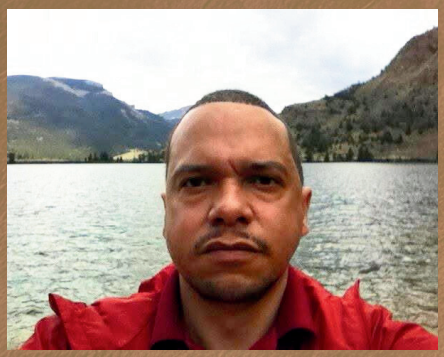


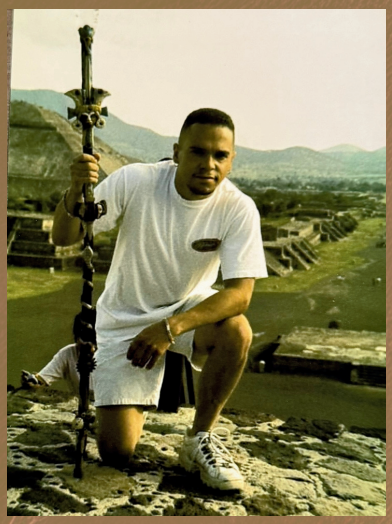






Beyond the academy and the pulpit, Michael embraced life with curiosity and joy. An avid traveler, he delighted in exploring global cultures, with a particular fascination for the history and spirituality of Egypt. He found freedom and peace in riding horses, swimming, and biking, and he delighted in discovering new culinary experiences, often guided by his love for Food Network features. These passions reflected his expansive spirit and deep appreciation for beauty, culture, and connection.



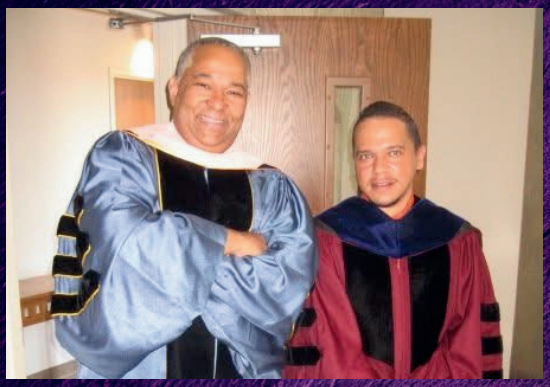


Michael's love for family was profound and deeply lived. Most notably, he was a devoted uncle and father figure to his nephew and namesake, Michael Anthony Brown, whom he lovingly raised while serving as a professor at Emory University. Their bond was one of deep affection, guidance, and pride, reflecting Michael's commitment not only to shaping institutions, but to nurturing lives with intention, sacrifice, and love. He freely shared stories of cherished family reunions whose gatherings were filled with laughter and close fellowship. He shared close bonds with his siblings, nieces, nephews, extended family, Most of all he held a special devotion to his mother, Gloria L. Brown Allen. When he was away from family, his beloved dog, Que, was a faithful companion and constant source of joy.

Michael was preceded in death by his father, Rev. R. Edgar Brown; his sister, Angelica; his brother, Jonathan; and several aunts, uncles, and grandparents. He leaves to cherish his memory his mother, Gloria L. Brown Allen (Michael); uncles Rev. Richard McCain, Sr., John McCain III, David Wille (Hazel), and Kirt Willie; his beloved nephew and namesake, Michael Anthony Brown (Kellie); nieces Gloria I. Brown and Patricia Lee; Sonya Bell (Ricky), Beatrice McCain-Oglesby (Perry), Richard McCain Jr.; along with a host of cousins, colleagues, students, and friends who loved him deeply and were shaped by his life.

Beyond his family by birth, Michael loved a broader "chosen" family of colleagues, students, and close friends who remember him as a force for good whose boundless generosity, faith in God, and deep love for people left this world a better place.

As we gather to honor and remember Michael Joseph Brown, we give thanks for his unwavering faith, his devotion to truth and justice, and the love he poured into every community he served. May we carry forward his spirit of inquiry, compassion, and courage, ensuring that his legacy continues to live through our scholarship, our service, and our care for one another. His life was beautifully lived, and his spirit will forever guide us.



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"Friendship Is Essential to the Soul"

His Legacy Lives

Rev. Michael Joseph Brown, Ph.D

1968 - 2025

In lieu of flowers
donations can be made to the
Michael Joseph Brown, Ph.D. Archives
in the Reverdy Ransome Library
at Payne Theological Seminary

payneseminary.edu/give

Acknowledgements

The Brown Family acknowledges the many kind and genuine expressions of love and sympathy with much appreciation. Special thanks is given to:

Dr. Alphonse Allen, Pastor and Allen Temple AME Church
Bishop Stafford Wicker, Presiding Prelate and the Third Episcopal District
Dr. Betty W. Holley, Interim President and Payne Theological Seminary
Presiding Elder Toni Belin Ingram
Dr. Sharon Blaylock
Dr. Jermaine Covington
Mr. Raymond Ingram
Mr. Tony Harris
Mr. & Mrs. Mo Winburn
Dr. Kathleen M. Wright

Pallbearers

Michael Anthony Brown
Tony Harris
Mo Winburn
Richard McCain, Jr.
Kim King
Perry Osbey

Services Entrusted To

Thompson, Hall and Jordan Funeral Home
11400 Winton Rd
Forest Park, OH 45240
thompsonhalljordan.com
(513) 742-3600