



## Mrs. Gertrude Payton

February 16, 1927 - February 16, 2022

In lieu of flowers please make a donation in Gertrude Payton's name to the Payton-Price Family Fund at the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, or the Mack & Gertrude Payton Endowed Scholarship Fund at Alcorn State University in Lorman, MS.

### Education Pioneer Gertrude Payton Leaves Legacy

When Gertrude Payton was hired to teach home economics at Roosevelt Jr. High School in 1953, she joined the ranks of pioneering African American Milwaukee Public School (MPS) educators. In the early 1950s, African American teachers were primarily hired to teach at elementary schools. Some were hired to teach electives (classes that did not count toward the credits needed to graduate from high school), but it was not common to have African American teachers in grades 7–12.

A native of Crystal Springs, Mississippi, Mrs. Payton received her undergraduate degree from Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College (now Alcorn State University) in Lorman, Mississippi, and worked as a teacher before moving to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1951 with her husband, Mack, and her daughter, Shelia, during “The Great Migration” when African Americans left Southern states to seek better opportunities in the North. Despite their degrees and teaching experience in the South, both Mrs. Payton and her husband were initially unable to get jobs in their fields of study. Her first two jobs in Milwaukee were sewing bags used to store potatoes and working in a tannery.

In 1963, Mrs. Payton became a home economics teacher at North Division High School and was later named home economics department chair. She was selected to become the Title 1 Coordinator at the school and was responsible for ensuring federal dollars were properly spent to help students overcome family, social, or economic barriers so they could achieve academic success. While teaching, Mrs. Payton enrolled in UW-Milwaukee’s Educational Psychology Master’s Degree program. She graduated in 1974, became a guidance counselor, and helped students with their educational, career, and social needs so they could achieve their post-high school goals.

She became a guidance counselor at West Division High School in 1976 and was later

promoted to director of the guidance department. In that role she helped set the goals and tone for how the department functioned and helped counselors provide the best possible assistance to students. When MPS decided to change West Division from a traditional high school to the Milwaukee High School of the Arts, Mrs. Payton continued to manage the guidance department while serving on the team that oversaw the transition. Mrs. Payton retired from full-time work at the High School of the Arts in 1989 but continued to work part-time for MPS another 10 years.

Mrs. Payton's impact on education extended beyond the classroom through her work as an adjutant counselor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and by representing the Milwaukee Public School system on boards, committees, and curriculum projects such as evaluation of the Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota, Home Economics Department for the North Central Evaluation Committee.

After retiring, Mrs. Payton cofounded two endowed scholarships with her husband and family to help students attend historically black colleges and universities. They are the Mack & Gertrude Payton Endowed Scholarship at Alcorn State University and the Payton-Price Family Fund at the Greater Milwaukee Foundation. As it grows, the Payton-Price Family Fund will also provide grants that benefit Milwaukee's African American community in areas such as economic self-sufficiency, health, innovative programs and techniques that improve educational outcomes for students of Black African ancestry, and efforts that showcase and preserve Black African arts and culture (among other things).

In addition to her work in education, Mrs. Payton was active in her church—St. Mark A.M.E. Church—and in organizations that worked to make a positive difference in the lives of others. She was a member of the Christian Social Action Form Committee that hosted information sessions and discussions regarding issues impacting people's lives in the community. She was a charter member of the church's credit union and First Vice President and later Parliamentarian of the Geraldine Bradford Missionary Society that provided services and assistance to people in need. She also worked with young people as Vacation Bible School Director and was Chairperson of St Mark's bicentennial celebration souvenir booklet that accompanied a diorama created and housed in the Milwaukee Public Museum.

Mrs. Payton was also an organizer and charter member of Kappa Beta Zeta Milwaukee Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority; a charter member of Sarah's Joy Chapter #8 O.E.S., Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and a member of Church Women United that presented her with their Valiant Woman Award in 2011. Other honors include recognition as a Living Legacy in the African American Women's organization booklet, Someone You Should Know Award in 2009, presented by the A.M.E. Church's Fourth Episcopal District, and the Shero Award presented by the Missionary Society in 2008.

Mrs. Payton was inducted into the Alcorn State University Hall of Honor and Hall of Fame, and the ASU Athletic Hall of Fame as a two-sport athlete who helped lead

the women's basketball team to a championship in 1949.

Mrs. Payton died peacefully in her sleep on her 95th birthday on February 16, 2022. She is survived by her daughter Shelia (Milwaukee, Wisconsin), her son Renato (Fontana, California), her grandchildren Joi (Minneapolis, Minnesota), Justin and Renee (Fontana, California), and a host of relatives and friends.

She added author to her resume when she wrote *A Caregivers Journey: Dealing with the aspects of Dementia* in which she shared lessons learned and information about available resources while caring for her late husband.

In lieu of flowers, Mrs. Payton requested a donation be made in her name to the Payton-Price Family Fund at the Greater Milwaukee Foundation or the Mack & Gertrude Endowed Scholarship Fund at Alcorn State University in Lorman, Mississippi.

# Cemetery

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# Events

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**Wisconsin Memorial Park**

13235 W. Capitol Dr.  
Brookfield, WI,

**MAR  
12**

**Visitation**

10:00AM - 11:00AM

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St Mark AME Church  
1616 W Atkinson Ave, Milwaukee, WI, US, 53206-2438

**MAR  
12**

**Funeral Service**

11:00AM

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St Mark AME Church  
1616 W Atkinson Ave, Milwaukee, WI, US, 53206-2438

# Comments

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“ Marcella lit a candle in memory of Mrs. Gertrude Payton



**Marcella** - March 12 at 01:03 PM

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“ Mrs Gertude Payton an inspiration in my life.Mrs Payton had insight to life and living which she shared with all individuals and groups to which she had contacts.Rest in peace.May the family be comforted knowing many prayers are there for you Gloria Hall

**Gloria Hall** - March 11 at 05:35 PM

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“ My condolences to The Payton family,I am a member of the Northwest Funeral Home Activity Support Group, that Mrs.Payton was a member also.She was such a blessing in my life.. A very caring person. God bless the family. Hazel Stewart

**Hazel Stewart** - March 11 at 04:59 PM

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“ So sorry to hear that Mrs. Payton has left us. She was a great lady. She worked tirelessly with my husband as he transitioned West Division High School to Milwaukee High School of the Arts. Her book demonstrates the heart of this wonderful lady. She is with the Lord to rest from her earthly work.

**Ann Kennedy** - March 11 at 11:50 AM

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“ Condolences to the Payton family and Mrs Payton will truly be missed. I've enjoyed working with her throughout the years!

**Michelle Crockett** - March 11 at 11:50 AM

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“ To the Payton Family: I am honored and blessed to have known Mrs. Payton. She was truly a blessing in my life. I will miss her and our regular telephone conversations. My condolences to Shelia, Renato and the entire Payton family.

Cassandra L. Brooks

**Cassandra Brooks** - March 10 at 05:09 PM

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“ The Louie Family purchased the Sentiments of Serenity Spray for the family of Mrs. Gertrude Payton.



**The Louie Family** - March 10 at 01:19 PM

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“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Mrs. Gertrude Payton.



March 07 at 06:20 PM

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“ Mrs. Payton was my favorite high school counselor and friend!!! Great Lady!!!

**Rachel Crumpton** - March 02 at 08:10 PM

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“ I enjoyed Mrs. Payton smiles and encouraging words. Valerie M. Beresford

**Valerie M Beresford** - February 22 at 08:18 PM



“ Thank you Sheila for sharing your mom with us. She was such a pleasant and beautiful soul. She is in my spirit of love. Thank you. Evangelist Sarita Denise.

**SARITA GRIFFIN** - February 24 at 03:38 PM



“ I can't say enough good about this woman. When I first moved to Milwaukee in 1975, she and her husband embraced me as one of their own. Those who know the Paytons understand that this was simply par for the course. We should all be so impactful in the lives of others.

I will be forever grateful to her and carry the spirit and example of Mrs. Gertrude Payton in my heart for the rest of my time on this earth. I have been, and always will be, committed to being a reflection of their example. Thank you, my dear sweet lady. It's time for all of us to lift up the example of humanity they gave us and pay it forward.

Renato and Shelia, I love you both. I and my family are with you.

Douglas R. Bender, Sr.

Greensboro, NC

**Douglas Bender** - March 02 at 04:46 PM



“ Mrs. Payton was my Home Economics teacher at North Division High School. She was one of the kindest and patient teachers I have ever known. She was never too busy for you, and it was obvious she loved teaching. Mrs. Payton will always hold a special place in my heart. Rest in Heavenly Peach Mrs. Payton and thank you for everything your poured into me.

**Linda F Stephens** - March 08 at 08:36 AM