



Mrs. Mary Lee Ellis

January 1, 1931 - January 1, 2017

Mary Lee Ellis was the first child born of the late Ruth Mae (Roby) Webb and William Simpson on January 1, 1931, in Sallis, Mississippi. She accepted Christ at an early age and joined Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church in Sallis, Mississippi where her grandfather, the late Oscar Roby, served as a deacon and her grandmother, the late Bena (Greer) Roby, served as a mother of the church. Throughout her childhood, Mary was very involved at Mount Olive in the choir, Sunday School, and the Baptist Training Union. Her many contributions to Mount Olive continued throughout her adulthood. Mary attended and graduated from Attala County Training School in Kosciusko, Mississippi. Following her high school graduation, Mary attended Jackson State College in Jackson Mississippi. At Jackson State College, Mary was actively engaged in a variety of activities including, cheerleading, the Archonian Club, Sunday School, and Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Lamda Pi Chapter. Upon graduation from college, Mary began her teaching career in the Attala County Training Schools.

Mary and the late Bill Ellis were blessed with three children Craig, Patricia, and Darnell. She was a proud, devoted, loving, passionate, protective, and caring mother to her children.

After living briefly in Chicago, Illinois and Gary, Indiana, Mary moved with her children to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She joined Mount Zion Missionary Baptist

Church under the leadership of Reverend W.J. Calvin.

In 1961, with the encouragement and support of her Aunt Matilda and Uncle Coy, Mary began working as a substitute teacher in the Milwaukee Public Schools. In 1962, she began teaching at Keefe Avenue School. It was the perfect fit. She poured her heart and soul into Keefe Avenue for 32 years. Mary was highly respected, valued, cherished, and admired as a teacher, friend, and mentor by her students, their families, and her colleagues. Many of her students went on to achieve great successes in their personal lives and careers, both locally and nationally in the fields of education, law, medicine, business, and politics. She deeply loved and cared for her students as if they were her own children. If her students or their families were in need, she was one of the first to make sure that their needs were met. Several of the parents of her students became her close friends, and it was not unusual to find her students sharing the holidays and other occasions with Craig, Patricia, and Darnell. As a result of her encouragement, many of her former colleagues who began their careers as secretaries or paraprofessionals at Keefe Avenue went on to become teachers, principals, and district administrators in the Milwaukee Public Schools. Mary's love of life, infectious laugh, energy, and commitment to excellence were greatly missed when she retired in 1994 along with her friend and colleague Gerry Helmers.

Mary's outstanding career as a teacher resulted in many special recognitions. She was extremely proud to be nominated by State Representative Annette Polly Williams and Winston Williams, and to be a recipient of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Honor Roll of Celebrated Teachers Award.

As a member of Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church for over sixty years, Mary was actively involved with the Nurses' Guild, serving as a president, vice-president, recording secretary, and financial secretary. She served for

many years on the Trustee Board. Mary also served on a variety of special committees and projects including most recently Pastor Sibley's 50th Anniversary Celebration.

Mary loved to work in the garden, cook, sing, read, travel back "home" to Sallis, Mississippi, have long telephone conversations with family and friends, and assist her children and friends with numerous projects. She was an active member of her Neighborhood Block Club, the Metropolitan Milwaukee Alliance of Black School Educators, and a lifetime member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated.

Mary took great joy and pride in the accomplishments of her children, sisters, other relatives, and friends. She was often one of the first to provide comfort and support, words of congratulations, and a little pocket change if needed. Her favorite saying was "Keep looking up!"

Mary departed this life on January 1, 2017. She was preceded in death by her maternal grandparents, Oscar and Bena Roby; parents, Ruth Mae (Roby) Webb and William Simpson; ex-husband, Bill Ellis; brother, Edward Jenkins, Jr.; sister, Betty A. Dotson; aunts: Minnie Pearl Roby, Annie Lee Harmon, and Matilda Dotson; and uncles, Ike, Clarence, and John Roby.

She leaves to cherish her memory loving and devoted children, Craig (Venita) Ellis, Dr. Patricia Ellis, and Darnell Ellis; two sisters, Yvonne Blacknell of Irving, Texas and Margaret Williams of Merrville, Indiana; two goddaughters, Dawn LaMeka Dotson of Oakland, California and Andrea Nicole Chavis of Milwaukee, Wisconsin; aunt, Minnie Connor of Chicago, Illinois; uncles, Oscar Roby, Jr. of Chicago, Illinois and Cleophus (Betty) Roby of Gary, Indiana; and a host of loving nieces, nephews, cousins, and dear friends.

Cemetery Details

Wisconsin Memorial Park

13235 W. Capitol Dr.
Brookfield, WI

Previous Events

Visitation

JAN 6. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (CT)

Mt. Zion Baptist Church
2207 N. 2nd Street
Milwaukee, WI

Service

JAN 6. 12:00 PM (CT)

Mt. Zion Baptist Church
2207 N. 2nd Street
Milwaukee, WI

Tribute Wall

ME

“ Marquette University, College of Education purchased the Sweet Tranquility Basket for the family of Mrs. Mary Lee Ellis.



Marquette University, College of Education - January 04, 2017
at 12:01 PM

BD

“ We are so sorry about the loss of your loved one. Our deepest condolences goes out to the family. May "the God of tender mercies" comfort and strengthen you all at this time of sorrow. (2Cor.1:3,4)

B. Daniels - January 02, 2017 at 09:10 PM

RH

I Didn't Know Mrs Mary Ellis Had Passed Away 😞 I Wsa Thinking About Her And Googled Her Nane. I Was Shocked 😱 Also Sad To See Her Obituary Yesterday 9/4/2025 Mrs Ellis Was My 3bd Grade Teacher At Keefe Ave School In 1964 I Loved Her So So Much Her Also The Late Eddie Williams Was Both My Teachers I Was Nless Ti Be Reunite With Mrs E. Williams In 2012 She Luved Ti Be 98Yrs Young May Tgey Both Rest Safe In God's Arms Of Love 🕊️🕊️🕊️🕊️🕊️

Renee Hardrick - September 07, 2025 at 02:00 AM