**Reverend Lewis W. Stewart**

**BIOGRAPHY**

A person sitting in a chair

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***“All men and women desire freedom and justice. If there is no remedy and these are denied, then the only alternative is rebellion. God is***

***our co-partner in the struggle for freedom, justice, and human rights.”***

**The Reverend Lewis W. Stewart, Jr.**

**Biography:**

**The Reverend Lewis W. Stewart, Jr.**

**Parents**

The Reverend Lewis W. Stewart, Jr., was born in Newburgh, New York, to the late Bishop Lewis W. Stewart, Sr., and the late Carrie Stultz-Williams Stewart.

**Education**

Rev. Stewart earned an AAS degree from Orange County Community College. In 1969, he transferred to the State University College at Brockport in 1969, graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science and History. He received the Master of Divinity degree from Colgate Rochester/Bexley Hall/Crozer Theological Seminary. He then studied at Syracuse University School of Social Work.

SUNY Brockport later recognized Rev. Stewart as one of its most Influential Graduates.

**Ministry**

Rev. Stewart was called to the ministry at the age of 17. He was ordained as an Elder in the NY City’s Churches of God in Christ in June of 1972. He was also an ordained Baptist Minister. He served as Associate Minister at Second Baptist Church in Mumford, New York, under the leadership of Dr. Charles Thurman, and also at Christian Friendship Missionary Baptist Church under the leadership of Dr. John S. Walker. He most recently served as the Pastor of Christian Community Church.

**Community and Social Activities**

While a student at Orange County Community College, Lewis Stewart strongly advocated for a Black Studies Department, which was created a year later.

At the State University College at Brockport, Stewart authored the Constitution for the Black Student Liberation Front. He organized protests against racism and the war in Vietnam. He was elected to the position of Student Government President.

Rev. Stewart was a board member of United Church Ministries, Inc. (UCM,) a forerunner of United Christian Leadership Ministry (UCLM). There he worked alongside Min. Franklin Florence, Sr., Rev. Raymond Graves, Dr. John S. Walker, Dr. Charles Thurman, and Dr. Dwight Fowler. He served as the Coordinator of UCM’s United People’s Coalition, which advocated for a revamped Civilian Review Board.

He served as the Coordinator and Organizer of Black Family Life Conferences 1 and 2 in 1976 and 1977. He was a coordinator for the Rochester Black Political Convention in 1978, and he was Coordinator and Organizer for the Black-Hispanic Political Conference in Newburgh, New York.

Rev. Stewart was a delegate to the National Black Political Convention in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1974, and a delegate to the New York State Black Political Assembly in 1975. Rev. Stewart was a founder and president of the Congress of African American Unity and in 1998, he was a candidate for the New York State Senate.

He was a contributing essayist for *About Time Magazine,* published by Jim and Carolyn Blount. He hosted the *RISE* television program in the early 90’s.

From 1988 - 1992, Rev. Stewart served the Pastor and Protestant Chaplain for the New York State Department of Corrections at Groveland Correctional Facility. From 2000 - 2009, he was the Pastor and Protestant Chaplain at Five Points Correctional Facility, a maximum-security prison in Romulus, New York. As Chaplain, he fought for prison reform and advocated on behalf of inmates. His ministry in prison was powerful, dramatic, and inspiring. Rev. Stewart conducted the largest-attended worship service in Five Points. He prevented a riot there when some of the correction officers wanted to arrest him, but the men who attended his services defended their Pastor.

In August 2013, Rev. Stewart, along with Dr. John S Walker and Bishop Dr. Dwight Fowler, co-founded UCLM. Rev. Stewart was elected the organization’s first president. In that capacity, he advocated on behalf of Brenda Hardaway, a victim of police violence, when no one else spoke up on her behalf. UCLM also advocated for other mistreatment victims including Rickey Bryant and Christopher Pate. One of Mr. Pate’s arresting officers was later convicted of misdemeanor assault and lost his job with the Rochester Police Department.

Prior to the 2014 rebellion in Ferguson, Missouri, which followed the police murder of Michael Brown, Rev. Stewart and ULCM advocated for the use of body-worn cameras (BWCs) to improve Rochester police accountability and to further the cause of justice and better community-police relations. UCLM team members researched drafted policies for the Rochester Police Department’s BWC program. This draft significantly influenced the Rochester Police Department’s eventual policy manual.

In November of 2017, Rochester Mayor Lovely Warren and Rev. Stewart signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) creating the Community Justice Advisory Board, whose purpose was to continue monitoring the utilization of BWCs by Rochester police and to make recommendations for ongoing policy improvements. Since then, UCLM signed a similar MOU with the Monroe County Sheriff’s Office (MCSO) regarding its implementation of BWCs.

UCLM and members of the Rochester Coalition for Police Reform researched models for an independent Police Accountability Board (PAB). Rev. Stewart participated in the City Council’s Public Safety Committee to revise the original PAB draft proposal.

Rev. Stewart has taken a public stand against gun violence. He lost several family members due to gun violence. In 2014, he organized a “Black Church Summit on Youth, Guns and Violence.” He engaged with UCLM’s Lentory Johnson and Min. Kenneth Muhammad to develop the “Light the Way” program, addressing gun violence trauma via programming with children in schools and recreation centers.

Other community support projects established under Rev. Stewart include Community Healers, Adopt-A-Block Initiative, and the Partnership in Excellence: Achieving Careers and Education in partnership with BOCES.

Rev. Stewart vigorously advocated against significant defunding of Office of Adult and Career Education Services (OACES), a program of the Rochester City School District that provides adults with the opportunity to earn GEDs and to obtain in-demand job skills. OACES is an invaluable asset to the community; fortunately, its funding was restored. Subsequently, Rev. Stewart served as chair of the OACES Institutional Advisory Board.

In the summer of 2016, Rev. Stewart called for a Community-Police Summit to address issues of harassment and excessive use of force by law enforcement against People of Color. To date, there have been six successful summits involving community leaders, police chiefs, sheriffs, and Monroe County Public safety, all of whom come together to dialogue and build trust and legitimacy. Betweem summits, UCLM continues to meet monthly with law enforcement leaders to explore strategies to improve Community-Police relations.

Rev. Stewart opposed the call for “defunding” and “abolishment” of police agencies, especially in light of the current high incidents of gun violence. If any group needs police patrols and protection, it is poor Communities of Color. Instead, Rev. Stewart strongly suppored the reallocation of resources for improved training of police to establish a non-racist police force rooted in transformation of culture, policies, procedures, and police education.

Rev. Stewart believed that police need to be “Servant-Protectors” rather than “Warriors” or “Occupiers”. Rev. Stewart supported former Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s Executive Order 203 regarding reimagining policing. To this end, UCLM proposed several changes:

* A Civilian Review Panel where citizens can participate and have real power in the hiring of candidates for the police force. This has been implemented in Rochester and in Brighton.
* A Community Safety Corps to serve as a supplement to law enforcement, in which citizens are trained and participate in providing public safety to their community.
* Racial Justice and Anti-Racism Training and Education for all law enforcement agencies.
* All police officers should receive mental health support and review annually.
* All regional police agencies should implement body-worn camera programs.

In addition, Rev. Stewart was a board member of the Greater Rochester Community of Churches, co-chair of the Rochester Coalition for Police Reform, and a member of the Mayor’s Judicial Screening Committee.

**Personal Life**

Rev. Stewart was married to Jan Puryear Stewart. He frequently expressed gratitude for the strong support he received from his wife, family, and friends, for which he frequently expressed gratitude. *(Note to the press: We will shortly provide names of family members who should be acknowledged in Rev. Stewart’s obituary.)*

As a young man, Rev. Stewart wrestled, boxed, and studied both Taekwondo and Jeet Kune Do, which he studied for several years. He was an enthusiastic board and computer gamer, and he engaged in writing fiction and non-fiction. He also studied dreams and practiced meditation. He was an avid reader of history, biography, literature, philosophy, theology, archaeology, astronomy, space exploration, science fiction, and fantasy.

His greatest enjoyment was studying and reflecting on the sacred Word of God as manifested in the Bible. He regarded the Scriptures as his map through life.

Rev. Stewart did not consider himself a “community activist” but rather a “Liberationist.” He believed in the prophetic calling for social justice and that the Gospel calls for the deliverance of the whole person and of society. He was committed to the systemic transformation of the community and nation and the eradication of social, economic, and racial inequities. In effect, he was a disciple of Jesus the Liberator.

Rev. Stewart battled cancer from 2009 thru 2012. At the time, he was told he had only a 20% chance of living after five years. Fortunately, the Lord preserved his life for a much longer time. He was cancer-free for many years, but succumbed to a recurrence in 2023. He was a Liberationist until the end.