

Celebrating the Life of Rawle James – March 26, 2023

Invocation And Prayer: Pastor Steve Mickelson

Prayer and Offering: *Doxology (Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow)* - Lyric Instrumental Video - <https://youtu.be/Mk4p3rihONU>

Music Special: *Surely Goodness and Mercy Shall Follow Me* - Lyric Instrumental Video - <https://youtu.be/GdN7q2lroJl>

Music Special: *I, the Lord of Sea and Sky (Here I Am Lord)* - Lyric Video - <https://youtu.be/5zURbVI3xp0>

Message - Pastor Steve Mickelson:

Celebrating the Life of Rawle James

Let us pray...

Good morning. I would like to welcome you to Bloor Lansdowne Christian Fellowship's Sunday Praise and Worship Service, which includes a life celebration of our dear friend, and brother-in-Christ, Rawle James. A recent article, written by **Kerry Doole** of **FYI Music News** on March 7, gave the following summary of Rawle's career:

FYI Music News by Kerry Doole, March 07, 2023

Rawle James, a Toronto dance music industry veteran, died of a heart attack on March 1 at age 68. James' career included roles in A&R, marketing, radio promotion, management, publicity, retail buying, record store ownership, DJing, record production and mixing, and album compilations (including some of the Much Music Dance Mix series) at such companies and labels as Koch, TJSB, Disco Sound, J's Records, Aires Entertainment, and Quality.

<https://www.fyimusicnews.ca/articles/2023/03/07/obituaries-march-9-2023>

While “dash” found between Rawle's date of birth and his date of death would include a multitude of achievements, anniversaries, and important events over the 68 years of his lifetime. I would like to leave the sharing of Rawle's personal and career events to those who will come forward to share their memories of him later in this service and focus instead upon Rawle's actions as a friend and brother-in-Christ here at BLCF over the last 16 or 17 years. My first impression of Rawle was his great smile, booming laugh, and friendly, casual demeanor. How could you not like this guy? Early on, our conversations were limited to the short coffee and tea time held after the service. Sometimes we talked about the message of the service, others it might be an aspect of sports or politics.

So if you were to ask me what single verse from the Bible best exemplifies Rowle James, I would have to say that Psalm 100 best exemplifies Rawle's joyfulness, gladness, and love for song:

Psalm 100 - His Steadfast Love Endures Forever (ESV)

A Psalm for giving thanks.

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!

Serve the LORD with gladness!

Come into his presence with singing!

Know that the LORD, he is God!

It is he who made us, and we are his;

we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

⁴Enter his gates with thanksgiving,

and his courts with praise!

Give thanks to him; bless his name!

⁵For the LORD is good;

his steadfast love endures forever,

and his faithfulness to all generations.

Over time BLCF sought to an outreach activity to grow the church and make the local community aware that BLCF was there to serve the needs of the neighborhood. When another church which had run a community dinner for several years proposed that we sponsor a similar one at BLCF, we did not hesitate to take the leap.

Within a few months, the Bloor Lansdowne Community Dinner, grew from an initial outreach to 30 guests to over 50 guests and by 2010, we found the number jumping to 100 or more every Wednesday.

When we needed servers Rawle stepped up. Then when BLCF needed a cook to help prepare and cook 100 or more meals ever Wednesday, Rawle stepped in. Later when one of the partner churches which would bring bread for the dinner moved to another part of the city, Rawle stepped in and negotiated donations from a couple of bakeries, which provided bread and pastries insufficient quantity to be served both as part of the meal and dessert, with enough left over that we could start distributing bread for our guests to take home after their meal. On two occasions we had local bakeries close their doors due to the economy, Rawle had sourced a new donor. And when we found that serving a weekly dinner to a 100 or more guests necessitated us to find a source of 70 to 80 chairs, Rawle found a donor willing to give us 80 chairs, as well as shelving and tables.

When Terry Sywanyk, our regular singer for the dinners bought in the rest of his group, Coldwater Roots to sing for fundraisers for the dinner and at special dinners, such as Christmas and New Years, Rawle approached them to see if he could help them fill their need for an experienced manager.

It was about this time that I realized that Rawle was a person who could easily wear any of many hats, including a chef's hat or the hat of a musical consultant. Rawle had a knack of finding solutions to logistical problems by involving friends in his quest to become the "Bread Man of BLCF". If he needed help to pick up donations from the bakery, he would ask friends to help. If would help if the friend had a vehicle to help transport the donations. After bringing the bread to the church during the week prior to the Wednesday BLCF Café, Rawle would ensure that the bread delivery was put safely away.

On Wednesday, Rawle would arrive around noon, and after seeing that the needs for the dinner prep were taken care of, our "Bread man" would next set up his bread tables, clean them, and after putting on the table cloths, he embarked upon cleaning them, then sorting his bakery goods and packaging them individually for distribution at the dinner that evening. At the end of the day, Rawle would strike down the tables, vacuum the floor. Our George Brown volunteers would keep attendance by taking a group photo of their student volunteers. As everyone needed to be in the photo, Rawle would offer to take the group photo. He would end the day by sweeping and mopping the kitchen and prep room, often offering to lock up at the end of the evening.

When all is said and done, you may conclude Rawle was a good, dedicated volunteer for a local dinner feeding the marginalized in our community, and you would be right. However, like broadcast journalist Paul Harvey would say, "and now the rest of the story."

Often after Rawle arrived at the bakery to pick up a donation, he would talk with the staff, and find that some would have a family or friend who may be in need of prayer for a concern. Rawle would bring these Prayer Requests to either the Wednesday Bible Study at BLCF or to the Sunday Worship Service.

And while Rawle serving at the bread table, dinner guests would often share a concern with the bread man. If Rawle could not think of a solution, he would ask if were OK to bring up the concern at Sunday Prayer at BLCF.

And then, having brought bread to BLCF for the dinner, Rawle would often play a game or two of hoops in the church gym, which provided him an opportunity to chat with those who helped him pick up the bread.

Rawle wore the hats, sometimes more than one at a time, of chef, musician, baker, basket ball player, and lay minister. If we had a Volunteer Appreciation Dinner and needed an MC for the event, Rawle would step up to the task.

This brings me to one of our multi-talented friends gifts, which was the ability to read the room, whether it be occupied by two individuals or a hundred and twenty. Rawle would see a need, figure out a solution, and take action to fix the problem.

Rawle's next talent was the tactful use of humour and a positive attitude to address a problem.

A number of years ago, I had developed what I thought was a great formula for writing my sermons. Having written the lesson for Sunday, and chosen illustrations for the online version of the message, all I needed was to select hymns which complemented the sermon. In the back of our hymnals were several indexes, allowing one to find a hymn by its title, by the first line of lyrics, based on a Scripture Verse, or based on a topic. I used the latter two to search out an appropriate hymn based on topic or a Scripture used in the lesson. If I did not know the hymn, I would read through the lyric, to see whether they were a match to the Scripture verses used in the message. But there was one problem to this system, I did not read music.

One Sunday, the failure of my system became quite evident when two of the hymns I had selected, though containing wonderful inspiring prose for lyrics, had a terrible melody. Both were remarkable for unknown, difficult for the congregation to sing, and almost depressingly slow. At the end of the service, Rawle walked up to me, and commented that "a couple of those hymns today were so bad, I wouldn't sing them at a funeral." To which I agreed and we both had a chuckle. Needless to say, when selecting hymns, I first audit either on **Youtube** or **Godtube**, and then verify with Sophie if it is OK from a musical standpoint. And then check to see if it meets the following criteria described by **Stephen Witwicki**:

- 1) Is it singable?**
- 2) Is it memorable?**
- 3) Does it tell the truth about God?**
- 4) Does it tell the truth about us? (are we saying/singing something we wouldn't actually do)**

<https://search.brave.com/search?q=christian+music+artists&source=web>

I believe on one occasion, a few years later did I repeat my mistake. And as Rawle approached me I said, "No need to say it, Rawle. I know!" At which point we both burst out in laughter!

Rawle had a compassionate care for the needs of others. Whether it was alternately missing church on alternate Sundays so that he could travel from his place near Mimico to visit his mom in a home in Markham, by way of public transit, or the time he invested in teaching students how to clean and temper a cast iron pan, or having taken a group photo of student volunteers, asking for them to pose for another one, this time make a funny face, Rowle always found a funny way to break the ice when the going gets tough. Rawle shone his light to all he met, just as Jesus taught us in **John 8:12**,

John 8:12 (ESV): I Am the Light of the World

¹² Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Rawle allowed the light of his faith to shine, as we see in **Matthew 5:14-16**.

Matthew 5:14-16 (ESV): You Are the Light of the World.

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that^[a] they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Dear friend Rawle, we will miss your booming, infectious laugh, your compassionate concern for those in need, your love for your God and your mom, and your joy for music. Goodbye for now dear friend, you will be sorely missed until the day the Lord chooses to reunite us. For how you have treated others, reflects a love for the Lord reflected through your love for others, as we read in **Matthew 25:21**:

Matthew 25:21(ESV)

²¹ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.^[a] You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’

As believers in the resurrected Christ, I would like to share the following poem, written by **Clare Harner** entitled, *Immortality*, which describes Jesus’ promise to those who believe:

Immortality

- by Clare Harner

**Do not stand at my grave and weep
I am not there; I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints on snow,
I am the sun on ripened grain,
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awaken in the morning’s hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circled flight.
I am the soft stars that shine at night.**

**Do not stand at my grave and cry,
I am not there; I did not die.**

This poem reflects the faith that we as believer in the resurrected Christ Jesus, believe is promised to all by way of His New Covenant:

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 (ESV): The Coming of the Lord

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

Let us pray...

At this time, I would like to invite members of the family and friends to come forward and share a memory of experience they had of our friend Rawle James.

Eulogies from Family and Friends

Music Benediction Special: *In Jesus' Name (God of Possible)* - Lyric Video -

https://youtu.be/R84PqRdZ7_Y

Benediction: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. - Romans 15:13 (ESV)

BLCF wishes to thank the family, friends, and volunteers for attending this Service to Celebrate the Life of our dear friend, and brother-in-Christ, Rawle James