



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

September 15, 2020

**Contact:** Jethro Rothe-Kushel, (213) 479-6970

**Email:** [jrothe-kushel@bos.lacounty.gov](mailto:jrothe-kushel@bos.lacounty.gov)

**Contact:** Kayla Tilton, (213) 309-6277

**Email:** [KTilton@bos.lacounty.gov](mailto:KTilton@bos.lacounty.gov)

## **County Proclaims “Rev. James M. Lawson, Jr. Day”**

On [a motion](#) by Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to proclaim September 22 as “Rev. James M. Lawson, Jr. Day.”

September 22, 2020 will mark the 92<sup>nd</sup> Birthday of a statesman who, since the 1950s, continues to be actively involved in training countless men and women on nonviolent resistance to achieve social justice. He has taught at the University of California, Los Angeles, California State University, Northridge, and countless other educational institutions--and even in retirement continues to travel across the country to teach nonviolence.

“When Reverend Lawson talks about those whose lives and livelihoods were in the balance, we are hearing the son of a movement,” said Supervisor Ridley-Thomas. “This is a well-deserved recognition honoring a leader who has dedicated so much to a nation and county through advancement of civil rights and non-violence.”

From a young age, Reverend Lawson sought to improve the lives and conditions of African Americans in his community. While a freshman at Baldwin Wallace College in Berea, Ohio, he studied sociology. In 1951, because of his refusal to serve in the US military when drafted, he was convicted of draft evasion and served 13 months of a three-year sentence. After his release, he traveled to India to study Mahatma Gandhi’s method of nonviolence to achieve social and political change.

He returned to the United States in 1955, entering the Graduate School of Theology at Oberlin College in Ohio. One of his Oberlin professors introduced him to Martin Luther King Jr. who had also embraced Gandhi’s principles of nonviolent resistance. Reverend Lawson was so moved by the ongoing social justice movement, that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. encouraged him to move to the South and teach nonviolent resistance to the men and women fighting for equal rights. In 1958, he relocated to Tennessee where he began his teachings about nonviolent resistance practices. He was influential in the founding of the Student Nonviolent

Coordinating Committee, the principal channel of student commitment in the United States to the Civil Rights Movement.

Reverend Lawson attended Vanderbilt from 1958 to 1960 when he was expelled for civil rights arrests, but received his Bachelor of Sacred Theology from Boston University that same year. In 1961, he participated and assisted in the coordination of the Freedom Rides, as well as the Meredith March in 1966.

He was also one of the key organizers of the Memphis sanitation workers strike, which would become the last event where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. would ever share one of his most inspirational and heart-moving speeches. It was in this last speech in 1968, "I've Been to the Mountaintop", that Dr. King spoke of Reverend Lawson by saying, "He's been going to jail for struggling; he's been kicked out of Vanderbilt University for this struggling; but he's still going on, fighting for the rights of his people." Reverend Lawson has dedicated his life to fighting for social justice for those communities often overlooked and marginalized.

In 1974, Reverend Lawson relocated from the South to Los Angeles to become a pastor at the historic Holman Methodist Church where he would serve until his retirement in 1999. During his tenure, he served as President of the Los Angeles Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which traces its founding to the Montgomery Bus Boycott, led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Reverend Lawson has been a beacon of hope during some of our darkest times. His service as a leading theoretician and tactician of nonviolence within the Civil Rights Movement, has nurtured the next generation of civil rights leaders. A leader in the labor movement supporting reproductive and gay rights when it wasn't popular, Reverend Lawson is always ahead of our time," said Senator Maria Elena Durazo.

His commitment to social justice is long-lasting, unwavering, and timeless. His experiences and his words have been used by generations as the foundation and framework in the fight for equality and social justice.

"Rev. Lawson has changed the course of U.S. history through his teachings on nonviolent theory and practice, and in training generations of emerging leaders who have advanced economic and racial justice," said UCLA Labor Center Director Kent Wong.

Even in retirement, he continues to travel across the country to participate in protests and give lectures, inspiring thousands of people to take action and become involved in social justice and civil rights.

"This is a beloved man who once knew the uncertainty and agony of staring down the evil of segregation and all that it wrought and responded not with hate nor with rage," said Supervisor Ridley-Thomas. "He has responded with courage, love, respect, and humanity for the possibility of us all, one of a kind, as members of humankind through non-violence. Sixty years is a lifetime for some, but Rev. Lawson's legacy of nonviolence will resonate for an eternity."

###