

Rev. A. Leon Lowery, civil rights leader, dies in Fla.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TAMPA—The Rev. A. Leon Lowry, a prominent local civil rights leader who once taught Martin Luther King Jr. and led the desegregation of public facilities in Tampa, has

died at 92.

Lowry died Saturday of congestive heart failure. He had been admitted to St. Joseph's Hospital last week, said his wife, Shirley.

Lowry's association with

the civil rights movement dated to the 1940s when he taught theology at Morehouse College and King was one of his students.

In the 1960s, he led peaceful protests at Tampa lunch

counters and helped found Tampa's first biracial bank.

He became president of the Florida NAACP and in 1976 was the first African-American elected to the Hillsborough County School Board,

where he served for 16 years. The Florida Bar awarded him a medal of honor for easing racial tensions and promoting social justice.

Until he was hospitalized, Lowry had continued counsel-

ing jail inmates, commuting by scooter because hip problems prevented driving.

"That was just his whole life," his wife said. "He always wanted to help people."

Lawsuit accuses Texas tax appraisal district of racial discrimination

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WICHITA FALLS, Texas—A lawsuit filed in state court accuses the Wichita County Appraisal District of denying tax-exempt status to a predominantly black church while granting it to other

churches in similar circumstances.

"Full Gospel Powerhouse Church is suffering unequal treatment," said Hiram Sasser, director of litigation for Plano-based Liberty Legal Institute. "It is shameful that the appraisal district is trying

to tax this church out of existence."

Lisa Stephens-Musick, the district's director of operations, said she has not seen the lawsuit and could not comment.

The Wichita Falls church has been trying to rebuild

after a fire but has not had a building on the property for three years.

"Right when they had the money to rebuild for themselves, the tax collector swooped down and grabbed it," Sasser said.

Other churches in the area

have not been penalized and taxed for unused land in the city, Sasser said.

Liberty Legal Institute is a legal organization committed to the defense of religious

freedoms.

On the Net:

Liberty Legal Institute, www.libertylegal.org

Wichita County Appraisal District, www.wadtx.com

Youths working on improving their future

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLUMBUS, Miss.—For many school kids, Saturday morning is a time for rest and relaxation, sleeping in or just hanging around in pajamas, but not for young men with plans to be future community leaders.

The Rites of Passage group, the Sons of Issachar, a group of 50 plus young black men, get together with mentors from Missionary Union Baptist Church every Saturday morning from 8 to 10 and work on self improvement through mental, physical, and spiritual exercises.

The group started in 1997 with only nine members, but has steadily increased through the years, with members ranging from 8 to 18 years old.

"We're trying to grow young men into community leaders, who know how to lead and help meet the needs of the community," said the Rev. Tony Montgomery of Missionary Union Baptist Church.

During the six-month program, which runs from May to October, the young men focus on Bible study, community awareness and commu-

nity service, family responsibility, schoolwork, and African-American history.

Montgomery believes all portions of the program are beneficial, but the history portion is stressed, because traditional education does not give young black men the knowledge necessary to build confidence from historical backgrounds.

"The history books of today haven't changed much since I was in high school," said Montgomery. "The brief African-American portion still ends the same way. Martin Luther King did what was right and stood up for his community, and he was assassinated."

"This makes these young men believe that if they do what is right and stay positive and active, something bad will happen to them," Montgomery continued.

"We just try to educate them past the 60s and 70s and 80s up until now to see where they fit in the picture. They need to know the truth and look at the whole scope of history."

Though the group started out with young men from the

church, Montgomery said he hopes to get more members who do not have church homes to join.

"I wish I could get the juvenile court to sentence young men to our program instead of jail, so we could work with them," he said.

"Our correctional system is not working, but we have the power to help our own. We want to reach out beyond the church community. It makes me happy to see that we have grown and now we do have people from all over and not just the church. That was the goal of the program."

Group members are enthusiastic about the Rites of Passage program. "It teaches kids about being a better man," said Terrell Jones, 17, in his first year as a group member. Fellow first-year member Bobby Jackson, 16, agreed. "It gets us ready for everything in the world," he said.

Eddie Guyton, 16, has been involved with the group for five years. He said it helped him get over the death of his brother, especially because it provided him with a whole new family

"A lot of us don't have brothers or fathers," he said. "But we have a lot of friends that are here for us. I really like it."

Tyler Jackson, 12, has been going to Rites of Passage meetings for several months. His favorite part about it, he said, is the exercise and fitness training he receives.

Ten-year-old Clayton Jordan said he likes learning more about the Bible. His friend Shaunase Stallings, 8, enjoys the group field trips. Rites of Passage members sometimes take.

The program lasts through the summer months, which in Montgomery's opinion, are most critical. "The summer is when guys can get in a lot of trouble and they need guidance," said Montgomery.

"Mom is at work and they're home by themselves. That's when a lot of them start getting involved with drugs, and sex, getting girls pregnant, just finding all kinds of things to get into."

"The Sons of Issachar were men from a tribe that knew what to help get the Israelites out of trouble," Montgomery said.

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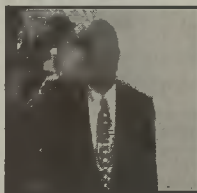
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