

# Mama G:

A lifetime of  
faithful service,  
compassionate  
leadership



## Linda Gadson

1949–2026

*“Her children rise up and call her blessed.”*

– Proverbs 31:28

# “Mama G:” A lifetime of faithful service, compassionate leadership

*“Her children rise up and call her blessed.”*

– Proverbs 31:28

As family, friends and communities across the Lowcountry gather this afternoon to give thanks for the life and witness of Linda Dingle Gadson, South Carolina United Methodists are remembering her faithful ministry, unwavering compassion and servant leadership, which touched countless lives over more than five decades.

The retired longtime executive director of Rural Mission Inc. – “Mama G” to many throughout the Sea Islands of coastal South Carolina – died June 29, 2026, at the age of 76.

“Mama G is the only person I’ve ever known who could greet you with, “Hey, precious heart!” and make you feel as though you were her family,” said the Rev. Fadetra Boyd, pastor of Gadson’s lifelong home church, Wesley United Methodist Church in Hollywood.

“I didn’t just feel respected as her pastor, I felt welcomed, loved, and encouraged as her daughter in the faith.

Rural Mission, which Gadson served as a community missionary for five decades, was an interdenominational, non-profit organization that ministered to the spiritual, social, educational, medical and housing requirements of the rural people of the Sea Islands through programs that improved housing and provided food and family services to those who otherwise couldn’t afford them.



To generations of children, families, migrant workers and neighbors in need, she was a steady reminder of God's love made visible through acts of kindness, justice and mercy.

"Mother Gadson possessed the rare gift of seeing possibility where others saw obstacles," said the Rev. Pattie Gordon, pastor of both Bethlehem-St. James UMC and New Webster UMC on Johns Island, and former chair of the Rural Mission Board of Trustees. "She became a catalyst for community transformation, helping neighbors discover hope, dignity, and opportunity.

"Her leadership united churches, volunteers, and mission teams from Washington to Tennessee, all working together to strengthen lives and communities throughout the Sea Islands."

Born in Hollywood, South Carolina, Gadson's life was marked by courage from an early age. She helped integrate St. Paul's High School before enrolling at the College of Charleston in 1969. In 1972, she became the first Black woman to graduate from the College, earning a degree in political science and opening doors that would make it possible for countless others to follow. Though she once envisioned a career in law, God had prepared another path.

A summer job at Rural Mission on Johns Island became a lifelong calling. What began as temporary employment grew into more than 50 years of ministry among the people of Johns, James, Wadmalaw, Edisto and Yonges islands. Under Gadson's leadership, Rural Mission became a place where people found not only food, clothing, housing assistance and educational opportunities, but also dignity, hope and the assurance that they were loved by God.

Gadson often reminded others that ministry begins by seeing Christ in every person. Those who served alongside her knew she never viewed people as projects to complete or problems to solve. She saw neighbors, children of God, each worthy of compassion, respect and love.

"There is no way to quantify the impact of her ministry and the number of lives she touched through the work of Rural Mission and the power of her praying heart," said The Rev. Kathy James, associate minister of discipleship at Washington Street UMC and former director of Conference Connectional Ministries.

"She called our attention to persons who might otherwise be overlooked, and thus has been instrumental in shaping the missional identity and focus of our annual conference and the wider church."

The Rev. Cathy Mitchell, pastor of Hibben United Methodist Church in Mount Pleasant, partnered in ministry with Gadson while pastoring Wesley UMC on Johns Island.

"She was always kind, positive, and praising God!" Rev. Mitchell said. "She loved God and God's people – always greeting you with a smile. She is an icon of all women, especially African American women in the Lowcountry. Being the first African American

woman to graduate from the College of Charleston, she set a standard for others to never give up and strive for more.

“Linda Gadson was an encourager, prayer warrior, and ‘Mother G’ to more than just her children, but to all whom she encountered. She will be severely missed, but never forgotten!”

When Rural Mission’s ministry came to an end in 2019, Gadson reflected not on her own accomplishments but on those whom she worked alongside and on God’s faithfulness.

“God is so, so good,” she said. “I thank God for all of you.”

Those simple words reflected the humility that defined her life. She measured success not by recognition but by lives changed and communities strengthened.

Her ministry reached far beyond the confines of Rural Mission. She became an advocate for educational opportunity, racial justice and community renewal, always believing that faith must be lived as well as proclaimed. In recognition of her extraordinary service, she received South Carolina’s highest civilian honor, the Order of the Palmetto, in 2010.

Yet those who knew Gadson best are less likely to remember the awards than the countless quiet moments of grace: listening to someone in crisis, encouraging a young person to pursue an education, helping a family through difficult times, or welcoming strangers as friends. She embodied the Gospel in ordinary, everyday ways that became extraordinary through faithful repetition.

Her legacy also lives on through her family. She celebrated seeing her granddaughter attend the College of Charleston, continuing a story that began with Gadson’s own historic graduation more than five decades earlier – a powerful reminder that faithfulness in one generation creates opportunities for the next.

Gadson’s spouse, the late Herbert Gadson, was the first Black mayor of Hollywood, and her daughter, the Rev. Telley Lynnette Gadson, is the superintendent of the Hartsville District of the South Carolina Conference.

The ministry of Linda Dingle Gadson reminds the Church that the Gospel is most powerfully proclaimed when it is lived. Through her gentle spirit, courageous leadership and steadfast faith, she reflected the love of Christ to people who were too often overlooked, ensuring they knew they were seen, valued and beloved.

As the Church gives thanks for her remarkable life, we also celebrate the promise she spent a lifetime sharing – that God’s love endures, faithful servants leave holy footprints, and the seeds planted in faith continue to bear fruit for generations to come.