

A Celebration of Blessing, Blessing of Celebration

By Stephanie James 10/06/26



Honoring Minister (Mother) Ann Strickland

Some people come into your life and leave a memory. Some leave a lesson. And then there are those rare people who leave something of themselves in you—something that stays with you long after the conversation has ended.

Mother Ann Strickland is that kind of woman.

If you have ever sat with her, listened to her, laughed with her, or simply been in her presence, you know there is something different about her. There is a gentleness in her spirit, a soft strength in her faith, and a wisdom in her words that makes you want to lean in a little closer, when she ain't even whispering.

Because Mother Ann has lived.

More than nine decades. That's 9 x's 10, plus some!

Over nine decades of watching life unfold. Over nine decades of loving and losing, celebrating and grieving, beginning again and carrying on. Over nine decades of witnessing generations come into this world, grow, change, struggle, succeed, and become.

And somewhere along that extraordinary journey, life taught Mother Ann some things, some amazing things, some wise things.

Not the kind of things you learn from a book.

The kind of things you learn by **living**.

The kind of wisdom that comes from having walked through enough seasons to know that storms pass and bellows can't knock you down. From having experienced enough heartache to understand the value of joy. From having seen enough of life to know what really matters—and what really doesn't.

And what makes Mother Ann so special is that she doesn't hold that wisdom tightly.

She gives it away. She releases it from her hands. She releases it from her heart.

She shares it in her stories.

She shares it in her counsel.

She shares it in her prayers.

She shares it in those little truths that stay with you years after she has said them. And the memory of her voice comes back to visit, not to say, "I told you so", but, "God's got it!"

She pours. And she has been pouring for a very long time.

That is why not just today, but from each moment forward, you continue to breathe a **celebration of blessings**.

Because we are not merely celebrating a birthday, an anniversary, or the extraordinary number of years God has allowed her to see.

We are celebrating what those years have produced.

We are celebrating **Mother Ann.**

We are celebrating the wisdom.

The faith.

The love.

The laughter.

The prayers.

The lessons.

The life teachings to young girls and boys, to young men and women...

The countless lives touched simply because she was willing to pour a little more of herself into somebody else.

There is a Scripture that says, "*My cup runneth over.*"

I understand that Scripture differently, when I think of Mother Ann.

Because there are people whose presence makes your cup run over.

You may come to them tired, discouraged, uncertain, or simply in need of a word—and somehow, you leave with something you didn't have when you arrived.

A little more hope.

A little more courage.

A little more faith.

A little more peace.

Her grace makes your cup runneth over.

And so today, we celebrate not only the blessing she has been to us, but **the blessing of celebrating her.**

Because after all these years of Mother Ann pouring into others, today is our opportunity to pour back.

We pour our gratitude.

We pour our love.

We pour our appreciation.

We pour our honor.

And we say, **thank you.**

Thank you for the wisdom you have shared.

Thank you for the prayers you have prayed.

Thank you for the lessons you didn't even realize you were teaching.

Thank you for showing us what it looks like to live long enough to become a blessing not just to generations, but to generations, 9 x's 10, plus some.

Mother Ann, more than nine decades have given you something precious.

You are not simply a woman who has lived a long life.

You are a **keeper of wisdom.**

A keeper of stories.

A keeper of faith.

A keeper of lessons that should travel from one generation to the next.

And perhaps that is one of the greatest blessings of a long life—not simply that you have accumulated years, but that you have accumulated something worth handing down.

And Mother Ann, you have something worth handing down.

So today, we honor not just the journey, but your journey.

We honor the woman.

We honor the minister.

We honor the mother.

We honor the wisdom.

We honor the grace.

And we honor the blessing.

But most of all, we give thanks.

Because God could have allowed us to walk this journey without you.

But He didn't.

He allowed us to know you.

To hear you.

To learn from you.

To laugh with you.

To be blessed by you.

And that is no small thing.

So, Mother Ann, after more than nine decades of pouring into everybody else, **today we pour into you.**

May God return to you every ounce of love you have given away.

May He answer the prayers you prayed for others.

May He restore every place where life asked you to be strong.

May He fill your remaining years with the kind of peace that only comes from knowing you have made a difference. How excellent!

And when you look around this room today, or when you think of all who may read this, may you see the evidence of your life.

Not simply people who came to celebrate you—

but people who have been **touched by you.**

People carrying something you gave them.

A word.

A prayer.

A lesson.

A laugh.

A memory.

A little piece of Mother Ann.

That is legacy.

Not simply the years you lived—

but what your years left behind.

Not simply the words you spoke—

but the lives those words changed.

Not simply the prayers you prayed—

but the people who are still standing because somebody prayed for them.

Not simply that you were here—

but that **you were here for us.**

And that is why today is more than a celebration of your years.

It is a celebration of your **impact.**

A celebration of your wisdom.

A celebration of your faith.

A celebration of your laughter.

A celebration of your love.

A celebration of the grace that has followed you through more than nine decades and somehow spilled over onto all of us.

Mother Ann, you have spent a lifetime filling other people's cups.

So today, let us lift ours to you.

For every lesson.

For every prayer.

For every laugh.

For every word.

For every embrace.

For every moment you reminded somebody that God had not forgotten them.

For every time you poured when you could have kept something for yourself.

For every generation you touched.

For every life you changed without even knowing you changed it.

We lift our cups to you.

And if you ever wonder what your life has meant, look around.

Look at the people who love you.

Look at the people who learned from you.

Look at the people who carry your words.

Look at the people who carry your faith.

Look at the people who carry your love.

That is what you left us.

You left us something to carry.

And because you poured—

our cups run over too.

That, Mother Ann, is the blessing.

That is the celebration.

And that is your legacy.

You didn't simply count the years.

You made the years count.

You didn't simply live through generations.

You poured into them.

You didn't simply leave memories.

You left pieces of yourself in the hearts of people who will carry them forward.

More than nine decades.

Still standing.

Still loving.

Still teaching.

Still laughing.

Still praying.

Still pouring.

And still reminding us that God's grace is sufficient.

Mother Ann has always said, “Life starts at...” And wherever she was in her life, she would fill in the blank with her age. Now at 95: Life starts at 95.

And there it is. Mother Ann is still beginning.

So, Mother Ann, today we celebrate the extraordinary gift of **you**.

And when words are no longer enough to tell you what you mean to us, when gratitude cannot possibly hold all that is in our hearts, when nine decades of wisdom and grace stand before us and we are searching for the one thing we can say that is worthy of such a life—

we say it the only way we can:

How EXCELLENT is Thy name!