



Rev. Willie F. Stinson (1936 – 2018) was a man on a mission. Born in 1936 in Enterprise, Alabama, he grew up in Steubenville, Ohio, where he began laying the foundation for a lifetime of service. Excelling in sports as a student, he continued his football career with a stint playing for the Wheeling Ironmen semi-pro team in 1964 and 1965. Continuing his education, Stinson graduated from the Oregon Institute of Technology and the Culinary Institute of America. In the U.S. Army, he served as an executive chef and chef instructor. After discharge, he worked as an executive chef for Waldorf Astoria Hotels and Resorts and as an instructor and regional director for the Culinary Institute of America. He later established the chef's apprentice program at the Community College of Allegheny County in Pittsburgh, where he served until he left to enter Christian ministry, answering God's call to change from feeding people's bodies to feeding their souls. Rev. Stinson was licensed to preach in June 1986 and ordained as a minister of the gospel in June 1987. He

earned a bachelor's degree in theology at Trinity College of the Bible, graduating in May 1990. Early in his ministry, he served churches in Washington, Pittsburgh, and Marianna, Pennsylvania. Moving to Wheeling in 1992, he and his wife, Evangelist Ruth Stinson, founded Agape Baptist Church, located at the corner of 14th and Jacob streets in East Wheeling. "Agape" is the Greek New Testament Bible word for God-like love. Stinson served as pastor there from February 1992 until his death in November 2018. In his ministry at Agape, Rev. Stinson worked with young people at the church's youth center, counseled criminally challenged youth, and served as a mentor to both single and married adults and to other pastors. Under his leadership, the church completely renovated its building, established essential ministries, and reached out in mission to the neighborhood, community, and world. Beyond the church walls, Rev. Stinson was a co-founder of the Black Ministerial Alliance in Wheeling in 1997, organized to foster cooperation among African-American clergy and their congregations. He also was instrumental in promoting changes that led the group to re-form in 2012 as the Upper Ohio Valley Ministerial Alliance, now open to all Christian clergy no matter what their race. Rev. Stinson played a key role in the process that led the City Council in 2014 to designate Stone Boulevard in Wheeling as Martin Luther King, Jr. Way, honoring the late civil rights hero. In 2015, at the annual West Virginia Civil Rights Day ceremony in Charleston, Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin and the West Virginia Human Rights Commission honored Rev. Stinson for his work in helping to fulfill its stated mission of advancing civil rights through advocacy. During his years as a Wheeling pastor, Rev. Stinson was an example to follow, an inspiration to all who knew him, a leader among people of faith, and a force for hope and progress in East Wheeling and the community at large. At his funeral on November 17, 2018, in his beloved Agape Baptist Church in Wheeling, a packed sanctuary, including black and white, rich and poor, prominent and unknown, a great variety of religious leaders and followers, elected officials, family, and friends from all over Wheeling, the Upper Ohio Valley and beyond, celebrated Rev. Willie Stinson's remarkable life with testimony after testimony to the influence he had on their individual lives and on the church and city he served. Perhaps the late Rev. Stinson's own words sum up his life best: "All I have done and been through has made me truly a man on a mission for God, the youth, and my community through Agape Baptist Church – 'The House that Faith Built.'"