



## **For Immediate Release**

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## **The King Center Mourns the Loss of Dr. Christine King Farris, Founding Board Member, Former Vice-Chair & Treasurer, Esteemed 64 Year Educator and Sister of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Atlanta, GA – The King Center joins the King and Farris families, civil rights activists, the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church family, academic family, and people of goodwill worldwide in celebrating the life of our servant leader, founding board member, former Vice-Chair & Treasurer, activist, educator, and family matriarch, the beloved Dr. Christine King Farris. The sister of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. passed on the morning of June 29 at age 95. Celebration of life arrangements will be announced at a later date. The family will hold a press conference on June 30, at The King Center in the Yolanda D. King Theatre for the Performing Arts at 11:00AM ET.

Dr. Farris' life overflowed with acts of service, love, and education that inspired the world for nearly a century. She worked diligently to help build The King Center, founded by her sister-in-law, Mrs. Coretta Scott King in June 1968. The two began a memorial library, documenting Dr. King's journey and the civil rights movement that same year. As a founding board member and long-time volunteer, Dr. Farris served as vice president, treasurer, and chief financial officer; later becoming senior vice president and ultimately vice chair and treasurer. Dr. Farris led a cadre of educators in developing Kingian Nonviolence curricula, such as the Martin Luther King, Jr. Infusion Model for Teaching Nonviolent Principles to grades K through 12. She also wrote the first intermediate-level textbook on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. Farris served as the first director of The Martin Luther King, Jr. Early Learning Center and the Right to Read Program. Dr. Farris chaired the planning committees for The King Center's Salute to Greatness Dinner and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Ecumenical Service, which later became The Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Service held in honor of her brother's birthday and national holiday. For more than thirty years she also served as a presider for the Ecumenical/Commemorative Service.



She was one of the longest-serving, tenured professors at Spelman College, impacting students' lives for 56 years, from 1958 to 2014. During her tenure, she was also appointed as an adjunct professor at Morehouse College and Atlanta University. Dr. Farris is the author of two children's

books, *My Brother Martin*, and *March On: The Day My Brother Martin Changed the World*, as well as her autobiography, *Through It All: Reflection on My Life, My Family, and My Faith*.

Dr. Farris is a recipient of Spelman's first Fannie Lou Hamer Outstanding Community Service Award, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work, the International Reading Association (IRA) Teachers' Choice Award, The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) Septima Clark Award, the Hyatt Hotels Heritage Community Service Award.

Dr. Farris was born Willie Christine King on September 11, 1927. Following the footsteps of her mother and grandmother, Dr. Farris attended Spelman College earning a bachelor's degree in economics in 1948. Two years later, she earned a master's degree in Social Foundations of Education from Columbia University and a second master's degree in Special Education in 1958. Dr. Farris earned an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters Degree from Bennett College.

She spent her entire life as a faithful member of Ebenezer Baptist Church where her grandfather, Rev. Adam Daniel Williams, father, and brothers served as senior and co-pastors, respectively, and her mother served as an organist, church leader, and choir director. Ebenezer was one of the first Atlanta churches to televise worship services in the 1970s. The church broadcast aired Sunday mornings on WAGA-TV, now Fox5 Atlanta. Dr. Farris served as one of the televised service's producers and was a soloist in The Church Choir. She often served as the mistress of ceremonies at Ebenezer's celebrations including an annual well-known gospel concert originated by her mother and featuring the M.L. King, Sr. Choir. Dr. Farris continued the choir concert as a living tribute to her mother, providing college scholarships for Ebenezer's youth. Dr. Farris was one of Ebenezer's longest-serving members.

Ebenezer's first daughter married Isaac Newton Farris, Sr. on August 19, 1960. Their marriage remained an example of love and commitment until his death on December 30, 2017. Her husband, an ordained deacon, supported his wife throughout her work as an educator, activist, and church trustee.

Dr. Farris was a strong supporter of Dr. King and the civil rights movement. She marched in the Selma to Montgomery March for Voting Rights in 1965 and the March Against Fear in Mississippi on June 26, 1966. She encouraged audiences at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the March on Washington to become champions for nonviolence and reminisced about her brother's speech saying, "On that day, Martin achieved greatness because he melded the hopes and dreams of millions into a grand vision of healing, reconciliation, and brotherhood. The dream my brother shared with our nation and world on that sweltering day of days fifty years ago, continues to



nurture and sustain nonviolent activists worldwide in their struggle for freedom and human rights...

Our challenge then, as followers of Martin Luther King, Jr, is to now honor his life, leadership, and legacy by living our lives in a way that carries forward the unfinished work. There is no better way to honor his sacrifices and contributions than by becoming champions of nonviolence in our homes and communities, in our places of work, worship, and learning, everywhere, every day.”

The family will continue Dr. Farris’ work through The Christine King Farris Legacy Foundation Inc. which promotes higher education and leadership development. Established in 2022 to honor her 95<sup>th</sup> birthday, the foundation raises funds to support the Leadership Program and The Christine King Farris Scholarship, both at Spelman College. The King Center will also continue her Legacy through the Christine King Farris Legacy of Service in Education Beloved Community Award.

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### **About The King Center**

The Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change (The King Center) is a 501(c) (3) organization established in 1968 by Mrs. Coretta Scott King. The King Center is the official living memorial and programmatic nonprofit organization committed to educating the world on the life, legacy, and teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The King Center serves to inspire new generations to carry forward his unfinished work, strengthen causes and empower change-makers who are continuing his efforts today. The King Center’s premiere educational initiative, Nonviolence365®, is based on Dr. King’s nonviolent philosophy and methodology. His teachings engage participants from various sectors of society, including emerging and next-generation leaders, in modules and exercises that enhance communication, leadership, interpersonal, and conflict reconciliation skills, as well as empower individuals to address injustice.



