

***Expression of Condolence for Bishop Chester Alexander Searles
by Toronto City Council***

Moved by: Councillor Mike Colle

Seconded by: Mayor Olivia Chow

The Mayor and Members of Toronto City Council are deeply saddened to learn of the passing of the Right Reverend Dr. Chester Alexander Searles.

Toronto's Black community has lost an incredible pioneer and leader, who served as pastor and Bishop at the British Methodist Episcopal Christ Church, Toronto's oldest Black Church.

Born in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Reverend Searles worked as a teacher before moving to Toronto in 1969 to continue his education. After earning a diploma in Business Administration, he went on to obtain a B.A., M.Ed., and PhD in International Missions and Counselling, before working as a Program Administrator with the federal Income Securities division.

Over the course of his career, Reverend Searles also served as a registered Social Worker and was a member of both the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers and the Ontario College of Mental Health Professionals. He became an ordained minister with the British Methodist Episcopal Church of Canada, where he served as a Youth Pastor, Assistant Pastor, and Pastor, before being elected in 2011 as General Superintendent of the British Methodist Episcopal Church Conference and appointed as Senior Pastor of the British Methodist Episcopal Christ Church in Toronto's Little Jamaica.

In 2022, Reverend Searles was consecrated as Bishop at Christ Church, Toronto's oldest Black church originally founded in 1889. The heart and soul of the Little Jamaica community, he faithfully served his congregation and the broader neighbourhood for 15 years, organizing annual Black History Month and Community Award Celebrations with the Toronto Police Service, conducting workshops for new police recruits, and organizing outreach sessions for inmates at the Don Jail.

Reverend Searles was happily married for almost 43 years to his wife, Janice Clarke Searles, a former school principal. He will be remembered by his congregation at Christ Church as an irreplaceable leader, and by the many lives he touched across Toronto through his service and advocacy.

The City Clerk is requested to convey, on behalf of the Members of Toronto City Council, our sincere sympathy to the Right Reverend Dr. Chester Alexander Searles' family.

May 20, 2026