

NEWS RELEASE
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Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church Boosts Endowment for UH CLASS
New Gift Honors Legacies of Rev. William A. Lawson, James Conyers

HOUSTON, Feb. 21, 2022 – A new gift from Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church in Houston’s Third Ward will increase an existing endowment in the University of Houston College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CLASS) to support students in the [department of African American studies](#) (AAS). The William Alexander Lawson Social Justice Scholarship Endowment, named after the founder of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, was created in 2020 by [James L. Conyers](#), longtime professor and director of AAS. Conyers passed away in January 2021.

“Dr. Conyers established this endowment following the death and aftermath of George Floyd,” said Linda Reed, interim chair of the AAS department. “He wanted to honor someone who had been deeply engaged in social justice activity with the scholarship, and he made a fine selection in connecting it with Rev. Lawson.”

The \$30,000 gift from Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church will be added to the Lawson endowed scholarship, which is offered to deserving AAS majors in perpetuity. The first cohort of recipients will be selected in Fall 2022, and they will receive \$1,500 in scholarship for the academic year. Preference will be given to students from two of Houston’s historically Black high schools: Jack Yates High School in Houston’s Third Ward and Booker T. Washington High School in Independence Heights.

“Dr. Conyers created this endowment to honor Rev. Lawson and his legacy, but it has also become linked with his own legacy,” said Daniel O’Connor, dean of CLASS, where the AAS department is housed. “Both men have contributed greatly over many decades to our city, our university and our students. Through this endowment, they will continue to do so for generations to come.”

Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church presented this contribution at [the Jan. 29 dedication of its new cathedral and education complex](#). University of Houston, also located in Houston’s Third Ward, was one of 22 organizations honored. Renu Khator, chancellor of the University of Houston System, and O’Connor accepted the donation at the dedication.

“As Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church celebrates 60 years of serving God and God’s people, we felt it necessary to again contribute to the Lawson Social Justice Scholarship endowment at the UofH College of Liberal Arts and Social Science. Our prayer is that future

scholars are blessed by the scholarship and bless society through their work and witness in return,” Reverend Alexander Johnson, Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church Executive Pastor, and Co-Chairman, CLASS Dean Advisory Board.

The church was founded in 1962 by Lawson, a prolific civil rights leader who marched with Martin Luther King, Jr. and actively advised Houston-area students during the struggle for civil rights in the 1960s. Over the years, Lawson has also taught and spoken to classes at the University of Houston. In 1969, UH became the first state university in Texas to establish an AAS program. It was [founded by four UH students](#): Lynn Eusan, Omowale Luthuli-Allen, Gene Locke and Deloyd Parker. AAS became a degreed program in 2018, and in 2019, Kianna Wright made history as the first graduate from UH to be conferred a degree in African American studies. In March 2021, departmental status was approved for AAS, another significant legacy of Conyers.

For information on how to support AAS students, [visit the AAS website](#).

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