

1911-1983

Born in 1911 in North Carolina, Reverend Junius W. Cofield took the helm of Star of Bethlehem in August 1939, when he was 28 years old. In 1973, at age 62, Rev. Cofield left Ossining for the Faith Baptist Church in Buffalo, NY, a post he held until 1980, three years before his death.

Reverend Cofield gave the best years of his life to Ossining. Thirty-three years, to be exact. In those decades, which aligned with Great Depression, World War II, and the Civil Rights movement, he was a spiritual leader, a civic leader, and a soldier for social justice. He was a beacon of the African American community, which has played such a vital role in our village history.

Upon his arrival in Ossining, Rev. Cofield wasted no time making his mark. At his first baptism in 1940, he baptized 45 people at once, the largest single baptism in Star's history. He baptized 715 people in all, dedicated 192 babies and performed 214 marriage ceremonies. He kept Star solvent and growing, but his influence went beyond Spring Street.

He was a lifetime member of the NAACP, president of the Ossining Council of Social Agencies and the Ossining Ministerial Assn., and moderator of the Central Hudson Baptist Assn. Under Cofield's leadership, IFCA, a bastion of affordable housing here in Ossining, received its first property in 1966 as a donation from Star. He was a presence in the schools, whether helping to keep the peace during the racial tension of the late 60s and early 70s or chairing the Courier Memorial Foundation, which offered a scholarship to a college-bound OHS student in memory of World War II veterans. He worked with the Police Athletic League to choose 16 local schoolchildren to attend free summer camp.

The Cofield family was both a product and a shaper of Ossining. Wilma Cofield taught in the local public schools and was active in the Ossining Children's Center. Their son Willard was born and raised here and is a man of the cloth himself.

Rev. Cofield did not seek the spotlight. He was not a big man, unless you were looking at his determination and spirit. As one congregant put it, "With our eyes, we see him as a man, slight in stature, but, in our hearts and minds, we him as tall."

"The people in Ossining are responsible for my staying in one place so long," Cofield said in 1969, during the 30th anniversary celebration of his pastorate at Star. "Their kindness, thoughtfulness and prayers have driving me closer to God and put humility in my life.... If people like [these] made up the world, what a beautiful world it would be."