

My Friend Ruffin Bridgeforth

by President Thomas S. Monson

February 2014

My friendship with Ruffin Bridgeforth began when I served as the president of the Canadian Mission. As our missionaries were asked questions about the blacks and the priesthood while proselyting in Canada, I thought of my friend Monroe Fleming, the employee at the Hotel Utah who remembered everyone's name. He had been baptized by one of my colleagues at the Deseret Press, S. Ross Fox. I wrote to Monroe and asked him if he would send me his testimony in writing so that I could provide our missionaries with a copy. He replied that his testimony was strong but that he knew a man named Ruffin Bridgeforth who had an equally strong testimony and could express himself better. Brother Bridgeforth prepared a letter and sent it to me, and we made copies of it and used it all over Eastern Canada.

In 1967, I finally had an opportunity to meet Ruffin in person when I was returning from an assignment in Montana on a train to Salt Lake City. I told Ruffin that I had been hoping to meet him and that his testimony had been shared throughout Eastern Canada, and we had a very pleasant visit.

When the Genesis Group was organized October 19, 1971, Ruffin Bridgeforth was selected as the president with Darius Gray and Eugene Orr as his counselors. Elder Gordon B. Hinckley, Elder Boyd K. Packer, and I had the privilege of setting them apart.

I enjoyed meeting with the Genesis Group leaders from time to time and was always impressed by them. I observed their longing for the day when they might be able to hold the priesthood, and I joined with them in that hope.

On June 10, 1978, I telephoned Ruffin Bridgeforth and Monroe Fleming and congratulated them on the opportunity which was now theirs to receive the priesthood. Both were elated.

On June 25, 1978, Sister Monson and I attended the meeting of the Genesis Group, where the sacrament was blessed and passed for the first time by brethren who had recently received the priesthood. They bore their testimonies, which were most inspiring. All of us were pleased about the new revelation.

On March 19, 1980, Sister Monson and I attended the funeral services for Ruffin's first wife, Helena. President Kimball spoke and bore testimony that the policy change regarding blacks and the priesthood was a revelation from God. President Kimball asked Brother Hinckley and me to share his time at the pulpit, which we did.

On October 19, 1996, Frances and I attended an event commemorating the 25th anniversary of the formation of the Genesis Group. I enjoyed participating on the program as Ruffin Bridgeforth was honored for leading the Genesis Group for 25 years.

On March 26, 1997, I attended Ruffin's funeral. He is a wonderful man, and I am grateful to have known him.