

STOCKTONSpeaks!

LEWIS D. STALLWORTH, SR.

In the 1850s, a few African Americans were able to make the migration west in response to the California Gold Rush. In Stockton, as early as 1854, African Americans could be found working as stagecoach men for Wells Fargo or as laborers for Sperry's Flour Mill. Many families settled in an area of the city defined by Washington, Lafayette, Commerce, and Madison Streets. This emerging Stockton neighborhood eventually gave rise to the formation of many African-American cultural and religious institutions, including the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the African Baptist Church (now known as the Second Baptist Church). Presently, over 27,000 residents claim African-American ancestry in Stockton.

Lewis Dolphin Stallworth was not among those early African-American settlers. He was part of a second wave of African-American migration, one of the effects of World War II. But he and his family have put down roots and are leaving indelible footprints in the city

Lewis Dolphin Stallworth was born in Welty, Oklahoma, in 1923. Not long after, his parents relocated to Boley, Oklahoma. Other members of his extended family have ties to the southeastern United States, including Alabama and Mississippi. Lewis and his eight brothers and sisters grew up in Boley, where religion provided a foundation for daily activities and routines. Church was an important part of the Stallworth family life. Lewis recalls regular attendance at Sunday services, and prayers both before bed and prior to every meal.

With nine children in the family, it was hard for Lewis's parents to provide enough for all. Unpredictable environmental conditions presented challenges to farming, and the family lived with the ongoing risk of crop failure. Lewis and his siblings all had to pitch in to run the farm, doing their part by helping their father

prepare the fields, plant, care for and harvest the crops as well as doing other household chores.

Lewis attended school in Boley, graduating from high school in 1941. The following year, the Stallworth family, including 19-year-old Lewis, joined other migrants seeking new opportunities in California's emerging defense industry. Soon afterward, Lewis joined the United States Army and was called to a front line assignment in 1944 as an ammunition loader for a tank battalion. Lewis fondly remembers his military experiences, which allowed him both to serve his country and interact with a diverse group of people. Although he had felt increasingly mature when he worked with his family in the fields of Oklahoma and was already of adult age when he left his home state, Lewis' coming-of-age process was reinforced by his years of military service.

After the war, Lewis returned home to Stockton, where he focused on family. He remembers his father's advice when he was starting life on his own: "If you have to pay your grocery bill or your doctor's bill, which would you pay? You choose to pay the grocery bill because if you don't take care of your loved ones or yourself, you *will* have to pay the doctor's bill."

Realizing the importance of his father's message, Lewis D. Stallworth used it as a guide as he worked and raised his family. As a father, he has encouraged his children to do well in school, to have the right priorities, and to work hard in all they do.

(Lewis D. Stallworth eventually became the bishop of the fifty-plus year old Christ Tempe Apostolic Faith Church in Stockton, which has become one of the most active churches in the city. The Church schedules several worship services and conducts a variety of social service and educational programs.)

Author: Brandon Stevens
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Ethnic Group: African American
Generation: Elder