

## SPEAKING NOTES

Councillor Rawlson King  
2026 Black History Month Address at St. Mark's Anglican Church  
Sunday, February 8, 2026  
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Good morning and thank you for welcoming me to St. Mark's Anglican Church this Black History Month.

It is truly an honour to stand before you in this sacred space, a church that has served this community with faith and dedication for over seventy years. Just as St. Mark's was founded as a veterans' parish, built on the values of service and sacrifice, Black History Month calls us to honour those who have served, sacrificed, and paved the way for the progress we celebrate today.

This month is a time of reflection, recognition, and renewal. It is when we pause to acknowledge the profound contributions that Black Canadians have made to building this nation, from the early settlers who arrived in chains and those who found freedom on the Underground Railroad, to the entrepreneurs, educators, artists, athletes, and leaders who have shaped every corner of Canadian society.

As Ottawa's first Black city councillor, I carry the weight and privilege of history with me every day. My parents came to Canada from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, teachers with a dream of building a better life for their family. They taught me that education, hard work, and community service were the foundations of a meaningful life. Those lessons guide me still.

But I also know that my presence on City Council is not mine alone. It belongs to every person who knocked on doors when they weren't welcome, who applied for jobs knowing they might be rejected because of the colour of their skin, who sent their children to schools where they would be the only one who looked like them. I stand on the shoulders of giants: community organizers, civil rights activists, and everyday people who refused to accept that "the way things are" is the way things must always be.

Black History Month reminds us that history is not just about the past; it's about the present and the future. It's about the Ottawa we are building together. Since my election in 2019, one of my proudest accomplishments has been leading the creation of the City's Anti-Racism Secretariat and our Anti-Racism Strategy. This work is not abstract; it's about ensuring that every child in Ottawa, regardless of their background, can see themselves reflected in positions of leadership. It's about creating pathways to opportunity that don't require twice the effort for half the recognition.

But this work cannot be done by government alone. It requires all of us, faith communities like St. Mark's, neighbourhood associations, businesses, and individuals to commit to building a more just and equitable city.

The theme that resonates with me most this Black History Month is "Ubuntu"—an African philosophy that says, "I am because we are." It reminds us that our humanity is bound up in one another's. When one of us suffers injustice, we all suffer. When one of us rises, we all rise.

This wisdom echoes the words of the Apostle Paul in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." These powerful words proclaimed a radical equality in a world built on hierarchy and division. They remind us that in God's eyes, we are one human family—each precious, each equal, each deserving of dignity and justice.

I see this truth in action right here at St. Mark's, in your community outreach programs, in the way you open your doors to neighbours, in the way you live out your faith through service. This is the spirit we need more of in our city.

As we celebrate Black History Month, I encourage each of you to do three things:

First, learn. Read the stories of Black Canadians who have shaped our history. Visit Black History Ottawa's exhibitions. Attend the many events happening across our city this month. Education is the beginning of empathy and understanding.

Second, listen. Black voices are not monolithic—we are doctors and artists, entrepreneurs and educators, each with unique experiences and perspectives. Create space for these voices in your workplaces, your schools, and your communities.

Third, act. Support Black-owned businesses. Advocate for equity in your spheres of influence. Challenge racism when you encounter it. The scholarship my wife and I established at Carleton University for Indigenous, Black, and racialized students is our small way of opening doors. What doors can you help open?

Black History Month is a celebration, yes, but it is also a call to action. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." That arc doesn't bend on its own. It bends because people of conscience, people of all backgrounds, faiths, and experiences, choose to bend it.

As we gather in this church, I'm reminded that faith communities have always been at the forefront of movements for justice. From the Black churches that were headquarters for the civil rights movement, to the interfaith coalitions working for justice today, people of faith have understood that we are called to be agents of change.

So my friends, as we honour Black history this month, let us also commit to making history, building an Ottawa where every person can thrive, where diversity is not just tolerated but celebrated, where opportunity is determined by talent and effort, not by the colour of one's skin.

Thank you for your partnership in this journey. Thank you for the witness of St. Mark's Anglican Church. And thank you for allowing me to share this moment with you.

May this Black History Month inspire us all to action, grounded in hope and guided by love.

Thank you.