

Gordon Cosby's essence

By [Amy Frykholm](#)

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Gordon Cosby, the prophetic founder of the Church of the Savior, passed away yesterday. I interviewed Cosby in the fall of 2009 in the library of the Festival Center, one of the many buildings in the Adams Morgan neighborhood of Washington D.C. where the (un)church that Cosby founded in the 1950s has thrived.

In our [interview](#), Cosby—at 91 dynamic and impassioned—talked about how ministries have an “essence.” The essence of a ministry, he said, is how it participates in the “breaking through of the Kingdom of God.”

But all too often, a ministry loses its essence. It begins to exist for itself and to lose its sense of ultimate purpose. It does a job, instead of listening for the heartbeat of the Holy Spirit. Growth, success, vision, organizational and individual ego all serve as obstacles to essence. All of them, he felt, were very much an issue in the contemporary church.

In his later years, Cosby helped to organize the sale of the building that had housed the Church of the Savior. A building, he had long felt, could be another obstacle to essence. He said, “All living organisms change form constantly. We waited too long to change our form.”

But Cosby’s work, and that of his many friends through Church of the Savior, lives on in many forms. Until the day he died, Cosby was seeking the forms that were most closely aligned with the reconciliation and justice of the kingdom of God.

After our interview, I wondered if anyone ever got through a conversation with Gordon Cosby without hearing a challenge to live more deeply and to claim one’s faith more completely. Cosby was a man who never lost his essence.