



President's Welcome Message

Greetings and blessings to each of you,

I am pleased to serve you all in this manner and to let you know about our plans for the 2023-2024, specifically in relation to the 2024 Emancipation Proclamation Association parade.

On January 1, 2024, our Annual New Year's Day parade will mark the 161st anniversary of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation by Abraham Lincoln, declaring all slaves held in southern states shall forever be free. Together we have made progress, but the struggle continues as we celebrate 158 years of consistent freedom parade celebrations here in Charleston. The first recorded freedom celebration in Charleston was held on March 21, 1865.

It is my honor and privilege to serve you as the President of the Emancipation Proclamation Association, Inc. To our friends, we are here to support and look forward to partnering with you. To the visitors of our website, we welcome you and thank you for sharing and being a vital part of our annual parade history. Our 2023 parade theme was "Reimaging Freedom" was led by Cyrus Birch, actor and stuntman, the block buster movie "Black Panther" energized and served as our Grand Marshal.

We will have two women serving as Grand Marshals who attended Charleston public schools. We are honored to have Dr. Vashti Washington, a Charles A. Brown High School graduate, who recently received a 2023 Lifetime Achievement Award by the South Carolina Alliance of Black Teachers; and Miss Katrina McClain, a St. Andrews High School graduate and 1996 Atlanta Olympic Gold medalist and inductee into the Basketball Hall of Fame. This year the parade's theme is "Festival of Freedom" as we continue the celebrations of many who were once enslaved and now are free, we invite you to sign up and be a part of the upcoming parade celebration.

I encourage each of you to visit our website and share our rich photo history and memories of Emancipation celebrations. We seek to have a healthy community by encouraging and empowering our family with photos of freedom celebrations that continue today. Determination, sacrifice, support, and leadership, can work together to guide our goals of educating our community about the importance of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, takes work. The three key words written into the Emancipation Proclamation

“shall be free” are about more than just a parade celebration, it is about our future here in America. Our elders with very little education and resources molded and guided our young men and women toward better opportunities going from doors of discrimination which were once closed to the freedom doors have now been opened. The emancipation document engaged Black men to serve in the Union Army and Navy to provide a better way of life to free those family members in bondage. Reinvesting in our community and our children are essential to achieving a high quality of life, so we can strive for the promise that is embedded in the phrase “shall be free” as we view the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation as a valuable living document. I am extremely proud of what we have accomplished together, but also recognize there is more work to do and am often concerned about the pockets of hatred that still exist and are determined to stagnate our community, city, state, and our government.

To our supporters this has been a challenging year for me, and I make no excuses. I give thanks to my heavenly father for guiding me and allowing me to serve. Luke 12:48 states that “to whom much is given, much is required.” Thank you all for your continued support and prayers this year. On August 5, 2023, the Lord gave my wife her heavenly wings; I miss my wife Deborah A. McPherson Crawford who was by my side for 41 years. In honor of my wife, let us make this a grand celebration. Thank you all for keeping my family in your prayers. Amen!!

Sincerely,

Deacon Robert Crawford