

New Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church History

The early beginning of New Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church takes us back to the year of 1929; a beginning that found seven Christians gathering at the home Mrs. Verna Edwards to worship and give God praises.

In the year of 1930, Sis. Lillie Still solicited the help of one of her white friends for some land to build a church for them to worship. This request was granted with the stipulation that a church must be built thereon. Sis. Still was then called 'the founder of this church' after securing the lumber from a demolition sale of unused wood for building motels {baseball living quarters} at Tinker Field on West Church Street- Orlando.

Under the skilled carpentry hand of Bro. Henry Brown, the church was built and upon the completion of the church the *seven pioneers adults: Sis. Lillie Still, Bro. Henry Brown, Bro. Benjamin Francis, Sr., Sis. Mary M. Francis, Sis. Nina C. Barber, Sis. Verna Edwards, and Bro. Andrew Parker along with the pioneer youth: Sis. Annie Mae Francis (Weber), Bro. Benjamin Francis, Jr., Sis. Louise Simmons, Sis. Julia Simmons, Bro. Burgess Merritt (deceased), and Bro. James Henry Merritt (deceased)* began to worship the Lord in new edifice. The Simmons young ladies and the Merritt young men were all foster children of Sis. Nina G. Barber. The Church was given the name **BETHEL AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**, with some of the early pastors serving: Rev. S. J. Baker, Rev. S. Cobb, Rev. Jerome Andrews and spouse Sis. Letha, and Rev. J. H. Woodard and spouse Sis. Mabel.

In 1948, Rev. Leroy L. Johnson was appointed pastor of this charge from the District Conference. Rev. Johnson was accompanied by his spouse, Sis. Cornelia and children Mary Alice (Slaughter), Leroy, Jr., Susie Lee (Harris). Rev. Johnson pursued various items of the church; one important item, the deed, for an AME Church has to be built on property owned by the church. In 1949 marked the beginning of blocks being place on the vacant spot of land to begin to build a new church.

In 1950 plans for building a new church were initialized with a membership of 26. Rev. L L. Johnson (a Mason), Sis. Annie Telfair (non-member Eastern Star), and Sis. Lucy Jacobs (non-member Eastern Star) turned the ground readying it for the foundation. Each family was organized to raise \$33.34 per month. The first rally realized \$1,460, and thereafter the members continued providing the necessary funds to complete the church. Bro. Henry Brown, Chief Carpenter, along with Bro. Andre Parker, Bro. N. P. Porter, Bro. Johnnie Bennett (non-member) laid the blocks at no charge. Bro. Jesse Hill (then a non-member), Bro. Elliot Welcome poured the floor along with other male members of the church, with the women handing the mortar to the men and making lemonade to assist them in the heat.

On April 10, 1955, Easter Sunday Morning, the church was dedicated under the leadership of Rev. Leroy L. Johnson. The Right Reverend Carey A. Gibbs, Presiding Bishop, dedicated the church with the name of *New Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church*. At the dedication service the only indebtedness of the church was the carpet on the floor; Bishop Gibbs donated the monies being paid to him, and along with other funds raised the carpet was paid in full.

In 1956, the church annex was built after we were able to acquire a loan from Orlando Federal Savings and Loan Association. However, Rev. Johnson and the Trustees were told the bank had not previously loaned money to African American Churches, because they never knew who the responsible persons for the loan would be. Once the loan was completed, the bank let the Trustees know that it was because of the pastor's excellent record of financial stability they were able to secure the loan. The annex was built where the choir stand now exist.

In 1972 the walls of the old annex were moved to expand the church and a new annex was built. In this same year, Rev. L. L. Johnson was promoted to Presiding Elder of the Ocala District (Central Florida Conference), after having served New Bethel for over 24 years.

Rev. Sandy P. Glass (Youngstown, Ohio) was appointed pastor along with his spouse, Sis. Alice, who introduced us to the Annual Pink Tea which was sponsored by the Lillie Still Women's Missionary Society in January 1974.

In 1976 Rev. R. D. Daniels was appointed as pastor of New Bethel; along with his spouse Sis. Doris Bagley. Under his leadership there were many accomplishments: paneling of the sanctuary; the building of the vestibule; a new brick front, new doors, stained glass windows the length of the sanctuary, covered the ceiling, new piano; ladies and men restrooms improvements; purchased kitchen gas stove, sidewalk added to west side of the church building; updated copier, air conditioners for offices; instrumental in installation of traffic light in front of church, hooked into city sewage; organized the YAMS (Young Adult Male Society) ages 8-18 promoting manhood with many adults serving as supervisors; instituted the Annual Youth Day observance; and hosted the 85th Session of the Central Florida Annual Conference in 1986, a first for New Bethel.

In September 1993, Rev. LaTanya Warren Floyd was appointed pastor of New Bethel, along with spouse Sis. Geneva. Under the leadership of Rev. Floyd the Finance Commission was established; the YES (Young Episcopal Sisters) was organized, with young ladies ages 9-18 developing ladylike Christian traits with adults serving as the supervisors; a grant was obtained for the "YAMS", "YES", and "YPDers", which aided in some of their activities and enabled them to purchase a television and VHS player for the fellowship hall; and the purchase of the Parsonage in Pine Hills.

Leading us into the new "millennium" was the Rev. David L. Connelly, appointed to New Bethel in September 1996, with spouse Sis. Dorothy. Under Rev. Connelly's leadership we celebrated our first church anniversary celebrating 67 years; the front of the church was renovated adding restrooms in the front of the church along with renovating the Pastor's office; the Couples Ministry was organized; the RAMS (Richard Allen Male Society), male usher ministry and the Sons of Allen (SOA) ministry were also organized. With Rev. Connelly's leadership, New Bethel successfully hosted the 96th Session of the Central Florida Annual Conference in 1997 and the 99th Session in 2000.

On November 22, 2004, Rev. Henry L. Postell, II was appointed to New Bethel, along with his spouse, Sis. Beverly and daughters, Sherrie and Deirdre. Pastor Postell moved the church forward with vim, vigor, and vitality of God, pressing toward the high calling of Jesus Christ. Under Pastor Postell's leadership, we renovated the Pastor's office and Finance Commission Room, organized the OWLS (Older-Wiser- Livelier Seniors) ministry, re-structured the Finance Commission; celebrated the 75th Church Anniversary with the proceeds from the activity going toward renovations in the church; two dance ministries were established- the Consecrated Praise Dancers for Christ and the Angel's Feet/Wings Dance Ministry; the JAMM (Jesus and Me Ministry), a male mentoring ministry was formed; a second Stewardess Board was added; a Young People's Bible Study was established; and we hosted the 110th Session of the Central Annual Conference. Pastor Postell spearheaded a rally of walking around the church and paying \$75.00 to pay off the remaining balance of the mortgage, and we became "debt-free" as of June 2010. On November 19, 2011, Rev. Henry L. Postell, II was elevated to the position of Presiding Elder of the Orlando District of the Central Annual Conference.

Rev. Kirk R. Bogen was assigned to New Bethel, along with his spouse Sis. Jacquelyn. Since arriving Rev. Bogen has been very busy reestablishing, reassigning, and revamping the organizations in the church. Rev. and Sis. Bogen have brought a fresh outlook to our Zion and we are continuing to do the work of Jesus Christ. Rev. Bogen has revamped the Finance Commission; revised the curriculum for the New Members' Class; established an evangelism ministry; and are in the process of establishing a not-for-profit community development foundation to extend the ministries/services of New Bethel to the surrounding community. Pastor Bogen led us in celebrating our previously noted accomplishment of eradicating our debt with our first Mortgage Burning Service with Bishop McKinley Young presiding.

Ministers who have served on the ministerial staff after retiring from or becoming voluntarily inactive in the pastoral ministry: Rev. Rev. Charles Smith, Sr., Rev. Guy Birk, Rev. McKinley Tyler, and Rev. Joanne Mitchell Ector.

Many sons and daughters have answered the call to the ministry. Under Rev. L. L. Johnson tutelage: Rev. George Washington, Rev. Dennis Bell, Rev. Samuel Williams, Rev. Isaac Mobley, Presiding Elder Damone A. Anderson, Jr., and Rev. Benjamin McRae (Minnesota). Under Rev. Sandy P. Glass tutelage: Presiding Elder Henry Green. Under Rev. R. D. Daniels tutelage: Rev. Theodore Smith, Bishop Samuel L. Green, Rev. Marvin Clyde Zanders, III, Rev. Susie L. Johnson Harris, Rev. Verdie McKinney, and Evangelist Mildred Glover. Under Rev. LaTanya W. Floyd tutelage: Rev. W. Damone Johnson and Rev. Joe Baker (Atlanta, GA). Under Rev. David L. Connelly tutelage: Rev. Ida Stephens Andrews.

Presiding Elders who have served New Bethel: Reverends D. A. Anderson, Sr. with spouse Elise; A. L. Sampson; M. M. Lindsey with spouse Alice; K. D. White with spouse Albertha; John E. Connelly with spouse Louise; Dr. Robert L Mitchell with spouse Delores; Y. Benjamin Bruce and spouse Gloria; and Hartford Lee with spouse Bernice.

Bishops who have served this great Zion are: Right Reverends John Andrew Gregg with Supervisor Melberta; Carey A. Gibbs; D. Ward Nichols with Supervisor Kay; Sherman L. Green with Supervisor Pinkie Beatrice; William F Ball; Ernest L. Hickman; George Wayman Blakely; Eugene C. Hatcher; George N. Collins; Dwight Dewey Robinson; Hubert N. Robinson; Samuel S. Morris, Jr.; Phillip R. Cousin with Supervisor Dr. Joanne; Frank Curtis Cummings with Supervisor Martha; John Hurst Adams with Supervisor Dr. Dolly; McKinley Young with Supervisor Dr. Dorothy; with Adam Jefferson Richardson, Jr. and Supervisor Dr. Connie presently serving.

Many lay persons, adult and youth, have served New Bethel in many capacities of leadership and we are grateful. Our website will include a complete listing of lay persons who have served our Zion down through the years.

Through the years we keep on toiling . . .