

## **MESSIAH BAPTIST CHURCH HISTORY**

According to oral history, colored people were worshipping at the First Baptist Church (white) in Bridgeport during the middle and later 1880's. This was traditional in many churches throughout the North and South.

In the late 1880's several colored churches were established in the state of Connecticut. Some of these churches started as "prayer bands", meeting from house to house. Many others were started by colored people, who were actual members or non-members of white churches, but they were allowed to sit in the balcony of such churches, or they held a separate worship service in the white church, often pastured by a white minister. It is not known whether the colored people attending First Baptist were actual members or just allowed to make use of the church in a separate worship service.

Nevertheless, when the colored persons of First Baptist, no doubt desiring to "sit every man under his own vine and his own fig tree", decided to establish their own church, they had the blessings of the white members of the First Baptist Church. Oral history says that Messiah Baptist Church "came out of the First Baptist Church: and the written record indicates that from its beginning, and apparently continued, the First Baptist Church was very supportive to Messiah.

In the beginning a small group of believers in Christ met at what was known as the Etney Building at 91 John Street, above a blacksmith shop on June 7, 1888 for the purpose of organizing themselves in a Baptist Church of Christ.

Benjamin R. Chandler called the company to order and proposed that they would proceed to organize. It was motioned by Brother Thaddeus Evans and seconded by Brother Arthur C. Miller, that the Reverend John R. Gow be the moderator for the evening. The motion was carried.

Twelve different individuals presented their letters for membership in the newly organized Church. The names were recorded June 7, 1888: Benjamin R. Chandler, William T. Evans, Arthur C. Miller, Charles Duyett, Elizabeth Butler, Mary E. Chandler, Ella Lewis, Mary V. Allen, Hester Miller, Estell Brightwell, Hattie Duyett, and Byram Miles.

The recognition services of the Messiah Baptist Church were held on June 19, 1888 in the First Baptist Church, Bridgeport, (white) formerly located at the corner of State and Broad Streets. It is now located at 126 Washington Avenue, Bridgeport.

The following churches were represented by delegates to consider the expediency of recognizing the above body of brethren and sisters as a regularly organized church: Easton; Danbury; Norwalk, Second Baptist; Bridgeport, First Baptist; Bridgeport, Second Baptist formerly located on East Washington Avenue and now located on Kossuth Street, Bridgeport; New Haven, Immanuel Baptist; and Stamford Baptist. The Rev. William V. Garner, D.D., pastor, First Baptist Church, Bridgeport, was chosen as moderator and Deacon Asa M. Thayer, of Stamford, as clerk. After a most thorough investigation the Council vote unanimously that, "The Church of the Messiah", Bridgeport, be recognized as a regularly organized Baptist church, and recommended the reception of this body into the Baptist sisterhood at the Association when it convened in October, 1888.

The Reverend George H. Jackson delivered the sermon, the Reverend Ritzman extended the right hand of fellowship, the Reverend J. R. Gow gave the charge to the church, and the Reverend W. V. Garner, D.D., gave the prayer of recognition.

The Church, being without a pastor, extended a call to the Reverend William N. Morton, a native of Washington, D.C., and a graduate of Virginia Union University, Richmond, Virginia and Howard University, Washington, D.C. On July 30, 1888, the Reverend Mr. Morton preached his first sermon and was unanimously chosen pastor of the Messiah Baptist Church on August 3, 1888, his first pastorate.

As the membership increased under Rev. Morton's pastorate, the members rented a hall in which to worship. Records do not indicate the location of this hall.

In January 1892, a Certificate of Organization was received by the Office of Secretary of State, State of Connecticut, and filed under the corporate name of Messiah Baptist Church of Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The church was erected and the corner stone laid on the First Sunday in August 1895. The building was completed at a cost of \$25,000 and dedicated on January 6, 1896. In 1896, the First Baptist Church, Bridgeport, gave pews to the church. According to the history of First Baptist Church, these pews were purchased in 1860, which makes them older than our church.

In May 1904, eight members loaned the church \$520 at 5% interest to purchase a parcel of land. In 1910, due to the increased membership and need for additional space, a study and a choir room was added. A new pipe organ was installed at a cost of \$2,500 to replace the reed organ. On August 2, 1917, the second mortgage on the church was burned, leaving no debt on the property.

Dr. William Morton conceived the idea that the church should have a parsonage. By strictest economy the church managed to save \$2,200 toward the purchase of a parsonage. However, it was not the Lord's will that Dr. Morton see his idea come to fruition, for after thirty years and six months of service, on January 23, 1919, God called Dr. Morton to rest from his labors from this church.

On the last Sunday in January, 1919, the Reverend Walter Gay, D.D. of Hartford, Connecticut was selected as interim minister. He later became the permanent pastor.

During the pastorate of Dr. Gay, the church raised an additional \$800 making a total of \$3,000 for the parsonage. On March 28, 1921, the first church parsonage was purchased at 26 Buckingham Place, Bridgeport with a mortgage placed on the same for \$2,500. Later a new heating system was installed in the church and the basement (Fellowship Hall) was entirely renovated.

After twelve years of devoted pastorship, the Reverend Dr. Gay retired in October 1931, because of failing health. He passed away October 31, 1937, in Hartford, Connecticut.

On December 23, 1931, the Reverend Frank Walter Jacobs, D.D., former pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, was called as the third pastor. He was installed on May 1, 1932.

During the pastorate of Dr. Jacobs, new organizations were formed; Board of Deacons, Special Chorus, Junior Choir, Girl Scouts, Nurses' Unit, Men's Council, Happy Hour Club, Junior Happy Hour Club and other organizations, some of which have since terminated their activities. The mortgage on the parsonage was paid-off and needed repairs were made to the church: most of the old pews in the main sanctuary (given to Messiah by the First Baptist Church) were replaced with new pews. The remaining pews were placed in the balcony.

Information was passed on to key members of the congregation that in closed session between the Common Council and Mayor Jasper McLevy plans were made to build Senior Citizen houses in the Congress Street-Bulls Head-Main Street-Washington Avenue section. Immediately, out of fear of being phased out, the church bought a four family house at 89-95 Arch Street. (The land space now provides parking for Police Headquarters.) This was a start toward collateral or equity for building another church when the time should come. In the meantime the city changed plans in 1955 or 1956 and built "Fireside Apartments" on city property (Bond Street) in another section of the city. The church maintained the property (four-family house) until 1972 when it was sold in another redevelopment plan.

Improvements continued throughout Reverend Jacobs' pastorate and the church continued to thrive. After twenty-eight years and nine months of pastorship and dedicated service to this church and community, Dr. Jacobs died on February 27, 1960.

A fourth pastor, the Reverend Reuben Erskine Williams of Norfolk, Virginia was selected on December 14, 1960. He accepted in February 1961, and was installed on Sunday, June 25, 1961.

Under his pastorship, the Girls Scouts were reactivated, but is no longer functioning. The Hostess Club and New Hope Club were organized.

A Gospel Choir and Men's Chorus were added to the music department.

As a result of church participation in an Every Member Canvas Program, the financial status was improved. The inside of the church was redecorated, the auditorium carpeted, the roof repaired and the organ reconditioned. Essential carpentry and electrical repairs were made at the parsonage. Equipment was purchased for the Primary Department to make it more beneficial for teaching and comfortable for the teacher and children. The Usher Board, with the cooperation of the church members and friends, had the kitchen renovated and purchased new pulpit furniture.

A basketball team was formed and became affiliated with the Church Basketball League. Some adult members of the congregation and fellow members from other churches formed a bowling team. Both teams have received numerous awards and trophies for their outstanding sportsmanship.

The Baptist Youth Fellowship hour, following Sunday morning worship service was also reactivated in an attempt to retain the youth in the church. In January 1970, a Youth and Church School Christian Education Program began with youth ages 10 to 18 meeting on Saturdays. They participated in dramatics, sewing lessons, knitting, crocheting, embroidery, art and carpentry. It was under the leadership of a University of Bridgeport drama student, James Evans, Stratford.

In 1962, the City of Bridgeport unveiled a redevelopment plan for the downtown area of our city, which included our church. Realizing that we would have to eventually relocate our church, the Official Board of Messiah began to look for acceptable locations to build our church. On June 17, 1964 the church voted to undertake a building fund to purchase property for a church.

After looking at several properties in various sections of the city, on December 15, 1965, the church voted to purchase real estate property on the corner of Grand Street and Hurd Avenue.

The property then consisted of a large used car sales lot, and an old school building. The intention was to renovate this building for an educational facility for the church.

On January 14, 1966, an agreement and contract was entered into with the Long Hill Construction Company to purchase said property for \$115,000. Mr. John Chisholm, a realtor and member of the church, handled the transaction and donated his commission of \$2,500 to the church, making the actual purchase price \$112,500.

In order to reduce the amount of money the church would have to borrow to purchase the property at Hurd Avenue and Grand Street, members of the church were asked to "Loan" the church money for this purpose. During the month of January 1966, the Board of Trustees issued promissory notes in various amounts to forty-one persons who loaned the church money at 5% interest for five years.

Twenty thousand dollars was received through promissory notes. Individuals, families, church auxiliaries and miscellaneous contributions donated an additional \$5,797. With additional funds taken from our church treasury, we paid \$45,000 on the property and assumed a \$67,000 mortgage at 6% interest payable in 15 years.

After three years and nine months the total indebtedness (\$118,961.44) on the Hurd Avenue and Grand Street property was paid and on Sunday, December 7, 1969, we burned the mortgage on the property.

In April 1970, all of the money loaned to the church through promissory notes was paid to the members. Although the church committed itself to pay interest on the money loaned, none of the members accepted the interest.

In 1970, the City of Bridgeport planned to build a middle school on the west side of the city in the vicinity of Buckingham Street, including our church parsonage.

The church, having been informed of these plans, authorized the Trustee Board and the pastor to obtain a new parsonage. Through their efforts a house at 44 Powell Place, Bridgeport was selected for the parsonage at the cost of \$46,000.

On July 27, 1970, payment of \$20,743 was made on the house and the church assumed a mortgage of \$25,257. The trustees signed the required papers and The Rev. and Mrs. Reuben E. Williams and daughter, Roslyn moved into the new parsonage.

In July 1971, the church, through Attorney Bruce Dillingham, negotiated with the city of Bridgeport to sell the former parsonage at 26 Buckingham Street for the price of \$23,500. Proceeds from that sale and an additional \$2,180, from the treasury, enabled the church to pay off the mortgage on the new parsonage in thirteen months.

A Mortgage Burning Ceremony for the parsonage was held on Sunday, September 19, 1971. An open house was held following the ceremony.

The greatest material opportunity given men to do is to BUILD THE HOUSE OF GOD. This privilege comes to most of us only once in a lifetime.

David Meyer, a representative from American Baptist Home Mission Society, investigated architectural firms to recommend. The Fletcher Thompson Architectural Company was selected.

In order to begin to raise the necessary funds for our new edifice, a capital funds campaign was launched in January 1971. David Meyer also obtained the service of Rev. Horace Taylor of the American Baptist Home Mission Societies to serve as the Director/Consultant for this capital fund campaign.

A committee was formed with the following chairpersons: Donald Clemons, General Chairman; Wiley Bowling, Publicity; Ophelia Bailey, Hostess; Dewey Amos, Evaluation; Joseph Raines, Treasurer; Thomas Blackwell, Advance Gifts; Inez Burton, Secretary; and James Cook, General Gifts.

Our victory goal for the campaign was \$200,000. The raising of adequate funds for the building was a great step forward, a step in faith. In order that everybody could do his or her part, proportionately, the pledges were made payable over a three year period.

The campaign was a tremendous success, not just in raising money, but in the fellowship shared, during the home visitations made to all of our members. Members had the opportunity to have a worthy part in the campaign to make possible an improved, enlarged, and expanded church ministry.

Although we had purchased land on Hurd Avenue and Grand Street for a probable construction of our new church, we were still desirous of relocating in the same area. On February 10, 1972, the Bridgeport Redevelopment Agency, in its renewal of the area, purchased our church building and land for \$179,000. We then bought the land back plus additional land from the Redevelopment Agency for \$74,181.

The church appealed to Superior Court and received an additional \$119,000, January 1973 from the Agency for our church building. The Redevelopment Agency took possession of our church building in April 1972, for which we paid one dollar a year until we moved into our new church in March 1976. Upon discovering that we would buy back our land at the present location and additional land, we began the construction of our new church. We were able to buy back the land for substantially less than what the Redevelopment Agency paid us for the property. Thus, we obtained the present location in March 1973.

For the next year and a half, we were busily engaged in the design of our new building. A committee was appointed to work on the design, periodically reporting to the membership on progress made. The architectural firm of Fletcher Thompson was engaged with Robert Mutrux as our design architect. Attorney Bruce Dillingham served as our attorney and Thompson, Hawley and Patterson was the builder.

In September 1973, the Trustee Board recommended the issuance of promissory notes for sale to members and associates, as a means of raising additional funds to erect the church. The board issued promissory notes, in April 1974, to 36 persons in multiples of \$100, payable in five years at a return rate of 6% per year.

A loan was secured from the People's Savings Bank for Construction and mortgage with 15 members as guarantors.

On December 29, 1974, a special 10:45 a.m. worship service was held. Afterwards the congregation marched the short distance to the new site for the groundbreaking ceremony – a glorious day for our church family. Our pastor extended an invitation to the public to attend both the worship service and the groundbreaking 90 minutes later.

Members of the ground breaking committee were Audra Allen, Chairman; Dorothy Edwards, Vice Chairman; Lucille Henderson, Secretary; John Chisholm, treasurer; and Bernice Ash, Lenora Brooks, Quinton Geter, J. Huie Pratt, and William Blackwell.

Others who took part in the ground breaking included William Blackwell, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees; Donald Clemons, Chairman of the Board of Deacons; Eleanor Holley, Church secretary; and Inez Holley, organist emeritus. Several long-time members of the congregation also took part.

The new church would provide us with larger and better facilities to worship and serve the Lord, to teach His Word, administer the affairs of the church, minister to the needs of our members on a daily basis and contribute to the spiritual enlightenment and uplifting of our city.

In January 1975, we started building our new church. William Blackwell, Deacon Quinton Geter, Dewey Amos and Rev. Reuben E. Williams served as the Building Committee. For the next fifteen months, at least one member was present each day, from start to finish of the building.

The new building, facing southwest toward Congress Street between the buildings of Bridgeport Police Headquarters and the Majestic-Loews Poli Theaters, was adjacent to our old church building, which the members could see, Sunday after Sunday, to note the progress on our new building. Several times, during construction the members were given a tour of the building.

In March 1976, our new edifice was completed.

The procession traveled east on Arch Street to Main Street, south on Main Street to Congress Street, turning west on Congress Street to the new House of Worship, while singing “We’ve Come This Far By Faith”.

On March 21, 1976, we held our last worship service in our old church building at 55 Arch Street, a landmark in the religious community since 1895. After completing part of the service we marched from the old church building to our new church building at 210 Congress Street. The procession was led by Rev. Reuben E. Williams, Pastor and William Blackwell, Chairman, Board of Trustees followed by the Official Board, choirs, ushers, members of the congregation and many friends.

Demolition of the old church building, April 1976, was completed soon after our entrance into the new church and the land space serves as our rear parking lot.

Members of the church were invited to take a brick for “keepsake”.

The 14,000 square foot new church, built on three levels, is built of off-white split-face brick with rustic ripples. The sanctuary seats 450-475 people. The choir loft seats 45-50 people with an additional 20-25 person on the top baptistery level. For overflow, the narthex is designed to seat 50-75. You may enter the building at the main level or lower level without using steps.

The building is completely fireproof with the latest in fire and lighting safety equipment. It is air conditioned with five different unit systems allowing the cooling of certain areas and rooms as needed. The heating and oil-fired systems are similarly operated to heat only where needed.

The sound system is two-circuit; one is piped from the sanctuary and heard throughout the building, the other in Fellowship Hall. There is a six-station intercom phone system with a built in paging system. Six telephone jacks are installed for incoming and outgoing calls.

The modern kitchen is fully equipped with an institutional dishwasher and a ten-burner gas stove with double oven. Kitchen units are installed on the main and upper levels.

The Fellowship Hall will seat approximately 250 for banquets and 350-375 for activities not requiring the use of tables. The chapel located on the lower level, seats approximately 50. The furnishings for the chapel include old pews from the balcony, which were used at Messiah for over 50 years.

The upper level includes six classrooms and one on the lower level. A large all-purpose area on the lower level is presently being used as a day care center.

There are nine restrooms throughout the building, two of which (lower level and narthex) are equipped for handicapped persons.

On March 27, 1976, the cornerstone was removed from the Arch Street building. It was quite a large stone. A metal box was removed from the stone.

On Sunday, March 28, 1976, the box and contents were displayed in the new edifice, after service. Some of the items were deteriorating and illegible.

On Sunday, May 16, 1976, we held our Service of Dedication for our new edifice. Dr. J. Jasper Freeman, Pastor of the Queen Street Baptist Church of Norfolk, Virginia was our guest speaker. Dr. Freeman eloquently proclaimed the Word of God as we all rejoiced in dedication our new church. Dr. Freeman had also been the guest speaker for the installation of our pastor, Rev. Reuben E. Williams, on Sunday, June 25, 1961.

Many dignitaries were in attendance at our Service of Dedication, including Nicholas Panuzio, Mayor of our city, The Rev. Richard Hardy, Pastor of First Baptist Church, Bridgeport, where Messiah had its beginning; representatives from the state and city, the persons involved in the building of our church, as well as a great number of our brothers and sisters from other churches who shared this grand and blessed occasion with us.

On Sunday afternoon, June 6, 1976, we held our Laying of the Cornerstone. The Rev. Reuben E. Williams, Pastor, conducted a worship service. He delivered a special message entitled "Christ the Cornerstone". Assisting in the worship service were Ethel Johnson, Alice Terry, William Wilson and Donald Clemons.

All choir members, along with the combined ushers boards and deacons participated in the program.

Enoch A. Parker, Sr. Grandmaster of Prince Hall Masons, Jurisdiction of Connecticut, was in charge of the actual laying of the cornerstone. The Grand Lodge, Prince Hall Masons, State of Connecticut, conducted the Laying of the Cornerstone Ceremony. Several of our members, also Masons, participated in the service.

Gladys Bailey, president of the Happy Hour Club, was in charge of refreshments.

The front of the "1895" cornerstone and a memorial plaque, in remembrance of our deceased members, are displayed in the narthex embedded in some of the brick from the exterior of the old building.

Still desirous of "remembering from whence we have come", and being practical, we retained numerous fixtures and pieces of equipment from the old building to be used in our new facility. The stained glass windows were re-cut and placed in the designed of the sanctuary and chapel windows; the pews from the balcony of the old building, given to Messiah by First Baptist Church are in the chapel...the cushions were re-upholstered; the carpet from the sanctuary was installed on the chapel floor; and some of the new pews purchased under the pastorate of Dr. Jacobs were re-designed into "circular pews" to fit the choir loft in our present church...of interest, (the fact that is) the cost of redesigning these pews was more than what new pews would have cost us, but we still held to..."lest we forget".

The pulpit furniture is from the old church. The new pipe organ installed in the church in 1910, having remained in use until we relocated, had to be dismantled. Being 66 years old, the organ had to be dismantled, and organ companies could not assure us that it would be serviceable if new parts were not obtainable. Although we were very desirous of bringing this old pipe organ into our new church, regretfully, we had to say "goodbye" to it. We did; however, we kept the "organ pipes" which are installed in our new sanctuary. We also brought the baby grand piano now in Fellowship Hall, and the old kitchen cabinets are installed in the new kitchen and serving area.

As the church activities expanded, Reverend Williams sought and received official approval for an assistant. In October, 1976, Reverend Vincent Lee Wimbush, became the first assistant to the pastor. While studying for a master's degree at Yale University Divinity School, New Haven, Connecticut, Reverend Wimbush held this position until completing his degree and accepting a scholarship to study at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts in September, 1978.

In the fall of 1976, we started our monthly mortgage payment to People's Savings Bank. Our Trustees, Chaired by William Blackwell, our Pastor Reverend Reuben E. Williams and the Official Board decided to invest any excess funds for a higher interest rate, rather than making advance payments on the mortgage. For the next ten years, we were in the process of paying off the mortgage. Due to the generosity of our members and the wondrous blessing of the Lord, it was not necessary for us to have a mortgage fund drive, or to make any special plea for mortgage money.

Also, the first scholarship, awarded in 1979, was the Messiah Baptist Church Scholarship in memory of the late Dr. Frank W. Jacobs, Mrs. Natalie Taylor Jacobs and Mrs. Arlie Snell. Since 1979, the Ministry has awarded more than 172 scholarships and given other financial aid totaling over \$255,000 through June 2008.

While making mortgage payments, there were improvements, additions and replacements made which includes: Lower-level, the ceiling in Fellowship Hall was lowered and ceiling lights installed, an office with storage space underneath was constructed in Fellowship Hall for use by the Church School staff, an inner door was installed in Fellowship Hall in line with the air conditioning unit, and storage cabinets built in the alcove, storage cabinets were built in the kitchen serving area and an archive built underneath the stairway near Fellowship Hall, and the kitchen island work area was re-designed to include lockable doors. Sanctuary: an entrance was constructed from the nursing station through the handicapped toilet in the narthex, a new organ and piano were purchased, and the Hymnals and pew Bibles were replaced.

To ensure the security of the building, outside lights connected to city streetlights were installed; and decorative bar grills were placed on lower-level windows.

In October 1980, Reverend Michael Blackwell was officially approved as the second assistant to the pastor. Reverend Blackwell, who was baptized and spent his youth in this church, held this position briefly before moving to New Haven, Connecticut to study for a master's degree at Yale University Divinity School in December 1980.

To fulfill the need for an assistant to the pastor, Reverend Harry Hayes became the third minister officially appointed for this position in March 1983. A graduate of the Connecticut School of Christian Religion in this city, Reverend Hayes serves as pulpit speaker, counselor, bible study instructor, as well as many other capacities.

At the annual meeting, January 24, 1986, a collective decision of The Reverend Reuben E. Williams, the Trustees and Official Boards and the membership was made to pay off the mortgage on the church. On February 27, 1986, the People's Savings Bank was paid \$190,819.68 to liquidate the mortgage. The officials paying the mortgage were The Reverend Reuben E. Williams, Pastor; William Blackwell, Chairman, Board of Trustees; Dewey Amos, Trustee and Neal Jones, Treasurer.

A celebration and ceremony were in order, the members agreed. On Sunday, March 16, 1986, during morning worship, the mortgage burning ceremony took place. It was indeed a glorious, praise worthy occasion. The Reverend Reuben E. Williams preached from Psalm 150. ...message, "Praise the Lord". The combined choir sang praises to God. Others participating in the service included, Rev. Harry Hayes, Assistant to the Pastor, William Blackwell, Chairman of the Trustee Board, as well as other members of the Trustee Board, Deacon Nelson Price, the oldest church member and Natasha Easter, representing the youth. Following the ceremony, a reception was held in Fellowship Hall.

When we purchased the property at Hurd Avenue and Grand Street, we planned to re-locate our church there. However, we were blessed to be able to build our new church at our same location. For the next twelve years, we leased the property to various tenants.

During this twelve-year period, property values dramatically increased. In 1986, we sold the Hurd Avenue and Grand Street property for more than three times its original cost.

Since our new church was paid for and we had no outstanding indebtedness, Reverend Williams recommended that the proceeds from the sale be placed in an endowment fund. Interest from the fund would be given to financially support our community activities: cultural enrichment, youth, community help, senior citizens, educational and smaller churches in need of financial assistance (for capital improvements or equipment).

At our Annual Church Meeting in January 1988, and a subsequent meeting the following month, the church voted approval for the Endowment Fund and specified use of interest. The principal amount of the fund would not be used for any other purpose for the next 25 years.

The Endowment Committee would always consist of the pastor, chairman of the trustee board, chairman of the deacon board, church treasurer and church secretary.

The Committee was empowered to invest the money, determine application procedure for request of funds, approve and grant such funds as it may determine. An annual report will be made at every church meeting and submitted any time during the year to the Official Board as requested.

Following the approval of the endowment fund, the committee spent the next seven months determining the process for allocating funds and investigating investments. The committee decided that for the first year, bank Certificates of Deposit would be the best and safest choice.

On October 31, 1988, with money received from the sale of Hurd Avenue and Grand Street and additional funds from the church treasury, the Messiah Baptist Church Endowment Fund was opened at two local banks with a total amount in both banks of one half million dollars. Disbursements of the interest, according to the guidelines of the fund, began January 1989.

Let God be praised for the 12 God fearing persons who conceived the idea of starting a church over a blacksmith shop in 1888. They were indeed wise, perceptive and had the faith to lay the foundation. The planted, many have watered, but God gave the increase.

We have undergone many significant changes in structure, organization activity and membership. Our blessings have been beyond number or count. We are convinced that the same God, who brought us thus far, will lead us on to greater heights in the years to come. Thanks be to God.

After 40 years of dedicated, committed and loyal services as pastor of Messiah Baptist Church, serving its membership and the surrounding community and representing the church at home and abroad, Reverend Williams decided to retire. Later, Reverend Williams and his wife Catherine moved to Matthews, NC.

A Pastor Search Committee was formed and an Announcement of Vacancy was made in August 2001 to churches, Religious Institutions and Schools of Theology. During the process of pastor search, several candidates were interviewed and scheduled to preach.

Reverend Tyrone P. Jones, IV, a pastoral candidate, was scheduled and preached on April 28, 2002. He was rescheduled and preached again on May 12, 2002. On June 16, 2002, the Pastor Search Committee announced to the church that he was the final and selected candidate for voting.

A membership meeting was scheduled for June 28, 2002. At that meeting the members present voted to call Reverend Tyrone P. Jones, IV as the fifth pastor of Messiah Baptist Church. Reverend Jones accepted and answered the call on that evening via telephone, and later officially by letter. His pastorate was made official on September 1, 2002. He was installed the weekend of March 14 – 16, 2003.

Pastor Jones brought to Messiah, the Bridgeport community, the State of Connecticut and the surrounding areas a ministry of “Empowerment” and our church has truly been made the better because of it.

Pastor Jones initiated the “Reverend Reuben E. Williams Day” at Messiah Baptist Church; which was held every year during the spring until Reverend Williams died August 19, 2006.

In the fall of 2003, Pastor Jones shared God's vision for Messiah. The vision detailed the need for Multi-faceted Ministries for the New Millennium and Beyond (Vision title M3) for the perpetual growth of Messiah.

Pastor Jones established and implemented the following, under the umbrella of the Vision:

- E Power Development Corp. (For the purpose of empowering the church, the community, and the world through partnership and collaboration for our seniors, young adults and youth population)
- Messiah Baptist Development, LLC (Created for the purpose of external ministry projects and land acquisition for perpetuation of Messiah and its ministries)
- In 2005, the Education/Scholarship Ministry conceived the idea of creating a "Tree of Giving" to be used as a fundraiser for the scholarship fund and acknowledge the donors. Pastor Jones approved the idea and decided that this Tree should also be used as a capital project and use different leaves to cover areas of donations, which would be given.
- Started a Pastor-taught Bible Study
- Implemented dress-down Sunday
- Unified Diaconate Ministry (men and women having the same title and responsibility)
- Hiring of Minister of Christian Discipleship, Youth Minister and New Director of Music
- Combining of several choirs to form the MBC Mass Choir. The MBC Mass Choir re-constitution was filmed by Yale University School of Music. The featured documentary titled, "You Can't Sing It for Them" was featured at the Hampton University Ministers' Conference
- Men of the Kingdom Fellowship (Men's Ministry), the MBC Women's Ministry, Minister to Women, Multi-Cultural Ministry, and Youth Explosion (Youth Conference, Youth Revival, Youth trips to Washington, DC, Six Flags Praise in the Park, other conventions)
- Health and Wellness Ministry (Daniels Fast, Daniels Table, Yearly Health Fair)
- Upgrade of sound system and improvement of aesthetics in the sanctuary (i.e. Banners, Cushioned Pews in Choir Stand, New Carpet)
- Installation of computer lab and re-design of church website, the establishment of the church logo, and featured services on Youtube and Vimeo. A ministry presence on Facebook as well.
- Messiah Baptist Church Library
- Inner Circle Ministry (A ministry designed to foster intentional relational power among the congregation with every member being assigned to a ministry house)
- Early Worship Service (7:45 a.m.) added
- Purchase of new fifteen passenger bus
- Purchase of a 20-space parking lot on the corner of Congress Street and Main Street.

Pastor Jones asked the church to engage in a capital campaign called the Faith Fund Initiative. This fund was for the sole purpose of funding other ministry projects under the M3 Vision and Beyond. Pastor Jones' model of ministry was to make sure that Messiah Baptist Church remained relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In order to foster relevant change, Pastor Jones sponsored a yearly leadership conference with facilitators from around the country coming to teach and train church leaders. It was through preaching and teaching that Pastor Jones reached many people for Christ both in and out of the Bridgeport community. The church experienced tremendous growth numerically and financially, under Pastor Jones' leadership. Pastor Jones established a radio broadcast for Messiah's reach to extend to the tri-state area.

After almost 10 years of dedicated service to Messiah Baptist Church and the Bridgeport Community. Pastor Jones' ministry assignment changed. On August 31, 2011, Pastor Jones announced to the congregation that the Lord led him to leave the Bridgeport area for a new ministry assignment in Columbia, MD. Pastor Jones preached his last sermon on Sunday September 25, 2011. His last day as pastor was on September 30, 2011. Pastor Jones left Messiah in the hands of the Lord, as he and his family journey to lead the First Baptist Church of Guilford, in Columbia, MD.

On October 1, 2011, Messiah Baptist Church was without pastor. The Deacons, Trustees and administrators continued to minister to the congregation. The associate ministers were very helpful to the Diaconate Ministry in supplying the pulpit.

A Pastor Search Committee was formed and began meeting in February 2012. An Announcement of Vacancy was made in April 2012 to churches, Religious Institutions and Schools of Theology. The deadline to submit applications was June 30, 2012. During the process of pastor search, 54 persons expressed interest and/or applied. Four candidates were interviewed and scheduled to preach.

Reverend James Bernard Logan, a pastoral candidate, was scheduled and preached on January 27, 2013. He was rescheduled and preached again on April 21, 2013. On May 26, 2013, the Pastor Search Committee announced to the church that Reverend James Bernard Logan was the final and selected one candidate for voting.

A membership meeting was scheduled for June 16, 2013. At that meeting the members voted to call Reverend James Bernard Logan as the sixth pastor of Messiah Baptist Church. Reverend Logan accepted and answered the call on that afternoon via telephone, and later officially by letter. He returned to the Messiah Baptist Church on July 7<sup>th</sup> to say, "Thank you", preach the Word and serve communion. As he entered the sanctuary, the congregation greeted him with applaud and a standing ovation. There were shouts of joy and praise. The church family knew that they were no longer without pastor. Their prayers were answered.

His pastorate officially began on September 1, 2013. However, Pastor Logan and his family were visible among the church family at Messiah Baptist Church, especially during the celebration of the church's 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary the weekend of July 12-14, 2013 and Vacation Bible School, July 15 – 19.

Pastor Logan was officially installed on March 17, 2014 as a part of a three-day celebration.

Pastor Logan brought to Messiah a well-rounded blend of education and experience. He is a graduate of both York College of the City University of New York with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration, and New York Theological Seminary where he earned a Master of Divinity degree. Currently Pastor Logan is a candidate for a Doctorate of Ministry degree at Dallas Theological Seminary, where his focus is Christian Education with concentrations in Marriage and Family Ministry and Change Management. He was bi-vocational for over 15 years with progressive management experience in the public and private market sectors that serve as an effective infrastructure for ministry.

Pastor Logan came to Messiah after serving as the Executive Pastor of The Convent Avenue Baptist Church in New York City and prior to that was faithful as the Children and Youth Pastor, impacting the lives of many children and youth in the Harlem community. Pastor Logan has a gift mix that enables him to minister effectively to all of the disciples at Messiah through teaching and preaching. This approach is undergirded with one of his favorite quotes, "no one cares how much you know, until they know how much you care".

The vision God has given Pastor Logan for our congregation is, "***Building people and transforming lives through Christ from the inside out***" - Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Ephesians 4:11-12. As the vision unfolds, Pastor Logan continues to lead the disciples of Messiah firmly and faithfully through the love of Jesus Christ and in obedience to the Great Commission.

We thank God for our new Pastor, our new First Lady, Virginia Caroline, and their daughters, Olivia and Sydney. As we move forward under the leadership of Pastor James B. Logan, we continue to build on our past as God moves us forward to minister to families, a community, a nation and a world that is indeed in need of the transformative power that only Christ can bring.

We firmly believe the best is yet to come!

#BuildingPeople #TransformingLives #InsideOut #TheBestIsYetToCome