Church Anniversary 69th (1); 2003-09-28

Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church

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HISTORY OF THE PILGRIM MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

On a Thursday evening, in the Spring of 1934, a small group of men and women left the fellowship of the Friendship Baptist Church which was pastored by the late Rev. Twilus Davis. The following Wednesday, Willie Gibson called a meeting at the home of Bro. Cleveland Allen at 222 Jefferson Avenue. A group of approximately thirty men and women met to discuss the idea of forming a Mission Group. The blessing of the Lord seemed to rest on the hearts of these troubled souls. The group continued to meet during the summer months of 1934 for the purpose of raising funds, solidarity and spiritual development. In August of the same year, the name Pilgrim Baptist Church, as submitted by Rosa Poole, would become the name of their future church.

An organizing committee was formed shortly thereafter. Rev. B.C. McCarly, the pastor of St. John Baptist Church, was sought by the early members to provide guidance in establishing the church. The missionary group selected various members to join and obtain letters for the purpose of organizing the church. At the Western New York Baptist District Association meeting Rev. BC. McCarly submitted the recommendation for organization of the Pilgrim Baptist Church. The recommendation was then perfected by Rev. Phillips and carried.

On September 19, 1934, at Jefferson Avenue, a "reality" was realized when the church elected its first officers: the late Rev. R.D. Harris was acting pastor, Mr. O.C. Madkins: Chairman of the Deacon Board, Mr. Willie Gibson: Chairman of the Trustee Board, Mr. Zenobia Alexander: Church Clerk, Mrs. Frances Moore: Financial Secretary, Mr. Luther Watts: Treasurer, Mr. James Ingram: Poor Saints Treasurer and Bessie Lytel: Building Fund Treasurer.

The late Rev. Harris worked dutifully as an interim pastor before Rev. Hosea Pickney was called to serve at the church. During this time, Pilgrim moved from 278 Jefferson Avenue to 488 Jefferson as its membership grew. In the Summer of 1936, Rev. Pickney resigned from the post as pastor after eighteen months of service. This forced our church to begin the process of securing a minister. The late Rev. Henry B. Shaw was selected to minister the flock of Pilgrim.

Under the guidance of Rev. Shaw, the church again moved to accommodate its ever increasing membership. The address was 214 Clinton Street. Many auxiliaries were created during this period: the Pastor's Aid, under the leadership of Sister Gertrude Lilly, Number One Choir, organized by Sister Bessie Lytel, Missionary Society under the leadership of Frances Moore, and the Usher Board under the leadership of Bro. Marshall Evans. The Gospel Chorus, White Rose Club, Red Circle Girls and Jr. Usher Board were also added.
Illness was ever present in the life of the late Rev. Shaw, In the Spring of 1940, his failing health forced him to resign after thirteen and half years of service. The late Rev. John Davis, an associate minister over the years, pastored Pilgrim until the calling of Rev. A.H. Banks.

In the Fall of 1949, Rev. Banks assumed the position of pastor. The membership continued to grow while the younger members began to take active roles in the church. After two years of service, Rev. Banks resigned. Rev. Davis was forced once again to guide the spiritual growth of the church. With prayers and saintly petitions, Pilgrim began to search for a pastor. Rev. Charles Alexander was selected. Rev. Alexander moved Pilgrim to 108 Clinton Street. The White Rose Club was reorganized under the leadership of its President, Sister Evelyn Frazier, during this time.

When Rev. Alexander resigned from the pastorate of the Church, it called a newly ordained minister, the Rev. Samuel Austin. With steadfast determination, initial apprehension and doubts to overcome, the congregation grew steadily into its present edifice. Along with the assistance of Rev. Davis, Rev. Austin encouraged men to take an active role in church affairs and set up a men’s organization known as the Laymen’s League.

The pride and dignity felt by the members of Pilgrim Church became contagious. Many new members were added and the name Pilgrim Baptist became nationally known as an ever progressing church. It was in this building period that the title Doctor of Divinity was bestowed upon Rev. Austin, and the church felt great sorrow when he resigned, but our members prayed and hoped for happiness. Rev. Davis picked up the spiritual pieces and supported us until a new minister was found. This time God sent a well-prepared leader, Rev. Richmond David Holloway, Jr. from Laurel, Mississippi. After assuming leadership, Rev. Holloway began preparing a program that lead to the realization of dreams of many members of Pilgrim.

Under the leadership of Rev. Holloway, the church beautified the classrooms of the educational building, installed a baptismal pool, rearranged choir stand, paved parking, added pew cushions and numerous other renovations, most recently new glass doors to the front of the edifice. Four memorial clubs and three state clubs were organized. During this period, the Youth Department became an interval part of the church under the direction of the late Beatrice Holloway. Mission Circle #1 was created with Sister Corrie Upshaw as President. In latter years, Sister Wanda Johnson was appointed President of Mission Circle #2.

In 1973, under the leadership of the Trustee Board and it’s chairman, the late Bro. Aaron Allen, Sr., Pilgrim burned its mortgage. The Laymen’s League invitation into the District Laymen’s League was extended to Pilgrim. Many ministers have

Out of the fold of Pilgrim has come several leaders in district, state and national associations. They are the late Deacon Cleveland Allen, the late Ervie Hilliard, Joe Morrow, Freddie Staples, Deacon Robert Staples, the late Deacon James Watkins, the late Grace Knox, the late Elijah Reed, the late Rev. Samuel Austin, Rev. John Hilliard, Rev. Whitfield Washington, and most recently: the late Aurelia Tinch, Machelle Smith, Doris Swink, Rev. Herman Potts, Mae Smith, Jimmie Green, Hattie Green, Martha Swink, Shirley Hall, Margaret Eison and our Superintendent of Sunday School, Bonita Nixon.

Pilgrim's stand in the community was increased with Pilgrim Village Housing Corporation. This Corporation led by Eugene Pierce along with Jack-Tram Developers secured ninety units of small family housing. Construction was started on August 1, 1980. These units remain filled today.

Under the leadership of Rev. Holloway for the past 40 years, we continue to grow and we are spiritually sound, always ready to serve with increasing faith and grace...how can we fail. We certainly can say with great pride, "I am a member of Pilgrim Baptist Church."