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HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

The Church was originally organized as an unincorporated Baptist religious organization sometime during the year of 1913. The fledgling Church, lacking a sanctuary, held religious services in the home of its members. Little is known about the history of the Church during the period of its initial organization to 1915, when it was reorganized by Rev. D. Robinson.

Rev. D. Robinson is considered to have been the first minister of Friendship. He was called to serve the Church in 1915 and served until his death in 1929. The Church secured its first permanent sanctuary, located at the corner of Pratt and Clinton Streets. Under the leadership of Rev. Robinson, the congregation grew to approximately 300 members. Rev. Robinson and the members saw that this growing Church needed to become an incorporated religious organization. On October 1, 1922, the trustees, deacons and ministers of Friendship met to organize Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, under the Religious Corporation Law of the State of New York. The initial trustees of Friendship were John C. Coleman, Elijah A. Thompson and John Cullens. The initial Board of Deacons consisted of Solomon Moore, James Wyatt, Miles White and Van Sims. The ministers named to serve the newly incorporated Church were Rev. D. Robinson, Rev. H.C. Taylor and Rev. G.W. Lee. The Certificate of Incorporation was filed in the Erie County Clerk's Office on May 1, 1923 (File No. 13793) and recorded in Liber 58 at page 185 of Certificates of Incorporations.

Friendship Missionary Baptist Church

The Church, during the time of Rev. Robinson's leadership continued to serve its members and particularly the youth by establishing and maintaining active Sunday School and Baptist Training Union programs. Additionally, the beginning of the Church's music department began with the organization of the Church Choir.

After the death of Rev. Robinson, the Rev. Twilus Davis was called in April of 1929 to be the second pastor of Friendship. Almost immediately upon becoming pastor of the Church, Rev. Davis and the Friendship family recognized that a plan had to be developed to enable the Church to strengthen its fiscal systems along with meeting the spiritual needs of the congregation. A committee was established to begin the planning for a new sanctuary to serve the ever growing membership.

On January 30, 1930, Rev. Davis obtained a parcel of land located at 146-148 Hickory Street near Clinton Street to be the site of the new sanctuary. The land was purchased with a \$4,000.00-loan from the Irish-American Savings and Loan Association and secured by mortgages of \$2,440.00 and \$1,560.00 dated February 4, 1930. To secure the cost of construction, Rev. Davis and his wife, Rosa obtained a mortgage from a Sam Doran and Samuel B. Darlich on February 4, 1930 in the principal amount of \$34,250.00.

Rev. Davis and his wife conveyed title of the property to the Church by way of a warranty deed dated February 1, 1930 subject to the mortgage liens, and which the Church agreed to repay (a total principal mortgage indebtedness of \$38,250.00).

The cornerstone for the new sanctuary was laid during the year 1931, with its dedication later that same year.

Rev. Davis left Friendship in 1938. Under his leadership in addition to the development, planning and construction of the new sanctuary, the membership grew to approximately 800 members.

The Church in 1939 called the Rev. Major J. Jenkins of Memphis, Tennessee to serve as its third pastor. Rev. Jenkins continued to follow through with the fiscal plan that had been developed to build the new sanctuary. The Irish-American mortgage debts were timely retired and the mortgage liens discharged during the year 1939 as they reached maturity. The Church furnished the sanctuary with new pews and completed finishing the basement.

The Church, under Rev. Jenkins' leadership, purchased a grocery store located at 407 Clinton Street from a Leila Clark on or about September 8, 1941. The purchase was financed by a giving Ms. Clark, a \$1,500.00 chattel mortgage on the fixtures and equipment of the store. The store, believed to be known as the Friendship Community Market, and was developed to serve the residents residing in the vicinity of the Church and the market.

Rev. Jenkins did not neglect his pastoral duties at Friendship. To that end, in addition to continuing the excellent programs already in place, he organized the Jenkins Choral Singers and the Nurses Guild.

Rev. Jenkins died in June of 1943. At the time of his death, membership at Friendship had grown to approximately 1,000 members.

In 1943, the Rev. Clarence L. Franklin (the father of mega singing star, Aretha Franklin) was called by the Church to be the fourth pastor. The emphasis the Church placed upon its youth was continued and expanded by Rev. Franklin with particular attention given to organizing youth groups to serve their needs. Strengthening the Sunday School and Baptist Training Union programs were also given high priorities.

Rev. Franklin and the congregation saw the need for the Church to acquire a parsonage. On May 26, 1944, the purchase of 179 Glenwood Avenue as the parsonage was completed. The purchase price was \$4,700.00. That purchase was financed with a \$3,500.00 6% interest mortgage from the Erie County Savings Bank, the balance having been furnished in cash.

On June 10, 1947, Friendship began to acquire the parcels that made up the site of the current sanctuary, by obtaining a parcel through a quit claim deed from a Carlton Fisher. In December of 1949, an additional parcel located at 402 Clinton Street was obtained by warranty deed from the Graber family for the sum of \$7,300.00.

Rev. Franklin began a Radio Ministry, broadcasting each Sunday morning from a local radio station in an attempt to fulfill the spiritual needs of those persons who for whatever reason could not attend the Church of their choice on Sunday mornings.

Rev. Franklin answered the call of New Bethel Baptist Church, Detroit, Michigan, and left Friendship in 1946. At the time of his departure, the membership of Friendship had grown to approximately 1,750 members.

The Church next called the Rev. Richard H. Dixon, Sr. to be its fifth pastor in 1946. Rev. Dixon established as a priority a campaign to retire the Church's debt. This campaign proved to be quite successful. By January 1, 1947, the Church's mortgage debt had been retired leaving the Church with a positive cash balance of approximately \$11,000.00. Rev. Dixon was instrumental in establishing a process to improve and renovate the sanctuary and other Church facilities as the need from time to time arose.

Rev. Dixon reorganized the Church's choirs into a musical alliance, through the support and assistance of his wife, E. Lett Dixon. Mrs. Dixon was actively involved in the music department. She assisted in preparing the choirs for services and concerts, directed plays and worked faithfully with the youth in the Church. Additionally, Rev. Dixon organized the Benevolent Society.

In 1948, Rev. Dixon left Friendship to organize and found the Second Temple Baptist Church. The membership following his departure fell to approximately 1,200 members.

The Rev. Edward D. McNeely was called by the Church to be its sixth pastor in 1948. During the period 1948 to the date of his death in 1978, Friendship was on the leading edge of social reform as it related to the spiritual growth and well being of the Friendship family and the City of Buffalo.

The Church's Federal Credit Union was established in 1961 to provide an alternative banking and financial format. A bowling league was established to provide a framework of cooperation and socialization outside of the normal Church activities, but within its spirit, aims and goals. The beginning of the Church's "Bus Ministry" was begun by Rev. McNeely with the acquisition of a single station wagon, and later a volkswagen van.

The Church was fast outgrowing its facility at 146-148 Hickory Street. Rev. McNeely, through the able assistance of the Board of Trustees chaired by Frank D. Hawkins, established a building fund, to facilitate the planning and building of a new sanctuary. The Board of Trustees began acquiring parcels on behalf of the Church. On November 10, 1952, the Church entered into a building contract with a Harold Coleman, d/b/a Prosperity Construction Company, 1115 North Compton Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri to construct the new facility at a cost of \$150,000.00. The terms of the contract required \$30,000.00 downpayment with an additional \$20,000.00 payment when work commenced on June 15, 1953. The balance of \$100,000.00 would be financed by the contractor. On June 7, 1953, ground was broken for the construction of the current sanctuary. On February 6, 1954, the Trustee Board chaired by Frank D. Hawkins, and whose other members included, Philip Roundtree, Wilburn Allen, Ernest Chappell and Wesley I. Hicks executed a quit claim deed conveying title to parcels known as 398, 400 and 402 Clinton Street to Friendship. On February 8, 1954, Friendship gave Harold Coleman a mortgage lien to secure the payment of \$100,000.00. The terms of the loan was for ten (10) years with an annual interest rate of 6%. The payments were to be made quarterly in installments of \$2,400.00 or more per quarter. Additional funding to build and furnish the new Church facility was obtained from Schweitzer and Company. This loan was secured by mortgages that were subsequently assumed by the Western New York Savings Bank (formerly Western Savings Bank of Buffalo). The Church acquired an additional parcel of land from a Carlton Fisher on February 18, 1954. Dedication services were held during the period August 7-24, 1954. The mortgage debt associated with the construction of the current sanctuary was retired in 1965.

In 1967, the Church decided to sell its parsonage located at 179 Glenwood Avenue and acquired another property located at 117 Humboldt Parkway for \$20,000.00. On August 1, 1967, title to 117 Humboldt Parkway was conveyed to the Church. Its acquisition was financed through a mortgage given to the Western Savings Bank of Buffalo in the principal amount of \$15,000.00 for a ten (10) year term at 6% interest. That mortgage was satisfied and discharged on December 7, 1967. The 179 Glenwood Avenue property was sold in December of 1967 for the sum of \$9,500.00.

Rev. McNeely and the Friendship family had an active interest in becoming a participant in the Federal Government's housing programs. Thus in the early 1960's, Friendship became one of the founding Churches in Towne Gardens Housing Development Fund Company, Inc. and Ellicott Community Redevelopment Foundation, Inc. These two developments, consists of a total of 600 units of subsidized housing for low and moderate income families. They remain a vital part of the quality housing stock of Buffalo. In 1974, Friendship endeavored to become part of a HUD sponsored Section 236 not-for-profit housing corporation that would build modular homes and place them in the Ellicott District.

Rev. McNeely knew that the future spiritual and economic growth of the Friendship family would require a christian education to ensure that African-American children and parents obtained the training, skills, and knowledge needed to become both a good christian, as well as a productive individual who would be able to care for themselves and their families. To that end, he begun the conceptualization of an education building being constructed adjacent to the newly completed Church. Unfortunately, his untimely passing on August 30, 1977 did not permit him to see the met fulfillment of that dream. He left behind his beloved wife, who has remained a strong member and supporter of Friendship.

During his tenure, Rev. McNeely oversaw, with great skill and dedication, the spiritual needs of the parishioners of Friendship, ordained seven ministers and led Friendship by the example of his hard work, dedication and service to others.

In July of 1978, the seventh and current pastor, the Rev. Albert Charles Ware answered the call to be the pastor of Friendship. During Rev. Ware's tenure, he has caused the reorganization of the Youth Department; Reestablished the Department of Christian Education and Bible Study; Church Auxiliary such as the Nurses Corp. (formerly the Nurses Guild) were expanded; instituted a mid-week noon prayer service; and obtained an IRS §501(c)(3) income tax exemption for the Church.

In the Music Department, Rev. Ware organized the A.C. Ware Angelic Choir. When it became apparent that the membership in the Mass Choir was falling to an unacceptable level, he reorganized the choirs into an alliance (The United Choir) in order to ensure that the Church would continue to have a Mass Choir.

The Church's Bus Ministry also has grown under Rev. Ware's leadership. The Church has acquired new equipment (1991 and 1993 Ford Vans) and constructed a four bay bus garage to house and service its entire fleet. The additional equipment has enabled the Bus Ministry to meet the demand for such service that had previously gone unmet.

In the tradition of all of his predecessors, Rev. Ware and the Board of Trustees were always seeking ways to improve the Church's facilities. To that end, an elevator was installed in order to make the Church accessible to the handicapped and infirmed, as well as the construction of the bus garage and parking lot.

Rev. Ware has remained active in the not-for-profit housing activity of the Church by providing leadership for Towne Gardens Housing Development Fund Company, Inc. and Ellicott Community Redevelopment Foundation, Inc. In addition, 50 units of housing has been developed by a not-for-profit housing company, Friendship Manor Housing Development Fund Company, Inc. to provide housing for the elderly and handicapped. Occupancy of these units began in 1992.

In addition to the \$250,000 renovation of the sanctuary and lower auditorium, the Education Wing has been completed at the cost of \$750,000. This multipurpose center houses office space for the pastor and secretary, a conference room, day care center and church school class rooms. The church will be able to expand its existing ministries, e.g., Sunshine Band (an outreach program which provides secular tutoring and Christian education for children ranging in age from 5 to 13 years of age), Missions & Brotherhood, Three Score Plus, Single Parents, Substance Abuse/Red Cross, Vacation Bible School and Youth Ministry.

A 1995 15-passenger van has been added to our Bus Ministry bringing the total number of vehicles to 5 (4 vans and a bus).

The church is currently involved in the Budget Food Club of the Food Bank of Western New York and the daily distribution of food to area residents.

Friendship Baptist Church is active in the Western District Baptist Association (Rev. Ware is the Moderator), the Empire Baptist Missionary Convention of New York State and the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.

Current enrollment is approximately 1,400 members.