

1921

## 1921-1998; Church History

Lincoln Memorial United Methodist Church

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## **A MOMENT IN OUR HISTORY: 1921-1998**

What some day would become Lincoln Memorial United Methodist Church began when the Rev. George H. Hollis, retired minister of the Delaware Conference, the Black division of the area's Methodist Episcopal Church, held prayer meetings with several families in the home of his upstairs neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester York at 484 Sycamore Street. The year was 1921, 1922.

As more people were attracted to these religious gatherings, the quarters soon became inadequate, and Rev. Hollis arranged for the group to hold services in the basement of Grace Methodist Episcopal Church at Michigan and North Division. By then, there were a choir, a ladies' aid and a young people's league, forerunner to our present UMYF. The year was 1923.

In 1924, Rev. Hollis, whose health was failing, contacted Rev. William R.A. Palmer of the Delaware Conference which appointed him official pastor of this small worshipping group who was, by then, called Grace Methodist Episcopal Mission. Rev. Palmer's first improvement was to move the services upstairs from the basement of the church, which necessitated holding services at noon after the morning services held by the regular Grace congregation were over. During this time, the Episcopal leadership of Buffalo was closing and consolidating some of its churches. One such church designated to be closed was Sentinel Methodist Episcopal Church at the corner of Howard and Monroe Streets. And so it was that in the Fall of 1925, the small congregation was incorporated as part of the Genesee Conference and was moved to the property on Monroe and Howard Streets. An eventful march to the new church home on a beautiful Sunday marked the occasion.

When the worshippers. Grace Methodist Episcopal Mission, were incorporated in the Genesee Conference in 1925, and for 17 years hence, they were designated an official missionary and church extension project of the Conference. Rev. William Palmer, their first official pastor and this group named the congregation Lincoln Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church. Among the founding families were the Yorks whose descendants include Madeline Anderson, Anna Evans, Geneva Herndon, Willie Evans; the Houses whose descendants include Maude Dorsey, Jessie Roberts, Willie Dorsey; Arthur and Caroline Williams; the James Robinsons whose descendants include the Currys; the Tillman brothers; the Mays; the Blacks; the Clemons; the Burns; the Moores; the Channels and the Simmons. The records of the Trustees and Official Board members, as it was called, list Joseph Spencer, Evans House, Frank Moore. George Smith, Dora Thorton, Sylvester York and Minie Walker, the first woman Trustee. In 1928, Lincoln Memorial celebrated its 5th Anniversary. By then, the church boasted a choir, Minister's Council, Church School, the Epworth League, a children's sewing class and included in its celebration activities Boy Scout night, a Buffalo District Supper. Young People's Night, Choir Night, Children's Hour, Women's Service, Men's Service and Masquerade Party. The young congregation was off to a good start, blessed with dedicated and hardworking members and the desire to praise God in an organized fashion.

In 1929, Rev. Palmer was replaced by the Rev. William H. Horner who was assigned by the Delaware Conference to become our new pastor. Through the ensuing years that spanned four decades, Lincoln became well established in the community and well respected in the Genesee Conference and by fellow Methodist Episcopalians. Under Mrs. Horner, the daughter of the late Dr. Charles Tinley, renowned author of many of the Hymns we sing even now, the choir grew in stature and reputation. She was known throughout the area and the state for her choral arrangements and musical plays. Some of her musical arrangements are still being used today. She worked very diligently with the Sunday School and the Children's Division, and hardly a child in the church or in the school across the street on Monroe (School 75), escaped her eye or her musical genius as each holiday was an occasion for a play or pageant. In 1953, the building occupied by Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church at Masten Street and Northland Avenue, was offered to Lincoln for the purchase price of \$150,000. It was considered well worth \$750,000. As an inducement, the Genesee Conference, through its Advanced Program, arranged to give Lincoln \$50,000 toward the purchase price. The property on Howard Street was sold for \$55,000 representing its escalated worth due to extensive repairs, renovations and increasing property values.

And thus, on another historic occasion on July 4, 1954, Rev. Horner, moved the Lincoln congregation to its new location as co-tenants with Trinity Church for seven months. Seven years later in June, 1961, the members, having rallied to their financial obligations, were able to burn the mortgage in an inspiring and moving ceremony. The illustrious ministry of Rev. William Horner lasted for 36 1/2 years, ending on November 1, 1965 with his transfer to Warren Methodist Episcopal Church in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania.

Following the departure of Rev. William H. Horner as minister in 1965, the Rev. Willard A. Williams was appointed to take over the ministerial duties of Lincoln Memorial. His appointment was made official on January 1, 1966. During his ministry, Rev. Williams sought to make the programs of the church more relevant not only to the congregation, but to the community at large. He worked to improve the organization of the church commissions and clubs, created the office of Black Community Developer, set up a library, and instituted preparatory classes for prospective new members. And as the church's ministry grew and improved, so did its physical surroundings: The parlor was remodeled and furnished, making it more homelike; the sanctuary was renovated: a playground was constructed across the street from the education wing.

Of great significance during this period, all Evangelical United Brethren and Methodist Episcopal churches merged to form the United Methodist Church, and in 1968, Lincoln Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church became Lincoln Memorial United Methodist Church. Rev. Williams remained our minister until September, 1970 when he left to join the Board of Discipleship, Division of Education of the United Methodist Church in Nashville, Tennessee

Following the ministry of Rev. Willard Williams, the Rev. Edmund Millet was appointed

Lincoln Memorial's 5<sup>th</sup> pastor on October, 1970. Rev. Millet was transferred from St. Andrews United Methodist Church located here in Buffalo. Growth - spiritually, organizationally, and physically, continued. One of Rev. Millet's first tasks was to organize a committee to design and publish a church newsletter, and on December, 1971, the first edition of FOCUS was published. Also during this time, a new parsonage was purchased on Woodard Avenue, and restoration of the church began. In 1973, several of the women's organizations were united into one fellowship under the name of the United Methodist Women. Later, the women's circles were organized. At first designated circles A, B and C. they were later named for early members or founders of the church: Rachel York, Sadie Johnson, and Emma J. Horner. Eventually the Utopia Circle, now known as the Pauline T. Smith Circle was added. Fund-raising took on a new meaning as we showcased celebrity musicians and sponsored annual concerts at Kleinhans Music Hall. Some of the guest artists included Nancy Wilson, Joe Williams, Count Basie, Ray Charles.

1973 marked our 50th Anniversary which was celebrated with gala Golden Jubilee festivities that began in October and continued through January 6, 1974. As we concluded the celebration, Rev. Horner, back as a guest speaker, left us with this challenge which is still relevant: "GO FORTH, LINCOLN. THE WORLD NEEDS IT; GOD DESERVES IT; AND YOUR CAPABILITIES WILL NOT BE REALIZED UNTIL YOU DO. GO FORTH, LINCOLN."

The ministry of Rev. Edmund Millet emphasized full church participation and involvement. The basketball team, bowling league, Cub Scouts, Sewing classes, Day Care Center were just some of the areas of activities. He took "charge" of former minister, Rev. Horner seriously, that is: "Go Forth, Lincoln." His ministry at Lincoln Memorial ended with his transfer to Calvary United Methodist Church in Detroit, Michigan in 1977.

On January 15, 1978, the Rev. Walter Barton was appointed minister of Lincoln. During this period, a library was set up on the 3rd floor in memory of Pauline T. Smith, a project initiated by Usher Board #2: in 1984, the membership considered and decided against a proposal from Asbury Delaware United Methodist Church to merge the two congregations and use the Delaware Avenue site; a new roof and furnace were installed in 1984 and 1985; Usher Board #-2 renamed itself the Blanche Nelson usher Board at a testimonial banquet honoring Mrs. Nelson; our first van was purchased; and the membership, in 1985, rededicated the pews in a drive led by the Senior Choir. The proceeds funded the painting of the sanctuary. In 1986, after eight years, Rev. Barton's ministry at Lincoln ended.

Upon the departure of Rev. Walter Barton in January, 1986, the Rev. Everett Spring, who was a retired minister at the time, was appointed interim pastor. He remained at Lincoln until July when the Rev. Melba Varner Chaney was appointed. In October of that year Lincoln Memorial observed its 63rd anniversary. During Pastor Chaney's tenure, the church, through the African American Heritage Study Committee conducted a number of enlightening programs in this area; the Summer Enrichment Program for children ages 5-12 was instituted with the goal of helping children understand their heritage, learn about it through Bible study and develop positive self-esteem and physical growth; and the wonderful pageant "Heaven Bound" was a successful

production that brought us joy and community support.

Lincoln Memorial became a part of the District Vitalization experiment at the time of Pastor Chaney's appointment and set goals for community outreach, church restoration, improved financial stability, and increased congregational involvement. The Contemporary Choir was organized, the Literacy Volunteer program was hosted. An ambitious fund-raising campaign for church restoration was planned and undertaken under the theme, "Rebuild Lincoln: Keep Our Beacon Bright." The late Laretta Anderson composed the music and lyrics for the occasion.

In 1993, Pastor Melba Varner Chaney, our 8th minister, saw us through another milestone anniversary celebration—our 70th. Her ministry was followed by interim Minister, the Rev. David E. Durham in 1995.

Rev. Durham was no stranger to us as a warm relationship with him had begun sometime earlier through the congregation exchange with Central Park United Methodist Church which he pastored until his retirement. Lincoln continued to evolve spiritually and organizationally. The Worship committee initiated the Sunday morning Devotional Service that preceded, and prepared the congregation for, the Sunday worship service. In 1995, the Administrative Council received a proposal to assist Durham Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church on Eagle Street with the Central City Cafe in feeding the hungry in the East side area. This program was approved and is still being operated with the assistance of a dedicated volunteer group from Lincoln. The Summer Enrichment and After School Programs expanded in scope and grew in numbers. The annual Lenten services, led by members of this church each Wednesday during Lent attest to our willingness and devotion to sharing our time and talents. And Rev. Durham gave us his time and talent for almost a year until the Rev. Dr. James S. Webb, Jr. was appointed Minister of Lincoln Memorial in July, 1996.

Rev. Webb's ministry is devoted to spiritual growth, community involvement, program expansion and organizational effectiveness. As we celebrate 75 years of Christ Within Us, we continue to grow and be proud: A Gospel choir has been added to our music ministry; the pulpit is frequently shared with visiting ministers and the church is often invited to be a part, of Revivals and other special services of our sister churches in the community; we assist in providing to the needy through our participation in the Christmas toy distribution. The UMYF and other youth ministries are active as well as a basketball competing team; community outreach extends to youth who participate in our Sunday School and the other youth activities.

Lincoln, as a church, continues to write pages for new milestones even as we celebrate, with pride, 75 Years of Christ Within Us. WE ARE TRULY BLESSED!