

HISTORY OF THE ABYSSINIA BAPTIST CHURCH

1932

Rooted—Regenerated—Reinvesting

The history of the Abyssinia Baptist Church reveals the power and influence of spiritual guidance and everlasting faith that all things are possible through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

During the trying days of the early 1930 's when many homes did not know where the next meal was coming from, Brother Material Meaders, a man of deep religious convictions and a strong faith in God, saw a need for prayer in his neighborhood. In the spring of 1932, he organized a few of his Christian friends and neighbors into a prayer band. This prayer band met once a week in his home at 816 New Hampshire Avenue, N. W., Washington, D. C. Among them were Mr. and Mrs. William Hardy, William and Cornelia Jones, Maria Scott, Oscar and Lucille Stephens, and John and Dora Womack.

The scenery changed as the location of the prayer band moved in 1933 to 2013 M Street N. W. Washington, D. C., to a house Brother Meaders rented. There Rev. and Mrs. C. Frontry, Rev. and Mrs. Dennis McGee, and Rev. Jesse and Mrs. Rosa Witherspoon joined the group in praising the Lord. Others attending the early prayer meetings included James and Alice Hester, Lydia Meaders, Emma Purcell, Walter Sturdivant, Felton Thomas, and Rev. and Mrs. Raefield Thomas.

With the increase in spiritual and numerical growth, the prayer band moved to a larger place at 1919 L Street, N. W., D. C., now the site of the Black Rooster Pub. Yet it was on this site where the prayer band became a Mission.

The size of this Mission, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, continued to increase and the group continued to sojourn to their land of Promise. On December 6, 1936, they arrived at 1923 L Street, N.W., D. C., now the site of a Staples Office Supply store. It was at this location that the mission was recognized and added into the sisterhood of churches and the name Abyssinian Baptist Church was adopted with Rev. Jesse Witherspoon serving as the first Pastor.

With the naming of a Pastor, church structure began to formulate as four men were set apart to serve as the church's first Deacon Board. They were: Willie Hardy, Pate Harris, Material Meaders and John Womack. Shortly thereafter, the Deaconess Board was organized with three Deaconesses: Lydia

Meaders, Rosa Witherspoon and Dora Womack. Deacon Pate Harris served as the first Sunday School Superintendent, while Deaconess Rosa Witherspoon served as the first Mission President, and Sister Vashti Barbour served as the church pianist.

Sometime after 1936, the church was able to purchase its first building, a larger house at 1136 19th Street N.W., D.C. However, in 1946, that building was sold and four lots were purchased for \$10.00 by Deacon and Deaconess Meaders at 5316 Maple Road (known

today as 4814 Deanwood Drive) in Deanwood Park, MD. Moving Abyssinian out of D.C. into the suburbs of Maryland.

In October 1946, a groundbreaking service for the new church was held. Officiating with Pastor Witherspoon was the late Rev. Arthur Lockett, Sr., Pastor of the Sylvan Vista Baptist Church, and the Rev. James Wyatt, Pastor of the First Baptist Church Highland Park, Landover, MD. During the construction of the new edifice worship services were held in the basement of the home of Mr. Fred Williams, a neighbor next door to the church. After the groundbreaking, Pastor Witherspoon stepped down as Pastor due to health concerns and Rev. Aaron McCombs stepped in to lead the congregation.

June 1947, the new church was completed, and Rev. McCombs led the congregation as they moved into their new place of worship. The church was a lower basement structure and is still standing and serving as a house of Worship for another congregation.

In 1948, Rev. McCombs resigned as pastor and Rev. Jesse Witherspoon returned making him the first and third pastor of this congregation. On March 31, 1948, the church received its Certificate of Incorporation. Rev. Witherspoon's leadership led the way in birthing many organizations to meet the growing needs of the church's ministry. His greatest emphasis was in Home and Foreign Missions.

The first 25 years of the church's sojourn, sacrifice and service aided Abyssinian in rooting herself in worship and the work of the Almighty God. Lives were being changed, souls being saved, and services rendered as the Holy Spirit moved and worked in the minds and hearts of our founders.

An additional highlight of that work was the licensing of our first minister, Deacon Isaiah Lyons in 1955. This move of God we will set as the church's beginning season of regeneration. The following year (1956) Rev. Witherspoon resigned as pastor, feeling he accomplished what God had purposed him to do.

On March 22, 1957, Rev. Leroy Jamison accepted the call to pastor and move the church forward into her new season. Under his pastorate significant strides were made in building Christian unity and church leadership. It was under his leadership the church became involved with the Baptist Training Union (BTU) to aid in the further equipping of the saints. Rev. Jamison resigned as pastor in 1960.

After Rev. Jamison's departure, Rev. James Simmons served as pastor for a brief period in 1961, continuing the work. Then in the late 1961, Rev. Moses J. Lifsey was called to lead this body of believers. Known for his organizational skills along with the preaching of the gospel, he added ministries for children and youth, drafted new building plans, and purchased additional properties adjacent to the then current property. He also encouraged the church to extend her reach beyond the church's walls into the community through Evangelism. Rev. Lifsey resigned in the fall of 1968.

In 1969, Rev. Carl L. Headen was called to serve as pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church. By

this time, the church was well on its way to becoming an intrinsic part of the Deanwood Park community. Rev. Headen led the church and the Deanwood community in addressing the challenges facing the Christian mission and emerging social issues. Abyssinian was often the host of many community meetings and revival activities. In 1976, Rev. Headen resigned as pastor.

In 1976 the church requested a minister from the Southern Maryland Baptist Association to serve as the interim pastor. Rev. Julius Prince served while the search for the next pastor was going forth. Rev. Prince's season of dedication, concern and leadership held the flock together, until December 29, 1977, when God blessed Abyssinian with a 20th century Moses, Rev. George E. Davis. Rev. Davis assumed his pastoral duties on January 8, 1978 and was installed on Sunday, April 30, 1978. Having faith that this was God's will for the church, Abyssinian family fell deeply in love with their new pastor and his family.

With a strong belief in prayer, fasting, tithing, and community services, Rev. Davis began to prepare God's people for another move. He informed the congregation that the current location would not be adequate for the ministry God had in store for them. Under his leadership the church soared to higher heights in spirituality, community outreach, tithing increased, a new order of worship initiated, property

was purchased for new a church building at 4705 Addison Road, and the church's name was amended to Abyssinia. Motivated by the vision, a building fund drive began and the church broke ground for a new edifice in August 1979. The new edifice was dedicated on April 13, 1980. (current site)

The 1980s also brought the Golden Anniversary celebration, remembering and reaping once again the benefits of God excellent greatness. Deacon Robert Singletary, Brother Ricky Miles, Deacon Walter Hamrick, and Sister Nina Conner were licensed to preach the gospel. Minister Robert Singletary was the first minister ordained by the church and Minister Nina Conner; the first woman ordained by the church.

In the 1990s Sister Esca Lee was consecrated as a Deaconess and Deaconess Mottie V. Davis was bestowed the title of Church Mother. The church started to focus on training and began ministering to inmates through the Good News Jail and Prison Ministry on Mondays and Thursdays at Prince George's County Correctional Facility.

Pastor Davis instituted the Wednesday Noonday Prayer hour following the inspiration of founder, Brother Meaders. In January 1998, a financial plan, called the "Holy Day of Sharing" was initiated to liquidate the church's mortgage within the next five years. On May 16, 2001, the church celebrated the burning of the mortgage ahead of schedule with a joyful praise service.

On August 24, 2001, our church was honored to have Nash Street, renamed to "Leroy Gorham Drive" after the late Trustee-Emeritus Leroy Gorham for his outstanding services to the Chapel Oaks Volunteer Fire Department (Station 38).

Biblical, scholastic and vocational education continues to be emphasized amongst the congregation, both in-house and through other mediums around the area. Abyssinia youth participated in numerous oratorical contests, returning with First, Second and Third place

awards for outstanding oratorical skills in conjunction with the application of God's word in their lives. As a missionary oriented church, we have participated in mission trips to Mississippi, Florida, Oklahoma and other missionary activities.

Pastor Davis departed this earthly life August 11, 2004 while still serving this congregation. We will forever be grateful and remember him for all his labors and his 26 years of leadership.

On May 22, 2006, another minister of the Gospel was birthed from within our ranks as Deacon Jesse Jackson was licensed to preach the gospel under the interim pastorate of Dr. Clark A. Houston. Dr. Houston served as interim pastor from 2004 to 2006 while the church prayed and was searching for their next leader.

On June 26, 2006, the Reverend Dr. Robert W. Trice Jr., was called to serve as our ninth Pastor. He began preaching as the Pastor-Elect on September 10, 2006. Under the leadership of Pastor Trice Abyssinia experienced the birth of ministries focusing on personal and spiritual empowerment. He has energized and evangelized our members to strive for excellence in all areas of ministry, challenging them in their biblical education and social consciousness as well as spiritual disciplines. His leadership has brought forth a harvest of souls to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Pastor Trice continues to guide us along our God given journey and directs us in our Kingdom focused efforts.

For every mountain of transfiguration experience, there is a reminder of the work to be done in the valley. It is there where needs must be met, people cared for, and souls to be led that others may experience the love of Christ. Because of these needs, ministering to others continues to be the focus for the church. Abyssinia partners with the Kettering Baptist Church in the Warm Nights program, preparing a full-course hot breakfast for the homeless. Each 1st Wednesday, residents from the Carroll Manor Nursing Home of D.C. attend the Noonday prayer service and are prepared a hot meal before leaving. The church has partnered with Robert R. Gray Elementary School – providing coats, hats, and gloves to needy students and family members. The Young Adults Ministry sponsors an annual Back to School Rally, giving school supplies to returning students in the church and the community. The children of Vacation Bible School, each year choose a mission project to learn the importance of serving others. A recent project was Flip Flops for Haiti in which they sent boxes of new shoes as a mission's project. For two years, VBS sponsored Going Green for the King recycling campaign to raise awareness to recycling and protecting the environment. The Usher's Ministry coordinates the annual Matthew's Project providing food baskets during Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays to families in need. The ministry of serving others is especially important to this congregation. As God continues to guide and provide, we shall strive to be the church of the community and not just a church in the community.

In January 2007 Children's Church was instituted, offering children a forum to learn and worship God on a level in which they can relate. In June 2008, Evangelist Frances Brown was added to the ministerial staff; January 2009 Brother Antoine Barnes was ordained to the Deacon Ministry, and a few months later (April 2009), First Lady Kim Trice was consecrated to the Deaconess Ministry.

Abyssinia also travels to Central Union Mission every 5th Monday to worship and share the gospel message. The church was recognized by the Mission in 2011 for over 15 years of committed service without a single absence and always arriving with no less than 6 persons.

Other ministries, mission projects and activities have been birthed during these past 80 years of history to address the needs that existed. Some continue to render service while others have become inactive. Christian living, through diverse small group classes such as M-PACT (youth ministry), AM SAVED (young adult men's ministry), Y-LOVE (young girls mentoring ministry), each designed to share the gospel message in a relevant manner. Also reorganized and revived have been the Angels of Praise liturgical dance ministry and WOW – Women of Worth (adult women's ministry).

Abyssinia realizes we are only here for a season. It is in that season, that we take our stand, offer our hand to reinvest what has been invested into us by the Master. It is our prayer that the footprints of our presence will illuminate the Glory of God, who has brought us thus far and as He carries us onward.