

History of Pilgrim Journey Baptist Church

The initial idea of the Pilgrim Journey Baptist Church originated in 1887 when a group of neighbors affiliated with the Elijah Community Hall began to meet occasionally for the purpose of Sunday school and extensive Bible study. The sessions were led by Reverend John Burton and Reverend Sherman Morse and included such memorable workers as James Garner, Phillip Pondexter, Randall Burrell, Lizzie Burrell, Lucy Burrell, and Martha Burrell. The building of the church was motivated by Randell Burrell. This small group of people with a deep desire and strong aspirations laid the ground work for what was to become the Pilgrim Journey Baptist Church. The church was erected on a parcel of land donated to the group by Elijah Hall. The land was located next to Elijah Hall. Church services were held in Elijah Hall while the work continued on the church.

The church was completed in 1892 and adopted the name Pilgrim Journey Baptist Church from Pilgrim, the name of the community it was to serve. It called its first pastor, the Reverend Andrew Jackson, and appointed its first Deacon Board, composed of Randall Burrell, James Garner, Phillip Poindexter and Baylor Winston. The pastor, deacons and a few members turned to the community and surrounding areas seeking membership as the community's spiritual needs grew. In an era of limited transportation, the proximity of the church to the community made it possible for greater participation in church activities. In 1911, the Reverend Nelson McCargo was called to Pilgrim Journey. Reverend McCargo is remembered for his strong youth program. During Reverend McCargo's pastorate, the late Madams Clara Coleman and Lucy Coleman were converted and baptized. When Reverend McCargo left, he was replaced by Reverend John E Fountain in 1914. Reverend Fountain was the pastor of Pilgrim Journey for 40 years. Pilgrim expanded in membership and mission during his tenure. During this time the church was blessed as four of its sons were called into the ministry. They were the Rev. Joseph N. Robinson, Dr. Maryland T. Fleming, Sr., Benjamin T. Starke, deceased and Rev. Emmett Fleming, Sr. Pilgrim Journey experienced the first of two devastating fires in 1923. The entire building and all records were destroyed. This disaster strengthened an already united membership, and with faith in the Almighty God, cooperation of Reverend Fountain and a hard working congregation, the Pilgrim Journey Baptist Church was rebuilt in 1925. The history of this church would not be complete without mentioning the name of the late Mrs. Emma W. Diggs. She was responsible for numerous Christian programs and was well-known as a Christian lady in the church and community. She donated the money for the first radiator heating system used in Pilgrim Journey in the 1940's. Mrs. Diggs served Pilgrim Journey as President of the Ladies Auxiliary Usher Board, and as a Missionary for many years until failing health prevented her participation. She died in 1957.

Reverend Earnest C. Fogle accepted the pastorate of Pilgrim Journey in 1954. He served the church and community well for nine years. During Rev. Fogle's tenure, disaster again struck Pilgrim Journey. On March 20, 1960, the church was for the second time in its history, completely destroyed by fire. While the remains were still smoldering, the members met for worship and voted unanimously to rebuild. That day the members were reminded that the church is not the building, but it is made up of a certain kind of people. In October 1961, ground breaking service was held. Services were held at neighboring churches and then at the Union

Public School, while the church was being rebuilt. The new church building was completed in June 1962. Rev Benjamin Starke led the congregation in dedicatory services of the new church building on July 1, 1962. A humble and grateful congregation praised God for his generosity.

Reverend James I Brooks became the next pastor of Pilgrim Journey in September 1963. Rev. Brooks' program stressed salvation through preaching, teaching, mission and education. He was dedicated toward saving souls. The church made great strides under the leadership of Rev. Brooks.

On May 26, 1968, Reverend King of Gravel Hill Baptist Church spoke at the Mortgage burning service. The burning of the mortgage was conducted by Miss Pheola Epps and the late Deacon James Winston. In this same year, Reverend Leroy Jones became the shepherd for the Pilgrim Journey flock. He was officially installed on June 30, 1968. Under Rev. Jones' untiring and urging leadership, the church has progressed spiritually and financially. Rev. Jones stresses Bible study, missions and education. Two sons and one daughter accepted the call to the gospel ministry during the early years of Rev. Jones' ministry. They are Dr. Ralph Henley, Rev. Gerald Fleming and Evangelist Ethel Green.

As the membership increased and educational needs became more pressing, it became obvious that the church building needed to expand. Also, during this time the area around the church changed from residential to commercial. The church began to experience problems associated with this change. Thefts and vandalism of the church property began to occur and traffic congestion made entrance and exiting difficult. After much study and prayer, the congregation voted to relocate the Pilgrim Journey Baptist Church.

The Trustee Board, which consisted of Chairman Thomas Kenney, Charlie Chamberlayne, Tyrone Kenney, James Thompson and John R. Valentine, Sr. was authorized to begin a search for a parcel of land large enough on which to build a church. The Trustees were also instructed to locate a buyer for the Broad Street property. A parcel of land was located in the 7200 block of Bethlehem Road. The congregation voted to purchase the land and to sell the Broad Street property to Richmond Hotel Developers Unlimited. The congregation further agreed to have the remains removed from the church grave yard and re-interred at Rose Lawn Memorial Gardens Cemetery in Hanover County, Virginia.

In spite of heavy hearts, yet with great anticipation and thankfulness, Rev. Jones led the congregation in the final morning worship service at 7009 West Broad on December 2, 1984.

This service was followed at 1:30pm by Ground Breaking Services at the new location on Bethlehem Road. The oldest member in attendance was the late Mrs. Clara Coleman and the youngest member was Jamal Cooper.

The beginning of the next phase in the history of Pilgrim Journey Baptist Church commence on December 9, 1984. Services were held at the Masonic Lodge on Callison Drive in Glen Allen, Virginia while construction took place on the new church building. On July 13 1985, the cornerstone laying service for the new building was conducted by the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge, Host Lodge, Limelight Lodge no 301 with Ralph Christian, Sr. as Worshipful Master.

The Pilgrim Journey congregation looked forward to the completion of the new church and with eagerness on December 15, 1985 Rev. Leroy Jones assisted by Thomas Kenney led in the ribbon cutting ceremony and led the congregation into its new home at 7204 Bethlehem Road for the first morning service. The dedication service was held in March 1986 . It was also voted on in 1986 to purchase the land adjacent to the church for future expansion. A committee was organized to make plans on how the land was to be purchased and paid for . This committee was spearheaded by Mrs. Florence Harris. The land was purchased for \$85,000 and paid for in less than five years.

The congregation continued to grow in Grace and attendance. In 1989 Pilgrim Journey appointed its first Assistant Pastor, Rev. Darrell Williams. The church was further blessed with the following associate minister: Rev. Major Coles, Rev. Jess Rufus, Rev. Derrick Jones, Rev. Mary Jackson. Rev. Craig Ester, Rev. Victor Williams, Rev. S. Janine Hyman, Rev. Sharone Davis, Rev. Dwight Shanklin, Rev. Elijah Thornton and Rev. Britt Starghill.

The church family spent the year 1991 celebrating God's goodness. This was quite a milestone in our history. We celebrated 100 years of being established and being the beneficiaries of God 's Grace and Mercy.

In the year of 1995 Dea. Florence Harris spearheaded another committee which was named "Project 2000". This committee was later named "Building For the Future".

In June of 1997 Rev. Leroy Jones announced his retirement after having served for 29 years, Rev. Jones was a faithful and very dedicated servant of God. Rev. Jones' theme in life was "You are not completely dressed without a smile" . September of 1997 Dr. Harold Braxton became the interim minister. During Dr. Braxton's tenure Lamont Gooding accepted the call into the ministry.

In the 1999 the Rev. Angelo Virtus Chatmon accepted the position as Pastor of the Pilgrim Journey Baptist Church. He was installed and became our 7th pastor. Under Rev. Chatmon's leadership we have adopted the Pilgrim Journey Invocation. Mrs. Bessie Brent and Mrs. Shirley Knight were installed as deaconess. Deaconess Kate Starke was reinstated. Dea. John Ballard and Dea. Ruth Ballard (the first female Dea. Of PJBC) was accepted as deacons. Also under Rev. Chatmon's leadership our Evangelism and Public Ministry- Rev. Kenneth Myrik facilitator The health Ministry-Rev. Greg Howard- facilitator, The Pilgrim Journey's newsletter- Jackie Lightfoot Editor was started. Other ministries which have been initiated are The Elm Tree, Praise Dance ministries.

The church has continued to grow. Several pieces of land have been purchased by the church in the surrounding area from the Coopers and Mattie White. In December of 2000, the Deaconess was ordained as deacons. They were Bessie Brent, Florence Harris, Julia Hopkins, Renee Jones, Shirley Knight, Kate Starkes, Phyllis Waddey, Joyce Williams, Lillian Wooten and Bessie Henley. Florestine M Johnson and Mary Madu were installed as Trustees.

On June 24, 2001 Judy Pollard was the first female licensed to the ministry. This was the

beginning of many. Sisters Linda Gresham, Shaniqua Jones, Jacquelyn Lightfoot, Julia Hopkins, Jenee Gilchrist, Brothers Justin House, George Jordan, and Robert Hill, were also licensed into the ministry. Rev. Linda Gresham, Rev. Lamont Gooding, Rev. Justin House, Rev Greg Howard, Rev. Jacquelyn Lightfoot, Rev. Antoine Britt and Rev. Marquita Burton, and Rev. Timothy Jones have been Ordained. The deacon Board has been increased by the ordaining of Sisters Laverne Coles, Minta Bell, Nichelle Cooper and Pamela Knight.

With GOD'S EVERLOVING Grace and Mercy the Pilgrim Journey Baptist Church continue to
"Move Forward by Faith!"