



Our Church History

In the Beginning

During the Reconstruction Era, the recently emancipated came to the waterfront seeking homes. The James River afforded the work to get the resources – food, shelter, and clothing – essentials of life. Thus, came large numbers of wandering people to the banks of The James to find these necessities. There were no churches in this section of the city (then Henrico County) at the time. A few families were connected with the First African Baptist Church, then located at 14th and Broad Streets.

The initial start for a church in this area came in the year of 1866, just one year after the Civil War, when some men of vision and faith in God, under the leadership of Rev. Daniel James, assembled and prayed. They decided in their deliberation to meet regularly from home to home to hold prayer services. Thus, on the Tenth day of May 1869, following many such prayer meetings, the Rising Mount Zion Baptist Church came into being in a little Quaker Schoolhouse on Hague Street in the Fulton Area, now called “Rocketts.” The church was named by Marshall B. Goodall.

1869 - 1879

Rev. Horatio Harris became the first pastor of Rising Mount Zion Baptist Church. Rev. Daniel James was the first clerk. Matthew Johnson and Robert McKay became the first Deacons, and Archie Warren was the first song leader. The organization hymn was Another Day’s Work is Done. The church was supported by 22 other charter members and assisted by Henry Brown of the First African Baptist Church. The first Sunday School was organized by Horatio Harris, Jr. who became the first superintendent. In 1874, the members purchased the Quaker School Building, but not the land. Rev. Harris resigned in 1875 and was succeeded by the Rev. Archie Ferguson. Following one of Rev. Ferguson’s revival services, 108 candidates were baptized and added to the church.

1880 - 1904

The church grew, however, in 1880 the church separated and Rev. Ferguson led a group in organizing the Mount Calvary Baptist Church. Rev. Abraham Cross then became the pastor of Rising Mount Zion. Deacon Whiting led the Sunday School movement as superintendent of the Sunday School from 1875 until 1912. Rev. Daniel James became the fourth pastor of the church and served until the latter part of the 1890’s. As the church grew, a lot at Graham and Erin Streets was purchased from a Mr. Cottrell and a wooden structure was erected. On September 14, 1889, trustees Leonard Smith, William Anderson and Henry Brown finalized the purchase of the adjoining 15-foot frontage of land from Mrs. Amanda Allen, the wife of William Allen, both members of the congregation. On October 24, 1892, the congregation began holding services at the Odd Fellows’ Hall on Nicholson Street and the Graham and Erin Streets structure was torn down. Then on this 45-foot frontage lot at Graham and Erin Streets, a Mr. Charley began



building the first unit of the new brick structure on March 1, 1893. Although not yet completed, a dedication service for the two-story structure was conducted with Rev. W. H. White as the speaker. The dedication song was Joy to the World. A pop bottle with the church's history and 33 cents was put in the cornerstone.

The Rev. Fendall W. Williams, a student of Virginia Union University, assumed the pastorate of the church at the turn of the century. The church took on new life under the leadership of Rev. Williams. Mrs. Maria Fleming was the angel of mercy among the families of our church and community in times of sickness and death. Mrs. Mary Jones Pittman worked with the children and youth as well as nursed the sick of the congregation. Mr. LeRoy Morris lent fervor to the Christian and spiritual life as the song leader. Brother Herbert (Hurt) Stamper was a spiritual singer of great force.

1905 - 1920

While serving the Union Baptist Church in Ashland, Virginia, Rev. Nelson B. Brown was called to Rising Mount Zion Baptist Church in 1905. By 1915 the church was actively engaged in missionary and educational work. In all of Rev. Brown's endeavors for the church, he was ably assisted by his wife, Mrs. Alice Brown, who was the organizer of the Infant Department of the Sunday School. Rev. Brown was also supported by an able board of deacons and trustees. Deacon Herbert White not only served as choir director (total of 29 years) but he followed Deacon Whiting in 1912 as superintendent of the Sunday School. Deacon White led the latter position until 1922. Mr. Adolphus White, brother of Deacon Preston White, served the church as an efficient clerk for 26 years. In October 1926, he was succeeded in the position by Mr. Harvey G. Howlett. Under the leadership of Mrs. Annie Whiting Brown, the missionary circle became affiliated with the Baptist Convention of Virginia Women. The Candlestick Club was also organized during Rev. Brown's pastorate.

1921 - 1942

In September 1921, the Rev. Obadiah B. Simms became the seventh pastor of this church. This was the beginning of a 20-year ministry in Zion. Not only was there growth in the church, but the Sunday School also grew under the leadership of Deacon Arthur white, who followed Deacon Herbert White as superintendent from 1922 to 1944. However, for a short period of time (1936-1938) Deacon Herbert White resumed his former position as superintendent of the Sunday School. Deacon Arthur White was also the organizer for the church for many years. Miss Theresita N. Braxton followed the dedicated Miss Lorene Johnson as superintendent of the Infant Department for the Sunday School from 1937 to 1943.

On April 12, 1926, the church authorized the establishment of the Deaconess Board, which consisted of ten charter members. Other church groups organized during this time were: The Faithful Few Club (March 23, 1927), the Senior Ushers and Auxiliary Boards (1927), and the Pilgrim Travelers Club (May 1, 1935). The Joseph Smith Memorial Usher Board, organized in 1940, bears the name of a conscientious young member whose work of art hangs in a back room



of the church. It was during this time that the Junior Choir was organized under the direction of Mrs. Rebecca Simms and Mrs. Hattie Allen Brooks.

1943 - 1949

Rev. James H. Robinson came to Rising Mount Zion in May of 1943 and was later installed as its eighth pastor in October of that same year. Under his administration, the attendance at Rising Mount Zion more than doubled and 226 persons were added to the church. Of historic significance, during Rev. Robinson's ministry was the installation in the sanctuary of a bronze memorial plaque to all former pastors of Rising Mount Zion Baptist Church. Major church improvements during his pastorate were the installation of an electric organ and a new stairway in the front of the church. The Willing Workers Club was organized with Mrs. Virginia White Jordan as the first president. Mrs. Charlotte Hope, as president of the Spratley-Allen Missionary Circle, was a leader not only in the missionary work of this church, but also of the city. Mrs. Hope led our missionaries in active participation in the Lott Carey Foreign Missionary Society.

1950 - 1958

On December 17, 1950, the Rev. E. Paul Simms began his pastorate at Rising Mount Zion Baptist Church. In addition to being an associate professor of speech at Virginia Union University, he brought with him a wealth of experience having worked for some time as a social worker. Some of the improvements planned prior to Rev. Simms' pastorate were finalized during his administration, such as the installation of modern restrooms and a church kitchen. The Decoration Club, organized May 12, 1951, donated furnishings to the kitchen and had a chain-link fence built around the church's property in the rear and improved the landscape with shrubbery.

In 1954, further physical improvement was made on the church in covering the outer walls with Permastone. Before the project was completed, the church experienced unusual financial difficulties. Two members, Mr. Calvin Gaskins and Mr. Horace Fleming came to the rescue by making a loan of almost \$3,000. In December of that same year, Rev. Peter G. Crawford began serving as pastor. At the time of his installation in May 1955, 34 new members had been added to the fellowship. Rev. Crawford was the editor of the Goodwill Voice, the official publication of the Goodwill Baptist Convention.

1959 - 1968

Rev. James Ealey was installed as the eleventh pastor of Rising Mount Zion Baptist Church in January 1959, after having served as interim pastor of the church for six months. Rev. Ealey was active in the community and civic affairs in the city. He was on the Executive Board of Bethlehem Center. He also served as the secretary of the Baptist Ministerial Conference of Richmond and Vicinity. Rev. Ealey organized the Children's Hour, a Saturday assembly of the children for religious education. Under his leadership, the Inspirational Choir was organized. Major church improvements during his administration were the installation of an Allen organ, a public address system and electric fans.



As a prelude to the 90th anniversary of the church, on May 9, 1959, Virginia Union University Day was held in Fulton at Rising Mount Zion Baptist Church. At the invitation of the church and some 60 persons of the community who graduated from or attended Virginia Union University, President Samuel D. Proctor spoke and the VUU choir under the direction of William Goodwin sang to the edification of all who joined in this celebration. One of the most inspirational and lofty occasions in the community took place at the church on June 30, 1963. The men of the church gave the Commander Recognition Award to Commander Samuel L. Gravely, Jr., of the US Navy who was the first Black to achieve the rank of Commander. In 1966, the church authorized a church scholarship fund to financially help high school graduates who entered college.

1969 - 1974

Rev. Franklyn Richardson, Jr. was called to become the twelfth pastor of Rising Mount Zion in 1969. He served from 1969 to 1975. During his administration, our bus ministry was established. Rev. Richardson served for a number of years as a member of the Capital Regional Airport Commission. Through his leadership, the youth ministry markedly expanded, offering the young people exposure to many cultural and educational experiences. Rev. Richardson was instrumental in planning the impending Urban Renewal Project for the Fulton area; thereby, formulating the foundation for the subsequent move to the present site of our church.

1976 - 1996

Rev. Leroy M. Bray, Jr. followed Rev. Richardson as the thirteenth pastor. Soon after his coming, Rising Mount Zion moved to the present site at Hartman Street and Elkridge Lane, due to the renewal program in the Fulton area. A day care center, a scouting program, and a new singing group, The Voices of Zion, were among some of the additions to the church under Rev. Bray's leadership. Rev. Bray served until 1996.

1997 - 2002

In 1997, Dr. Joseph Dancey, Jr. succeeded Rev. Bray as interim pastor, and a year later he became Zion's fourteenth pastor. Under his leadership, the church ramp was built. Following Dr. Dancey, Rev. Lawrence Samuels served as interim pastor. It was his spirited leadership that kept Zion moving forward, until God sent our present shepherd.

2003 - Present

In 2003, God united Zion with Rev. Roscoe D. Cooper, III. Under Pastor Cooper's leadership, Zion has grown spiritually, physically and financially. In his first three years at Zion, the congregation almost tripled in size. Throughout Pastor Cooper's tenure, the church continues to astronomically expand its membership and the ministries and services it provides. Zion has added an electrifying 8:15AM worship service as well as enhanced its Worship on Wednesday (W.O.W.) service. In addition to these successful strides, Zion continues to embark on new technological advances as well as continuing to improve God's house. Zion began and completed Phase-I of a three-phase



masterplan of a much needed multi-million dollar facility. Rising Mount Zion Baptist Church continues to serve as a place of hope...a place where people can come and be themselves...a place where everyone is welcomed and loved! We give ALL GLORY to God for the great things He has done and continues to do here at Rising Mount Zion Baptist Church!