

## OVERVIEW OF FIFTY YEARS OF WORSHIP AND PRAISE

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September 10, 1966, a group of 42 people acting on faith joined together and conceived Bethel Baptist Church. One hundred and twenty years after the Franklindale Baptist Church was built, this unoccupied building was purchased by Bethel Baptist Church in 1967 for \$7,500. Only a few of the original 42 signers constituted the core membership who entered the new Bethel Baptist Church holding Sunday service, Sunday school and other meetings in the basement where a potbelly stove was the only source of heat. This group worked feverishly removing mounds of debris, replacing broken windows with stained glass, and beautifying the sanctuary. They were joined by more believers who readied the “ole ship of Zion” for the dedication of a new church. On Sunday afternoon, October 15, 1967, the congregation gathered with community people in attendance for the official dedication of Bethel Missionary Baptist Church, the new name of the church.

The seeds to grow were sewn during the first ten years of worship under the first three pastors: the Reverend Clarence T. Carson (1966); Reverend Gordon E. Henderson (1967-74); and Reverend Willie L. Hardin (1975-78). These leaders were the “foundation builders” and served as part-time pastors. The church was incorporated on September 18, 1976. The Reverend Eddie L. McBride was installed as the first full-time pastor serving from 1979-81. In August, 1982 the Reverend Dr. Edward L. Hunt affirmed the offer to serve as pastor. On November 28, 1982 he was installed as the fifth pastor. In 1984 the church building was listed by New York State as part of the Wappingers Historic District.

Guided by the Holy Spirit, Pastor Hunt has served a growing and vibrant Bethel Missionary Baptist Church for thirty-four years. The Glory of God has surrounded the Bethel family with continuous blessings. The Deacon Ministry consists of ten ordained deacons and there are five associate ministers; thirteen deaconesses, and one deaconess emerita; and eleven trustees. Bethel has eight church officers, a director of music, a church historian and assistant historian. There are four choirs; a worship and praise team; an usher ministry; weekly prayer and Bible study meetings; and Sunday School, which includes age/grade level classes as well as an adult specialty class. Other ministries are Black History, Book Club, Education, Glory to God Outreach, Health/AIDS, Hospitality, Media, Men’s Fellowship, Missionaries, Petals on the Pulpit, Liturgical Dancers/Mime/Stompers and several youth ministries. During the year there are spiritual retreats for women and youth, as well as a summer Bible School. Beginning in 1982, the Music Ministry has presented the annual Christmas concert every year. Since January 1989 the church has hosted the Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Commemorative program. During the Black History month of February, different black history facts are posted in each week’s service bulletin. Among other annual events are the Church Outing (July), Health Fair, Golf Tournament, Scholarship Luncheon (June) and several ministries’ concerts. During the fall the Black History Ministry presents a relevant historical film showing. Once each month meals are prepared and distributed to a homeless shelter. In 1997, the need for additional meeting space spurred the congregation to acquire the 13-room Kerrigan House formerly located on the site of the new church. On November 16, 2002, an additional Sunday worship service was instituted allowing two services at 8 a.m. and 10:45 a.m.

The faith in God demonstrated in 1966 to establish a church, was the same faith exhibited to build a new edifice. On October 11, 2009 a 556-seat extension of Bethel Missionary Baptist Church was dedicated as The Glory to God Sanctuary symbolizing the completion of the first new church building in Wappingers Falls since 1877. The former worship building is now Founders Hall and is a part of the congregation’s Phase II expansion plans.

This 2016 year commemorates fifty years of worship and praise shrouded in faith as this congregation has weathered storms and basked in the showers of His blessings thanking Him for being so good. The membership is over 400 worshippers praising His name and trusting in His will as He leads the Bethel Missionary Baptist Church to “fish” for the salvation of souls.

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen.” *Ephesians 3:20-21*