

Moving to A Higher Ground
A Narrative History of Mt. Zion Baptist Church
by William F. Sims, Church Historian

In 1869, African-Americans who lived in Fletcher Bottom about eight miles southwest of Indianapolis usually worshiped at the White Lick Colored Baptist Church near Bridgeport or at the Lick Creek Baptist Church near Beech Grove. Sometimes during the year, seven or eight persons who represented the two congregations met on Fletcher's Farm to organize a new church. It is not know whether this group were ex-slaves or freed men, but most of them apparently lived on Fletcher's Farm. It had been only seven years since the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862 and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1866 that conferred citizenship upon Black Americans.

It is believed that founding group included Armma McCrackman, a charter member and perhaps Lucy Woodridge who was 104 years old when she died in 1925. Ramsey Dirks an original member was probably just a child in 1869, but he remembered the first meeting place of this new congregation. Hobart Banks was a boy in the early 1900s when he recall this story told by Ramsey Dirks. Mr. Banks who died in 1996 at 98 years old had been a member for 85 years. Mr. Dirks shared that the owner of Fletcher's Farm donated an old abandon tool shed to the members of the new congregation. He remembered watching the men of Fletcher's Farm picking up that old tool shed and miraculously carrying it from lowland up a hill to higher ground. There they reset the tool shed and added on to it. Because it was set on a hill, they called this new church Mt. Zion. As Hobart Banks retold this story there were sparkles in his eyes. He stated that he read that Mt. Zion meant "higher ground". And since that day in Fletcher's Bottom, Mt. Zion has been on the move to higher ground..

From its humble beginning until the present, Mt. Zion has always sought to live up to its name. The congregation's determination to do the will of God is evident in its progress during the past 130 years. Mt. Zion has truly been a people of faith. Its mission has been steadfast, immovable and always abounding in the work of the Lord. Its journey has indeed been a move toward higher ground. From an abandon tool shed on Fletcher's Farm to a house on Railroad and Second St. ; to its first edifice at that location (1872 - 1907); From its second edifice at 12th and Fayette Street(1908-1960) to a magnificent limestone cathedral at 35th Street, Boulevard Place and Graceland Avenue(1960 - present).

Since its founding in 1869, twenty pastors(includes interim pastors) have served Mt. Zion. Mt. Zion 's pastors have come from various backgrounds. Its pastors included persons who have held offices in the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc Indiana General Missionary Baptist Convention and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial State Convention.

Mt. Zion through the years has been a trailblazer and a Spiritual leader in the Indianapolis community. Mt. Zion was one of the first African-American congregation to join the Church Federation of Indianapolis and the Indianapolis Baptist Association(American Baptist Churches). Mt. Zion has been leader in the development of a daycare center, senior citizen housing, healthcare center and the organization of the first black church sponsored federal credit union in Indiana.

Mt. Zion has been a leader in community outreach, Christian Education, Youth Ministry and worship. Its worship has included sound biblical preaching enhanced by good church music. The music ministry has been inclusive of anthems, gospel, Negro spirituals, choral selections and hymns of faith. In addition to its various vocal choirs, there is also a Handbell choir.

The membership of Mt. Zion has over the years has been predominantly African-American, but during the eighties six to eight members were caucasian. Through the years the Mt. Zion family has included persons from many professions and walks to life. During the 45-year pastorate of Dr. R. T. Andrews, Sr. (1939-1984) there was a heavy concentration of educators and professional persons inclusive of laborers, business persons, teachers, principals, and government personnel. The membership of the church has seen decline and growth over the years. From its eight founding members to a membership of 150 in 1880; to 350 between 1883 - 1890; to 500 in 1907.

In 1907 the membership dropped to 190, but by 1921 increased to 1050 under the leadership of Rev. G. W. Ward. According to historical data, high membership of 1150 was reached during the Andrews years. Since 1984 church membership has declined from 800 to 550 persons.

Since the demise of Mt. Zion's longest pastorate, R. T. Andrews in 1984, four pastors have served the congregation, Rev. James W. Robinson was interim pastor 1987-1988, Dr. Joseph H. Finnell was pastor from 1988 until his untimely death in February 1997. Dr. M. Samuel Pinkston served as interim pastor, 1997 - 1998. The current pastor, Dr. Philip Karl James was called from the Beautiful Plain Baptist Church of Binghamton, New York came to serve as Mt. Zion's 20th pastor.

So the faith journey continues, a people prepares to move to even higher ground. Looking toward the God of our fathers, and remembering the God of our heritage, Mt. Zion is setting new goals for the future. We shall not forget our humble beginning, but we will build on the foundations of our ancestors as we embrace the new millennium and continue the journey to Higher Ground..

Known Pastors of Mt. Zion Baptist Church
Indianapolis, Indiana
1869 - 1999

Pastors Between 1869 - 1878

1. Rev. William Neal
2. Reverend Baxter
3. Elder Andrew Simms
4. Reverend William Singleton

5. Reverend David Slaughter
(1878-1880)
6. Reverend Harvey Bloodworth
(1880-1883)

Pastors Between 1883 -1890

7. Reverend Edward Thomas
(Short-term)
8. Reverend Tom Huffman
(Short-term)
9. Reverend James M. Morton
(18 months)
10. Reverend B. F. Farrell
1890-1906
11. Reverend Harris
(1906-1907)
12. Rev. G. William Ward
(1907 - 1921)
13. Reverend S. B. Butler
(1921 - 1931)
14. Dr. Marshall A. Talley
(1931-1937)
15. Reverend Cornell E. Talley
Interim (12/37 - 1/38)
16. Dr. R. T. Andrews, Sr.
1939 - 1984)
17. Rev. James W. Robinson
Interim (1987-1988)
18. Dr. Joseph H. Finnell
(1988 - 1997)
19. Dr. M. Samuel Pinkston
Interim (1997 - 1998)
20. Dr. Philip Karl James
(1998 - Present)

CONGRATULATIONS AND BEST WISHES TO MOUNT ZION BAPTIST
CHURCH ON OUR 130TH ANNIVERSARY

MOUNT ZION LAYMEN

1/2 PAGE AD WITH PICTURE

CONGRATULATIONS TO MOUNT ZION ON 130 YEARS OF SERVICE IN
THE NAME OF JESUS.

MALE CHORUS

1/8 PAGE AD





OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA 46204-2797

FRANK O'BANNON
GOVERNOR

September 26, 1999

Ms. Agnes Shelton Talib
Mount Zion Baptist Church
35th Street – Graceland Avenue and Boulevard Place
Indianapolis, IN 46208

Dear Ms. Talib and members of the Mount Zion Baptist Church family:

Congratulations on your first 130 years of continued service to the community of Indianapolis. What a wonderful event to celebrate!

You and your church family have much to celebrate. You have built well upon rich foundation of faith and service. Your ancestors would be proud of the work you have continued in their tradition. It is through spiritual communities such as yours that our neighborhoods are strengthened and our lives are enriched. I commend you on your sense of community and your consistently strong spirituality that provides a beacon for all citizens.

Best wishes on your celebration. Judy and I will be with you in spirit.

Sincerely,

Frank O'Bannon

FOB/jad

LIFE LINE CLUB MEMBERSHIP ROSTER

Mattie Watson President.
Barbara Jenkins Vice.President.
Ruth Walker Recording Secretary.

Crystal Harris Ass.Recording Secretary.
Addie Jones Financial Secretary.
Mentha Conner Ass.Financial Secretary
Joseph Shelton Treasurer

John Conner Liason Deacon, For our Club

Ruth Gardner Chaplin.

Earon Dinwiddie

Louis Dinwiddie

Beatrice Davis

Middie Jenkins

Pauline Nesbitt

Margaret Shirley



HISTORY OF THE MT. ZION GOSPEL CHOIR

PROGRAMME

The Mt. Zion Gospel Choir was organized by the late, great Dr. R. T. Andrews, Sr., Pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church.

The Church had been without a "Gospel Choir" for some time. It was the feeling of the Pastor and other members of the congregation, that a "Gospel Choir" would enhance and increase the night service attendance rate.

Our first director was Roosevelt Squires and he really started the choir out on a good firm foundation. After Mr. Squires became ill and could no longer be with us, we experienced "up and down" periods, but with our perservation and the help and encouragement of our pastor, we managed to stay together. One thought that was left with us by Mr. Squires was to: "Never disband; just keep meeting, through good times and bad." We almost died so many times that Rev. Andrews gave us the nick name of "HIS CAT CHOIR."

Subsequently, we were blessed with loyal and faithful directors. Among them were: Mrs. Earlee Combs, Mrs. Pearl Williams and Mrs. Ruth McGruder. For a while, before our present director, Mrs. Vernie Newcomb came to us, we carried on with the assistance of Mrs. Minnie Hawkins and our own Dennis H. Freeman, who at the time was a young teenager. Then...God blessed us and sent our beloved Mrs. Vernie Newcomb. Mrs. Newcomb has been with us now for over 40 years and we have the greatest respect for her.

We pray that God will continue to bless us with Sister Newcomb's dedicated service for many, many, more years.

Master of Ceremony	Ivan Baird
Announcement & Call To Worship	
*Processional	Gospel Choir & St. John Chancel Choir
"We've Come This Far By Faith"	
Scripture Reading	Sister Elizabeth Smith
Invocation	Brother Odell Gray
*Congregational Hymn #191	"Glory To His Name"
Words of Welcome	Sister Mattie Watson
Response	Guest Choir Designate
History of the Mt. Gospel Choir & Memorial Recognition of Decreased Members	Sister Sharon Hooks
Introduction of Guest Director & Presentation of the St. John Choir	
By The Director	Brother Alfred Finnell
THE PROGRAM - PART 1	
Offertory	Finance Committee
THE PROGRAM - PART 2	
Additional Inspiration-Solo Presented by Director	Bro. James Gibson
*Invitation to Discipleship	Paster Pinkston
Hymn #229	"I Need Thee Every Hour"
Remarks	
Anniversary Chairperson	Diane Marshall
Remarks & Benediction	Pastor Pinkston

WHEREVER THE * APPEARS, THE CONGREGATION WILL STAND

Full Page Ad / Names
& History & Picture

MT. ZION GOSPEL CHOIR MEMBERSHIP

Mrs. Vernie Newcomb, Directress

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| Ivan Baird | Janet Means |
| Cherrie Barbour | Nathaniel Scott |
| Bessie Burnside | Elizabeth Smith |
| Augusta Combs | Mrs. Howard Smith |
| Bertha Davis | Maggie Smith |
| Margarete Derickson | Virginia Spaulding |
| Alfred Finnell | Norman Thompson |
| Odell Gray | Mildred Walker |
| Jean Holder | Ruth Walker |
| Sharon Hooks | Mattie Watson |
| Anna Jones | Angela Williams |
| Texana Lange | Fred Williams |
| Mary Langford | Charles Woodward |
| Diane Marshall | Hope Wray |

A NOTE OF GRATITUDE

The Mt. Zion Gospel Choir is very grateful to everyone for their attendance, or for assisting in any manner in this observance. We especially thank the directors of the St. John Chancel Choir and to each of it's members for the very fine and outstanding service which they have rendered in making this observance and service to be long remembered.

We pray for God's blessings to be with you as you continually sing His praises.

MT. ZION BAPTIST CHURCH
GOSPEL CHOIR'S FIFTY-EIGHTH
ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
Sunday, October 19, 1997
4:00 P.M.

Presenting
THE CHANCEL CHOIR OF THE
ST. JOHN MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

"Make a joyful shout unto God,
all the earth.
Sing out the honor of His name.
Make His praise glorious."

- Psalm 66-Verse 1-2

Rev. Dr. M. Samuel Pinkston
Interim Pastor

