

**Short History of Bethel A. M. E. Church, Detroit, Michigan**

Johns Stewart, free, and a Methodist, born in Powhattan county, Virginia was the first Negro Protestant Missionary to the Indians in his section. He began work in the year 1816, arriving at Wyandotte Village, near Detroit. So successful were his efforts that in 1819 this work was taken in charge by the Ohio Conference of the M. E. Church, under the operation of its Missionary Society.

The first Colored Methodist Society organized in Detroit proper, was in 1839, and was afterwards merged into Bethel A. M. E. Church. This organization held its meetings in an old building near Woodward Ave., known as Military Hall, located on the north side of Congress Street. This hall was granted by the Common Council on July 9, 1839 to the Colored Methodists and was removed with a few weeks to Croghan Street, near the northwest corner of Hastings St., on what was known as "Father Armstrong's" lot. It was while there that John M. Brown, afterwards Bishop in the A. M. E. Church was made an exhorter.

On May 10, 1841, this society was definitely organized under control of the African Methodist Church, hence the origin of the Bethel A. M. E. Church of Detroit, Michigan. The society remained at Croghan Street nearly two years and then moved to Fort St. East. The building was at the same time moved, neatly fitted up, and formally dedicated on June 4, 1842. The next effort of the society was the erection of a brick church on the south side of Lafayette Street, which cost \$2,000. The lot purchased on June 5, 1845 cost \$300.00. The church was 40 by 50 feet and was dedicated September 19, 1847. The society was incorporated July 30, 1849.

In 1842 Detroit was made part of the Canadian work, and later taken over by the Ohio Conference when that body convened in 1849 at Cincinnati and aided out three missionary fields, the third of which included Michigan and was known as the Ypsilanti Mission. Still later Detroit became part of the Indiana Conference where it remained until the organization of the Michigan Annual Conference by Rt. Rev. J. P. Campbell, August 1877.

In 1845 the Ohio Annual Conference was held in this church, Bishop Wm. Quinn presided. On December 2, 1866 extensive repairs which cost \$4,000 and an extension of 18 feet to the church was made.

On August 26, 1875 the 36th session of the Indiana Annual Conference convened in this church. Bishop A. W. Wayman assisted by Bishop Shorter presided. At this conference resolutions of sympathy were passed with reference to the death of Bishop Willis Nazrey, (B. M. E. Church, Canada) with request that the members of the conference attend his funeral held at Chatham, Ont., Thursday, September 2, 1875. Rev. C. H. Ward was ordained Elder and Reverends A. Smith and H. H. Thompson, Deacons during this conference.

August 29, 1884, the Bishops' Council met in this church, the oldest society of the church. "The Self Denial Club" was organized by the Rev. J. M. Henderson, September 20, 1877 under the name of Ladies Helping Hand Society. The officers were Lucinda Evans, President; Julius Molone, Vice-President; Mary Smith Bull, Secretary; Annie Corneal, Treasurer; Elizabeth Linyear, Chairman Program Committee. Today the only living members are Sisters A. L. Evans, Harriet Smith, Ada Vernell, Mary McCoy, Amelia Collins, Georgia Smith-Hackley and

Elda Proce.

On December 22, 1889, the corner stone of the present building, corner Napoleon and Hastings, was laid; Rev. James M. Henderson, Pastor. The cost of the property: lot \$3,000; building \$18,000; total \$21,000.

The year of Bethel's gravest financial crisis was that of 1900 when the church faced an indebtedness of \$18,000. It was at this time that the Rev. Robert Seymore proved equal to the task and saved Bethel and consequently African Methodism in Detroit for all times.

During the pastorate of Rev. T. A. Smythe, 1906-09, the church was enlarged and a pipe organ installed.

The Social Service Department, organized under Rev. J. P. Q. Wallace, in October 1911 received its great impetus under the pastorate of Rev. Jos. Evans. In 1916, with the coming of our people in large numbers from the south, a labor and housing bureau was added. The church experienced a great revival of interest.

On August 29, 1917, the property adjoining the church was purchased under the administration of Rev. Jos. Evans for \$9,000.

In 1917, under the administration of the Rev. T. D. Scott, the remaining indebtedness of \$7,000 was paid as a result of a splendid system in rallies. The colored people of Detroit celebrated the signing of the Armistice in the church.

Bethel Church was the first organization to inaugurate Public Welfare Movements, its social service department being the first to make preparations for welcome for the thousands who flocked to Detroit, after the war.

On September 10, 1919, the Michigan Annual Conference was entertained for the first time free of cost in this church, Rev. T. D. Scott was pastor. At this conference, the Rev. Jos. Gomez, the present pastor was appointed to the pastorate of Bethel. The appointment insofar as the age of the incoming pastor was concerned was a shattering of all precedents.

In November 1919, the morning services became so crowded that an overflow service was established, Rev. Isaac Baker in charge.

In the winter of this year a building fund was started in interest of a "New Bethel."

In May 1920, the building adjoining the church was turned into a Social Service Department, with labor and housing bureau and classes, under the management of the Recreation Commission of the city. Mr. A. Bass was elected president of the Brotherhood, succeeded by Mr. Geo. Green and later by Mr. G. M. Carter, Mrs. E. L. Johnson elected president of the Sisterhood. The social service work is being conducted under the auspices of these two societies.

At the meeting of the Michigan Annual Conference held at Fort Wayne, Indiana, September 8, 1920, Bethel took her place among the first five churches of the confederation in her financial report. \$1,025.00 was reported as Dollar Money. The total for all purposes was nearly \$30,000. A comparative study of finances of the church shows more reported at this conference for all purposes than amount collected for current expenses from 1887 to 1914.

Bishop J. M. Conner appointed to the Episcopal Supervision of the 15 District preached in Bethel the latter part of May 1920.

On Wednesday, 18th, 1921, the idea of 'New Bethel' received a practical start. It was initiated in one of the greatest real-estate deals made by colored people in Detroit and the largest of any congregation. The lot corner of Frederick and St. Antoine streets was purchased for \$40,

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**PLEADING GETHSEMANE.**

By William D. Robinson.

Why should my soul be given thus to suffer,  
Not only for my faults but others' wrongs?  
Why should my heart be made a bleeding buffer  
For stinging darts and everlashing thongs?

Why should my sweetest songs have saddest echoes?  
My merriest laugh the tremor of a sigh?  
My brightest smile, a gentle touch of pathos?  
A tear behind each sparkle in my eye?

Why do I often in some solitude,  
Fall prostrate, kneeling on the chilling sod;  
And there, where none but angels dare intrude,  
All bathed with tears, lay bare my soul to God?

As thru a veil of darkness drawn, I see  
A soul that bore the sorrows of the world,  
And on the cross in bitterest agony,  
Into the jaws of death for us was hurled.

He gave His life for us because He loved;  
He conquered Death and Sorrow with His blood;  
And bade us, with that love with which He loved,  
Unite our hearts, as one in brotherhood.

And so my heart is given thus to suffer,  
Not only for my sins, but others' wrongs;  
I feel with Him whose soul is now my buffer,  
The love that gladly shares my brother's thongs.

000. The first payment, \$10,000; lot, 140x145, with a double building which cost approximately \$12,000 in the lot.

Plans for the Great Chautauqua in interest of the 5 million dollar drive were made at Bethel Wednesday, May 18, 1921, Bishop J. M. Conner presiding.

The new church site was purchased three years ago, the entire plant with new church building, costing about \$3,000,000. This is now one of the best equipped churches in America and regardless of race, one of the four largest in Detroit. It will seat approximately 2500 people. The gymnasium, club rooms, showers and accommodation dining room are among some of its chief features. The church building covers ground 83x130.

The Rev. Joseph Gomez is serving his sixth year, being the youngest man appointed to a church of its size in the history of the connection.

The church plans two weeks of Dedication Exercises with the opening services at 9:30 A. M., June 7th. Leading Bishops and Public Speakers of churches and race will be featured. A special parade is being arranged for the afternoon service of June 9th.

Rev. Joseph Gomez, the splendid, energetic and able pastor of Bethel A. M. E. Church under whose leadership this monument to church and racial progress has been erected, was born November 26, 1890 at Trinidad. He received his primary education in New York City and College course at Wilberforce University, graduating therefrom in 1914, having finished a special course in Art and Sciences. He took a course at Payne Theological Seminary, finishing with honors and receiving the degree of Bachelor of Divinity.

Rev. Gomez joined the New York Conference in 1909 was ordained deacon 1912, and ordained Elder in June 1914. He pastored in Bermuda where he cancelled a long standing indebtedness on the church, and at Hamilton, Ont., Canada, from which he was transferred to Big Bethel, Detroit, in 1922 being probably the youngest minister ever appointed to a church of its size.

He has led his delegation in the General Conference of 1920-1924 and was elected leader of the 15 Episcopal District Delegation. Rev. Gomez is a dynamic exponent of modern Theology using 100 per cent effort in the religious, material and civic welfare

of his numberless followers. He is highly respected as a minister and a Christian Citizen. The latest illustration of his high ideals, the erection of this landmark, historic, is tangible evidence of his capable generalship.

Rev. Gomez was married to Miss Hazel Thompson, June 18, 1914, a former classmate at Wilberforce, who graduated therefrom in 1913, and taught school prior to her marriage. Mrs. Gomez has been a valuable helpmate and kindred spirit to Rev. Gomez in all his endeavors. She re-organized the Junior Allen Christian Endeavor League of Bethel Church and is greatly active in the development of the youth of the Church.

**ON PRAYER**

First how should we pray? Christ said, When thou prayest use not vain repetition as heathen do for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Verily I say unto you they have their reward. How shall we pray then? When thou prayest, says Christ, enter into thy closet and when thou hath shut the door pray to thy Father that is in secret, that thy Father that seeth in secret may reward thee openly. And in following these words Christ lined his disciples a model prayer to pray after, in other words he taught them how to pray.

We have the Bible and it is full of prayers. Christ used the Bible in teaching others. Why, tell me, that he did not use it in teaching prayer? John the Baptist used the Bible to teach the people that the water Baptism was given unto him from above. Why tell me that he did not use it to teach prayer.

People that have not been taught to pray, for instance I have heard this of them when ending their prayer, Amen and Thank God. There is not a prayer in the Bible that ends in this manner. Amen is the last word in all prayers.

I have seen the heathen worship, perform and Amen ends the prayer. There is too much vain repetition used among us as Christians. I say we use more of it than the heathens.

This and all such as this is what I hear in private and public prayers.

Signed: GRADY JONES.

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