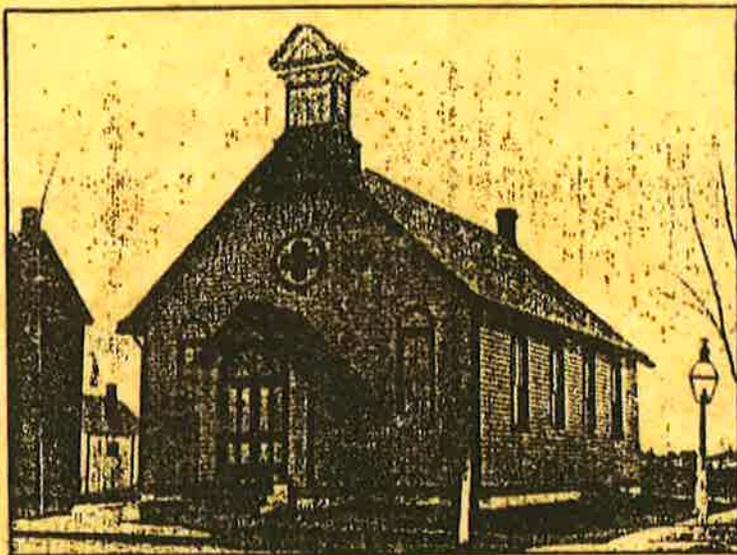


Calvary Baptist Church

Centennial Celebration

Queen & Fulton Sts., Dover, De.



1884

WE'VE COME A MIGHTY LONG WAY

1984



A HISTORY OF CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH

According to public records, Calvary Baptist Church was being formed in 1884. During this time, most colored churches, as they were called in those days, were of the Methodist faith. Of the thirty-eight colored churches in Delaware prior to 1900, twenty-seven were of the Methodist faith. Hence, the first members of Calvary Baptist Church were probably former members of Whatcoat U.M.E. Church dedicated in 1854 and/or Mount Zion A.M.E. Church dedicated in 1874, the only two existing colored Methodist churches in the Dover area prior to the development of Calvary Baptist Church.

"A number of colored people from the Methodist congregation accepted the faith of the Baptists, and in 1883 met for worship in private houses. In 1886, by the aid of the Baptist Association and the citizens of Dover, a lot was purchased on the corner of Queen and Fulton Streets, and a neat frame chapel, thirty by fifty feet was erected, which, with furniture, cost about two thousand dollars. It was dedicated July 29, 1887. The Rev. Henry C. Jones was in charge of the congregation."
(Scharf, page 1069).

Later in the year 1884, Delaware Baptist Union, which consisted of several churches in Delaware and Pennsylvania, bought two parcels of land on the corner of Queen and Fulton Streets, less than three blocks from this new store. The land was to be the permanent home of Calvary Baptist Church.

Calvary Baptist Church would be the first colored Baptist church in Dover and the second colored Baptist church in the State of Delaware. Shiloh Baptist Church, established in 1875, was the first colored Baptist church in the state and was one of the member churches in the Delaware Baptist Union. It has been said that Benjamin T. Moore, the pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church for fifty-two years, came down to Dover and helped organize Calvary Baptist Church.

In one historical account of Calvary's earlier years, it was stated that services were held in a hall over the building which presently is occupied by Widman's Drugstore. The building is on the corner of Bradford and Loockerman Streets. (Church Archives). In 1884, the hall was probably a large room which extended the length of the building. Today, however, the top floor of the building is partitioned into several offices. It is not hard to imagine Calvary's forefathers climbing the sixteen steps up to the hall and once reaching it, praying that God will see to it that they will one day have a church — and God was to see to it, for Calvary was built and still exists today — 100 years later.

Calvary has not always prospered though, it has been stated (Pitts, 1978) that the membership dwindled to two members by 1922. John Charles Wilson, better known as Pop Wilson, was the chairman of the Board of Deacons in 1924 and held that office for the next fifty-one years. He joined the church probably at the lowest point.

"(as Pop Wilson recalls) he and Rev. Anderson arrived at Calvary Baptist Church just a short period behind each other in the fall of 1922. When Rev. Anderson came to pastor Calvary Baptist Church, he found two members there, 'Aunt Caroline Bailey' and 'Mom Morris', singing their little hymns and praying their little prayers ..." (Pitts, 1978).

Calvary grew under the pastorate of Rev. Anderson to a size so large that it required people to come early in order to be seated. Church records do not state the length of Rev. Anderson's tenure at Calvary but indications are that it was long and quite fruitful.

The next pastor to lead Calvary for an extended period was Rev. Milton Gayman. His pastorate began in 1942 and he was to stay for the next thirty-three years — until 1975. According to Rev. Gayman, presently the pastor of St. James Baptist Church in Wilmington, "I had a very successful pastorate at Calvary. Many souls were saved under my administration."

In a recent interview with Rev. Gayman, he stated that the membership of Calvary had dwindled to about five members when he arrived.

"The church and I went through some hard times ... I remembered when we had three services on Sunday — morning, afternoon and evening — and the total of the collection for the day was ten dollars ... I can remember when the church could only pay me four dollars a week because that was all we could afford. But, we kept on struggling."

And the struggle paid off, for Calvary grew bigger and better.

The two things of which Rev. Gayman is most proud and which occurred under his pastorship at Calvary are: first, that two ministers were called to the ministry under his teachings and eventually went on to form their own churches, Rev. Raymond Fisher of New Calvary Baptist Church in Wilmington and Rev. Gaston Poole of Little Union Baptist Church in Lincoln. The second accomplishment of which Rev. Gayman is proud is that a traveling missionary program called Holy City Pageant was successful in saving lots of souls. The Holy City Pageant, under the direction of Ruth Wilson, was composed of the deacons, ministers and members of Calvary. Each Sunday they would all crowd into the church's bus "and travel to small cities and towns in Delaware and Maryland saving souls for our Lord and Savior."

William "Bill" Wilson, the present Chairman of the Trustee Board, was one of the souls saved while the Holy City Pageant was worshipping in Frederica, Delaware. Bill has been the Chairman of the Trustee Board for the past thirty-three years and has been instrumental in planning and, in most instances, working on all major church renovations. Some of the projects that Bill has directed are the remodeling of the chapel and basement, connecting the parsonage to the church, and putting on a new roof and siding. The list is endless!

Rev. Robert Scott Jones was then to Pastor Calvary from August 1976 until mid 1977. Much progress was made under his leadership. A marked increase in membership was the result of his able spiritual guidance and managerial expertise. The first recorded set of bylaws were initiated during his administration.

Rev. Michael Brinkley, Sr., became the interim Pastor in 1978. He was called to be the official Pastor on January 6, 1979 and served until January 7, 1981. Under his leadership, Calvary continued to grow, both physically and spiritually, through his trust and faith in God.

From January 1981 through February 1982, Calvary carried on without a Pastor. Through God's grace, the spiritual life was kept in tact. During this period the interior of the church was refurbished, through faith and diligent work of the members.

Calvary was blessed with Richard M. Avant, who is the present Pastor. He was called to reside over the congregation the first Sunday in February, 1982. When he arrived, he found approximately forty-six active members supporting the work of the church with weekly offerings averaging three hundred dollars. On the night of his installation, he stated that "one of his dreams was that the church would grow bigger and stronger and that the Lord would guide us toward this end."

God continues to bless Calvary, for in the very short time that Rev. Avant has pastored at Calvary, the church has grown tremendously. There is now an active membership of about three hundred and the weekly offerings average fifteen hundred dollars. Almost every Sunday the chapel is packed with worshippers. People are often seated in the aisle, in the area behind the pulpit and sometimes in the basement of the church. Obviously, the church has outgrown its present facilities. Rev. Avant's dream, thanks to God, is being realized.

Property adjacent to the church which was owned by William "Bill" Wilson and his wife, Iris, was donated to help in Calvary's expansion. Plans are now drawn to expand the church to accommodate its growth. This expansion, the most extensive in Calvary's history, will be completed in the near future. It will include a full basement; offices for the pastor, deacons, trustees and secretaries; a choir room; new baptismal pool; male and female dressing rooms for baptism, an enlarged choir loft and a main chapel which will comfortably seat approximately 400 people. The estimated cost of the expansion is \$300,000.

Under the direction of Rev. Avant, the church has grown in other aspects as well. The Deacon and Trustee Boards have increased; the Ladies' Auxiliary and the Brotherhood have joined together and composes the Missionary Society; the Voices of Calvary, always a very strong and thriving group, has almost doubled in membership, and the Mass Choir, composed of Calvary's young people, has also increased tremendously.

Other organizations that have been organized since Rev. Avant arrived at Calvary are: Champions for Christ Youth Fellowship, The Educational Committee, Pastor's Aide Society, Deaconess Board, Floral Committee, Program Coordinating Committee and the Twelve Tribes.

The theme of the centennial is "We've Come A Mighty Long Way". According to Rev. Avant, "the history of Calvary Baptist Church is truly a testimonial of God's grace. With God as our guide, His will as our aim, we cannot help but continue to move ever onward and upward."

THE MINISTERIAL STAFF



REV. RICHARD M. AVANT

Minister Henry Brown

Minister John Grady

Rev. J.W. Kelly (Not Shown)

EVANGELISTS (Not Shown)

Sharon Morgan

Bertha Smith

Emma Richards