

A few baptized believers in Christ Jesus assembled at 1725 Massachusetts Street, in the year of Our Lord, 1918, July 10, on a Wednesday evening for the purpose of organizing a church. A council of ministers was invited to help in the organization. Included in the council were: Rev. LA. Thomas, Rev. J.R. Butler, and Rev. I.C. Ball, The Rev. I.C. Ball served as Clerk on the Council, while the Rev. Butler served as Moderator. This small group of believers decided to call themselves Mt. Zion Baptist Church. The Rev. J.R. Butler became the first Pastor.

Later in the year 1918, this group moved to 2813 Madison Street, and after having worshipped there for a period of about three years, moved into what is now known as Roosevelt School.

In the year 1923, Rev. A.T. Allen accepted the pastorate of this church. Two lots were purchased at 2457 Massachusetts Street. A basement was erected, in which we worshipped until it became too small for our membership and had to be extended for more space. Under his leadership, the members were inspired to build a church and organized themselves into groups for a financial building program.

In 1929, the winds of adversity began to blow and this small group was split. The group, which left, called themselves St. John Baptist Church and was located at 2229 Washington Street. But thanks be to God, who in his all wise purpose, sent in the year 1932, the Rev. T.L. Ballou to pastor the St. John Baptist Church. As only a God can do, the church was reunited. Until this day, the reunited church is known as the St. John Baptist Church. In the year 1930, a Sanctuary was built. The late Mr. Joe Caudle, deacon and church treasurer, presented the church with a seal bearing its name.

On Tuesday evening, October 27, 1936, a fire completely destroyed our place of worship. But through the help of Almighty God and the kindness of the Seventh Day Adventist Church and its Minister, the church was able to use their place of worship.

On May 11, 1937, Rev. Leon Davis was called to the pastorate. Under his leadership, the church was able to liquidate all debts and remodel. Through faith and prayer, we were able to overcome the shackles of adversity and march in the name of God, back into our own church. (By Mrs. Georgia Caudle Jackson)

On October 16, 1952, the Rev. Ivor Moore accepted the pastorate of the St. John Baptist Church and led us to undreamed heights. Under his dynamic leadership, a very fine congregation was built and also a parsonage was erected. In 1955, the Rev. Moore was called to the pastorate of the Walker Memorial Baptist Church, Bronx, N.Y. He accepted the call.

On Wednesday night, September 22, 1955, the congregation assembled in the lower auditorium for the purpose of calling a Pastor and called unanimously, the Rev. Julius James, then, of Brunswick, Georgia. On Sunday, October 16, 1955, Rev. James accepted

the call to become the Pastor of St. John Baptist Church. During his pastorate, many souls were added to the church, the basement was remodeled, the sanctuary and basement redecorated, outside was re-bricked and improved, office equipment purchased, an addition was made to the parsonage, and new officers were added to the Board of Deacons. We see in his leadership a greater St. John, but these were expected improvements. It was under the leadership of James that the church began a journey that would involve them in one of the most important periods of African American history.

During the 1959 Steel Strike, James walked the picket lines next to members and steelworkers, and the women of St. John prepared sandwiches and coffee to be distributed on the picket lines. The church was home to meetings and planning sessions for various civil rights organizations that were active in the city of Gary during the late 50's and the 60's. St. John members supported the Fair Share Organization and the Freedom Movement. Members marched, protested and boycotted to see more Blacks hired in the stores that we were helping to keep in business. James was very active in this movement and Rev. James was a vocal voice in the community against discrimination and racial inequality and was subjected to threats of violence. The support of his membership allowed him to continue the work.

Rev. James brought the civil rights movement to the St. John pulpit and members were exposed to the most prominent speakers in the country. These included Martin L. King Jr., Benjamin E. Mays, Ralph Abernathy, Howard Thurman, Otis Moss, Johnny Ford, Jesse Jackson, and many others. St. John members marched in the historic Selma March with their pastor. Dr. King's appearance in 1967 was his last public appearance in this area.

The first King Birthday celebration was held at St. John Baptist church and many petitions were signed to make the birthday a holiday. In 1961 St. John was instrumental in formation of the first Simultaneous revival which is still held today. St. John has been a supporter of Civil rights and community organizations with financial support and membership.

James commitment to Black colleges and universities led St. John to support various colleges by bringing the choirs to Gary for concerts. St. John was the most popular destination of the Morehouse College Glee Club. Spelman and Morris Brown colleges were also hosted by St. John. The church supported scholarships for students attending college and many students from the church received help from St. John to attend college.

The spirit of a service and leadership has caused St John members to stand out as a "Christian community in action" Recognizing the need for affordable housing in the city, in 1972 St. John purchased a 22 yr. old, 152 unit, rundown housing complex at 22<sup>nd</sup> and Carolina and not very far from the church. The units were completely remodeled through government grants and were named the St. John Homes. They were operated by the church until 1984 and were one of the few viable non-profit homes in the country.

The church recognized the number of homeless and hungry people in the neighborhood and started a weekly feeding program that was made available to anyone that wanted a home-cooked meal. They also sponsor clothing drives and Angel Trees for children at Christmas. In 1989 the church participated in the 'Adopt a Cop' program. During the 38 years of his pastorate, Rev. James and the St. John membership served as a spiritual and civic leader in the community and grew and prospered.

After the death of Rev. James in 1994, the church called Rev. Raymond McDonald Jr. in 1995. He led the church until 2010. The sudden departure of Rev. McDonald left the church in a position the congregation had never before experienced. It was during this time that the church was reminded of the importance of putting God first in all things and to trust in him to help us through the tough times.

In 2012, Rev. Rodney Griffin was called to serve as the Pastor of St. John. He served until June 2014.

On August 18, 2015, the members of St. John Baptist Church elected Rev. R.E. Robinson to serve as the church's ninth Pastor and to boldly proclaim God's word of love, hope and restoration to His people. Under his leadership, the church continues to bring in new members, expand the church staff, incorporate new ministries within the church, and has already completed a major capital improvement project, (including new windows, the addition of two restrooms on the main level, remodeling the restrooms on the lower level, new carpeting throughout the main level of the church and making improvements to our balcony) as well as fortified its reach and impact in the community. With his energy for the things of God and his insight into the word of God, we truly believe that the best is yet to come.

"This church shall ever be dedicated to the worship and glory of God to shine as a beacon light upon the highway of life to the weary traveler. This church shall inspire to reach the highest and lift the lowest to the marvelous throne of God. May we forever hold in memory the great souls that have crossed the bar, who have made their contributions to the wellbeing of this church."