

THE HISTORY OF SHILOH BAPTIST CHURCH

The words of that old familiar hymn, The Church's One Foundation, must have been an inspiring factor in the birth of Shiloh Baptist Church. As the plan of our Heavenly Father unfolds for His people, we find the Shiloh Baptist Church family beginning in 1867, two years after the Emancipation Proclamation, as a small group of individuals. This group of newly freed people was seeking a place to worship. After expressing their religious convictions in their small huts, Colonel Dudley, one of the earliest immigrants to America, gave them a cabin for religious services. This cabin was called the Community Building and was located on the corner of Marshall and Hudson Streets. Within the Community Building, this dedicated group of early saints was divided into three religious categories: Baptist, Methodist, and Zion. Each denomination had a Sunday for worship services; nevertheless, a dispute over who would have the fifth Sunday led to the separation from this building.

In 1870, Rev. Caesar Munnerlyn led the Baptists to a baptismal service at the Boldin Mill pond which is below the bypass. After this service, they moved to a schoolhouse on Market Street known as the Old Bradford House. There, the foundation for Shiloh Baptist Church was laid. Rev. Munnerlyn, a man of great inspiration and determination, remained at Shiloh until September of 1878.

Rev. Jesse Campbell succeeded Rev. Munnerlyn as pastor in October 1878. Rev. Campbell was one who preached on the missionary order and remained at Shiloh for only one year. Furthermore, it should be noted that throughout the leadership of the first two ministers, Shiloh Baptist Church remained in the Bradford House.

One year later, in October 1879, Rev. Fleming W. Prince, his wife, and three children came to Shiloh. Rev. Prince, one of the first graduates of the University of South Carolina, was chosen to preach the second and fourth Sundays at Shiloh, as well as the first and third Sundays at Saw Mill Baptist Church. It appears that the congregation was spiritually motivated and had a great mind to work at this point in church history. Therefore, on December 24, 1880, Rev. Prince and the church family were happy to learn that the land for the present site was sold by Mr. James B. Breeden for the sum of \$600.00 to the following trustees: Mr. Tony Lide, Mr. James F. McLaurin, Mr. D. D. Reese, Mr. Richard Reese, Sr., and Mr. Johnnie Thomas.

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In 1886, with a greater plan in view for the future, Rev. Prince especially encouraged the congregation to have strong faith and trust in God. It was on the basis of these two principles that the substantial frame building for the first Shiloh was built on the present site. It was painted white and was well furnished. Then, the building was worth \$3,000.00 and was built chiefly through contributions from the pastor and members. The sanctuary had a larger seating capacity than any other black church in town. In 1912, Rev. Prince resigned as minister of Saw Mill and became the full-time pastor of Shiloh. After an enormously productive ministry of thirty-nine years with this church, he resigned and accepted the pastorate of Pee Dee Baptist Church in Cheraw where he served until his death.

After the departure of Rev. Prince in 1918, Rev. H. Waller, his wife, and six children came to Shiloh. Rev. Waller was a feeble but cultured man. Known for his humility, it was unfortunate that he was only able to serve one year.

Rev. S. S. Youngblood, a graduate of Benedict College in Columbia, was called to pastor at Shiloh in 1919; Mrs. Youngblood served as the church musician. They were blessed with one daughter, Margaret, shortly after coming here. While Rev. Youngblood was at Shiloh, the curbing around the church and the steps that once led to the old Shiloh (now leading to the A. J. Wright Memorial Building) were constructed. Rev. Youngblood remained at Shiloh eight years. He resigned as minister of Shiloh in 1927 and accepted the pastorate of First Calvary Baptist Church in Columbia.

By the time Dr. John Jacob Starks arrived in 1928, he had already attended Brewer Normals Benedict Institute (now Benedict College) and Atlanta Baptist College. He had also received degrees from Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. He was then president of Morris College in Sumter and came with his wife as pastor to Shiloh. Dr. Starks, though childless, came to us as a father trying to keep his children together. He was an educator, a philanthropist, a businessman, an organizer, and a builder. Dr. Starks was a lover of the old familiar hymn, Go Preach My Gospel, Saith the Lord, which he did by precept and example.

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Regrettably, the original Shiloh burned after Dr. Starks was here for two years. With his ability, vision, and faith in God, plans were immediately initiated to build a new church. Until the new building was complete enough to reenter for worship, the church family met at the former Marlboro County Training and High School on King Street. Mr. H. H. Harrell, one of the best known architects, drew the plans. The plans of this building and that of Antisdal Chapel on the campus of Benedict College are very much the same. This was the idea of Dr. Starks and the members were quite happy about it.

After the plans were drawn, Mr. K. D. Reese, a deacon of Shiloh, was chosen as contractor; in addition, Mr. Charlie Reese, also a deacon, and his son, Mr. Pierce Reese, a trustee, were hired to do masonry work and the plastering. Mr. Joseph H. W. Morris, a master mason, often gave of his time until the building was completed. When the building was about six feet above the ground, Dr. Starks resigned as president of Morris College to become the first black president of Benedict College; because of this change, he also resigned as pastor of Shiloh. However, before leaving Shiloh, it was recommended that Rev. Arthur J. Wright become pastor. Dr. Starks, who had labored well, was then sorrowfully released from his ministerial duties.

Rev. Wright was a native of Gaffney and had graduated from high school there. He had continued his education at Morris College, Oberlin University in Ohio, and Union Theological Seminary in New York. He was a prepared man of God who chose to meet the challenge of the times and to fulfill a divine mission. In this instance, he was called to become our spiritual leader. He ended his duties as a New York City Mission Worker and accepted the responsibility to pastor Shiloh.

Rev. and Mrs. Wright moved to Bennettsville in 1929 with their two children, Olive and Arthur, to a big job to be finished. He could see that the church building was in an early stage of development and immediately began his duties. With a finance committee consisting of Mr. Carolina Breeden, Mr. Charlie Leake, and Mr. Peter F. Thompson, also having his officers one-hundred percent with him, the Shiloh family was soon ready to begin worshipping at home again. It was Easter Sunday morning of 1932 when Rev. Wright, his dear wife, three children (Olive, Arthur, and Harry), and the church family happily

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returned to the present location for morning service; nonetheless, there was still a great deal of work to be done before the project would be brought to total fruition. In addition to the current design being finished under his leadership, the church was furnished with pews, hymnals, pulpit set, communion set and table, piano, and a Hammond organ. This instrument was the first to be purchased by a black church in Marlboro County.

Rev. Wright was also interested in the youth and showed children much love and affection. This was demonstrated by carrying them to different activities and conventions. Out of this concern grew the Vacation Bible School, the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, the Sunshine Band, and the church playground. All of these helped in forming a solid foundation during the formative years of our children so that one day they would become fine citizens. In addressing the needs of adults, the Men's Bible Class and the Sunday School Forum were formed.

Moreover, Rev. Wright had the highest respect for the elderly people of Marlboro County. Due to this interest, he spent much of his time transporting and caring for them. Finally, during the depression years, a dream became a reality. The doors of the first home for the aged in Marlboro County were 3 opened to those requiring permanent care. With this and his church family in mind, he went about his busy way humming the old, familiar tune, Oh My Good Lord Show Me the Way. He always remembered that a good shepherd must lead and tend to his flock at all times.

With untiring zeal, Rev. Wright embarked upon another ambitious project which seemed to be an impossible dream, the erection of a new parsonage and educational building. Mr. H. H. Harrell, noted architect who had designed plans for the Shiloh sanctuary, also drew the plans for these two new units. Deacon James Grace was general contractor; Trustee Tommie Grace was the "master carpenter"; Deacon Charlie Reese and his son, Trustee Pierce Reece, were the brick masons. The combined plan was completed in 1952 and a service of dedication was held. Shortly after moving into the parsonage, their daughter Olive was married to Mr. Heber Covington, Jr. Rev. Wright performed the ceremony, Marian, who was quite young then, served as a junior bridesmaid, Harry and Julian B. served as ushers; the bride was given in marriage by her brother, Arthur.

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After twenty-five years of service, Rev. Wright preached his last sermon, Take the Wings of the Morning and Fly to the Uttermost Parts of the Earth. Rev. Wright, being ill, calmly left the pulpit for the last time. He said to the church family as he left, "I am leaving, but you always stand by your church." Pastor A. J. Wright quietly passed to his eternal rest on Thursday evening, May 6, 1954. The death of Rev. A. J. Wright ended his first and only pastorate. The Shiloh family was shocked, saddened, and somewhat helpless as sheep without a shepherd.

The congregation turned to the source of unending prayer in its grief and the church continued successfully without a leader for a short time. The officers were a powerful force in steering their beloved church that had so suddenly found itself without a minister. The Shiloh family prayed continuously, asking God to bless them with another special person possessing character, courage, strength, vision, and power of God.

Later during May 1954, a blessing came in the form of a son, Harry Starks Wright. He had been reared in Shiloh and developed under the guidance of his eminent father, Rev. Arthur J. Wright. Like his father, he was scholarly, ethically sound, dignified, eloquent, and bore polished manners. He was, at that time, a student at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School in Rochester, New York, and returned to Shiloh at a crucial time as our pastor. He came as an affable, congenial, and hospitable individual with a passion for the ministry.

This enthusiasm led him to attend, as the delegate from Shiloh in July 1955, the Golden Jubilee Conference of the Baptist World Alliance in London, England. This trip to share in this world "gathering of Baptists" had been planned by Pastor A. J. Wright and Shiloh in tribute to his 25th pastoral anniversary. Funds were gathered for him to be the delegate from Shiloh at that historic meeting, which was the ninth international meeting of Baptists since the beginning of the organization in 1905; however, it was not to be. Instead, his successor and son would represent Shiloh in London. Following the World Alliance sessions, Rev. Wright toured countries in Europe, North Africa, and the Holy Land. In 1957, Rev. Wright was married to the former Chequeta Bell of Florence and they were later blessed with four children: Deborah, Harryetta, Harry, Jr., and Schawanna.

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During the thirteen years of his ministry at Shiloh, Rev. Wright grew and strengthened the Christian Education, Community and Youth Outreach, and thriving Scout programs. He led the church family in extinguishing the remaining debt to the H. J. Munnerlyn Company, as well as burning the mortgage on the new parsonage and educational building. Old windows were replaced with those composed of stained-glass and a nursery was provided. In the A. J. Wright Memorial Building, doors were added to the kitchen area and a new refrigerator was purchased; new robe racks for the choir room were bought and the entire physical structure was refurbished (the building was painted on the inside and outside, new carpet was laid in the sanctuary, the floor was redone in the vestibule, new hymnals and art pictures were purchased). Dr. Wright tendered his resignation as pastor of Shiloh in 1967 in order to accept the position as dean of the Carr P. Collins Chapel at Bishop College in Dallas, Texas.

In the absence of a pastor, Dr. O. R. Reuben served as supply pastor. He was a magna cum laude graduate of Benedict College with A.B. and B.D. degrees. He held a master's degree in sacred theology from Oberlin University and later earned a Doctor of Philosophy in Religion from Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. At the time, he was also president of Morris College.

While at Shiloh, Dr. Reuben was respected and admired by the members. He always exercised the highest official standards and judgments when handling church problems, and was an inspiring embodiment of Christian ideals in action. He was at home among the people and had a passion for bringing the homeless within the fold. His ministry was a powerful reminder that "man does not live by bread alone." Nevertheless, the time that Dr. Reuben spent at Shiloh was short. He resigned as supply pastor in 1968 on account of illness.

Upon the resignation of Dr. Reuben, Rev. James J. Abney was elected as pastor. He was another prepared man who was capable of coping with any situation. Due to ill health, however, he preached only one sermon. He resigned the following week and never came to fill the pulpit.

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Rev. George Hamilton, a student of theology at Virginia Union in Richmond, came to Shiloh as minister later in 1968. He was a very qualified man with a pleasant personality. After completing his work at Virginia Union, Rev. Hamilton, his wife, daughter, and mother moved to Bennettsville. One outstanding addition while he was here was the installation of an air conditioner. Rev. Hamilton resigned as pastor to accept the position of Zion Baptist Church in Columbia.

Shiloh stood tall once again without a pastor from 1970 to 1971. The officers of the church formed a mighty team to hold her together during that time and were extremely diligent in their efforts to keep this "Ship of Zion" sailing in smooth waters without a captain. Many things were accomplished in the near future through the help of God and the continued support of the faithful membership; yet, the Shiloh family continued to pray and ask God to bless them with another leader.

Inquiries were made during this period and Rev. Maxie S. Gordon, who was professor of religion and philosophy at Benedict College, suggested one of his students whom he felt confident to equal the task. Rev. Ernest Donald Williams, Jr. came to preach one Sunday morning and subsequently served one year as supply pastor. The church, being pleased with the performance of this young man, elected him as the twelfth pastor of Shiloh in 1971. He was accompanied by his wife, Linda Bradley Albright, and his daughter, Lori Arlene. A young, astute, and scholarly gentleman, Rev. Williams came with genuine desires for a better Shiloh.

Born in Baltimore, Maryland on August 27, 1949, he had graduated with honors from the Buffalo (New York) public school system and received the Bachelor of Arts in English with a minor in Religion and Philosophy in May 1972 from Benedict College. Before coming to Shiloh, he had been a former instructor of English and director of church relations at Friendship College in Rock Hill. While at Shiloh, Rev. Williams received the Master of Divinity in May 1976; and on May 10, 1985, the Doctor of Ministry (the dissertation title: A Comprehensive Adult Christian Education Program for Shiloh Baptist Church – Bennettsville, South Carolina) was bestowed. Both degrees were the result of study at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta.

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Many physical accomplishments were made to the education building, the parsonage, and the steeple during his tenure at Shiloh. A new set of steps was also added to the front of the church and three adjacent properties, including the old Morris Funeral Home, were purchased. This additional space provided badly needed off-street parking. The list of accomplishments was completed by paving the 5 driveway. Some of the organizations which began under the leadership of Rev. Williams are as follows: The Good Samaritan Club, The Willing Workers Club, The Young Women's Auxiliary, The Male Chorus, The Youth Usher Board, and The Young Adult Choir.

Aside from his pastoral responsibilities to Shiloh, Rev. Williams served as president of the Marlboro County Ministerial Alliance and the Marlboro County NAACP, teacher of Christian Ethics at the South Carolina State Congress, and operator of the Geneva H. Clark Home for the Aged in Bennettsville. Dr. Williams served as pastor of Shiloh until June 1985 when he left the ministry of this church and returned to his home in Buffalo.

Rev. Kenneth F. Hodges came from Atlanta, Georgia to begin a full-time pastorate at Shiloh in 1986. He officially replaced Rev. Williams on January 4, 1987. He and his lovely wife, the former Patricia A. Few, had spent several weekends in Bennettsville and had been fervently received by many members. They were the proud parents of two daughters, Kendrea Patrice and Kenyatta Ashanti. After they were in Bennettsville for some time, they were blessed with another daughter, Kenithea Sarai.

One of twelve children of the late Benjamin and Lydia Hodges, Rev. Hodges was reared in Bennetts Point. He was educated in the public schools of Colleton County and received his high school diploma from Walterboro High School in 1970. Continuing his education at Clark College in Atlanta, he received the Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration in 1977. His seminary preparation was done at the Morehouse School of Religion of the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta where he received the Master of Divinity degree in 1986. He later served as a member of the Interdenominational Theological Center Board of Trustees.

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Accomplishments during his pastorate include the Family Life Center, the Brown and Sanders properties, the Arts and Crafts Program, the Gospel Choir, the renovation of the restrooms, a new public-address system, the Wednesday Night Bible Study, new carpet for the sanctuary, a tutorial program, the Saturday Morning Leadership Breakfast, the property of Shiloh Park, a new church roof, the Smith property, new pews in the balcony, and a new floor in the A. J. Wright Memorial Building. Rev. Hodges resigned his duties in 1995 at Shiloh to accept the position as pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church in Beaufort.

The Reverend Dr. Coley Mearite, a resident of Clio, accepted the call to serve as the fourteenth pastor of Shiloh in August 1996. Dr. Mearite, his wife, Christine, and daughter, Cynthia, moved into the Shiloh Baptist Church parsonage in September 1996. Pastor Mearite came to Shiloh with many years of ministerial experience from Mount Tabor Missionary Baptist Church, also in Clio, where he had served for eighteen years until the end of July 1996. For sixteen years, he had also served as pastor of the Butler Branch Missionary Baptist Church in Fair Bluff, North Carolina.

Dr. Mearite received his elementary and secondary education in Clio, graduating from the former Lincoln High School in 1963. He is a graduate of the Morris College School of Religion as well as the David A. A. Mungo Theological Seminary in Pageland. He also attended Chesterfield-Marlboro Technical College where he studied data processing fundamentals and typing. He was employed with Delta Mills Marketing as a computer operator in accounts payable for thirty-five years from which he retired on December 5, 2005. Additionally, Dr. Mearite attended the Interdenominational Theological Center in conjunction with Benedict College where he earned his Bachelor of Theology and Doctor of Divinity.

Dr. Mearite has served as president of the Berea Missionary Baptist Educational Sunday School Congress, vice-moderator of the Berea Association, and past moderator of the New Era Union of Columbus and Bladen Counties in North Carolina. He is a member and has served as treasurer of the Marlboro County Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, a member of the National Baptist Convention, U. S. A., Inc., the Baptist Education and

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Missionary Convention of South Carolina, the 6 South Carolina Baptist Congress of Christian Education, and a member of the National Baptist Congress of Christian Education.

For the period of his years as pastor of Shiloh, Dr. Mearite has been engaged and involved in numerous church activities. Under his vision and spiritual leadership, he has led the church in making the following improvements and accomplishments:

- Paving and lighting of the church parking lot
- Purchasing of the property on the left of Shiloh from the daughters of Mr. Durwood Duncan
- Organizing a Nurse's Aide Unit
- Purchased a fifteen-passenger Dodge Ram Van
- Established the Shiloh Informer
- Computerization of the church office
- Installation of touch tone telephones
- Painting and giving the front of the church a complete face lift
- Adopting a family
- Organizing a Brotherhood
- Established the Scholarship Fund
- Purchased an electronic piano
- Placing of rails around the balcony as a safety measure
- Restoration of stained-glass windows
- Installation of rails on the stairs leading up to the balcony along with new ceiling lights
- Addition of a kitchen, as well as the purchasing of completely new appliances for the kitchen in the Family Life Center
- Addition of restrooms and storage rooms to the Family Life Center
- Purchased new tables and chairs for the dining area of the Family Life Center
- Renovation of the Sunday school classrooms
- Purchased the property across the street in front of Shiloh
- Landscaping of the 0.73 acres of property donated to Shiloh by Mrs. Harry Easterling for the Shiloh Cemetery and purchasing of the other plots 7
- Placing Plexiglas over the stained-glass windows
- Installation of lightning rods on the roof of the church
- Installing two restrooms in the rear of the church, including one for the disabled
- Renovation of the children's nursery and choir room for the Nurse's Aid and choir room

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- Purchased a new shelter for church van
- Purchased additional lots at Ideal Cemetery
- Purchased the building of the former Maggie Wright Nursing Home

In addition to the rich and internal history of the church, Shiloh has also been involved in creating a rather varied and external one. There have been one association and two churches that were started as a result of her existence: the Pee Dee Association, Saint Beulah Baptist Church, and Saint Paul Baptist Church.

Under the direction of Rev. Fleming W. Prince in 1881, the Pee Dee Association began. Various churches felt the need to come together from time to time to promote good fellowship, brotherhood, the education of blacks, as well as maintain the Christian attitude all through the Pee Dee region. With these ideals held in the forefront, the main purpose for organization was made clear. The association has existed for over a hundred years and remains an integral part of Baptist unity in the Pee Dee area.

At a time due to great distance and very poor means of transportation, a small group of Baptists in the area met across the road from several dry branches. Because of this, the seeds of Dry Branch Baptist Church were planted. The name was later changed from Dry Branch to Saint Beulah Baptist Church.

Saint Paul Baptist Church was the next religious institution to be extended from Shiloh. It is regrettable that its advent occurred as a consequence of a disagreement between the pastor and deacons. A few members, including one deacon and one trustee, left Shiloh though most of them soon returned to their home church. The drifting back of the majority of the members left a well organized and strong Saint Paul. To the present day, Saint Paul has one of the largest black Baptist congregations in Bennettsville.

Shiloh has grown from a small membership of approximately seventy members to over three-hundred members. The old \$3,000.00 wooden frame building has improved to a brick edifice amounting to more than two-hundred thousand dollars. It has been stated that Shiloh is truly a church born out of the soil of oppression. She has been an untapped source of power in the past, she continues to stand tall in the present, and in the future, it is hoped that her strength and legacy will continue to serve as a bright and shining beacon to others. The members of Shiloh must remember the statement that Christ made to Peter: "Upon this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against thee."

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The writing of any history is quite an undertaking and much is owed to the vision of our first historians for their documentation. The first history of Shiloh Baptist Church, which was prepared for the publication of 1972 anniversary book, was written by the Thompson sisters: Mrs. Theo T. Robinson, Mrs. Madeleine T. Leake, and Mrs. Etherine T. Cain. In 1979, the second historical committee consisted of Mrs. Madeleine T. Leake, Mrs. Etherine T. Cain, Mrs. Winifred M. Ridges, Mrs. Shirley J. McLeod, Mrs. Karen R. Clark, and Mr. Richard C. Reese. The historians for the third anniversary edition in 1997 were Mrs. Etherine T. Cain, Mrs. Winifred M. Ridges, and Mrs. Shirley J. McLeod.

PAST MINISTERS

Rev. James J. Abney	Rev. Kenneth F. Hodges
Dr. O. R. Reuben	Rev. Ernest D. Williams
Rev. Jesse Campbell	Rev. Cesar Munnerlyn
Dr. John J. Starks	Rev. Arthur J. Wright
Rev. George Hamilton	Rev. Fleming W. Prince
Rev. H. Waller	Dr. Harry S. Wright

Rev. S. S. Youngblood

MINISTERS SENT OUT FROM SHILOH

Rev. John Alsbrooks, Jr.
Rev. James R. Drake
Rev. John B. Drake
Rev. Flemin McCoy
Rev. David L. Page
Rev. William Reese
Dr. Harry S. Wright

HISTORICAL COMMITTEE

Mrs. Etherine T. Cain, Chair
Mrs. Winifred M. Ridges, Co-chair
Miss Marilyn Grace
Mrs. Lenora W. Jacobs
Miss Valerie D. Moody