

OUR HISTORY

The Church, The Community, and The People

The Early Years

The Marion County African Methodist Episcopal Churches became an organized part of the Northeast Annual Conference in 1892 under the leadership of Bishop Moses B. Salters (21st) with Bishop Wesley J. Gains (16th) assisting. The conference first met at Saint John in Marion on December 7, 1892.

The first congregation worship service of St. James A.M.E. Church was under a bush shelter. We do not know how long this type of worship service prevailed. Records indicate that on October 13, 1891, Ms. Mattie Munmerly White sold one-half acre of land to the Trustees of Saint James African Methodist Episcopal Church; W.H. Legette, J.H. White, Samuel Crawford, Allen Bostic, and P. P. Leonard for the sum of one dollar. The first cornerstone was laid May 16, 1914, under the leadership of Rev. A.J. Starks, Pastor and Rev. W.P. Carolina, Presiding Elder.

January 1, 1919, Zack R. Leonard sold one and three-fourths acres to the Trustees of Saint James A.M.E. Church; W.G. Davis, James Leonard, and James B. Davis for the sum of one hundred dollars (\$100) land that is currently St. James Cemetery. One of the oldest markers noted in the cemetery is that of Matilda Leonard Scarber (Scarborough) buried in 1896. The cemetery was known then as Ariel's Cemetery.

On October 24, 1959, Benjamin J. Stevenson sold an additional lot to Saint James for three hundred dollars (\$300). This increased the church's yard area.

Other Pastoral Leaders of our historic church were as follows: Rev. A. Isiah, Rev. Cooper, Rev. Wallace, Rev. McCray, Rev. Nathaniel Bethea, Rev. J. M. Delaine, Rev. D.D. Dowdy, Rev. J.S. Stanley, Rev. James Davis, Rev. Hughes, Rev. B.J. Johnson, Rev. Jerry Richardson, Rev. Samuel D. Johnson, Rev. Hugo Stanley, Rev. Hardy Sims, Rev. Calvin B. Glenn, Interim Pastor Rev. Dr. Virginia F. Davis, Rev. James C. Evans, Rev. Franklin K. Richardson, Sr., Rev. Dr. Georgeann T. Pringle, Rev. Timothy A. Johnson, Sr., Rev. James O. Rodgers and presently Rev. Felix Jordan, Sr.

Our Presiding Elders were as follows: Elder F.D. Flagler, Elder J.M. Delaine, Elder D.C. Deas, Elder W.P. Carolina, Elder A.G. Spears, Elder J.S. Coe, Elder M.F. Robinson, Elder I. W. Jenerette, Elder A.J. Jenkins, Elder Mingo W. Singleton, Elder Robert L. McCants, Elder Charles J. Graves, Elder William Smith, Jr. and presently Elder Johnnie O. Coe

When initially established, St. James was a part of the Saint Mary Circuit; which included Saint James, Saint Mary and Bethlehem A.M.E. churches. These churches shared one pastor and became a "Station" or stand-alone church in 1968 under the leadership of Rev. Calvin B. Glenn and was no longer a part of the Saint Mary Circuit.

Church and Community Transitions

Our church was renovated in 1941. Later, in the 1960s Rev. James Davis and Rev. Hugo Stanley were instrumental in bringing changes to the interior by adding a pastor's study and ladies room. The church interior has undergone modernization namely, pot-bellied wood stoves were converted to central heat and air. Hardwood floors were carpeted, clear glass

windowpanes were replaced with stained glass ones. In addition, single ceiling lights were converted into chandeliers. Our music was upgraded from just a piano to an organ, piano, keyboard, and drums for worship service. Cushioned padded pews replaced wooden benches and our outside facilities became inside facilities. All these physical changes serve to better meet the spiritual, social, and physical needs of our congregation.

Under the leadership of Rev. C.B. Glenn the Education Center and Fellowship Hall was started in 1983 and completed in 1985 by the Young Adults Ministry of the church. The facility was named The C.B. Glenn Education Building. The facility includes a dining area, a kitchen, a pastor's office with restroom, business office, two classrooms, computer lab, covered area for the church van and two other restrooms. Currently, a room has been arranged to accommodate a clothing closet and storage for the Senior Ministry. The first church van was purchased under the leadership of Rev. F.K. Richardson, Sr.

Our membership has grown over the years. Our choirs have grown from one to six over the years to include "The Little Angels," which is now the Junior Mass Choir, The C.B. Glenn Choir, The Sanctuary Choir, The Gospel Choir, The Male Chorus, The G.T. Pringle Mass Choir and presently The Mass Choir.

Since its inception, many local and leading pastors received their calling at St. James and have gone forth to serve as Jesus disciples. Among them are: Rev. Claudia L. Leonard, Rev. James M. Leonard, Rev. Lorenzo R. Stevenson, Rev. Preston Stevenson, Rev. Romeo Leonard, Presiding Elder Richard A. Leonard, Presiding Elder Levern Stevenson, Rev. Boston Ford, Jr., Rev. Archie C. Leonard, Rev. E. Davis, Rev. Arthur Lee Leonard, Rev. Auzzie Burch Leonard, Rev. Nora Leonard Reed, Rev. Connie Rosetta Leonard, Rev. James B. Leonard, Rev. Wayne D. Gregg, Rev. Lenora Brunson Bonaparte, Rev. Johnny L. Miller, Sr., Rev. Willie Hayes, Jr. and Rev. Dr. Anthony Stevenson. Also, with family and strong ties to the community and church is The Honorable Senator Rev. Dr. Clementa C. Pinckney.

St. James Church not only produced many ministers, but many educators as well through the St. James School which was built as one of the Rosenwald Schools. These schools were built primarily for the education of African American children in the South during the early 20th century. Julius Rosenwald was part-owner and president of Sears and Roebuck Company and founder of The Rosenwald Fund. Rosenwald required local communities to commit public funds and contribute additional cash donations. Saint James Church assisted in the support of the school. The Saint James School (1925) was instrumental in educating many children from 1925 through the mid 1950's when a public school (Terrell's Bay) was built in Centenary. The first class entered Terrell's Bay School in the fall of 1954, with the last class graduating in 2003 and making way for the current Creek Bridge School.

Until the mid-1960's, the majority of the community were farmers. Families were large with a number of children who worked daily to help on the farms. The farm was a way of supporting the family's livelihood. Tobacco, cotton, corn, and fresh vegetable gardens were the main crops. These farms provided many families with tuition money to send their children to college. Modern-day technology, education and economics have transformed the community's way of life. There are very few farmers left today in the community. Those left are basically vegetable farmers.

Moving Into the 21st Century

Rev. F.K. Richardson, Sr., served the St. James A.M.E. Church from 1993 until his untimely

death in 2007. A Marion County native, Rev. Richardson served as a community educator and minister. At St. James, he worked to inspire the congregation to be ever mindful of God's desire for each of us to be instruments of His will.

In 2008, under the visionary leadership of Rev. Georgeann T. Pringle, St. James renewed its commitment to the mission of serving the spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional, and environmental needs of the community-at-large. New ministries were established including a food bank, clothing closet, afterschool and summer learning program, seniors' ministry, drama club and the building fund for the new church was kicked off on October 2, 2009, with the purchase of eight acres of land adjoining the church property to be developed.

Rev. Timothy A. Johnson, Sr. was appointed pastor of St. James in 2011. During his tenure, he has endeavored to continue to build upon the foundation that had been laid. He has worked diligently to expand the membership by reaching out to recruit new members. A preacher and teacher, Rev. Johnson continued to administer to the spiritual needs of all members of the church, and with strategic planning he is carefully pushed forward the building program for the new St. James Church. On the fourth Sunday in April of 2015 the congregation joyously moved into the new St. James Church facility under the leadership of Rev. Johnson.

Rev. James O. Rodgers was appointed pastor of St. James in November 2015, during the Northeast Conference Post Conference. Under Rev. Rodgers' leadership the church financial department moved into total computerized accounting and online giving. A beautiful, donated sign was erected, and the church and the membership moved on to work for success. During the COVID19 pandemic Rev. Rodgers instituted the telephone and zoom church worship service format allowing worship to continue and membership to stay connected.

Rev. Felix Jordan, Sr. was appointed pastor of St. James in October 2021. Rev. Jordan has continued to follow through with current projects while developing and planning for future projects to make St. James and the membership servant leaders.

Looking Back . . . While Moving Forward

Many families have contributed hard work, prayers, their treasure, and fellowship to make this the great church it is today. Some of those families are the. . .

Belin	Bell	Best	Bethea	
Brunson				
Burch	Cochran	Crawford	Davis	
Ford				
Franklin	Frazier	Godbolt	Graham	
Grant				
Graves	Gregg	Green	Grice	
Howard				
Johnson	Leonard	Miller	Murrell	
McQueen				
Owens	Reed	Richardson	Roberts	Rogers
Rowell	Singletary	Stackhouse	Stevenson	
Thomas				
Vandroff	Williams	Woodberry		

. . .and other connecting families. Many of these families are related. Approximately eighty percent (80%) of the communities are descendants of Jack and Bina Davis Leonard. Jack was

a slave from Tennessee (now Lexington, NC), who settle in the community. Jack took the last name of his Master which was Leonard. Jack and Bina were the parents of eight children and are listed in the Marion County, South Carolina United States Census of 1870 and 1880. (See Leonard History).

Over the years, many residents who grew up in and were nurtured by the St. James A.M.E. Church Family left the community to seek opportunities looking for a better way of life. Currently, many of them reside all over the world. In reflection, we acknowledge and celebrate today because we understand that all we have achieved has been made possible first and foremost because of the fervent prayers of our forefathers at the altar of Saint James African Methodist Episcopal Church, and secondly by the legacy and beliefs that Jack and Bina Leonard instilled in their children, grandchildren and the descendants living today which has been passed down through the generations and states, "We should:

(1) Stick Together,

(2) WorK Hard

and above all

(3) Believe in God."

St. James is blessed with a renewed sense of community consciousness. Our future is bright, and we believe with God's divine help our success will be sustained as we pursue our vision of

Building Bridges and Changing Lives.