

"... Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it."

These words of Jesus mark the beginning of the Universal Church and in particular, the ST. MARK MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH. A realization nineteen centuries later when a group of ex-slaves with their children purposed in their hearts to lead a spiritual journey to prosperity.

In A. D. 1872, a group of tired but willing workers, led by the Spirit of God under the direction of Rev. H. Harris, made provisions to purchase land from Mr. and Mrs. W. T. Nelson to construct an edifice to be known as ST. MARK CHURCH and SCHOOL. Among these workers were W. H. Shelton, M. C. Moon, Louis John Wesley, Henry Clay, Perry Jefferson, and Josh Clemmons. In 1919 demands for an even larger edifice led to the purchase of more land to build a new church.

The Pastorate down through the years has listed within its memoirs such notables as Rev. Mark Herring, Rev. Hardy Tate, Rev. Cham Nathaniel, Rev. Peter Baker, Rev. John Dotts, Rev. A. L. Williams, Rev. Napoleon Rodgers and Rev. C. W. Waller.

In 1936 Rev. A. L. Williams became pastor and remained in that position until 1963. Under his dynamic and inspired leadership, the church grew to the extent of organizing a junior church. Reverend Williams acquainted the church with local and national Christian organizations and the well-remembered Singing Union organized by his wife, Mrs. Willie Mae Williams. Reverend Williams will long be remembered as a man of vision, a singer, a farmer, a poet, and a counselor. Some of the national events he carried the church through included World War II, the Korean Uprising, and the 1954 Supreme Court Decision about which he remarked, "We are the problems on the table." Some of the officers serving the church under him were Harrison McDaniel, Sam Young, Robert King, Bogart Jones, John Jones, Willie Ware, Tony Webb, Sr., Sam Jones, Robert S. Strong, Clarence Nathaniel, Sr., Marcelles Sneed, Sr. and Oliver Malone, Sr. Rev. A. L. Williams, a beacon of hope and refuge for the saved and unsaved, now sleeps with the Father.

Succeeding Reverend Williams was Rev. Napoleon Rodgers. His (Rev. Rodgers) leadership began in 1964. A man filled with spiritual leadership and wise administration, he led the membership to purchase some frontal land from Robert and Bertha Strong located on Wilkinsville Road. In the development of his plans, a new sanctuary, an outdoors baptism pool, Sunday School classrooms and an ample parking area was leveled to accommodate the growing community.

Under the leadership of Rev. Rodgers, many new and innovative ministries were added to the church's calendar. The Deacon board was increased with such notables as Bro. James L. (Joe) Sneed and Bro. Wilbert Peete. The Sunday School attendance became increasingly noticeable. St. Mark can truly say that its growth was spanned duly to the efforts of this dynamic, tireless, and lovable Pastor. However, 1974 with so much work to be done on God's program, Rev. Rodgers decided to move on to a greater field of harvest with Gods' blessing.

On December 15, 1974, after a long ten-month search for the one to fill the pastorate of St. Mark, a strong pulpiteer came in the manner of one Rev. C.W. Waller, a man who was always looking on the positive side. His administration was characterized by an unusual calm, which led to great and grand progress. Rev. Waller can be credited with the formation of The Children's Hour, the Carol Choir, the Chanting of the "Lord's Prayer" during morning devotional, an outlined Order of Service, the revitalization of the Women Home Mission Society, and the building of a cooperative family spirit among the membership. Rev. Waller's reign lasted until December 19, 1975, when he was summoned to rest in the bosom of his father, but St. Mark never forgot those fruitful months of service. In late 1975 following the death of Rev. Waller, St. Mark found itself in search of another leader.

Through the faithful and fervent prayers of its members, in April of 1976 the services of one Reverend Leo M. Gray, Jr., were summoned to be used in the Wilkinsville community. Reverend Gray's pastoral career at this juncture cannot be described as nothing less than charismatic, for certainly he has prepared the hearts and minds of the people for a new awakening.

Under Pastor Gray's ministerial leadership, we began worshipping every Sunday instead of just the first and third Sundays and regular weekly bible study began. Other notable events include: 1977 The first Vacation Bible Study was established:

A bus was purchased, and bus ministry was added

1978 An organ was purchased to enhance the musical program
Observed our First Black History Month
Traveled to Eureka Springs, Arkansas on our first church trip

1979 Broke ground for the addition to the present sanctuary

Church trip traveled to the Martin Luther King Center of Cultural Development, Atlanta, Georgia and Lookout Mountain in Chattanooga, Tennessee
Organized the Mary E. King Scholarship Fund

1980 Dedication of the new sanctuary

Pastor Gray and the deacons established the Third Sunday Layman's Breakfast
The Annual Christmas and Thanksgiving Services were combined with St. James C.M.E. Church, Millington, Tennessee on a rotating basis.
Introduced Friday Night fellowship during revival week

The church trip traveled to the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and the Martin Luther King Center in Atlanta, Georgia

1982 Church trip travel to the World's Fair in Knoxville, Tennessee

1983 Organized the St. Mark Church Growth and Development Committee
Designated the month of July as Youth Month

1984 Launched our first Church Homecoming Carnival

1985 Launched first Youth Retreat at Shelby Forest

1986 Opened the St. Mark Christian Day Care Center

1987 Began fifth Sunday full worship service

Traveled to Eureka Springs, Arkansas for a church trip

The Institute for African American Youth opened to support academic learning and to enrich cultural awareness. The five-year grant funded program served several communities in the Mid-South.

Under Reverend Gray's leadership the following Deacons were added to the Deacons ministry: Eli Williams, Ernest Neal, Oliver Malone, Jr., Andrew Fisher and George Harris.

Reverend Gray's ministry at St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church ended in June 1992.

The magnificent growth of the St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church has been so fruitful with an enumeration of many accomplishments. The church has continued to make progress toward the future.

Whether you believe it, circumstances along with destiny have a way of directing our paths and where we sojourn is not always ours to determine.

On the 4th Sunday, the 27th day of September in 1992, an exuberant young man made his first visit to St. Mark. He left an indelible impression. It was so impressive that on December 6, 1992, the Reverend Keith LaShun McGee was commissioned and installed as the 14th Pastor of the St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church. Standing on the shoulders of 13 giants and having the advantage of such a rich spiritual tradition behind him, Rev. McGee's ministry ushered St. Mark into the 21st century.

Under Pastor McGee's ministerial leadership, deacons added to the St. Mark Church ministry included Christopher Malone, Freddie McFarland, Marcelles Sneed, Jr., David Hamilton, James Collins, and Ernest Casey.

Pastor McGee expressed an unending thankfulness for the blessings in which God had bestowed upon him. He reminded members that if they only placed their hope and trust in God and followed the things God had given them to live by success would follow. He really enjoyed challenging and inspiring people to live up to the potential for which God had called them to live. Under his leadership, sixteen additional acres of land were purchased for the future growth and development of the St. Mark M. B. Church. He envisioned plans to include a Church Family Life Center and desired for the total utilization of all the acreage and resources God had provided to the congregation of St. Mark.

The Church Trip Committee was reorganized to provide further opportunities for fellowship among members, families and friends and afford all the benefits of traveling during the summer. These church trips have become a successful annual event with great family and community participation. The committee members included Bro. Trent McVay, Sis. Donnie McVay, Bro. Jerry Cooper, Sis. Estella Malone, Sis. Rosemary Harris, and Sis. Clarice Lewis. The annual church trips have taken us many thousands of miles from St. Mark, dating back from 1994 to this present date. The annual excursions include: 1994 - New York/New Jersey; 1995 - Washington, D.C./Baltimore, MD; 1996 - Dallas/San Antonio, TX; 1997 - New York, New York (Piscataway, NY/Lancaster, PA); 1998 - Charleston, SC; 1999 - Gulf Shores, AL; 2000 - Washington, D.C.; 2001 - Toronto, Canada/Detroit, MI; 2002 - Destin, FL; 2003 - Myrtle Beach, SC; 2004 - Chicago, IL; 2005 - San Antonio, TX; 2006 - Washington, D.C.; 2007 - Albuquerque, NM; 2008 - Destin, FL; 2009 - Charleston, SC; 2010 - Washington, D.C.; 2011 - Denver, CO; 2012 - Tampa, FL; 2013 - New York, New York; 2014 - Myrtle Beach, SC; 2015 - Minneapolis, Minnesota; 2016 - Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

As we embraced the new Millennium in the year 2000, God's blessings continued to fall upon St. Mark. Upon becoming an integral part of a growing community and growing membership the need for more space and adequate accommodations was deemed necessary. Pastor McGee was instrumental in guiding many enhancements to the church facilities and worship services. We have taken great strides in making the worship experience around St. Mark comfortable and more meaningful.

In April of 2001, the college ministry held its first Annual College Retreat in Nashville, Tennessee, where all the college students were brought in for a full weekend of supportive seminars and leadership activities. Subsequent retreats have been in Alabama, Georgia, Atlanta, Arkansas, Kentucky, Missouri, and Louisiana. The college retreats have included educational workshops, visiting historical landmarks, and participating in community outreach.

In 2002, St. Mark, while marking its 130 years of existence, continued to march on in the faith of Abraham knowing that we truly had come this far by trusting and believing in God, our builder and maker. During this era of continued growth many important and pivotal strides were made in the history of our church. Among the many new innovative programs and activities of 2002 was the launch of "Sunday School Month." The entire month of September that year was filled with Christian educational activities to help promote the interest and attendance in the Sunday School Program at St. Mark. The month of this great event ended with an Awards Banquet, wherein each class was presented with special promotions, tributes, and awards. The banquet was organized by our Superintendent during that time, Sis. Stephanie Lewis.

In 2003, history records that things associated with St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church continued to grow and prosper. During that year we participated in many history-making events. The Golden Circle ministry provided the senior members an outing to see the Broadway production of "The Lion King" at the Orpheum Theater in Memphis. The Women's Retreat took the ladies of the church to an overnight stay in Nashville, Tennessee, where they shopped, dined, and toured various sites of the city in joyful fun, faith, and fellowship.

In January 2004, the services of Reverend Julius Beasley were acquired. He became the first salaried staff minister at St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church.

In November of 2005, we expanded our deacon ministry with an additional six members. Deacons added to the ministry were Willie Jean Gills, Stephanie Lewis, Ruby Godwin, Jacque Hayes-Fennell, Woodrow Holman, and Carl Lewis.

In 2007, we ordained our three associate ministers: Reverend Brenda Fayne, Reverend Romey Green, and Reverend Nina Tidwell. We held our first annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend celebration. Breakfast honorees were Mayor Willie Herenton, Herbert Hilliard, and Barbara Bostick-Hunt. The holiday celebration honorees were Dr. Barbara Duncan-Cody, W. S. (Babe) Howard, and James L. "Joe" Sneed. Also, that year St. Mark's inaugural Easter Production, "He Lives", was written, produced and directed by, Pastor Keith Lashun McGee.

In 2008, our second Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend celebration was observed. Breakfast honorees were Dr. Nathan Essex, Edith Kelly-Green, William Hudson, Jr., and Reginia Watson-Jefferson. The holiday celebration honorees were Charles E. "Bub" Cole, Reverend Al Green, Doris Thomas Hill, and Justice Janice M. Holder. This year also marked Vacation Bible School being held nightly for the first time from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Continuing our mission in 2009, the third annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Celebration was observed. Honorees were William O. "Billy" Brooks, Pastor Michael W. Owens, Beverly Robertson, and Dr. Jane Walters. Our Annual Youth Month Celebration was enhanced with a continuation of the "Keepers of the Dream" Observance. Honorees were Dwight Fryer, Willie Gregory, Mary Arine Jones Haynes, and Attorney Camille R. McMullen.

In February of 2009, Pastor Keith L. McGee launched the St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church Essay Contest. Eligible participants were students in grades 3-12. The Essay Topic: "What Does the Life of Dr. Martin Luther King Mean to You?" Many students participated and the judges selected three winners who were awarded \$50.00 each. The winners were Michael Alston, Keith McGee, II, and Taylor Payne. Also in this same year, Pastor McGee added a new ministry to protect congregants and visitors, while in the worship services of St. Mark which was simply called the "Watch Ministry."

During the year 2010, our fourth annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Celebration was observed. Honorees for that year were Quincey Barlow, Dr. Shirley Raines, Marilyn Robinson, and Joyce Waters. Our Black History Celebration was enhanced with the continuation of the "Keepers of the Dream" Observance. Honorees were Martha L. Beard, Rickey Fayne, Cato Johnson, Johnny B. Moore, Jr., and Bianca Sweeten, M.D. The continuation of the St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church Essay Contest was launched using the same guidelines as in 2009. The judges selected two winners who were awarded \$50.00 each. Winners for that particular year were Maelin Harris and Keith McGee, II.

In 2011, our 5th annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Celebration was observed. Honorees were Anna Barbara Cavan Bernil, Dr. Robert J. Canady, Lois M. Deberry, Harold A. Middlebrook, Sr., and Mary Drew Taylor Jones. In the month of February 2011, we celebrated our African American History Observance and the "Keepers of the Dream" Recipients. Honorees that year were Kym Clark, Major Quinton Jones, Mary Taylor Jones, and Lucy Shaw. The continuation of the St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church Essay Contest was held once again using the same guidelines as in 2010. The judges selected two winners who were awarded \$50.00 each. Winners were Kiera Richardson and Michael Alston.

On Monday, January 16, 2012, our 6th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Celebration was observed. As our nation continues to be impacted by the words, deeds, and principles of Dr. King, we here at St. Mark continue to be overwhelmed by his mountaintop experience. We continued to honor our community leaders who have dedicated their time and life's work to follow in his footsteps. Our 2012 honorees were Michelle Alexander-Best, Joe Birch, Katherine Flemings and John Everett Strong, Jr. As we continue to celebrate African American History Month, we have come to the place for which our fathers died with a reminder that the struggle is still on for those who continue to carry the cross. We have those brave individuals who with God's guidance have made some awesome achievements for our people and are a stern reminder that they are "Keepers of the Dream". Our 2012 honorees were Delois Bolden, Anfernee "Penny" Hardaway, Dr. Charlotte Fisher, and Coach Vertis Sails, Jr. Dr. Chrisla Tidwell received our first "Dreamer of Tomorrow" award.

The year 2013 began with a special blessing placed upon St. Mark, the installation and dedication of stained-glass windows which was a special gift from the Canady/Raines family. Each window represents a part of the Christian history and legacy of St. Mark: The Bible – The word of God; Alpha and Omega – God is the beginning and the end; The Dove – Love and peace; The Cross – Sacrifice; The Crown – God's authority and rule; The Commandments – Redemption; The Bread and Wine – The blood and the body of Christ; The Circles – The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. In 2013, there were new additions to the church's Deacons Ministry: Donna K. Williams, Daveri Shipp, Jewel Gates, Walter Montgomery and Chrisla Tidwell were selected.

In the same year we celebrated our 7th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Celebration. Our honorees included: Dr. Fred Heros, Dr. Inetta Rogers, Mr. Mark Stansbury, and Ms. Nelba Thomas. Our 2013 "Keepers of the Dream" Awards were presented to the following honorees: Karla Davis, Aaron T. Ford, and Attorney Edward L. Stanton, III. Shawn Boyd received the honor of "Dreamer of Tomorrow" award.

In 2014, the 8th annual community celebration was held at the Millington Community Center. The keynote speaker was Pastor Dr. Alan V. Ragland of Chicago, IL. Those honored were Robert Gatewood, Esq., Elmore Nickelberry, Lori Spicer Robertson, and Billy S. McCullough. Our 2014 "Keepers of the Dream" awards were presented to Thomas Wayne Selles, Deanie Parker, Attorney David E. McKinney, Dr. Shania A. McKinney, Dr. Reginald W. Coopwood, and Dr. Lai Brooks.

In 2015, our 9th Annual MLK Community Celebration was held at the Millington Community Center. Those honored were Attorney V. Latosha Dexter, Reverend Romey Green, Dr. Steve Stone, Sheriff J.T. "Pancho" Chumley, and Attorney Linda Nettles Harris. Our African American History Keepers of the Dream honorees were Carl M. Barnes, Gail Jones Carson, Shelvie Rose, Sr., and Lonnie L. Vaughn. Jerica Phillips received the honor of "Dreamer of Tomorrow" award.

On November 7, 2015, St. Mark launched its first 5K Walk/Run in remembrance of Johnnie P. Alston, a victim of domestic violence and a member of the St. Mark Church family. Proceeds from the walk were distributed to the Northwest Safeline Center for Domestic Violence and provided two scholarships for the graduating class of Munford High School in Munford, Tennessee. In 2016 the second walk was held with proceeds benefiting four graduating seniors from Munford High School.

In 2016, our 10th Annual MLK Community Celebration was held at the Millington Community Center in Millington, Tennessee. The keynote speaker was Pastor Christopher Davis of St. Paul Baptist Church of Memphis, Tennessee. Those honored were Dr. Martin Croce, Carolyn Hardy, Judge Gina Higgins, Dr. Thomas Kirchberg, and Adrian Nathaniel. Our 2016 "Keepers of the Dream" awards were presented to Taylor Eskridge, Louis C. Hayslett, Rachel Lawson, and Norma A. Hines-Mason. In the same year Associate Minister Reverend Andrew Fisher was ordained.

During Pastor McGee's years of service, he placed a strong emphasis upon the children and the youth of the church. A focus on their work was emphasized through change in ministry names to reflect their mission: the children to "Kingdom Builders" and the youth to "Ambassadors for Christ". We feel our youth are the best that life can offer and capable of amazing accomplishments. We consciously look for this in each young person that God entrusts to our care.

In April 2016 Reverend Keith L. McGee's ministry at St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church ended. "It is in your moments of decisions that your destiny is shaped". Turning to the Lord Jesus Christ for guidance, the St. Mark church family began the search for a new leader.

In September 2016 a charismatic, gifted, and exciting preacher stepped into the pulpit of the St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church, in the person of Reverend E. Allen Redwell, Jr. It was evident that the Lord had sent St. Mark an awesome Pastor.

On November 20, 2016, Reverend E. Allen Redwell, Jr. was called to be the Senior Servant at the Saint. His calling ushered in a new chapter in the history and legacy of St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church on Wilkinsville Road. Pastor Redwell embarked on this journey with faith, courage, and determination as our 15th leader. Since taking the reins as Senior Pastor of the historic St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church, we've experienced great growth. Pastor Redwell has implemented so many innovative ideas. Under Pastor Redwell's leadership an amazing Praise Team was developed and incorporated into the weekly worship services. A dynamic youth choir and youth day was reinstated bringing a fresh wave of worship to our services as the youth were given the 4th Sunday of each month to express themselves in praise to our God. Pastor Redwell also professionally branded the church. He introduced a church logo and a church theme song where we are now affectionately known as "The Saint" stating "YOU'LL FIND EVERYTHING YOU NEED AT THE SAINT!"

Pastor Redwell's love for God's Word brought about a thirst and a yearning for good biblical teaching. He has gone through great lengths to ensure everyone understands God's word accurately. Our weekly Bible Class that he named Monday Manna has grown spiritually and numerically. Not only do we have an adult Bible Class, but we also have a youth Bible study class as well. Pastor Redwell thought it was befitting to carry on the rich legacy that was placed in his care by continuing the Dr. Martin Luther King Day Community Celebration and the Keepers of The Dream Awards Celebration. We've continued to celebrate the hard work and dedication of those torch carriers who have committed themselves to bridging the gap racially while offering hope and healing to our communities. In 2017, more excitement came to "The Saint" when we added our first official Executive Chef, Brother Reather D. Cooper.

In that same year we reinstated our Mothers Ministry, adding eight newly crowned Mothers to the ministry: Martha Gracie Mae Williams, Mary Franklin Williams, Bessie Sneed, Carolyn Malone Sneed, Charlotte Fisher, Mary Elizabeth Gates, Dianne Richey, and Toilya Smith.

We also added three new deacons to our Deacons Ministry: James Fields, Dennis Lofton, and Dennis Matthews.

Several building improvements and remodeling projects have successfully taken place. We've been blessed to upgrade our entire security and surveillance systems and the entire sound system. We added video cameras and lighting for our livestream services online. We have a full multimedia project where we added video screens and media software throughout our campus. We also have an official line of St. Mark apparel. Our church has now entered the cyber world as we now have a heavy social media presence on all major social media platforms. In June 2017 our church was blessed to be reintroduced to the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. We sent 23 delegates to the National Baptist Congress of Christian Education. Additionally, we held our First Men's Ministry BBQ Cooking Contest as a kickoff to our Men and Women's Month.

In the fall of 2017, Pastor Redwell introduced the idea of a Community Carnival. With the footwork and unified efforts of our amazing members we held our first Annual "ROCK THE SAINT" Fall Festival. The "ROCK THE SAINT" Carnival offered support to First Responders of Tipton County as well as the surrounding schools and decision-making bodies. We were so overwhelmed with participation and patronage that we added a Christmas to Remember Gala with Live Music. During this event we celebrated our members and our Music and Fine Arts Ministry which was in conjunction with our Annual Community Christmas Cantata.

The Lord blessed us with another amazing visionary in the person of Pastor E. Allen Redwell, Jr., to lead us into the bright future that God has for us. St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church (THE SAINT) has experienced an amazing awakening. We are a 5G Church where we operate as a Gracious, Giving, Growing, Glowing, and Going Church. God has truly blessed and prospered St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church from its humble beginning in 1872 through today. It is our prayer and our hope that these blessings will continue for this body of Christ as we stand and become a beacon of service to all through God. Of course, like all who follow Christ, we have weathered storms of oppositions – crossed seas of criticism – climbed mountains of doubt, but with God leading us – nothing is impossible.

As we reflect on the rich history of our church with a deep sense of thanksgiving and remembrance from where we have come, let us look forward to the future with an abiding faith and prayers for continued guidance from a loving and faithful God.