

History of The Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church

Sometime prior to 1827, the exact date is unknown, the African Religion Society came into existence, and owned a building on Talcott Street which they used as a place of worship. About 1833 there was a split in the organization which resulted in the formation of two churches, one of the Congregational faith and one of them Methodist Faith. The first was known as a Colored Congregational Church and the other as the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church. For a brief period they both used the same place of worship.

In 1842 the Colored M.E. Church purchased land on Elm Street. This plot of land was sold to the City in 1856. After this we find the A.M.E. Zion Society purchasing the property on Pearl Street. Sometime between 1842-1856 they took the name of the A.M.E. Zion Society. Rev. George A. Spywood, to whom the Colored M.E. Society conveyed its Elm Street property in trust in 1844, took an active part in the split of the A.M.E. Zion Church in 1852 which was not healed until 1860, during that time the eastern part of the Church was called "Zion" and the western part called "Wesley". It is interesting to note in this connection that the property of the Colored M.E. Society on Elm Street was conveyed to the City of Hartford under the name of the A.M.E. Zion Society, and nowhere on the records do we find a change in the name of the M.E. Society, or of a union with the A.M.E. Zion Society.

In March, 1862, the A.M.E. Zion Society conveyed its Pearl Street property to James Hosner, Thomas Smith, and Samuel Coit in trust, honor and confidence, that said grantees shall at all times suffer and permit the said Ecclesiastical Society, known as the A.M.E. Zion society to use and occupy said land and building for the purpose of a place of religious worship and for all the uses for which the said Ecclesiastical Society may lawfully need the same, and in further trust to sell and convey the said land and building whenever in concurrent opinion of the grantors as expressed by their vote at a legal meeting dully called, and the grantees, it shall be for the best interest of said Ecclesiastical Society to sell the same, and in case of such sale, then

in further trust to invest the avails of such sale in another lot of land and house of worship for said Ecclesiastical Society.

The first New England Annual Conference of the Church was held in Hartford in 1845. Since that time the members of the local Church have taken an active part in the subsequent Annual and General Conference of the Church and have been represented by delegates, and while no written record of the admission of this local Society into the A.M.E. Zion Church can be found, the members of the local organization have for more than one hundred years acquiesced in the use of the name A.M.E. Zion Society, in the deeds and conveyances of their Property and in the description of the Church in the local Directories and State Manuals.

The first church was created on Pearl Street in 1856 and used by a devoted people for forty-two years. In 1898 a new church was erected under the very successful pastorate of Rev. J. Sulla Cooper who served this congregation for five years.

In 1908, Rev. B. W. Swain was appointed pastor of this old historic church, and under his leadership a grand rally was held in November 1908, and the mortgage and every known obligation of the church was paid. The mortgage was burned on December 15, 1908. Bishop Alexander Walters, the presiding Bishop of the Conference was the honored guest on the day of the mortgage burning. The Pearl Street Church was used until 1924. Because of the migration of our people to the northern section of the city, leaving the church in what is called the "downtown section" the City of Hartford purchased the Pearl Street property in 1924 for one hundred and twenty thousand (\$120,000) dollars. This transaction was consummated under the pastorate of Rev. Amos J. Gorham, who served as pastor from 1925-1929. The proceeds from the sale of the church to the City of Hartford in 1924 enabled the congregation to purchase a beautiful church located at 2051 Main Street. this plant was purchased at a cost of ninety-five thousand (\$95,000) dollars. In addition to this there was purchased across the street from the church, two well appointed houses and lots, the buildings of brick and stone, with all modern conveniences. The cost of these two buildings was thirty-five thousand (\$35,000) dollars.

Under the pastorate of Rev. J.H. D. Bailey, who served as pastor for four years (1936-1940) the church was incorporated. During the years of the church's history on Pearl Street, it was known as the Pearl Street Church. After moving to its new location it was known as the Main Street Methodist Church. Rev. Bailey had it incorporated as the Metropolitan A.M.E Zion Church, the present name.

It is impossible to give a complete history of the Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church. Many names of hard workers must be omitted, and many heartwarming stories must go untold. However, the size of the present congregation of the church, the leadership it has shown in the community, and the cooperation of the worshippers tell the story of the success of the church today.

In 1984 the church was blessed to have had the 35th pastor, The Rev. Dr. Alfred E. White who was also serving as Presiding Elder of the Hartford District, elected to the Episcopacy. Bishop White, the eightieth in succession in the A.M.E. Zion Church, was the first Bishop to be elected while serving in the New England Conference. Among the many accomplishments during Dr. White's leadership (1962-1984) were replacement of roof on the church, complete renovation of the church interior including new floor, lights, carpet, pews, pulpit furniture, commercial kitchen, new lavatory facilities and lounge; purchase of the parsonage on Ridgefield Street, parking lot adjacent to the church office building, and two vans; installation of an elevator and the construction of a ramp.

Dr. White's accomplishments were not limited to improvement and development of the physical structure. In addition, his leadership inspired spiritual vitality, educational growth, and cultural enlightenment that extended beyond the walls of the church to the wider community.

The 36th pastor was the Rev. Raymond E. Price. During Rev. Price's tenure, Phase I of the Restoration Project surfaced and was near completion at the time of his departure. Also, Rev. Price was instrumental in creating the Day of Jubilee Celebration. He extended the existing Rochester Scholarship Fund to the Rochester/Strickland

Scholarship Fund. The church was placed on the National Register of Historical Sites under his pastorate.

In December 1994, The Rt Rev. George W. C. Walker, Sr. appointed the Rev. Kenneth Monroe to continue the ministry at Metropolitan. Rev. Monroe's vision of ministry is rooted in Christian Education. The work of Christian Education is in its infancy; however, Metropolitan's mission is headed for new heights and new dimensions. Restoration is still important, physically Phase I has been complete; some restoration has taken place at the Manse and the church office building. More importantly, restoration is occurring in the lives of the membership and the approach the church is taking to do ministry.

The Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church, now 163 years old (1833-1996) may be proud of its history and of its present status. It is a church that has been consistently growing in membership and receives the admiration of the entire city.

PASTORS OF THE METROPOLITAN A.M.E. CHURCH

Rev. Hosea Easton	1836-1842	Rev. Alfred Day	1889-1892
Rev. Geo. A. Spywood	1842-1846	Rev. Lewis Henry Taylor	1892-1897
Rev. Joseph Hicks	1846-1848	Rev. J. Sulla Cooper	1897-1902
Rev. Lovin Smith	1848-1849	Rev A. A. Crooke	1902-1906
Rev. Alexander Posey	1849-1850	Rev. Andrew McCallum	1906-1908
Rev. John Mars	1850-1852	Rev. Benjamin W. Swain	1908-1912
Rev Samuel T. Gray, MD	1852-1857	Rev. Richard Robert Ball	1912-1924
Rev. John Williams	1857-1860	Rev. S. W. Weller	1924-1925
Rev. Samuel M. Giles	1860-1861	Rev Amos Joseph Gorham	1929-1932
Rev Geo. H. Washington	1861-1862	Rev. William Orlando Carrington	1929-1932
Rev. John F. Lloyd	1862-1865	Rev. Henry Duvall Tillman	1932-1936
Rev. Joseph G. Smith	1865-1866	Rev. J. H. D. Bailey	1936-1940
Rev. Peter Roas	1866-1867	Rev. William O. Carson	1940-1942
Rev. Robert H. G. Dyson	1867-1873	Rev. Austin Paul Morris	1942-1949
Rev. Samuel H. Birchmore	1878-1880	Rev. Robert T Hunter	1949-1961
Rev. Joseph Smith	1878-1880	Rev. Alfred E. White	1962-1984
Rev. Robert Russell Morris	1880-1884	Rev. Raymond E. Price	1984-1994
Rev. G.H. S. Bell	1884-1887	Rev. Kenneth Monroe	1994-
Rev. W. H. Abbot	1887-1889		