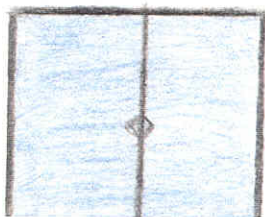


*The Third Annual  
McKinley High School Oral History Project  
Presents*



*Visions:  
The Soul & Spirit of  
South Baton Rouge Churches*



# ***Visions: The Soul and Spirit of South Baton Rouge Churches***

Introduction by  
Pamela Dean, Director  
T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History

The South Baton Rouge neighborhood that lies between Government Street and the northern boundary of the LSU campus has long been a vital center of commerce and community for the city's African-American residents. It has a rich history, one that is only partially documented in newspapers and official records. Much essential information remains locked in the memories of our neighbors, relatives, and friends. Since the summer of 1995, groups of young people have been doing oral history interviews to learn about the people and institutions of this community, to fill in the gaps in the written record, and to ensure that those memories are not lost.

Since education was such an important force in the community, our first topic was the history of McKinley High School, the first public high school for blacks in Louisiana. Based on over fifty interviews and extensive research, the staff of that first program produced a time line, photo exhibit, slide-tape show, and a video on the history of the school. In 1996 we turned our attention to the businesses in the area. The result was over thirty interviews, a photo exhibit, a slide-tape presentation and a book with photos of the businesses on Thomas Delpit Drive and our interviewees, along with excerpts from the interviews.

This year we turn to the heart and soul of the community, the churches and other faith-based institutions. We tried to include some representation of all such groups -- we identified forty-three -- but surely we have missed some. We know we can barely scratch the surface of this rich and important topic over a few weeks of the summer but this is a work in progress and we welcome your suggestions for others that should be included.

We also added a new element to the project this year. Thanks to a grant from the Louisiana Educational Quality Support Fund (LEQSF) to Petra Munro, a professor in the LSU College of Education, we were able to offer a graduate-level course, "Community Oral History in the Classroom," at the same time we were doing our summer youth project at McKinley. Seven graduate students -- Helen Haw, Toni Morrison, Tayari Kwa Salaam, LaVada Taylor, Paula Jacobi, Christy Sanders, Rose Joubert-Thompson -- under the direction of Dr. Munro, spent the first three weeks of June working with our young summer workers, learning together how to do oral history interviews, and researching the history of African American religion in general and several area churches in particular. You will find the results of their work included in this book under *Profiles*. Excerpts of interviews in the *Voices* section include some done by the graduate students as well as

our summer project staff.

We were fortunate to have Toby Daspit and Carol Jean Anderson return again this summer as project supervisor and community liaison respectively. They did a terrific job as always. Project workers included Beau Bogart, Shawnte Green, Melvin Heard, Rahshada Jenkins, Veonetta Jewell, Chasity Lovely, Heidi McGee, and Katina Welsh, all students or recent graduates of McKinley High School. Shanta Jenkins, an alumnae of the project from the first summer and currently a student worker at the Williams Center for Oral History, also assisted.

Thanks in part to the LEQSF grant we had a number of guest speakers this year who helped us understand more about oral history and the history of religion. They included Gaines Foster, LSU History Department; Jimmy James, Exxon; Jamie Credle, McFaddin-Ward House, Beaumont, Texas; Lacy Hunter and Kaye Collins from the Foxfire program in Georgia; Joyce Jackson, LSU Department of Anthropology; and Thomas Durant, LSU Department of Sociology. Hazel Freeman, Rev. Ellis, Rev. Williams, Rev. Smith, and Father Michael started us off with an excellent panel discussion of the history of South Baton Rouge churches.

This on-going project on the history of South Baton Rouge is sponsored by the Williams Center for Oral History and the Community University Partnership at LSU, with funding and support from JTPA and the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board, and the encouragement of the McKinley High School Alumni Association and the Metropolitan Community Housing Development Organization.

It takes many people to make a project like this work. Petra Munro has led this project from the beginning. Michele Livermore and the Office of Research and Development at LSU have helped us in ways too numerous to list, although we especially appreciate the supplies they provided this year. We are grateful for the past encouragement of Clarence Jones, former principal at McKinley and the enthusiastic welcome Almenia Williams, the current principal, gave us this summer. The College of Education and especially Dr. Robert Lafayette have been very supportive. We also want to thank the folks at JTPA and the EBRP School Board.

But, as always, our greatest debt is to the community members who generously shared with us their time and their memories of South Baton Rouge. This book is dedicated to them.

## ***From the Staff of the Summer Oral History Project***

*by Shawnte Green*

Since I started this oral history project, I have learned more about my community churches and the people who attend them. Since we started this program, we have interviewed about 50 people. I really enjoy finding out information about how the church has helped people in the past and how it is helping people in their lives today. Heidi McGee, a fellow staff member, adds, "I think this is a very interesting study for someone who likes this type of work. I've learned things about my church and other churches I did not know."

In the McKinley High Oral History Project we do not just interview, we also have guest lecturers who help us to understand a little bit more about oral history. For example, we have had speakers like Lacy Hunter and Kaye Collins from "Foxfire." Located in Georgia, Foxfire is one of the oldest high school oral history projects in the United States. They produce *The Foxfire Magazine* every year which describes the interviews they have done in their unique community in Georgia. Another speaker was Jamie Credle, education coordinator of McFaddin-Ward House in Beaumont, TX. She told us that pretty much everything has something to do with history and that oral history is a great way to record valuable information.

The McKinley project has helped us in many other ways as well. It has helped me and others develop the necessary skills for interviewing. Chasity Lovely thinks that "this project will become very successful. I also think this project has helped me improve in many skills, such as in communication, interviewing, and researching skills. This project has helped me a lot to get ready for college." Rahshada Jenkins, another member of the project, says, "The McKinley Oral History Project has taught me basic communication skills, interviewing skills, and it has helped me to regain an open mind." Melvin Heard says, "I really think that the project helps us greatly in all types of ways and I really thank everyone who has helped and contributed time and money." As you can see, most of the students in the project really appreciate the way it helps them develop more skills in writing and interviewing.

At the beginning of the summer, we worked with students from LSU. We really enjoyed working with them and helping them out. We went on many interviews and did many projects with them. We like working with them because we really had to help them out. Not all, but most of them didn't know about the churches and their traditions. At the end of their study they gave us a beautiful overlook on the churches they studied. One student, Toni Morrison, did her project on Bethel AME, Fairview Baptist Church, and Wesley AMC. You can tell she put a lot of work into it because she knew about the history, where each church got its name, and what the church is doing to help its community. Another person was LaVada Taylor, who did an excellent presentation on Magnolia Baptist Church. She knew pretty much everything about Magnolia Baptist Church like the history, how did the church receive its name, and how did the church come to be in the location it's in today. Tayari kwa Salaam did a presentation on Shiloh



Baptist Church. I noticed how she took pride in this church. She broke it down and told us many important things Shiloh did for its community. It also helped in the Civil Rights movement. These projects and many more really are valued because most people really don't know about the so-called "South Baton Rouge Churches".

We decided to do two final projects for the end of the program this summer. Group one, which includes Rahshada Jenkins, Katina Welsh, Veonetta Jewels, and Shanta Jenkins, decided their project will be a gospel concert. Veonetta Jewel gives us a brief overlook on this project: "The project we are doing concerns gospel music in South Baton Rouge so we decided to put a gospel concert together dealing with the different types of gospel music we have today." Ms. Carol Anderson added, "For this summers' oral history project we are placing special emphasis on gospel music by organizing a gospel concert with choirs performing all types of music from old Negro spirituals of yesterday, to the modern and contemporary music of today." Group two, which is yours truly, Shawnte Green, plus Chasity Lovely, Heidi McGee, Melvin Heard, and Beau Bogart, is doing a book on the South Baton Rouge Churches. We are contacting all the churches in the community so no church will be left out. We hope to interview as many people as necessary so our book can be a success. We plan to have the book ready for group one's gospel concert. We hope both groups' projects will be successful and we hope the community will enjoy them.

## ***A Brief Introduction to African American Religion***

*by Tayari kwa Salaam*

Wherever Africans found themselves, whether through migration or the forces of history, they combined their own African culture with whatever culture they encountered. The result of this combination has been ownership. Through this use of "creolization," when black people have found themselves in varying historical situations they have come up with new cultural entities. This is no less true in the case of African American religious practices, beliefs, and experiences.

Distinct "Africanisms" can be found throughout African American culture. Culture remains resilient, continuing despite invasive assault or systemic disruption, in two ways. The first way is by creating new forms to explain old meanings. An example of this is the adaptation of European religions to African beliefs and needs. The second way is by infusing old forms with new meanings, demonstrated, for instance, by the incorporation of African musical instrumentation and composition into that of European music, thereby creating jazz, a new musical form.

For African Americans, religion has been a primary source of independence. In the early days of the formation of African American churches in the United States, this independence posed a problem. By law, no Christian could be a slave. To preserve slavery, a new law was passed in 1667 stating that baptism did not change a slave's condition.

African traditions retained the most resiliency in regions such as Louisiana where labor was most difficult and mortality was very high. There were two reasons for this. First was the necessity for a continuous replenishment of African slaves, and thus the replenishment of African beliefs and practices. Secondly, the harshness of these areas prevented whites from living and thriving there, creating an environment receptive to African influences.

Although traditional African religions rarely survived intact in the United States, African cultural elements were retained and shaped how enslaved persons interpreted and transmitted Christianity. One such interpretation posited that conversion depended not on knowledge but only on the experience of God's grace. African traditions became the medium for expressing Christianity. The emphasis on the experience of grace and cultural expression of religion from an African orientation points to why Africans born in the United States became attracted to the Baptist religion and underscores one of the ways in which culture continues. As one scholar notes, through "story and song...a poor, oppressed and largely illiterate people [learned] the...message of redemption..."

Many of the over 200 slave rebellions in the United States occurred because of religion. This is an historical precursor to the black church's involvement in not only the civil rights movement but in every aspect of black life, a life characterized by injustice, mistreatment, oppression, and exploitation. The independent black church was born because of white racism and the desire of blacks to be independent of white authority. Religion unified African

Americans, allowing them to begin to create a viable society.

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. DuBois richly captures the African American experience and offers analysis that explains basic ways in which African Americans "be," then and now. DuBois begins with his own experience witnessing a "Southern Negro revival [as] a country school teacher..., fresh from the East." He says, "the Preacher, the Music, the Frenzy" are three aspects that distinguished the "religion of the slave." DuBois denotes the "adroitness" of the Preacher who had and showed skill, cleverness or resourcefulness to ensure his position as "a leader, a politician, an orator, a 'boss,' an intriguer, an idealist." He describes "the music of the Negro religion...[as] the most original and beautiful expression of human life and longing yet born on American soil." Using "Shouting" as a synonym for "the Frenzy," DuBois attempts to express what he believes is a "supernatural joy" among African Americans when they experience "the spirit of the Lord." He suggests that there is a reason why Africans exhibit some physical behavior at the moment of contact with God. DuBois states "...without this visible manifestation of the God there could be no true communion with the Invisible." Out of this reality and from these roots contemporary black churches came to be.

## ***A Short History of Spirituals and Gospel Music***

### **Spirituals**

*by Katina Welsh*

Spirituals developed among slaves before the civil war. They weren't written down but were sung within a group of slaves or families. In the 1860's spirituals were first recognized and written. Later the spirituals were composed. Spirituals are a form of folk literature. There are no known composers. It is unlikely that any group of worshipers or singers composed spirituals. Single individuals with poetic talents composed lines. According to accounts given by runaway slaves, the spirituals became censored songs. Certain religious leaders of the Bible, like Moses, became popular in spirituals. Some spirituals were known as "Signal Songs." They were used to carry messages that overseers would not understand. James Weldon Johnson says that the spirituals were born of oppression but became a poetry of hope, both for salvation and freedom on earth. If the Negro had not accepted Christianity there would be no Negro spirituals.

In 1871 one of the first spiritual groups was introduced from Fisk University in Tennessee. They were known as the Fisk Jubilee Singers. They went on tour singing spirituals that their parents had taught them. They became famous after one performance and the Fisk Jubilee Singers are still well known throughout the world.

There are some spirituals that are well known. These spirituals are the most commonly sung. They are: "Go Down, Moses," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," "Steal Away," "I Got a Home in Dat Rock," and "I Thank God I'm Free at Las'." The Black Negro National Anthem is "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing." This is a spiritual that gave African Americans hope for the future and pride in mankind.

### **Gospel Music**

*by Veonetta Jewell*

Gospel originated from spirituals in the late 1800s. Defining gospel music is difficult as there are different codes based on region. For example, "Southern gospel" refers to songs performed by white singers and based on folk and country music. However, gospel music is generally considered African American although some occasionally use the term when referring to any type of religious music.

The instruments used in gospel music have changed throughout the years. In the past musicians used anything that could hold a beat for instruments, like banjos, or everyday items like washboards. The instruments used now are more advanced and include the guitar, the organ,



drums, the piano, and the harp. The term "modern gospel" is used when referring to gospel music that emerged in the 1960s. In the past, most gospel music was written to be sung a capella. Today gospel music is most often accompanied with music.

Thomas A. Dorsey, the father of gospel music, is a legend in both the blues and gospel. He was a pianist, composer, and arranger of seminal blues. During his times of depression he wrote his songs to keep up his hopes. Other gospel legends, such as Aretha Franklin and Mahalia Jackson, sang gospel music because they enjoyed singing for and praising to God. Gospel music was popular in the past and remains popular today. Many people enjoy it because it is another way to praise God.

## Gospel Music

by Mahalia Jackson

Gospel music has been around in the past 1800s. Defining gospel music is difficult as there are different styles based on region. For example, "Southern gospel" refers to songs performed by white singers and based on folk and country music. However, gospel music is generally considered African American although some occasionally use the term when referring to any type of religious music.

The instruments used in gospel music have changed throughout the years. In the past musicians used anything that could hold a beat for instruments like banjos or fiddles. These instruments were now more refined and include the guitar, the organ,

*A Photo Album*



Bethel AME  
1358 S. Blvd.  
344-6931  
Rev. James  
Founded 1867



Calvary III  
Baptist Church  
1911 Georgia St.  
387-2396  
Rev. L. Richardson  
Founded 1904

## A Photo Album

...the place, and the hope. "The Gospel" is used when referring to gospel music that emerged in the 1960s. Gospel music was written to be sung in churches. Gospel music is not often associated with soul music.

Thomas A. Dorsey, the father of gospel music, is a legend in both the church and the music world.

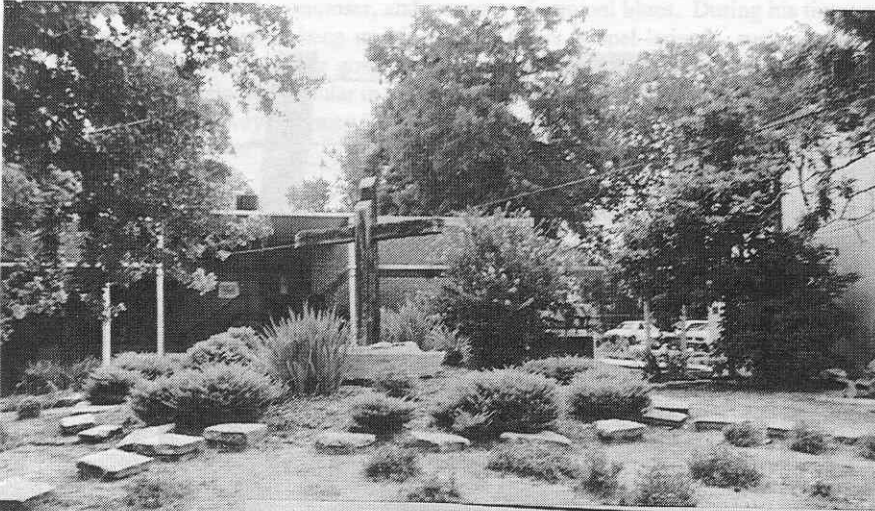
Charity Christian Center

650 W. McKinley St.

343-4859

Rev. Don Bradford

Founded 1982

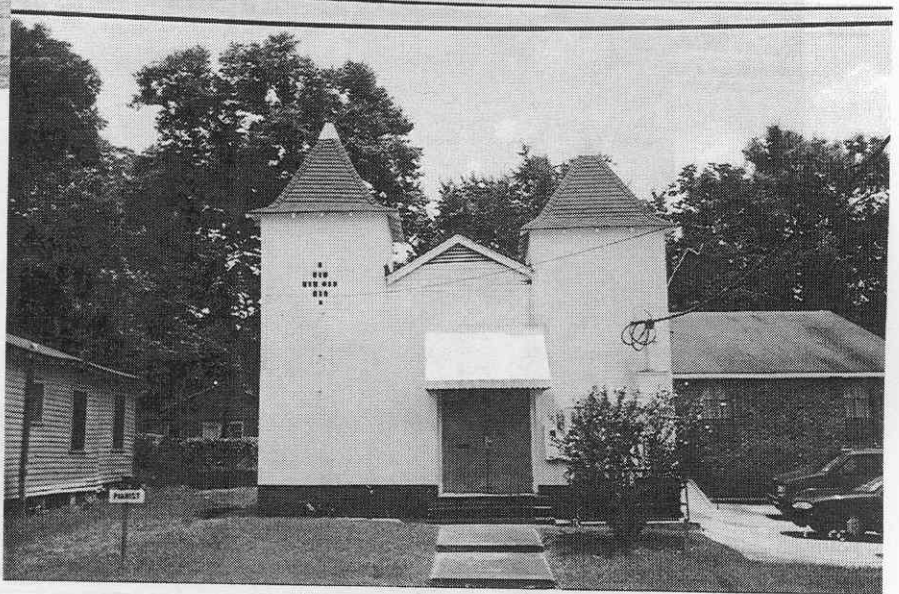


Ebenezer Baptist Church

1901 Missouri St.

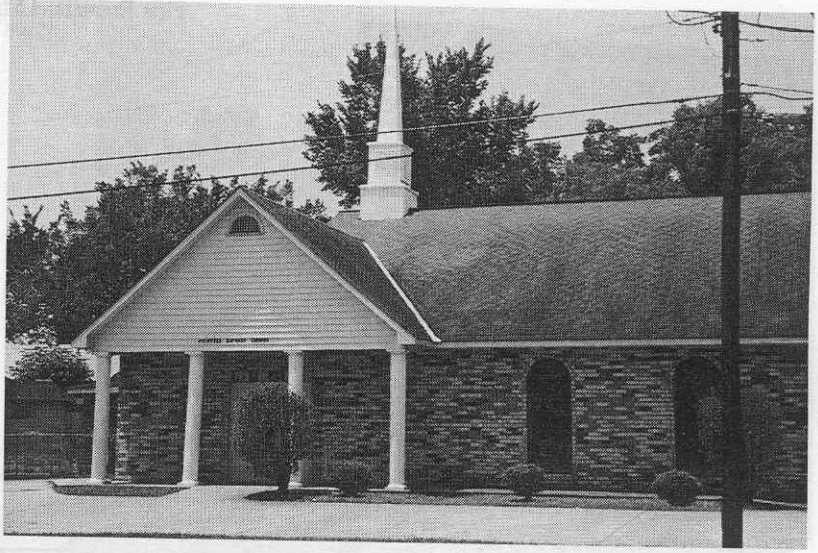
343-9310

Rev. Q. T. Ellis



## *A Photo Album*

Fairview Baptist Church  
1636 Braddock St.  
344-3590/343-6529  
Rev. Q. T. Ellis  
Founded 1934

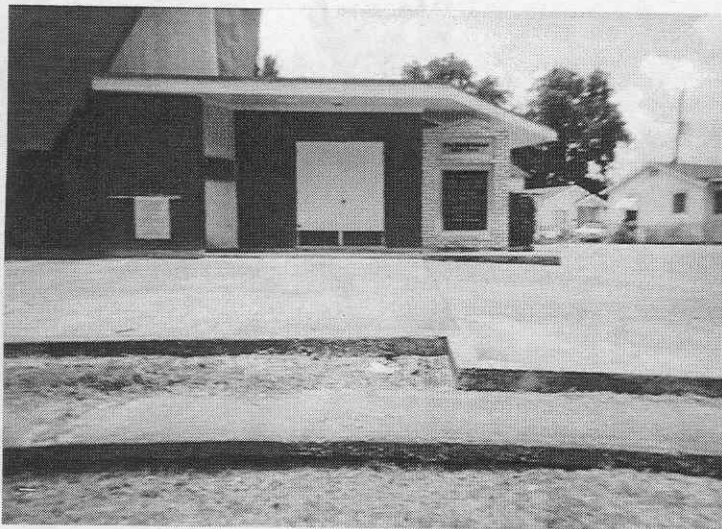


First Damascus Baptist Church  
155 W. Washington St.  
344-8930  
Rev. T. E. Brown



## A Photo Album

First Emmanuel Missionary Baptist Church  
575 Education St.  
343-4095  
Rev. Henry Brown  
Founded 1964

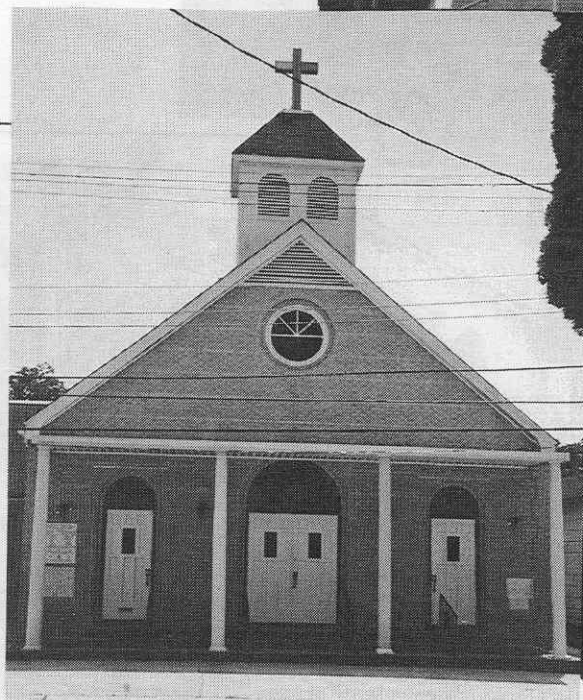


Greater Antioch Baptist Church  
1901 Missouri St.  
343-9310  
Rev. L. E. Brown  
Founded 1964

Greater Antioch Baptist Church  
2139 Nebraska St.  
336-9548  
Rev. Levert Kemp

## *A Photo Album*

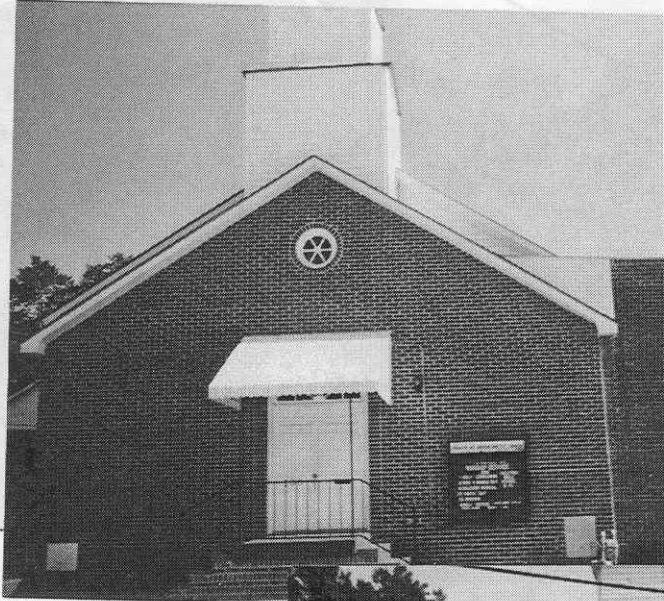
Greater Beulah Baptist Church  
955 E. Polk St.  
343-5610  
Rev. Alando O'Conner  
Founded 1930



Greater Israelite Baptist Church  
1841 Thomas H. Delpit  
344-3553  
Rev. Charles Burris, Sr.  
Founded 1915

A Photo Album

*A Photo Album*



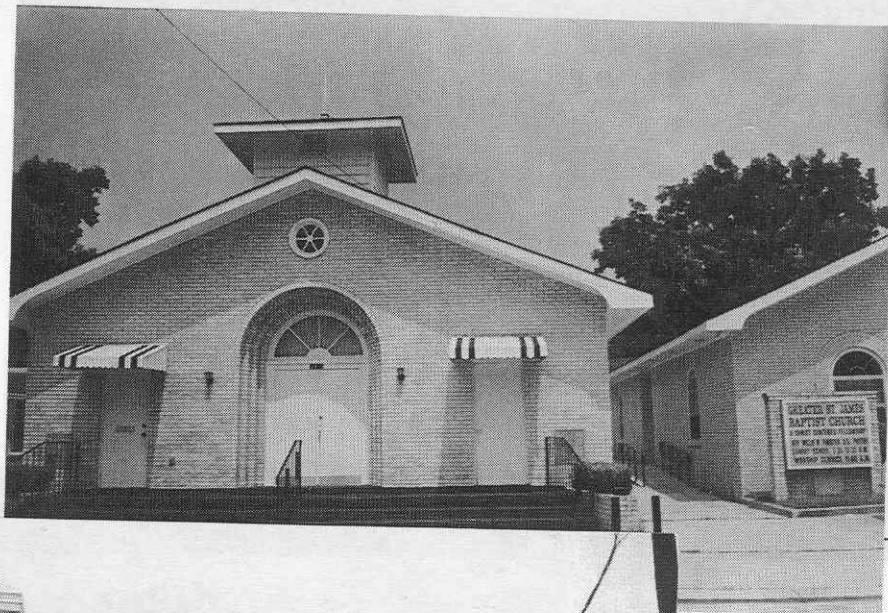
Greater Mt. Gideon Baptist Church  
205 Alice St.  
344-6448  
Rev. Edward Howard  
Founded 1911



Greater Pleasant Green Baptist Church  
1441 Napoleon St.  
343-1819  
Rev. Donald Tumer, Sr.

## *A Photo Album*

Greater St. James Baptist Church  
1919 Arizona St.  
387-0569  
Rev. Finister  
Founded 1932



Greater St. John  
Baptist Church  
2019 Colorado St.  
339-9710  
307 E. Washington St.  
383-5987  
Rev. L. B. Griffin  
Founded 1919



## A Photo Album



Heard Chapel AME  
2019 Colorado St.  
339-9710



Islamic Complex  
740 E. Washington St  
388-0838

*A Photo Album*



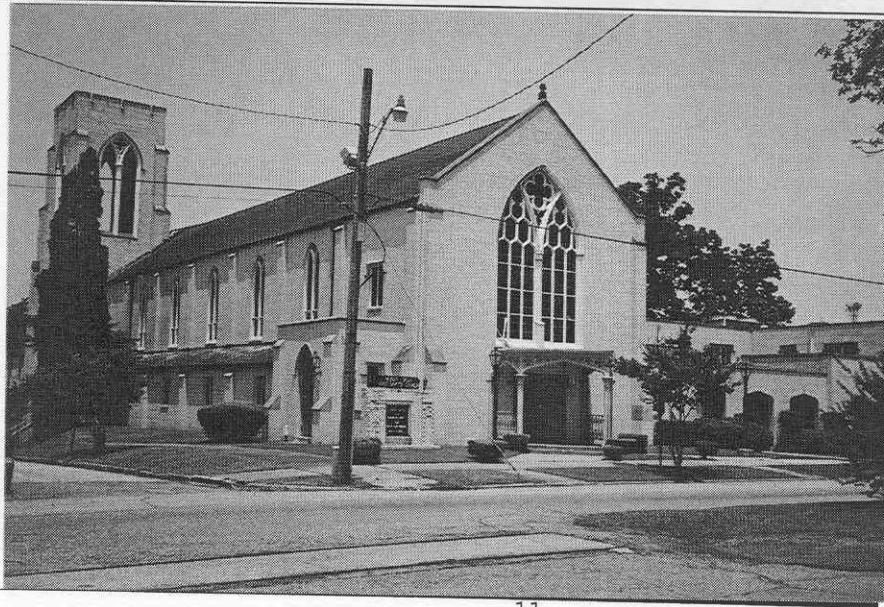
Magnolia Baptist Church  
920 E. Buchanan St.  
383-2913  
Rev. R. Williams



McKowen Baptist Church  
1255 Louise St.  
344-4739  
Rev. G. Robinson  
Founded 1956

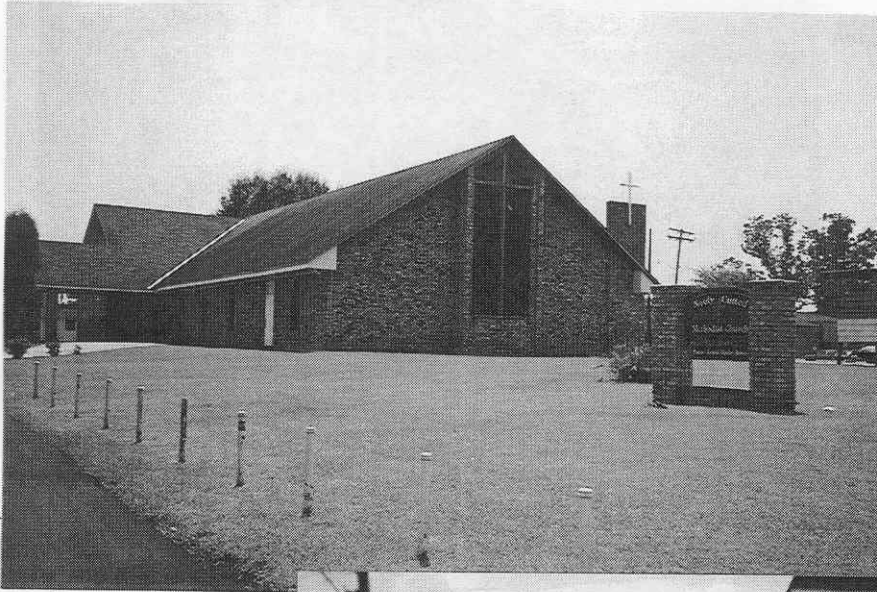
*A Photo Album*

Mt. Gillion Baptist Church  
346 E. Buchanan St.  
344-6939  
Founded 1876

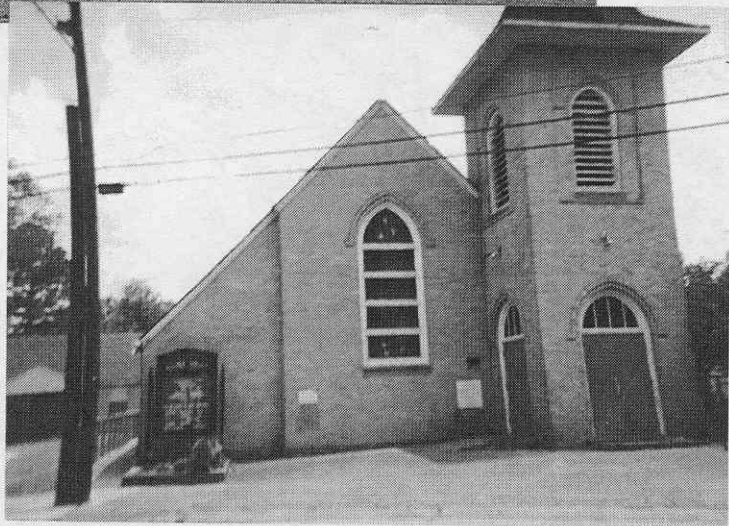


Mt. Zion First  
Baptist Church  
356 E. Blvd.  
383-5401  
Rev. T. J. Jemison  
Founded 1858

## *A Photo Album*



Neely United  
Methodist Church  
1755 Fig St.  
344-2050  
Rev. Arnold Brown  
Founded 1914



New Ark Baptist Church  
1344 Terrace St.  
344-0858  
Rev. Q. T. Ellis  
Founded 1905



*A Photo Album*

New Bethel Baptist Church  
1540 Matilda St.  
387-4960  
Rev. W. Simon  
Founded 1913



New Canaan  
Baptist Church  
353 E. Harding  
344-5426  
Rev. Joseph West

*A Photo Album*



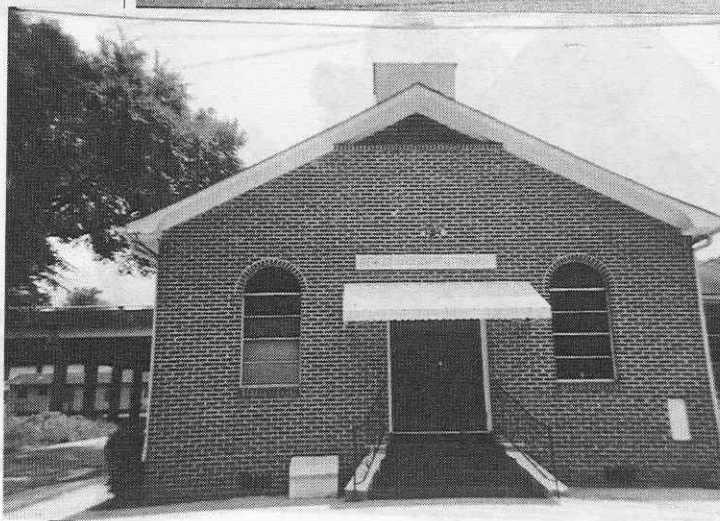
New Jerusalem Baptist Church  
1627 Thomas H. Delpit  
343-3673  
Rev. Dan Smith Jr.  
Founded 1898



New Prospect  
Missionary Baptist Church  
1174 Terrace St.  
343-4437  
Rev. Dan Alexander  
Founded 1929

## *A Photo Album*

New St. John  
Missionary Baptist Church  
1455 South Blvd.  
383-5280  
Rev. W. Marshall Myles  
Founded 1920



New St. Luke  
Baptist Church  
538 S. Blvd.  
343-4411  
Rev. S. M. Clark  
Founded 1928

## *A Photo Album*

Pleasant Green Baptist Church  
364 Howard St.  
344-9031  
Rev. W. Hardy, Jr.



Progressive  
Baptist Church  
998 Julia St.  
344-7165  
Rev. J. J. Mitchel  
Founded 1916



## *A Photo Album*

Rose Hill Missionary  
Baptist Church  
1384 W. Grant St.  
383-2815  
Rev. I. Ponds  
Founded 1940



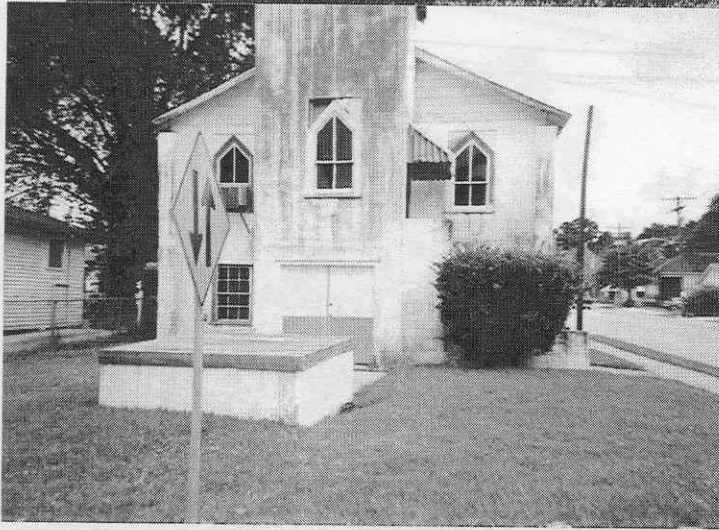
Shiloh Baptist Church  
185 Eddie Robinson  
343-0640  
Rev. Charles Smith  
Founded 1872





## *A Photo Album*

St. Agnes Catholic Church  
749 E. Blvd.  
383-4127  
Founded 1917



St Claire Spiritual Temple  
2364 Thomas Delpit  
383-4379

*A Photo Album*



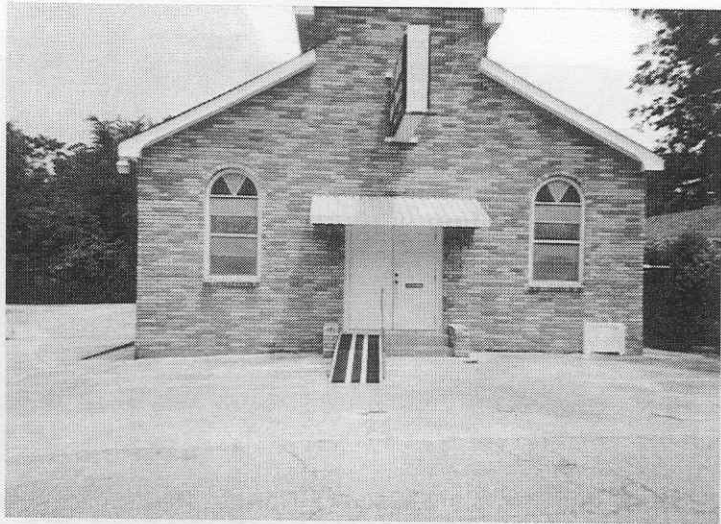
St. Francis Xavier  
Catholic Church  
1143 S. 11th St.  
383-3479  
Father Buchman  
Founded 1906



St. Joseph Baptist Church  
2424 Tennessee St.  
343-7926  
Rev. L. Lee  
Founded 1927

*A Photo Album*

St. Luke Baptist Church  
240 Van Buren St.  
344-7980  
Rev. L. Richardson



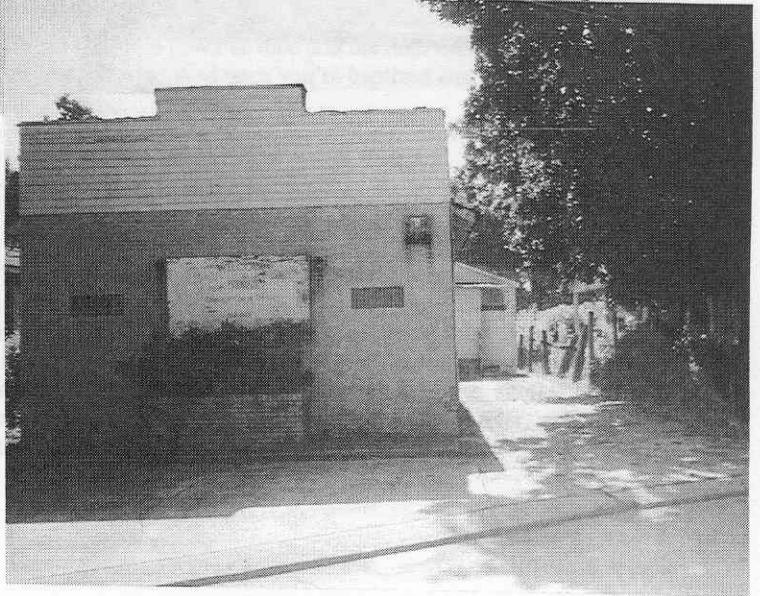
Star of Bethlehem  
Baptist Church  
1204 St. Joseph St.  
344-5153  
Rev. Darensberg  
Founded 1948

## A Photo Album

Sweet Home Baptist Church  
343 W. Buchanan St.  
343-0322  
Rev. R. Pryer  
Founded 1923



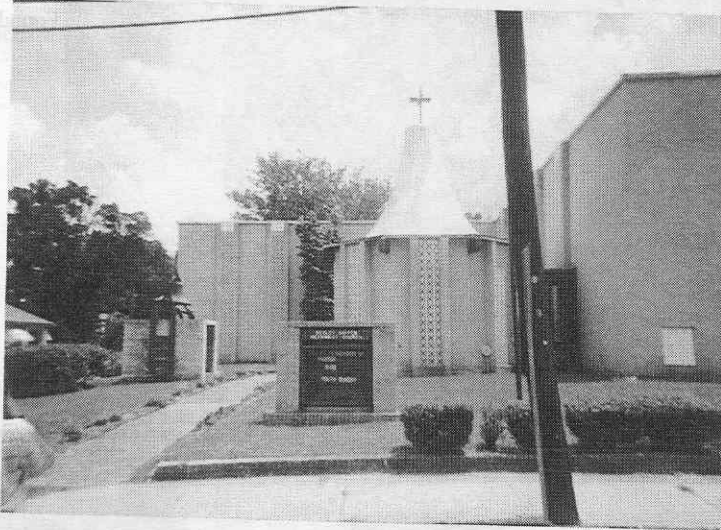
Welcome Friendship  
Church of God in Christ  
1450 Napoleon St.  
Pastor Elder General Watts, Jr.





## *A Photo Album*

Wesley United Methodist Church  
544 Government St.  
343-8421  
Rev. Freddie Henderson  
Founded 1866





# VOICES

## *Selections From Our Summer Interviews*

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### BAPTISMS

**Almenia Freeman**

*Calvary III Baptist Church*

I was about thirteen years old and I was baptized down in the creek in the woods. We'll go down and the preacher will go out and stick you in the water with a white flag, you in that little white gown. Majority of the members were there. They take you to somebody's house and dress you and take you on to the church with your white dress on, you had revival and you sit on moaner's bench and you pray and all that kind of stuff.

**Eddie Johnson**

*New Sunlight Baptist Church*

Baptism is an outward showing of people that you know you have accepted Christ. And we believe in the full baptism, so that means you are to merge into water. Usually when a female accepts Christ and she wants to be baptized she has on white gown or robe and the man has a handkerchief or a white garment, a white piece, around his arm. And once you're baptized and you take your first communion you are accepted into church.

**Rev. Lionel Lee**

*St. Joseph Baptist Church*

Churches are moderner now. We got to build a new church, we have a very fine pool. We don't have go into the Mississippi River now and preach and things to be baptized. Old fashioned baptisms were very much enjoyed by African Americans during that time in the Mississippi river, or out there on the L.S.U. lake, people very much enjoyed that. My mother was baptized in the Mississippi river and people from that generation. They used to walk for miles, singing down the street -- there were not many cars then -- just singing hymns until they get to the river, and then they baptized. Great time back in that day.

**Donald R. Sterling**  
*Israelite Baptist Church*

We baptize them and we baptize them in the pool. And we believe in emerging. We believe in baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and we baptize them in the water. We take them down in the water. My mother and them say they baptized in the river. But we've graduated from that now. We baptize in the pool in the church. We have a picture on the wall up there of the old time baptism. And I asked them, I said, "How could you go out in the water like that and wasn't afraid that they had snakes and things out in the water." They say they just went to places where they would stake off in the morning time where it wasn't so deep, and they would just trust the Lord and go out there and baptize in the river.

**Ida Mae Whiten**  
*St. Joseph Baptist Church*

My baptism was an old fashion one. The year I was baptized they must of had about 12 of us and I was the last one to go in the water which was a hallelujah time. It's different from baptisms now. Back then that feeling was like, "Oh Lord." I just can't describe it to you. I mean the church would rock. I mean the singing and jumping and the noise, but now there is silence.

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## **FUNERALS**

**Almenia Freeman**

I remember when they took bodies to the house because when I first join that church my mother, if someone would die they would tell her come lay the person. They didn't have embalming back then. They would put you on a cooling board and lay you out. My grandfather used to make caskets and put you in the casket then put you in a wagon and take you to the grave yard. They both then combed their hair, put their clothes on. I guess they would put their clothes on the same day. Like if you died last night they bury you the same day without an embalming. They wouldn't save you like they do now.

**Donald Sterling**

They used to bury people on Sundays when I was a boy and they used to have wakes. They used to bring people back to their houses. I guess it was an old African Tradition. They would bring the body back to the house and have the wake that night and the next day they would bring it to the

church. And then you would have the funerals at the church. I've been to funerals where wherever you lived at they would bring your body back there and they would have singing. They didn't have no preacher, they would just have singing and they would have food. They would have a lot of food and people would eat and drink and just have fun. And the next day they would have the funeral.

**Almenia Williams**

*Calvary III Baptist Church/Mt. Zion Baptist Church*

Funerals haven't changed much, it's just people don't cry as well as they used to. I think we finally realized there is life after death, it's not compared to what they experienced as we live everyday. Funerals used to be very, very, very long. And they used to be in the homes. Nobody was waked at a funeral home, everybody was waked at home because that was their last time home and you were waked there and the next day they picked the body up. The body would be placed in the living room of the house and the people would come in and view the body. I always looked under the body to see if it was leaking. It was just weird how you would see the person walking around one day, and then they are dead and they just put them there. It was just there and I thought the body would leak.

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## **COMMITMENT TO GOD & RELIGION'S ROLE**

**John R. Gray**

*Shiloh Baptist Church*

I try to center my life around religion because it's very hard now days and it plays a very important role in my life because whatever I do or whatever major decision I have to make I usually try to refer back to the Bible or back to what I learned in Sunday School or in church. My choices or decisions may not come out to be as they supposed to be but I basically try to have my life centered around religion and God. I will say it's harder for us to choose right or wrong than it would have been back then because the consequences for doing bad things or going with the crowd right now are more risky than it was back then. I'll give you an example. Back then what the older generation would call bad is like stealing a couple of things out of general stores like candy or something like that, but nowadays its armed robbery, something that you could get put away for life. Back then it would be bad to drink alcohol but nowadays it's drugs.

**Virginia Butler**  
*Beulah Baptist Church*

These days people don't know how to treat one another. But I'm not that way. If you do me wrong or say anything wrong to me I ain't gonna fly off the handle. I don't care what nobody do. I turn it over to the hand of the good Master and I let Him work it out. That's the way of person I am. I let him work it out not me, cause you can't do it by yourself. You got to let him work it out. And that's the way I is. You are going to find some up and downs, I don't care where you go, you gonna find some ups and downs baby. Yes indeed. That's why I stay my distance.

**Rev. Don Bradford**  
*Charity Christian Center*

The term backsliding is often used. I backslid. I came up in a setting where religion was a part of my family, serving the Lord was a part of my family from age 12 to 17. I was committed to a local church. At age 17 I decided I wanted to do my own thing and I kinda got away from the things of God. I joined the United States Navy and for several years I stopped going to church, stopped doing the things I knew was right according to the Bible and the way that I was brought up as far as knowing right from wrong. I stopped doing those things. At age 21, through the prompting of the spirit of God and through the teaching of the pulpit of a minister that I came to know as a pastor and then ultimately as my father-in-law, helped me to get my bearings back straight, and that's what I mean by recommitting my life to the Lord. One Sunday morning I decided that what I had been living was not right from what I had been taught and what I had seen in the word of God, and I said Jesus would you forgive me for my sins and want to come back to you, and I want to live my life as a Christian and I want the spirit of the Lord to lead me and to guide me. So that's what I mean by recommitting my life to him.

**Mary Moss**  
*Shiloh Baptist Church*

We try to bring people into a relationship with Jesus. I can say that I met you and really not have a relationship with you. I can have intellectual knowledge of you, I can have facts, but I really don't know you. I would like to coin a Hebrew term, "Yada," (?) which had to do with knowledge, but yet in the biblical sense it moves us from just facts that we can get out of a book. "Yada" means that one would have an intimate knowledge, a personal knowledge. I've sat with you, I've talked with you. I really do know you, I know how you think, because I've spent some time with you, and we've talked, and you've shared with me, I've shared with you. That's a "Yada" kind of knowledge on intimate knowledge that moves you from just my saying, "Do you believe in Jesus?" Yes I've

read the bible and I've heard about Him, and I believe in Him, yes. "You believe in the Lord, Jesus Christ, and thou shall be saved!" And many people take that for surface value. And then inadvertently they say, "yes I do believe that Jesus is who we say He is." But then moving from that perspective to the ultimate "Yada," or from the Greek which we are more familiar with more here with the New Testament, the "Nosco," (?) which means the same thing, that personal relationship. Those are the kind of terms that the Bible uses when they talk about relationships. If you really believe something, believing brings you to action, and shall I say, it ought not to be passive, if you really believe. If I believe in education and I've never had any kind of move toward education, I really have to question do I really believe. I equate believing almost synonymously with action. It certainly moves me out of a passive mode.

**Rev. Lionel Lee**

Religion has had a great impact on my life from childhood until now. It gave me the guidance I needed in going through a wild age and it gave me opportunities to make decisions. It gave me opportunities for my faith to grow. It gave me opportunity to love people. It gave me opportunities to do ministries for people. It gave me opportunity to become closer to Christ.

**Rev. Charles Smith**

*Shiloh Baptist Church*

When you talk about Baptist churches you have to look at the things that are basic to churches. The church is referred to Biblically as the body of Christ and of course, when you talk about the body of Christ you really define that practically as its visible representation of Jesus Christ in the world today. So you have to ask yourself, what did Jesus do when he was in the world? He did three basic things: he came first of all for salvation, his crucifixion and resurrection established the cornerstone of Christianity which is the salvation of Mankind. So then the Church would first of all be an agency of salvation. But then in addition to that, Jesus taught a science of conduct and ethical standard, a way of life that was uniquely his and Christian people are supposed to be representatives of that in the world. So in addition to being an agency of salvation, the Church is also an agency of nurture, an agency of discipleship, it is our responsibility to instill and propagate the ethical and moral standards of Jesus in people. The third thing Jesus did was that he dealt in a holistic ministry. He addressed the material and social and even to some extent physical needs of people as well as these other things. By this I simply refer to the fact that he fed hungry people, he healed sick people, he helped people who were in trouble. So this is the third aspect of Church life, ministry. So we are traditionally an agency of salvation and of nurture. Uniquely, we are also an agency of ministry. And when I say uniquely an agency of ministry, because we are primarily African American and African American people have unique needs, we're dedicated to addressing those needs.



**Annie Kimble**  
*Ebenezer Baptist Church*

I got religion in 1931 on August 16. I even know what the man was singing. "Swing low chariot, let's take a ride," that's what he was singing. When I came out, when I came back, I was a new person. The world didn't look the same and I didn't feel the same and the people didn't look the same. I'm born again. I didn't make no mistakes, I can feel it all in me. I got Jesus in my life. I'm satisfied. I'm going home.

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## **TRADITIONS**

**Jennifer Jones**  
*Shiloh Baptist Church*

For years in our churches most of what we did centered around fund raising, just to kind of get the bills paid, and the lights on and the building up where it could be some place for the community to come to. And over the years they had things like Pew Rallies, and all of those kind things and some competitive things. That would sometimes tend to raise money. Several years ago Pastor decided we would do it Gods way and that is through tithes and offerings and we don't have any fund raisers per se anymore. But it comes out of a necessity that most of the churches and some of them still do have fund raisers and they do it for a number of reasons -- to help with the pastor salary, whatever, but they were not able to pay the pastor that much in that day and time. So they did fund raisers such as Pew Rallies, car washes, suppers, fashion shows, and the Zodiac Club Party. We had fund raisers because we are there to serve others, and not necessarily to be served.

**Almenia Williams**

When I was a little girl there were other things that went on at Calvary like we used to contact a local funeral home and get a coffin. They would bring the coffin in the church and they would keep it closed until the end of it and then they would have somebody in the church to be the deacons, I mean other than the deacons, and someone else to be the Ushers, and someone else to be the preacher and they would have like a mock funeral for the Devil. Portions of the services they'd have candles lit and turn the lights out. And then at the end they'd let everybody walk around and look at the casket as you do now and they would have a mirror in it so when you look at it you saw yourself. And people used to pay big money to come to that and used to pack the churches. It was a type of entertainment as I said yesterday. Back then in segregated times there were not a lot of places for black people to go for entertainment so the church became a source of entertainment too.

And at Calvary they used to have a Tom Thumb Wedding, and they would have a bride and groom in the young adult age, like 20 to 25, and they would have a bride and groom in teenager's age, and then they would have a bride and groom in the little kids. And each bride and groom would have all the attendants and the ring bearer and the little flower girl and they would wed -- just like a mock wedding -- they would wed each the little kids. Parents would be proud and all that and people paid money to come and see this and parents would spend lots of money on making wedding dresses for those girls and it was really nice.

**Rev. Roger C. Williams**  
*Magnolia Baptist Church*

I think some of the enduring traditions in our churches have been the special day programs, the annual day programs such as our church anniversary, which we celebrate every third Sunday in May. Of course our church, like many other churches, we are annually in revival, every year we have revival services. Our particular auxiliary celebration such as our senior choir anniversary, our chancellor choir anniversary, junior and senior usher board anniversaries, deacon/deaconess anniversaries -- all of these annual days have been with the church history for as long as the church, I think, has been in existence. Of course, prayer meetings have been a hallmark of the church function and I think basically is a part of the complexion of all of our black Baptist witnesses -- Bible studies and of course, Sunday School, which has been really the basis for church growth in the black Baptist Church. You'll find a lot of other paradigms and a lot of other traditions in say perhaps your Catholic churches or your white Baptist churches and so forth and so on but in the black Baptist Church, I think not only in south Baton Rouge but nationally, you will see that the Sunday School has been the basis for growing our churches as opposed to -- not to say that there's no door to door proselytizing or that kind of thing or evangelism, but basically the Sunday School is set to where anyone -- whether they're a member of the church or not -- is able to come in and be a part of that discipleship program within the church and that's the way its been for so long.

We just implemented a youth revival at the Magnolia Church last year. This year would be our second year with it. The revivals are basically -- we have been going five nights of revival. But for the last two years, we've been going three nights in revival. The minister will come in, of course, preach and there's singing and of course before the revival services, which is another strong tradition, we have these prayer services where we start the revival services off in prayer and you'll always see the faithful deaconess in white and the deacons there praying and if I may go off into further detail about those prayer meetings in those revivals, the older deaconess and deacons take pride in making sure that when they do pray, they are at least on one knee. And that's a strong tradition. In fact, I don't mind sharing one of the questions that some of our elderly had about me in the church was that I said a prayer and I wasn't on one knee and I with all due respect, I mentioned to them that I respect your tradition and the thought processes of prayer and how it should be conducted in the church, I said, but my grandmother prayed for me all of her life and she had arthritis and never was able to

kneel on her knees and no one in this church is going to tell me her prayers didn't reach heaven. So, it just goes to show you that these certain time periods, traditions, bring out certain things that are enduring and I find appreciated.

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## SPIRITUALS, GOSPEL, AND A SONG IN MY HEART

**Eula Mae Hatter**

*New Prospect Baptist Church, WXOK Radio Station*

We didn't know of gospel when I was a youth at that time like we know of it today. First, there were spirituals, Negro spirituals, and then came blues, and then jazz and then gospel. This is the order of our music types in Black music. And gospel didn't come in until the thirties. I was a child during that time, too, during the thirties, but there were not many activities, church activities. We had Sunday school, we had eleven o'clock service, we had Baptist Training Union, that's in the evenings, and then the night service. And that was it.

I heard an announcement that a woman was needed to play gospel on the radio. They said you didn't have to have any training whatsoever, that you would be taught what you would have to do. It was a must, however, that you know a little bit about gospel music. So, I had been going to gospel concerts, and I knew about the Five Blind Boys and I knew about Brother Joe May. I knew about Albertina Walker and the Caravans. I knew about Mahalia Jackson. I knew their music, what they sang. And that's how I started off with them and working in this job.

As a younger woman when I started to work here, there have been quite a few changes because the music has changed in that it is more instrumental now. We used to have no instruments -- probably a tambourine or maybe a light drumming. But, the people more or less sang without music, and they, as my uncle used to say, they clapped their hands and they tapped their feet, and that made some rhythm, you know, that gave the music some rhythm.

Voices of Zion have been singing for twenty-eight years now. Paul Simon was instrumental in helping to get them started along with Edward Gaines and Brother Leo Perkins. They were persons who started the Voices of Zion, the first large group in the South Baton Rouge area. As a matter of fact, some of the young people were from South Baton Rouge and some were from the Scotlandville area and they combined and made the one group the Voices of Zion. They recorded during their earlier years

I have interviewed Willie Joe Legard, The Mighty Clouds of Joy, Willie Neil Johnson, the Gospel Keynotes. I haven't had the pleasure of interviewing Albertina Walker or Shirley Caesar, but I have been on programs where they were, and, in some instances, introduced some of the, I guess you

could call them, gospel stars. I have attended conventions and have been in the auditoriums and in classes with many gospel artists and those who form groups. I went to the Gospel Music Workshop for many years, and I haven't traveled there recently. But, I went to New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Cleveland Ohio, and a number of places where among thousands of people who were in attendance.

I say that gospel is the word of God put to music. Spirituals come from the cotton fields. These are the songs that our fore-parents sung when they were picking cotton or raising gardens and that type of thing. They sung spiritual songs. Songs without music. The hymns have come from the hymn book where you have the notes and the musician sits down, reads the notes and plays the hymns and that's how I describe it, a hymn from spiritual song.

**Leo Perkins**

*St. James Baptist Church*

Religion or church in my life has been my life. I've been playing music or gospel music in church -- I think I started playing when I was about fourteen. I started playing music for different choirs when I was coming up over a period of thirty-six or thirty-seven years. Gospel and church has been all of my life. I have a community choir along with church choirs. I have two church choirs and I have a community choir, and I have a younger group, a youth group. So we bring in some of the traditional songs, upbeat and all that, but basically if you've been in church a long time you know that Baptists tend to stay on a certain level.

**Betty Parker**

*Mt. Gillion Baptist Church*

I used to be a member of the choir, but I have heart trouble. I cannot hold a key and stuff like that, I get tired. Oh, but I sing when sometimes the pianist is late. They always say, "Betty start a song." I always have a song in my heart, you know I keep a song in my heart.

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## **THE ROLE OF WOMEN**

**Almenia Williams**

Calvary III has grown quite a bit because as a child women were not allowed in the pulpit. They could only fix communion -- women were allowed to break the cracker and pour the wine in the glasses and put them on the trays and cover it and that was it. Women were also allow to usher, I

guess so if anybody got the holy spirit and shouted it won't always be men touching women. Well the church has changed to women wearing pants in the church. The things that shock me is what the people are wearing to church. When I was very young and the communion was served the women always had to have their head covered. Now they don't. Some do, like the deaconess, choir, and ushers may always follow those traditions, but the persons that sit in the audience don't anymore.

#### **Ida Mae Whiten**

Women play a very important role in the church and they still do. I feel the women is the leader of a lot of things at the church. I really must say that they're much stronger in the church than back then. Back then they didn't have women preaching but now they do. The duties of the mother of the church is very much like a leader. She comes right after the pastor. When you need something but couldn't get from the pastor you go to the mother. You go to the mother for advice or whatever she feels she could do for you. She's like your mother, she listens to you. You talk with her really for anything.

#### **Annie Mae Holmes**

##### *Fairview Baptist Church*

A deaconess is ones who are being set aside to be able to help the deacons. Just like if someone is sick -- maybe it's a lady that's sick and the deacons going to see about her -- they won't approach the house because we never know if she is in there by herself. We never know whether she's in order for someone to come in or not. The ladies go ahead of the deacons and see the situation of the home before they let them come in and the deaconess of the church are supposed to go ahead and see about anybody that not coming to church and see what's their reason why, even the new candidates, the new converts that come in the church. The deacons -- the deaconess are suppose to go and pray with them -- teach them how to pray and teach them about the Bible and what Christ say. This is their role. When I first joined the church we couldn't go in wearing pants as a woman. But now they wear most of what you want, whatever you comfortable in and however you want to come because that's the way most of the churches doing now, and I see they wear some pants at our church sometime. They come. Nobody bothers. But back then, they did. You know, but time brings change.



# PROFILES

## *Five Members of South Baton Rouge Churches*

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**BRIDGET JACKSON BRISTER**

*St. Francis Xavier*

(Interviewed by Paula Jacobi)

This was the original colored settlement. The people came from Point Coupee' and the Felicianas with strong ties to African roots and European roots. And some of us are descended from Cajuns, you know, from the Nova Scotia bunch. I say "us" in the sense of people who were either born or raised or migrated to the South Baton Rouge area. When you take that and integrate in the African tradition, for South Louisiana, you really have what could be considered Creole tradition.

There are a lot of words that we use in Creole cooking. Like people talk about okra gumbo and that sort of thing. Well, okra actually came from Africa. So its not like it was something that was indigenous to this area. So you just have to take everything and put it together, and maybe that's why they call Louisiana a hodgepodge or a real gumbo of people.

I used to work for a man who told me one day, he said, "Bridget, I don't know how to classify you, you not black enough to be black." Well the term could probably apply to most of the people at Saint Francis Xavier in the early years. Different mix now.

When I think of my early years in this parish, I think first of the St. Francis Xavier bazaars. There was no way you could do anything other than go to a St. Francis Xavier Bazaar. They used to have rides, the Ferris wheel, the Tilt-A-Whirl. Fun stuff, you know. And all the parishioners would get together from the parish. And, oh, the food was just incredible. From the chicken dinners to the gumbos on Saturdays, to the pralines or as we call them, the pecan candy, (to the) home baked cakes. You name it, it was there.

As far as the crafts go, I don't know if you've ever seen these dolls, maybe you have, they're only so tall, maybe twelve inches, you know, the predecessors of Barbie, I guess. But the dresses were handmade, and depending on who made what, you had some that were made from pieces of felt that were actually cut out into circles and they were sort of hand knitted or hand crocheted together. There were some with long dresses with embroidery and lace and tucks. There were others that were knitted or crocheted. We used to always love these beautiful little dolls. And the idea, of course, was to win some game, or put a ring toss over a bottle in hopes of winning one of these dolls.

Let's see, when I started school there in 1960, the new school wasn't built. It was the old school I went to. So that's why I said, "Now let me think back to my history." The old school resembled a big house. If you see the old pictures, that's kind of what it looks like. The nuns lived on the third floor, and the school was housed on the first and second floors. So, that's really where we went to school.

Still, the hall was there, just as it is now, because I think that was built in 1947. The cafeteria was there always in its present place. But where the new school is actually was the original site of

the old school.

For those of us who are baptized as babies, the "Cradle Catholics" as we're called, we really did not learn a lot about the Bible. We were taught from the Baltimore Catechism. You know, "Who made us?" — "God made us." It was more a rote sort of learning of the doctrine of the church, but not so much actual scripture. The Mass, of course, was in Latin when I was a child. I sang with the choir when I was in elementary school and I used to love to sing the mass for the dead. Because I thought it was beautiful. (She laughs and sings a few notes in Latin).

But it really wasn't until I got older and the mass started to be said in English that I guess I started gaining an appreciation of what was actually being said in the mass. Of course, they always had the English next to the Latin in the little books, the missallettes. But you really didn't pay any attention to that. You were a kid. You heard father talking all this gibberish on the altar. And it was like, oh well, you had parents like I did, they put us in the middle, my brother and I, and they kind of nudged us if we got a little out of hand.

It wasn't until they built the interstate and split the community in two, did people actually leave what had been their home-base since, I guess, their families first came to this area. That, to me, had a very devastating effect on our parish. When that interstate came through it really changed my life. Because when I told you that we moved out of South Baton Rouge to another area of town and started to attend St. Paul Catholic church, well that's why. Because our house was taken when the interstate came. And a lot of families experienced that. Some continued to reside in the South Baton Rouge area. Most people, though, ended up moving.

And to leave everything that you're familiar with and kids that you've grown up with, a neighborhood where you felt comfortable walking to your door and around the corner or down the street, or a group of you would get together and you would walk over to the YMCA, or go down to Lincoln Theater. Because when I was growing up, the Lincoln Theater was very much part of Baton Rouge. And it cost 25 cents, I want you to know, to go to the movies. That says something about my age.

But it had a very devastating effect, I think, on all of us. Then, when they took the high school! Oh, my, I can't tell you what it did to this parish. People from our parish went to the interstate. Particularly where the curve is that comes across the Mississippi River Bridge, because it would take the high school.

We were told at that time that originally, the way that it was supposed to have been done, it would have taken St. Agnes Catholic church as opposed to ours. But, it is and was a white man's world. And as a result of that the decision was made to take our high school even though it was only a couple of years old. And that's what was done.

To this day, we have no Catholic high school for African American youth in this parish. I personally believe that there's one that's desperately needed. I really think so. And I'm not the only one that feels that way.

When I first started attending mass at St. Francis again as an adult, I guess what drew me wasn't so much the service as much as it was the comradery of the people. There's a very strong sense of family that's a part of that parish. So many people were grown up there or it had been an integral part of their lives in some way or another.

It was new and some us really thrived on it. For some of the older parishioners, oh, it was devastating. And a lot of them left our church and went to St. Agnes. We ended up reserving our five o'clock Mass on Saturday for some of the older, more traditional parishioners. It's more in keeping with the way we Catholics are used to going to church. You know, forty-five minutes or an hour and you're out.

For those of us who have come to appreciate this new expression of our faith, to get out of mass in forty-five minutes makes us feel like we been robbed. It's not unusual for us to come to church today and sit there for an hour and a half, sometimes two hours, depending on how good it gets. Which is wonderful! Well, for me it's wonderful.

For some people, church is all about taking, getting, but church should really be about giving and taking. Now that's really participating. You come to our church, it's not unusual to hear a good "Amen" or a "Well," or some other comment made. Or when the choir sings a song that's moving it's not unusual for folks to stand up and throw their hands in the air to let people know that I relate to this and this is touching me and maybe this is something that I've gone through. It's not unusual for people to sit and rock from side to side because they feel the music and they've taken it into their hearts and their souls. It's not unusual for people to sing with tears running down their eyes. It's not unusual for people to clap if it's good and just really get into the music.

Now women, there's been some changing lately in the role women play. To be perfectly honest with you, women have always been the backbone of the church, I don't care what church. They've always been the backbone. We now have women altar servers, women lecturers, women Eucharistic ministers. We cannot be ordained as priest or deacons, and cannot say Mass. However, depending on the priest, we can give homilies. And probably I shouldn't say this, but it's been very inspiring when it happens. I think the doors have opened somewhat.

You know, if there is ever a classless revolution, it will be made up of women, led by women, and we would take over, change the world. And we'd be good at it too -- a real gumbo of people.

### MOTHER SARAH JONES

*Magnolia Baptist Church*

(Interviewed by LaVada Taylor)

The church where I was baptized was Little Lezone Baptist Church on Plank Road. I was baptized in Redwood Creek. I remember that day like it was yesterday. The Reverend Handy had ran revival at our church. It was around maybe fifteen head of us was baptized that year.

Now child, at that time we had to pray. You could not do like people do today just come up and join church. We had to pray. And, we had to have something to say, how we felt you know.

We would pray to the Son to show us some kind of sign that we had religion. If they didn't believe that you had religion, they would send you back and say you got to pray some more. You didn't pray in the church in front of everybody. You would go out to pray. Do it all during the

day. You would have something like a praying ground maybe behind the house. You would go off to yourself and you would pray.

Having religion is a real personal thing. The way I got religion, I was real young. But my daddy told me I was too young and he would not let me be baptized. Finally, I went on and I was baptized.

We would meet at the church that Sunday morning, we would have service, there wasn't many cars then for us to ride, and some people would walk to where we got baptized. Some went by wagons.

We would go to the creek and we would get baptized. Then we would come back to church and we would fellowship in church that Sunday. And we took our communion that Sunday. We'd wear white cause that means pure. Everybody was dressed in white and we had something white on our heads.

When you get religion, well you pray. You ask the Lord to convert your soul. I was about six years old then and my daddy thought I was too young. Old peoples would think that children would be too young. They always say that the sin wasn't on you until you get, I think it was twelve years old. If you did something bad the sin would be on your parents until you got twelve. That's what old people used to say at that time.

When I was twenty-one years old, I left Zachary and I moved to Baton Rouge. I start going to Magnolia cause I lived on Buchanan Street with my brother and sister-in-law. For a while I sang in the choir. Then I became a member of the steward board, I mean deaconess board. It used to be called the steward board a long time ago.

By and by, I start helping out Ms. Mary McCauley, she was our other mother. I had been on the deaconess board a long time. I mostly took her place as the Mother of our church after she got ill and kind of down and wasn't able to serve and I was really serving a lot.

I would go to see the sick. I would call up the sick. See how they was. Fix the communion table. See to the ones that was going to be baptized. See that they bring the right clothes. Ah, putting their gowns on when they was ready to be baptized. And I would go around and take the communion to the sick with the deacons. People take communion because it pertains to what Christ left for us to do.

Ladies at our church don't have to serve on the deaconess board. On the usher board, we have ladies and we have men. Mostly in the choir is ladies. Right now we don't have but one man in the choir. All the rest of them is ladies. We have one young man. We just only have one minister lady in our church. Her name is Rev. Bernice Johnson. She was our late pastor's sister, Reverend Charlie Smith. Some ladies teach Sunday school. Some of them is over the vacation bible study. Some of them is over the children.

Women are over all these choirs: the senior choir is the older ladies; the chancellor choir is the younger ladies; then we have the junior choir. We have three choirs. Women are over all these choirs. We did have a man over our senior choir. Oh, for years Brother Dan Sterling. He got sick some years ago, about two years ago. He died a few months ago. I reckon you heard talk of Brother Dan Sterling? Cause he sang a many year at all these churches.

The children are also real involved at our church. Oh yes indeed! They like to go to other

churches to sing. And, like if we have something, they like to come down. If we have Thanksgiving dinner they like to serve. We had dinner for the elderly people, they like to serve. And, they love Sunday school. They're real polite. They'll help you getting down and out you know. They'll open the door for you.

Every summer we have vacation bible study. We invite all the children in the community to come. That meets in July, starts about the 7th of July. Our children take a trip every year.

Last year for Thanksgiving they fixed a dinner for the elderly people. Any elderly people in the neighborhood were welcomed to come. The children of the church did that. They served us elderly people at the church. We just sat there and the children served. The children had a dinner for the children of the community too. They had toys. And, they had a clothes drive not too long ago. And we're having another drive soon, Magnolia Hope.

When I look back, you know...the church has really changed. Yes, it's changed a lot. With the children of today you can join church now if you three years old (chuckle). Your parents don't mind you join church. As I say, when I was coming along they wouldn't let you join church that young.

The deaconess, they would bear up the Preacher. When the Preacher be preaching they would sing, (Mother Sarah begins to sing in a melodious voice) "The Lord is my shepherd and I shall not want." But you don't hear the people say that anymore.

The deaconess board was the Amen corner. When the Preacher be preaching that's what they'll be singing but they don't do that anymore. The deaconess' will pat their hands and maybe say amen now. You know years ago the Mother of the church use to make the bread for communion.

But for the Spirit part it's about the same. We use to have a Friday night -- what we use to call: Tell Your Determination. When you say, I'm determined to go to heaven. And, you would ask the church to pray for you. Now we don't have that any more. If you do have anything to say now they would call it a testimony.

The testimony is pertaining if there has been something that happen to you and the Lord had blessed you. And then you want to tell the church that you done overcome whatever that happened to you. Maybe you been very sick and you want to tell the church that you're doing better. Or, maybe there's something that you have wanted the Lord to do for you. Or your parents have been going through it or the family has gone through a distress and the Lord has eased that. You would want to express that. You'd want to tell what the Lord has did for me.

It's so important for me to go to church. Because that's all, I love the church. I love people. I love the Lord. And that is my greater pleasure that I have. And it's from growing up.

I love the Lord because, well, he died on the cross. He's so good. God is so good to me. And, that's all I live for. He gives me strength enough to go around and serve the people. And to go to church. I love my church. I love people. And, that's all I ever wanted to was to serve him, to serve Jesus Christ. That is my greatest pleasure -- church.

Even if he didn't make a way for me, I still would serve the people, because I just love the Lord.



## SADIE KEEL

*St. Francis Xavier*

(Interviewed by Helen Haw)

I was born Sadie May O'Connor in 1914. My grandfather's father was an O'Connor. For some business reasons my grandfather dropped the "O." But from people of the old school I'm still referred to as Sadie May O'Connor, and I accept any of it. My father told me I was going to get mixed up one day, using O'Connor and Connor. I said but I'm one and the same. He said, "but they won't know it." That was all right too. Now I took on Sadie Connor Keel. I was married fifty-six years to one man, quite a history, huh? It would have been fifty-seven years this Christmas Eve.

I was christened at the cathedral. Most Catholics went to St. Joseph's cathedral for christenings. We didn't have a church of our own until we got St. Francis Xavier. We lived in the St. Agnes area, so we went there on Sundays, but it was a white church. At the time there was a certain mass said for black Catholics. If other people wished to attend they could, but it was mostly for black Catholics that one mass for Sunday. From St. Agnes we went to St. Francis Xavier where we are now. I must have been three or four years old holding hands with my grandparents to go to St. Francis Xavier.

I attended the public school, but I went to St. Francis to church and for catechism. At the age of twelve I made my communion and confirmation at the same time. I remember my first communion dress, the veil and everything, how it was designed. The dress was long-sleeved with pin tucks from the shoulders down to the waistline, lace ruffling around the sleeve, and around the neck, an inch wide white satin ribbon pique' on either end that came around the waist and tied in a bow around the front. The skirt was gathered, the skirt was plain with a satin slip under it. The veil was of white illusion. I didn't know what illusion was at the time, but I learned later, with a lazy-daisy stitch all around it. The nuns had purchased the little wreaths for all of the little girls, the candles, the prayer books and the beads. Everybody was given a saint's name. I think mine was St. Ann. When you went up to make your confirmation you held your card between your fingers and the priest addressed you by your saint name. For example, "Ann," and said what he had to say. After I got up somebody else took my place until the confirmation was over. Both communion and confirmation were done at once. Now some churches do communion at seven or eighth (grade) and eleventh grade for confirmation. I can see why. It seems to me the understanding is so different now. You have a few of the teachers teaching catechism who really stick with the premise that what was good then for understanding is good for children now. But there are those who do otherwise, which in my opinion could make for conflict in understanding.

We had to learn the whole Baltimore Catechism. I did my Catechism alone. I had to come from the public school in the afternoon, run home and change clothes and then go over. The priest heard mine once or twice a week. He gave me one chapter each time, but I always went knowing two or three. Finally I got through with it much earlier than some of the other children in the Catholic school because they were doing it alone, many at a time. I was real proud of it and that type of thing.

Before we made our first communion, we went to confession. The nuns always taught us the difference between mortal and venial sins. At that time if you ate meat on Friday that was a mortal

sin. If you missed mass on Sunday that was a mortal sin. Things that you maybe misbehaved, you thought, but you apologized for, it could be considered a venial sin.

My grandfather built the confessional boxes, the stands, the speaker stands, all of that he built for the church. I remember the confessional boxes. On the inside, envision a cabinet and it was draped on the inside, as I recall, in red velvet. You walked in, you pulled the curtain back and there was a kneeler there. It was partitioned midway. The priest sat on one side. There was also a kneeling bench over there too. You went in for confession and you knelt on the other side. After you told the type, after you make your confession, let me put it that way, the priest talked with you. If there were things that you wanted to ask him, he answered, then at the end of it he dismissed you. The last part you made your act of contrition. You would come out, go down to the front of the church or wherever you chose to kneel and say whatever prayers you had to say before leaving. You were ready for Communion the next day, or the same day you were ready.

The confessionals are so different now. You go into a room. You're face to face with the priest. Now that didn't happen until I was grown. Very grown, that's been within the last twenty, twenty-five years.

The nuns also taught us how to go to communion. You would walk up in an orderly fashion. We had kneelers all the way around the rail, you knelt there until the priest came to you. After you received communion, you got up and went back and someone else in the line took your place, until communion was over. Truthfully, I'm remembering a linen cloth which was all the way around the rail. You had to keep your hands under because you were not allowed to touch the host. Should it fall it had the linen cloth there to catch it. The altar boys had a pallet so if one fell it could fall in there. There were two ways it could fall -- either while the altar boy held that or when it was placed with you. All of these are things that give us a chance to refresh our memories about things we have lived through. It's so strange how we take for granted so many things.

Now that I think about it, the nuns have changed too. During that time you never saw their hair. They wore long black robes which touched the floor. They wore long black stockings, and black shoes. They had a white, very stiff headpiece, that went around the head and which held the black veil that they wore. They had a white, very stiff headpiece that went around the head and which held the black veil that they wore. They wore a long rosary which hung almost down to the waist, with a large cross. In the wintertime they had a long black cape that they threw around their shoulders. I never saw them with an overcoat. It was always a cape.

It's so different now. Many of them don't wear any headpiece at all. They cut their hair, they curl it, or whatever. They wear short dresses, color stockings, and that type of thing. Then they wore heavy undies, long heavy petticoats. If they were working in the kitchens, they always had white aprons that they put around very stiff and their duties were to keep the altar clothes washed, starched, ironed, everything that went into the church. They cleaned every Saturday before mass on Sunday. That was a part of their life. Their life style was so different from today. The children dearly loved them and respected them. They taught and lived in the old school. The school went from grades one through six. Later they added the middle school, I suppose. I think they perhaps go to the eighth or ninth now. There are still there in a new school. The old one I remember was a three story, the auditorium was downstairs. On the first floor up I think the classes were held, in

the classrooms. On the second floor, this is where the nuns lived. It was wooden at that time. Later on it had plaster added on to the outside to the bottom. The top was still wood. The inside had wood floors you had to scrub and that type thing, but plenty good times, a lot of learning, a lot of love, a lot of vision took place.

The old church has been demolished and there is a new church. We have the stained glass windows in the church now. I remember putting in one and selecting the one that I wanted in memory of my father and grandparents. The little plaque is under it with "Donated By" our name.

My grandparents did a lot of work for St. Francis and so did my father. Half the benches were built by my grandfather. He died before they were finished. The church itself was red brick. There was a foyer as you entered, and two side doors if you chose to go that way. There was a center aisle with benches on both sides. The confessional was to the right and one to the left. At Christmas time you had a lot people going to confession. There would be two priests there to hear your confession. The benches were stained a dark mahogany. On the end of each bench was a cross all the way down and the top of the pews were arched. Down front they had stands for the Blessed Mother, Saint Joseph, and other stands.

The altar was in the background. The choir sang in the upper part of the church. You could see them if you turned around which you didn't often do because they were singing down. That's where the organ was and the organists and the choir.

The windows of St. Francis were interesting. The old windows are the type that you see now. They are put in already or painted or glassed in with different pictures in it. At that time I don't remember too many of the pictures, but they did have the paper that came by sheets. You cut out the paper and pasted it into the glass in the window frames. The windows had been put into the church and they were a fraction of an inch off. My father went in and he was asked to come and make the correction and he did. So they got the windows straight. They were real pretty. All of the glass was colored in very prominent colors.

It is so funny to go back there now. They had a bell that was rung when church was taking in. They also rang that bell if a member happened to die. The fellow who kept the building up would toll, they called it toll, the bell. Everybody in the community knew something had happened in the church and perhaps a death had taken place. The bell now at the new St. Francis is housed in a special edifice on the outside. That bell was given to the church by my grandfather. It was brought to him by a friend from one of the plantations and placed there in my grandfather's shop. Of course he gave the bell to St. Francis and it's there now. So I still feel that we have a part of St. Francis because the bell remains. It isn't tolled very often, if ever, but it's there and they preserved it.

### **JULIA PURNELL**

*Bethel A.M.E.*

(Interviewed by Tonetta Morrison)

I came to Baton Rouge directly from the University of Michigan. It was late September, hottest I've ever been in my ever loving life, and I got here at 8:00 P.M.. It was still hot. When I left

Ann Arbor it was snowing. Anyway, I got here that Friday, inquired about the A.M.E. church on Saturday, someone told me where it was and I joined church that Sunday and have been a member every since. Anywhere I go, I'm gonna find the church and in finding the church, it didn't take me long to know the community because I met people in the community. Later, I met my husband in the church. So the church has had an impact on my life. I'm not feeling good if I don't go to church. I think the church is a filling station that helps me. I fill up on Sunday and it takes me through the week. I feel that it is my church. I take something to church instead of looking for something to bring home.

I was born Julia Brogdon in Belton, South Carolina. My father was a minister and my mother was a teacher. I am a retired Southern University professor. Religion has played the number one role, because my father was a minister, our lives were in churches, all day Sunday and during the week. The good people of the church are responsible for who I am today. The church is number one in my life.

The A.M.E. church has a mission and that is to clothe, feed, and to improve the quality of life; to make a difference in the community in which the church is located. The Scott-Gilchrist Quality of Life Center was established for this purpose and is the only center of its type at an A.M.E. church in the Baton Rouge area. Bethel also sponsors "Juneteenth Day" and we are very proud of its success. On this day, a celebration of our freedom, everybody in the community comes to the church for the festivities. We serve a free meal to about 300 to 500 community members.

The structure of the A.M.E. church is similar to that of the United States. Monies raised by the church are shared to support the national church. Baptists do with their money whatever they wish to do. A.M.E. churches have conference claims and are required to support the national conference. Ministers are also sent to church one year at a time. The longest period of time a minister remained at Bethel was 14 years and that was Rev. M. J. Black. We can get rid of ministers quite easily. The church does not belong to the minister, it belongs to the members. We have ritualistic church services according to the discipline of the church.

The biggest change in the church service has been the music. It's mostly gospel. Others still have "straight" music with a little gospel while others are still in the old "stayed" area of singing hymns straight from the hymnal; a little dead, sleepy music. Bethel has several choirs, the Gospel choir and Children's choir. Some individuals still don't like the gospel singing. They wouldn't like that. The role of the church has changed in that the people have changed, people have died. The culture and climate of the city have changed and the churches have had to change as well.

The women's role has been Bethel. They have been everything in the church. If you want something done, you give it to the women whether they get credit or not. The women's role has been the church, no doubt about it. You can give it to the husband, and she'll do the work for the husband. Women are dependable in carrying out projects.

The A.M.E. church was very instrumental in the Civil Rights Movement. The A.M.E. church started out as a Civil Rights Movement when Richard Allen withdrew from the St. George Methodist Episcopal Church in 1787. Blacks had to sit in the balconies and received communion last. Richard Allen decided he wasn't going to do this anymore, thus the birth of the African Methodist Episcopal church. The A.M.E. church then provided schools for educating blacks, a printing press to employ

blacks, etc.

In keeping with the mission of the A.M.E. church and the growing needs of the community, the church has a number of outreach programs. We have dope clinics, Young People's Department (YPD), the Scott-Gilchrist Quality of Life Center, Young Men of Bethel (YMOB) — a group of men organized to aid in the guidance of troubled young black men, to teach them how to be men. It's difficult to meet the needs of the 1997 youth if the parents are not a part of it. If parents are not concerned, it's just difficult, but we do what we can. I would say we do a fair job.

Bethel is attracting new members, and I must tell you the truth about how the young people are having a lot of babies. We have some of the prettiest children in our church. Forty-percent of our membership are retired persons so we have to do a better job at attracting young people. The church is supported through tithes. The church is in the heart of the black community and in the past most members lived in the neighborhood. Now, most members live in the suburbs. We've gotten to the place where we've got the degrees and we're in our Mercedes. We've forgotten where we come from. There is a difference in the attitude of middle-class blacks. The church ought to be situated where it can serve its constituencies. I am going to continue doing what I can as an individual to serve the church.

### **ROSELLA WILLIAMS**

*Israelite Baptist/St. Agnes*

(Interviewed by Christy Sanders)

I was born in my home on 2318 Carolina Street on January 31, 1946. I was delivered by a midwife, Ms. Julia, and they put me in the nicely covered chest drawer, because they did not have a baby bed for me. My mother was Mary E. Williams, and my grandmother was Dolly Ridley. I also have an older sister, Ruth Williams. My father was deceased. He died when I was about five and Ruth was six. My mother chose never to remarry again because she wanted us to be brought up in an atmosphere in which we would not fear anyone. My mother feared that we would not want to share her.

As I recall, the expressway made a large impact on the people living in this area. I can recall specifically that I developed a poem to the State Times telling them the discomfort and distress we were encountering as result of the move. I remember we were the last people on that block to leave. People would come during the night to take the pipes to sell for the copper. We would hear the rattling on the pipes and we'd say, "we haven't gone yet." This would let them know they couldn't destroy our house yet. A community was destroyed because of the expressway. Many persons, if they could not find housing in the area, they had venture out to other areas. I think my house was sold and they moved it in the Valley Park area. From time to time I pass through Valley Park and I see my home. I really loved that home!

I was a terrible child when I was at Israelite Baptist Church. Sometimes I think about the fact that we had a cousin, named Cousin Stella, who was my Sunday School teacher. Cousin Stella, one of the older members of the church, came off of West McKinley Street. I think Turner was her last



name. I was such a terrible little girl until every Sunday I would go to Cousin Stella's class and I would sit on the pews. They divided the church into sections: the primary group, the adults, the mid-adults, and the teenagers were in between there. Well, I was in the primary group and not being very nice, I would pull my shoes off. I would pull the other children's hair. I would tear up the fans. I would tear up the Sunday Schoolbooks. I would mark with markers on things. I was a holy terror and my sister was a blabber mouth, so every Sunday when I would get into that rage she would go to the phone and call my mom. She would say, "Momma, Rosella cutting up again." My mother would come to Israelite and whip me with a switch. It was a real, real green switch that did not dry out and when you got hit with that switch, it was a lasting lick. She would whip me from Israelite, all the way down the street, all the way down the hill, all the way up the hill to our house, and I would come back the next week and do the same thing. Brother Williams, who was Superintendent of the Sunday School, would make me apologize to the Sunday School for cutting up. Brother Williams had prayed for me. He had taken me under his wings and nothing changed me. I still came back every Sunday and cut up. He decided, after praying about it one night, to make me the teacher of the Sunday School class. I was the first young aged teacher at Israelite. I think I was a teacher at age seven and it was because of my attitudes that I got to be a teacher. Believe you me it really turned me around. I demanded that those kids respect me, that they have their Sunday School lesson ready, that they come in and act like they were at church and not act like they were in a ballroom or outside batting a ball.

The third Sunday at Israelite was the dress up day. Everybody went out and bought something new for third Sunday. Honey, you had to have your gloves, your hat, your pocket book, your shoes, your dress, everything had to match. Rosenfield's, I. H. Rubenstein, Relay's had nothing on Israelite members because they dressed. They were all dressed women and men. They flourishly dressed. Sometimes you began to wonder if you were really coming to the church, to have church or if you were coming to the church to just intermingle and show off your dress up clothes.

Suppers started on Thursday and they would sell supper dinners until Sunday. On Sundays they would have what is called a tea. A tea was really another party because they would sell hot sausages and fish sandwiches. They were held in the homes of the members so they could raise money to build the structure. Since that time they have changed the philosophy of raising money. People have gotten away from having suppers. It used to be quite fascinating because once somebody had a supper in South Baton Rouge, everybody knew where the supper was. I think the dinners were running somewhere in the neighborhood of \$1.50 to \$2.50 a plate. You could get fish and red beans and smoked sausage and potato salad and toast and strawberry cold drink -- a Barq's cold drink at that!

The one thing I just really disliked was going to church all day long. You went to church for 7:00 A.M., then you stayed for Sunday School at 9:30, then you came back for BYPU, then you came back for night service. Your whole day was spent in church and on Sundays you could not play cards. You could not go to the movies. You could not iron. You barely watched television. You couldn't do anything that was not good in the sight of God. And of course we respected those wishes.

I remained in Israelite up until age thirteen. As a youngster I had a desire to be Catholic. I

had an uncle, George Davis, who is deceased. He was the only person in my family that was Catholic and I wanted to be Catholic, but my mom always said I had to be Baptist because everybody in the family was Baptist. If by thirteen I still felt that way, I could be Catholic, but I had to attend church at the Baptist church. So I retained my position of singing with the choir at Israelite, but I walked every Sunday to the Catholic church and then came back to the Baptist church. When I first joined St. Agnes it was very much segregated. There was section in the church that was designated for the blacks and section for the whites. The blacks had a small three to four seats in the back of the church. This was before the Catholic faith was integrated. I chose to go to St. Agnes because it was something that I wanted to do, not because I wanted to break a racial barrier, I wasn't interested in that. It was the faith that I was concerned about. I wanted to be where I wanted to be. I could have stayed in all black setting which was St. Francis Xavier because this is where I was baptized Catholic. But I chose to move. I used to pass by and see this gorgeous church on East Boulevard. I used to always say "Oh, I want to go to that church one day." I am still a member of St. Agnes.

After my mother and grandmother died, I still make it a point to attend Israelite every Mothers' Day. This was a home church for us.

*Staff: Left to Right  
Veonetta Jewell, Chasity Lovely, Heidi McGee, Shawnte Green,  
Shanta Jenkins, Rahshada Jenkins, Melvin Heard, Katina Welsh, Beau Bogart (Not pictured)*

