

**CITY COUNCIL****The City of Orange Township, New Jersey**DATE December 6, 2022NUMBER 461-2022

**TITLE: A RESOLUTION CELEBRATING BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH ON ITS 105<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY IN THE CITY OF ORANGE TOWNSHIP (Submitted by Councilmember-At-Large Adrienne Wooten & Councilmember Kerry Coley)**

**WHEREAS**, the history Bethel Baptist Church congregation in the City of Orange Township goes back to 1917 when Deacon Malachi Jones gathered a group of approximately 30 baptized Christians from his hometown of Dothan, Alabama to worship together in the Orange/East Orange, NJ vicinity; and

**WHEREAS**, he contacted Rev. Wilbur Neal and asked if he would pastor this group. Reverend Neal consented and upon arrival, Rev. Neal and his prayer group assembled in a building on Dodd Street and Brighton Avenue in East Orange; and

**WHEREAS**, the name "BETHEL" was selected for the church in accordance with Genesis 35:3, "And let us arise, and go up to Bethel and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went."; and

**WHEREAS**, Bethel relocated to another address on Dodd Street in East Orange, and from there to Main Street (near Day Street) in Orange, in a hall over the now defunct Bijou Theatre. In 1922, Bethel purchased 229 Wallace Street in Orange, from Antonio Cerollo, which was part of a grape harbor; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1928 the adjoining lot was purchased. The Church building was started and the basement was completed for usage as the permanent place of worship; and

**WHEREAS**, the mortgage was obtained from the Metropolitan Building and Loan Association in Newark; and

**WHEREAS**, until 1937, the following ministers pastored at Bethel: Rev. ML Robertson, Rev. Elliott, and Rev. Robert Lee. Rev. George L. Johnson was called to Pastor in 1937; and

**WHEREAS**, he established several auxiliaries, and with the assistance of Rev. Williams Chalmers, the church grew spiritually and financially; and

**WHEREAS**, the people had an aim to work. The Sunday School and the B.Y.P.U. were second to none. Rev. Chalmers served as supply minister; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1940 Rev. Earl Lawrence was called to the ministry of Bethel Baptist Church. He pastored from 1940 to 1952. During his Pastorate, the mortgage of \$4,300 was paid in full; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1946, the two coal stoves were removed, a hot water system was installed, and the lighting system was converted to fluorescent; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1948, the Hammond organ was purchased for the sanctuary from the Griffith Piano Company. A drive was started to raise \$1,500 for a down payment on the Lutheran Church on Summit Street in East Orange. Bethel did not raise the funds in the allotted time and the plan was dropped. The money raised was earmarked for the Building Fund, where it grew; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1952, as a successful two-week revival, Rev. Hayes G. Thompson was called to pastor Bethel, and remained until his sudden death in 1965; and

**WHEREAS**, under Rev. Thompson's pastorate, the church was extended above the basement, and Bethel's first kitchen was installed; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1953, the ground was broken on the side lot to extend the second floor over that section of the property, where the dining room and kitchen now stand; and

**WHEREAS**, the rear stairway on the west side of the building was where the garage once stood. Unfortunately, Bethel was unable to secure bank financing for the expansion, therefore church officers extended their personal finances to continue the construction. Later, through Chauncey Harrison's hard efforts, Bethel successfully secured financing from the Interstate Realty and Construction Company for three years, with additional financing from Second National Bank of Orange; and

**WHEREAS**, Bethel's very own Brother Levy Richards completed the second-floor interior, and Brother Richard Smith completed the basement; and

**WHEREAS**, Rev. Russell R. White first preached at Bethel on October 31, 1965, and on March 23, 1966 he was selected to pastor Bethel by the Deacon Board; and

**WHEREAS**, on April 10, 1966, the entire church accepted Rev. White as the new Pastor. Under his pastorate, the basement was completely renovated, creating multipurpose space for Sunday School classrooms, and dining/fellowship hall. Additionally, office space was constructed. Church membership continued to grow, and the Bethel adopted a motto: "There is no such thing as can't." With this motto, Bethel began to climb to higher grounds. In 1975, Rev. White founded Eagle Flight Pilot Training Academy, in East Orange. This highly respected academy provides flight instruction to youth and young adults. On May 12, 1998, Rev. White was inducted into the New Jersey Aviation Hall of Fame; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1991, the Bethel Baptist Finance Committee was formed to plan the rebuilding and renovation of the church. The committee consisted of Mel Adams, Marion Boswell, Marjorie Bozeman, Susan Burwell, Todd Burwell, Andre Cooke, Freeman Ingram, Hilliard Neal, Preston Oliver, Dallas Pinnix, and Henry Settles. The "Ground Breaking" service was held on April 21, 1991; and

**WHEREAS**, it was through Rev. White's untiring persistence that Bethel was renovated after many years of challenges which included the bankruptcy of the builder originally hired for the renovation. Upon notification of the bankruptcy filing, Trustees Willie Sumlar and Dallas Pinnix coordinated the balance of the renovations. In confirmation of Rev. White's motto, "There's no

such thing as can't", the men and women of Bethel and friends joined together to complete the renovation.; and

**WHEREAS**, during the construction, Sunday services and other activities were held at the Seventh Day Adventist church on Reynolds Terrace in Orange; and

**WHEREAS**, the construction took 2 ¼ years to complete. It was a glorious day when the congregation and friends marched back to Bethel from the Seventh Day Adventist Church; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1998, Rev. White retired as Pastor, after 32 years of dedicated leadership. Following Rev. White's retirement, the Deacons, with the assistance of Rev. Willie Washington, were able to keep the spiritual hopes of Bethel high during the two-year search for a new Pastor; and

**WHEREAS**, in April 2000, Rev. Dr. Verenander L. Hughes was selected as Pastor of Bethel, and the church was richly blessed with his leadership with the following initiatives: \*The appointment of an Assistant Minister \*The reactivation of the Youth Program\*An increase in active ministries to 24 \*Annual two-day retreat\*Ordination of three new Deacons \*Reactivation of Bethel's newsletter\*Consecration of five new Deaconesses \*Appointment of five new Trustees\*2 Outreach Programs (Bethel Safe Haven & Bridging the Gap) \*Paid off Mortgage in June 2003 – 5 years early! Rev. Dr. Hughes served Bethel until his relocation in November 2016; and

**WHEREAS**, in March 2018, Bethel voted upon Bishop Dr. Darren A. Ferguson as its new Pastor. After a six-month interim period, Bishop Dr. Ferguson was duly installed as Bethel's 7th Pastor, with Dr. Calvin Butts of Abyssinian Baptist Church of Harlem, NY invited as Keynote Speaker. Rev. Al Sharpton of National Action Network kicked off the Installation Weekend with a Friday night worship service. Bethel strives to continue enlarging our territory, and remains committed to service to ALL!

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Municipal Council of the City of Orange Township do celebrate Bethel Baptist Church 105<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in the City of Orange Township.

**Adopted: December 6, 2022**

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**Joyce L. Lanier**  
City Clerk

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**Tency A. Eason**  
Council President