

"Where there are two or three gathered in My Name, there will I be also."

The biblical quote was a true testimony of faith for the origin of the Mt. Zion Baptist Church. A small group of people who wanted a Black Baptist Church gathered, in 1890, at a storefront on Fourteenth and East Madison. They included Mr. Anderson, Mr. and Mrs. R.A. Clark, Mr. and Mrs. R.W. Butler, Mrs. Braxton, Mrs. Edmunds, W.H. Teemer, Mrs. Eliza Washington, Mrs. Eliza Shephard, and others whose names are not recalled.

The budding congregation was very similar to a tree which, although having withstood the "sands of time," had battled gusty winds, torrential rain storms and eroding soil around its roots. There were a series of pastors, changes in locations, fluctuations in membership, and many financial crises which rocked the struggling churchgoers. For instance, in a ten year span, the church occupied four locations: the Young Naturalist Hall at 4th and University in 1894; the Peoples Church at 3rd and East Madison in 1896; a site at 2nd and Spring in 1899; and a building at 9th and Olive in 1903. Three years later, property was purchased at 11th and Union.

At times there was happiness in the struggles. The construction of the first church edifice in 1906 was cause for rejoicing. The building was a one room wooden frame structure. A boardwalk crossed a gully in front of the church. The windows were plain glass panes and placed high enough to permit light. In the back of the pulpit stood the choir stand. For heat, a pot-bellied stove was placed in the center of the room. The pews were backless wooden benches.

Later, the structure was raised upon stilts and a partial basement added. The basement was used as a dining area and for Sunday afternoon fellowship. While housed at this location the leadership of the Reverend Mr. and Mrs. W.D. Carter had profound effect upon the viability of the Church. The congregation grew, and the mortgage was paid.

Although the 11th Avenue site was a credit to its founders, the growth of the membership necessitated seeking a new location. In 1918, a beautiful eight room house and a lot, eighty feet by one-hundred twenty-two feet, were purchased at 19th and East Madison. After remodeling, the house became the parsonage. Dr. Felix Cooper chaired the Building Committee whose efforts resulted in groundbreaking ceremonies for a new building. Upon completion of the edifice, the local Cayton Weekly carried the following...

"The new church building is fifty-three feet wide and eighty-seven feet long with a seating capacity of about seven hundred. It is well equipped with ladies' parlor, choir rooms, baptistry, ladies' and gentlemen's dressing rooms, pastor's study and gallery. The basement is equipped with everything to make it a modern workshop for the Sunday School. This property is an evidence of the Church pride of its members and race in general in Seattle. It is valued at \$30,000.00 and bespeaks the sacrifices made by members and friends."

The wisdom of the membership in the creation of such a utilitarian edifice had far reaching effects on the role of the church. It became, and remains, a center for religious, educational, political and community activities.

In 1940, two lots adjacent to the church were purchased. The size of the membership reflected the economic periods of depression or prosperity. A significant period of growth was seen following World War II. Because a bus was purchased to transport children and adults, the Sunday School flourished. Women organized a missionary outreach program which served those at home and abroad. Nursery service during worship was created and Junior Church re-emerged with a greater emphasis on early religious training.

The desire and need for a new church structure led to the creation of the Building Fund whose Committee Chairperson was Mrs. Jessie Shields. The fund grew under three pastorates, and, in 1962, the parsonage was razed, making room for a new educational unit which was completed in 1963.

The present pastor, the Reverend Dr. Samuel B. McKinney, began his ministry to the Mt. Zion Baptist Church on February 1, 1958, and embarked upon a path of leadership that has provided a Federal Credit Union, a Preschool and Kindergarten, an Ethnic School, and an expanded program of spiritual development, Christian education and fellowship, greater missionary, social and civic outreach, and new construction.

In 1965, the membership celebrated its Diamond anniversary. Recognition was given to those who have been members of the Eleventh Street congregation and remained active in the church. They included: Mrs. B.H. Barrow, Mr. James E. Allen, Mrs. Lillie Smithea, Mr. Ernest White, Mr. Joe Staton, Mrs. Genevieve Roberts, Mrs. Elizabeth Wells, Mrs. V.M. Christian, Mr. James Davis, Mrs. Mable Parker. With apologies for any omissions, the church maintains gratitude for all of the great souls whose dreams and labors helped to make it the institution it is today.

In 1974, the old church was razed and in March, 1976, Mt. Zion walked into its present sanctuary, a structure whose architecture and art reflect its African, Christian, early and contemporary history.

From humble beginnings to a place of prominence in religious and civic affairs in the greater Seattle area, the Mt. Zion Baptist Church looks forward to 1990, in which year it will celebrate its 100th anniversary. Regarded as the mother Church of Black Baptists in the Puget Sound area, the Mt. Zion Baptist Church, pioneer church in the Pacific Northwest, stands as a tower of strength and good will to the community and welcomes the challenge of a larger measure of service.

WITHIN HER CITADELS, GOD HAS SHOWN HIMSELF A SURE DEFENSE.