

## THE 2<sup>nd</sup> ABBREVIATED CHURCH HISTORY

This Church began its history in 1848, when a group of laymen of several churches started a “Sabbath School” in the Navy Yard District. The first building was erected in 1851, on Concord Street, and the school was placed under the care of the First Presbyterian Church in 1862. In the year 1866, a second and larger building was constructed. Then in 1896 a third and final building at 209 Concord Street was erected and named City Park Chapel.

Through the years, until 1942, the First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn was responsible for Ministry in that building. When the Fort Green project was undertaken, those who were responsible for the Protestant Church realized that to minister effectively in such a large project it would be necessary to have a cooperative program. Therefore in 1942, Dr. Kenneth D. Miller of the New York City Mission Society and Dr. Phillip P. Elliott of the First Presbyterian Church called together leaders of several churches and formed a committee to provide for a religious program for the surrounding community.

This committee’s effective work resulted in the forming of The Church Of The Open Door, which represents six denominations: Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Congregational, Reformed United Presbyterian and Evangelical.

Also instrumental in our Church's creation were two organizations, the New York City Mission Society and the Protestant Council (later renamed the NYC Council of Churches.) Chosen to be the leader in this Christian endeavor was the Reverend Everett E. Sheldon.

Due to the building of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, the City Park Chapel building had to be torn down. This challenge was a turning point in the history of our church. The united effort of the Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Congregational, Reformed United Presbyterian, Evangelical denominations, and the New York City Mission Society and the Protestant Council made our new Church building possible. These churches and agencies witnessed to their faith in our future by underwriting the new building, which we now enjoy.

The Church Of The Open Door established its primary functions and aim: A Church whose doors would be open to serve humanity with no questions as to race, color, or religious origin. In the year 1953 ground was broken. In 1954 our dreams came true, and on October 31, 1954, we enjoyed the dedication of our new church. The Reverend Richard H. Siciliano became the new spiritual leader.

Through the years the following ministers have contributed greatly to the spiritual growth of our church. The Reverends:

W. Sterling Carey, Willis C. Tabor, Dr. Coe Wellman, Ray Frazier, Jose Sanchez, Alberto Filomeno, Calvin O. Pressley, Juan A. Velasquez, Charles Fisher and the Reverend Walter S. Keiller.

During the 1960s we had a small Spanish Congregation under the pastorate of Rev. Juan Velazquez and Rev. Andre Diaz. The 1960s also saw the integration of the mid-week services as was suggested by Rev. Velazquez. These services were well attended by both congregations. This service is continued every Wednesday with Bible Study and Prayer. Under the pastorate of Rev. Walter S. Keiller, who served us for eighteen years, The Church Of The Open Door became incorporated in 1971.

In July 1990 the Rev. Mark V. C. Taylor was elected to the pastorate of The Church Of The Open Door and installed as the seventh pastor in its 36<sup>th</sup> year. He brought new emphasis and re-emphasized older practices. First among these new emphases, was the Holiness-Pentecostal emphasis on the centrality of the Holy Bible, the necessity of Holy Living and the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Second, was the emphasis on salvation and constant praise as the key to victorious living. Third, was the need to counteract racial self-hatred and the racism on society. A fourth emphases, was the importance of

tithing to the Church. A fifth among these was the development of the Council of Ministries for community outreach.

These emphases led to changes in the most important areas of the church's ministry. In the area of Worship, a Praise Period led by the Deacons was instituted in the Sunday service in 2000. After March 2001 a Praise Team, led by Sis. (later Deacon) Doris Brickhouse, replaced the Deacons, so that praise became a vital part of the church's worship experience. A new praise emphasis required new instruments. In the year 1996, the new Minister of Music, Larry Banks began to use an electronic keyboard in the worship service. Other instruments soon followed: a new Hammond organ (2005), a new drum set and conga drums (2007), a bass guitar and guitarist (2012) and timbales and bongos (2013).

One of the greatest innovations in worship was the addition of the Outdoor Evangelistic Services in 1993. The entire church went outside under rented tents, umbrellas and chairs and held services. The church building was closed. People who never came to church heard the Gospel and many came to the Lord Jesus and joined the church. The negative elements in the community, drug dealers, users and the criminal element, learned that they could not claim the surrounding projects as

their own. Over the years the number of services varied from 10 to 4.

In order to deal with a rapid growth in membership a second service, held at 8:00 am, was added in 2007. This enabled the church to expand without building a new building. Another new element in worship was the celebration of Pentecost. Pastor Taylor stated that this celebration should be as important to the church as Christmas and Easter. Prior to this most Holy day all members were asked to fast. On that Sunday all members were asked to wear white and a special Anointing service was held at the end of the two worship services. All who so desired were anointed with oil. The movement of the Holy Spirit was especially powerful in these services.

In the area of community service, the church continued a long history of Social Action. The Church Of The Open Door began to attend the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) public hearing on its annual plans. Often 70-100 people were ferried to these hearings by our church on buses. The Church Of The Open Door participated in many organizations which helped us pursue an agenda to defend, improve, and develop public housing in NYC. In 1990 the church worked in Brooklyn Ecumenical Communities (BEC) to obtain individual housing unit

repairs, deal with criminal hot spots and grapple with larger issues of management, expansion and development

The Social Action record of The Church of The Open Door between 1990 and 2020 has featured great accomplishments. Among these are the closing of a neighborhood strip club, Steam Heat, due to protests led by Pastor Taylor and Deacon John R. Thomas and a host of members, many of them senior citizens. Also, the Church was the main litigant of a class action lawsuit that stopped the building of an incinerator that would have burned 15 tons of garbage a day in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Members rallied with Pastor Taylor in a protest that prevented the destruction of the lawn next to the church to build an unnecessary parking lot.

This record of Social Action also includes Candidates Nights, Town Hall meetings, and participation in protests. The church protested against police brutality as was seen in the Amadou Diallo case, against the War in Iraq, and against violence in the community. The church also sponsored a Gun Buyback program, Project Safe Surrender (misdemeanor suspensions) and meetings for members of the surrounding public housing communities.

In the early years between 2000 and 2005 the church was a member of the Downtown Brooklyn Coalition which brought

together 10 churches and over 700 people to fight for a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) with the developer of the Nets arena Forrest city Ratner. Between 2009 and 2020 the church has been a member of African American Clergy and Elected Officials, a group made up of religious and political leaders which pursue justice and equity for members of the African American community and all New Yorkers.

Starting with 1990, changes were also evident within the church administration. The first change was making the church secretary position a full-time position in 1994. The Church added a Church administrator position in 2007, filled by Dea. David Brandt. The Church created a nonprofit entity called Open Door Opportunities in 2000. In 2003 under the leadership of Pastor Taylor and the chairperson of the Trustee Board, Edna Louise Griffin, the church restored its 501(c)(3) status had that had been lost.

During the years between 1990 and 2020 there were also many changes in the area of Pastoral Care. First among these was a new dynamism in the funeral ministry of the church. Greater emphasis was placed on preaching the Gospel in these services and during the 1990's a great harvest of souls was reaped in many funeral services of up to 700 or 800 persons. Another major innovation in this area was the addition of a

Leadership Training Class for Deacons and a similar class for those called to ministry. In this class the best practices for counseling, worship, community service, crisis management, and crisis intervention were taught by the Pastor. These classes produced a harvest of trained and talented leaders throughout the church.

The area of Pastoral Care was also helped by the addition of three ordained ministers, the first such group in the history of the church. After completing a five-year training class, Ministers Joyce McDonald, Joan-el Thompson and Warren Young were ordained to the gospel ministry by a Council of Ministers in 2009. The passing of Isaac Mills, the Chairman of the Deacon Board, affectionately known as “The Hammer”, in 2014 marked the end of an era. The nine Deacons which remained had all been ordained under Pastor Taylor since 1990.

The Hand of the Almighty can be seen in the fact that all of the above blessings occurred while the surrounding community was besieged by the twin evils of crack and AIDS. Crack produced street violence and reduced its users to zombie-like status. AIDS was accompanied in the 1990’s by great fear and shame which helped it to spread even further under a cloak of secrecy, debilitating bodies and depressing souls. While many churches cowered in fear of these evils, The Church of The Open



Door took up its weapons and went out into the midst of the community, shining a light in the deepest darkness.

At present, the history of The Church of The Open Door is being written by the hand of Almighty God. Our Church is a Fortress of Faith out of which the healing powers of God's Holy Spirit flow (Ezekiel 47:1-12). We stand beneath the banner of the Ruler of the Universe, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Power over all Powers. We stand humbly, prayerfully, meditatively and joyfully as the Lord uses our Church to challenge evil and shine the light of the Glorious Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in our midst and in the midst of Farragut, Fort Green, Brooklyn and the world.