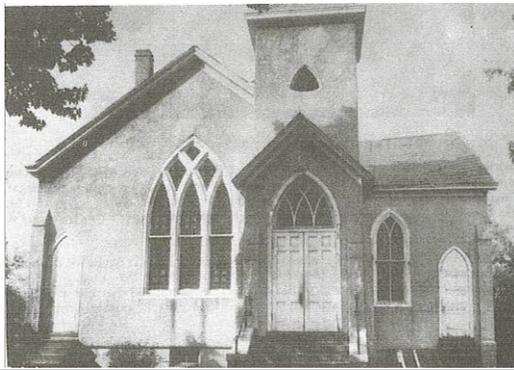


The History of Providence Park Baptist Church

1876-2016

Jerome Clayton Ross, Ph.D., Pastor
Compiler/Editor



Foreword

In our 140th year as a congregation, Providence Park Baptist Church faces the challenges of the 21st century—challenges that it has never before encountered! The portrait and the dynamics of the universal church have drastically evolved in response to increasingly newer changes within our society. Though sometimes perceived as turbulent and destructive, these changes constitute the stimulants that serve as the multi-faceted catalyst for the continual transformation of the church's ministry. In spite of the demographic changes among the congregation, the ministry of Providence Park remains guided by the Spirit and is being rebirthed as a light of the Living God in the canopy of voices that compose the chorus of Heaven! Through these pages, look back with us in awe and wonder at what the LORD *does*, as we have practiced the Gospel that is preached.

March 2016

1876—1916

Providence Park Baptist Church was conceived as a dream that our spiritual forefathers had and steadfastly pursued—a desire to come together to worship the LORD.

It was first manifested as gatherings in various homes for prayer. At times, they met at Brother Richard and Nancy Jones' home near the corner of Ladies Mile and Meadowbridge Roads called the "Big House," then, in the homes of Brothers William Edwards, Westley Jones, or Louis Cooper. As these meetings continued and the early founders gained strength and support, they pushed ahead with their dream.

On May 27, 1876, as indicated by the official records in the Henrico County Courthouse, our first three Trustees (namely, Brothers Richard Jones, Enoch Braxton, and Peter Markins) realized the first phase of their dream by purchasing from Mr. and Mrs. H. P. Taylor the land of the present site of our church for the sum of forty-five dollars (\$45.00). In 1879, the second phase of their dream was realized: the first formal meeting-place was erected. It was a small chapel dually-known as "Dick Jones' Meeting House" and "Dick Jones Chapel." After a few years, this chapel was torn down and a larger framed-building was erected, which served as a place of worship and a community school.

In partnership with the first Trustees, Reverends Rashi Harris, Ben Gentry, Joseph Clayborne, Scott Wallace, and Joshua Griffin served as the first 'Preacher-Pastors' and helped to seed the earliest dreams of our congregation. On August 16, 1885, our Sunday School was organized with Brother Joseph Wilkerson serving as the first Superintendent, while in 1895 our Men's Usher Board was organized with Brother Washington Winston serving as the first President.

In 1903, our congregation called Rev. John James Woodson as Pastor.¹ Under his leadership, numerous organizations and auxiliaries were formed, whose services proved valuable to the community as well as the congregation. In 1904, our Senior Choir was organized and until 1939 performed with Mr. James Scott as Director and Mr. James Conway as Pianist. Most noteworthy is Miss Edna C. Knight, a later Director, who displayed the unusual ability to sing the bass, the tenor, the alto, and the soprano parts! In 1912, a more desirable building formerly occupied by the Monument Methodist Church was bought, moved to the present church site, and erected as our old building was razed.

This earliest period of our history concluded with fond memories: Deacon Westley Jones tolling the steeple bell, when a member's body was delivered to the sanctuary for a funeral; Mrs. Daisy Jackson Beard tolling the bell for Sunday School; Rev. Woodson blowing the horn of his car for Morning Worship! The people of Providence were now in place!

¹ He was a native of Powhatan County, VA, the son of Archer and Williana Woodson, born on March 10, 1875. When he was twelve years old, his family moved to Richmond, where he became a member of Sharon Baptist Church under the pastorate of Rev. A. S. Thomas and later served as Church Clerk and Superintendent of Sunday School. When he acknowledged the call to preach, he was married with a family and worked during the day, while attending night school at Virginia Union University.

1917—1940

The second period of our history was marked by ‘providence’ within and beyond our congregation.

Encouraged by Pastor Woodson, young migrating ex-farm workers bought land and built homes in the community. Providence Park School, a three-room building located in the playground across from the present sanctuary, housed six grades that were divided among three teachers with Miss Mary M. Scott, the Principal, teaching the fifth and the sixth grades. Working in close collaboration, parents, teachers, and our congregation spearheaded fund-raising activities in order to purchase supplies that the school board did not provide and implemented the regular staples of the curriculum, such as prayer, singing of the Negro National Anthem (“Lift Ev’ry Voice”) and other songs led by Mrs. Mildred Cross, and the three “Rs”. These church-sponsored efforts garnered respect for Pastor Woodson within the developing community, which named one of the local streets after him in recognition of his contributions.

Internally, efforts were directed toward improvement of the church facilities and enhancement of its ministries, in spite of three-fourths of the facility being annexed to the City of Richmond in 1914 with the line that separates Henrico County from the city running through part of the building. In 1922, Mrs. Martha Turner founded and organized the Lighthouse Club for the purpose of installing electric lights within our sanctuary and served as the first President. In 1928, our facility was expanded by erection of an annex, which was contracted by Deacon Thornton Davis, and our ministry was extended with more space for developing our Sunday School and Bible Training Union (BTU). Further improvements of our church facilities were underwritten by the Earnest Workers Club with Mrs. Hestelle V. Braxton as the first President, which sponsored numerous fund-raising projects. In 1932, the roof of the sanctuary collapsed. As our ‘ram in the bush,’ Deacon Thornton

Davis served as contractor and enlisted the aid of Architect-Professor Charles Russell. Our trouble was turned into triumph! The setback occasioned the enrichment of fellowship and the deepening of love and commitment as worship was held in the annex until the repairs were completed.

Ministry-wise, in 1924, the Ladies Auxiliary Usher Board was organized with Mrs. Ruth B. Evans serving as the first President. Shortly thereafter, the Missionary Circle under the tutelage of Mrs. Mary C. Bagby emerged and touched the lives of many with visits, prayers, and monetary gifts. In 1927, the idea of a Junior Choir² was birthed by Mr. George Crawford and Mrs. Daisy Jackson Beard,³ his sister, both of whom served as the first Directors with Mrs. Evalina Wynn Bell as the first Pianist and Mr. James Edwards as the first Organist.⁴ In 1929, the music ministry was further enhanced by the organization of a Sunday School Orchestra by Mr. Ulysses S. Randolph, a noted violinist, who was accompanied in performance

² In 1943, it was the Young People's Choir as well as the Intermediate Choir, before eventually being named the George Crawford Memorial Choir in the mid-1950s in honor of its first director. The first members of the choir, most of whom are now ascended, included: Edith D. Booker, Christian Crawford, Acquilla Davis, Alberta Davis, Arlene Evans, Irene Evans, Jesse Evans, Jr., Jesse Evans, Sr., Lewis Evans, Josephine Gary, Consuella Jackson, Clara Jones, Vincent Jordan, Jean Kemp, Barbara Parker, Elizabeth Perkins, George A. Scales, Gladys A. Shaw, Lola Smith, Aurelia Ware, Aaron Wilson, and Lillian Woodard. The more recent members are: sopranos—Sandra Ausberry, Alicia Carter, Janet Dugger, Helen Harris, Vernelle Nelson, Edith Pace, Fosterlyn Perkins, Eleanor Rainey, Gladys A. Shaw (now ascended), Shirley Tabb, Queen Taylor, Jeanette Urquhart; altos—Edith Booker (now ascended), Annette C. Ross, Gloria Greene, Janice Johnson, Odessa Johnson, Sharlene Johnson, LaThornia Murph, Floydie Peeples; tenors—Edgar Ausberry, Carl Bagby, Thomasina Binga, Richard Collins, J. McKinley Davis (now ascended), Alfred Edwards (now ascended), Eric Freeman, James Quash (now ascended); basses—Ivan Johnson, Purcell Lowry, Newton Perkins (now ascended), Christopher Turner.

³ The directors who have succeeded Mr. Crawford and Mrs. Beard are: Mrs. Louise Southall, Mr. Arthur Bolling, Mr. Robert Jones, Mr. James Wade, Mr. William F. Johnson, Jr. (all ascended except the last). During the tenure of Pastor Pinkston, Mr. Johnson was charged with directing all of the choirs and served in that capacity until the tenure of Pastor Jones, when additional directors were tasked.

⁴ The succeeding pianists are Mrs. Phyllis R. Dance (ascended), Miss Gwendolyn Myers, Miss Charlotte Flowers, and Mrs. Jean Evans Quash. Since the purchase of an organ in the 1960s, Miss Charlotte Flowers and Mrs. Vergie B. Cowans have served as organists with Mrs. Donna C. Gammon as flutist for much of those years.

by violinists, Jesse T. Evans, Sr. and Charles Bell, saxophonist Andrew J. Hocker, banjo player Richard Langhorne, and pianists Norman Randolph and Phyllis Randolph, his children. In 1936, Pastor Woodson organized the Board of Deaconesses, which was tasked with preparing the communion bread and glasses, laundering the linen tablecloths, assisting the candidates for baptism, and visiting and aiding the sick and the distressed. Among the first Deaconesses were Mesdames Hestelle Braxton, Eliza Carter, Adelaide Davis, and Martha Turner (the first Chair) including Miss Edna C. Knight and Mrs. Melissa Randolph in recognition of their outstanding contributions to the ministry of our congregation. Noteworthy was the work of Deaconess Eliza Carter and Mrs. Rosa Duncan, who mentored the Junior Prayer Circle, especially Deaconess Carter who prepared and sold dinners between the morning worship and the afternoon communion services.⁵ Attendees of the church meetings which were held on the evenings following communion services awaited her reports and the officials eagerly asked, “Did Mrs. Carter report from the dinner?”

The second period of our history witnessed material as well as spiritual construction, as our congregation excelled in the labor of the LORD!

⁵ Communion Services were held monthly on Sundays at 4:00 p.m.

1941—1963

In spite of the international turmoil precipitated by World War II, the third period of our history was a time of community gains, property acquisition, and external improvement of our church facilities coupled with internal reorganization of our boards.

In 1943, the Junior Choir was renamed the Young People's Choir,⁶ reorganized with Mrs. Phyllis R. Dance (formerly Phyllis Randolph) serving as Organist and Directress, and served for seventeen years. Also, the ministry of Scouting was instituted: the Boy Scout and the Girl Scout Troops were organized with Mr. Sylvester C. Booker, Sr. serving as the first Scoutmaster and Mrs. Mary E. Dance serving as the first Girl Scout Leader. Undoubtedly, in conjunction with such youth ministries, Mrs. Mary E. Spottwood is fondly remembered as the first Playground Director, who touched the lives of many with her creativity and concern for the children. In 1946, the Junior Usher Board was organized by Mr. Holman Cross. At the request of Pastor Woodson, Rev. Dois Love organized a male chorus for Men's Day in 1954. His service as Director and Pianist contributed to the permanence of the chorus, which was labeled "The Lord's Men's Chorus" (now, the Male Chorus). By 1957, two more organizations emerged. The Floral Club with Mrs. Sarah R. Brown as President was organized for the purpose of beautifying our sanctuary and the Cub Scouts and the Brownie Scouts were organized with Mrs. Edith D. Booker and Mrs. Vernelle Myers (now, Nelson) serving as Scout Leaders. Also, in 1957, a "This Is Your Life" service for Mr. Ulysses S. Randolph was sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. Frederick White, Sr. for his extensive contributions to our congregation.

Several key upgrades to our church facility occurred under the leadership of three dedicated Trustees: Mr. James Edwards, Church Clerk; Mr. Ulysses S. Randolph; and Mr. Sylvester C. Booker, Sr. In 1946, our first Mortgage Burning Service was held and a new

⁶ See note 2 above.

heating plant was installed. In 1949, the first electric organ was procured, replacing the old pump organ. These milestones highlighted the outward expressions of inward love that characterized the increasing fellowship of our growing congregation.

The years, 1957-1962, constituted years of transition and tension, as Pastor Woodson concluded his service to our congregation and Pastor Harold E. Pinkston⁷, his assistant, succeeded him. 1954 marked the fifty-first year of Pastor Woodson's tenure at Providence Park. In appreciation of his dedicated and extensive labor, a "This Is Your Life" service was held in his honor and well attended by our congregation as well as members of his former congregations. In 1957, due to waning health and terminal illness, Pastor Woodson ascended to our Heavenly Father, having completed fifty-four years of labor for the LORD at Providence Park. He was aptly eulogized (title: "Man of Good Reputation") by Dr. W. L. Ransome, Pastor of First Baptist Church—South Richmond on Thursday, August 1, 1957. On July 28, 1957, Pastor Woodson was succeeded by Rev. Pinkston.

Numerous adjustments that enhanced the ministry and the worship of our congregation were made during the tenure of Pastor

⁷ He was the fourth minister of seven brothers and one sister and the sixth son of Rev. William L. Pinkston and Bennie Mae Pinkston of Camden, NJ. Licensed to preach by the Messiah Baptist Church of Brockton, MA, he was ordained as the Minister of Mount Carmel Baptist Junior Church in Richmond by the council of the Bethany Baptist Association of New Jersey, which convened at his home church, Kaighn Avenue Baptist Church in Camden. A 1950 graduate of the School of Methods of the New England Baptist Convention (Ocean Park, ME) and a 1951 graduate of the Northern Baptist Assembly Training School (New Jersey), he attended Eastern Nazarene College (Quincy, MA) for two years and transferred to Virginia Union University (Richmond, VA), where he earned an A.B. from the Department of Languages and Literature and later a Bachelor of Divinity (now, labeled Master of Divinity) in 1957. He accepted the call to the pastorate of Providence Park Baptist Church in February 1957 and assumed the pastorate July 28, 1957. After his tenure at Providence Park, he continued to serve the LORD at other congregations and furthered his education in manifold venues, becoming certified in Clinical Pastoral Education and earning a Doctor of Philosophy from Temple University (Philadelphia, PA) and a Doctor of Theology from Trinity Theological Seminary (Newburgh, IN) among many other achievements.

Pinkston, such as revision and restructuring of the Order of Worship pertaining to prayer, offering collection, etc., establishment of the preparation and the procedures for worship on the part of the Deacons and the Ushers, and scrutinization and reorganization of the 'delivery venues' of Christian Education. From sanctuary décor to procedures in worship to training of officers and members to day-to-day administration and creation and ratification of a church constitution, the impact of Pastor Pinkston's innovations was widespread. His expertise as a conscientious Bible student, a trained musician (organist), and a second-generation minister led to comprehensive overhaul of our congregation's ministry. Among his many contributions are the formation of the Literary Club, the J. J. Woodson Club, and the Providence Park Baptist Church Teenage Chapel Choir and the organization and the direction of the Young People's Orchestra. He instituted various annual days (e. g., Men's Day, Women's Day, Veterans' Day, Virginia Union University Day, Scholarship Day) and assorted activities (e. g., Youth Rally with 'Pot-Luck' Supper, Night Sunday School, Honor's Night). In collaboration with Mr. Sylvester Booker (then, Chair of Trustees), he supervised the drafting of blueprints for the sanctuary that was eventually constructed by his successor. Even his wife, Mrs. Margaret Pinkston, among other involvements initiated a "Pink Tea" in order to enhance the ministries of our congregation through personal outreach, creative planning, one-on-one encouragement of youths and saints in addition to pulpit aesthetics and pastoral care. The cumulative effect of these changes was experienced by many members as growing pains!

Sadly, the innovations and the progressive (possibly, aggressive) style of Pastor Pinkston coupled with his youth and his initial singleness during his tenure seemingly stimulated opposition that derived from differences in the views and the directions of the

ministry of our congregation. Disunity and strife emerged, leading to disputes in court and eventually the departure of Pastor Pinkston.⁸

The wounds of this period left scars that remained over thirty years! However, the blessed bright spot in spite of this temporary turmoil was twofold: the continuation of our congregation and the calling of the second longest serving Pastor, Rev. Miles Jerome Jones.

⁸ Documentation for these years may be found in the transcripts of Dr. Pinkston that he submitted to our congregation by means of Pastor Jerome C. Ross and *The Richmond Afro and The Richmond Planet* (Oct. 6, 1962) along with the court records.

1963—1993

The pulpit committee chaired by Mrs. Irene P. Evans and the congregation rejoiced in the summer of 1963, when Rev. Miles Jerome Jones⁹ accepted the call to serve as our eighth Pastor. He assumed his duties on the first Sunday of September 1963 and was installed on Sunday, September 29, 1963 with Rev. A. W. Brown, Pastor of Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, serving as the speaker.

In a most erudite and sage-like fashion coupled with Spirit-seasoned compassion, Pastor Jones began the process of healing and directing our congregation by shifting the focus from organizational concerns to interpersonal relationships, which he aptly articulated in “Our Congregational Covenant.”

- ❖ By the providence of Almighty God we have assembled ourselves for worship in the Spirit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
- ❖ We affirm our unity in that Spirit and acknowledge our congregational relationship and individual responsibility for one another.
- ❖ We pledge our support to each other as members of this congregation and participants in the baptized body of believers who receive Jesus Christ as Lord of life and victor over death.
- ❖ We share this worship as a witness to our promise of prayerful concern for this communion. We covenant

⁹ Coming from the pastorate of Springfield Baptist Church in the vicinity of Richmond, he was accompanied by his wife, Marion, and one son, Keith. Though a native of Virginia, Rev. Jones’ extensive and varied church experience began in Brooklyn, NY as a member of Cornerstone Baptist Church. During the pre-World War II years, he received his early education and after graduating from Haaren High School he became an Army Air Force Sergeant before being honorably discharged in 1946. Under the influence of Cornerstone’s Pastor, the renown Dr. Sandy F. Ray, he experienced his call to Christian ministry, which led him to Virginia Union University, where he earned an undergraduate and a Master of Divinity degree followed by a Master of Arts from the Presbyterian School of Christian Education (also in Richmond). Later, for his notable service to the Church and the greater Richmond community, he was awarded the honorary Doctor of Divinity degree in 1974 from the University of Richmond.

with one another that in daily duties and persistent practice we will seek the well-being of the other one for whom Christ also died. We willingly bind ourselves to the obligations of continuing fellowship.

- ❖ Expecting to move toward the fulfillment of our association that we may know each other even as we have been known by our Heavenly Father,
- ❖ We await the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

He restored Deacons who had been removed and welcomed members who had been silenced. Picking up the baton from the days of the previous Pastors, he astutely led the members in realizing long-standing dreams within and beyond the congregation. The Nursery was organized in 1965 with Mrs. Estelle C. Baker serving as Director. The sanctuary was demolished and a new one was constructed by Davis and Myers Construction Company and dedicated with a glorious grand march into the present edifice in March 1966. Later, on May 20, 1973, the Mortgage Burning Service was held, paying off the indebtedness. In 1968, he aided the Henrico residents of Providence Park in securing water and sewage services. Originally organized as a Women's Day Choir in April 1972 and subsequently including men, the Inspirations Choir was formed under the direction of Mrs. Helen W. Morton with Ms. Diane Bacon as Organist and has served on the third Sunday of each month. On May 12, 1974, a year after burning the mortgage on the recently-constructed edifice, a ground-breaking service was held to erect a new education building.

In 1975 the church began preparation for its 100th anniversary. Mrs. Phyllis Dance and Mrs. Gladys Shaw served as Chairperson and Co-Chairperson, respectively. The centennial celebrations during 1976 entailed monthly services that included a three-day Providence Park Reunion, at which Mrs. Phyllis Dance, Mrs. Evelyn Kindle (a

former teacher at Providence Park Elementary School), and Trustee Sylvester C. Booker, Sr. (one of the first Black principals in the city) were honored. The year's activities culminated with a banquet, a souvenir journal, and a pageant of history. Dr. Sandy Ray from Brooklyn, NY was the banquet speaker, who addressed the theme, "Fulfilling Great Expectations," while the new annex to the church was named in memory of the late Rev. J. J. Woodson, the longest serving Pastor, whose picture was unveiled by his son.

The 1970s ended memorably. In 1978, a memorial plaque was placed on the door of the Reading Room (now, the Edith D. Booker Library), while in 1979 the education building was completed and named, along with the establishment of the Scholarship Fund, in memory of Trustee Sylvester C. Booker and marked by a mortgage burning service.

During the '80s, the congregation undertook further enhancements to its ministry with an acute eye to the community. In 1980, Providence Park presented the first of two gifts of \$10,000 to Virginia Union University for the restoration of Coburn Chapel (which was destroyed by fire during the '70s). In 1984, the Board (and the ministry) of Christian Education was established by Rev. Deborah Jackson and eventually was coordinated by Mrs. Willette P. Johnson (who served well into the new millennium). In 1985, new sanctuary hymnals (i. e., *The Baptist Standard Hymnal*) were donated and dedicated in honor or memory of relatives and friends. In 1988, in collaboration with several Pastors of area congregations, Pastor Jones organized the Cooperative Outreach Ministry (COM) with the expressed purpose of providing charitable relief to the poor, the distressed, and the underprivileged in the Washington Park, Providence Park, and Highland Park communities of Richmond and Henrico County, in addition to Christian education and training for all members of the COM family. The climatic event of the '80s was the celebration of

the 25th anniversary of Pastor Jones during the month of September. Each Sunday guest ministers and their congregations joined with Providence Park in praising the LORD for His servant. The festivities included a concert by our combined choirs, a program by the children of our congregation, and a boat ride on the Annabelle Lee. The month-long celebrations culminated with a banquet at The Richmond Center with Dr. Wyatt T. Walker from New York as the speaker. Appreciatively and lovingly, numerous members orchestrated its festivities: Deacon Wilbert Ware, the General Chairman; Mrs. Thomasina Binga, the Chairperson for Hospitality; Mrs. Phyllis Dance and Mrs. Gladys Shaw, the Chairpersons for the Souvenir Journal; Mr. William Fleece, the Photographer.

Unknowingly, the 1990s reflected a transition in the leadership of our congregation. The usual components of our ministry continued. In conjunction with our congregation, in 1990 the Committee for the Black History Museum held a special program of Tribute and Appreciation in honor of Mr. Anthony Binga, Sr. In 1992, for instance, more Deacons (i. e., George Oliver and Anthony Robinson) were notably added to the Board, one of the first of many piano recitals by the students of Mrs. Ethel Johnson (the Director of the Women's, Youth, and Children Choirs) was held, and a second Providence Park Reunion was held for three days and chaired by Deacon Miles M. Jones. Significantly, Pastor Jones announced his retirement at the December church meeting, prompting the formation of the Search Committee¹⁰ (i. e., a representative and an alternate from each organization of the church) with Trustee William F. Johnson, Jr. as Chair.

¹⁰ Two teams of members served on the Committee. The members of the Primary Team were: Deaconess (now Rev. Dr.) Gloria J. Flowers; Mrs. Ethel F. Johnson; Deacon Thomas I. Johnson; and Trustee William F. Johnson, Jr. (Chair). The members of the Alternate Team were: Deacon Alvin A. Flowers, Jr.; Deaconess (now Deacon) Eva W. Ferguson; Dr. George B. Johnson; and Mrs. (now Deacon) Barbara Parker.

In 1993, during the latter months of his tenure, Pastor Jones sought to prepare the congregation for the coming Pastor. Again, his sage-like advice and honed pastoral counsel nurtured the congregation along until they elected Jerome Clayton Ross¹¹ as their ninth Pastor on Monday, July 19, 1993. Upon acceptance of the call by Pastor Ross¹², planning began for the Retirement Celebration of Pastor Jones. The transition from retiring Pastor to incoming Pastor was prayerfully expedited on Sunday, September 5, 1993, as Pastor Jones ascended the pulpit for the last time as ‘Retiring Pastor’ with Pastor

¹¹ Jerome Clayton Ross is a native of Richmond, VA and, since November 20, 2010, the husband of his Beloved, Mrs. Annette C. Ross. He was baptized (April 10, 1966), licensed to preach (February 10, 1974), and ordained (August 20, 1978) at Moore Street Missionary Baptist Church. After graduating from Maggie L. Walker High School as salutatorian in 1971, he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Religious Studies (1975) from Randolph-Macon College, Ashland, VA, a Master of Divinity degree, *Magna Cum Laude* (1978) from the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology, Virginia Union University, Richmond, VA, and a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Hebrew Bible (1997) from the University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA. He taught Hebrew Bible in the School of Theology at Virginia Union University from 1982 to 2006 and Religious Studies at his alma mater, Randolph-Macon College, Ashland, VA, from 2006-2013. At present, he offers his expertise and services as a consultant in Biblical Studies for clergy and congregations. In addition to teaching, he has been privileged to serve as Pastor of Mount Olive Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, VA from December 1983 to August 1993 and as Pastor of Providence Park Baptist Church, Richmond, VA, since September 5, 1993. His effort to leave a legacy for coming generations has resulted in several publications: *The Composition of the Holiness Code (Lev. 17-26)*. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1997. (UMI 9816816); “The Cultural Affinity between the Ancient Yahwists and the African Americans: A Hermeneutic for Homiletics.” In *Born to Preach*, ed. Samuel K. Roberts. 22-39 (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000. ISBN: 0-8170-1368-7); *The History of Ancient Israel and Judah: A Compilation* (Pittsburgh: Dorrance Publishing Co., 2003. ISBN: 0-8059-5818-5); “Jubilee in Lev. 17-26.” In the *Holy Bible: The African American Jubilee Edition* (1999); James H. Harris, Jerome C. Ross, & Miles Jerome Jones, Proclamation 6 | Series B: *Lent* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. ISBN: 0-8006-4217-1); Book Review of *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Cain Hope Felder in *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology* (Apr 1993): 200-201; “The Deuteronomistic History” in *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel’s Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora*, gen. ed. Hugh R. Page, Jr., 112-114 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-8006-2125-4); “Zechariah” in *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel’s Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora*, gen. ed. Hugh R. Page, Jr., 206-212 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-8006-2125-4); “Reading from Below”. Unpublished paper presented at the Mid-Atlantic Region of the Society of Biblical Literature (March 2012) in New Brunswick, NJ. In his words, “my national address is the Hebrew Bible, my state address is the Torah, and my city address is Leviticus.” Giving his life to studying the Sacred Text, loving the LORD, and serving His people, his testimony is “I believe.”

¹² Accepting the call by telephone from Virginia Beach, VA, Pastor Ross sent word, “I love you!”

Ross and emotionally yet gratefully celebrated his retirement that evening with expressions from every organization, friends, and family and the dedication of The Miles Jerome Jones History Room in his honor. The transition was finalized on Sunday, October 24, 1993, when Pastor Ross was installed. Rev. Gilbert G. Campbell, Sr., D.D., Pastor of Moore Street Missionary Baptist Church in Richmond and of Pastor Ross, delivered the message with Rev. Kenneth Dennis (President) representing the Baptist Ministers' Conference of Richmond and Vicinity, Dr. Ralph Reavis, Pastor of Riverview Baptist Church in Richmond, representing the clergy at-large, and Pastor Jones bestowed his blessings by his attendance. Thirty years of distinguished service was marked and completed by the literal passing of the mantle of ministry!

As his schedule permitted, Pastor Jones regularly attended and faithfully contributed to the quality of Providence Park's ministry, preaching the first fall revival and often sharing communion until he was called home to Heaven on December 19, 2002. Eulogized by his closest and long-standing friend, Rev. Nathan Dell, Heaven even shed tears with all the attendees as it rained and our congregation glorified God with Pastor Jones' favorite anthem, "Let Mount Zion Rejoice!"

Pastor Ross ever gratefully builds upon the foundation that has been laid by the previous three Pastors—a foundation laid over 100 years—and continually reaps the fruit of their labors! It is the humble desire of this Pastor that the final recorders of his story and legacy at Providence Park will appreciatively and accurately write the visions and transmit all the testimonies that will have been realized, since he has been bequeathed the privilege of caretaking the congregation of Providence Park Baptist Church!

1993—2016

The latest period of Providence Park's history distinctly reflects the labors of the present Pastor, whose hands have penned this overview of our heritage. The 'outside' perspective of the previous years now yields to an 'inside' perspective. Though the closeness to the reported events has precipitated greater detail and personal introspection, the objective of fairness in interpreting coupled with sensitivity remains.

The trends of the present period in our congregation's history are dictated by the demographics of our congregation. First, in spite of the economic, educational, and ethnic changes in the residents of our community, our congregation has chosen to remain in the community and offer its services to the community's new constituents. Also, a high number of the members of our congregation has attained the status of "seniors," having raised their children and overseen the maturation and the departure of their children as well as grandchildren for careers and lives beyond Providence Park. This has resulted in a continual decrease in the numbers of youths and young adults within our congregation.

In response to these new features and in light of our congregation's primary asset (i. e., a wealth of intelligentsia and professionals), Pastor Ross has advocated a 'team approach' to ministry, which emphasizes accountability among the officers and the members. The previously mentioned demographic changes beyond and within our congregation have therefore mandated internal re-organization coupled with community outreach.

Pastor Ross began his tenure by observing and learning the congregation and focusing on fellowship. Minor adjustments were made with the order of worship and a more thorough and itemized format was instituted for reporting the finances of the congregation. As a Professor of Bible, Pastor Ross has continually shared his expertise by developing the Vacation Bible School

curricula around the themes and their respective texts¹³ that he annually selects in order to focus the congregation ministry-wise. Fellowship groups¹⁴ were formed in order to include and mobilize as many members as possible in the life of the congregation, while the fifth Sunday was designated for youth participation in worship. “Community Day” was memorably instituted by the Young Adult Fellowship¹⁵ as a day of outreach and homecoming in order to meet and greet and extend the congregation’s love and good-faith to residents of the neighborhood and delinquent members who live in the vicinity of the church facility. A few workshops were held in order to ascertain the self-assessments of the members and to provide guidelines for healthy working relations.¹⁶ To foster a prayerful identity for our congregation, on June 13, 1994, Pastor Ross wrote “The Providence Park Prayer.”

¹³ The themes for the respective years are: 1994: “Fun in Fellowship”—1 John 1:5-10; 1995: “Personalizing the Gospel”—1 Corinthians 2:1-5; 1996: “Pressing toward the Mark”—Philippians 3:12-16; 1997: “Taking Up the Cross Daily”—Luke 9:23; 1998: “The Light Still Shines”—John 1:5; 1999: “Using the Keys of the Kingdom”—Matthew 16:19; 2000: “Living in Fulfilled Time”—Mark 1:14-15; 2001: “Getting Our Story Straight”—Luke 1:1-4; 2002: “Seeing His Glory”—John 1:14; 2003: “Preparing for His Kingdom”—Matthew 3:2; 2004: “Following Jesus”—Mark 1:18, 20; 2005: “By the Spirit”—Zech. 4:6; Luke 4:18; 2006: “Bearing Witness to the Light”—John 1:7-8; 2007: “Walking the Straight and Narrow”—Matthew 7:13-14; 2008: “Preaching the Gospel of God”—Mark 1:14; 2009: “By the Spirit”—Luke 1:15, 35, 41, 67; 2:25, 26; 3:22; 4:1, 14, 18; 11:13; 12:10; 2010: “Abiding with the Advocate among Us”—John 14:16-17, 23; 15:4-7, 10; 2011: “Getting Ready to Reap”—Matthew 9:37-38; 2012: “Acknowledging the Almighty”—Mark 1:40; 2013: “Knowing the Worth of Our Witness”—Luke 1:4; 2014: “The Way of the LORD”—Psalm 1; 2015: “In the Name of the LORD”—Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11; 2016: “The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ...As it is written”—Mark 1:1-2.

¹⁴ The groups were: the Mellows, which included members ages 40-50; the Rayach, which included ages 30-40; the Young Adults, which included ages 30 and below.

¹⁵ Florence and Willie Morris (later Deacons), Norma Wynn, Natalie and Timothy Meade along with numerous others spearheaded the initial effort, which resulted in widespread support from the business community and the municipal agencies and massive attendance by the residents of the neighborhood, as the block in which our facility stands was closed and the playground across from the sanctuary was completely filled.

¹⁶ See “The Leadership Training Data for Providence Park Baptist Church” by Jerome Clayton Ross, Ph.D.

O LORD our God:

We thank Thee for the abundance of Thy love that spares us to enjoy each day. We praise Thy name that Thou dost continually keep us by Thy covenant-faithfulness. Ever touch us with Thy hands of mercy, that we may be mindful of the uncontrollable, undeserved, unearned goodness that fills our lives. Ever breathe upon us Thy breath of power, that we may be encouraged to be righteous, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Thee. Ever show us Thy way of truth, that we may be practitioners of the Gospel that is preached. And ever lead us in Thy way of love, that we may be promoters of the Providence that Thou dost continually provide this people in this place. We pray in the name of our Master, Jesus of Nazareth. Amen.

Pastor Ross, also, subtly instilled a twelve-fold charge, which he created at his previous pastorate and shares as a 'to-do' list for Christian discipleship:

The JCR Charge

Heart-search by the Spirit! Always examine yourself according to the standards or principles God requires for living. Let His creative and active Power called Spirit guide you in all righteousness.

Sacrifice self! Deny yourself of those desires that only satisfy self and are not toward the benefit of all of God's People. Seek only those things whereby others as well as yourself may be helped and holy.

Abide in Christ! Seek always to maintain the posture of living in relation to God that Jesus of Nazareth demonstrates in the Bible. Seek always to live with respect for the Presence and Person and

Power of God.

Learn wisdom! Practice all that you know and learn of the way of God. Seek to apply at all times the principles for practice that are life-affirming, life-promoting, and life-sustaining. Let what is in your head and heart be expressed in your talk and walk.

Grow by the Word! Seek to be in accordance with whatever God is doing in your life. Let His activity be the plan or project for practice in your life. Progress, never stand still, within the Presence of God so that His Power will impress His Person increasingly upon you.

Preach the Truth! Proclaim and personify that which you know from personal experience with God. Live your testimony. Walk your talk. Deliver a statement about God as you know Him by exemplifying the Power He gives and sharing the grace He gives.

Have mercy! Be compassionate and considerate of others. Imagine the posture and position of others with which you relate and seek to feel with them as you treat them. Be understanding of those with which you disagree and ever ready to further reconciliation.

Forgive seventy times seven! Never make a person a prisoner of a sinful past. Do not hold grudges or constantly remember the negatives about others, if you are not helping them to overcome such. Give your fellow sinners a chance to change and embrace grace.

Stand with hope! Assume a posture of living that is not based upon circumstance or condition, but upon trust in God. Believe God in spite of whatever occurs

in your life. Never let the treatment of others or the situations and circumstances of life determine your acts.

Travel by prayer! Actively and verbally communicate with God at all times. Conduct your life in such a manner that you enjoy the Presence of God. Do what you can do and seek from God what only He can do or give. Live seeking what you ask from God.

Walk by faith! In all areas of your life, live as the believer you are. In all decisions apply the principles of God. Faith is the lifestyle of one who believes God. Be an ambassador for God in Christ. Represent Him by your behavior wherever you go.

Live by Grace! Be grateful in all things at all times. Life and its fullness are gifts from God. Take nothing for granted. Seek to receive and handle properly whatever you gain in life. Thank God for every thing you have and are and become. Amen.¹⁷

Asserting an inverted, administrative model that envisions God as the Head and the top tier, Jesus as the second tier, the congregation as the third tier, and the officers (i. e., the Diaconate, the Board of Christian Education, and the Board of Trustees) at the bottom tier with all tiers connected by the Holy Spirit and the Pastor as the point interfacing the officers on the bottom tier, Pastor Ross led the congregation in developing a constitution as a legal covenant-statement to protect the rights and privileges of all members and parties, to preserve the integrity, and to ensure the longevity of the congregation. After six drafts and the final adoption on Wednesday, July 2, 1997, the Constitution of Providence Park Baptist Church¹⁸ was notarized.

¹⁷ Written February 25, 1986, first delivered on March 2, 1986, and copyrighted in 1999.

¹⁸ See "The Constitution of Providence Park Baptist Church."

In light of the congregation's stability and significant number of elderly members, Pastor Ross has directed the attention of the congregation to mentoring and inclusion of the youths, but not to the neglect of our seniors. A particular passion of Pastor Ross is Scouting. Continuing Providence Park's long-standing commitment to Scouting, Pastor Ross serves as a merit badge counselor¹⁹ and the Chaplain for the Troop. Consonant with the Scout-friendly support of our congregation, a team of adults reinstated our Girl Scout components in 2001. Over the years, Deacons²⁰ as well as Trustees²¹ have joined the ranks of leadership,

¹⁹ He is certified as a merit badge counselor for the "Family Life," "Personal Management," "Scholarship," and "Reading" merit badges. As Pastor he qualifies to oversee "Religious Emblem" awards, of which Sean Christophé Collins-Smith has earned two. Under his tutelage, the following Scouts have earned merit badges in the respective areas: Family Life: Eric B. Freeman (1993); Charles C. Cameron, Jr. and Joseph Earl Ricks, II (19 Oct. 1998); Caleb Matthew Harris (22 Feb. 1999); Sean Christophé Collins-Smith (4 Jun. 2001); Darryl Wilson (17 Sept. 2001); Langston Hallion and Malcolm Hallion (30 Jun. 2003); James D. Gammon, Jr. (22 Aug. 2005); Timothy Jones (14 Nov. 2005); Robert J. Carr (21 Aug. 2006); Adrian Jefferson (13 Sept. 2010); Melvin Wilson (23 Jul. 2011); and Michael David Caldwell, II (8 Apr. 2013); Personal Management: Charles C. Cameron, Jr. (8 Feb. 1999); Joseph Earl Ricks, II (12 Apr. 1999); Sean Christophé Collins-Smith (27 Aug. 2001); Darryl Anthony Wilson (1 Oct. 2001); Hamilton Booker (29 Jul. 2002); Langston Hallion and Malcolm Hallion (23 Feb. 2004); James D. Gammon, Jr. (19 Mar. 2007); Robert J. Carr (30 Apr. 2007); Michael David Caldwell, II, Canaan Greenhill, Justin A. Lundy (11 Jul. 2010); Adrian Jefferson, Wayne Mathis, Melvin Wilson, and Jalen Woody (23 Aug. 2010); Donovan Chew (30 Aug. 2010); Reading: Eric B. Freeman (1993-1994) and Adrian Jefferson (22 May 2006); Scholarship: Eric B. Freeman (1993); Charles C. Cameron, Jr. (3 Feb. 1999); Joseph Earl Ricks, II (22 Feb. 1999); Caleb Matthew Harris (28 Mar. 1999); Sean Christophé Collins-Smith (28 Jul. 2002); Robert J. Carr (9 May 2005). Also, during his tenure, the following Scouts have achieved the rank of Eagle Scout and were awarded a resolution that Pastor Ross drafted in their honor: Brian D. Ferguson, Eric B. Freeman, Richard A. Lambert, Jr., and John H. Morton, II (8 January 1995); Charles C. Cameron, Jr. and Joseph Earl Ricks, II (26 November 1999); Caleb Matthew Harris (30 December 2000); Sean Christophé Collins-Smith and Darryl Anthony Wilson (4 May 2002); Langston and Malcolm Hallion (21 May 2006); Robert J. Carr (25 August 2007); James D. Gammon, Jr. (29 May 2010); Adrian Jefferson (11 February 2012); Michael David Caldwell, II (8 June 2013); Melvin Deion Wilson and Jalen Montell Woody (26 April 2014); and Justin Andre` Woody (8 August 2015).

²⁰ Deacons who have been ordained and/or added, during Pastor Ross' tenure, are: Constance and Theodore Caul; Monique and Paul Flowers; Gilbert Burroughs (ascended); Tommie D. and Charles Hatcher (both ascended); Helen and Ben Herndon; Marva and Forris Hinton; Janice S. Johnson; Charles A. Jones, Sr.; George Long; Florence and Willie Morris; Barbara A. B. Parker (ascended); Joan B. Peck; Christopher Turner.

²¹ Trustees who have been added, during Pastor Ross' tenure, are: Edgar Ausberry; Mildred Barden; Richard Collins; McKinley Davis (ascended); Deacon William Ferguson; Camille Green;

thereby adding new insights and youthful energy to the administrative dynamics of our congregation, and several leaders²² were licensed and ordained to the Gospel Ministry as clergy. Loving efforts directed toward the Pastor and his wife prompted the organization of the Golden Circle Ministry by the late Mrs. Zena Edwards, Mrs. Shirley Taylor-Hayes, and Mrs. Rosetta Taylor, which seeks to facilitate appreciation of the Pastor and his wife on the part of the congregation. Staff changes over the years have included Mr. Johnny Evans as Sexton and Mrs. Cora Nickens as Clerk, replacing the late Mr. Royal Harris and the late Mr. Thomas Willis as Sextons and the late Mrs. Gladys Shaw as Clerk. Also, between 1993 and 1994, the fifth Sunday was designated as “Youth Sunday” and the Youth Choir was formed under the direction of Mrs. Helen W. Morton to serve in addition to the Children’s Choir under the direction of Mrs. Ethel Johnson. The Van Ministry was instituted. In 1995, a church van was purchased and dedicated, while on June 17, 2007, the church bus was dedicated, and shortly thereafter garages were constructed to house them. In 1997, the Handbell Choir was formed under the direction of Ms. Caroline Pauley and later named the Tommie D. Hatcher Memorial Choir in honor of said named Deacon. In 2000, the Parish Nurse Ministry was organized in order to attend to the health needs of the congregation within and beyond worship gatherings. Also, in March and June, 2000 and again in 2008, paraments given by Pastor and Mrs. Jones in memory of his mother, Mrs. Ethel Cooper, and by Mrs. Edith D. Booker and Mrs. Thomasina Binga were dedicated to the glory of God, both symbolizing the themes of the

Deacon Ben Herndon, Ed.D.; Sharlene Johnson, Ph.D.; Lloyd Layne; Melvin Murph; Shellawase S. Snead; Van Turner; and William Warren. Accompanying the Trustees are Mrs. Doretha Banks and Mr. James Cooper who serve as the Treasurer and the Assistant Treasurer/Financial Secretary, respectively, replacing Mr. Jesse Evans (ascended).

²² Persons who were licensed and/or ordained to the Gospel Ministry during Pastor Ross’ tenure are: Melvin Cowans; Gloria J. Flowers, D.Min.; Paul Flowers, Sr., D.Min.; Reuben Turner; George Urquhart, D.Min.

Church Calendar and beautifying the sanctuary. In 2001, the Praise Dancers were organized by Deacon Marva Hinton, Mrs. Tameka Edwards, and Miss Michele Burroughs to engage and involve our youths meaningfully in worship. On September 21, 2002, the church library was named and dedicated in honor of Mrs. Edith D. Booker (now, ascended) for her long-time service as Church Librarian. Her mantle of service was taken up by Mrs. Tanya Edwards-Hart. Between 1997 and 2003, Mrs. Shirley Taylor-Hayes and Mrs. Gladys Jordan spearheaded the formation of the Women's Ministry in order to mobilize the women of our congregation in addressing the concerns and the needs of women, both young and old. On July 11, 2004, new hymnals (*The Baptist Hymnal*) were donated and dedicated in honor or memory of friends and relatives. On May 14, 2006, the organ of Mrs. Phyllis Randolph Dance (now, ascended) that was donated by Mr. William Randolph, her brother, was dedicated. On June 4, 2006, one of the Adult Sunday School classrooms was dedicated in memory of Melvin Davis for his long-standing service as a Deacon and a Trustee.

Additions and advancements in technology soared throughout the '90s. Computers were installed and upgraded, church records were computerized, and, on February 20, 2000, the Technology Lab was dedicated in honor of Deacon Lula B. White and in memory of Mrs. Ernestine Johnson to provide computer access for members. This led to the publication of a PPBC website and the availability of wireless technology to members using electronic devices in Woodson Hall and throughout the Booker building. Also, the Church Cassette Tape Ministry was improved to include church services recorded via DVDs and CDs, having copies processed electronically with the benefit of a tape duplicator machine. September 2014 marked a milestone: new computer technology that includes a flat-screen monitor was installed in one of our

classroom. Subsequent to this addition, a new and more compatible computer was purchased, which provides the latest technological features. The debut of technology within our ministry offers promising possibilities for outreach, as Providence Park is more accessible to the general community and wider audiences.

Also, during the '80s and '90s land within the neighborhood was acquired, particularly the lots adjacent to the sanctuary that belonged to Mr. Jesse Evans, Sr. (where his store once stood) and to Mrs. Gladys Braxton (a former sexton), and a lot a few blocks from the church facility on Richmond-Henrico Turnpike. Significantly contributing to residential life within the community, three lots from the corner of East Ladies Mile Road and Branch Avenue were given for construction of homes by Habitat for Humanity, a project in which several members participated.

In September 2013, the 20th anniversary of Pastor Ross was worshipfully celebrated. The Scout Room in the Booker Building and the Scout House²³ (formerly the parsonage, in which Pastor Jones resided) were dedicated in his honor and name for his extensive work with the Boy and the Girl Scouts. A banquet was held at the Cedar Street Memorial Baptist Church Banquet Hall and a Sunday celebration at home. On Saturday, the 21st, Rev. Jaimal Hayes, Pastor of Abner Baptist Church, Glen Allen, VA (and a son of Mrs. Shirley Taylor-Hayes) was the banquet speaker with Dr. Janet Copeland as the featured singer. On Sunday, John W. Kinney, Ph.D., Pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, Beaverdam, VA and Dean of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology, Virginia Union University, Richmond, VA, preached.

²³ Formerly, it was the parsonage, in which Pastor Jones and his family lived. Now, it serves as rental property.

Afterword

The years 2014-2016 find our congregation thriving²⁴ in spite of financial challenges due to internal demographic changes and national trends and rebounding as former members are returning and new members are joining as well as birthing and raising families within our fellowship. Apprehensively and gradually, senior leaders and officers are passing on the mantle of responsibility to younger and innovative shoulders, as the congregation is being spiritually remolded. Newer endeavors in ministry consist of mobilizing our men and women²⁵ in mentoring our young, sustaining the fellowship among and beyond our congregation, partnering with community agencies, and in preserving our heritage as we prepare the next generations of members. Like never before, Providence Park is answering its call to practice the Gospel that is preached!

Jerome Clayton Ross, Ph.D.
The 9th Pastor
6 October 2014
Revised 21 March 2016

²⁴ For example, the trend toward fiscal stability that began during the tenure of Pastor Pinkston continued through the tenure of Pastor Ross, as the Trustees under the likes of Mr. William F. Johnson, Jr. (who served as Chair for over forty years) and Mr. Jesse Evans (who served as Treasurer) scrupulously and conservatively managed the finances of the congregation. This resulted in the sum-total of over \$.5m in church assets. Most noteworthy is the self-sacrificing and tireless service of Trustee Johnson. Having served our congregation as one of our Choir Directors, at one point directing all of the choirs, and Chair of the Board of Trustees, his administrative skills as a Principal in the Richmond Public Schools translated into a macro-management style that left deep impressions upon all of our ministries and fostered spiritual maturity and tenacity among our membership!

²⁵ In the spirit of fellowship and for the sake of nurturing spiritual mentoring and offering-raising, Men's and Women's Time efforts have returned.

Resources

1953. “The Golden Jubilee of our Pastor, Rev. J. J. Woodson, and the 69th Anniversary of Providence Baptist Church” (October 25—November 2, 1953).

1976. “The 100th Anniversary Journal of Providence Park Baptist Church” (January—December 1976).

1988. “The Souvenir Journal of Dr. Miles Jerome Jones, Pastor” (September 1-30, 1988).

1996. “The 120th Anniversary Observances of Providence Park Baptist Church” (1996).

1997. “The Constitution of Providence Park Baptist” Church (July 1997).

1997. “The Training Data of Providence Park Baptist Church” by Jerome Clayton Ross, Ph.D. (1997).

1999. “The JCR Charge” (1999).

The Personal Records of Harold E. Pinkston, Ph.D.

The Personal Statistics of Jerome Clayton Ross, Ph.D.

- Baby Dedications
- Merit Badges
- Marriages
- Membership