

## **Brown Grove Baptist Church History and Community Growth**

"...upon this rock I will build my church..." -  
Matthew 6:18

The story of the beginning growth and achievements of the Brown Grove Baptist Church and the credibility set forth were obtained from many recorded documents and told by many families and community members. This information may help readers receive historical information of the early beginning and throughout our first 150 years. We are thankful to all who made this possible.

Slavery ended after the Civil War and was declared unconstitutional with the ratification of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution in 1865. Negroes worshiped in the churches of their masters under their guidance and advice. The task of preparing a place of worship was indeed a venture of faith, courage, and sheer determination. These new circumstances provided ample opportunity for the labors and expressions of Christian men and women.

Brown Grove Baptist Church was organized in 1870 by six members who worshiped in a brush (h)arbor. While its exact location is unknown, most seem to think it was in the vicinity of Sliding Hill Road. The members worshiped there for three years.

In 1893, Edmund (or Edwin) and Martha Brown, community residents, purchased 1.95 acres of land from Orson and Frances Staley. The Browns agreed to donate their land provided it would be used to build a house of worship. Their daughter Elizabeth saw to it that her parents' wishes were carried out.

Brown Grove is made up of descendants of Jeff Morris, Sr. and Caroline Dobson Morris. While the congregation consists of many families - Jackson, Jones, Morris, Carter, Walker, Lewis, King - it's unclear which of these families

members are direct descendents of the founding six. However, many believe the name Morris is the tie that binds our church membership and the community.

Affectionately called Grandma Caroline and Aunt (pronounced Ant) Caroline, she presented herself as a strong and stern woman with loving kinships. Many spoke of her as the mother of Brown Grove. Currently, her portrait remains in our modern day church.

## 1920s - 1960s

A wooden church was built in the late 1920's or early 1930's under the pastor-ship of

Rev. S. E. Funn. He served faithfully for 16 years. A Sock Social Rally held on June 12, 1922 was one of the fundraisers used to fund the church. (See photo of Sock Rally Envelope) Rev. Jim Weatherless later served as Pastor. Under his leadership, a frame church was built.

Succeeding Rev. Weatherless were Rev. Izeiah Johnson, Rev. J.R. West, Rev. A.J. Ryan, and Rev. T.M. Allen.

Rev. M. W. Rainey was installed as Pastor of Brown Grove Baptist Church in 1933.

During the early 1940's church service was held the first and third Sundays of each month.

In April of 1941, the wooden church was completely destroyed by fire. After the church was destroyed, services were held at the Brown Grove School, located across from the church. Later, it too was destroyed by fire. Determined not to let the fire destroy their desire to worship, some members held service at the home of Mrs. Mary Lewis and family.

The present day brick church was built in 1945. Rev. Church services then changed to every Sunday and the membership continued to grow. Kerosene

lamps resembling chandeliers were used to illuminate our sanctuary. These lamps were previously used by Slash Christian Church, where members of Brown Grove had been allowed to worship in the balcony or the back pews.

Many souls were saved under Rev. Rainey's pastor-ship and fiery baptisms. (See Photo)

On baptism mornings, members and candidates walked to Loving's Pond, or Cady's Pond or Wingfield's Pond to be baptized. In later years, Dabney's bus was used to provide transportation to the ponds for baptisms. Today, a beautiful stained glass portrait overlooks our modern day baptism pool inside our brick church.

After winning many souls to Christ, marrying many and burying many, Rev. Rainey was called from labor to reward on December 7, 1961. He was our beloved pastor for 28 years.

Mrs. Nancy Rainey (first lady) survived her husband by 30 years and on July 14, 1991,

Brown Grove honored her with a banquet during her 100th birthday year. Upon her return to Brown Grove, Mrs. Rainey remembered many members and acknowledged the portrait of her beloved "Pie" (Rev. Rainey) hanging on the wall in the New Fellowship Hall (constructed by Lanny Jones, Robert Lewis and others). Months following the banquet, Mrs. Rainey joined her husband.

Some of the deacons in the early years of Brown Grove included Deacons Harvey Davis, Willie Lewis, Johnny Harris, Percy Johnson, Johnny Price, Jeff Morris, Nat Lewis, Arthur Lewis, Samuel Coleman, Thaddeus Jones Sr., Garrett King, James Carter, Botts Morris, Billy Davenport, Walter Jackson Sr., and others who may have been omitted.

Missionaries and Deaconess of Brown Grove were faithful servants too. A few known names are Leizar Jones, Blanche Morris, Lucinda Hall, Shirley Jones King, Bessie Taylor, Sarah Morris Winston, Mary Lewis and others who may have been omitted.

In early years of establishing an usher board ministry, Elizabeth Lewis was a faithful usher and served as a very stern president, mentor and trainer to many. Other active ushers were Lucinda Hall, Julia King, Delia Lewis, Thelma Peterson, Iris Carter, Leizer Jones, Gracie Jones, Martha (Jones)King Anderson, Raymond Lewis, Marshall Lewis, Wilson Lewis, Leo Lewis, John Lewis, James Lewis and others who may have been omitted.

Additionally, church members were active in the choirs. Some early Senior Choir members included Edith Howard, Irene Lewis, Arthur Lewis, Jane Lewis, Leizer Lewis, Willie Lewis, Frances Jackson, Melvina Jackson, Alease Coleman, Gertrude Jackson, Iris Carter, Laura Jackson, Golden Lewis, Evelyn Jones, Elizabeth Walker Smith, Annie (Kicki) Proctor, Elizabeth Robinson, Sarah Morris Winston, Blanche Morris, Margaret Washington, Helen King, Frances Mason, Maxine Coleman, Robert Morris, Sr., Hillard (Hayet) Lewis, Ernest Coleman, Willie Jackson, Sr., Willie Jackson, Jr., Herman Carter Sr., Thurman Wormley, and others who may have been omitted.

The Rainey Memorial Gospel Chorus was formed in memory of pastor, Rev. M.W. Rainey. As the church grew, other choirs were formed, which include a youth choir, a young adult choir, a male chorus, a sanctuary choir and The Buds of Promise children choir. A praise dance team was formed under the leadership of Keishanna Morris James.

The Music Ministry has also encompassed many musicians and choir directors who devoted their time and talent at Brown Grove. They include Mrs. James Grant, Frank Jackson, Mary Lewis, Joseph Hopson, Gertrude Coleman, Arnita Morris, Robinette Huff, William Hoston, McClaudia Nolley, Jerry Davis, Donald Fonville, Kevin Pleasants, Louis Lacy, Cliethenia Durant, Brandon Cash, Kenneth (Tyler) Spurlock, Jr., Artrianna Morris, Braylon Jackson, Mario Shelton, Berdie Hayes, Sarah Winston, Timmy Fife, James Taylor, Jr., Henry Patterson Jr., Michael Morris, William Edwards, Brian Morris, Christopher Morris, Christian Morris, Glendora Woodard, Evelyn Johnson, Janice Morris, Cynthia Davis, Andrew Alexander, Wanda Bynum, Cherud Wilkerson and others who may have been omitted.

The third Sunday in August was and still is a special day for members of Brown Grove Baptist Church. It's called Homecoming, Big Meeting or Revival. Many visitors attend and in previous years, and with their permission, church parking overflowed across the road into Sister Sophie and Mitchell Lewis' yard. They would also act as the eyes and ears providing security for our church grounds.

In preparation for Big Meeting, tables were set up on the west side of the church on the Saturday prior to service. Those arriving for Sunday school and church service waited with great anticipation for a delicious dinner from many households in the community. Prior to the end of the service, family members, especially the grandmothers would politely leave service to prepare for the Big Meeting dinner.

Guest pastors and preachers would be served first. It was quite an honor to have the pastor or visiting preacher request an item from your family basket. Everyone ate outside, on cars, inside cars, on the steps, or wherever space was found. No one dared to enter the sanctuary to eat unless perhaps on a rainy day. Even then, eating was done with very careful hand-mouth coordination. It was a grand time!

After the Homecoming dinner came the beginning of our revival service. Preachers preached, many testified, many said a prayer or started singing. Those in attendance stumped their feet, clapped their hands, shouted Hallelujah, and praised God in their own way. Many confessed Christ and were saved.

As the years progressed, Brown Grove added on a fellowship hall, which is now where Homecoming dinner is served and eaten. Members and visitors can eat and fellowship together for what is still a wonderful and blessed time. To God Be the Glory for the Great Things He Has Done!

In the 1960's, three of Brown Grove's finest were ordained into the ministry. They were the Reverends Benjamin H. Jackson, Sr., Irving Coleman and Warren Lewis. Rev. Jackson pastored at First Union Baptist Church in Crozier,

Virginia (Goochland County) for 26 years and returned for 3 more years after his retirement. Rev. Coleman pastored at First Baptist Church in New Jersey and Rev. Lewis pastored at Abner Baptist Church in Glen Allen, Virginia.

Rev. Raymond T. Gavins, was installed as Pastor of Brown Grove on May 31, 1964. He was a young man who served faithfully, and preached the gospel with many fiery sermons. Several confessed Christ under his leadership. Rev. Gavins pastored for 3 years and resigned in November 1967.

Rev. James Lynch was installed as Pastor on October 26, 1969. Under his pastorate, a large Deacon Board served, consisting of Deacons Theodore Carter (TB), Booker T. Carter (BT), Earl Carter, Ernest Hayes, Sr., Alphine Lewis, Thaddeus Jones, Sr., Johnny Harris, Willie R. Jackson, Sr., Walter Jackson, Sr. and others who may have been omitted.

## 1970s

In 1970, Brown Grove celebrated its 100th anniversary with one celebratory service each month. Various churches in the county and vicinity were our guests.

On Sunday, January 23, 1972, Wallace Jackson, Linwood Lewis, Benjamin Baylor, Sr., and Fleming Morris Sr. were ordained as Deacons.

During October 1979, the 109th anniversary of the church and 10th of Pastor Lynch were celebrated with a banquet at the Howard Johnson.

## 1980s

In 1980, the Missionary Circle, an outreach program to the community, was reorganized.

In Spring 1981, the Sunday School Department, under the leadership of Superintendent, Brother Lanny Jones, organized the Athletic Department of Sunday School Scholars. Brother Anthony Hall served as president and Brothers John Lewis and Robert Hall, Jr., served as sponsors.

A bus was purchased for church-related functions such as transporting children and adults to Sunday School as well as youth activities. Brother Charles Tyler, who enjoyed driving, became our faithful and dedicated bus driver.

Our first Spring Revival, sponsored by the Sunday School, was held featuring two nights of Bible study.

Sister Betty (Jones) King Lozano became the first woman to serve on our Trustee Board.

In January 1982, after having pastored for 13 years, Rev. James Lynch resigned. As the church continued to move forward under the spiritual leadership of our deacons, we praised God for the many blessings HE had already given us. We remained faithful.

Seven months later on July 25, 1982, Fernando E. Temple, Sr., was installed as Pastor of Brown Grove Baptist Church. Under his leadership, many improvements were made to the church, including beautification projects to improve the appearance of the sanctuary. The building and grounds were improved with additions, renovations, landscaping and asphaltting.

In 1983, a Budget Committee was created, a new piano purchased, and a handicapped ramp was built.

In 1984, a Scholarship Fund was created (later named the Frances L. Mason Scholarship).

On Sunday, November 18, 1984, William Sessoms and Willie Dendy were ordained as deacons.

In 1985, the Youth Department was formed. In February 1986, the Pastor's Aid Ministry was organized and Shirley (Jones) King was the first president. In May 1986, a groundbreaking ceremony took place to begin a new addition to the church.

Deacon Emmanuel Davis was ordained in February 1989.

## 1990s

On March 24, 1991, the following were ordained as Deacons: Robert Hall, Sr., Leo Lewis, and Charles Tyler. Others ordained in the 90's were Michael Morris, Robert Hinson and Clifton Arrington.

The Senior Citizen's Ministry was organized and dedicated by Rev. Benjamin H. Jackson, Sr., on November 19, 1995.

In October 1996, Rev. W. Darrell Leftwich was ordained as Associate Minister. Rev. Gracie Jones was licensed to preach the Gospel in November 1996. Rev. Kelvin Moore was also licensed to preach.

After several inquiries about an outdoor service by Youth Director, Sandra Watkins and reservations from Rev. Temple, he finally acquiesced and presented this challenge: "If you can get it together by next week, we'll do it." She accepted the challenge and on Sunday, September 21, 1997, the inaugural Church in the Field Service was held on the Jackson property as a way to pay homage to Brown Grove's humble beginnings in the Brush (H)arbor. The first service had no tent, and instead of a stage, the choir and clergy ministered from a flatbed truck. Today's services can be recognized by its large white tent, rows of parked cars, and the fragrant aroma of food cooking on the brick grill.

In April 1998, the 8:00 a.m. worship service started. Also in 1998, Wendell Sims became an Associate Minister at Brown Grove and the Food Bank was established by Rev. Gracie Jones.

## 2000s

In 2000, Brown Grove celebrated its 130th Anniversary.

Between 2002 and 2003 the Roman Roads Park was constructed as a method to introduce the scriptures of salvation. The walking trail was aimed at keeping our members and the community healthy. An outside play area for children was also added.



On March 6, 2003, Rev. Fernando E. Temple Sr., resigned as Pastor of Brown Grove. He pastored for 21 years and left a legacy of many souls saved including 82 year old Susie (pronounced Sudie) Morris Walker who confessed Christ and was re-baptized.

During this transition, God continued to provide us with leaders who shared the utmost concern and love for the church and its people. Deacon Carroll Bush was Chairman of the Deacon Board and Kenneth Spurlock Sr., served as chairman of the Search Team for a Pastor.

Rev. Herman Truehart humbly accepted the call to serve as Interim Pastor. His spiritual guidance and sermons were a blessing to our church family. Many souls were saved.

Also, on November 15, 2003, The Roman Roads Park was dedicated with a ribbon cutting and brief ceremony of scriptures and prayer. Rev. Truehart served for 15 months.

Year 2003 continued to be fruitful for the church. The Youth Department's name changed to Youth Ministry. Under the leadership of Robert (Jay) Hall Jr., Kenneth Spurlock Sr., Valerie Booker, they mentored approximately 50 youth.

Under the leadership of Jay Hall and Jason Stanley from Lebanon United Methodist Church, youth worshiped and worked together to provide interdenominational experiences. Those included Habitat for Humanity, contributing to the Virginia Food Bank, Hanover County Missions, and CARITAS. The youth ministries enjoyed worshiping at each other's churches, participating in youth revivals, youth lock-ins and Bible studies. These activities provided unity and meaningful worship experiences.

On February 27, 2005, Rev. Gordon Pleasants was installed as Pastor of Brown Grove. Under his leadership, Reverends Robert Morris and Edna Grier were licensed to preach the Gospel. Three men were ordained as Deacons, Lanny Jones, Charles Dabney and Michael Johnson.

Brown Grove Baptist Church continued to prosper. In April, 2005 a church van was purchased.

During the summer months, the youth would travel to various cities to study its history and to vacation. The Youth Ministry traveled to Orlando, Cincinnati, New York City, Atlanta and Myrtle Beach.

During Rev. Pleasants' tenure, Anthony Hall and Kenneth Spurlock Sr., were ordained as deacons on May 21, 2006.

Rev. Benjamin Jackson, Sr., introduced the concept of Principle Place to the seniors of Brown Grove. The mission: To respect and present the spiritual principles, vital to the preservation of life, family and community as told by the valued elders of the Brown Grove Baptist Church through public presentation and narrative documentation.

During 2006 and 2007, The Principle Place honorees and their families were recognized once a month during morning worship service. The honoree's autobiography would be read. It became a wonderful occasion to learn something about them.

During his leadership of the Senior's Ministry, he also invited the youth to attend one meeting during the summer and to bring a book from which to read aloud. He even came up with the saying, "Reading for study or reading for fun, it really doesn't matter why it's done. We found this to be a good solid rule, that students who read more do better in school."

In January 2008 Brown Grove sent Youth Director Jay Hall to Costa Rica for its first international mission trip.

After 3 years, Rev. Gordon Pleasants resigned on April 27, 2008. Various ministers were selected by the deacons to perform interim pastoral duties to meet the needs of the church.

On November 9, 2009 Reverend Dr. Darius E. Beechaum was elected Pastor.

## 2010s

On April 18, 2010, Rev. Beechaum was installed as Pastor of Brown Grove Baptist Church. He is a young man with great knowledge and wisdom; called by God to teach and preach thus saith the Lord. He continues to introduce to those who may not know his best friend, whose name is Jesus the Christ. Under his leadership, the church grounds have expanded, annual themes devised, and many improvements have been made to the building and grounds. In October 2010 the church celebrated 140 years and 5 years with our pastor.

Dr. Beechaum's mission is to provide a place of worship where we can walk together in Christian Love; to grow in the knowledge of holiness, sustain worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrine and to support the community by winning souls to Christ and the building of healthy families.

In 2011, with the support of the church, Jay Hall and youth members Stefany Brown, Stacie Brown, Aaron Hall, Drucilla Harris and Kelsie Moore accompanied Jay on his second mission trip to Costa Rica. The team helped repair a church, held Bible School, and fed over 200 children who lived in extremely poor conditions.

The Youth Ministry has always been blessed with supportive church families, loving parents, friends, and sponsorship. Today, the youth from this ministry are adults with families of their own now showing leadership in communities in and out of state as teachers, news reporters, engineers, musicians, hair stylists to name a few. Several have their own businesses and some are successful employees in large companies.

In 2014 Keishanna Morris James became the youth director with a new generation of people. She has approximately 20 youth department members and 12 praise team members. Keishanna believes her leadership would not be possible without the support of the parents and guardians. Our youth continues to display God's Word through new ideas and creativity.

In 2019, it was announced that New York based supermarket chain, Wegmans, was planning to build a \$175 million distribution center and regional headquarters near the intersection of Sliding Hill and Ashcake Roads. This facility would essentially be located across from Brown Grove and would likely disturb cemetery land. Artifacts from Brown Grove School were also likely disturbed.

Many members of Brown Grove and the community attended community meetings, participated in interviews, filed lawsuits, and expressed their opposition to the decision. The Brown Grove Preservation Group was formed to "Save Brown Grove" and call attention to the industrial threat that the community was facing.

## 2020s

In March, 2020, our faith in the Lord was tested. A life-threatening respiratory virus caused a worldwide pandemic. Churches, schools, businesses, parks, restaurants, jobs, etc. closed and social distancing was ordered by the Centers for Disease Control. Virginians were ordered by Governor Northam to stay home to prevent the virus from spreading more rapidly. Many young and old lost their lives or became seriously sick and self-quarantined. The Coronavirus (COVID-19) affected the economy and left millions unemployed.

Even in the midst of these challenging times, Christians continued to trust God and members were still determined to serve. On March 29, 2020 a drive-up giving idea was put in place by the leadership of our church. Members faithfully drove onto the church grounds and dropped their tithes and offerings in a basket. We thank God for the monetary blessings received to continue our church missions and help others in need.

Sunday, April 5, 2020, our first virtual service was held thanks to the virtual conferencing software, GoTo Meeting. As statewide restrictions eased, Brown Grove held drive-in services in the church parking lot on first and third Sundays, with the first being held on April 20, 2020, Resurrection Sunday.

April 19, 2020, we celebrated 10 years with Pastor Beechaum. A drive-in service was held on the church grounds. Our Hallelujah and praises were expressed by honking of horns.

Our first online and dial-in Sunday School class started Saturday, May 2, 2020 with Deacon Kenneth Spurlock, Sr. teaching a lesson from Jeremiah 23:1-8 entitled "The Righteous Branch."

In the Summer of 2021, Brown Grove held socially distanced indoor church service. Members were required to wear masks and families were asked to sit together and pews were labeled to provide social distancing directions.

Prior to the pandemic, a committee was formed to plan a celebration for Brown Grove's 150th anniversary. In the midst of planning, the number of individuals affected by Covid continued to increase, causing the committee to make the decision to delay the celebration. In true Brown Grove fashion, they continued to persevere.

In the Spring of 2022, the committee reorganized and proceeded in planning the celebration. The 152nd Anniversary Celebration was held the weekend of October 22nd. It consisted of a drive-in movie night on Friday, game day on Saturday, morning worship on Sunday and culminated with a banquet held at The Place at Innsbrook from 4pm - 8pm Sunday evening. It was truly a grand celebration reflective of Brown Grove's past, present, and future.

On June 16, 2022, Brown Grove was recognized as a historic district by the Virginia Board of Historic Resources and State Review Board.

We thank God for all past, present and future generations of people and for allowing them to have a vision to build a place of worship and believing "There is No Limit When God is In It!