

# Westwood Baptist Church History

In 1872, a group of ex-slaves left the Patterson Plantation and gathered in a section of Henrico County known as the "Furnace." This group of religious seekers organized a Sunday School. A year later, the group settled in what is now known as Westwood. Mr. Robert Pemberton and Mr. Willie Williams welcomed them into their homes for Prayer Service.

In 1874, the first Westwood Church was established. The building was a log cabin erected by both men and women. The first pastor, Rev. George Daggett, served the church and community for 20 years. The congregation steadily grew. Soon another edifice was built, this time of weatherboard. A cemetery was also designated in the rear of the church.

In 1896, Rev. Joshua Moore was called. During his pastorate, plans were made to turn the building. The church initially faced south on Marian Street. It was turned westward so that it would face Glenburnie Road where it faces today. Before the plans were completed, death took Rev. Moore, who served Westwood for 18 years.

The third pastor, Rev. I. H. Hines, who was called in 1915, completed the rotation of the building. During his administration, an anteroom was built, heat installed and new pews placed in the sanctuary. Use of the baptizing pond, Jordan's Branch, once located at the corner of Patterson Avenue and Willow Lawn Drive, was discontinued. A baptismal pool was constructed inside the church. A semi-pipe organ was also installed during this time. Rev. Hines resigned in 1934.

Rev. R. W. Twiggs followed as pastor of Westwood and served until 1943. Under his leadership, the Deaconess Board was organized, the church redecorated and the pulpit reconditioned.

Rev. Robert L. Taylor became the fifth pastor, serving from 1943-1944. Under his pastorate the exterior was modernized with brick siding.

In 1945, Rev. Alfred Waller was called. During his tenure the building was elevated, the water system was installed and the construction of the ground vestry started. The city had plans to convert the Westwood Community into a park. As a result of Rev. Waller's untiring efforts, the community still stands.

Rev. Edward McCreary was called in 1948. Under his leadership, the vestry was completed, the pastor's study enlarged and the heating system modernized. Rev. McCreary served until 1955. The church was again without a leader. Rev. Maxwell Johnson was the next leader called to pastor this great church. During his three-year stay, Rev. Johnson reorganized the Sunday School.

In 1959, a call was extended to Dr. Wendell P. Russell, Dean of Students at Virginia Union University. His outstanding project was air-conditioning the church, making Westwood the first Black church to do so.

Rev. Dwight Jones served as assistant minister under Rev. Russell. After Rev. Russell's departure, Rev. Jones was elected and installed as pastor of Westwood in July of 1969. His goal was to bring to reality the project, which began under Rev. Russell's administration, the building of a new sanctuary.

In the spring of 1971, groundbreaking ceremonies were held. In October of that same year, the congregation marched into new sanctuary. Under Rev. Jones a church bus was also purchased. Rev. Jones resigned in November 1973.

After Rev. Joseph Dancy served as interim minister during the church's centennial, Rev. Robert G. Murray was elected pastor. During his tenure, the congregation burned the mortgage, brick veneered the old church, purchased property, paved the parking lot, fenced the cemetery grounds, increased the size of the Deacon Board,

established a Youth Ministry and the Lil Folks Choir. Also, the J.L. Nixon Scholarship Fund, today known as the Nixon Cunningham Scholarship Fund, was established. Rev. Murray also received his doctoral degree during his ministry at Westwood. During Rev. Murray's pastorate, Rev. Alonza Lawrence was elected as assistant minister and later ordained. Rev. Willie T. Phillips and Rev. Wendell Waller were licensed as ministers. Others serving as assistant ministers under Dr. Murray were Rev. Samuel Burleigh and Rev. Charles Hart. Dr. Murray resigned in 1983.

Rev. Lawrence served briefly as interim minister and in 1983, became the 12th pastor of this great church. During his tenure, new Deacons were added to the board. Among them was Kathleen Hopkins Valentine, our first female deacon. Under Rev. Lawrence's pastorate, Rev. Willie T. Phillips became Assistant to the Pastor. Also under Rev. Lawrence, the Intercessory Prayer Ministry was organized, two new buses were purchased, additional parking spaces were provided, two pieces of property were purchased, the worship service was expanded with a Children's Ministry period, and the sanctuary was beautifully renovated. Rev. Lawrence also received his doctoral degree during his ministry at Westwood. Dr. Lawrence resigned November 1, 1994.

Following Dr. Lawrence's resignation, the church body voted Dr. Joseph Dancey to, once again be our interim pastor. Dr. Dancey spearheaded three large projects: reviving the Senior Citizens Group, publishing a Church Business/Skills Directory and raising our consciousness of our Black Heritage through a theatrical production, "The Roots of our Heritage."

On an April 21, 1996, Westwood Baptist Church extended the call to its 13th pastor, Rev. Linda D. Stevens. During Pastor Stevens' leadership, a new van was purchased, the upper educational building was remodelled, a new sound system installed, Twilights reinstated. Several outreach ministries, such as Prison Ministry, the Nursing Home Ministry and the Evangelism Ministry were established. Also during her Pastorate two ministers, Rev. Roberta Walker and Rev. Tracy Clack were licensed and ordained. Five new deacons: Lynda Sharp Anderson, Carol Artis, Robin Griffin, Gloria Washington and Keith Valentine were ordained and two deaconess: Otelia Boswell and Mabel Duncan were consecrated. Two new associate ministers, Rev. Amin Flowers and Pastor Tom Ordiara were added to the ministerial staff. Rev. Stevens resigned in 2005.

While without a pastor Westwood called the Rev. Dr. Grady W. Powell as its Interim Pastor for almost two years. During Rev. Powell leadership he combined all the choirs to form the Westwood Combined Choirs they had a musical workshop that commentated with a melodious concert. The Combined Choirs are still providing music today.

In December 2007, the Lord led Rev. A. Michael Black to Westwood. In this short period he has added a Youth minister in that of Rev. Michael Moore. He has established numerous ministries to include Children Ministry, and Public Relations Ministry. Church attendance has grown and Pastor Black's belief in "intentional faith development" has caused much life within the body of Christ.

Radical Hospitality  
Passionate Worship  
Intentional Faith Development  
Risk Taking Mission and Service  
Extravagant Generosity