**MOUNT ZION AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

**Virginia Beach, Virginia**

During the year 1872, a few religious men living in the Nimmos Community in Princess Anne County, Virginia; decided they needed a church in which they could worship God in their own way. In August of 1872, Tat Walke, Daniel Whitehurst and Frank Rainey, Trustees of Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church, negotiated with Durant Simmons to purchase an acre of land. Mr. Simmons, being also a religious man, sold one acre of land for one dollar ($1.00) with a stipulation the land would be used for religious purposes only. The trustees were fortunate to find property with a building made of logs already erected. This building of logs was used for a place of worship. In 1873, the sale of the land was completed. On October 16, 1873, the deed was recorded in the Clerk’s Office in Princess Anne County Courthouse of Virginia in the name of Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church. It is unknown who became interim pastor when the church first began. According to the record presented by George A. Singleton, General Secretary of the A.M.E. Church… when the Virginia Annual Conference was held in Richmond, Virginia in 1875, the Presiding Bishop J.P. Campbell appointed Reverend Peter Sheppard as the first pastor of Mount Zion AME Church. The congregation worshipped in the log church for twelve years. The next recording of the Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church history was transcribed in 1884. Reverend Jeremiah Cuffee, was 2 appointed pastor. Under his leadership the flock began to grow and the first frame church was built. This church was used for twenty-one (21) years. In 1907, under the pastorate of Rev. Joseph Mackey, work on the present church was initiated and completed in 1908, under the leadership of Rev. Andrew Robertson. The construction was a frame building with interior walls of wood and no ceiling. In 1916, Rev. J. H. Duckett was appointed pastor and served for two years. Rev. Duckett fed the flock spiritually as large crowds gathered to hear him. During this time, Mt. Zion was on the Princess Anne circuit with two sister churches: Campbell’s Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church, located on Indian River Road and Saint Matthew African Methodist Episcopal Church, which no longer exist. During the 1940’s, under the leadership of Rev. M. C. Williams, improvements were made to the building. The walls were plastered and the ceiling installed. Under the leadership of Rev. R. L. Upshaw, the choir loft was moved from the side of the pulpit to the rear of it, and a room was built on each side of the choir loft. The parsonage was remodeled from two stories to one story. Under the leadership of Rev. H. L. James, oil stoves replaced coal burners, the currently used communion table was purchased and a bathroom was installed in the parsonage. During the pastorate of Rev. C.A. Hayman, Harold Cason accepted his call to preach the gospel. There were several major improvements initiated during Reverend Hayman’s pastorate which included the addition of four rooms, two restrooms, and a lounge added to the rear of the church. A central heating system, new tile, and carpet in the sanctuary were 3 installed. Other furnishings and purchases included: pews, a pulpit set, flower stands, baptismal fount, and a Hammond organ. Reverend H. L. Camper was appointed pastor for one year. During his administration, central heating was installed in the parsonage. Reverend Paul M. Caldwell, the thirty-seventh pastor, was assigned to the church in 1964. Under his administration the church was bricked; a new parsonage was built; and a fellowship hall was erected. Numerous purchases were made including pulpit chairs, public offering tables, a communion set, a piano, pads for pews and new hymnals. Additionally, under this administration five members received the call to preach the gospel: Mary Kimbell, Gregory Jones, Vivian Gary, Emma Brown and Michael Gray. Rev. Caldwell remained pastor of the church for twenty-four years, thus holding the title of the pastor to serve the congregation of Mount Zion the longest. Prior to the end of Reverend Caldwell’s pastorate, the church became financial solvent. Several years after retiring, he was appointed by the Bishop Brookins as Pastor Emeritus. In 1988, Rev. Leon B. Hall became the thirty-eighth pastor. During his administration the Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church established a Child Care Development Center and the first church van was purchased. Under Reverend Hall’s pastorate, Helen Cason and Eunice Mitchell received their call to preach. The thirty-ninth pastor, Rev. Larry S. Hinton, was appointed on June 12, 1992. Under his administration new lighting inside the church was installed and a marquee erected. The pastor’s study was remodeled; new furniture was purchased for the parsonage and the pastor’s study. Additional 4 purchases were made including a sound system, new air conditioning unit, a new copier and a computer. During Rev. Hinton’s administration, Linda Smith, a daughter of the church received her call to preach. Rev. William A Dyson, Sr. became the fortieth pastor and received his appointment on May 10, 1998. Under his administration the congregation increased in membership. Rev. Dyson implemented the commission system of administration and created an active ministry designed to include the total membership of the congregation. A van was purchased and used by the Commission on Senior Citizenship to visit area nursing homes. During Rev. Dyson’s administration, an additional morning worship service at the hour of eight o’clock was initiated. The New Gospel Choir was organized and became the choir for the eight o’clock service. Under the administration of Reverend Dyson, Anthony Sanders received his call into the ministry and became an associate minister at Mount Zion. Rev. Lonnie C. McClain became the forty-first pastor and was appointed in April of 2007. Under his administration the first Praise Dance Ministry was organized. He also established the Dora G. Caldwell Legacy of Love Fellowship. This organization’s ministry serves in the area of hospitality. Under Rev. McClain’s pastorate, George Odom received his call into the ministry. Mount Zion developed partners in education with Seatack Elementary, one of Virginia Beach Public Schools. During Rev. McClain’s administration, Mount Zion began participating in an Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service shared by four local interdenominational churches including Grace Covenant Presbyterian, St. Michael’s Lutheran, Nimmo United Methodist and St. John The Apostle Catholic Church. Each year, one church is scheduled to host the service. Music is provided by a mass 5 combined choir and clergy from each church participates on the program. Fellowship follows the service with dessert provided by church members. Rev. McClain continued his pastorate at Mount Zion until he became ill and retired in the year of 2011. The forty-second pastor was appointed by Bishop Adam J. Richardson during the WMS Quadrennial in Florida in August 2011. Rev. Vanessa A. Copeland became the first female pastor of Mt. Zion. The congregation learned quickly that she was a woman of prayer, vision, and commitment. Her vision for the members of the church involved becoming connected, consistent, and committed. She immediately began work towards decreasing the church debt with a focus on Mount Zion becoming financially solvent. On May 4, 2014, Mount Zion celebrated as a debt-free church. The mortgage was paid off and the Presiding Elder Chester Morris presided over a mortgage burning service. Under Reverend Copeland’s leadership, a Tuesday afternoon Bible Study class was organized and Sunday worship services were combined and scheduled at ten o’clock each Sunday morning. During Reverend Copeland’s administration, Michael Johnson, a son of Mount Zion received his call to preach the gospel. There have been numerous upgrades and purchases including a copier, computer, a van, air conditioning units, and communion dressing for the altar. A security ministry was organized and a new church Security System installed. Reverend Copeland has been instrumental in expanding the church into the community through outreach ministry. We are thankful to God for 6 using Mount Zion in serving the community and fellowshipping with other congregations. Mount Zion’s outreach ministry has assisted in providing finances and food to homeless shelters, feeding and providing gifts to the homeless. The church annually provides school supplies, food items and support resources for special programs at our adopted schools in Virginia Beach and Norfolk. Reverend Copeland, along with Rev. Dr. Oretha Cross, pastor of Gaskins Chapel and now St. Paul, Newport News established the Six o’clock Prayer and Meditation ministry Monday through Friday morning. This allows anyone to dial in and listen to an audible Prayer and Meditation. Announcements and/or information needing to reach members are completed via a Calling Post message. Reverend Copeland has introduced Conference Call meetings and online streaming as a different avenue of conducting business as well as an option of worship during inclement weather. Under her exceptional leadership, Mount Zion remains current in civic affairs of the community and nation. Electronic giving through swiping debt card/credit card and Givelify have been added as options for giving. We are proud of Reverend Vanessa Copeland! She is an anointed woman who has dedicated her life in service to God.