

History of Zion Baptist Church

Zion Baptist Church's beginning can be likened to that of the miraculous growth of a single human cell. Like the tiny cell, it took on shape, and form, and organization; it multiplied in number; and it nurtured itself through the spirit of God.

Over one hundred years ago, a small nucleus of Christians began to meet at each other's homes for prayer and worship. No doubt they were honoring the age-old prayer meeting tradition which began during slavery. (During slavery, however, they had to gather secretly). No doubt they were thanking God for bringing them out of bondage. No doubt they were praying for God's help as they saw the freedom they had enjoyed since 1865 in Manchester, Virginia, erode as Black Laws were beginning to be enacted to disfranchise them. Whatever their purpose, Zion was formed.

It is interesting to note that Zion's birth should so closely resemble the birth of the New Testament Churches which had their beginnings in homes long before church buildings were erected. On this Biblical foundation, then, the small nucleus of believers opened their homes for weekly prayer. It appears from some of the early records found in various archives, that this group began to hold prayer meetings in their homes before the end of the Civil War.

Approximately thirty years later, in 1888, Zion was formally organized as a church. The first pastor, Rev. Moses Wilkes, was from Halifax, Virginia. He died shortly after the church was organized. Under his brief tenure, membership in the church increased so rapidly that a building was needed for worship service. Therefore, a lot was purchased on 22nd Street to build a church. When the church was completed, it was named 22nd Street Baptist Church after its location. The Founders of 22nd Street Baptist Church were: Rev. Moses Wilkes, pastor, brothers Joseph F. Bebbs, Randall Jones, Henry Coleman, Archer Taylor, and Henry Stevenson.

In the interim after Rev. Wilkes' death, Rev. Charles Coleman from Halifax, Virginia "communed" for the church every third Sunday, and different ministers served the other Sundays. Rev. Charles Coleman began the practice of collecting a penny for "poor saints" offering during communion services. It was used to offset the cost of paying for the minister and for bread and wine. The practice of charging at the door to help pay the minister was begun. This money was kept at the treasurer's home. Rev. Henry Coleman was elected Zion's second pastor and the church began to flourish.

1890 was a year of growth and change for the young church. It was in this year, that, under the leadership of Rev. Henry Coleman, the 22nd Street Baptist Church School was organized, boasting sixty members. Deacon Henry Stevenson became the first Superintendent. The teachers were: Rev. Henry Coleman, pastor and organist, Deacon Henry Stevenson, Sister Rosa Andrews, Sister Rosa White, and Sister Marie Coleman.

Deacon Henry Stevenson provided sound leadership as superintendent of the Sunday School. While he was superintendent during the 1890's, the Church School joined the National Baptist Sunday School Convention, and began sending delegates to the convention. Sister Bessie Scott was the first delegate to be sent. She attended the convention in Suffolk, Virginia. In addition, six Sunday School classes were organized. Recreational activities were also provided in the form of church school picnics.

"For recreation the school held its picnic on the church grounds, and refreshments were served. The offering was small and was kept at the home of the Treasurer, Brother Ruben Hall." This quote which was found in a "History of Zion Baptist Church Sunday School" summarizes the activities of the Sunday School during the turn of the century.

The church became one of the major institutions for Black survival and Black resistance. It was a place for meeting and fellowship; it offered spiritual relief, hope and unity; it also served as an important training ground for Black leadership to fight the injustices of the Black Laws and other racial inequities of the period.

When Rev. Coleman left to pastor another church, Rev. James Burke of Roanoke, Virginia was elected as the third pastor of Zion. The length of his pastorate is unknown. By this time, the congregation had outgrown their first small church. To meet the demand for more space, they built a larger church on a lot on 22nd Street between Holland (now known as McDougal) and Bainbridge Streets. This property had been donated to the church earlier. The fourth pastor, from Cleveland, Virginia, was Rev. W.R. Ashburn. The length of Rev. Ashburn's pastorate is also unknown.

During the latter part of June or early July, 1911, A. Powell sold some property to the 22nd Street Baptist Church. The property, which was located at 20th and Decatur Streets, was purchased for the sum of \$169.00.



Rev. W. T. Anthony

Rev. William Thomas Anthony, a native of Richmond, Virginia served admirably as the fifth pastor. Under his courageous, spiritual, and aggressive leadership, 22nd Street instituted some major changes. Paramount among them was the importance of family devotion and worship. Everyone worshipped together as a family from Sunday School through to evening services. As the choir was organized. Baptisms in June of each year became a spiritually uplifting and spectacular worship event. After a rousing Revival in each May, Rev. Anthony baptized in the James River in June. The congregation walked from the church down to the river, singing and praising God all the way there and all the way back.

The church was destroyed by lightning in 1914. This was a tragic event for the worshippers who had struggled so hard to build this church. However, their faith in God was undaunted and they soon decided to build another church. It was at this time, that they decided to change the location of the church to the site of the property they had purchased three years earlier at 20th and Decatur Streets.

Services were held at the Young Men's Loving and Union Hall while the new church, with its Colonial style architecture, cream interior walls with oak trim, oak furniture, a balcony above the pulpit for the choir, and a balcony across the entrance facing the pulpit was impressive and large enough to accommodate the rapidly increasing membership. Rev. Anthony named the new church "Zion Baptist Church." Before it could be completed, however, Rev. Anthony died. His funeral was the first to be held in the new church. It was conducted in the basement because construction was still in progress.

The Deacon Board, with Deacon W.B. Kearney as Chairman, assumed leadership of Zion for approximately eighteen months while it sought another pastor. In the meantime, work continued on the church with the laying of the corner stone and completion of the main sanctuary.



Rev. J. W. Dudley

Rev. J.W. Dudley was called to Zion as its sixth pastor in 1920. The church progressed uneventfully during Rev. Dudley's nine-year pastorate. He resigned in 1929 and moved to another city.



Rev. J. J. Harris

Zion Baptist Church, under the pastorate of Rev. John J. Harris (1929-1954), was zealous in its commitment to bringing sinners to Christ. As a result, the congregation grew tremendously. Members were encouraged to testify openly and to sing while the sacraments were being passed during Holy Communion. Much of the music which was sung during worship service reflected the hardship of the times. One of the most noted hymns, "I Am A Soldier Of The Cross", was published in 1933 by J. Jackson.

Many accomplishments were made during Rev. Harris' tenure: The mortgage was paid off; free will offering was begun; and the practice of charging at the door was ceased. All of this was accomplished, with the help of God, during very difficult economic times.

By 1951, the Korean Conflict was in full bloom and had spread to include all able-bodied Americans, black and white. Rev. J.J. Harris continued to lead Zion through the tumultuous years of yet another war. He did so until around December of 1953 when ill-health hindered him physically. (He had been suffering from Arthritis even before then because during the January, 1953 church meeting, his daughter requested the church not to go to her father with stressful or undesirable matters due to his condition).

Taking Rev. Harris' ill-health into consideration, the deacon board recommended relieving him of his duties, but agreed to maintain his present salary until a new minister could be secured. This decision was made at the July, 1954 church meeting. Subsequently, an appreciation service was given for Rev. Harris, the second Sunday in October, 1954. He officially retired February, 1955, having pastored Zion over 25 years. Rev. Harris died on November 22, 1955.

Prior to Rev. Harris' death, however, the officials appointed a pulpit committee, comprised of Deacon Johnnie Johnson, Chairman of the Board, Deacon Lawrence Chavis, Deacon Noah Barnes, and Deacon O.D. Archer. This committee was empowered to find another leader for God's people. The committee sought advice from Dr. W.L. Ransome of First Baptist Church on the most feasible procedure to use.



By the December 17, 1954 church meeting, the pulpit committee recommended to the church that Rev. Maryland Taft Fleming become the next pastor. There were 84 members present, and there was much discussion. To avoid more delay in accepting or rejecting the recommendation, Brother Harding Shaw motioned to consider Rev. Fleming. The motion was seconded by Brother Walter Stovall. A standing vote was taken. Seventy-six persons were in favor and 8 against. The call was extended to Rev. Fleming in late December, 1954. He accepted and became the eighth pastor of Zion on February 6, 1955; thus beginning another dynamic leadership.

The main sanctuary and Sunday School classrooms were remodeled sometime in 1951, and, in 1952, fundraising programs were successfully given in order to pay off a renovation debt of \$4,412.35. A membership pledge system went into effect around this time also.

It was also in the 50s that Mr. J. Harry Williams, an educator, had the foresight to establish a workable financial system which is still in operation today. He eradicated the "petty cash" method in favor of paying for all necessary items by check. He set up the auditing committee and served as its chairman until his death in the late 60s.

The decision to call Rev. Fleming to the pastorate proved to be very beneficial for Zion. During his tenure, much progress was made. The present child care center was organized in November, 1963. It was specifically designed to help those families who had very limited income who needed adequate child care. A kitchen was added in the lower auditorium. The restrooms were improved and the church facade was steam-cleaned and permastoned. A public address system and air conditioning system were installed.

In the mid 1960s, Rev. Fleming began a bus transportation ministry, and led the church family in the spirit of missions and education. Furthermore, he is credited with our church motto, "A Church With A Genuine Fellowship", and was instrumental in making the congregation aware of its civic and civil duties. He led by example. During the height of the civil rights movement when demonstrations and boycotts were being held to protest segregation, Pastor Fleming marched and picketed. In January, 1964, Rev. Fleming was out with other demonstrators at Thalhimers marching with determination against the injustices directed at the Negro people all over the nation.

Rev. Fleming came to Zion well qualified as a leader, having received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Virginia Union University and Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1950 from Union Theological Seminary. In 1962, Virginia Seminary and College conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity. Before coming to Zion, he served as pastor of several Baptist churches. Among them are St. James, Jetersville, Virginia; Shady Grove of Louisa; Jerusalem of Doswell; St. Peter of Glen Allen; St. John of Richmond and Bethany of Montpelier.

Rev. Fleming was married and the father of five children. He served faithfully as pastor from February, 1955 until July, 1980 when he became ill. He was retired in April, 1981 as pastor emeritus. He died on Monday afternoon, May 3, 1982.



Our present pastor, Rev. Robert L. Pettis is the ninth pastor of Zion. He is a leader who likes to be known as a servant of God, attempting to do God's will from his heart to please God not men. Our pastor has a unique beginning in Christian life and ministry. At the very early age of three, Pastor Pettis believed the Biblical principles that God's Son, Jesus Christ, died for him and wanted to be his Savior and Lord.

While being nurtured in the spiritual principles of becoming a mature Christian, our pastor felt and experienced God's distinctive call to him to serve in the preaching ministry. This encounter took place at the age of sixteen. After Canada Junior College, Pastor Pettis left his native State of California to pursue studies for the Christian ministry at Bishop College in Dallas, Texas. He decided that further study was necessary. Thus, after graduating from Bishop College, he came to Richmond, Virginia to study at Virginia Union University School of Theology. He received his Master of Divinity degree in 1981. In May of the same year, the people of Zion Baptist Church, led by the Holy Spirit, extended to Reverend Pettis the responsibilities of serving as pastor.

Pastor Pettis is inspired by the Holy Spirit to lead the members of this congregation by the vision that God has given him. He has instilled in this church family the idea that we are the extension of the "MIND, MESSAGE, MINISTRY, AND MISSION OF JESUS CHRIST." He shares with us the promise of God that we can and will become a church that demonstrates the gifts, will, and witness of God effectively. As such, the pastor invites all men, women, youth, and children to come and learn of the Lord and to perform His perfect will.

Robert L. Pettis is a child of God, a preacher sent by God, and gifted by God. Reverend Pettis is married to the former Palma Duncan and they have two daughters, Nicole and Ashley.

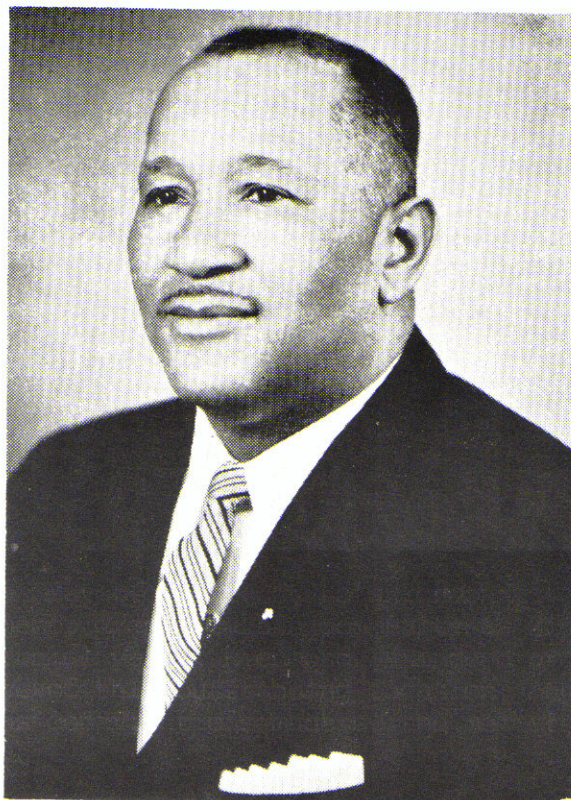
Under Pastor Pettis' spiritual leadership, the church has expanded some ministries and added others to effectively minister to the needs of the church and the community. It has continued to ally itself with the Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention, National Baptist Convention, and the Baptist General Association and Allied Bodies. It is also a member of the Tuckahoe Baptist Association of Virginia and does its giving for mission through these agencies. On the home front, it budgets a sum each year for the local missionary needs, such as the care of the sick. We contribute annually to the UGF, Senior Citizens Center, and other social agencies whenever called upon.

The church continues its emphasis on education. We have a very fine Christian Education Ministry available for the entire congregation through weekly class meetings; Bible study classes for adult and youth participation, Sunday School instruction for teachers, new members classes, and other instruction in Christian fundamentals are also available.

Food and Clothing, Tape, Tutorial, Men's Fellowship, Sunday Morning Meditation, New Members, Youth Fellowship, Adult and Children Choirs, Scouting, Junior and Senior Missionary Circles are the ministries that Zion offers in an attempt to carry out the challenge that we are an extension of, "THE MIND, MESSAGE, MINISTRY, AND MISSION OF JESUS CHRIST," and that we are indeed, "The Church With A Genuine Fellowship." Beyond all other interests, Zion Baptist Church rightfully accepts as its specialty the Salvation of the souls of men and women. Therefore, this is, and will remain, our first priority.

Always moving toward greater heights according to the Will of God, we have every reason to believe that ZION will reach her goals. We cordially invite the public to share with us in all of our endeavors and services.

Our Former Pastors



Maryland Taft Fleming, D.D.

Rev. Mcses Wilkes
Rev. James Burks

Rev. Charles Coleman
Rev. W. R. Ashburn



Rev. W. T. Anthony



Rev. J. J. Harris



Rev. J. W. Dudley

Ministers Sent Out From Zion

Rev. Isaac Roane
Rev. J. W. Davis
Rev. Washington Johnson

Rev. Bernard Giles
Rev. Howard Jones
Rev. Earnest Jones

Rev. Leroy Jones
Rev. Marshall D. Burgess
Rev. Willie Blount

THE HOMEGOING
Celebration for



REV. DR. ROBERT L. PETTIS, SR.
OUR JOY: DECEMBER 2, 1954 - HIS JOY: MARCH 19, 2022

Saturday, March 26th, 2022 at 11:00 A.M.

United Nations International
214 Cowardin Avenue | Richmond, VA 23224

Rev. Dr. Jerome O. Lee, Officiating

Rev. Dr. David L. Kelly, II, Eulogist

OBITUARY

REFLECTIONS

ON THE LIFE OF A DEDICATED SERVANT OF GOD

Today we celebrate the life of Reverend Dr. Robert Lee Pettis, Sr. who transitioned from this life to rest eternally in his heavenly home on Saturday, March 19, 2022. Dr. Pettis was born on December 2, 1954 in San Francisco to the late William and Vadie Pettis.

At the early age of three years old, Robert accepted the lord as his savior and was baptized. By the age of eight years old, he was certain that he had been called by God to preach. However, his pastor's wisdom prevailed, and he was not licensed to preach until he was sixteen. Robert Lee Pettis' career as a preacher of the Gospel was launched in 1971. Dr. Pettis was ordained in 1976.

Dr. Pettis attended public schools in California and graduated from Ravenwood High School in East Palo Alto, California. He continued his formal education at Biola College in LaMirra, California. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Religion and Philosophy from Bishop College in Dallas, Texas. While in Dallas Texas he joined Concord Baptist Church. Besides serving as Director of Evangelism for the Bishop College Ministers' Lyceum, he also served as Associate Minister, Sunday School Teacher, Teacher of Evangelism, and Youth Leader at Concord Baptist Church.

Dr. Pettis enrolled in the School of Theology at Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia, earning a Master of Divinity degree in May 1981. He served as the first youth pastor of the Baptist General Convention and was a part of the Baptist Ministers Conference.

On May 29, 1981, Dr. Pettis received the pastoral call to serve at Zion Baptist Church. As the spiritual leader for over 40 years, he made great emphasis on individual and group ministries, and offered many courses of training in the ministry. Discipleship, Evangelism, Children's Church, Literacy Ministry, ZBC Childcare, Clothes Ministry, Outreach, L.O.G.O.S., Women's Bible Fellowship, Mid-Day Bible Study,

OBITUARY (CONT'D)

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Selected as one of the first candidates for the Doctor of Ministry program at Virginia Union University, Dr. Pettis was part of a historical academic endeavor. Dr. Pettis received his Doctor of Divinity degree, with an emphasis in church management, in May, 1993.

Continuously achieving and educating himself, he joined the Parliamentary Law Club of Richmond 2016. Dr. Pettis served as the President of the Parliamentary Law Club of Richmond 2019-2021. Also, he served as the Chaplain during the recent term.

He was a major fan of sports, but his major passion was baseball. He loved his San Francisco Giants baseball team and the San Francisco 49ers football team.

For 39 years Dr. Pettis and the former Palma L. Duncan of Richmond were united in marriage. They were blessed to be the proud parents of Nichole Grace, Ashley Dionna, and Robert Lee, Jr.

Dr. Pettis has been a faithful servant, a compassionate and passionate preacher, teacher, author and loving husband and father.

Dr. Pettis leaves to cherish his memories his loving wife, Palma D. Pettis; two daughters, Nichole and Ashley Pettis; a son, Robert Lee Pettis, Jr; sister, Crystal Pettis; sisters-in-law, Delfina Pettis and Shirley Sheppard; nephews, Will Pettis (Akiah) and Travis Terry (Wendy); niece, Pamela Pettis-Jones; a host of other relatives and friends among them devoted, Dr. Johnny J. Branch

"LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING"

Negro National Anthem

Lift Every Voice and Sing
Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the listening skies
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun
Let us march on till victory is won

Stony the road we trod
Bitter the chastening rod
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died
Yet with a steady beat
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered
Out from the gloomy past
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast

God of our weary years
God of our silent tears
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way
Thou who has by Thy might Led us into the light
Keep us forever in the path, we pray
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee
Shadowed beneath Thy hand
May we forever stand
True to our God
True to our native land

ORDER OF SERVICE

Organ Prelude.....Mr. Heywood Harrison
Ebenezer Baptist Church, Richmond, VA

Processional.....Clergy, Diaconate, and Family

The Invocation.....Reverend Dr. Jerome Lee
First Baptist Church, West Main Street, Charlottesville, VA

Opening Hymn.....“Lift Every Voice And Sing”

Scripture Readings

Old Testament ~ Psalms 121.....Deaconess Theresa Shackleford, Zion B.C.

New Testament ~ Luke 4:18-19.....Deaconess Nan Wilson, Zion B.C.

Prayer of Consolation.....Deacon Tyrone Anderson, Zion B.C.

Chant.....“Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow”

Brief Expressions (Sons and Daughters of Zion) (*Respectfully two minutes*)

Rev. Brenda Anderson, Zion Baptist Church

Rev. Dr. Adam Bond, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Richmond, VA

Rev. Dr. Carl Johnson, Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Alexandria, VA

Rev. Dr. D. Tyrone Brandon, Sr., First Calvary Baptist Church, Norfolk, VA

Musical Selection.....“I Come to the Garden” Ashley Pettis, daughter

Brief Expressions (*Respectfully two minutes*)

Rev. Micah Jackson, Moderator, Tuckahoe Baptist Association

Edna Rodwell, Parliamentary Law Club of Richmond, Virginia

Sheryl Blowe McDowney, Baptist General Convention of Virginia

Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Harris, President, Minister’s Conference of Richmond
and Vicinity

Special Tribute.....Nichole Pettis, daughter

Acknowledgements & Silent Reading of the Obituary.....Mrs. Carolyn Branch
Union Branch Baptist Church, Chesterfield, VA

Special Video

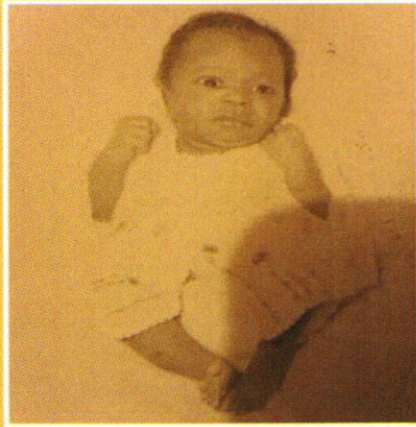
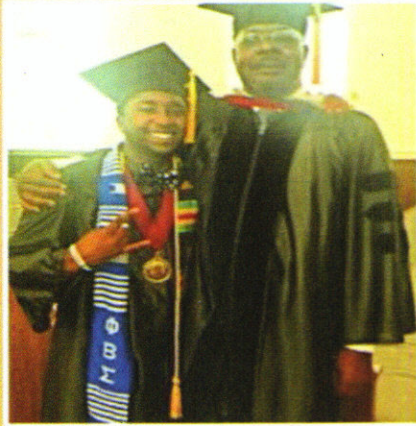
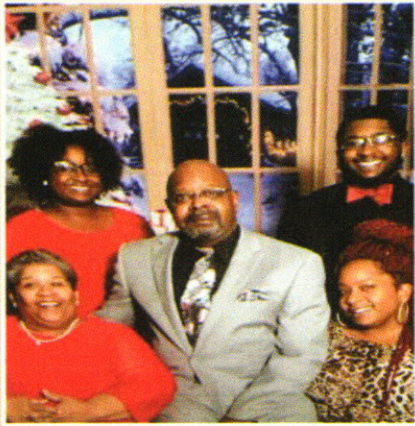
Musical Selection.....The A. Alexander Singers

The Eulogy.....Rev. Dr. David L. Kelly, II
Pastor, Christ Fellowship Baptist Church , Brooklyn New York

Recessional Hymn.....“I’ve Got a New Home in Over in Glory”

INTERMENT

Maury Cemetery ▪ 2700 Maury St ▪ Richmond, VA 23224



THE MASTER CALLED

*I'm sorry I had to leave you.
My loved ones, oh so dear.
But you see, the Master called me,
His voice was very clear!
I had made my reservation
A heaven bound ticket for one,
And I knew that He would call me
When He felt my work was done.
I know that your hearts are heavy
Because I have gone away,
But when the Master called me,
I knew that I could not stay.
Yes, I'm sorry I had to leave you
My loved ones, oh so dear,
But, you see, the Master called me
And now I'm resting here.
Yes, I've crossed on over to glory
And to you all I say
Just stay in the hands of Jesus
And we'll meet again someday.
-Author unknown*

Ministerial Sons and Daughters of Zion



Rev. Willie Bates
Rev. Willie Blunt
Rev. Lucius Dalton
Rev. Dorian Daniels
Rev. Michelle Hatcher
Rev. Herman Kemp
Rev. Paul Lowe
Rev. Avery Miller
Rev. C. L. Nash
Rev. Sheridan Nelson
Rev. Kenneth Sheppard
Rev. Edgar Street
Rev. Terrell Wilson

HONORARY PALLBEARERS

Rev. Brenda Anderson	Rev. Dr. Michelle Hatcher
Rev. Dr. Adam Bond	Rev. Dr. Eric W. Jackson
Rev. Dr. D. Tyrone Brandon, Sr.	Rev. Dr. Carl Johnson
Rev. Dr. Marshall Burgess	Rev. Avery Miller
Rev. Dr. Lucius M. Dalton	Rev. Edgar Street
Dr. Gregory Fisher	Rev. Terrell Wilson

PALLBEARERS

Alvin Brandon | Kevin Brandon | Cameron Elmore
Ernest Harrison | Kevin Jasey | Carl White

FLOWER BEARERS

Jameka Joyner | DaVona McCready | Sheryl Blowe-McDowney | LaKeshia McGhee | Iesha Pugh | Chiniqua Radford | Tajuana Smith | Vanessa Blount-White

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The family of the late Reverend Dr. Robert L. Pettis, Sr. would like to express our thanks to each of you for your outpouring of love, kindness, and prayers during our time of need. We also would like to thank the program participants, the professional services of Mimms Funeral Home, the pastors, musicians, soloists, ushers union of Richmond & Vicinity, and our Zion Baptist Church family. We take comfort from the loving expressions of sympathy and support from everyone who prayed for our family, sent cards and flowers, cooked a meal, and/or called.

The Pettis Family

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES ENTRUSTED TO

Mimms Funeral Home

1827 Hull Street • Richmond, VA 23224 • (804) 232-3874

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