

The History
MOUNT CANAAN BAPTIST CHURCH
1868-2023



In the year 1868, one hundred fifty-five years ago, an historic event occurred in the Aiken and Edgefield communities. For it was under the spiritual leadership of Rev. Alexander Bettis that the first church for Blacks in this vicinity was established. It was the first of forty churches established by Rev. Alexander Bettis. It was Rev. Bettis, along with several White ministers (Rev. Josiah Matthias, Rev. Samuel Murphy, Rev. John Mealing) and a Black minister from Augusta, GA (Rev. Joseph Tolbert) along with 17 Negroes (who had withdrawn their membership from the First Baptist Church of Edgefield) who organized Mount Canaan Baptist Church under a brush arbor.

Sixteen of the original members were Brothers Griffin Palmore (deacon), Peter Palmore, Alex Harris, Alfred Hughes, Jack Lloyd, Griffin Clark (deacon), Alfred Miller, Solomon Jones, Joe Tillman, and Sisters Sarah Miller, Mary A. Tillman, Ann Jones, Eliza Palmore, Susan Anderson, Jane Clark, and Ann Hughes. The name of the seventeenth member is uncertain.

Rev. Alexander Bettis, an ex-slave, who founded Mount Canaan was its pastor for 27 years (until his death). Under his pastoral leadership, the original membership of 17 increased to two thousand within a three-year period.

Mount Canaan, when first organized in 1868, was located across Highway #25 (west of the present site) on approximately 3 acres of land donated/loaned to the church by the Turner family. The church never had a deed and title to this site; and could only use it for a church. There was no adjacent cemetery. In 1961, while Rev. Isaac Eugene Smith was Pastor, the Mount Canaan congregation built a new church (east of the 1st church) on land donated to the church by the Mt. Canaan B&E Society. In the same year, the church was incorporated as **Mt. Canaan Baptist Church**; and in 2006 was reincorporated as **Mount Canaan Baptist Church**. The mortgage for that church was burned on Sunday, May 12, 1968. On July 30, 2017, we moved into and dedicated the new and larger sanctuary that we now occupy. Mount Canaan Baptist Church now owns approximately 34 acres of land in 2 separate tracts, both fronting US Highway #25.

In 2004 Mount Canaan was designated an “Outstanding Historical Site” by the South Carolina State Department of Archives and History. Therefore, a Historical Marker was installed on Highway #25 and was dedicated on Sunday, September 12, 2004.



Increased membership and activities and expansion of our mission and ministries necessitated a revision of our physical facilities. Therefore, in the early 1970's the Educational Annex was constructed and was dedicated on August 3, 1975. This facility has a fellowship hall; 5 classrooms; library; copy/computer room; two rest rooms and kitchen. In 2009 a paved 100 spaces parking lot with green spaces was constructed; followed by the completion of the G.L. Brightharp Youth Center (with a gymnasium and game rooms). The G.L. Brightharp Youth Center was dedicated on May 29, 2010. The mortgage for the Center was burned on December 4, 2011. The present sanctuary was dedicated and occupied July 30, 2017.

Mount Canaan has been led by 11 pastors during its one hundred fifty-five years. These are (*in chronological order*):

Rev. Alexander Bettis	27 years
Rev. Allen Washington	2 years
Rev. Washington Oliphant	9 years
Rev. Henry L. Ryans	13 years
Rev. George W. Blocker	23 years
Rev. Willar Hightower, Sr.	7 years
Rev. Wade H. Vaughns	5 years
Rev. John P. Reeder	1 year
Rev. Isaac Eugene Smith	5 years
Rev. Augustus T. Stephens	18 years

The **11th and present pastor is Rev. George L. Brightharp** who is serving in his 45th year at Mount Canaan. Rev. Brightharp is truly a leader, a friend, and a child of God. We praise God for directing him in our path.

Mount Canaan's clerks were Brothers Zack Lloyd; Frank Adams; John Wesley Ashley; Clarence Warrick Jackson; W. M. Harris; Robert Ashley, II; Thomas Butler; Abraham Brightharp; Alex Palmore; John R. Brightharp; and Sisters; Katherine H. Williams; Betty A. Butler, and present clerk, Sister Janet H. Gordon.

Treasurers of Mount Canaan Baptist Church were Brothers Stephen Mason, Riley Goodwin, Nathan Goodwin, Michael Garrett, and Sister Gail B. Smith (present treasurer).

Sunday school superintendents were Brothers Wyatt Lloyd; Robert Curry; Joseph Blocker; Thomas Jackson; Henry Ryans; Woodrow Johnson; Herman Holmes; Cornelius Palmore; Benjamin Goodwin; Robert Brighthop; Sisters Beatrice Scott; Barbara A. Peterson; and Annie Ruth Williams (present superintendent).

Chairmen of the Deacons' Ministry were Brothers Will Palmore; Alonzo Cummings, Sr.; Robert Ashley, III; Herman Holmes, Sr.; Ernest Butler; Walter R. Scott; Robert Brighthop; Alfonzo Peterson, Otis Griffin, and Calvin Cooks (present chairman).

The following served as chairpersons of the Trustees' Ministry: Brothers Herman Holmes, Sr.; Bernard Cummings; Joseph F. Anderson; Pernell Ashley; Daniel L. Johnson; Joseph P. Curry; Thomas C. McCain, Sr.; Willie A. Knight, Sister Norma L. Camp, and Brother Freddie Newsome (present chairman).

The first financial secretary of Mount Canaan Baptist Church was Brother Vernon Adams. The present financial secretary is Sister Renee W. Williams. The first church secretary (from January 2001 – January 2023) was Sister Willie J. Lanham.

Church Musicians have been Sister Diamond K. Lloyd; Brothers Willie Thomas (Billy) Williams; Roosevelt Simpkins; Melvin Williams; Lorenzo Williams; and Sister Beryl W. Garrett. Presently, our head musician is Brother Lionel T. Williams with Sisters Vernell Goodwin and Carolyn Hardy (deceased) assistants.

We have (or had) the following auxiliaries, ministries, and programs: Deacons; Trustees; Deaconesses; Ushers; Billy Williams Senior Choir; Gospel Chorus; Male Chorus; Youth Choir; Voices of Canaan (organized 2005); Pastor’s Aid Club; Baptist Training Union (discontinued in 2001); Praise Team (organized December 2001); Women’s Club; Men’s Club; Willing Worker’s Club (discontinued in 1999).

Other programs for spiritual growth include Sunday school each Sunday; Wednesday evening prayer and Bible study; and Vacation Bible School. Secular education programs were Summer Tutorial and FINE (the Future is Now in Education). After more than 16 years the Boy and Girl Scout troops were discontinued and in 1998 were replaced with Explorers; and Boys and Girls Clubs. In 2001, a Benevolent Committee was formed to visit, pray, and fellowship with those living in extended care facilities. We also support ECCHO (Edgefield County Churches Helping Others).

Our present pastor, Rev. George L. Brightharp, initiated a recognition ceremony in 2001 for the youth of Mount Canaan whereby sixteen-year-olds make the “**Pre-Adulthood Promises**” (in the presence of the congregation) to live Godly lives. In 2007, Rev. Brightharp initiated the idea of a ‘church garden’ to teach youth the principles and benefits of gardening and to offer Mount Canaan members, as well as senior citizens in the community, a resource of fresh vegetables.

The following Ministers were licensed and/or ordained to preach the Gospel by Mount Canaan: Brothers Charlie Walton; Robert Lincoln Ryans; Arthur “Doc” Lloyd; Milledge Brown; Charlie Brightharp; George W. Brightharp; John H. Brown; Willar Hightower, Sr.; Robert Brighthop; James E. Reynolds; John R. Brightharp; Sammie L. Williams; Daniel L. Johnson; Steven Bohler; Rodney Hay; Walter R. Scott; and Sister Sallie M. Brightharp Cooks.

For over one and one-half century, Mount Canaan has continued to “*Serve the Present Age.*” May the church continue to reach out and feed God’s Sheep. May it strive to draw souls to Christ through service, prayers, love, understanding, and exemplary lives.

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Our Prayer

*Oh, make us more aware, Dear God.
Of little daily graces
That come to us with ‘sweet surprise’
From never dreamed of places!*