

The History
MOUNT CANAAN BAPTIST CHURCH
Trenton, South Carolina
Founded 1868



Rev. Alexander Bettis

In the year 1868, 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 Joseph Tolbert) along with 17 Negroes (who had withdrawn their membership from the First Baptist Church of Edgefield), who organized Mount Canaan Baptist Church under a brush arbor.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 17th member is uncertain.

Rev. Alexander Bettis, an ex-slave who founded Mount Canaan was its pastor for 27 years (until his death in 1895). 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 US 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 (the one we now occupy) 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 re-incorporated as **Mount Canaan Baptist Church**. The mortgage for this church was burned on Sunday, May 12, 1968. 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 as an Outstanding Historical Site by the South Carolina State Department of Archives and History. Therefore a Historical Marker was installed on US Highway #25, in front of the present church; and was dedicated on Sunday, September 12, 2004.



Increased membership and activities; 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 an auditorium; four classrooms; library (now used as the pastor's office); secretary's office; copy/computer room; kitchen and two rest rooms. In the early 1990's physical improvements of the church included renovations in the restrooms (making them handicap accessible) and vestibule. In 1998, ceiling lights and chandeliers were installed; pews were padded and new courtesy panels placed around the choir stands. The heating and air-conditioning systems were upgraded in both the church and Educational Annex. In 2001, a camera and television were installed to project services from the Sanctuary to the auditorium in the Educational Building. In 2009, a paved-100 spaces parking area (with green spaces) was constructed; followed by the completion of the Youth Center (with gymnasium and game rooms). The Youth Center was dedicated on May 29, 2010.

Mount Canaan has been led by eleven pastors during its one hundred forty-two years. These pastors 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 Washington 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 eleventh and present pastor is Rev. George Lenward Brightharp who is serving in his 32nd 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 had twelve clerks; 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 Betty A. Butler and Katherine Williams, (present clerk).

We have verified four of the treasurers of Mount Canaan, at this writing. They are Brothers Stephen Mason, Riley Goodwin, Nathan Goodwin and Michael Garrett (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; Sister Beatrice Scott, Brother Calvin Butler, and Sister Barbara Peterson (present interim superintendent).

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

The following Brothers served as Chairmen of the Trustees' Ministry (formerly Trustees' Board). Brothers Herman Holmes, Sr.; Bernard Cummings; Joseph F. Anderson; Pernell Ashley; Daniel L. Johnson; Joseph P. Curry; Thomas C. McCain, Sr.; and Willie A. Knight (present chairman).

The first Financial Secretary of Mount Canaan Baptist Church was Brother Vernon Adams. The present Financial Secretary is Sister Renee Williams. The first and present Church Secretary is Sister Willie (Willa) J. Lanham.

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

We have the following auxiliaries, ministries and programs. Deacons; Trustees; Deaconesses; Ushers; Billy Williams Sr. Choir; Gospel Chorus; Male Chorus; Youth Choir; Voices of Canaan (organized, 2005); Creative Harmony; Pastor's Aid Club;; Baptist Training Union (discontinued in 2001); ; Men's Club; Willing Workers' Club (discontinued, 1999); Praise Team (organized December, 2001); Mount Canaan Women for Jesus; and Mount Canaan Garden Club.

Other programs for spiritual growth include Sunday school each Sunday; Wednesday evening prayer and Bible Study; and Summer Vacation Bible School. Secular education programs were/are Summer Tutorial and FINE (The Future is Now in Education). After more than sixteen years the Boy and Girl Scout Troops were discontinued and in 1998 were replaced with the Explorers; and Boys' & Girls' Clubs. In 2001, a Benevolent Committee was formed to visit, pray and fellowship with those living in extended care facilities.

The 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 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 Brightharp; James E. Reynolds; John R. Brightharp; Sammie L. Williams; Daniel L. Johnson; Walter R. Scott; and Sister Sallie B. Cooks. Others who joined Mount Canaan already licensed or ordained are Rev. James R. Martin; Rev. Steven Bohler; Rev. Paul Martin; and Rev. Rodney Hay (deceased).

For almost one and a 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.

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!*
