

## **THE HISTORY OF LIVE OAK AME CHURCH – VANCE, SC**

This is an updated version of the history of Live Oak African Methodist Episcopal Church of the Orangeburg District of the Central South Carolina Annual Conference of the Seventh Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The Live Oak African Methodist Episcopal Church evolved from very humble beginnings with her lineage tracing back to the early 1860s. Live Oak began under a “Bush Harbor.” Research indicates a bush harbor (brush arbor or bush arbor) was sapling poles covered with brush in the custom built by Slaves, often secretly and in secluded places, for religious services held at night. This story of slaves often tells the story regarding the locations of African American Churches, today.

In the early 1860s, two acres of land was donated to our ancestors by the Rhames family for the purpose of Christian worship and the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Live Oak was formally organized in 1890 as an African Methodist Episcopal congregation by members of Shiloh African Methodist Episcopal Church of Elloree, South Carolina who lived in the Vance community; who wanted to worship God in an area closer to their homes. The Reverend David Christen was appointed as the first pastor. He was a great leader and organizer. As this community of faith grew by the grace of God on December 23, 1913, Live Oak purchased three more acres for the amount of \$25.00 per acre. This purchased was signed by Thomas Glover, Glover Holman, and James Williams. This group of faithful disciples of Jesus walked great distances and made many sacrifices in order to fellowship with other believers. It is due to the faithfulness of great lay leaders and members that Live Oak reaps a legacy of perseverance and vision.

As Live Oak gathered for worship, instruction, and encouragement; they worshipped in various settings on this property for the glory of God. Live Oak initially gathered under a Bush Harbor for Sunday Worship. By the grace of God, the congregation erected the first edifice (*small, frame building*) in 1891. A second edifice for worship was completed in July 1911 under the pastoral leadership of The Reverend J. W. Murph.

In a spirit of unity and love, Live Oak partnered in ministry with Rock Hill AME Church in Vance, SC. The two sister churches served as a circuit within the AME Church and shared the same pastor from 1950-1986. It was known as the Live Oak Circuit. The circuit shared a parsonage for the pastor and his family to reside during their pastoral tenure. The parsonage was centrally located between the two churches off Highway 310 on Westberry Road in Vance, SC.

From the inception of Live Oak, God sent godly, faithful, and visionary clergy leaders to help the church grow into a vibrant community of faith. We praise God for the anointed and dedicated leadership of African Methodist Episcopal Clergy (Bishops, Presiding Elders, and Pastors) who contributed to the formation, development, growth, maturity, and stability of Live Oak. We know that “everything rises and falls upon leadership.”

### **Former Bishops of the Seventh Episcopal District (1890-2016)**

The Right Reverends Wesley J. Gaines, Levi J. Coppin, Benjamin F. Lee, Henry McNeal Turner, William David Chappelle, John Hurst, Reverdy C. Ransom, Noah Williams, William Johnson, Joseph Flipper, Frank M. Reid, Sr., Isaiah Bonner, Samuel R. Higgins, Carey A.

# **THE HISTORY OF LIVE OAK AME CHURCH – VANCE, SC**

Gibbs, William F. Ball, Sr., Decatur Ward Nichols, Frank M. Reid, Jr., Frederick Calhoun James, John Hurst Adams, Henry A. Belin, Jr., Preston W. Williams, II, Richard F. Norris

## **Former Presiding Elders of the Orangeburg District (1890-2016)**

The Reverends Jimmy James, Dr. Robert McCants, Benjamin P. Boston, Willie J. Baxter, Dr. Juenarri Keith, Lorenza T. Baker, and James R. Glover

## **Former Pastors of Live Oak AME Church (1890-2016)**

The Reverends David Christen, Muffin, **(later Bishop)** William David Chappelle, C.W. Dunlap, Walley, Pruitt, Benjamin F. Hildebrand, George Johnson, Gamble, John Scott, Sr.; Samuel J. Johnson, **(later Presiding Elder)** C.V. Alston, Julius Steed, Saint Julian Snider, Melvin S. Williams, Willie H. Brown, Edward T. Jones, Dr. Obie Madison, and Dr. Richard Allen McKnight.

As the various pastors, lay leaders, and members worked together under the auspices of the Holy Spirit, Live Oak continued to make disciples of Jesus Christ. As the church progressed in ministry, our ministry fulfilled the objective of African Methodism by preaching the gospel, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, housing the homeless, cheering the fallen, providing jobs for the jobless, administering to the needs of those in prisons, hospitals, nursing homes, asylums and mental institutions, and senior citizens' homes; caring for the sick, the shut-in, the mentally and socially disturbed; and encouraging thrift and economic advancement.

Under the pastoral leadership of the Rev. C. V. Alston, initiated several upgrades to the church edifice. He provided great leadership at the church and within the community. He was elevated to the position of Presiding Elder and transferred to another Annual Conference by the Bishop.

In 1971, the Reverend Julius Steed was appointed to serve as pastor. He led the congregation in spiritual renewal and growth with his excellent preaching abilities, effective leadership skills, and community involvement. During his sixteen years of service, he led Live Oak to completely renovate the church edifice, installed a new heating and air conditioning system, installed new stained glass windows, purchased new sound system for the sanctuary, built new Conference Room/Pastor's Study Annex, and initiated many other projects for the glory of God.

In October 1986, the Live Oak Circuit was separated by the Central Annual Conference and each church received their own pastor. The Reverend William Washington was assigned to Rock Hill AME Church and The Reverend Saint Julian Snider was assigned to Live Oak.

The Rev. Saint Julian Snider was another anointed man of God with many gifts and graces. As a great preacher, many people were drawn closer to the Lord. During Pastor Snider's tenure, Live Oak was able to purchase new pews and an organ, reorganize the music ministry, established new choirs, and accomplished many other tasks in the life of the church.

In December 1994, the Reverend Melvin S. Williams was appointed to lead our congregation. He served with passion and grace. He led the church to complete the following upgrades:

## **THE HISTORY OF LIVE OAK AME CHURCH – VANCE, SC**

installed an efficient handicap ramp, repainted the church edifice, and updated the outside bulletin board.

Later, the Reverend Willie H. Brown was assigned to lead our church into a new millennium. He was a man of great integrity, love and encouragement. Under his leadership, the church purchased a van to transport members for ministry purposes. In April 2004, The Honorable Mark Sanford, former Governor of the state of South Carolina, worshipped at Live Oak for Morning Worship. Governor Stanford was participating in his annual bike trek at the time. Live Oak continued to strive forward in faith under the faithful leadership of the Reverend Brown.

In April 2005, the Rev. Edward T. “ET” Jones was appointed to serve as pastor. He was a true man of God. The Rev. Jones led the congregation in spiritual formation with an emphasis on worshipping in the true spirit of African Methodism. The church repainted the edifice and remodeled the kitchen under his leadership. We were also blessed with an Episcopal visit by Bishop Preston Warren Williams, former Presiding Prelate of the 7<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District to our church on Monday, April 25, 2005.

The Reverend Dr. Obie Madison came to serve as pastor in November 2008. Various projects and activities were accomplished under his leadership. Most notably, he shared the vision of a carnival for the community. Therefore, the church launched the Live Oak Fall Carnival which is now an annual event held in October.

The Rev. Dr. Richard Allen McKnight was assigned to lead our congregation in October 2010. He was youthful, energetic, and full of good ideas. Under Pastor McKnight’s leadership, the church completed several building repairs, initiated several programs for fundraising, and established a Traffic Security Ministry. The church established a social media presence on the internet by creating a Facebook Fan Page to connect the world to Live Oak’s ministries.

In October 2016, the Reverend Fedrick Allen Wilson and his wife, Licentiate Tenessa Wilson; were appointed to lead Live Oak to the next level of ministry and service. He is young minister with vision, passion, and love for serving God’s people with excellence. Under his leadership, Live Oak accomplished the following achievements: completed building upgrades and replaced entire roof on the church edifice, completely reorganized our leadership structure and ministry systems for greater efficiency in the local church, instituted a new prayer ministry, purchased and erected a new Storage Building, redesigned the church marquee, established a Military Ministry, launched Operation L.O.V.E. (*a 12 month, church wide outreach campaign to give back to the community through missions and service*), launched an new interactive website with online and text giving, and introduced new ministry ideas to increase worship attendance and giving. Additionally, Live Oak purchased a church management software (ACS/Realm Connect) to meet the technological needs of the church by providing greater efficiency in church administration, financial accounting, and community engagement. Lastly, Pastor Wilson introduced a “God-sized” vision for making necessary repairs to our existing church edifice and laying out a five-year stewardship campaign entitled the “B.I.G. (*Believing in God*) Campaign to raise money for the construction of a new church edifice in a new location for God’s glory. In 2017, the congregation voted for the church to begin planning and preparing for the building of a new edifice. In April 2018,

## **THE HISTORY OF LIVE OAK AME CHURCH – VANCE, SC**

after several conversations between Pastor Fedrick A. Wilson and Mr. Virgil “Sonny” Irick, our church received a generous donation by the Irick Family (originally from Vance, SC) of property across the road from the current church edifice for the building of a new worship facility. 14 acres was donated to the church by the Irick Family. Additionally, under Pastor Fedrick Wilson’s leadership, the church entered into a leasing agreement with two telecommunication companies to erect two Cell Phone Towers on properties owned by the church for the purpose of the church to begin generating significant monthly income for the future. In May 2020, Live Oak Cares, Incorporated, was founded by Pastor Fedrick Wilson. It is a not-for-profit, 501 c 3 social service organization of Live Oak African Methodist Episcopal Church whose mission is to identify and develop programs that will serve individuals, families, and communities in the communities of Eastern Orangeburg County, South Carolina through a network of partnerships addressing diverse needs of economic development, healthy living, community empowerment, and education equity.

Today, our current Presiding Bishop is the Right Reverend Samuel L. Green, Sr., and our current Presiding Elder is the Reverend Dr. Charles E. Young.

In addition to our pastors and lay leadership, several members from within our congregation answered God’s calling to pursue the preaching and/or pastoral ministry. We honor these sons and daughters of Live Oak who emerged from our soil to carry the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. The following ministers were members of or grew up in Live Oak AME Church and later pursued the Christian Preaching Ministry:

- Bishop Richard Allen Hildebrand *(88th elected and consecrated Bishop of the AME Church and son of former pastor, the Rev. Benjamin F. Hildebrand)*
- Pastor Henry A. Hildebrand *(son of former pastor, the Rev. Benjamin F. Hildebrand/AME clergy)*
- Pastor Isaiah Felder (AME clergy)
- Pastor Ralph L. Brown, Jr. (AME clergy)
- Pastor Ralph Martino, Pastor Kenny Shuler, Pastor Keisha Sellers, Evangelist Joseph King, Minister Althea Washington, Minister Sondra Guilley

***We praise God for a great past and a greater future for Live Oak African Methodist Episcopal Church. To God be the glory!***

# **THE HISTORY OF LIVE OAK AME CHURCH – VANCE, SC**

## **Motto**

Going B.I.G. (Believing In God)

## **Mission Statement**

The mission of Live Oak AME Church is to make effective and contagious disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

## **Vision Statement**

Live Oak AME Church is building a vibrant, faith community where people can come as they are, meet Jesus, grow in their faith, and find a place to serve.

## **Core Values**

Radical Hospitality (Gather)  
Passionate Worship (Glorify)  
Intentional Faith Development (Grow)  
Risk-Taking Mission and Service (Go)  
Extravagant Generosity (Give)

**Adopted by the Church Conference  
Monday, January 8, 2018  
The Rev. Fedrick A. Wilson, Pastor**