

# **CHURCH HISTORY**

## **1876 - PRESENT**

In the years following the Civil War, newly emancipated African Americans met under the branches of an oak tree located on the Outlaw Plantation in the Indian Woods Township of Bertie County, NC. There they listened to gospel preaching, shared in the singing of spirituals and enjoyed the warmth of Christian fellowship. That tree stood until 2011 when Hurricane Irene uprooted what was affectionately known as the "Gospel Oak". As early as 1876, a group of worshipers began meeting on the third Sunday of each month in what has been described as "a small upright board building" owned by a local white farmer. This, the congregation's first humble house of worship, was known as the "Indian Woods Chapel". Reverend Abram Mebane served as the congregation's first pastor. Baptist Terpin, Valder Bond, Moses Gilliam, Robbin Smallwood, Cary Speller, and Isaac Bond were listed among the first Deacons and Trustees.

On January 1, 1877, the young congregation purchased the Indian Woods Chapel and a small parcel of land on which the building stood and established itself as the Indian Woods Baptist Church. Reverend Mebane continued to serve until a new minister, Reverend Thaddeus Wilson, was called to pastor the church. Reverend Wilson preached in the Indian Woods Church building and at the Gospel Oak where members of the community continued to gather for worship.

The third pastor to lead the congregation was Reverend J.J. Thompson, a dynamic preacher who was known as "Black Horse"—a nickname he proudly gave himself. Under his leadership, additional land was purchased and the church began its first building program leading to the construction of an eloquent wood frame building with a gallery and a potbelly stove. This building is affectionately remembered by many members of the present day congregation as the "Old Church."

Upon the death of Reverend Thompson, the Reverend John Paige Law served the flock. Reverend Law was a highly respected school teacher, community leader, and Moderator of the local Baptist Association. Upon his resignation in 1935, Reverend U.G. Privott accepted the call to pastor the church, serving until 1939. The Reverend Haywood Ruffin served as pastor from 1939 to 1949.

In 1949, Reverend John White, Sr. accepted the call of the church on an interim basis. Through Reverend White's foresight and guidance, the church called Reverend Charles Melvin Creecy. Under his pastorate, an incredible story of progress unfolds. Reverend Creecy wasn't with the congregation long before he began to stress the need for a larger sanctuary for an ever-increasing membership. In 1955, ground breaking for the new building began. The congregation set out with a "pay as you go" plan for funding the church building. Although progress on the church was slow, Reverend Creecy kept the belief of the people high. In December 1961, the members met for the last time in the old structure and marched into the new edifice.

This marked the beginning of a true test of faith. The interior of the church was yet to be finished, and the congregation found itself in financial debt. The members, led by the Deacon and Trustee boards, continued to press forward until the interior was completed and the mortgages were liquidated. By November 1975, the building was completed and the congregation was debt free. A Note Burning Ceremony was held in celebration of this momentous occasion on November 1, 1975.

In 1980, Reverend Creecy was the first black to be elected to the NC Legislature. He served three consecutive terms to the Fifth District to the NC House of Representatives. He continued to lead the church until his retirement in 1991, at which time he became Pastor Emeritus. He served the congregation faithfully for forty-two years. On February 11, 1996, Dr. Creecy passed from labor to reward when our Heavenly Father called him home to glory.

In October 1992, Reverend Ronald E. Maxwell was called to be the ninth pastor of Indian Woods Missionary Baptist Church. Under his guidance, the church established a Gospel Choir, a Male Chorus, a Mass Choir, an Usher Board, and a Junior Usher Board. In 1994, upon the retirement of the Minister of Music, Mr. John Eley, the Senior Choir changed its name to the "John Eley Inspirational Choir." The Junior Choir grew extensively after 1992 and became known as "The Young Voices of Praise."

The church established the "Johnny Etheridge Laymen's League", which is an outreach for male youth of the community. In addition, the Women's Ministry took root, Deaconess' were ordained and the initial blueprint and drawings of the future expansion were drawn up and presented.

The Jethro Pugh Scholarship Fund was established in January 1996. Jethro, formerly of the Dallas Cowboys, donated \$50,000 to the church for the establishment of a scholarship which would be used to assist students in four-year professional programs meet their financial obligations. He recommended that Deaconess Sarah Bond and Deacon Rascoe Gilliam originally co-chair the committee. As of 2015, more than forty students have benefited from his generosity.

When Reverend Maxwell left in December 1998, the doors were opened for Reverend Ralph D. White. He was installed as the tenth pastor, following in the footsteps of his father, the Reverend John D. White, who acted as interim pastor for Indian Woods in 1949. Several new ministries have been organized including Singles' Ministry, Senior Saints Fellowship, Youth Bible Study, Spirit Dancers, and Praise and Worship teams, as well as the Women's Ministry, the Young Adult Missionaries, and the Family Bible Institute Program.

Rev. White retired in June 2012. Within the three years while we searched for a pastor, Rev. W. Rob Lewis, II served as our Interim. Finally, God sent his servant, Rev. David E. Moore, as the eleventh pastor of Indian Woods Missionary Baptist Church. He was officially installed on December 13, 2015. We continue to be thankful for the leaders we have had and we anticipate continued growth and progress under the leadership of Rev. Moore.