

HISTORY AND VISION OF THE WEST LAUREL STREET CONGREGATION, SAN ANTONIO, TX

Our Legacy

The congregation of the Lord 's people, known as the West Laurel Street church of Christ which now meets at 1747 W. Laurel Street, looks back on 76 years of existence. With great faith, enormous hope and an emancipated spirit set with a vision for future grandness, we give thanks to our Almighty Heavenly Father for the past, present and hope for the future. This congregation had the usual not so auspiciously humble beginning, being situated in a racially segregated community in South Texas 150 miles north of the country of Mexico in the year of 1935. It was the first congregation of the church of Christ among "colored people" in the region.

It began in the home of Brother and Sister Walter Chaney located at 813 Culebra Road, just two blocks from the present location. This group began with approximately ten members which were, Seth McCain and wife, Daniel Mitchell and wife, John Mitchell, Quinton Mitchell, Eddie Cannon and daughter, John T. Ramsey, brother Wilson and sister Etta Adams. When and from where these individuals arrived in San Antonio, or when they obeyed the Gospel of Christ is unknown. In 1938, Lamie Bell and 8 children from Giddings, Texas, placed membership. One of the children, Argolia Jackson is still a faithful member, with her son, John Jackson and granddaughter Letrice. After worshiping at 813 Culebra for almost 4 1/2 years, the brothers acquired a big house on Laurel Street which sat on cinder blocks. The Lord blessed the congregation, the word spread, and "white brethren" from the Beacon Hills church began to assist this congregation. In 1940, they encouraged the popular "colored preacher" R. N. Hogan to conduct a 30 day Gospel Meeting under a tent set up on the corner of Culebra and Zarzamora. Excitement and expectations were high as the church was now receiving national exposure and attention.

Approximately 40 souls were added to the group. Brother James M. Butler, song leader and a gospel preacher who frequently traveled with Brother Hogan, remained to set things in order, and became the congregation's first full-time located preacher. The congregation appointed trustees, became incorporated, and purchased land for \$300 dollars in October 1940. In 1945, additional land was purchased for \$4,000 dollars on which the church building now stands. James Butler served for three years, followed by Emerson Powers who served five years, after which Alonzo N. Patterson served twice, 1948 - 1955; 1958 - 1964, for a total of 13 years. During his ministry, this spiritually energized group of Christians out grew the old facility and a new one was constructed in 1958, part of which stands today. Under the energetic leadership of A.N. Patterson, an evangelistic outreach surged as never before. Following are the names of several men who became preachers through his leadership: A.J. Adams, Howard Adams, L. J. Brannon, Clyde Muse, Frank Richard's son and others. A. N. Patterson passed away in 1964.

The time was right for other congregations among the "colored brethren" to begin. In 1950, the Spriggs- dale /Coliseum Park congregation was established when several members who resided on the East side of the city started meeting together with Alvin Davis, Abraham Davis and O. Burnley. (It is now the Dellcrest Church of Christ on South W.W. White Blvd.) C. F. Richardson began serving as the preacher. Later, A. J. Adams, Abraham Davis and others, through encouragement from Laurel Street, began working in New Braunsfels, Seguin,

Kingsbury, Gonzales and Luling. These were the days of Gospel Tent Meetings. Popular preachers from the brotherhood would preach for two to four weeks which led many to Christ, evangelizing the church of Christ among both the colored and white. In 1963, four families moved to Seguin and established the Harper Street congregation. Abraham Davis, with other families, settled in New Braunfels where he served as minister for 26 years. In the Fall of 1965, four more families left Laurel Street and established the second church of Christ among the “coloreds” on the Eastside and became known as the East Commerce congregation. After a few years of adjustments, this church met at 2706 E. Commerce, and was served by Namon Cunningham from Laurel Street for approximately 15 years. Later, Orece Greer from Laurel Street served as minister from 1994 until 2005.

In 1965, Eugene Lee, nationally known Gospel preacher became the minister. Under his two year leadership, he expanded and renovated the building as it stands in 2010. Windows were closed up, air-conditioners and upstairs classrooms were added. Many strong hands and faithful members enabled the church to grow and withstand the many storms that came with the many blessings. It was during this period that Laurel Street achieved its largest sustained weekly attendance.

Following Eugene Lee, several ministers have graced the pulpit at West Laurel Street, including Alvertice Bowdre, Jr., 1966 -1970, Lloyd Nash, 1971 -1 983, Robert Smith, 1984 -1998, Joseph C. Walsh, Jr. 1999 – 2008, Dwight B. Jones, 2008 -2010. Serving as Interim Ministers during periods of transition from minister to minister, were Jessie Sams, A. J. Adams, John Mitchell, Eddie Cannon, Louis Blair, L. J. Brannon, Asberry Mitchell and George Kelly. During the leadership of Lloyd Nash, the church ordained two elders, Robert Woodard and James Scott. Fredrick Starks was appointed youth minister in 1997 by Robert Smith. Starks and his family moved to the Fort Sam Houston congregation in 2007. He was appointed the minister of Fort Sam in 2009.

The West Laurel Street congregation consist of many dedicated families who have withstood the tests of time to bridge the past with the present, giving us a legacy for which to dedicate our future. Sister Argolia Jackson celebrated 67 years at Laurel Street in 2010. Others who have been at Laurel Street for over 50 years are: Jessie Woodard , Elvia Taylor, James and Barbara Haley.

In 1999, under the leadership of Joseph C. Walsh, Jr., another nationally known evangelist, having served congregations in California, Arizona, and Florida, conducted Gospel Meetings in several states and in several foreign countries in the Caribbean, Laurel Street continues its upward journey. He began serving the congregation with Discipleship Training, Personal Evangelism, Leadership and Teachers Workshops, and a Marriage Seminar. He initiated new budget controls in the finance department and instituted a program called L. I. F. E. Group (Zone) Program. (L-love, I-involvement, F-fellowship, E-evangelism) The congregation was divided into four geographical areas to facilitate small group meetings, visitation and leadership training for the LIFE Group leaders. A new eight-room parsonage was purchased in 2001 to house present and future ministers, replacing the 60 year old parsonage on the church property. Each year a Program of Work Book was published detailing all the activities of the congregation for the entire year. Included in this book is an updated membership directory. He encouraged the

West Laurel Street congregation to boldly set forth a Ten Year Community Outreach, Land Acquisition and Rebuilding Program, which was started in 2002.

Our Vision for the Future

The Ten Year Plan was designed for three stages of development, immediate, short-range (3-5 years) and long-range (5-10 years). As of January 2005, the immediate goal had been reached, which was to give the church building better visibility from Culebra Ave. a main thoroughfare as opposed to Laurel Street which is a back street. Property at 942 and 950 Culebra was purchased, a drive thru from Culebra Ave. to the church facility on Laurel Street was constructed, a changeable message board on Culebra Ave. was erected with a wrought iron fence across both lots which was completed. In 2006, property at 938 Culebra was purchased. In 2008, property at 934 Culebra was also purchased. The congregation, for most of its 70 years, existed hidden from view by most, can now be viewed by thousands each day as they walk and drive on Culebra Ave.

The Second Phase, which was to build a multi-purpose (Family Life Center) building was discontinued when the property at 938 and 934 Culebra became available and was purchased.

The Third Phase. With newly acquired land, the third phase, the long-range development, which was to build a 350 seat worship center was began. The present building will be renovated to become a Community -Fellowship –Family and Educational Center. While in 2010 architectural and engineering plans were near completion; property at 930 Culebra Ave. was purchased. As of January 2011, construction bids will be in order

Included in this Vision for the Future was the appointing of a Spanish speaking minister to lead Laurel Street in its soul-saving outreach to the Spanish-Latino community which surrounds the church facility. Also, the In-House Edification and Visitation L.I.F.E. Group development is being strengthen, improvement of our Bible School Department with continued Bible School Teacher Training Series, and a strong Personal Evangelism Program will determine the erecting of our physical projects.

In 2005, initiating the Community Outreach segment, Dwight Barron Jones answered the call for the Spanish speaking Bi-lingual outreach. He, his wife and two children moved to San Antonio from Atlanta, Georgia in 2007, to become the lead evangelist replacing Joseph Walsh, Jr. He was ordained in 2008, to fulfill the Vision of evangelizing our Latino Outreach. The congregation was given new life as his experience in the Spanish speaking community, both nationally and internationally and the preaching of the Gospel of Christ was welcomed at Laurel Street. He started a weekly English to Spanish speaking class, and a Sunday morning Bible Class for Spanish speakers. In 2009, the Sunday AM worship was translated into Spanish by an interpreter. Spiritual and numerical growth soared as some 42 souls from the Latino community were baptized into Christ or placed membership at Laurel Street. This came largely through his ability to preach and to lead both in English and in Spanish. He also had a heart of evangelism as he traveled in preaching to smaller congregations in Mexico.

Apart from its established missionary outreach, both foreign and local, support of the National Crusade for Christ and community outreach; the congregation is dedicated to continue to seek the lost and edify the saints as it has during its 76 years of existence. A World Wide Web Page

was begun to show the world the soul and purpose of the saints that meet at the West Laurel Street church of Christ. This is found at <http://www.laurelstreetchurcoc.com> and is linked to churches of Christ web sites throughout the country. The inquirer can receive hours of Bible Study through hundreds of articles on the Church of Christ and the Christian faith. After accessing the web site, click on Resources for a link to the Interactive Bible and stay awhile. During worship, all sermons are recorded on CD and cassette. Also, announcements, worship assignments, songs and Scriptures are projected on a screen through overhead video projection system.

We, at Laurel Street, have come this far by Faith, Leaning on the Lord and now stand at the crossroads of our legacy. After 76years, the Church of Christ which meets at 1747 W. Laurel Street is still attempting to be a full service congregation which promotes the growth of the whole man into the full stature of Jesus Christ. Our Yearly Program of Work allows our Youth to grow up in Christ through Sunday School classes, Children Worship, Bible Bowl activities, Bible Camp and other area youth programs. Classes and counseling for Married Couples, outreach to Singles and ministry to Seniors and the Sick and Shut-in promotes a healthy in-house spiritual family. Our Personal Evangelism outreach is designed to lead any sincere searcher for truth through the Scriptures via congregational Worship, Home Bible Studies and Benevolence. We will always hold to the Biblical doctrine of One Lord, One Faith and One Baptism. In spite of several ministerial changes, and the influx of false doctrines within the church community, Laurel Street has stood firm on the foundation of New Testament Scripture. The West Laurel Street Church of Christ continues on the shoulders and in the hearts and prayers of dozens of unnamed Christians in this historical presentation, who worked and are working diligently with each other not to receive the glory, but to please God our Father and Jesus Christ our Savior. We will continue to allow the Holy Spirit to guide us in the footsteps of the Faith, that was "once delivered to the saints" that we might hear the eternal words, "Well Done My Good and Faithful Servants, Enter into The Joy Prepared for You Before the Foundation of the World," and that will make it all worthwhile. Our Motto: "There Are No Strangers At Laurel Street, Only Friends That Had Not Met," is more than a maxim adopted as expressing a guiding principle, but is a sincere expression from the heart of a dedicated group of God's Children.

In July of 2010, Dwight B. Jones resigned as evangelist at West Laurel Street. Joseph C. Walsh, Jr. was asked to become Interim Minister until a replacement was appointed.

On May 1, 2011, Courtney R. Caruthers of Elyria, Ohio was appointed the ministering evangelist. Brother Caruthers with his wife and three teen-age daughters brings to Laurel Street a new dimension of hope and ministry outreach. He is well known and respected across our brotherhood having served Churches of Christ from California to the Carolinas. Brother Caruthers has presented a Five Year Vision for Laurel Street. With God's Blessing upon him and the members at Laurel Street; we are sure that our Legacy will continue to flourish. In an elaborate ceremony before 200 hundred members and singers from several congregations; the Passing of the Torch to Brother Caruthers for a new beginning was held at Laurel Street on August 7, 2011.

Humbly submitted, *Joseph C. Walsh Jr., Minister Emeritus August 2011*

This historical legacy is submitted with approximate dates, time and events with mental recall of persons associated with these occurrences. Apologies are in order if there were omissions of names in the compilation of the foregone history or any other unintentional errors.