

From “The Bottoms” to the Top! First G Still Standing, Still Strong! Our History

In May 1910 a small band of courageous believers, some mere babes in Christ, who could see a need for a greater Christian witness in the “Bottoms” of Louisville, stepped out in faith and organized the Gethsemane Baptist Church. Following a revival, these servants called the evangelist Rev. Rufus Hayes Hughes to lead them in this new venture. Leaving an already established congregation, Rev. Hughes faithfully led this congregation for the next 45 years. In 1955 Pastor Hughes and wife Sarah both departed for their heavenly reward and Gethsemane in the next year marched forward with its second leader Rev. J. C. Harris. Although serving only a few years (6 yrs.) followed by an unexpected passing, Rev. Harris was instrumental in getting the congregation to see beyond its faithful beginnings toward further expansion and growth. The effort to plan for expansion led to a name change to First Gethsemane and official incorporation.



In 1963 the Rev. Herschel Martin assumed leadership. His ministry of 16 years is characterized by the relocation and construction of a new church facility in 1972 on Algonquin Parkway. A \$300,000 project was a monumental feat for these faithful believers in the early 1970's. Their determination to build a new facility rather than acquiring one of several older church buildings, and not departing from the inner city is most notable and commendable. Rev. Martin's retirement in 1979 marked another major shift in the ministry focus and emphasis for this nearly 70-year-old Christian fellowship.

In 1980 Rev. Walter Malone, Jr. assumed the role as 4th Senior Pastor. His emphasis on greater Christian stewardship and a more comprehensive ministry lead to some challenges to change and expand the vision for the ministry.

The seeds of expansion were sown with the realization that more property would be required to prepare for ministry to a new generation. Rev. Malone suddenly resigned in March of 1983 and later organized the Canaan Baptist Church (Now Canaan Christian Church) with 97 persons leaving First Gethsemane in search of a different vision and direction.

In March 1984, Dr. T. Vaughn Walker assumed the leadership as the 5th Senior Pastor. During 35 years under Dr. Walker's leadership, First Gethsemane was blessed to reach many new disciples; construct a family development center, office, and educational wing in 1994; acquisition of several pieces of property along the former Herr Ave (now First Gethsemane Avenue) including the McCord Property and truck terminal building; renovation of what is now the 1st "G" CFD West complex in 2005, which helps connect the church and community; added full-time and part-time ministry staff; and several new ministries. During Dr. Walker's tenure, several ministers were licensed and ordained including our first women clergy in 1995, and we also began to call our church First G. During the next 35 years First Gethsemane moved to a full-service, seven-day-a-week ministry. For several years, the Back-To-School Give-away and

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Health Fairs provided assistance to thousands of families in our community and demonstrated our commitment to Christ, the community, and to the last, the least, and the often left out.

In September of 2018, Dr. Walker became ill and found it necessary to take some time off from the pulpit. Rev. Keith A. Bush, Sr. was named Minister-in-Charge during his time away. On January 26, 2019, Dr. T. Vaughn Walker transitioned home to be with the Lord. A historical homegoing service was held for him at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Immediately following, the church began a 30-day time of prayer and fasting in honor of Pastor Walker. The name “CFD West” was changed to the Dr. T. Vaughn Walker Center for Family Development to further show appreciation for Dr. Walker and to his family.

On February 17, 2019, Rev. Keith A. Bush, Sr. was voted Interim Pastor of First Gethsemane Baptist Church. And then the search began for our new pastor, knowing that God had already appointed him.

After searching for a pastor in the midst of a pandemic, the Pastoral Search Committee unanimously recommended to the congregation that Rev. Dr. Joshua A. Harris Sr. be the next pastor of First Gethsemane. Ninety-six percent of the congregation voted to accept the Search Committee’s recommendation and Dr. Harris became the 6th pastor of First Gethsemane.

On November 7, 2020, Rev. Dr. Joshua A. Harris Sr. officially assumed pastoral leadership of First Gethsemane. Although Dr. Harris has been with First Gethsemane for only 6 months, these noteworthy achievements and additions have taken place.

- A new budget review process has been adopted and implemented
- First Gethsemane served as both a COVID-19 testing and vaccination site.
- Sweet Hour of Prayer Service has been added to the weekly schedule
- New Members Orientation has been restructured with the 1st G Pathways Curriculum and the “Welcome Weekend” experience.
- A mobile congregational visitation ministry has been established, 1st G S.O.U.L. (Sharing Our Unconditional Love) Train
- On Easter Sunday 2021 after being closed for more than a year, the church was able to reopen its doors for Sunday morning worship

A new vision statement as well as a new mantra has been added to the church, “Love God. Love People. Period.”

Throughout the history of First Gethsemane Baptist Church, God has proven faithful! May He continue to lead and direct us as we move, in His name, into a new era. Amen!