The History of the Alameda Christian Church

(1940-2016)

“Life is made from volume three, the past, the present, and the yet to be; the past we've read and laid away; the present we’re reading day by day; the last and the best is yet to be; it’s laid away in Heaven, and God has the Key.”

On April 3, 1940, a small number of former members of Gay Street Christian Church met with the late Elder Rufus Charles Maloy (1894-1977) in the home of Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Simmons located at 2503 Alameda Street for the purpose of organizing a new church congregation. This was during a time when segregation in Nashville was the norm, and the pending Capitol Hill Re-development Plan would negatively affect Gay Street and the surrounding areas through gentrification. After prayer and consultation, “ALAMEDA STREET CHRISTIAN CHURCH” was organized. Even though many names were recommended, Alameda Street Christian Church was the name selected, primary due to its location. Elder Maloy was called to lead the new congregation on the third Sunday in April. In spite of being blind, he had graduated from the Tennessee School for the Blind, attended Knoxville College, and had been ordained by Elder Preston Taylor in 1917. He had ministered to other churches and had pastored Gay Street Christian Church from 1923 to 1939. His first sermon preached as Alameda’s pastor was “Division Is Condemned: Unity”, scriptures Proverb 6:19 and I Corinthians 3:1-4. According to church records, the new congregation started with thirty-three charter members. Their names in alphabetical order are as follows:

Anderson, Howard  
Coleman, Gazella  
Grant, Laura  
Howland, Anna  
Lyons, Granville II  
McCall, C.  
Moore, Mary  
Simmons, J. W.  
Young, Marjorie  
Battle, Johnnie  
Endsley, L.  
Harris, Dallas  
Jackson, Annette  
Lyons, Kitty  
McKissack, Dillard  
Russell, Sarah  
Simmons, Mattie  
Carroll, John  
Ewing, Chester  
Harris, Lena  
Johnson, Bro. C.P.  
Lyons, Mable  
McKissack, Mary  
Saxton, Marjorie  
Thompson, Mary  
Carroll, Mattie  
Gantt, Gladys  
Hickman, Tillie  
Kennedy, C.  
Maloy, Robbie  
Mclemore, Mary  
Simmons, Doris  
Williams, Serman

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1 In November 1993, Alameda Street Christian Church in anticipation of relocating to 4006 Ashland City Highway, the congregation voted in a congregational meeting to rename the congregation Alameda Christian Church.  
For the first few years of the congregation’s existence, Mr. and Mrs. J.W. Simmons opened their home for Alameda Street Christian Church to worship in until God blessed the congregation to purchase property at 2422 Alameda Street from Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Holmes, Jr. A stone constructed facility was erected on the Alameda Street site in 1950 at the cost of $12,000.00.

Even though a legal battle was waged against it, in 1968, the government began routing I-40 eastward through the middle of a predominantly African American community into downtown, including cutting off Alameda Street to a continual flow of traffic.

In 1969, a one story education building was added to the church facility which was then called the “Fellowship Hall,” at a cost of $13,000. In 1975, Elder Maloy retired after nearly sixty years of service in ministry due to declining health.

Following Elder Maloy’s retirement, the Reverend Alvin Brown pastored Alameda and through his leadership, Alameda’s “Bus Ministry” was anchored. Later, the Reverend Brown resigned as pastor to continue his education at American Baptist Theological Seminary. The Reverend Janiro Hawkins then stepped in and assisted as leader and minister along with the abled assistance of Deacon Robert Drummond.

In March of 1977, Elder Maloy died “went to be with the Lord.” Certainly, this would have been a challenging time for the Alameda congregation. Under Elder Maloy’s leadership, the vision for a new congregation was realized, a temporary meeting location was acquired, land was obtained and a new building was constructed then expanded, and over three hundred converts were baptized.

In 1977, the Elder Howard Bruce Bowser (1932-1985) of Alabama was elected pastor of Alameda. In the Interim, regular church services were held under the leadership of the deacons headed by Deacon Robert Drummond. During Elder Bowser’s three year leadership the “Bus Ministry” continued and the adjacent lot that was used for parking was purchased. Elder Browser was highly concerned about school children receiving free tutorial lessons throughout the community. Therefore, the tutorial program began under his leadership and continued through 1993. Alameda’s athletic team was also started under Elder Browser. In June of 1980, Elder Bowser left Alameda and Community Christian Church was formed under his leadership. During this period guest ministers, including the Reverend Janiro Hawkins ministered to the congregation along with assistance of the deacons.

The members of Alameda did not rush into getting another pastor. Through prayer, meditation and the grace of God, Elder Norman Reed, a member of Second Christian (since childhood) in Indianapolis, Indiana was called as pastor of Alameda in January 1981. Even though this was his first pastorate, before becoming to Alameda Elder Reed had obtained a Doctor of Pharmacy degree from Purdue University, and had years of experience as a pharmacist. According to Pastor Reed, after graduating with a Master of Divinity Degree from Christian Theological Seminary, Robert Hayes People and Lorenzo
Evans told him that he should consider going to Nashville, Tennessee to pastor Alameda Street Christian Church. Sharing this prayerful decision with him were his wife, May, and their two children. Elder Reed was installed on July 26, 1981. Dr. T. Garrott Benjamin, Jr., pastor of Second Christian Church^3 Indianapolis, Indiana preached the installation service.

Early in his ministry Pastor Reed introduced many spiritual activities for the first time to Alameda including Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, detailed Bible study acknowledging how to use references and search the scriptures, and baby dedications. Cheerleaders were also formed under Elder Reed to further enhance Alameda’s athletic team.

Like Pastor Reed explained in a Board of Church Extension publication, “Alameda found itself boxed in with no place to expand, but with a vision for ministry beyond what the facilities allowed. We tried but we just didn’t have adequate room for church school and vacation Bible school. . . Our weekday tutorial program for young people was limited to 30 because there was no room for what was needed. We explored buying land next to us but no property was available, building codes were prohibitive and an interstate cut us off from our people.”

In 1988, the congregation purchased 3.75 acres of land at 4006 Ashland City Highway from Mr. James and Mrs. Frances Utley, and Mr. Ivan Glenn Jr. for a total price of $40,500. In anticipation of the relocation, the congregation voted in a congregational meeting on November 7, 1993 to rename the congregation Alameda Christian Church.

The building located at 2422 Alameda Street, which serviced the congregation for forty-three years, was sold to Abundant Life Apostolic Church in November of 1993 for $78,800. Abundant Life moved into the building January 1, 1994. Alameda worshipped at the Wharton Middle School located at 1625 D. B. Todd Boulevard from January 1994 until July 9, 1995.

The building of a new facility was challenging to say the least. The initial estimated cost and timing of the facility was $374,000 with a targeted completion of six months, however, the final project took 20 months to complete at a cost of approximately $550,000, with some items remaining unfinished. Sadly during the planning and construction phases, there were unexpected illnesses and deaths but the Lord saw the congregation through these challenges.

The congregation moved into the new edifice and celebrated their first worship service on July 16, 1995. The dedication service was held that afternoon at 4:00 pm with the Reverend Dr. John R. Foulkes, Associated General.

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^3 Second Christian Church was renamed Light of the World Christian Church in 1982.
Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and Administrative Secretary of the National Convocation, preaching the dedicatory sermon. Funding for the new building was provided by loan from the Board of Church Extension with the Reverend Dr. Raymond E. Brown and Dr. Harold Watkins serving as consultants.

Under Pastor Reed, Alameda ordained its first lay elder, improved the leadership role of women in ministry, put more focus on a critical analysis of scripture, and increased member participation in local, regional and national church ministries. The vision for a facility was realized, land was obtained, a temporary meeting location was acquired, and a new building was constructed. While still pastoring Alameda, and working as a part-time pharmacist, in Dec 1997, Elder Reed was appointed manager of the historic Greenwood Cemetery. In 2001, the first Alameda Christian Church college scholarship was awarded. In October 2004, after 24 years of service Pastor Norman Reed resigned effective December 31.

Following Pastor Reed, the Reverend Perry D. Wiggins III began his service as interim pastor, after serving as an elder of Alameda Christian Church since 1995. Prior to coming to Alameda, the Reverend Wiggins had attended Oberlin College in Oberlin, OH, and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN. He had received his BA degree in theology from American Baptist College, Nashville TN, and attended Vanderbilt University Divinity School for two years. The Reverend Wiggins had pastored Bentley Street Christian Church (DOC), Knoxville, TN (1986-1990) and Gay-Lea Christian Church (DOC), Nashville, TN (1990-1994). Alameda elected the Reverend Wiggins as Senior Pastor in November of 2005. To date under Pastor Wiggins’ leadership, a Church Mission Statement was adopted, Alameda website www.alamedacc.org was started, Young Adult/Youth Ministry re-birthed, Youth church started, refinancing of the church mortgage allowing for much needed renovations and the completion of some unfinished building construction items. As of 2013, the church edifice was appraised at 1 million dollars. The Mobile Food Pantry, the Community Food Garden, and praise/worship in the park, and the Disciples Men outreach with some of the residents of the Nashville Union Rescue Mission, speak to the hunger needs of the community and seek to literally answer Jesus’ command, “Feed my sheep.”

During 2015 Alameda Christian Church celebrated its 75th Anniversary with numerous events - theme “75 Glorious Years of Service.” A formal celebration was held on the weekend of April 25th and 26th, including a banquet on Saturday at the World Baptist Center with the Rev. Dr. Judy Cummings as the speaker. On Sunday the speaker for the morning service was Minister Granville “Sonny” Lyons III, followed by the afternoon speaker, former pastor, the Rev. Dr. Norman Reed. Two former ministers were also in attendance, the Rev. Alvin Brown, and Pastor Janiro Hawkins.

To better address social justice issues, in June of 2015 Alameda Christian Church hosted a Metro Council District 2 Candidates Forum with NOAH (Nashville Organized for Action and Hope), and in August of 2015 Alameda Christian Church became an active dues-paying member of NOAH.

Greenwood Cemetery of Nashville Tennessee is owned and operated by the National Christian Missionary Convention of The Christian Church (Disciple of Christ).
Many unnamed brothers and sisters contributed to ministry at Alameda Christian Church since 1940. Memories still glow in expressing the appreciation for their service to the Lord, including our long-standing auxiliaries and organizations. We thank God for another year of service as Alameda Christian Church is Still Shining in Christ. Note: A number of individuals significantly contributed to or completed the written text of this history of Alameda Christian Church.  

In Memory

This year’s historical update for Alameda Christian Church was completed in memory of Deacon Emeritus “Mother” Annette Smith Jackson who went to be with the Lord on April 7th 2016. Like the Apostle Paul, Sister Jackson “fought the good fight, finished her race, and kept the faith.” Her memory will continue to encourage us to “STAY WITH THE LORD CHILDREN” and for us to realize that the Lord has been good to us, so we have “NO RIGHT TO GRUMBLE.”

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