

# *A Brief History Of Gordon Memorial United Methodist Church*



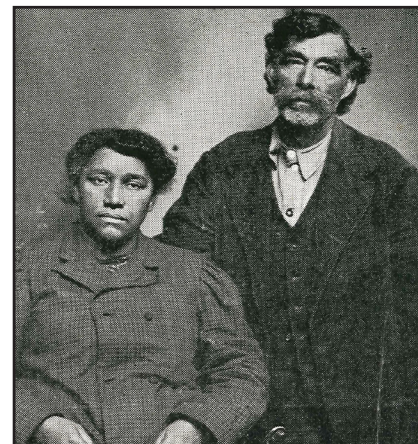
## **1876 to 1899**

The history of Gordon Memorial United Methodist Church is rooted in the Methodist Episcopal Church North and in the work of the Freedman's Aid Society.

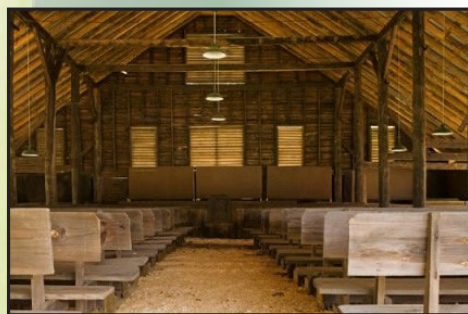
The Methodist Episcopal Church North began its missionary work in Nashville, Tennessee in 1865. Under the Methodist Episcopal Church umbrella, a group ministers and laymen organized the Freedman's Aid Society in 1866 to consider the relief and education of the Freedmen. Unlike many other Black churches of that time period, Gordon Memorial began and remained in the Methodist Episcopal Church North.

In the year of Gordon's founding (1876), a small group of devout worshipers began meeting in the home of *Brother John and Sister Belle Rouse*. They had prayer service and Sunday school in this Christian home for nine years, until their numbers had grown so large that a new place of worship was needed.

Before agreeing on the purchase of land for an established church, the congregation met first in a rented house, then at Gordon's Hall, which was located on the current site of Meharry Medical College.



*Belle and John Rouse*

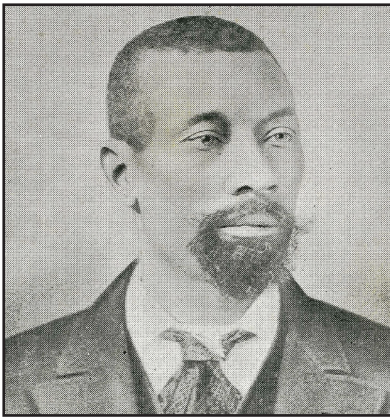


*Typical Brush Arbor Structure*

Finally, five members—Belle Rouse, Nancy Martin, Viney Lewis, John L. Lewis and John Rouse—banded together to raise money for the purchase of a church lot. The property they bought was no more than a *brush harbor* covered with an earthen floor overlaid with sawdust. It cost them \$125.00 and was located across the street from the current Gordon Memorial UMC historic building.

The **Reverend Dave Gordon** (1876 - 1915), was appointed as the first Pastor. Under his leadership, the first frame church was built, dedicated, and named Gordon Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church in his honor. The membership grew to 171, and the church was recognized in the Tennessee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church.





*Reverend Dave Gordon*

(1913 -1923), several new ministries, including the Busy Bee Club, Ladies Guild, Old St. Treasury, and the Junior Choir, were formed. During Rev. Satterfield's tenure, the first brick church was built.

Gordon Memorial became part of the West End & Brierville Circuit and the various pastors who followed Rev. Gordon continued to faithfully establish the church in the community.

The growth of the membership of Gordon Chapel was such that under the **Reverend Samuel Hartsfield** (1898 – 1902), a larger frame church was built; the first choir and Ladies Aid Society were formed, and the first cornerstone was laid. A fire destroyed this church structure but it was rebuilt.

### 1900 to 1950

Seven ministers served Gordon Chapel for brief periods between 1903 and 1912 and the congregation continued to grow.

Under the **Reverend J. W. Satterfield**,



*The 4th church building to house Gordon Chapel*

Gordon Chapel's 14th pastor, The **Reverend Henry Payton Gordon**, served for 23 years, (1923 – 1946).

During this period, the membership increased from 300 to 500. A parsonage was built in 1925 at a cost of \$5,000. The congregation then hired McKissack Brothers as architects and builders and constructed our now historic building at a cost of \$44,000.

In 1929, plans were made for Gordon Chapel's first Homecoming celebration and the church was given a new name—Gordon Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church.



*Rev. Henry Payton Gordon (center), pictured with members of the tract society*

When the United Conference met in Kansas City on April 26, 1939, Gordon Memorial experienced another name change. With the union of The Methodist Episcopal Church, The Methodist Episcopal Church South and The Methodist Protestant Church in May 1939, Gordon Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church became Gordon Memorial Methodist Church.

In 1946, the **Reverend H. M. White** became the pastor and he served for Gordon Memorial for eleven years. Gordon Memorial's first female associate minister, the Reverend Mary Bragg, was appointed under Rev. White. The congregation grew to 600 members, a pipe organ was installed in 1950, and all clubs were merged into the Women's Society of Christian Service/Wesleyan Service Guild, Youth Fellowship, and Methodist Men.



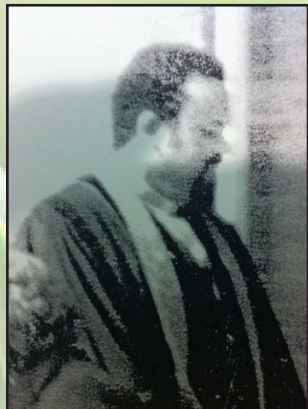
*Front row: Mrs. Mary Bragg (left), and Rev. H. P. Gordon (center)*

## 1951 - 1999

The **Reverend Theodore R. Dunlap** succeeded Rev. White in 1957. Rev. Dunlap is credited with nurturing greater cohesiveness in the membership, introducing Lenten self-denial folders, and promoting the Methodist Sunday Evening Fellowship.

The **Reverend I. R. Sumner** succeeded Reverend Dunlap in 1959 and the introduction of a Sunday worship service from the pulpit over radio station WVOL was one of the highlights of his tenure.

Under The **Reverend Dan Williams**, (1963 – 1967), the membership increased to 800. Rev. Williams strengthened the Sunday school and provided a dynamic spiritual uplift and outreach for Gordon Memorial.



Gordon Memorial's 20th pastor, the **Reverend Dogan Williams**, (1967 – 1982), shepherded the church through another historical change. A new church union in 1968 brought The Evangelical United Brethren Church into the fold and Gordon Memorial Methodist Church became Gordon Memorial United Methodist Church.

For 15 years, the ministry of the church prospered under the leadership of the Reverend Dr. Dogan Williams, and numerous improvements were made to the church building and facilities. In 1975, Gordon Memorial hosted the Tennessee Annual Conference.

The **Reverend Elijah E. McGee** (1982 – 1990), Gordon Memorial's 21st pastor, initiated a progressive spiritual revival. Rev. McGee prioritized stewardship, evangelism and social outreach. At an installation service, on Sunday, January 9, 1983, the Reverend John G. Corry installed all

new officers working directly under the Administration Board and Council on Ministries. They comprised 14 committees, five special secretaries, lay leaders, and trustees.

Refurbishment of the church's facilities continued as the members, led by trustee board chairperson, Mr. Andrew Manlove, worked on the church basement, kitchen fellowship hall and parsonage. Reverend McGee was promoted to District Superintendent in 1990 and moved to Hendersonville, Tennessee.



*Reverend Janet Wolf*

The **Reverend Donald Jenkins** succeeded Rev. McGee as pastor of Gordon Memorial UMC and the congregation welcomed the Reverend Janet Wolf as its full-time associate pastor. This was significant in that it was the first appointment of a white minister to a black church in the Tennessee Conference.

Under Rev. Jenkins, the church's membership roll and financial records were computerized. Reverend Jenkins instituted a committee to develop a Mission Statement for the church as well as a long-range planning committee to guide the future development of the church that was headed by Mrs. Angella Current-Felder and Mr. George I. Moorman.



*Reverend and Mrs. Donald Jenkins  
and their daughter, Brittany Marie*





The **Reverend Paul Perkins** of Greensboro, NC was appointed as pastor in July 1993 and served Gordon Memorial for one year.

The **Reverend Clarence A. Smith, Jr.** (1994 – 1999), succeeded Rev. Perkins. He too was from the North Carolina Conference. Rev. Smith was a teaching minister and often expressed his messages dramatically. He was also an accomplished musician. He came to Gordon Memorial with the dream of building a “cathedral.” This led to the formation of the Building and Revitalization Committee, with Mrs. Angella Current-Felder and Mr. George Moorman as co-chairpersons.

The trustee board, under the leadership of Dr. William C. Bowen, Sr., oversaw projects such as the installation of a new roof and the purchase of additional parcels of land on Herman Street, helping to pave the way for expansion of the church campus.

In 1999, Gordon Memorial welcomed a former member, **Reverend Daniel Hayes, Sr.**, as its pastor. Rev. Hayes began church-wide Bible study and worked closely with the Building and Revitalization Committee in bringing the church’s physical expansion plans to fruition.

The church reviewed and adopted a financing plan of \$2.5 million, proposed by its Finance Committee and received Tennessee Conference approval for the building project. Bids were sought and a contractor was selected. On April 29, 2001—during Gordon Memorial’s 125th year of existence—the congregation broke ground for the construction of a new building.

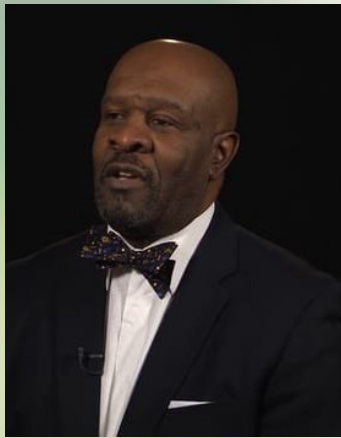


On December 1, 2003, Bishop William W. Morris consecrated the new sanctuary with seating for 850 worshippers, a baptistery, a 75-seat choir loft, and spacious Narthex. Other new facilities included a Ladies Lounge, multipurpose/ rehearsal hall, chapel, serving kitchen, nursery and administrative offices.

The renovation of the historic building followed. Mr. Victor Tyler oversaw this project on behalf of the church and obtained cash donations to cover 80% of the cost of the renovation. When the project was completed in 2008, it provided additional classroom space, a multi-use room designated for the United Methodist Men, a 300+ seat fellowship hall as well as an industrial kitchen, serving kitchen and conference room.

In December 2010, Rev. Hayes accepted a new appointment in the Springfield Charge. Bishop William W. Morris, a retired Bishop of the Alabama & Tennessee conferences was assigned as the interim pastor of Gordon Memorial United Methodist Church. He re-birthed the Summer Enrichment program, centralized the meeting dates of the church, implemented a plan to stabilize the churches finances, worked hand and hand with the ministries and the United Methodist Men in procuring \$35,000.00 in cash for the purchase of a 26-passenger bus.

In June 2011, the Tennessee Annual Conference named the **Reverend Dr. Vance P. Ross** (2011 – 2015) as pastor of Gordon Memorial United Methodist Church.



Rev. Ross challenged the membership to be disciples for Jesus and to be “about bringing people to Jesus Christ”. He utilized his strong connections across the denomination to cultivate partnerships and seek resources for ministry to the wider community around Gordon Memorial. Under his leadership, Gordon Memorial became a charter church in the “Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century” (SBC21) launching of the “Collaborative Coaching Network” (CCN) which sought to nurture vital, community-oriented Black churches.

The 2011 Homecoming celebration was a monumental occasion. Gordon was blessed with the dynamic preaching of two of its former sons, The Reverend Alvin Goodwin and Rev. Dr. Kenneth Robinson. The general theme was “....a mind to work”, Nehemiah 4:6, with powerful messages of

commitment, dedication and long suffering.



*Gordon Ministerial Staff: Keith Caldwell, Jana Hall, Karasheila Jackson, Dr. Sheila Peters & Rena Knight, Vernon Acklin, Natasha McGee & Pastor Ross*

Gordon Ministerial Staff; Keith Caldwell, Jana Hall, Karasheila Jackson, Dr. Sheila Peters & Rena Knight, Vernon Acklin, Natasha McGee & Pastor Ross

Gordon forged forward with committed and “by example leadership” from the late Mrs. Opal Ransom, Lay Leader of Gordon Memorial and the Tennessee Conference; Mr. Julius Witherspoon, Church Council Chair, Mrs. Velma Jenkins, Church Council Secretary, Mrs. Zelma Waller, Pastor-Parrish Relations Committee Chair, Mrs. Barbara Thomas, Director of Music, Mr. Donald Fields, Church Treasurer, Ms. Kathy Booker, Finance chair, and Mrs. Tabatha Wilson-Munday, 2012 Homecoming Chair.

Mr. Matthew Jobe spearheaded the revitalization of the former “Love in Action”, now renamed “Hands of Hope” ministry. Fellow church leaders, Mr. Robert Bostick and Mr. Kenneth Davis, United Methodist Men’s President and Vice President; Ms. Sheila Suddeth, United Methodist Women’s President and Church Secretary, officers and ministry leaders, moved into 2012 with commitment and fortitude.

The church continued to be in the forefront of the community, “Changing the Game” with a vibrant Summer Enrichment Program, led by Ms. Teressa Hill and Vernon Jordan followed by an extremely well attended “Vacation Bible School”, led by Mrs. Linda G. Fair and Mrs. Jackie Garrett. The Christian Education Department, with the support of the United Methodist Women and Men’s ministries, sponsored a neighborhood wide “Back to School Community Day”, where students were provided school supplies, back-packs and school uniform



*Holy Ghost Party at Pentecost Service*



clothing. This event culminated with a post Sunday Worship service “Back to School Fashion Show Program” that featured Public and Private School Educators along with more free school supplies.

Gordon was blessed with the appointment of our first Associate Pastor in almost 25 years with the appointment of Rev. James Hamilton of the Memphis Conference in March 2013. The appointment was reaffirmed by the Tennessee Annual Conference in June 2013.

Rev. Hamilton added contributed greatly to our growing church until his appointment in June 2014, as the Senior Pastor of Friendship United Methodist Church in Millington, TN



*Pastor Ross & Ministerial Staff administering Baptism*

In celebrating 137 years of ministry, Gordon Memorial United Methodist Church blessed with powerful sermons from Bishop Ernest S. Lyght (Northeastern Jurisdiction) and Rev. Dr. Fred Allen (National Director SBC 21). Both leaders challenged and inspired the congregation around the Homecoming theme of “*Changing the Game: God’s New Thing through Us*”.



*“Let’s Talk Forum”*

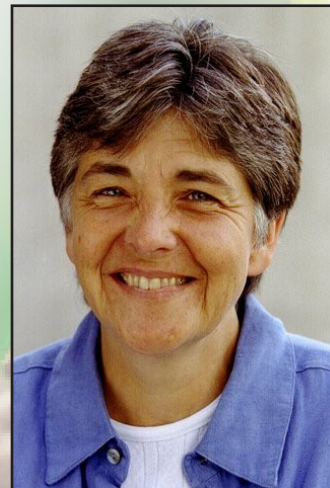
2014 was not a quiet year. Moving into its 138th anniversary, Gordon Memorial explored the concepts of “**Ultimate Changing the Game**” and “Living our Mission”. A new ministry structure—incorporating ministries of Connecting, Centering, Community Caring, Celebrating, Calling, Corroborating, Considering, and Conveying—was instituted.

New initiatives included a prayer line every Tuesday morning, Zumba classes, a healthy walkers group every Saturday morning, a Community Garden and members’ participation in “Love Work Shop”, and the “Stop the Violence Forum”.

The year 2014 unfolded as one of challenge, faith and opportunity for Gordon Memorial.

The Finance Committee launched a stewardship campaign that emphasized the importance of tithing and second-mile giving. Members received a detailed presentation on the state of the church’s finances. They were invited to honor the commitment to tithing (10% of income) and also contribute to a Phase I (\$100,000.00 brick & mortar) campaign segment; and Phase II (Homecoming 2014 \$60,000.00) segment. Membership was encouraged to commit to one or both of the initiatives while continuing to give as God has blessed them and to, if able, increase their current giving.

God challenged Gordon Memorial to reach further into our community by presenting two initiatives—the Reformation Center and Freedom School. The church successfully launched both programs. Through the stalwart leadership of a former associate pastor, Rev. Janet Wolf,



and her affiliation with the Children's Defense Fund, Gordon Memorial obtained funding and implemented a six-week Freedom School program for 50 young scholars. It was the first faith-based Freedom School location in Nashville, TN.



The Freedom School allowed the church to engage children, in the 5th to 8th grades, in life changing learning and confidence-building experiences.

Coming out of a spirit-filled summer, Gordon Memorial challenged itself to "be about the Lord's work". The theme of the 138th

Homecoming celebration was "Power for a Game Changing Future" (Hebrews 11:1) and the congregation welcomed two dynamic female speakers, Nontombi Naomi Tutu and Rev. Dr. Candice Lewis.



Other ministry milestones at Gordon Memorial UMC in 2014 included the securing of the 501(c) (3) non-profit status for the Reclamation Center and the establishment of a dynamic men's outreach ministry, Brother's Keeper, where men meet weekly to discuss real-life issues and support one another.



*Brother's Keeper Ministry*

Gordon Memorial's 2014 Charge Conference offered an opportunity for the church to regenerate and push forward. The newly appointed District Superintendent, the Reverend Harriet Bryan, urged congregants to be pacesetters, not only in the district and conference, but across the general church.

The congregation celebrated "All Saints Day" by recognizing the "Saints gone on to Glory"; and turned its focus towards Thanksgiving with the United Methodist Men's Annual Uteley-Bell Banquet, where the "Mighty Men of Gordon" were recognized.



*Mrs. Estelle Johnson Manlove*

The season of Advent was a time of continued thanksgiving and praise, tinged with sorrow, for Gordon Memorial. The church lost one of its stalwart matriarchs, **Mrs. Estelle Johnson Manlove** (May 27, 1914 to December 18, 2014). She was Gordon Memorial's oldest member the churches oldest member and deeply influential in the lives of many generations of her family and of the Gordon Memorial family.



## 2015

Early in the New Year, another of Gordon Memorial's beloved leaders, Mrs. Opal Greene Ransom, was called home to be with the Lord. She had served the church and the Tennessee Conference with distinction for more than 25 years.

The Lenten season led into a forty days of fasting with devotionals featuring a journey through the wilderness, which ended with a memorable Easter celebration. The United Methodist Men celebrated their annual day with the theme of "Man in the Mirror", and guest Speaker, Gordon's own, Dr. William C. Bowen, Sr., president of the Tennessee Conference United Methodist Men.

In March 2015, Rev. Ross announced that he would be taking an assignment with the General Board of Discipleship of the United Methodist Church. The assignment would allow him to move to Atlanta to be with his wife, the Reverend Bridgette Young Ross, who had been named as Dean of the Chapel at Emory University in June 2014.

The church celebrated the pastor's new appointment with a memorable reception and acknowledgement of his significant leadership. Pastor Ross preached his last sermon on May 10th, Mother's Day 2015.



*Mrs. Opal G. Ransom*



*Reverend Charles L. White, Jr.*

At the 2015 Tennessee Annual Conference, the **Reverend Charles L. White, Jr.** was appointed pastor of Gordon Memorial UMC. Known as a strategic thinker, coalition builder, visionary and activist and believing in the urgency of now, Rev. Charles L. White, Jr. has dedicated his life to the cause of civil and human rights.

Rev. White's first sermon as pastor of Gordon Memorial, entitled "Down But Not Out" (Psalm 119:68-71), was dynamic and provocative.



His first month at Gordon Memorial was a busy one as he led Home-going services for several bereaved families in the congregation.



*Leadership Retreat at GBOB*

Rev. White is continuing his visionary leadership guiding and encouraging the church leadership and members and with sermons aimed at moving Gordon Memorial UMC from "Good to Great". In July, Rev. White and the Church Council conducted a Church Servant Leadership Retreat at the Board of Discipleship offices in Nashville.

Gordon is being blessed by God with the presence of Rev. White, his family and the gifts and energy that he brings with his ministry.

Pastor White is finding Gordon Memorial UMC to be a church a "**Christ-Like, Compassionate, diverse Community**".



*Growing from Good to Great*