

# **The Greater Solid Rock Baptist Church**

## **“From Where God Has Brought Us”**

(1923-2010)

In 1923, The Solid Rock Baptist Church was organized in the home of The Reverend and Sister B. Randall. Reverend Thomas, Reverend Tener, and many others were a part of this organization. Tradition has it that the church name was suggested by Sister Alberta Randall. The newly formed Solid Rock Missionary Baptist Church met in a rented house located at Grady Avenue and Glenn Street. On October 18, 1923, The Reverend J.W. Calhoun was called to the pastorate of the church. He served until December 22, 1923.

On January 2, 1924, Solid Rock Baptist Church called The Reverend G.L. Spears as pastor. There was continued growth under his dynamic leadership, which necessitated moving into a larger facility. With some 100 members on roll, the congregation moved into its Farrington Avenue sanctuary. The church, its members praying consistently, continued to grow.

In January 1926, the pastor and deacons asked the church to ordain The Reverend E.D. James to serve as assistant pastor. His duty was to assist the Mothers in their programs and serve in the absence of the pastor. Reverend Spears served as pastor until January, 1927. Reverend James led the church as an interim pastor until a new minister was named.

On March 4, 1927, the church called The Reverend S.M. Johnson. He served until May 1927, when he was called to eternal rest. On August 5, 1927, the church called The Reverend P.T. Steels as its leader. Reverend Steels served until March 1929, the time at which the congregation discovered that it had not rightly acquired the Farrington Avenue property. The returning owners laid claim to the property. As this was happening, Reverend Steels left the congregation.

The decade of the 20's was coming to a close and struggles had begun to occur within the congregation. In 1929, the congregation was forced to move from its Farrington Avenue location. Thus, there was no place to worship and no minister. A faithful few, believing and trusting in God, rented the second floor of a building at Martin and Love Streets in Summerhill where they held their Worship Services. Eventually, The Reverend Wilkes was called to the pastorate of the church. Reverend Wilkes did not remain at Solid Rock very long.

The Reverend E.D. James, Sr., fulfilled the role of acting pastor, a role he played many times in his long association with the church.

On August 27, 1929, The Reverend J.L. Russell was called to pastor the congregation and served until June 2, 1930. On August 20, 1930, the church called The Reverend W.M. Tucker as its leader. The church began to grow again. Under his leadership, the congregation purchased a building located 747 Reed Street, in the Summerhill Community. The purchase of this site took place on November 30, 1930. Reverend Tucker served until December 7, 1932. From June 5, 1933 and during the Depression, The Reverend A.L. Humphrey served the congregation.

Weathering various storms, strong leadership came from within the congregation. The congregation converted the structure at 747 Reed Street from a house into a church. Here the

congregation had periods of growth and decline. The faithful held on and in spite of circumstances, improvements were made and the mortgage was paid. Reverend Humphrey's service was surrendered in July 1942. The church called The Reverend N. Davie. He served until November, 1944. The congregation then called The Reverend W.J. Cox in March, 1945. Under his leadership, the church increased its membership and became active in a number of associations. Reverend Cox remained with the church until October 7, 1949.

The Reverend J.H. Sanders served the church briefly as pastor from May 5, 1950 until August 3, 1951. Following Reverend Sanders was The Reverend G.L. Shaw, who served as pastor from November 30, 1951 until death in 1966. The church, while under Reverend Shaw's leadership, once again began to grow. The "new" members became active as the congregation continued to make improvements upon the structure.

Upon Reverend Shaw's death, The Reverend L.C. Robinson was called to guide the congregation. Under his leadership, the congregation acquired a new edifice in which to worship, located at 88 Martin Avenue in South Atlanta. The congregation entered its new sanctuary on April 19, 1970. The name of the Church was changed to The Greater Solid Rock Baptist Church in order to indicate its progression and optimism of the congregation. In 1976, The Reverend Robinson resigned as pastor.

The congregation called and ordained a young man who was serving as director of the choir, The Reverend B. Copeland. Reverend Copeland led the congregation from 1976 until 1979.

For six months, the church was without a minister. In June, 1979, the congregation installed The Reverend W.O. DeVaughn as its pastor. In October 1980, Dr. John W Waters was asked by the congregation to assume responsibility for the ministry of the church. He served the church in this capacity through August 31, 2005.

During the year 1985, the congregation decided to relocate. The target date set was November, 1988. However, in the Spring of 1986, the congregation decided to enter into negotiations to purchase the property at 6280 Camp Road in Riverdale, Georgia. Committing itself to hard work and prayer, the congregation began to worship on Camp Road on Sunday, May 18, 1986. Papers to purchase were signed August 15, 1986.

Under capable leadership in its present location, The Greater Solid Rock Baptist Church was reorganized with a primary focus on missions. There is a Church Council, the decision making body when the church is not in session, representing the various ministries of the congregation. The council meets monthly. There are two congregational conferences each year.

Since its relocation, the church established The Solid Rock Academy, Inc., obtained a 501(c) 3 status, and sold its two previous locations, Reed Street and Martin Avenue. It has replaced its entire heating and air conditioning systems, acquired heating for the balcony, installed a sound system and purchased a Yamaha Grand Piano.

In the tenth year at Camp Road, due to interior water damage, the decision was reached to repair the interior ceiling and replace the baptismal curtains. Deciding to do so led to a major

renovation project: Project Sanctuary Renovation. This project included a complete renovation of the sanctuary, purchase of new interior furnishings for the pulpit and sanctuary (pew), new carpet for the entire main level, repairs and repainting of all exterior wood, installing gutters, etc., and the expansion of the sound system. This resulted in a “new” sanctuary. The debt for the renovation was retired within one year.

In July 2000, the church ordained two deacons, Ms. Ann Huff and Mr. Marvin Henderson. Deacon Ann Huff became the church’s first ordained female deacon.

In the fall of 2001, under the auspice of the Building Endowment Committee, we completed a major renovation of our downstairs area. In March 2002, our downstairs renovation area was dedicated as the “*John W Waters Education Complex.*” This is “a multi-functional training and community service center established for the purpose of assisting with and enhancing the overall mission and operation of The Greater Solid Rock Baptist Church...”

In addition, stained glass windows were installed in our sanctuary. Each window is a memorial so that others will know those whose lives enriched ours.

In November 2001, we served as host for the Annual Meeting of the New Era Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia, Inc. We accepted this challenge by default. Nevertheless, this, our first for hosting a convention was a stellar success. The opening night celebration was unique in its music and honor of those whose lives were lost on 9/11. Our Music Ministry, under the directorship of Rev. Cynthia Rivers, presented “*The Sounds of the Harvest.*” We still receive rave comments about the quality of what we did for the 40th Annual Meeting of New Era.

Our Education Complex has served for numerous workshops, meeting, seminars, etc. Monthly, the Association of Black Christian Ministers of Clayton County met in our facility. Our sanctuary has become a popular place for weddings. Person from the community have had their weddings performed in our sanctuary.

Several years back, we introduced MasterLife as a major discipleship program. This has been placed under our Deacons Ministry. The most recent twenty-six week session was been facilitated by Deacon Marion Hughes. We have discovered others, having heard of MasterLife, who have wanted to participate. Class sizes are limited to twelve participants. As a focus on stewardship and debt-free living, Crown Ministry was introduced to our congregation several years back. This debt-free, Bible-based program for personal finance is placed with our Trustees Ministry. Mrs. Sharon Ingram and Mrs. Beverly Taylor have served as facilitators of at least three cycles of this project. Those completing Crown Ministry testify of the good feeling to be debt free.

These training programs are in addition to our regular Sunday School offerings. We continue to move toward the G.O.S.S. model. Seeing the need for adequate space for classrooms, we engaged the Georgia Baptist Convention to conduct a Space Analysis. From this study, we were committed to relocating and enlarging our nursery. This was accomplished primarily by our membership, under the leadership of Deacon Bill Weems and assisted by Deacon. Kendall Jackson.

The Greater Solid Rock Baptist Church has always emphasized Christian Education. Beginning with our 2003-2004 fiscal year, this commitment was presented as a challenge to grow each of our Sunday School classes by one new member per month. The Sunday School class that required the largest number of members during this fiscal year was to receive a lunch or dinner at a good restaurant in our area. During this time period, a deacon-led group went out in various communities with information about our church targeting a two-mile radius of our church where every household would be touched.

The Greater Solid Rock Baptist Church holds membership in the New Era Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia, the Georgia Baptist Convention, the Clayton County Chamber of Commerce, and the Clayton County Branch of the NAACP. It supports missions through regular and continuous contributions to agencies and institutions external to the church. Among these are the UNCF, Morehouse School of Religion, Carver Bible College, Southern Crescent Habitat for Humanity, AID Atlanta, Samaritans Together, etc. Our membership is active in the life of the Fairburn Baptist Association where Mrs. Barbara Morris held the position of Director of the WMU and Mrs. Deborah Sneed was the Mission Director.

We have come a long way since October, 1923 in Peoplestown. Spiritual and numerical growth we attribute to the grace of God. There are committed, dedicated, and loyal members who work to maintain our buildings and grounds.

Those who tithe assure us of financial stability and the ability to plan for the future. We have a mortgage on our property which with aggressive and asserted effort could be retired within the next five years. We have launched a renewed PR Campaign and see “new” faces during our Worship Celebrations.

In January 2003, we added a 7:45 AM Worship Celebration with an up-beat, contemporary format. Our 10:45 AM Celebration was also modified.

On September 24, 2004, we acquired a 2+ acre tract of land at 2040 Conkle Road, at the corner of Camp Road. This property across the street from our main location was dedicated in November 2004 as The Greater Solid Rock Baptist Church Community Outreach Ministry. It serves primarily as classrooms for the Church School.

In November 2004, the church installed an elevator/lift. This serves the needs of handicapped and the physically challenged. Entrance is from downstairs to the first floor level. Mr. Jerome Harris took leadership in this project.

On February 20, 2005, Dr. John W Waters officially retired as Senior Minister of The Greater Solid Rock Baptist Church. On June 19, 2005, Rev. Will D. Hayes, III, who joined us as Youth Minister in June, 2004, was elected as Senior Pastor. He officially began his duties on September 1, 2005. The Installation Service for Rev. Hayes took place on Sunday, December 11, 2005. He is the seventeenth pastor of our church and came to this position during the 82nd year of our existence.

The Year of 2005 was a transitional year for our Church Family. In February 2005, our church honored its retiring senior minister with a month-long celebration of his life of ministry and retirement from active ministry of the church. A part of the celebration for Dr. John W Waters took place at the Atlanta Civic Center under the theme, *The Grand Celebration of Lifetime Achievements Honoring John W Waters, Ph.D.: Twenty-fifty Anniversary, Senior Minister, The Greater Solid Rock Baptist Church, Forty-two Years of Christian Ministry*. Dr. Waters served our church until August 31, 2005 and was granted the status of Senior Minister Emeritus.

On the first Sunday of May 2005, the church ordained its first female minister, the Rev. Cynthia Rivers. Rev. Rivers served our church for more than six years as its Minister of Music and had received her M.Div. degree through the Morehouse School of Religion at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC). During this church year, the church ordained two deacons, one of whom was female. This brought the second female into our Deacons Ministry, Deacon Marion Hughes.

In 2005, our Annual Fall Revival took on a special significance and character as we shared with some of the displaced members of the Franklin Avenue Baptist Church of New Orleans, LA. Its Senior Pastor, the Rev. Fred Luter, Jr., served as our evangelist. This must be set within the context of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the devastation along the Gulf Coast, especially in the City of New Orleans. On the final night of the revival, a special offering was taken for the Franklin Avenue Baptist Church and its pastor.

Through much prayer and dedication from the members, The Greater Solid Rock Baptist Church family continued to move through the transitional process of leadership. On December 11, 2005, The Greater Solid Rock Baptist Church officially installed the Reverend Will D. Hayes, III as the Senior Pastor. Throughout the first months of new leadership, a new wave of excitement filled the air at Greater Solid Rock, but the road ahead wasn't going to be easy. Within the first six months of new leadership, the church went through some transitional challenges, but through it all, God kept the ministry moving forward.

In the month of February 2006 at the Annual Mid-year Church Conference, the church voted to eliminate the 7:45 AM service and focus on having the church family come together at the 10:45 AM Worship Celebration. The objective for combining both services was to bring the congregation together so that Greater Solid Rock could grow together.

During the 2005-2006 fiscal year, two ministries were licensed into the Christian Ministry at Greater Solid Rock. The Reverend Carl Lowry and The Reverend James Jordan, Sr. became two additions to the Ministerial Staff. The Building Endowment completed a cornerstone project and the church cornerstone was dedicated and installed.

Also, during the 2005-2006 fiscal year, a grant writing committee was formed and the church received a capacity building grant in the amount \$7,000.00 from Morehouse School of Medicine. The funding was used to provide technical assistance and support to organizations looking to do work in the community.

During the fall of 2005, the sound system was updated and two floor monitors were added to the pulpit area while two floor speakers were added to the main floor. The following year, video projectors and screens were installed in the sanctuary. Television monitors were also installed on the lower level allowing the services to be viewed from the nursery and fellowship hall.

In the month of July 2006, a campaign to raise monies for the purchase of computers for a computer lab was started. Monies were contributed by members and this project was a great success.

In September 2006, the church moved into a new fiscal year. The theme for the 2006-2007 fiscal year was, "Walking Together in Unity" (Psalms 133:1).

One of the focuses for the 2006-2007 fiscal year was the Church School. Pastor Hayes presented an idea to the Sunday School to secure needed equipment to do effective ministry, and it was received well from the Sunday School. The efforts to secure funds for this project were very successful. After the Sunday School classes creatively raised the needed funds, each class was equipped with a TV/DVD/VCR combo with a stand, and a dry erase board with an easel.

In the Fall of 2006, the Deacons Ministry completed a Playground Project allowing youth and adults an opportunity to relax, fellowship and have fun on the grounds of the church. A playground dedication was held on October 22, 2006 after the worship service.

The Youth Empowerment Program on Wednesday nights that was started under the leadership of Pastor Hayes when he served as Youth Minister, continued to draw several youth from the community. As an avenue to give the youth and young adults more Christian activities, Deacon Kendall Jackson and Sister Deirdre Hart started a "First Friday" fellowship at Greater Solid Rock. This fellowship offered a time of movie watching, bowling, singing, food, fellowship, and fun!

God was good to Greater Solid Rock during the 2005-2006 fiscal year. Between September 1, 2005 and August 31, 2006, God blessed the ministry with thirty eight (38) new family members. In addition, the church hired Bro. Greg Isaac as the Minister of Music. Under his leadership, the choirs began to express themselves more through their music ministry and the quality of music was tremendously enhanced.

The 2007-2008 fiscal year brought more change for Greater Solid Rock. Deacon Ann Huff was named as our first female chair of the Deacons Ministry in the history of the church. We also installed the first phase of the Brick Pathway around the much marquee.

The pew dedications, which provided scholarships for graduating seniors within the congregation, was implemented as well. It was the first year of the John W Waters Endowed Scholarship Fund coordinated by Deacon and Mrs. Herbert Hart. Both the pew dedication and the Brick Pathway projects serve as memorials to our faithful members and friends.

In July 2008, The Rev. Dr. Steven Wilhite assumed leadership of the Music Ministry. Prior to his official hiring, Rev. Wilhite invited members of the Unity Choir to join him as he led the Gospel

Christmas Concert of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra in December 2007. Additionally in 2008, the church hosted the Fort Valley State Concert Choir as a part of their tour.

We shared in the loss of our matriarch, Mother Grace Barksdale, in May 2008. We must say good night for now, but we will meet again in the morning.

In September 2008, we celebrated the third anniversary of our pastor, Rev. Will D. Hayes, III. It was a grand occasion as we hosted his uncle, recording artist Dr. Charles G. Hayes of Cosmopolitan Church of Prayer in Chicago, IL. The congregation and surrounding communities showed honor with a capacity crowd.

On March 22- 25, 2009, the Adjourned Session of the New Era Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia was held at the Greater Solid Rock Baptist Church. The adjourned session was a success and the Convention President thanked the church for a job well done in hosting this event. Mrs. Barbara Morris, WMU Ministry Director, was the coordinator.

In August 2009, the church was successfully refinanced and the resale of the Reed Street property was realized through the hard work of our Trustees Ministry. Mrs. Beverly Taylor and Mr. Romon Desessaure were facilitators of these projects.

Even through the leadership transition, the membership of Greater Solid Rock has remained faithful to God and to God's Word! We are grateful for the solid foundation that The Greater Solid Rock Baptist Church is founded on.

The Church Family has survived through faith in God, dedicated membership and the willingness to hold onto the assurance that God Never Fails. We realize that it is our responsibility to keep the dreams of the founding members forever alive: "***A Church where the Gospel is preached and the love of God and each other is practiced.***" We continue to keep the dream alive by affirming a commitment to the spreading of the "Good News" of God's salvation to others at a church where we proclaim, "***You can make a difference!***"

Composed by:  
Deacon Gus Prince (deceased)  
Mother Grace R. Barksdale (deceased)  
Sister Reva Marsh  
John W Waters, Ph.D.  
Pastor Will D. Hayes, III  
Mrs. Cynthia Barnett  
Mrs. Barbara Morris  
Deacon Ann Huff  
(Revised October 2010)