



The History of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church of Los Angeles

Bethel A.M.E. Church met for the first time as an organized Mission of the African Methodist Episcopal Connection on Sunday, October 2, 1921 in the Normandie Hall Building, under the ministry of Major G. W. Prioleau. Rev. George W. Prioleau had transferred from the North Ohio Conference and had enrolled as an Elder.

He was a retired Major of the United States Army. Retired Major G. W. Prioleau and family were members of Los Angeles First A. M. E. Church. As a community project, he led a group of friends in a house to house prayer band. Finally, the Holy Spirit moved upon him to establish a church for the Westside populace of Los Angeles.

Encouraged by Rev. A. Milton Ward, pastor of the Los Angeles First Church and the members of the prayer band, he organized the Mission. It was accepted, October 19, 1921 by the Fifty-Fourth Session of the California Conference of the Eighteenth District held at San Die California. The Rt. Rev. William Alfred Fountain, D.D. was the presiding Bishop. The membership numbered fourteen. The Sunday School membership was twenty-three. Mrs. Ethel G. Prioleau was the superintendent. Rev. James Washington. Presiding Elder of the Los Angeles District of the California Conference of the Eighteenth Episcopal District, perfected the organization of the First A.M.E. Church Mission, Westside. This name was soon changed to Los Angeles Westside Mission.

Charter members of Bethel Westside A.M.E. Mission according to available records, included:

Major G.W. Prioleau – *Founder*

Ethel G. Prioleau	Ella Braxton	Lucille Glover	Louise Robinson
Charles Bond	Ada Brewer	Hattie Henry	James Stafford
Anna Bond	Cara Cruise	Alice Jackson	Mary Stafford
Anna Brantley	Julia Davis	Hattie Manning	

The Mission grew and prospered and finally, with much prayer and great sacrifice, the members were able to purchase a lot and church building at 1511 West 36th Street. For the first three years, Major Prioleau served the Mission as its pastor without pay. While painting the church, Major Prioleau fell from a ladder and injured himself internally. After several months of critical illness, on July 15, 1927, he departed this life after singing in a beautiful strong voice, two verses of *"My Faith Looks Up To Thee."* Beginning with fourteen members and a rented dance hall, he was able to leave at the time of his death five years later, 120 full members, 18 probationers, church property free of debt and \$1,171.00 in the bank for the purchase of a new church building.

Bethel continued to grow and prosper at the 36th Street location, and in 1963, under the leadership of Rev. Frederick Stephens, purchased property at the corner of Western Avenue and 79th Street. A Jewish Synagogue and recreation building were on these four lots. The new site was remodeled and the old site on 36th Street was sold to the City of Los Angeles. The church began to come alive. Two morning services were established to accommodate the worshippers.

During the ministry of Rev. L.T. Thornhill, Bethel began to search for a parsonage. The site chosen was the corner of 8th Avenue and 76^h Street in Inglewood, CA.

The years between 1966 and 1977, or the "Ford Years as they were called, was a period of rapid growth, excitement and enthusiasm at Bethel. Rev. Jerry Ford was assigned to Bethel by Bishop Howard Thomas Primm. Under his leadership, Bethel placed a special emphasis on nurturing and encouraging the youth and young adults of the surrounding community. The YPD, the Sunday School and the Music Department were strengthened to focus on the needs of young people.

Under the leadership of Rev. A. A. Morgan, Bethel realized its long-standing goal of erecting a worthy edifice. After many years of sacrifice and hard work, Bethel held its groundbreaking service on May 2, 1983 with a capacity audience of members and friends. Bishop H. Hartford Brookins, presiding prelate of the Great Fifth Episcopal District, was the principal speaker. In August 1984, Bethel hosted the 60th Session of the Southern California Conference in a nearly completed new edifice at a cost of \$1.5 million. The new sanctuary doubled the previous capacity with seating for 650 in the main sanctuary, 250 seats in the balcony and seating for 90 in the choir loft. The new building also included an office staff unit, pastor's study and counsel room, 15 classrooms, social hall, kitchen and a childcare center.

In 1989, the 65th Session of the Southern California Conference was held at Bethel. Bethel was then under the leadership of Ray Edgar Boyd. Rev. Boyd initiated a ministry of community outreach and political activism. As Bethel extended its reach into the community, additional property was purchased and the mortgage on the sanctuary was retired.

In 1992, Rev. Cheviene Jones was appointed to Bethel. He filled the church with a new-found energy and enthusiasm. He was not only concerned about the spiritual growth of the Bethel congregation, but he reached out to the community at large to offer hope and encouragement.

In 1996, Rev. Warren Campbell was appointed to Bethel by Bishop Vinton R. Anderson. Under his administration, three vans were purchased, office equipment purchased, two mortgages were retired and improvements were made on the church.

Rev. Dr. Lewis E. Logan, II was appointed in 204 by Bishop John R. Bryant. He brought spirit-filled messages and ministers to the members and the community. Under his administration, Bethel purchased two lots across the street from the church. "Restoration – The Next Level Of Increase" is the blessing that we anticipate from God!

In 2008, GOD breathed a "Fresh Wind" upon the rich legacy at Bethel and sent the dynamic and anointed pastoral team of the Rev. Dr. Kelvin T. Calloway and First Lady Jacquelyn Calloway. Through their leadership souls are being saved, spirits are being renewed and lives transformed.

Chronology of Ministers

Bethel A. M. E. Church, Los Angeles

Major George W. Prioleau – 1921 - 1927
Rev. B. R. Guy – 1926 - 1927
Rev. J. B. Keaton – 1927 - 1928
Rev. Ralph R. King – 1928 - 1931
Rev. A. L. Washington – 1931 - 1932
Rev. W. C. B. Lewis – 1932 - 1933
Rev. J.B. St. Felix Isaac – 1934 - 1936
Rev. J.W. Price – 1936 - 1937
Rev. Arthur A. Moore – 1937 - 1938
Rev. J. Cincinnatus White – 1938 - 1948
Rev. T. Leslie Scott – 1948 – 1952
Rev. Xanthenes C. Runyon – 1952 – 1960
Rev. Frederick E. Stephens – 1960 – 1966
Rev. L.T. Thornhill – 1963 – 1966
Rev. Jerry W. Ford – 1966 – 1977
Rev. Alexander A. Morgan – 1977 – 1986
Rev. Edgar E. Boyd – 1986 – 1992
Rev. Cheviene Jones – 1992 – 1996
Rev. Dr. Lewis E. Logan II – 2004 – 2008
Rev. Dr. Kelvin T. Calloway Sr. – 2008 - Present