

EAST PRESTON UNITED BAPTIST CHURCH HISTORY – September 2016

The East Preston United Baptist Church was founded on September 12, 1842 through the gallant efforts of Father Richard Preston, the founding father of the African United Baptist Association of Nova Scotia. Richard Preston, a freed slave out of Virginia, came to Nova Scotia in search of his Mother, Mary; separated by the American Slave Trade, she is said to have arrived here years earlier during the War of 1812. Richard's search took him door to door in the tiny black settlement of Preston, where his Mother discovered her son bearing a childhood-scar on his neck...as she was closing the door on him. Father Preston passed in 1861 and is believed buried on or near Crane Hill Road.

We were officially known as the First Preston Church in 1842, and our Membership consisted of: Pastor Richard Preston, Deacon Meredith Stanley, Elder John Collins, and George Carvery, Letty James, William Robertson, Thomas Saunders, H. Taylor, Peter Clayton, William Dares, Edward Sye, Thomas Cox, Freeman Kelly, Daniel Brown, and John Rodgers. By 1843, the population had grown close to one hundred people, and the church membership grew to 54. New member Benson Smithers became so popular he went on to form his own church. The Smithers' Church became St. Thomas Church at North Preston. Then it was George Carvery who organized a Church on Frog Lake Road. In the early life of East Preston, three other churches were formed out of the East Preston Church in the area. The Fulton Church and the First Preston Church were neighbours. These churches would later dissolve.

Father Preston served this church for 19 years. (1842-1861)

The Rev. James Thomas, who had been ordained by Father Preston, succeeded him and served for 8-years (1861-1869) A major dissention erupted in our church and he left. Our church even broke away from the AUBA because of the infighting; and stayed out for eleven years.

Thomas was succeeded by the Rev. George Neale who came from Georgia, and was baptized by Father John Burton, a white preacher who was serving the black congregation in Halifax. Burton ordained Neal into the ministry in 1864, and Neal would nobly serve this church for 24 years (1869-1893). Neale brought the First Preston Church back into the Association in 1880, and he was known for walking from Preston to Yarmouth to attend the AUBA. During his tenure here, Neale conducted several baptisms in Partridge River and he did his last one after his 85th Birthday.

A young man, Edward Dixon, of Africville succeeded Rev. George Neale to the pastorate. Dixon would walk from Africville to East Preston every Saturday to preach the Sunday services. He would visit the homes on Monday morning, and hold the Church Business meeting with

the congregation at 2pm, then walk back Monday evening with his pay of sixty-cents. He served our church 15-years from 1893 until his death in 1908.

The Rev John Smith, a senior and in poor health, succeeded Pastor Dixon in 1908, and served until his death in 1910.

Thankfully, Neale and Dixon had laid a strong foundation at First Preston church; with a strong team of Laymen and women...They carried the ministry for the next five-years.

Then there was the Montague Mines gold-miner; a cargo ship labourer; born at Lake Loon in 1867, without an inclination for the church until he received the Lord in Baptism at age 26. Arthur A. Wyse served as a Licentiate Pastor of both the new Cherry Brook Church and East Preston for about four-years (1910-1914).

Preston East had a struggle getting Pastor Wyse ordained. That struggle almost resulted in Preston East again leaving the Association. Cherry Brook protested, Convention wouldn't cooperate, and then a Council of Baptist leaders from across the region with a young lawyer James R. Johnston, as mediator saw cooler heads prevail, and Pastor Wyse was ordained at Preston East the evening of February 15, 1915. East Preston people had loved Pastor Wyse. Renowned as a powerful preacher, Pastor Wyse was ordained at the age of 48 and served this church for 42 years, the longest in the Association's history. He died in 1953.

Following the death of Rev. Wyse, the church welcomed Rev. Donald D. Skeir as Pastor. A Public School Teacher, Rev. Skeir modeled his style after Wyse. Skeir was a powerful and prophetic preacher, and consummate speaker; and like his predecessor Rev. Wyse, he served this church for 42 years, retiring in 1995 due to poor health.

Under Skeir's leadership, the church witnessed substantial growth in membership. Rev. Skeir conducted the largest baptism in our history on July 26, 1976, when 110 candidates received believers' baptism. Rev. Skeir was an historian in his own right, well versed in the Black Church. Regrettably, he did not publish any journals on the History of the Church.

The church honoured Rev, Skeir in 1995 with a Retirement Dinner at the former Keddy's Inn, Dartmouth. Acadia University recognized Rev. Skeir's many social and spiritual contributions and would later confer upon him, an Honourary Doctorate of Divinity- Degree.

As a lasting tribute to his ministry here at East Preston, the church, in October 2000 renamed the parsonage: The Rev. Dr. Donald Skeir Memorial Building. That building became the home of our Family Life & Ministry Centre, offering operational facilities to the following Ministries: Pastoral Care & Counseling; Prison Ministries; Youth and Sunday school; and the C@P site. The church also named the Resource Room in memory of the Pastor's wife, Mrs. Evelina Skeir.

The Rev. Glen Gray succeeded Rev. Dr. Skeir as Pastor in 1996. He served until March 1998, when he left to form the New Beginnings Ministry at Ross Road School. They later settled into new worship facilities off the Cherry Brook Road. That Church continues to thrive under the leadership of Rev. Kirby Spivey III.

The Rev. Ogueri Ohanaka came to our church in June 1998 as Interim Pastor during another difficult time in the life of our church. Rev. Ohanaka guided us through a healing process and assisted the church in its reorganization.

In October of 1998, the church called Rev. Ohanaka to serve as full time Pastor. During Rev. Ohanaka's tenure, the church appointed eight new Deacons on November 14, 1999, including four Women. This marked for the first time in our church history, and that of the AUBA, to see the election of female Deacons.

Within the year we established two other firsts. The church confirmed the Pastor's selection of a Board of Elders to be comprised of 3-men and 3-women; and the Church honoured the age and services of the Deacon Albert F. Colley (late), as "Deacon Emeritus".

One Lay-Pastor-In-Training was appointed, and three church moderators; and in October 2000, we commissioned our first Coordinator of Prison Ministries, and our first female Licentiate in the church. After that time, two female licentiates, Dr. Thomas and Dr. Ross were licensed. Also in 2005, Brother Howard Williams received a license to preach in our church. Rev. Ohanaka left the Church in June, 2008 and continues to minister at the Shiloh Baptist Church of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.

We were highlighted in 2005 when the national Vision television program 'Divine Restoration'; selected East Preston United Baptist as one of its broadcast projects—to renovate facilities both upstairs and down in the Skeir Memorial Building.

After several months with fill-in Pastors, Deacons, and Lay Preachers, we welcomed the spiritual mediation of Rev. Dr. Morley Shaw (Ret'd).

In March 2008 the Deacons called Rev. Matthew Lucas to help bring stability to the pulpit, and we are grateful to God for acquiring the services of Rev. Lucas, an Armed Forces Chaplain, to serve our pulpit as Supply Pastor, effective in May 2008.

God richly blessed our congregation with the services of Pastor Lucas which went well beyond that of a Supply Person. Pastor Lucas invoked healing by way of the Holy Spirit...he gave diligent and prayerful leadership and guidance in several areas...like the restructuring of the Church Constitution; a new dimension in Bible Study that resulted in overflow-attendance; and a streamlined order to the process of Church leadership. We have a Praise Team, second to none thanks to Rev. Lucas' leadership; and our Music team is simply the best!

As Interim Pastor, Rev. Lucas worked graciously in healing divisions, and making the Love of Christ central to his Gospel messages. When we engaged in the 167th Anniversary-year at East Preston United Baptist Church, Rev. Lucas wound down his time with us by offering strong leadership to the Pulpit Committee, with its search for a succeeding Pastor.

The succeeding Pastor opened yet another new chapter in our history... Yes for the first time an ordained woman minister arrived for full time Pastoral Services On July 4, 2010. A vibrant, God possessed person in the Reverend LeQuita Hopgood Porter arrived at East Preston on fire for Jesus Christ, and ready for the Lord's assignment in this Historic Church Community.

Together we celebrate and appreciate full time Pastoral Ministry by Pastor Porter, a licensed and ordained minister with a Master of Divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary at Princeton, New Jersey. In the past years, Pastor Porter has led the church in developing a strong and trained Leadership, while focusing everyone's attention on God's Word as the source of all of our direction and strength. Pastor Porter has initiated policies and procedures to establish structure in our Church organization, emphasizing God's requirement of Excellence in everything we do for God. Under Pastor's Porter's leadership, we have developed an Adult Learning Program (The East Preston Empowerment Academy), a newly established Youth Empowerment Ministry, a Ministers-in-Training Program and a Junior Deacon and Sunday School Teacher Apprentice Program, along with many other Ministries to minister to the whole person. Pastor Porter has also worked with a team to further our goal of constructing a new church building, through prayer, fundraising and meticulous planning. Pastor Porter is passionate about all members being engaged in Ministry utilizing their gifts for the Kingdom, and is determined to reach that goal! Pastor Porter is currently working on a Doctor of Ministry degree in Transformational Leadership and is applying all of what she learns in our ministry context.

Our Community population today stands at less than 2000, with our Church membership at 280-300. It is our goal to engage the Community as much as possible as we firmly believe that Church is Community and Community is Church!

This is a tiny reflection of our church history, and we thank God for all those who have served this church since 1842, and for our rich Christian Heritage. We owe a great deal of indebtedness and gratitude to our Forbearers...keeping in mind that these men and women were unschooled, untutored and possessed little of this worlds goods; yet they formulated the life of our communities with passed-down wisdom and knowledge the Church was indeed central in the life of our people across these many, many years.

We give Almighty God all praise, glory and honour for sustaining us 174 years!

By Elder Wayne Adams, C.M., D.C.L./Updated: Rev. LeQuita H. Porter, Pastor