

# EASTER HILL HISTORY

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The history of Easter United Methodist Church began in the late forties and early fifties, when there became a need for a Church on the South Side of Richmond. Some of the residents began attending St. Luke's Methodist Church. In the late forties, a small group met at the apartment of Jones and Mattie Mann to explore the possibilities of forming a church. There were other subsequent meetings; some of those in attendance were John and Marie Griffin, Charles and Nola Bridges, Everett and Rosa Mae Pendleton, James and Romance Mann, Samuel and Augustine Williams. Rev. F. H. Busher (Pastor of St. Luke's) also attended these meetings and suggested the organization of a Methodist Church.

On November 7, 1950, a Banquet was held at St. Luke's Church as the first fund raising activity to secure a Methodist Church, sponsored by Rev. Busher, the Richmond Council of Churches and the Richmond Cooperative Parish, the banquet raised \$1,600.00, which was used to buy the property at 30th and Hoffman Blvd. Rev. Dixon served for a short while as the first pastor of this small group, followed by Rev. S. D. Rhone, Rev. Carr and Rev. W. B. Smith. Easter Hill as a Church became a reality, although not formally organized. The name Easter Hill was chosen due to the location. There was a hill between 28th Street and Hoffman Blvd. that served as the site for Easter Sunrise Worship. Easter Hill housing development was also built nearby and the Church being so close to this site assumed the name Easter Hill.

On February 15, 1951, Rev. Wilbur R. Johnson arrived from Boston Massachusetts. He would become the first pastor of the newly organized church, "The Little Brown Church." Rev. Johnson reflects on one of the most influential persons involved in the early development of Easter Hill. Rev. Fred Busher was so aggressive that he was affectionately known as "Pusher Busher." Rev. Busher wanted to develop a Non-Denominational Community Church, so that he could embrace both Baptist and Methodist members. When Rev. Wilbur Johnson arrived to be the minister in charge, he persuaded Rev. Busher and the other concerned persons to recognize the church's Methodist roots and call the New Congregation what it really was, so that all new members would clearly know they were joining a United Methodist Church. Thus Rev. Wilbur Johnson became the founding and first pastor of Easter Hill United Methodist Church.

This would be their home until 1956, when the State of California purchased the site for highway expansion. Land was purchased at 39th and Cutting Blvd., and on December 25, 1957 the first worship service was held in the newly built Church. Pastor Johnson continued his

outstanding leadership until his appointment to the Southern California Conference in June of 1959.

Rev. Booker Anderson was appointed to Easter Hill in June of 1959 and served as Pastor until 1969. Under his leadership, Easter Hill became known as a Social Justice Church. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and other activists spoke at Easter Hill. Civil Rights Rallies and Community meetings were also held at Easter Hill. The church facilities were improved and a parsonage was built at 55th and Bayview. Pastor Anderson was appointed to the Joint Strategy and Action Committee of the Methodist Church in June of 1969, and he was also elected to the Richmond City Council.

In 1969, Rev. Dr. A. Edward Bell was appointed and faithfully served Easter Hill until 1971. Several interim pastors served at Easter Hill during the transition period following Rev. Dr. Bell: They were Rev. Amos Cambridge, Rev. Max Brown and Rev. David Houston.

Rev. King was appointed pastor in 1973 and served until September 1977. The Church experienced a significant growth in the Children and Youth Ministries. Pastor King left Easter Hill to become the Director of Campus Ministries for the Wesley Foundation in Nashville, TN. Rev. Amos Cambridge Jr. served as interim pastor until a permanent pastor was appointed.

In 1977, Rev. Ronald E. Swisher was appointed and served until 1990. Under his leadership the church's Young Adult membership increased. The Mann-Swisher Hall was built and the Parsonage Mortgage was liquidated. Pastor Swisher was appointed District Superintendent, Delta District of California-Nevada Conference in June 1990.

Rev. Dorothy Williams was the first African American Female Pastor ordained by the California-Nevada Conference and became Easter Hill's first female pastor in June of 1990. During her two year stay, Rev. Williams developed a strong spiritual ministry. In June 1992, she retired from Parish Ministry.

Rev. Frederick G. Gray and Rev. Reginald Nichols have been a part of Easter Hill's Ministry.

Rev. Phillip Lawson was appointed to Easter Hill in June 1992. In his first Sunday of worship, he introduced the highly appreciated Children's Moment. The 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary was celebrated November 1995 at the Richmond Convention Center with a banquet and program.

In 1997, Easter Hill purchased the property between 36<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> Streets on Cutting Blvd. formerly the Jim McMillan Pharmacy and Professional Building. In 1998, Easter Hill's Thrift Store opened. The Family Life Center was offering; Health Screening, Parenting Classes, Senior Information and Computer classes.

Easter Hill has produced three seminarians who have been called to ministry in the United Methodist Church. Rev. Billye Austin, Rev. Dr. Antonia Jones-Bryant and Rev. Carol Estes. In 1998 Rev. Billye Austin was appointed as Easter Hill's first Associate Pastor. This appointment was unique in that Rev. Austin had been a member of Easter Hill since 1988.

After Rev. Phillip Lawson's retirement July 1, 2003 Rev. Billye Austin was appointed Easter Hill's Senior Pastor.

The Easter Hill East Bay Community Development Corporation is organized and receives non-profit Federal 501 (c) 3 status.

Rev. Billye Austin continues Easter Hill's legacy of spiritually-based Social Justice Ministries. The goals of her ministry are to stress the importance of every member, to empower members and to initiate Succession Planning & Training of the next generation of members as leaders at Easter Hill and in the community.