

## **The History of New Hope Church of God in Christ, Cowan, Tenn.**

New Hope Church of God in Christ in Cowan, Tennessee was founded in the Year 1982 by Elder Willie Lee Bonner, Jr. The church is located in a historic church building at the corner of South Hodges and East Cowan Street.

Elder Willie Bonner is a life-long Cowan resident with a strong family history in the Cowan community. In 1981 Elder Bonner had a vision to preach the Word of God and provide a House of Prayer, but this vision was met with huge challenges.

After several weeks of prayer, Bonner went for a drive up and down the streets of Cowan. The historic brick church at the corner of South Hodges and East Cowan Street grabbed his attention. This beautiful structure was built in 1907 as Cowan Presbyterian Church. In 1962 it was home to Cowan Fellowship Church - a merger of Cowan Presbyterian and the Cowan Methodist Church. In 1966 Cowan Fellowship sold the old Presbyterian property to a newly formed Church of God congregation. In the mid-1970's, after the Church of God congregation disbanded, the historic church building was home to the Appletree Dinner Theatre. By the time Elder Bonner noticed the building, it had been abandoned for the past few years.

Elder Bonner truly believed this was the house of prayer God had called him to, but the ownership of the building was a complete mystery. The Appletree Theatre had disbanded under mysterious circumstances and the previous owner was nowhere to be found. After several phone calls and follow up leads, Bonner learned the building had gone into receivership and that a bank officer in Nashville took possession. With no prior appointment, Bonner drove to Nashville to find out more.

At the bank, the office receptionist told Bonner that the bank officer, Mr. W. Ezell, was out of town. Bonner, suspecting that he had just been misled, replied, "Madam, I did not come here of my own, but God sent me." Immediately, the secretary went into the adjacent office and brought out Mr. Ezell.

Mr. Ezell told Elder Bonner that others were interested in the building, but that he would contact him if none of the leads came through. A few weeks went by with no phone call, so Bonner returned to Mr. Ezell's office in Nashville. The two of them discussed the building and the fact that it did not have a buyer. Elder Bonner explained that even though he did not have a job or the funds to purchase the building, it was truly God's will that this historic church building come back to life as a house of prayer. The banker replied, "Rev. Bonner, you are truly a man of God," and he agreed to finance him the building and content. In fact, Mr. Ezell contributed the first \$1,000 toward the bank note.

On October 31, 1982, Rev. Bonner, members of his family, and several friends and neighbors pulled together the official opening ceremony of New Hope Church of God in Christ. The

ceremony was presided over by Bishop Audley King who was the Presiding Bishop of the Church of God in Christ denomination, headquartered in Memphis.

Mr. Ezell's willingness to finance the building to the newly-formed congregation was most helpful, but the Nashville banker bestowed yet another gift to the congregation. On March 6, 1988, Mr. Ezell visited the church with a cancelled mortgage note in his hand. New Hope Church was debt free after only five-and-a-half years!

New Hope Church of God in Christ, now approaching three decades of ministry, has done great things in the Cowan community. The historic church building is filled with vibrant ministry and serves as a beacon of light for the people of Cowan. Besides weekly services, New Hope hosts a number of meetings and conferences for the church's local jurisdiction. The congregation is also takes an active role in Cowan Ministerial Association.

### **Interesting Facts about New Hope Church of God in Christ**

The historic church caught fire in 1990, heavily damaging the worship space and destroying most of the original stained glass. New Hope held services in other Cowan churches while the building underwent repairs. The building was restored beyond its former beauty. The stained glass windows were replaced with new windows designed to resemble the originals.

In 1995 the church trustees purchased the empty lot east of the church facility and built a metal frame building to house a fellowship hall and additional classroom space.