

JOHN FLOWERS AND NW CHURCH HISTORY

31 May 99

John Flowers rehearsed some of the NW history, beginning with the overcrowded conditions at the Westside church when they were all together and before the beginning of the NW church.

The white NW leadership had brought Eddie Dunn back from the mission field in Scandinavia to be their pulpit preacher. Things seemed to go along well until one Wednesday evening Eddie asked the leadership to come with him to the basement for a special prayer session. While in the prayer time, Eddie began to speak in tongues. At the end of his prayer, one of the elders asked him what he was doing? He told them he was speaking in tongues and at that, the elder said "You're fired!" It came out that Eddie had been practicing this kind of prayer life for a few years. As if that was not a shock enough to the leaders, it turned out that the same activity was being practiced/encouraged among the young adults of the church, including the elder's son. A cluster of these young people began to meet with the Dunns in worship in the younger Montgomery's home.

Because of the racial change in the neighborhood, the white NW church had been seriously considering their future. At first they invited the WS church to consider merging with them. As this was being discussed, the incident with Eddie Dunn so devastated the white church with the pull-out of the younger generation, that the white leadership came back to the WS leaders in a demoralized state.

John R. asked if the WS might buy the NW building and the white leaders were willing to consider the matter. It turned out that the charter of the building made selling it an impossibility, but if the WS leadership wanted to make a donation to the Romeo Home, over which they functioned, it might be worked out. John R. asked how much might they want?

A donation of \$100,000 was suggested. The WS leaders made inquiry with the Christian Schools Foundation out of TX for some money. This foundation was created by several millionaires in the church to help churches in the building of churches. A church could borrow as much as possible with the stipulation that 10% of the weekly collection be given back to pay off the loan. This organization had helped fund projects through Levi Kennedy, R. N. Hogan, G. E. Stewart and John S. Winston. Although the WS church had \$50,000 in the bank, they decided not to touch this amount but try to raise and borrow the entire amount through the Christian Schools Foundation. John R. began selling bonds to the members and quickly raised \$75,000 in two weeks. The Romeo Home board bought the rest of the \$25,000 to complete the amount needed to purchase the NW building.

Since it was obvious not all members of the WS church were in favor of leaving the WS community, the eldership at WS proposed that there be a 5 year plan whereby the two groups would function under a single eldership until it was decided where all the members preferred to worship. The new name was to be Westside-Northwest. It would be much like a church beginning a mission point and sustaining it until it was on its feet.

The date of October 1 was set for all the members to decide where they would worship. When Coy Burgess was asked if he was going to the new building, he replied with a firm "Hell, no!" John Holt, an elder, stayed with the WS group while Scott French and John R. went with the NW group. Their preacher, Woodrow Wilson, began preaching in the NW building while John R preached at WS. Several members were not pleased with the arrangement, including Joseph Lewis, who eventually pulled away with about 25 members and began the Holbrook church. It eventually ended up worshipping on Wyoming when he died and the church collapsed.

One Saturday John R received an anonymous letter which said the Mafia loves money, implying he was too much a lover of money and was the chief instigator of the church division. He called Coy and told him what he had received. Coy rushed over from his home in River Rouge to see for himself. In the pulpit the next day, John R tried to preach but the stress of the matter was working on him, plus there were members giving him the

cold treatment. A couple of ladies were openly hostile in looks and comments, but kept eyeing Coy Burgess as if taking their cues from him. John finally broke down and lost his composure.

He rehearsed to the church that they had been over crowded at first and something had to be done. Their location in the middle of the block prevented them from buying houses and expanding. When the opportunity to get an attractive new building as a bargain basement price, it seemed the logical way for the church to expand and grow. The two ladies who were hostile began to sympathize with John R. One confessed to having sinned in her attitude toward him. Coy Burgess remained stiff and unmoved.

In the five year plan to stay under one eldership for the time being proved difficult to many. The Christian Schools Foundation went broke after paying the church the first amount of \$29,000. The best the foundation directors could do was advised the church they were unable to pay the church the rest of the amount due. They would try to stretch out the financing for the church or the elders could take a drastic reduction of the money (\$14,500) on the spot. Dan Matson, the lawyer in the Hamilton church, suggested they take the \$14,500 while it was being offered. This amount was accepted and put in the bank where it has remained until the present time and has grown to around \$50,000.

John went on the payroll of the church in 1969. Old brother Bishop had called the church when they were looking for a preacher and suggested his son Zebedee. He came and preached for a while until he left. Woody Wilson was converted, went to Southwestern Christian College for some classes, then came back to preach for the NW church for 14 1/2 years. It was one of the most productive times in the church's history. That church became the first black church to fully support a man on the mission field.