

Seminar. Artis Fletcher then curtailed his studies at Washington Bible College in order to return as pastor to ABC. During his tenure, fellowships were built with Berean Baptist, Mt. Zion Bible Baptist and Beulah Baptist Churches. In addition, a Sunday School was started with Marion Christy, Ruth Stanley and Harriet Mckenzie serving as the first Sunday school teachers.

Local pastoral mentors, Pastor Smith and Pastor Kipp, delivered the first revival in 1969. Yearly revivals became a tradition and the congregation continued to grow. By 1969, ten families were actively involved with ABC. By 1971, the Vacation Bible School had progressed to teaching 300 children participants. Earnestine Moorehead's and Harriet Christy's homes were used as class-rooms. The first funeral performed at ABC was for Mrs. Carrie Johnson and the second was for Japheth Johns. ABC's first wedding celebration was for Mr. and Mrs. Mathew Johnson.

Church members reached out to the community with visitation and evangelism that extended to the towns of Dembytown and Havre De Grace. The church supported youth programs and sent missionaries to Africa in addition to providing a food pantry for the community.

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In the mid 1980's, Greer McMillan, known as "Brother Mack", became the acting pastor in addition to conducting a local radio ministry. Later Kern Beale was called to serve as pastor for 2 years. In 1986, Brother Nathaniel Johnson and Brother Michael Waters were called by ABC to act as acting pastors with the support of a board of elders and deacons.

In 1987, Nathaniel Johnson became the senior pastor, the position that he still holds today. Under Pastor Johnson's leadership, plans were developed to build the new church and construction started in May of 1987. The adjacent old church building (dormitory) still exists today and has been renamed Johns' Fellowship Hall, after its founder, Margaret Johns.

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Inner County Outreach (ICO), a ministry of ABC, is celebrating 30 years of service with a Community Circus at Aberdeen Shopping Plaza, June 5th from 2-5pm.

Pre-Sale tickets \$12/adult and \$6/child
Tickets at the door \$16/adult and \$8/child

Also "Our Gala" will be held at the Waters Edge Event Center in Belcamp on June 24th from 6-11pm. Tickets price is \$100.

For more information call 410-272-3278.

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Bringing Communities Together Through Sharing History



Harford County's Churches have been well documented in *Churches: An Illustrated History, Harford County's Rural Heritage* by Henry C. Peden, Jr. and Jack L. Shagena, Jr. (2009). For the mainstream religions associated with Harford County, the book explains the concept of mother churches being followed by their daughter churches. However, the book lacks an overall history of the black churches of Harford County, possibly because all African-American churches did not follow the mother-daughter church concept. *Churches* contains a brief history of individual black churches, many of which need updating and expanding.

The church serves as a cornerstone of the African-American community. The history of individual black churches in Harford County will be explored starting with Aberdeen Bible Church in this pamphlet. Other churches will be researched and pamphlets published as information becomes available. After a thorough review has been completed of individual churches, an attempt will be made to piece together the unique overall history of African-American churches in Harford County.

Aberdeen Bible Church

Mrs. Margaret Johns was a resident of Aberdeen and a former student of the

Maryland Bible Institute located in Aberdeen. She also taught Vacation Bible School classes at local churches. In 1964, she had a vision to start her own church. As a result, on the first Sunday in May of 1964, she took a stand for Christ and did not return to her former church as a member. That Sunday morning, Mrs. Johns held services in her home at 430 Law Street around the dining room table.

As time went on, with much prayer and Bible study, she sought a minister from Washington Bible College in Washington, DC. The first reply from the college was that no one was available. However, one week later, another letter came from the college stating that John Perkins, an on-staff missionary and mentor, had enrolled several young men from Mendenhall, Mississippi. One man of the group, a nineteen year old Artis Fletcher agreed to travel to Aberdeen to perform services and preach the virtues of the Bible in Mrs. Johns home. Preacher Fletcher visited the house each weekend as members gathered in the living room for Sunday morning services and Saturday night Bible studies.

Next, Margaret Johns worked at finding the Bible group a permanent place to worship. Mrs. Johns' mother, Mrs. Mary Lawson, agreed to finance and sell a piece of property on Edmund Street for the building of a church. Thus, Margaret and her husband, Jepheth Johns, became the

new landowners with deed in hand and the / opportunity to start building a new church.



Margaret Johns, founder (l) and Artis Fletcher (r). The picture shows Pastor Fletcher of the Mendenhall Bible Church in Simpson County Mississippi (2014)

The congregation continued to meet in the Johns' home through 1966. In September of 1967, a servicemen's dormitory adjacent to the church lot was purchased in order to house the growing group of bible enthusiast. Renovations were made to the building and on November 18, 1967, Michael Frank, a young serviceman, preached the first message in the newly named Aberdeen Bible Church (ABC) and began serving as the first acting pastor. Blanche Christy and Alice Hardy along with their families were honored in becoming the first official members of the church.

By September 1968, Michael Frank left ABC to enroll in the Dallas Theological