

Bethlehem Baptist Church, Mansfield

February 21, 2023

This is a special edition of Deep in the Hearts of Texans featuring historic Black Texas Baptist churches in celebration of Black History Month.

The following responses were provided by Rev. Dr. Michael Evans Sr.—pastor of [Bethlehem Baptist Church](#) in Mansfield for more than 30 years, mayor of Mansfield and past president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. The congregation meets at 1188 W. Broad Street.

When and why was Bethlehem Baptist Church founded?

Bethlehem Baptist Church was founded in 1870 and predates the city of Mansfield by 10 years. The church was founded by liberated former slaves. Bethlehem served as the primary worship place for these newly manumitted people who sought to express their freedom, not only physically, but spiritually and psychologically from the bonds of chattel slavery.

What was a struggle during the church's history?

The main struggle during the early history of the church was helping former slaves rise out of the mental and emotional terror of being owned, bought and sold like cattle. The group grappled with economic survival.

What was a triumph?

Bethlehem prides itself on serving as the beacon light of hope for people who had various needs, spiritually and economically. The church has served as the catalyst for economic development, educational enrichment and the

gathering place for those who fought for equal rights under the law.

What was a significant moment?

A significant moment in the life of the church was when the congregation moved from worshipping under a brush arbor to an actual physical structure in the late 1890s.

Another significant moment was in 1976 when the church relocated to the last remaining structure constructed by the Mansfield Independent School District during the years of segregation. It was that building that afforded our church members access to indoor toilet facilities.

What makes Bethlehem proud?

Bethlehem is proud of being known in the Mansfield community as the “Community Church.” It has long prided itself on serving as the place to meet the needs of the community on various levels, including offering food, shelter and the basic needs for subsistence.



Artist's rendering of Bethlehem's Pioneer Place, opened in 2019.

What is the church's impact on its community?

Bethlehem serves literally thousands of pounds of groceries to needy families annually. The church prepares backpacks filled with food for local school children. Bethlehem continues to be involved in advocacy efforts for the marginalized and the less fortunate.

The gymnasium is opened for free play on Mondays through a program called Bibles and Basketball, where neighborhood kids can play in a safe environment and experience a weekly devotion.

Our church is known for working in tandem with the city to help improve the living conditions of people who will be fined for property code violations.

The church constructed [Pioneer Place](#), a 134,000-square-foot independent living apartment complex for indigent senior adults with plans to add an assisted living and hospice facility in the future.

Bethlehem hopes to be intricately involved in the development of an entire neighborhood that will include mixed-use retail development and diverse housing options to include a corner grocery store, amphitheater and other community amenities.

We believe God has called us to be the presence of Christ to the world, and with his guidance, we will be empowered to do extraordinary work in our growing city.