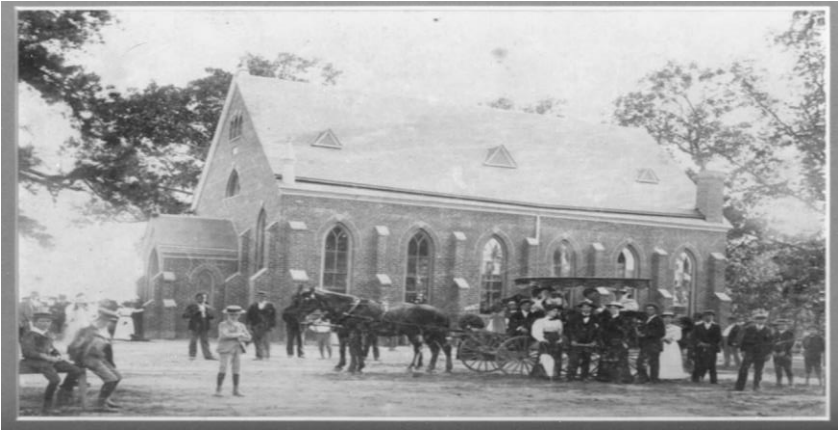


HISTORY OF THE STAINED-GLASS WINDOWS OF BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH



Let the *Jesus and the Lamb* window remind us of Jesus as our *shepherd*, and may each of the other windows, so lovingly given, pay tribute to those who came before us.

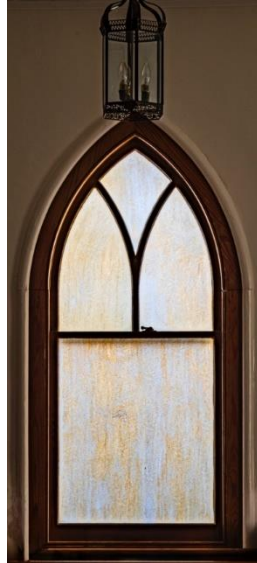
Imagine sitting in Bethel's pews in 1894. There are clear glass church windows open in the summertime for insects to fly in and out as they please. The congregants are cooling themselves with Bliley's Funeral Home handheld fans, and horse drawn buggies are tied up to posts or trees on the church grounds. These windows, which resonate with voices raised in worship, would one day host a more colorful display of light.



Benjamin Watkins, the founding minister of Bethel Baptist Church, was born in 1755 and died in 1831. In 1931, on the 100th Anniversary of his birth, the *Jesus and the Lamb* stained-glass window, donated by his descendants, was dedicated to Bethel in memory of him. The beautiful south-facing window would miraculously survive a dreadful storm just two years later.

On April 19, 1933, a violent hailstorm shattered many windows of the sanctuary. Miss Dorothy Hudson, a Midlothian school teacher, wrote in her diary that most of the clear glass windows on the north side of the church were broken by the hail. Many other congregants recollected details from this storm as well. Ed Moseley, a deacon for many years, recalled the hail piled up as high as the windowsills. Tommy Justis said the depth of accumulated hail was “up to my knees” as he trudged from the school bus to his home (now Sommerville Industrial Park).

Chewning Watkins remembered that his family business, Watkins Nursery, lost glass in the greenhouses, ruining plants inside as well as the plants in the fields. After the storm, Bethel's clear windows were replaced with gold marbled windows, which remain today in the side room (annex) of the sanctuary. The marbled lamps also remain hanging from the ceiling in the sanctuary.



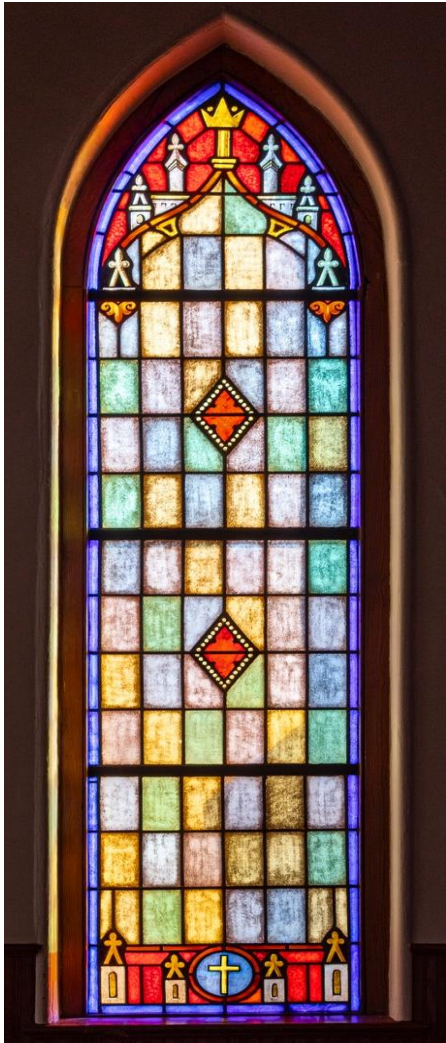
Still, the church adored its *Jesus and the Lamb* window, hoping to add more colorful windows to the picturesque Gothic sanctuary. William Dance and Dr. William H. Ellett contributed financially toward future windows that would complement *Jesus and the Lamb*. At the July 10, 1967, church business meeting, these monies were set aside as an official stained-glass window fund as motioned by Mr. E. A. Moseley, Jr., Mrs. Anne J. Smith, and Mr. R. M. Hudson. It would take almost ten years to grow the fund from its original \$1,000 installment.

In the April 12, 1976, business meeting, Mr. Chewing Watkins, Chairman of the Building and Grounds Committee, presented a drawing of the proposed stained-glass windows, as submitted by the Old Dominion Stained-Glass Window Company in Ashland, Virginia. Chewing Watkins moved to accept the drawing and go ahead with the work. Mr. H. Coleman Goodman seconded the motion, and the colorful windows to adorn Bethel's sanctuary were to become a reality. Mr. W. W. Watkins (Billy) was Treasurer during this time. Within three months, the beautiful stained-glass windows were installed.

A dedication of the windows followed on October 23, 1977, where Miss Dorothy Hudson gave a talk. The following excerpt from her speech relates a valuable history of the windows:

“The **Spears/Ellett** window comes to us from a bequest of Dr. William H. Ellett whose mother, before her marriage, was Miss Bettie Spears, the sister of Julian A. Spears, Sr. Dr. Ellett was ‘born and raised’ in Bethel and lived for a number of years on Old Hundred Road where Billy and Jeanne Watkins now live. He was a veterinarian whose practice covered such an area of southside Virginia that he moved to Amelia in the 50’s to be more centrally located. After retiring, he moved to Little Rock, Arkansas to be near his daughter, Mrs. Bettie Ellett Liles, and nearer to his son, Dr. Edwin W. Ellett, a professor of Animal Husbandry at Texas A and M. Dr. Ellett moved his membership from Bethel when he moved to Amelia, but his love for Bethel was never moved, and because of that he left this bequest when he died in 1965. His family has made it clear that this window is not only a memorial to the Spears and Ellett’s who have gone on to their reward, but also to honor those of the Spears family who are still with us, particularly Mrs. Gladys Spears Dance. The Spears family have been members of this church for six generations, Mr. John Spears, whose grave is here, was a Revolutionary War soldier. His son, Mr. Austin Spears, gave the original piece of land for the building of Bethel Church in 1817. He later sold the church

additional land for the cemetery. His grandson, Mr. Julian A. Spears, Sr., served the church in many ways, and at the time of his death, 27 years ago this past Thursday, he was senior deacon and trustee.”



“The window in memory of **Robert Adolphus Justis, Jr.**, and his wife **Margaret Gibson Justis**, is given by a member of their family. I knew them as ‘Mr. Robert’ and ‘Miss Margaret’. Mr. Robert was another loyal, lifetime member of Bethel, faithful in his attendance and support. He was a quiet, unassuming, gentle person, not given to places of leadership, but one who could be counted on to do his part in the church and the community. Miss Margaret worked in the Primary Department of the Sunday School, served as President of the Women’s Missionary Society, and as Chairman of the Personal Services Committee of the church. In one report of her committee in the church minutes, it was noted that they had made 76 church-related

visits. Whenever anything was to be done for the beautification of Bethel, whether clean-up day, selecting new carpet or hemstitching a cloth for the communion table, Miss Margaret was not only on hand, but probably the instigator.”

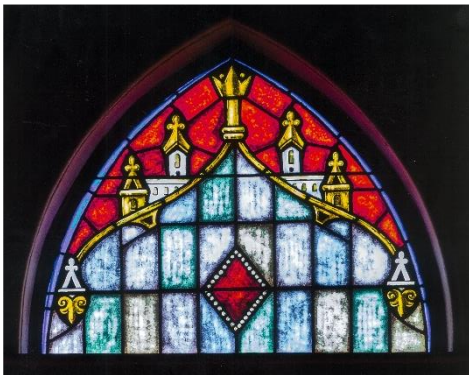
“The memorial window to **Linwood A. Gravatt** is given by his widow, Mrs. Rosa M. Gravatt, and his daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. E. R. Lewis, Jr. Mr. Gravatt became a member of Bethel in 1950, soon after moving into the community. He was ordained a deacon on April 12, 1953, and until his death on February 20, 1971, he fulfilled the duties of that office in such a magnificent way that our deacons of today could well follow his example. How he could carry on all his business activities – three large dairy farms, president of Richmond’s largest cab company, on the boards of the Productive Credit Association and a bank – and still do all the good that he did is personally almost unbelievable. He never failed to visit the sick in the hospitals, whether a child or an adult, and in some instances, he was more attentive than members of the patient’s family. And let me give you some other glimpses of Linwood Gravatt: he was the one who carried milk and ice cream to some elderly neighbors every week; went on his yard tractor two miles up the road to mow the lawn of a recently widowed lady; and helped to park the cars for funerals and other special occasions at Bethel. Generous with his means as well as his time, this church and many other good causes were benefited by his generosity.”

“The other window is a memorial to **William Carter Dance**, better known to his friends as ‘Bill’. Bill Dance grew up in Bethel’s Sunday School and participated in all other church activities. However, he did not join Bethel until 1949, since he was the son of a devout Episcopalian mother and had been christened in infancy. For the remaining 26 years of his life, Bethel never had a more devoted and loyal member. Through the years he served in many capacities...as deacon, Sunday School Superintendent, Training Union Director, soloist and member of the choir. For a number of years, it was Bill Dance who rose early on winter Sunday mornings and came from his home in Hallsboro to turn on the heat. However, as great as his service and financial support was, possibly his greatest contribution was his witness to

his love for the Lord, the Bible, and Bethel Church. It was this devotion that found him present every Sunday, even when some would have considered it physically impossible. The Sunday before his death, Bill was in Sunday School and the worship service after having slept less than fifteen minutes the previous night. There can be no doubt of the faith and deep commitment of a man whose favorite hymn was “Wherever He Leads I’ll Go.” Therefore, it is not surprising that Bill left a generous bequest to Bethel in his will, stipulating that it be used for installing stained glass windows in our sanctuary.”

“And so today, we, the present members of Bethel, express our profound gratitude to those whom these windows now honor, and to the families who have made it possible for us to enjoy a more beautiful sanctuary. As God’s sunlight shines through these windows, may we be reminded to let our own light so shine that we, too, may bless our church and our world as these have done.”

Additionally, “Stan” Watkins noted that Mrs. Evelyn Dance donated this window above the front door of the sanctuary and the windows in the chancel area on either side of the pulpit.



Above the front door of the sanctuary



Window in the chancel area

Stanley “Stan” Benjamin Watkins II, famous for his Stancakes when the men serve breakfast every fifth Sunday, is a direct descendant of Benjamin Watkins. “Stan” related that the original cream-colored marbleized window over the front door of the sanctuary was given to Ebenezer Baptist Church in Amherst, Virginia when the current windows were installed in 1976.

In 2023, Wayne Cain of Architectural Art in Bremo Bluff, Virginia, located in Fluvanna County, replaced Bethel’s yellowed plexiglass which protected the stained-glass windows, repaired some of the stained-glass, and installed tempered glass instead for protection.

These stained-glass windows add great beauty and warmth for worship in Bethel’s sanctuary as they let in God’s light. May His light forever glow outward to those in need of God’s love.

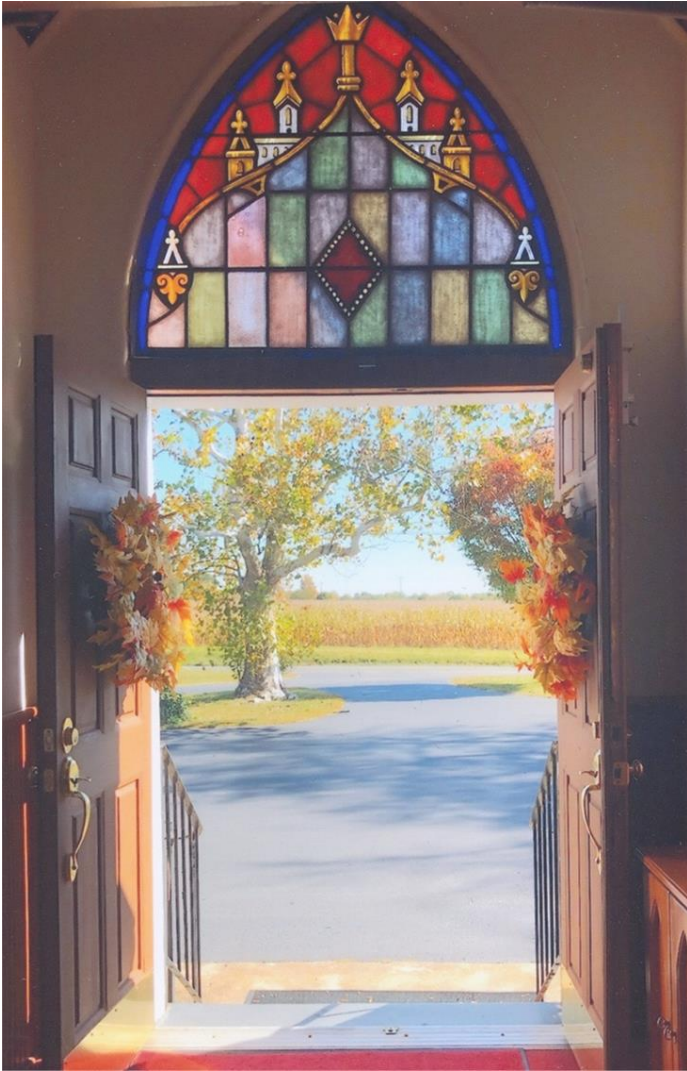


***By our Historians
Aleta Goodwyn Jenkins and Ellen Francis Moseley***

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Sherwood Dance, Carolyn Turner, Stanley Watkins, Cindy Wight, and Ben Turner for contributing information or sharing memories. Sissy Dance graciously typed the draft, and we appreciated Carolyn Turner, Sissy Dance, Julie Strohkorb, and Jennifer Wakefield for editing.

The beautiful photos and photo retouching were done by Doug Turner. Betty Weaver's sesquicentennial booklet, "Bethel Baptist 1817 – 1967," contributed valuable information. Our church business meeting minutes and archives, housed at the Virginia Baptist Historical Society at the University of Richmond, also laid an important foundation for this project.



May Bethel's open doors extend from viewing cornfields to an ever-changing community where the love of Christ is proclaimed!

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