

The Episcopal Church's Mission Among African-Americans in Pittsboro, North Carolina:
St. Bartholomew's and St. James' 1865-1967

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From its organization in 1833 through 1878, St. Bartholomew's, Pittsboro was a bi-racial congregation. Though the communicant strength of the parish was overwhelmingly White, the parochial reports consistently recorded two or three Black communicants, even in the years following the Civil War when many formerly enslaved members of southern Episcopal congregations left to join Black denominations. A partial explanation may be that the rector of St. Bartholomew's, Robert B. Sutton, and his daughter, Annie, took special interest in ministering to the Black members of the parish.¹ One of those who received particular attention was a promising young man named Primus Priss Alston. With help and encouragement from the Suttons and others in Pittsboro, Alston attended St. Augustine's School in Raleigh, where he studied to be a teacher and prepare for the ministry. Ordained deacon in 1883, Alston was sent to Charlotte to assume responsibility for a Black congregation that had recently been established: St. Michael and All Angels. Alston would devote the remaining twenty-seven years of his life and ministry to this post.²

When Sutton left Pittsboro for Greensboro at the close of 1878, he was succeeded by the Rev. Edmund N. Joyner, who commenced his ministry in Pittsboro in March 1879. The following month, the vestry approved the establishment of a Black mission, under the new rector's supervision, and in May, Joyner offered the following note in his initial parochial report:

By an act of the Vestry, a Mission, including a Sunday School, has recently been established for the negroes. At present it gives us much

¹ Annie Sutton is credited with organizing the first class for Black children at St. Bartholomew's. See R. G. Shannonhouse, ed., *History of St. Bartholomew's Parish, Pittsboro, N.C.* (Pittsboro, 1933), p. 37. The Rev. Dr. Robert B. Sutton later served as the Principal of St. Augustine's School from 1884 to 1891 and remained on the faculty until his death in 1896. See Cecil D. Halliburton, *A History of St. Augustine's College: 1867-1937* (Raleigh, 1937), pp. 14-18.

² *Journal of the 95th Annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina.* (1911): 9. Hereinafter abbreviated *NCDJ*.

encouragement. The white members of the Parish enter heartily into the work, a prominent Layman [W.L. London] offering his services as Superintendent, and others showing equal readiness to help make the Mission successful. Could a suitable instructor be found and furnished, a day school could be here planted with great mental and spiritual benefit to the negroes.³

A year later, Joyner reported that he had extended his mission work beyond Pittsboro to Haywood, Lockville, and Sanford. He then added that there was “a *most urgent need* for a chapel for the colored Mission in Pittsborough, and with a little outside assistance one might be soon commenced.” For the year, Joyner had held fifteen services for the Black mission congregation; the other mission stations in his report he had visited quarterly.⁴

The report was even more promising in 1881. Joyner noted that the Black mission had steadily increased in numbers, strength, and influence. A parochial school had opened that spring with nearly 60 pupils. He added: “If sustained financially, it gives every promise of great and lasting good.” Moreover, the vestry of St. Bartholomew’s had shown its interest in the work by purchasing property for the mission.⁵ The report for 1882 was equally bright; Joyner wrote: “The Mission for the negroes in this Parish is doing all we could expect, and its progress in many respects has been beyond the hopes we at first felt it safe to entertain. This has been due, to no little extent, to the zeal and devotion of Mr. [Brooke G.] White, the Lay Missionary engaged in the work.”⁶

1883 brought significant change to the leadership of both St. Bartholomew’s and the Black mission in Pittsboro. The Rev. Edmund Joyner, the rector of St. Bartholomew’s who had been shepherding the Black congregation for the past four years, departed for South Carolina. The new rector of St. Bartholomew’s was a priest from Maine named William Walker. Walker, however, did not take charge of the Black mission. Instead, Bishop Theodore B. Lyman, greatly encouraged by

³ *NCDJ 63rd* (1879): 159,160.

⁴ *NCDJ 64th* (1880): 145.

⁵ *NCDJ 65th* (1881): 135.

⁶ *NCDJ 66th* (1882): 140. After leaving Pittsboro, Brooke G. White moved to Florida, where he was ordained (deacon 1883; priest 1884) and where he organized the Black mission in Jacksonville (now St. Philip’s Episcopal Church, Jacksonville). See *41st Annual Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Florida* (1884): 5; *42nd Annual Council of the PEC in the Diocese of Florida* (1885): 47, 72.

the progress of the mission in Pittsboro, placed it under the care of a newly-ordained Black deacon, the Rev. Edward Hezekiah Butler.⁷

Butler was one of three Black candidates for ministry who received their training at St. Augustine's, Raleigh and were ordained deacon on Pentecost, May 13, 1883. The two candidates ordained with Butler were the Rev. Henry Stephen McDuffey, who was sent to serve St. Joseph's, the Black congregation in Fayetteville, and the Rev. Primus P. Alston, who was sent to the new Black congregation in Charlotte, St. Michael and All Angels. At St. Augustine's, all three men had been trained both as teachers and as ministers.

In Pittsboro, Butler was responsible for a congregation that numbered twenty families, 130 members, and 34 communicants. In his first year, he held over 200 services, oversaw a Sunday School of five teachers and fifty scholars, and taught thirty children daily in a parochial school. On November 5, 1883, the Pittsboro congregation received Bishop Lyman's approval to be formally organized as "St. James' Mission."⁸

The development of the Black mission in Pittsboro from its inception in 1879 to its formal organization in 1883 was in keeping with the stated policy of the diocese. At the 1883 diocesan convention, the Principal of St. Augustine's School, the Rev. J. E. C Smedes, had offered the following resolution, which the convention subsequently ratified:

[*Resolved*] That, in the judgment of this Convention, the Church can best promote the Christian elevation of the colored people, not by giving to them an ecclesiastical organization autonomous and independent of our own, but by fostering colored congregations under the care and supervision of our Bishops, to be represented in our Conventions, and to be ministered to by our own rectors and missionaries, until they can be supplied with duly educated colored Clergymen; and, further, by establishing and maintaining institutions of Christian learning for their special benefit, and theological seminaries for the training of colored candidates for the ministry.⁹

There was nothing new about the resolution Smedes was offering; it simply codified the practices which had guided the formation of Black mission schools

⁷ Martha H Smith, *History of St. Bartholomew's Parish, Pittsboro, North Carolina, 1833-1983* (Pittsboro, 1983), 28.

⁸ *NCDJ 68th* (1884): 75,76.

⁹ *NCDJ 67th* (1883): 35.

and congregations in North Carolina during the early years of Reconstruction under the auspices of the national church's Freedman's Commission.

But once the Freedman's Commission stopped establishing new missions, the predominantly White congregations of the diocese were slow to take up the work. By 1883, St. James', Pittsboro was one of only three new Black congregations within the bounds of our diocese: the other two were St. Luke's, Tarboro and St. Michael and All Angels, Charlotte. Notably, all three were being served by Black clergy trained at St. Augustine's: the Rev. John Perry in Tarboro, the Rev. Primus Alston in Charlotte, and the Rev. E. H. Butler in Pittsboro.

For his 1885 parochial report, Butler submitted numbers comparable to the year before. But in March 1886, a fire destroyed the building used as the chapel, the schoolroom, and Butler's living quarters. Nevertheless, Butler was able to continue his work. St. Bartholomew's offered its church for Sunday evening services, and the Masonic Lodge was made available for morning services and Sunday school. The day school was moved to the residence of St. Bartholomew's rector.¹⁰ Later that year, however, Butler left Pittsboro and subsequently accepted a position in Florida.

Stepping in to take Butler's place at St. James' was a priest already resident in Pittsboro, the Rev. Franklin L. Bush. Bush had been rector of St. Stephen's, Oxford, North Carolina, before retiring in 1883 to reside near his brother-in-law, the Rev. William Walker, who had come south from Maine to become rector of St. Bartholomew's.¹¹ In Pittsboro, Bush served as Walker's assistant and as a missionary in surrounding counties. Bush was a graduate of Harvard and the Berkeley Divinity School, who had served parishes in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts prior to moving to North Carolina in 1878. He was still in his early 40s, and he brought considerable energy and commitment to his work at St. James'.

Bush already knew St. James' well and had been celebrating Holy Communion there since arriving in 1883, because Butler was still in deacon's orders. Bush and Walker had initially hoped to hold shared Communion services for the communicants of both St. Bartholomew's and St. James', but they were overruled, and the two congregations instead communed separately.¹²

¹⁰ *NCDJ 70th* (1886): 62.

¹¹ *NCDJ 68th* (1884): 64.

¹² *Spirit of Missions* 56 (March 1891): 97.

Under Bush's leadership, St. James' maintained its active worship life, retained its communicant strength, and continued its educational programs. Within three years, the congregation had a new chapel, designed by the Boston architectural firm of Cabot & Chandler, and a new schoolhouse. These were completed, paid for, and consecrated in 1889. With new buildings came new interest in the congregation: 1890 saw a significant increase in the number of families (from 27 to 43) and communicants (from 27 to 37). Bush enlisted the help of a St. Augustine's graduate to teach in the school and added a Saturday sewing class.¹³

In 1889, Walker and Bush expanded their ministry among African Americans to neighboring Moore County. Walker had received word that members of an AME Zion congregation in the rural community of Noise were desirous of seeking a new affiliation. He and Bush, along with a student from St. Augustine's, went to visit. They conducted a service of Holy Eucharist, followed by catechetical instruction. The members desirous of joining the Episcopal Church subsequently purchased land and proceeded to erect a house of worship. Walker, Bush, and the St. Augustine's student returned in June to hold morning and evening services, and they decided to call the new congregation St. Philip's. The following month, Bishop Lyman licensed the St. Augustine's student as a lay-reader and catechist, and that student stayed in the community until he had to return to school in the fall. By then, the congregation numbered eleven families, sixty-eight children, and had thirteen candidates for confirmation.¹⁴

The evident interest which Bush and Walker showed in supporting outreach to African Americans both in Pittsboro and in Moore County, and the demonstrable success of their efforts, led Bishop Lyman to appoint Walker the first diocesan Archdeacon for Colored Work in 1891.¹⁵ Walker resigned his position at St. Bartholomew's effective February 1, 1891 and moved to Raleigh; Bush remained in Pittsboro and continued at St. James'.

As Archdeacon, Walker was expected to consolidate and strengthen work among African Americans throughout the diocese. Clergy deployment and allocation of resources to Black congregations would now be his administrative responsibility. The Archdeacon wasted little time in starting new missions and mission schools in Louisburg, Littleton, and Warrenton. St. James' he left under the care of Franklin Bush, and in 1892, he approved extending Bush's ministry to Durham, where Bush

¹³ *Spirit of Missions* 56 (March 1891): 97; *NCDJ* 74th (1890): 83, 84.

¹⁴ *Spirit of Missions* 55 (January 1890): 15-17.

¹⁵ *Spirit of Missions* 56 (February 1891): 1.

would hold services twice monthly in the small room then being rented for a day school. Moreover, Bush was given the additional responsibility of helping to prepare Black candidates for Holy Orders.¹⁶

When diocesan convention met in May of 1893, everything looked promising for the Black missions in Pittsboro and Durham. But then Franklin Bush died unexpectedly on July 25, 1893. Instead of finding a new resident deacon or priest for St. James', Walker decided to fill the position himself. Although he knew the congregation and the community well, he could not devote the same amount of attention as his brother-in-law. The number of Sunday services at St. James' declined, first to two Sundays/month and then to one Sunday/month. The mission in Durham was suspended altogether in 1894 and would not be revived for another fifteen years.¹⁷ In 1896, Walker reported that he was hopeful a deacon could be appointed to serve in Pittsboro and in Moncure (a community in southern Chatham County), and in March 1897, that came to pass: The Rev. Thomas B. Bailey moved to Pittsboro and took charge of the missions in Chatham and Moore Counties.¹⁸

The St. James' parochial report Bailey submitted for 1898 was in shocking contrast to the way the mission had previously been described. Bailey wrote:

The condition of the Mission work here is not very hopeful and it is difficult to manage. The proper notion of the Church has not yet been fully grasped. I do not see how it is ever to become a strong centre unless the work is overhauled and a new start made. Those who belong to the Mission have no care whatever for the day school and Sunday-school and no regard for the Church services.¹⁹

Rather than subject St. James' to Bailey's overhaul, however, it was decided to remove Bailey from Pittsboro and assign him to the Black missions in Concord and Statesville instead. There he found the work much more promising.²⁰

By 1898, Walker had resigned as Archdeacon and moved back to New England. His place was taken by the Ven. John H. M. Pollard, a Black priest originally from Virginia, who had been serving most recently in Charleston, SC. When Bailey was

¹⁶ *NCDJ 77th* (1893): 104; 128,129; 146-148. *NCDJ 78th* (1894): necrology inserted between pages 8 & 10.

¹⁷ *NCDJ 79th* (1895): 105; 128.

¹⁸ *NCDJ 81st* (1897): 90. 91.

¹⁹ *NCDJ 82nd* (1898): 96. *NCDJ 83rd* (1899): 105.

²⁰ *NCDJ 83rd* (1899): 116.

transferred to Statesville, Archdeacon Pollard took responsibility for St. James', Pittsboro, along with his other duties throughout the diocese. In his annual report for 1899, Pollard only listed seven families belonging to St. James'; Sunday services were down to eighteen for the year, with Holy Communion only celebrated twice.²¹

In 1900, Archdeacon Pollard moved his base of operation from Raleigh to Littleton, in conjunction with the purchase of a 34-acre farm in Halifax County and the launching of a new agricultural training school. Archdeacon Pollard now assigned the Rev. James King, the minister of St. Ambrose', Raleigh to oversee St. James', Pittsboro. King, who was busy with a thriving parish of his own, could only devote one Sunday a month to the mission in Pittsboro. Even so, King was able to re-open the day school in 1901 and had high praise for the new teacher, Carrie S. Young.²²

King's monthly ministrations in Pittsboro for the next twelve years were evidently enough to keep the congregation stable in membership and communicant strength. The annual parochial report statistics were virtually unchanged from 1901 to 1913; the core of the congregational membership were the same seven families. In King's assessment, the prospects for the mission remained healthy so long as the day school remained in operation. It was through the school that St. James' extended the influence of the church to the larger community.²³

In 1908, however, no suitable teacher could be secured and the mission school had to be discontinued. King wrote: "Since my last report the Mission School at Pittsboro has been discontinued and this has hindered the work very much. I am more convinced than ever that a day school is a necessity to the life and growth of our country missions."²⁴ In 1911, King noted that his duties in Raleigh were preventing him from devoting even a monthly visitation to Pittsboro, and he again pleaded for funds to supply a teacher there.²⁵ Bishop Cheshire, in his 1910 assessment of diocesan Black ministry was more blunt: he declared the work once done by Walker and Bush in Moore Co., Moncure, and Pittsboro now "lost."²⁶

²¹ *NCDJ 83rd* (1899): 96.

²² *NCDJ 86th* (1902): 95,96.

²³ On the importance of the day school to the mission, see *NCDJ 89th* (1905): 99.

²⁴ *NCDJ 92nd* (1908): 96, 97.

²⁵ *NCDJ 95th* (1911): 103, 104.

²⁶ *Minutes of the 9th Annual Convocation of the Archdeaconry for Work Among Colored People, Diocese of North Carolina, September 7-11, 1910*, p. 5.

After James King left Raleigh to succeed Primus Alston as rector of St. Michael and All Angels in Charlotte, the new rector of St. Ambrose', the Rev. James K. Satterwhite was given oversight of St. James', Pittsboro, presumably retaining the same monthly visitation for the Pittsboro congregation as his predecessor. The practice of entrusting St. James' to the pastoral oversight of the rectors of St. Ambrose' would continue until the Colored Convocation was disbanded following the death of Bishop Delany in 1928.²⁷

Remarkably, during the decades that St. James' was being served by the non-resident clergy of St. Ambrose', Raleigh, there was a Black priest living in Pittsboro. The Rev. Edward Hezekiah Butler, who had charge of St. James' from 1883 to 1886, returned to live in Pittsboro after his retirement from active ministry in 1899. Butler is not mentioned in any of the parochial reports filed for St. James' between 1900 and 1930, so one must assume he did not undertake any pastoral duties while he lived there. At his death in 1931, however, Butler did leave his Pittsboro property to the diocese for the benefit of St. James'.²⁸

Beginning in 1931, the rector of St. Bartholomew's, the Rev. Royal G. Shannonhouse, assumed pastoral oversight for St. James'. It had now been forty years since the clergy of St. Bartholomew's had any such responsibility. Shannonhouse had already been at St. Bartholomew's for seven years before this new arrangement was made, apparently at the request of Bishop Cheshire.²⁹

The care of St. James' remained with Shannonhouse for eight years. Beginning in 1939, St. James' was yoked with a different Black mission congregation: this time, St. Titus', Durham. St. James' was once again in the hands of a non-resident, part-time Black priest: first the Rev. Othello Stanley (1939-1947) and then the Rev. Frederick Jesse Hunter (1948-1959). After twenty years of being yoked with St. Titus', St. James' returned once more to the ministrations of the clergy at St. Bartholomew's: first the Rev. Charles Greene (1960-1962), and then the Rev. Frederick Hoyt (1963-1967).³⁰

St. James' closed in 1967 and on August 7, the property was sold to Pittsboro Methodist Church for \$5,000.00.³¹ The building was subsequently offered to the

²⁷ The Rev. George Fisher was still listed as Rector of St. Ambrose's Church, Raleigh, and Priest in charge of St. James' Church, Pittsboro in 1930. See *NCDJ 114th* (1930): 9.

²⁸ See Martha H Smith, *History of St. Bartholomew's Parish, Pittsboro, North Carolina, 1833-1983* (Pittsboro, 1983) 39, 40. On Butler's bequest, see *NCDJ 116th* (1932): 33 and *NCDJ 117th* (1933): 26.

²⁹ *NCDJ 115th* (1931): 90.

³⁰ *NCDJ 123rd* (1939): 10; *NCDJ 132nd* (1948): 10; *NCDJ 144th* (1960): 10; *NCDJ 147th* (1963): 17.

³¹ *NCDJ 152nd* (1968): 124.

Pittsboro fire department for training purposes, was burned and then demolished. For several years before the closing, the building was in such poor condition that it was no longer being used for worship, and the congregation of St. James' had been holding its services at St. Bartholomew's on Sunday afternoons. The members of St. James' at the time of the closing were invited to join St. Bartholomew's.³²

Could this outcome have been avoided? The decline certainly would not have been predicted based on the prospects for St. James' in 1890. Thanks to a succession of dedicated clergy and lay missionaries in the 1880s, St. James' had a flourishing congregation, a thriving school, and an attractive church building that was paid for in full. It had overcome a devastating fire without losing program or membership. Moreover, the Pittsboro clergy, William Walker and Franklin Bush, had expanded their missionary activities among African Americans to neighboring Moore County, and the evident success of these efforts led Bishop Lyman to tap Walker, the rector of St. Bartholomew's, for the position of Archdeacon in charge of all Black ministry in the diocese.

These encouraging prospects, however, were dealt a devastating blow when Franklin Bush died unexpectedly in the summer of 1893.³³ As a stop-gap measure, it made sense for Walker as Archdeacon to step in and provide clergy support for St. James'. But from that moment on, St. James' would never again enjoy the presence of a dedicated, full-time resident priest, and the one attempt to provide such a person ended in failure, when the Rev. Thomas Bailey did not find St. James' to his liking. Without a vigorous clergy presence, the congregation rapidly dwindled. In 1890, Bush reported 43 families at St. James'; a decade later, Archdeacon Pollard counted only seven.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear the 1891 decision to place all diocesan Black ministry in the care of an Archdeacon worked to the detriment of the ministry in Pittsboro, since there were never enough resources in terms of clergy

³² Virginia Thomas, "The History and Closure of St. James' Episcopal Chapel in Pittsboro, North Carolina: An Inquiry into Identity Politics," Honors Thesis, American Studies Department, University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill, 2012, pp. 75, 81. (Copy in the Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, Raleigh)

³³ Bush's singular contribution to the upbuilding of St. James' was noted at the time of his death. See the resolution of respect passed at the 1894 diocesan convention: "*Resolved*, That the Convention of the Diocese of North Carolina desires to place of record its sense of loss in the death of the Rev. Franklin Leonard Bush, on July 25, 1893. He was a thoroughly trained scholar, learned in the Scriptures and in the teachings of the Church, a devout man and thoroughly devoted to his priestly work. St. James Church, Pittsboro, erected under his care and largely by his exertions, will ever be a monument to his interest in work among the colored people. His modesty and humility and his saintly life will ever be an esteemed heritage for this Diocese." *NCDJ 78th* (1894): 53.

and finances allocated to Black ministry. So, as new missions were created in places like Louisburg, Littleton, Warrenton, Oxford, Winston-Salem, and Greensboro, the effort to support them came at the expense of adding additional resources for an existing mission such as St. James'. Instead, St. James' was left in the care of non-resident part-time clergy from neighboring Black churches: St. Ambrose'. Raleigh from 1901 to 1930; St. Titus', Durham from 1939 to 1959.

These part-time, non-resident Black clergy were able to provide sufficient care and nurture to retain a faithful, committed core of members at St. James', but not enough to reverse the gradual decline that set in as the congregation continued to age. In 1951, the diocesan Department of Missions made a detailed assessment of Black congregations. For St. James', the report noted the aging population of the congregation, the lack of anyone under the age of twenty, the fact that no Sunday School had been offered for the past ten years, and predicted that the mission would soon be closing. The church building had broken windows and needed to be fixed up and painted, if it were going to continue to be used for worship. Yet the report held out hope that with proper program and leadership, and with property renovation, this dire prognosis might be reversed.³⁴ Such investment was not forthcoming; the congregation continued to dwindle and the building further deteriorated. After 1968, St. James' lived on only in the memories of the former members.

Racism undoubtedly permeates the story of St. James'. The largesse of St. Batholomew's in the establishment of a Black mission and the early years of St. James' certainly contained an element of racial paternalism, and it is telling that Walker and Bush could not convince the two congregations to celebrate Holy Communion together. But the decisions which ultimately curtailed the ministry of St. James' and consigned the mission to being an adjunct to St. Ambrose', Raleigh were made by Archdeacons charged with responsibility for the wellbeing of Black ministry throughout the diocese. If those decisions precluded the flourishing of St. James', the reason must be sought in the systemic racism which denied adequate resources for Black ministry and forced leaders like Archdeacons Pollard and Delany to make hard decisions and allocate scarce resources as best they knew how. And once those patterns were set, they were allowed to play out without any effort to reverse course until the end became inevitable.

³⁴ "Report on St. James, Pittsboro" in "The Department of Missions 1951 Survey" Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, Raleigh.