

Friendship Methodist Church, Damascus, Maryland



Clagettsville, Maryland, is a small community located north of Damascus along Route 27 and Route 80. Currently, Clagettsville has a population of approximately five hundred residents from diverse ethnic backgrounds. This community is home to three significant African American sites dating back to the mid-1800s: Holsey Road, Friendship United Methodist Church, and the home of Inez McAbee, which are landmarks for the African-American community.

The first Friendship Church was built in the late 1800s and was named after a nearby farm owned by the Moxley family, who were white residents of the area. The name "Friendship" is derived from the land grant on which the Moxley family developed Friendship Farm in Clagettsville. Some of the first families to be members of the church included the Taylors, Welshes, Holsey's, Gaither's, Grays, Zeigler's, Potts, Lyles, and Donnellys. The initial church building was located among the pines behind the Welch farm; it was a brown frame structure, and the first seats and studs were made from pine trees cut down from the site. The first benches were also constructed from the same pine.

In 1901, a second church was built, retaining the name Friendship. The cornerstone, which bears the date 1901, can still be seen on the left front corner of the church. In the early days, men and women were separated during worship; men sat on the left side, while women sat on the right. In 1909, Friendship and Pleasant Grove churches merged to form a two-point charge, as both were very small at the time. The Davis family donated the land and building for Pleasant Grove. In 1928, the church's parsonage was renovated, and that same year, Friendship became part of a five-point charge that included Pleasant Grove, Mount Zion, Warren, and Simpson.

In 1939, the Methodist Episcopal Church joined with the Methodist Protestant Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, to form the Methodist Church. One of the delegates sent to the Jurisdictional Conference to approve the merger was Inez McAbee from Friendship Church. In 1942, the Friendship Church building was moved back from Route 27 to its present location, and a basement was added, which continues to serve as a kitchen and meeting room. Alexander McAbee, a trustee and local builder, was responsible for constructing the new foundation and digging the basement for the church.

In early 1952, a community house was built adjacent to the church, with the trustees of the church donating their time and skills for the construction. The pastors who served during this period included Rev. Sherman Mason (1951-1954, in his second tenure at Friendship), Rev. Aaron Johnson (1954-1960), and Rev. James Smith (1961-1967). During Rev. Smith's tenure, Rev. Maurice Moore served as the assistant pastor.

In 1984, the church completed paying off the mortgage used to remodel the church after the fire in 1963, which had caused significant damage to the roof. Retired Bishop Edward G. Carroll delivered the sermon for the occasion, and several former pastors, including Rev. Terry Burley and Rev. Sherman Mason, Sr., were present to help the church celebrate this milestone.

****Oneness in Christ**** was a defining characteristic of the early Methodist movement in the United States. Many of the first congregations were integrated, and by the early 1800s, around 33 percent of the members of the Baltimore Conference were Black. In 1800, the General Conference issued a pastoral letter condemning slavery. However, over time, Black members were increasingly excluded from white churches. A significant outcome of this segregation was the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816. Despite this, many Black individuals continued to attend the Methodist Episcopal Church under the pastoral care of white ministers, although very few (if any) Black members worshiped alongside white members.

The Methodist Conference supported the colonization of Liberia by freed slaves, and in 1858, it elected Francis Burns as the first Black bishop. However, it wasn't until 1920 that Black bishops were authorized to serve in the United States. The first Black bishops in the U.S. were Robert Jones and Matthew W. Clair, Sr., the latter coming from the Washington Conference.

In 1844, the Methodist Episcopal Church split over the issue of slavery, a division triggered by the Baltimore Conference's suspension of a slaveholding preacher. In 1864, the General Conference allowed the formation of new Black conferences. The Washington Conference covered western Maryland, the District of Columbia, and Virginia, while the Delaware Conference included the territory north and west of the Washington Conference.

In 1939, the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Protestant Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South formally united. However, this union maintained separate Black conferences and faced opposition in the Washington Conference, where the vote for union failed 78 to 68 among ministers and 96 to 1 among lay members. All Black conferences were consolidated into the Central Jurisdiction. By 1944, there were already calls to eliminate the Central Jurisdiction and integrate the Methodist Church.

In 1956, Bishop Oxnam of the Baltimore Conference and Bishop Love of the Washington Conference convened leaders for a Human Relations Conference. An informal study in 1957 aimed to promote functional unity between the Baltimore and Washington Conferences, culminating in a complete union in 1965. In 1968, with the merger of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church to form The United Methodist Church, the Central Jurisdiction was finally abolished, and all conferences were integrated.

During these years, the pastors included Rev. J.J. Barnes (1931-1940), Rev. Sherman Mason (briefly following Rev. Barnes' death), and Rev. Terry Burley (1941-1945). In 1939, the Methodist Episcopal Church merged with the Methodist Protestant Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, to become the Methodist Church. One of the delegates sent to the Jurisdictional Conference that approved of the merger was Inez McAbee from Friendship Church. In 1942, the Friendship Church building was relocated further back from Route 27 to its current location.

The last pastor to serve Friendship before it combined with Damascus United Methodist Church was Rev. Elmer Frink (1967-1968). In 1968, the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church merged to create The United Methodist Church. In 1969, Friendship and Damascus churches were joined as a two-point charge, which remains in place today.

****Recent History****

Members of the community established Friendship Church before 1901. Among the early members were families such as the Zeigler's, Holsey's, Welches, and Taylors. The original Friendship Church was built in the late 1800s and was named after a nearby farm owned by the Moxley family, a white family in the area. The name "Friendship" originates from the land grant on which the Moxley family developed Friendship Farm in Clagettsville.

In the church cemetery, headstones bear names such as Pott, Holsey, Lyles, Zeigler, and Gaither, representing the families that attended and supported the church in its early days, whose descendants are members today.

In the early 1950s, a community house was constructed adjacent to the church. This building supported the church's executive branch and was also used for African-American social functions within the community.

Friendship United Methodist Church continues to be very active as it enters its second century of ministry to the community. The church holds worship services and Sunday School every Sunday at 9:45 AM, along with special services throughout the year. Friendship offers a Christmas Day service, and the Damascus Friendship Parish Holy Week services begin with Monday and Tuesday services at Friendship. Additionally, the church is heavily involved in local community initiatives, regularly serving at the Frederick Soup Kitchen and participating in various district programs, including support for the N.M. Carroll Home and initiatives for Africa University.