

# Early History of St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church and Interesting Facts



*Saint Cyprian's Church is named after Cyprian, the first Bishop of Carthage, North Africa (248-258). He spoke for reconciliation of the Church with those who had denied their faith. Cyprian was beheaded for refusing to worship pagan gods and deny Christianity. Thus, he became a martyr of Christ's Church universal.*

## **Early History of St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church and Interesting Facts**

St. Cyprian's began with an idea that was nurtured and developed by many committed visionaries. It has grown to become a viable community asset over a period of 120 years (1905 to 2025).

Let's set the stage for St. Cyprian's birth. St. Cyprian's was born in a different time from today; it was a time of strict segregation of races in all areas of life's activities. There was no organized Episcopal Church for people of color (Colored) in Hampton and those few "Colored Episcopalians" who lived on the campus of Hampton Institute (now Hampton University) were not welcomed at the organized Episcopal Churches of St. John's and Emmanuel. Vacationing people of color who came to Hampton were not welcomed at the white established vacationing locations and consequently, they stayed with family, friends or with someone who took in roomers.

In the summer of 1905 when the Rev. Maxio F. Duty, Rector of St. Philip's Episcopal Church in Richmond, came to visit Hampton, he vacationed in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Phillips. Mr. Phillips was a Civil War veteran, a Navy retiree and a non-practicing Baptist. The two men had many conversations about the Episcopal Church. Mr. Phillips was truly impressed, expressed interest in becoming a member of the Episcopal Church and he wanted to work toward establishing a church for people of color. The two devised a plan to talk with the Rev. C. Braxton Bryan, Rector of St. John's, about their desire. Rev. Bryan expressed his similar thoughts about establishing a church for people of color and was pleased to assist them. Rev. Bryan shared that a mission could be started if ten (10) Episcopalians/ those of interest could be found.

The aged Mr. Phillips enlisted the help of his childhood friend, Mrs. Mary Williams Cardwell, an elementary school teacher, to make contacts for him. She knew and found seven (7) Colored Episcopalians on Hampton's campus and they were all happy to hear the news of the pending mission. The Ten Founders included

Mr. and Mrs. Richard Phillips, Mrs. Mary W. Cardwell, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Spennie, Mrs. Lottie Fairfield, Mr. and Mrs. Charles S. Freeman, Mrs. Cora Beamon and Mrs. Mary Santa Cruz. They met with Rev. Bryan on October 5, 1905 establishing us as a mission of St. John's. **Note: We were a part of the Episcopal Church in a category called "colored ministry work." Better integration in the Episcopal Church followed national trends of the fifties and sixties.** They met every Sunday and Thursday afternoon for Bible Study and Confirmation Instruction at various places in the city, including St. John's. The group grew to thirty (30) for the first Confirmation Class. How ironic, as it may seem, the birth of St. Cyprian's was realized by the desire to belong to the Episcopal Church by a non-practicing Baptist and not an Episcopalian.

After becoming a functional mission under the Rev. Reverdy Estill, a lot was purchased to build the first church at 136 Lincoln Street through donations from various sources. Much of the furnishing was made by or given by Founder Spennie. We still have a functional podium that was made by him. Lincoln Street remained St. Cyprian's home for more than fifty (50) years, followed by Tyler Street, Hampton University, and the current home at Queen Street.

### **Interesting Facts About Us**

1. We were founded by ten diligent God-fearing persons and a Founders' plaque can be viewed in the narthex. The plaque was donated by the Clapp/Taylor Family.
2. We have had fifteen (15) rectors: The Rev. Ebenezer Holcom Hamilton, The Rev. Julian F. Dozier, The Rev. Charles S. Sedgewick, The Rev. Charles H. Dukes, The Rev. Theodore R. Gibson, The Rev. George E. Harper, The Rev. Lloyd M. Alexander, The Rev. Walter D. Dennis, The Rev. Ivor A. Ottley, The Rev. Nathan D. Baxter, The Rev. James H. Hall, The Rev. Joy E. Walton, The Rev. Dennis Patterson, The Very Rev. Ronald E. Ramsey and our current, The Rev. Dr. Hector K. Sintim.

3. Two (2) of our rectors have become Bishops: The Rt. Rev. Walter D. Dennis and The Rt. Rev. Nathan D. Baxter.
4. We have had one female rector, The Rev. Joy E. Walton.
5. We became a parish (self- supporting congregation) in 1974 under our ninth (9th) rector, The Rev. Ivor A. Ottley.
6. We have 20 parishioners who have fifty or more years of active membership.
7. We have a parishioner, Ms. Juanita Alexander, who is the daughter of our seventh (7th) rector, The Rev. Lloyd M. Alexander.
8. We have a parishioner who drew the plans and his company constructed our current church site: Mr. Stanley G. Carnegie.
9. Our first female acolytes were Ms. Serena M. Satcher and Ms. Lenese A. Walls in 1975 under our ninth (9th) rector, Fr. Ottley.
10. In 1965 the first female, Mrs. Louise Woodhouse, was elected to the Vestry.
11. Eight (8) females have been elected as Senior Wardens: Mrs. Rosalind Exum, Mrs. Annette Monroe-Martin, Ms. Ardelle Anderson, Mrs. Fannie J. Walls, Mrs. Stephanie Kendall, Mrs. Darlene Jackson, Mrs. Laura L. Manigault and Mrs. Mary Tall Jackson.
12. In 2014 The Rev. Earl R. Christian became our Deacon-in-Residence. He retired as Deacon Emeritus on October 1, 2022.
13. In 2016 The Rt. Rev. Herman Hollerith, IV, appointed our 14th Rector as Dean of Convocation V, which gave him the title of The Very Rev. Ronald E. Ramsey.
14. For 55 years, Mrs. Phyllis Holland-James has served as our Minister of Music.
15. In 2021 The Rev. Darlene Ann Jackson was ordained as the first female Deacon of St. Cyprian's.
16. In 2022 the first female, Mrs. Gail Boyd Jones, was elected as a Trustee of the church.

17. One communicant, Ms. Cornelia Z. Taylor, is a first-year seminarian at Sewanee, University of the South.
18. Former communicant, Charles A. Wynder, Jr., was ordained an Episcopal priest and is currently Dean of Chapel and Spiritual Life at St. Paul's School, Concord, NH.
19. The Rev. Eric Robinson, who grew up in St. Cyprian's, is currently an ordained minister and on occasion serves as a supply minister here.
20. The late Rev. Henry Mitchell, husband of deceased parishioner Mrs. Gertrude Phillips Mitchell, was ordained an Episcopal priest, serving parishes in Northern Virginia.
21. On August 28, 2025 Mr. Lucius C. Wyatt was elevated to Emeritus Trustee status in appreciation of his more than 30 years of service in this capacity.
22. Over the years we have sponsored a Girl Scout/Brownie Troop, a Boy Scout/Cub Scout Troop, Summer Student Enrichment Programs, a Bowling Team, a Golf Team and Summer Bible School.

St. Cyprian's has remained a small viable congregation, with committed clergy and lay leadership. It has been active in Convocation V of the Diocese of Southern Virginia and the National Church and has worked diligently to improve the community. We give thanks to God for the many blessings given throughout our 120-years of existence and pray that those blessings will continue in our work for many years to come. **ALLELUIA!**

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