

Father-Son Pastors Provided Lifeblood At Bright Hope Church for 56 Years

By ORRIN EVANS

Of The Bulletin Staff

The Rev. William H. Gray, Jr., pastor of one of the largest Baptist congregations in Philadelphia said yesterday that Thanksgiving Day, 1966, has special significance for him.

For one thing, he observed, he and his 1,500 communicants are worshipping in a recently completed \$1.1 million edifice at 12th st. and Columbia av

"It's a far cry from 1910, when Bright Hope Baptist Church began as a mission in the dining room of a home at 2435 N. Alder st.," Mr. Gray said.

3 Generations

And he's thankful for what he believes is a unique distinction in this area: He is the son of a former pastor of the church and has a son, William H. Gray, 3d, who is a minister.

"When my son indicated a desire to enter the ministry I was elated," Mr. Gray said.

"The one thing I regretted when he received his bachelor of divinity degree at Drew University was that his grandfather was not there to share my pride."

The grandfather died in 1950, and his son assumed the pastorate of the church. The son, who also is a Philadelphia Civil Service commissioner, previously had served as president of Florida A & M College, Tallahassee, Fla.

Son In Montclair

Mr. Gray was hopeful that his son would remain with him at Bright Hope Baptist Church, as assistant minister.

The son, however, accepted the pastorate of Union Baptist Church in Montclair, N. J.

"But I'm glad now that he decided to strike out on his own," the father said.

Mr. Gray and his congregation decided to build the new church in 1958, when the Redevelopment Authority revealed

plans to redevelop the section now known as the Southwest Temple Area.

"There were 18 churches in the area," Mr. Gray said, "and with the help and guidance of the Department of Research and Planning of the Greater Philadelphia Council of Churches, leaders of neighborhood churches began working on their relocation plans."

At one planning session, he recalled, there was a discussion regarding the possibility of some of the churches rebuilding and remaining in the community.

"Thus, an idea was planted in the minds and hearts of members and leaders of Bright Hope Baptist Church," he said.

The church includes an auditorium, which accommodates 1,200 persons, a lower auditorium-chapel to which the sermon being delivered above is carried through loudspeakers to an overflow audience, and a gymnasium with a basketball court. The gym can seat 600.



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