



St. Paul Methodist Episcopal Church, Dallas, Texas: Its History and Significance

St. Paul Methodist Episcopal Church (now known as St. Paul United Methodist Church) was constructed beginning in 1913 and completed by 1927. The two-to-three story red brick church is a rare surviving example in Dallas of an early twentieth-century, architect-designed African American church that incorporates the construction contributions of its African American membership and residents of the surrounding Freedman's Town/North Dallas community. The church also is a rare example within the downtown Dallas area of the Collegiate Gothic Revival style embellished with Romanesque Revival style elements. Limited alterations were made in 1972, 1989, and 1997. A major renovation and restoration of this historic church began in 2007 and was completed in 2010. The church was designated as an historic landmark by the City of Dallas in 1982 and by the State of Texas in 2014.

Oral tradition relates that during the summer of 1873, a group of freedmen and freedwomen began meeting under a brush arbor on a vacant lot at the northeast end of North Dallas. At that time, the new congregation had not yet received official recognition by the Methodist Episcopal Church, nor had it received its official name. St. Paul church is considered the oldest African American Methodist Church in Dallas, and the third oldest African American church to be founded in the Freedman's Town/North Dallas neighborhood. St. Paul's first pastor was H. Boliver. Those attending the initial services led by Rev. Boliver included "...ex-slaves and freed soldiers..." and these individuals formed the nucleus of the congregation that became St. Paul Methodist Episcopal Church. Now lost to demolition and redevelopment as an arts district, the Freedman's Town/North Dallas neighborhood was a stable, thriving, regional center of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Black culture that supported as many as fifteen churches, a number of educational and social service institutions, and many businesses, and included a mix of laborers, wage workers and professionals.

St. Paul Church is architecturally significant for its locally unusual Collegiate Gothic/Romanesque Revival style architecture and its rare, surviving, archaic construction methods. The church is socially significant for its associations with the Freedman's Town/North Dallas African American community, for its reflection of segregated community development patterns and life in Dallas, for its role in providing community support and social services to church members and to the larger African American community, for its leadership in assisting in the professionalization and permanence of African American churches in Dallas, and for fostering social change through action designed to desegregate institutions and provide improved living conditions for Dallas African Americans in the pre-Civil Rights era. The church also is socially and architecturally significant for the contribution of member labor to its construction, which continues the prevalent late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century practice of first-generation-free-people working together toward a long-range goal. St. Paul church is in excellent condition and retains a very high degree of exterior integrity. For these reasons, St. Paul Methodist Episcopal Church was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on December 27, 2016 at the local level of significance for its architectural design, and its ability to tell a few of the under-told stories of African American life and achievement between the years 1927 to 1966.

From its founding, the church has been a leader in the community on spiritual, educational and social justice matters. As a community change agent, it was at St. Paul in 1876 where Sam Houston College, now Huston-Tillotson University, located in Austin, was founded and its first classes were held.

As the North Texas region began to expand, St. Paul helped plant the following congregations to address that growth: Carver Heights, Crest Moore-King, Grand Prairie Trinity, Hamilton Park, Highland Hills and Warren United Methodist Churches.

St. Paul continues to support ministries that serve the community like Body and Soul Homeless Ministry and the Dallas Bethlehem Center which was founded at St. Paul in 1944. Along with creative niche outreach ministries like Tuesday Night Jazz, ArtsVision, Roseland Partners and Easter on the Bridge, the church strives to be a community innovator.

In 2014, St. Paul made history once again as it merged with Union Cathedral, and the appointment of Union's founding Pastor Richie Butler. The union made St. Paul a multigenerational and multi-cultural congregation and marches St. Paul toward a greater future.

Since its inception, St. Paul has been led by 34 pastors. Each brought their own diverse leadership styles that reflected the needs of the community, both locally and regionally. The church continues to play an active role in the community through spiritual, social, educational and civic activities.