

***Middle Atlantic Regional Gospel Ministries, Inc.***

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## The Headquarters Story An Abbreviated Narrative

By E. Myron Noble

Although the need existed, enormous amounts of energy had not been expended to meet that need. An ever-increasing ministry outreach and workload clearly indicated the pursuit of a suitable facility for MARGM. The search was initiated, then dropped and later, casually renewed.

During 1996 we observed a vacant property in the 2300 block of Sherman Avenue, N.W. Following several weeks of investigation by three real estate companies, one realtor finally uncovered the treasure. Buried deep in legal records, the vacant (several years) property was listed as a holding of Howard University. Our vision for a physical plant was clear-cut but hope was somewhat diminished.

Previously, the late Pastor Helen I. Noble had observed in 1995 a different unoccupied northwest property. After her investigation she informed us of the results: the list price was quoted "\$225,000 as is." Not interested. Nearly a year afterward, MARGM board member, Elder Shiren Noble encouraged us to learn the particulars of the same property. We declined. She continued to encourage us. We continued to decline. Months later we agreed to investigate but took no immediate action.

### The Pursuit

On a summer afternoon during 1997, we observed a man exiting the now boarded up (same) property. Moving quickly to approach the man, we inquired. Are you in charged? "Yes" was the reply. Your asking price? "\$125,000 as is; I can help you purchase it." Advice was sought from an attorney specializing in real estate litigation. Meanwhile, another realtor informed us of the legal representative for the property who was located in an office only seven blocks south on the same street as the property. During an illuminating conversation with the representative, we learned that the heir of the property resided in Philadelphia, PA. We forwarded that information to a friend and Philadelphia native, Pastor Elwin Urquhart. He investigated. Within a few days a report was sent to us. Details precipitated preliminary long distance telephone exploratory negotiations with the heir.

An African American attorney in Silver Spring, MD accepted our retainer fee and initiated a legal investigation. About two weeks later she very sternly told us not to

become involved because the business was too entangled, too much red tape. The retainer was immediately refunded.

A few weeks later on an autumn morning (about 5:00 a.m.), we went to the property, placed our hands on the front lawn and prayed. It was a prayer for guidance. The unknown loomed ahead.

We went to another law firm, which declined our request to investigate. However, a different attorney was recommended to us. That attorney agreed only to a cursory review of the case. A few days later he reported, suggesting that the circumstances of the situation were very complicated and the legal work would be expensive. However, if we yet desired to pursue the case, there were two possible means to an end. Either the attorney would perform the work and bill us all the costly fees or the attorney would give us guidance and we would do the extensive "leg work," thereby reducing expenses. The latter arrangement was agreed upon.

For several months it was legwork, paper work, headwork and much more legwork. Tedious negotiations with personnel of various departments of the District of Columbia Government and time consuming meetings with several utility companies all proved to be very educational. Pleasant transactions with the heir/owner, however, kept us smiling.

After much work during a hot summer, the deed was executed on October 16, 1998. The original sale price of \$225,000, later listed at \$125,000 by another realtor did not compare to the Divine set cost of less than \$40,000. Praise the Lord! Although Attorney Roy Kaufmann readily performed his services, charging the necessary fees during the months long process, *he unexpectedly dropped his final \$4,000 fee*. Had we not been sitting, we would have dropped to the floor, for the checkbook was in hand. We were prepared to draft the check. Again, the Lord bestowed His favor upon the process. The end of phase one opened the way for phase two.

## The Face of Rehabilitation

It was obvious that expert contractors were required. When the boarded up building was opened up, the logical conclusion was to gut it out. About one fourth of the foundational work was completed by the first general contractor, prior to his departure from the job in 1999. Four contractors gave estimates from \$73,000 - \$180,000 ( $\pm$  10% adjustments) to complete the unfinished work. Following the hiring of a recommended contractor, the rehabilitation was resumed and completed in 2001.

Many unexpected events occurred during the restoration project - some good, some not so good. The first contractor did not fulfill his contractual obligations. On three separate occasions the property was burglarized. Theft necessitated installation of iron bars on the windows and iron security doors at the three primary entrances. Thankfully, no one was on the premises when the break-ins occurred.

From time to time notes, letters of inquiry and formal purchase proposals were left at the front door. Often time we received telephone calls from potential buyers. Offers ranged from \$150,000 - \$275,000. All proposals were emphatically rejected!

## The Lord's Blessing to US

And so the restored four level structure, perched on a hilltop is about twenty paces from a panoramic view of downtown Washington, D.C. The new occupants eagerly embraced their Lord's Blessing on the southeast corner of 11<sup>th</sup> and Euclid Streets. However, the cross street was known as Roanoke Street when the original structure was built during the end of the nineteenth century (circa 1899). One of the first residents of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was George Simmons (circa 1904). A substantial addition was built onto the structure in 1915.

Following the turn of the century, development greatly increased north of Florida Avenue, N.W., from Georgia Avenue to 16<sup>th</sup> Street. Already established were Howard University (George Avenue; Garfield Memorial Hospital (Sherman Avenue to 11<sup>th</sup> Street) and Merriweather Post Castle (16<sup>th</sup> and Florida). After many zoning nomenclature changes during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, our real property was formally ledgered as lot 0012 and lot 0807, square 2864, neighborhood code 015; 2549 Eleventh Street, Northwest in Mount Pleasant Plains. Years later, the political designation was added: Ward 1, Zone 4, Precinct 37, ANC/SMD 1B03.

## The Other History

Glimpses of immediate past owners are a wonderful lead-in to a significant, unique narrative. The heir property was owned by a niece of a former Church of God in Christ jurisdictional bishop of Washington, D.C. The late Bishop Samuel Kelsey became the second pastor of the First Church of God in Christ. Later renamed Temple COGIC, the congregation made a third name change, Kelsey Temple COGIC. Pastor Kelsey, a previous owner, lived on the premise about a quarter century, until his death in 1992.

During early 1923 Overseer Thompson, the presiding jurisdictional prelate, appointed Elder Joseph T. Durbin, Sr., pastor of First COGIC. Elder Durbin had been a host to Elder William J. Seymour in 1911 when Seymour visited Washington, D.C. (Seymour was the African American leader credited with spawning the worldwide Pentecostal Movement from the Azusa Street Revival, Los Angeles, California. 1906 -1909). In the summer of 1923 Kelsey conducted revivals in D.C. It was documented how Kelsey and Durbin set up a large rubber pool in front of Freedmen's Hospital (now School of Communications, Howard University) and together they conducted water baptisms there. During the fall of 1923 Kelsey became pastor of First COHIC and Durbin returned to active membership at his former Pentecostal church in D.C. Thus the hands (Durbin) that welcomed Seymour, the hands that greeted Kelsey (Durbin) are the same hands (Durbin) that cradled E. Myron Noble, the baby. The late Elder Joseph T. Durbin, Sr., father of the late Pastor Helen I. Durbin Noble was the grandfather of Elder

E. Myron Noble. And E. Myron Noble shook the hands of Bishop Samuel Kelsey. Hence, the property has had its Galilee, its "circle" of Pentecostal hands-on ownership.

### The MARGM Faith Partners

Oh, what a shell; completed it looked well. However, furnishing and equipping the 1,600 square foot building required immediate action. Unsolicited and volunteered, by the truckloads and by carloads, MARGM Faith Partners and friends supplied furnishings for six rooms. Their gifts were sent from several states. Office equipment, some new and some pre-owned, valued at more than \$30,000 was purchased over a nine-month period.

And they came to celebrate, to celebrate what the Lord God had provided for His people. On March 9, 2002 the dedication celebration marked a significant milestone in the annals of MAR Gospel Ministries (see MARGM newsletter, Vol. 13, No.1, Spring 2002). This ministry has been debt free since its inception. Guests were overjoyed when informed that MARGM possessed, moved into and furnished the building debt free! There were no building committees/rallies, no dinners sold, no solicitation, no bank loans, no collateral, no lottery played and no foundation grants appropriated in the acquisition of our MARGM International Headquarters. Jehovah—jireh! Each of the four levels serves a particular function. Each room on each floor is designed for a designated activity. Each includes its own, singular story. A guided tour is one hour, twenty minutes.

### The Open Doors: Present and Future

Whether it is an educational student field trip, home schoolers included or church group or tourist party or family, your visits to our headquarters is welcome. Ministry development, foreign missions, writing, publishing, building acquisition, prison ministry, selected African American church history and other subjects actualized through MARGM are highlighted during the on-site tours. (Nursery and handicap accessibility is not **available at this time.**)

If it be the Lord's will, MARGM will initiate Christian education seminars and practicum sessions in 2004. These sessions will be **convened at headquarters**. A course catalog will be **made available** to the public. Each block will be from four to six weeks.

Office space in two previously registered locations in Washington, D.C. was donated to MARGM rent free. Each of those venues included a snippet of Pentecostal history. And now a tradition continues because the present headquarters bears an aspect of Pentecostal history. With an attitude of gratitude we thank God who has shown mercy and given direction to this ministry. Your participation is encouraged and welcome.

For your visit, tour group appointment or other MARGM interests, call now: (202) 265-4603. See you soon...