

# Our History

## **The Foundation**

In 1939 a group of Christians founded a new church in Scottdale, Georgia, Travelers Rest Baptist church. The name was inspired by the fact that members had traveled to various places for worship before construction of their first church building. Over the years, membership grew under the leadership of four pastors: Reverend Hezekiah E. Smith, Reverend Theodore R. Smith, Reverend Eugene Bryant and Reverend Chester L. Carter.

In October 1982 Reverend Kenneth Samuel became the fifth pastor as the church continue to grow. In the summer of 1983, Reverend Samuel and a group of deacons began looking for a new church to handle the growth. In January 1984 they announced to the Travelers Rest congregation that Life and Praise Tabernacle, located at 2778 Snapfinger Road in Decatur, Georgia, was available.

Although some Travelers Rest members chose to remain at their church in Scottdale, later that year on Sunday, May 20, about 150 people gathered at 2778 Snapfinger Road for their first church service in the new building.

At the recommendation of Reverend Samuel, the congregation unanimously approved a most befitting name, "New Birth Missionary Baptist Church." New Birth continued to grow as many changes took place, some very difficult, as the Lord began to mold and shape this new church body into His perfect will. Part of that change brought a new pastor. The Lord led Reverend Eddie L. Long to New Birth, and he was appointed pastor in July 1987.

Under the dynamic leadership of Reverend Long, New Birth experienced tremendous growth spiritually, economically and numerically. Reverend Long realized the need for a new sanctuary and accomplished this vision just three and a half years after becoming pastor.

In January 1991 New Birth dedicated their facility worth over \$2 million to the glory of God. By 1982 New Birth had grown from 300 (in 1987) to more than 8,000 members. "God had to teach me and grow me," said Reverend Long. "As I'm growing the congregation is growing. Now He's giving me more responsibility. God said, 'I've sheltered you, and you were the preacher; now you've been here five years, and I have taught you many things. Now you are the pastor. Be pastor.'" Reverend Long took those words from the Lord and put them into action. He broke religious traditions, constantly teaching the word of God in an uncompromising way. He was a bold, yet loving shepherd of a church that called itself "The Church That Shares and Cares."

The next year New Birth was cited as the fastest growing church in North America, and many new ministries were born, including the opening of a New Birth Christian School, Faith Academy, now known as New Birth Christian Academy. The school opened by welcoming students from kindergarten through third grade with plans to expand each year.



The church theme for 1993, “Vision to Victory,” as explained by Reverend Long, represented their purpose to do ministry throughout the community and the country.

The next five years would see an unprecedented growth of new members and new ministries. In His sovereignty, God chose New Birth to be a major forerunner for the body of Christ and appropriately appointed its powerful leader, Reverend Eddie L. Long; each year he unveiled a different theme as he received vision and divine direction from God. Subsequently, as he followed God’s will, New Birth’s favor grew with man and with God, from glory to glory.

In 1994 the new theme, “Taking Authority,” was adopted based on Matthew 16:19. The year began with an unforgettable service: On Wednesday, January 13, Reverend Long was consecrated as the third presiding Bishop of the Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship. This historic period was the year Bishop Long introduced the community to Project Destiny (formally Project Impact), a comprehensive family restoration program that provides services to youth and their families who are challenged by the demands of their environment.

Bishop Long expanded his ministry through television in 1994 and began the “New Birth News” broadcast on a local television network.

Bishop Long ushered in the theme “Building God a House” in 1995, based on Psalm 127:1. “New Birth News” gave way to the weekly, Emmy Award winning “Taking Authority” broadcast, which aired internationally on several networks, reaching over 170 countries. That year Bishop Long led New Birth in a bold stance for God when he publicly challenged the Muslim-led million-man march.

After Building God a House, it was time to set it in order. Ezekiel 43:10 inspired the theme for 1996: “Setting the House in Order.” This year saw a myriad of Spirit-filled messages by Bishop Long released as audio and video series, one of which still claims the highest number of sales in the New Birth Media Book Store: “I Don’t Want Delilah, I Need You.” Bishop Long was obedient to God in setting the house in order, the church received tremendous favor and was able to purchase 170 acres of prime property worth over \$10 million for only \$3 million. During a caravan to the new land, Bishop Long stated, “God spoke to me in reference to putting the church in order, that it would become His church and not man’s church. God said ‘Upon this rock I will build my church and the very gates of hell will not prevail against it.’ (Matthew 16:17–19). So whatever hell threw up, it could not stand because it was God’s movement.

1997, Bishop Long’s 10th anniversary year, brought a growth in membership to over 18,000. Early in the year, New Birth and several area churches opened a joint credit union, the South Dekalb Church Federal Credit Union. Later that year after selling the 170 acres acquired in 1996, the church made a profit of \$11 million. With this profit, they were able to purchase over 240 acres for a new multimillion-dollar church complex, pay off church debt and deposit \$2 million in the bank.

These major achievements were a perfect representation of God’s favor and befitting of the new theme, “Thy Kingdom Come,” based on Matthew 6:10. Growing from a newspaper into a



magazine, the “New Birth Voice” captured these and many other blessings bestowed upon New Birth.

Though experiencing much favor with God, the New Birth family still had to go higher and higher in Him. In 1998 they were led by Bishop Long to “Launch Out Into the Deep,” based on a sermon from Luke 5:4. New Birth reached out to the world through all forms of media, including commercials, international television and radio broadcasts, and a new book was published by Bishop Long, “I Don’t Want Delilah, I Need You.” Bishop Long spoke to members of the Georgia State Senate and prayed for the United States House of Representatives, and New Birth always welcomed candidates in local elections. God was expanding the ministry of New Birth throughout the country, that His glory would be revealed to all. On October 17 thousands of members rejoiced at the official groundbreaking ceremony for the new church complex, and building plans were underway.

“It’s On In ’99!” This exciting theme was a testament to the whirlwind of blessing and growth for New Birth in 1999. Membership grew to over 23,000 members. Bishop Long wrote a new book, “Taking Over,” and God elevated New Birth to a new level in its ministry outside the four walls of the church, even as far as Japan and Africa.

On the home front, the New Birth family celebrated the grand opening of its new Family Life Center on October 4 and 5, located on the current New Birth Stonecrest campus. The center served as a temporary worship site while construction of the new sanctuary complex continued. After the sanctuary was complete, it was renamed as the Samson Health & Fitness Center. Member benefits include concierge lifestyle and sports nutrition, month-to-month memberships, personal training, group fitness and aerobics, spinning and cycling classes, one-on-one and group fitness, and weight loss consulting.

### **Significant Growth**

New Birth entered the new millennium stronger than ever with over 25,000 members. Bishop Long’s book “Called to Conquer” hit the scene in the year 2000. New Birth moved into a magnificent new place of worship, the New Birthday Cathedral, in the spring of 2001. The \$50 million complex seats 10,000 people and contains administrative offices, a library, a 1700-square foot bookstore, a computer lab, kitchen, audio and video studios, a nursery and more.

The Cathedral is magnificent in beauty and size. Perhaps one of the neatest things about the striking structure is this: When the foundation was laid, members submitted individual prayers that were placed directly into the concrete mix that solidified the floors of the sanctuary; so each week, worshippers are standing on the prayers and declarations — literally and spiritually — of New Birth members of old, some of whom are still members today.

The New Birth ministry continued to expand and became known as the fastest growing church in North America, which brought worldwide influence, as well.

During the next 14 years, New Birth expanded its footprint: New Birth churches were planted in various cities across the United States.



In 2006, the eyes of the world were on New Birth when it hosted the homegoing service for Coretta Scott King and welcomed three presidents and a host of dignitaries. Later that same year, New Birth drew nearly 40,000 into the Georgia Dome for the country's largest Easter Service.

In the decade that followed, Bishop Long continued to make sure that the New Birth family was connected to each other through ministries — from the youngest toddlers to the most seasoned saints. This was enforced through the slogan, “We are New Birth,” and “we” included *all* members, young and old, leading the world to worship God through serving, loving, evangelizing and discipleship.

New Birth's International Prayer Conference Call, now known as the Bishop Eddie L. Long International Prayer Call, has faithfully continued since 2012 with nearly 4 million prayer warriors from 97 countries joining five days a week for early morning prayer.

With its expansive building facilities and all of its resources, New Birth continues to sponsor various programs and events that minister to people locally, nationally and internationally. Throughout the years, thousands discovered their destinies due to the sacrificial life led by Bishop Eddie L. Long, a man after God's own heart. To God be the glory.

### **New Legacy**

On January 15, 2017, God decided to call one of his generals home. After fighting an aggressive form of cancer, Bishop Eddie L. Long breathed his last breath at the age of 63 and relaxed in the arms of his Maker and Creator. It is there where we will meet him again.

Dignitaries, politicians, celebrities, pastors and New Birth members from ‘Snapfinger Woods days’ to the present came to commemorate his life in a moving and unforgettable Celebration of Life service on January 25, 2017.

Bishop Eddie L. Long demonstrated compassion, giving and serving while teaching and encouraging spiritual growth. New Birth Stonecrest was his home base, but like a true soldier in the Army of the Lord, his influence was global.

Before settling into his heavenly home, Bishop Long made his wishes known that Bishop Stephen A. Davis should become New Birth's Interim Senior Pastor. Davis had founded Refiner's House Church in Alabama and later changed the name to New Birth Birmingham after joining the New Birth family of churches in 2010. New Birth members and many touched by Bishop Long around the world were still in mourning over Bishop Long when Bishop Davis took the helm. He was officially introduced to the New Birth family as their new pastor on January 29, 2017, right on the heels of Bishop Long's Celebration of Life service. During his time as Senior Pastor, Davis took on the challenge of bringing stability, demonstrating strength and navigating the waters in a sea of brokenness. It was time for a season of healing.

After about 16 months of leading New Birth members through their transition and resettling, Davis decided it was time to return to New Birth Birmingham. He felt his focus was needed there as well as at his second church in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.



Once Bishop Davis returned to Alabama, a nationwide search for a new leader ushered in the beginning of a new era of leadership: Dr. Jamal Harrison-Bryant was named as the new Senior Pastor in November 2018.

A third-generation pastor, Dr. Bryant delivered his first sermon at New Birth on Sunday, December 9, 2018, and was later officially installed as pastor at a ceremony on March 10, 2019.

In addition to his drive for social activism and ability to affect change in social, economic and political arenas, Dr. Bryant founded and grew a 43-member congregation — Empowerment Temple A.M.E. Church of Baltimore — to over 10,000 members, all experience which poised him as a perfect candidate to lead New Birth, a church with a similar ‘upbringing.’ Chosen among a pool of more than 180 applicants, Dr. Bryant has hit the ground sprinting with what he calls “a rebirth of New Birth”; he’s implemented socially uplifting and faith-building programs for members, as well as impactful programs and activities for the community. In his first Atlanta television interview, December 7, 2018, he told Fox 5’s Marissa Mitchell that New Birth is “getting ready to take this city back by storm.” He wants to make sure that the gospel and its full meaning does not stay hidden inside the four walls of the church but flows far out into the streets.

The very next month after his first sermon, in January 2019, Dr. Bryant would see just what type of place he was called to lead. Due to a prolonged United States government shutdown, many members who were federal workers were in great need, and he felt New Birth should do something to help. Members eagerly collected enough funds to give 30 government workers nearly \$300 each. An article featured on the event Jan 16, 2019, in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution by Tom Jones said Bryant “was absolutely blown away” by the compassion he saw from his new flock.

Also, in January 2019, true to his vision to impact the Atlanta community at large, Dr. Bryant initiated Soup and Souls. He strategically challenged the Millennials and Baby Boomers to see which team could collect the most cans toward the effort to collect 5,000 cans of soup. Well over 10,000 cans were collected, and New Birth members delivered them door to door, along with an invitation to visit the church. The initiative culminated with a grand Super Bowl party for the homeless community, held at New Birth along with the Safe House Outreach. The event was a great success and was featured in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution on January 31, 2019, in the article “Touchdown for Jesus: New Birth hosts huge Super Bowl Party for Homeless” by Valerie J. Morgan.

The following month on February 24, New Birth collected a United Negro College Fund Offering. We partnered with Hampton University to provide tuition and assisted students with getting tickets and passports. The same month, Bennett College President Dr. Phyllis Worthy Dawkins was able to announce that the college had raised well over the required funds it needed to maintain its SACSCOC accreditation, thanks in part to a \$16,000 donation from New Birth, initiated by Dr. Bryant.

On February 25, Dr. Bryant hosted “The Vow,” a free citywide wedding celebration for couples who were in need of assistance for their wedding. Church members and local vendors gave donations that blessed the couples with formal wear, bridal gowns, cakes and more, gifting them with lasting memories of their special day.



In the month of April, Bryant brought in highly successful black wealth accumulators — George Fraser, James Hunt, Amy Dawkins and others — to teach the membership through a series called “The Millionaire Academy.” Also, since becoming pastor, Dr. Bryant began a Book of the Month Club, encouraging members to read a book a month to inspire entrepreneurship, personal development and wealth building. He is serious about his vision for New Birth, and each month, ‘he puts his money where his mouth is.’

True to the New Birth style, on March 3, the congregation collected \$8,736 for eviction relief, serving five families. And in early April they assisted more than 1,000 kids in the Spring Break Mobile Lunch Program. Kids in apartment complexes within the Stonecrest area received free hot lunches and enjoyed games, music, fun and evangelistic ministry. Additionally, in April, 150 intercessors participated in a Holy Saturday Prayer Walk around the New Birth Campus, putting to practice God's mandate to pray about everything, per Ephesians 4:6.

For his first Resurrection Weekend at New Birth, Dr. Bryant planned a ‘mega weekend’ to remember. On Friday night, April 19, New Birth aired “Seven Last Words” on the Word Network and BET, featuring seven of Dr. Bryant’s well-known ministry associates from around the country. On Saturday, New Birth was able to celebrate a life-changing effort called “The Word Is Our Bond.” Working with Dekalb, Gwinnett and Fulton county officials, New Birth raised more than \$118,000 in community donations to post bail for more than 150 families. Freed individuals were able to spend the Resurrection holiday weekend with family instead of behind bars. But Dr. Bryant didn’t stop there; he made sure that “Word is Our Bond” helped those released transition back into society by providing food, legal assistance and other social services through nonprofit organizations.

The month of May holds a special place in New Birth’s heart: It’s the birth month of both the late Bishop Eddie L. Long on May 12 and also of Dr. Bryant on May 18. In honor of Bishop Long’s posthumous birthday, New Birth held the grand opening of the B.E.L.L. Legacy Center, which showcases Long’s memorabilia, vestiges, books, popular messages, favorite clothing and more. In honor of Dr. Bryant’s birthday, New Birth presented a free red-carpet premiere of the movie “Sinners Wanted.” Bryant’s gift of bringing people and dynamic events together — not only for the sake of empowerment, but also for the sake of the gospel — is making steady headway into impacting the lives of people inside and outside the four walls of the church.

The next month on Sunday, June 30, New Birth kicked off Campaign 235, a life-changing quest to eliminate debt. True to New Birth’s style of always expanding love outside their four walls, their missions outreach continued into the following month as they hosted Global Missions Outreach Day on July 7. One thousand volunteers helped prepare 50,000 meals, \$15,000 was donated to Food Aid International, and \$5,000 was donated to Compassion International. The ministry’s ball of compassion continued to roll, and on August 3, New Birth give away 5,000 pairs of shoes to students in grades K-12 at a Back to School Shoe Drive, and 300 pairs of shoes were left over to bless additional families. The number of volunteers that pulled this off? Four thousand.



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When Hurricane Dorian hit the Bahamas, New Birth's hands stretched even more and launched Restoration Bahamas on September 3, partnering with Caring for Others, Delta, Jet Blue, Lowe's, Smile Truck and Hampton University to send relief — pallets of food, toiletries, diapers, first aid items, cleaning supplies, canned goods and more.

October 18-19, Dr. Bryant brought culture, community and fun together and hosted the New Birth International Film Festival, presented by Lisa Wu. With the intent to bring local, national and global awareness to the arts, the nonprofit festival will provide a platform for emerging artists whose voices and talent the public may not otherwise know.

In addition to blessing those outside the four walls of the church, Dr. Bryant ensures that members are also equipped with what they need. In a spirit of continual growth, mentally and spiritually, throughout 2019 Bryant adopted a different theme and corresponding book of the month for members to dive into.

2019 was wrapped up with more impactful missions, globally and locally. November 29 - December 9, a team of six led by Elder Carla Stokes provided ministry in Kenya. The last month of the year saw local ministry with huge blessings for the homeless community in metropolitan Atlanta. Eight hundred and thirty-two coats were delivered to homeless shelters (Covenant House, Safe House, Gateway, Atlanta City Mission, and Our House – Atlanta & Decatur); 600 coats were given away to the homeless downtown in Hurt Park and at Tent City (under the bridge at I-75/85 near Gateway Shelter); and 225 coats were given to other individuals and organizations (VMI, Rockdale County Schools, Phoenix Pass Transitional Housing, South Fulton County High School Students via The Love Care Package & Positive Transitional Services). New Birth is grateful to both Popeyes on Panola Road and Chick-fil-A on Turner Hill Road for providing the volunteers with chicken sandwiches.

Partnering with New York-based nonprofit RIP Medical Debt, New Birth canceled nearly \$1.3 million in medical debt for 1,200 people in DeKalb County, Georgia. Dr. Bryant is serious about empowering people, not only spiritually but financially, as well. Launched during the 2019 Christmas holiday season, this debt relief effort was a surprise blessing and most welcome.

2020 began with New Birth in full swing, continuing to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the community. On January 28 they held the grand opening of The King's Table Food Ministry, which will distribute free groceries to those in need. Together with volunteers, The King's Table will serve the community on Tuesdays between 5-7 p.m., or as long as supplies last on a first-come, first-served basis. Yet another grand opening took place on Saturday, February 1: The Garden of Eden Groundbreaking Ceremony.



Bryant once led nearly 70,000 young people worldwide on non-violent campaigns as the National Youth and College Director of the NAACP, a position he began at just 22 years old. Such early leadership and activism paired with a strong interest to empower the economically disadvantaged and spread the gospel is just the type of leader New Birth needs. His convictions fit in perfect with New Birth's mantra to "live, love and lead like Christ." Bryant falls fourth in line to lead New Birth, following Kenneth Samuel, 1984 – 1987; Bishop Eddie L. Long 1987 – 2017; and Bishop Stephen A. Davis, 2017 – 2018.

In "God Recycles," an article featured in [theatlantavoices.com](http://theatlantavoices.com) on April 19, 2019, Dr. Bryant informed interviewer Marshall A. Latimore that he plans to "use the assets of the megachurch to teach his members about land accumulation, development and wealth building." Sitting on more than 240 acres in unincorporated Dekalb County, New Birth stands as an incentive itself for this agenda, as Dr. Bryant noted in the Atlanta Voice article that Bishop Eddie L. Long created "the largest land-owning mass of any black church in America." In addition to the stadium-sized sanctuary, the campus includes a community center, a grade school, a day care center, a gymnasium with membership opened to the public, and a football field used by local schools.

Dr. Bryant is honored to have accepted the challenge to lead New Birth and looks forward to creating a new legacy; taking the church and its members to even greater heights; and making a significant difference in the greater Atlanta community, and in the world.