



ST. JAMES PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN
NEW YORK CITY



A Brief History of
St. James Presbyterian Church
New York, New York

St. James Presbyterian Church is the child of the Shiloh Presbyterian Church. Shiloh, founded in 1822 and a part of the Underground Railroad, was the first Presbyterian church in the city of New York, to be organized as an African American Congregation. St. James beginnings started with the concerns of a number of individuals dissatisfied with the dissolution of Shiloh Church, pastored by Rev. Henry Highland Garnet.

St. James was founded at the Odd Fellows Hall at 108 W. 32nd Street under the leadership of Rev. Pierce Butler Thompkins on April 26, 1895. Known as the New Presbyterian Church, the members immediately selected the name St. James Church. St. James moved several times before settling into its current location at 141st Street and St. Nicholas Avenue. St. James' history of service starts with the abolition movement, the Underground Railroad, the Harlem race riots, and the organizing of the Lucy Craft Laney League to fund schools in the south.

The ministers: Rev. Pierce Butler Thompkins, 1895-1902; Rev. C. Leroy Butler, 1902-1911; Rev. Frances M. Hyder, 1924-1926, Rev. William Lloyd Imes, 1925-1943—under whose leadership the membership grew to 2000; Rev. Shelby Rooks, 1943-1973—whose leadership saw the growth of many clubs and organizations, and numerous choirs under the direction of his wife, Dorothy Maynor, who founded the Harlem School of the Arts in the gym of St. James, now housed next door; Rev. Lenton Gunn, 1977-2002—Co-founder of Harlem Congregations for Community Improvement (HCCI) and Harlem Initiatives Together (H.I.T.); Rev. Eugene S. Callendar, Stated Supply Pastor, continued to do outreach and work with in the community and was instrumental in getting St. James to be a member of Presbyterian Welcome (now known as Parity). We are the only African American Presbyterian Church to be a Welcoming and Affirming church in the Presbytery of New York. Rev. Callendar left in 2006. Rev. Derrick W. McQueen joined us in 2015 as our Interim Pastor and has served as the moderator of the Presbytery of New York City.