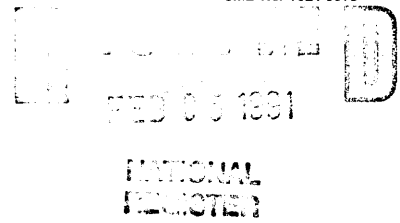


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Bethel A.M.E. Church  
other names/site number Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church

### 2. Location

street & number 414 West Vermont Street N/A not for publication  
city, town Indianapolis N/A vicinity  
state IN code IN county Marion code 097 zip code 46202

### 3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

### 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

*John T. Little* 1-18-91  
Signature of certifying official Date  
Indiana Department of Natural Resources  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

### 5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register. *Patrick Andrews* 3/21/91  
 See continuation sheet.  
 determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.  
 determined not eligible for the National Register.  
 removed from the National Register.  
 other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

*Pat* Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: Religious Structure,  
Church Related Residence

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: Religious Structure

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN: Romanesque

MODERN MOVEMENT: Post Modern

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE: limestone

walls BRICK

STUCCO

roof ASPHALT

other

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Describe present and historic physical appearance.

See continuation sheets.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

ETHNIC HERITAGE: Black  
RELIGION  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance

1869-1941  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates

1869  
1894  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder

Busch, Adam  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

See continuation sheets.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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Davita, James. "Ethnic Settlement Patterns in Indianapolis," Context Study Prepared for the Indiana Division of Historic Preservation, 1988.

Dunn, Jacob Piatt. Greater Indianapolis. Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1911, Vols, I and II.

Ferguson, Earline Rae. "In Pursuit of the Full Enjoyment of Liberty and Happiness: Blacks in Antebellum Indianapolis, 1820-1860,"

See continuation sheet

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

**Specify repository:**

Indiana Historic Sites and Structures Inventory

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of property Less than one acre.

**UTM References**

A 

1	6
---	---

5	7	1	4	6	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

4	4	0	2	6	8	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Zone      Easting      Northing

C 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

B 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Zone      Easting      Northing

D 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

A parcel of land in Center Township, Marion County, Indiana, described as follows: Cox and Strickland Subdivision, 110' off of south end of Lot 4-6, and 3.84' x 110', southwest corner, Lot 3, Square 11.

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

This is the historic boundary, including both the church and office (parsonage).

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Elisabeta Goodall, Paul Diebold, Iris Yateman

organization \_\_\_\_\_ date 12/19/90

street & number 414 West Vermont Street telephone 317/634-7012

city or town Indianapolis state IN zip code 46202

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1 Bethel A.M.E. Church

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Bethel A.M.E. Church occupies a level site in the northeast section of the original plat of Indianapolis. Through the years, this area was a mixture of residential, commercial, and light industrial uses. Historically, this part of the downtown was traditionally the heart of the city's black community. The immediate environment is now dominated by the redevelopment of the adjacent Central Canal of 1836. New housing and landscaping are located south and east of the site. Vermont Street is now closed to vehicular traffic, giving the church a plaza-like setting. Vacant lots surround the site to the west and north.

Judging from Sanborn maps and church records, the main portion of the church building was erected in 1867-9, while the tower, east gable, and west cross gable were added in 1894. It is possible that further brick work was done to the exterior in 1894 since there is no immediately apparent difference between the type of brick used for the tower and the main block.

The church actually consists of two interconnected buildings: the church and an adjacent former parsonage (now office). The church is a three story, red brick building with a square four story tower. It rests on a rock faced limestone foundation. The church has Romanesque Revival style features. The main facade faces south to Vermont Street. It shows clearly the only significant alteration to the building: a three story false facade which was placed over the main block in 1973-4. The false facade consists of a hollow metal framework coated with stucco to resemble stone. It forms a single stilted arch over the main entrance and two narrow arches to either side. The false facade has a flared cornice.

Originally, the main facade had three openings on the upper and lower portions of the facade (see photocopy). The main entry was flanked by quoined pilasters and featured a large round arch. Flanking this were short, segmental arched windows with label hoods. A brick stringcourse which curved to follow the entry arch divided the upper level from the first story. The upper floor windows extended over one story in height. A window with paired lancets stood above the entry. To either side were single round arch windows set within round arched recessed panels. A gabled dormer with a large round arch crowned the roof above the entry. This was removed in 1973. Still remaining visible on the front of

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2 Bethel A.M.E. Church

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the main block are the first story quoined corners, stringcourse, and the brick corbel table at the cornice, which is used on all sides of the main block.

The massive square tower retains a good degree of integrity. It provides an effective vertical counterpoint to the bulky main block. The northwest corner of the tower is attached to the main block, leaving the rest of the tower as a forward projecting mass. The foundation of the tower extends about three feet above grade and is battered. Centered in the first floor is a recessed entry. A broad, multiple coursed round arch springs from the foundation. Corner quoins flank the entry.

An angular stringcourse divides the first and second stories. The second story has paired windows with rock-faced lintels divided by a narrow brick pier. This vertical element is continued above by two tall round arched windows which align with those of the second floor. Multiple coursed round arches above the third floor windows merge over the center pier. Several stringcourses emphatically mark the top of the third floor.

The fourth stage of the tower consists of a large round arch flanked by pairs of stocky doric pilasters on each elevation. This floor of the tower is (and was) unglazed. The upper walls of the tower have a corbel table matching that of the main block. A pyramidal hip roof with a cross finial completes the tower.

The east facade of the church is partly obscured by the immediately adjacent parsonage (which will be described later). The most dominant element of this facade is the roughly centered, projecting cross gabled section. Visible openings at the second floor are tall, round arched windows. A continuous brick beltcourse runs across the wall at the second floor springer height and merges with the window arches. The gable area has a raked corbel table and is infilled by two quarter-round windows. A single chimney breaks the roof ridge of the gable. North of the cross gabled section is an extra wide, two story tall segmental arched window divided into two lancets.

The west elevation of the main block gives one a good idea of the original character of the building. Openings on this side are

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3 Bethel A.M.E. Church

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vertically aligned, except for one doorway. On the first story, set to the south, is a door bearing original stained glass glazing. As with all first story openings on this side, the door is set into a segmental arch. North of the door are four small windows. The northernmost bay has a doorway which has been blocked off.

On the second and third floors are five round arched windows each. These align vertically with the first five openings of the first floor (counting from the north). Second floor windows are round arched, with a beltcourse at springer height, just as on the east elevation. Third floor windows are similar to this, but shorter.

Roughly centered on this elevation is a cross gable, similar in detail to the east gable, but featuring a lunette window.

The north or rear elevation of the church is more utilitarian in character. A broad gable roofed section projects forward. A staircase addition with stuccoed panels and an irregular roof has been added to the elevation. It is accessible from a concrete ramp leading to glass and metal doors. To the right of this are two first story segmental arched windows. A single second story round arched window is placed to the west. At the third floor are two symmetrically placed round arched windows. The corbel table continues at either end of the gable as a short return, but the gable itself has simplified corbeling. A single exterior chimney stack rises just to the west of the ridge.

Set back from the gable is hip roofed section with a segmental arched doorway and window on the ground floor. Above this is a two story tall segmental arched window divided into two round arched lancets.

Standing just east of the church is the two story former parsonage, now housing offices for the church. It was built concurrently with the church (1867-9). The church and parsonage are interconnected at both the first and second floors. The parsonage is a simple gable-front brick structure. The main facade has been obscured by a false facade consisting of a metal grid holding stuccoed or cement-coated panels, added in 1974. The entry is sheltered by a gable roofed porch resting on a pointed

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 4 Bethel A.M.E. Church

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arch support. A metal cross decorates the upper right facade.

Originally, the south facade of the parsonage had segmental arched openings. Each floor had three bays, with the entry being in its current location, and two windows to the right. Three windows filled the second floor. An old (c. 1950?) photo shows that a bungalow style porch, with brick piers and a hip roof, once covered the first story. It appears that the openings of the south facade have been blocked in to accommodate the false facade. The 1974 facade appears to have done no permanent damage, and it could be easily removed.

The east facade of the parsonage is uncovered. It consists of the front two story gabled section with a rear shed roofed section. All segmental windows on the two story section are found in the rear half. There are two windows on the first story and one on the second floor. The shed roof area has a single window on this side.

The west side of the parsonage is generally not visible, except by close inspection. Segmental windows are found on the second floor. Masonry walls connect the house and church in this area.

The north or rear facade has two windows flanking a door on the shed roof area and two windows on the second floor. A metal carport extends north of the shed roof section.

The interior of the church is very intact. The general plan is well expressed by the exterior: the cube-like main block houses the sanctuary and meeting rooms while the tower houses the main staircase. One enters either from the glass doors centered in the main block or from the entry in the tower. A narrow lobby runs across the front of the main block. Doors on the north lead to a large meeting room featuring two rows of massive oak posts with chamfered edges and lambs-tongue stops. These posts support the open sanctuary above. A dropped ceiling obscures the plaster ceiling. Partition walls create several small rooms along the west exterior wall. A heavy wall with large openings divides the kitchen area from the meeting hall. Original door and window openings on this floor have simple surrounds with pedimental headers. The large posts and pedimented window moldings are likely



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 5 Bethel A.M.E. Church

original to the 1867-9 building campaign.

If one were to follow the lobby to the east, the principal staircase would be found. It centers around an open well and has several flights. Newell posts are massive eastlake style elements. The balustrade consists of a low car-sided wall capped by a molded rail.

At the second floor landing, a diagonal wall with original (1894) paneled double doors leads to southeast corner of the sanctuary. The sanctuary was altered in 1894, probably including the addition of a new altar area, balcony, and seating arrangement. Older church members recall that the sanctuary was "reversed." This likely indicates that the 1867-9 sanctuary was arranged on a standard plan with rows of pews and an altar at either the north or south end. The sanctuary now has an unusual plan. It is a lofty two-story cubical space oriented east - west, with the altar on the east wall and a balcony across the west wall. Seating is arranged auditorium style facing in toward the altar. The pews are contemporary.

The altar is defined by a rood screen consisting of two massive cast iron columns with Romanesque capitals from which spring jigsawed wood arches. The arches feature cutout wagon wheel motifs. The altar is elevated several steps. A modern wood altar piece, about one story tall, occupies the front center of the altar. An old (added 1894) organ is found at the rear center of the altar area. It was made by A.B. Helgemaker of Erie, Pennsylvania, according to markings found on the key board, and it is still operable.

Across from the altar is a semihexagonal balcony accessible from narrow staircases in the southeast and northwest corners of the sanctuary. The balcony is supported on wooden Tuscan columns and has a car-sided balustrade. Several original pews can be found in the balcony area.

The west and north walls have two tiers of windows lighting the sanctuary. Simple Eastlake style woodwork defines window openings. Tall windows illuminate the altar area, while the south wall now has no openings due to the addition of the false facade.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 6 Bethel A.M.E. Church

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Apparently, the woodwork was removed and openings skim coated, so that no trace of them remains.

The ceiling of the sanctuary is entirely covered by beaded wood boards. The wall/ceiling junction is coved and a large square coffer defines the center. As with all woodwork in the sanctuary, the ceiling has been "antiqued" to a medium light wood tone.

The parsonage retains many original interior features. The front door leads to a side stairhall. The stairhall has an original staircase, with a large turned newel post, turned balusters, and a molded rail. A small room since converted to an office, is found east of the stairhall. It has contemporary doors and a sliding interior window. Several rooms occupy the rear of the first floor. Several rooms are found on the second floor. Most walls have been covered by paneling, but much of the woodwork remains intact.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1 Bethel A.M.E. Church

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Bethel A.M.E. Church meets Criterion A in the areas of ethnic heritage and religion. This church has been a significant institution in the black community of Indianapolis for over one hundred years. In addition to its importance as the oldest church in the city which was founded, owned, and operated by and for blacks, the church was the site of several important events in the ethnic history of Indianapolis. The church satisfies Exception A due to its exceptional local importance in black history.

### Context

Richard Allen and Absalom Jones founded the A.M.E. Church in America in 1787. Allen and Jones split from St. George's Methodist Church in Philadelphia due to the issue of racial prejudice in the church. For a time, the new congregation also favored abandoning Methodism, but Allen, favoring the direct appeal of its teachings, carried the day. The A.M.E. Church retained Methodism as a cornerstone, but its hierarchy was controlled by blacks. Thus through the A.M.E. Church, blacks formed and led their own congregations. A.M.E. Churches became proud symbols of small, but growing black communities throughout the north.

The earliest A.M.E. congregations in Indiana appear to date from about 1836. Churches were established simultaneously in Richmond and Indianapolis, both by William Paul Quinn. Richmond was a natural location for blacks to settle; with its strong Quaker population, blacks had a reasonable chance for equitable treatment there. Quinn himself settled in Richmond and later became a bishop in the A.M.E. church in 1844.

When the Bethel congregation in Indianapolis was founded in 1836, the city was home to 122 blacks out of a total population of 2,575. Augustus Turner, a barber, organized a group of followers using instructions from the A.M.E. Church, and they began to meet regularly. After meeting in Turner's log cabin on Georgia Street between Capitol and Senate Streets for some time, the group petitioned the Philadelphia Conference for acceptance. The group was officially recognized and Quinn was sent as a circuit rider. Bethel A.M.E. was also known as Indianapolis Station at this time.

In 1841, the group built a small frame house for worship on

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2 Bethel A.M.E. Church

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Georgia Street between Mississippi Street (now Senate Avenue) and the Canal. In 1848, under the leadership of the Reverend Aeneas McIntosh, with a membership of 100, the church was assessed \$50.00 to defray expenses of General Conference delegates who met at Madison, Indiana, to go by boat along the Ohio River to the seat of the Conference in Philadelphia.

"Indianapolis Station" entertained the Annual Conference in 1854 and at that meeting, which lasted nine days, the Constitution of the William Paul Quinn Missionary Society was adopted.

It is of historical interest also that three members of "Indianapolis Station", Mrs. E. Overall, Mr. A. T. Delaney, and C. Gurton contributed to the Book Business at Philadelphia in order that it might continue. In 1857, the congregation bought Christ Church, located on the Circle and moved it to Georgia Street.

The membership participated actively in the "Underground Railroad" aiding escaped slaves in their flight to Canada. This activity aroused certain slavery sympathizers and they were believed to have set a fire which destroyed the church on July 9, 1862. The minister at that time was W. R. Revels, brother of the Reconstruction Senator from Mississippi. The congregation was hard pressed for shelter. Eventually, however, a lot which belonged to the group, located at Michigan and Tennessee (now Capitol Avenue) streets, was sold for \$3,000.00 and a lot on Vermont Street was purchased for \$5,000.00. Under the pastorate of the Reverend W. T. Trevan, construction of a new church began in 1867.

The members of this historic church, which was beginning to be known as Bethel Church, had a deep concern about education opportunities for blacks and to that end a school was conducted at the church starting in 1858. It was not a part of a public school system but was an institution to which children came whose parents could afford to pay for their instruction. Public schools in Indianapolis did not allow blacks to attend classes until the mid 1870s. In 1866, the church established a school on the eastside which became Allen Chapel A.M.E. Church. Bethel A.M.E., then, planned an important role in the education of blacks in Indianapolis. Years later a kindergarten was conducted in the

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 3 Bethel A.M.E. Church

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edifice. The late Adele Sims, who at the time of her death was the oldest living member of Bethel, was a teacher in the kindergarten.

In 1867, the Trustees of the church contracted with Adam Busch, who is listed in city directories as a carpenter, to build a brick building with a pulpit, a gallery and a tower on the Vermont Street lot.

It was to cost \$10,400. Busch, having no property of his own, offered William Gulliver as security. Two years later the congregation occupied the partially completed building. The church began to be known, in addition to "Bethel Church", as the "Vermont Street Church". Years later, it became formally "Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church". The structure which the body now occupies was remodeled in 1894 during the pastorate of the Reverend T. W. Henderson. During this remodeling, the entrance to the sanctuary was changed to its current plan and a Pflegmaker pipe organ was installed. Electric lights, steam heat and stained glass windows were added years later. The adjacent parsonage was converted into a Parish House and a beautiful Prayer Chapel was arranged. The Parish House was later renovated to provide office space.

Aside from being the "Mother Church" of African Methodism in Indiana, Bethel is the Mother of both Allen Chapel and Coppin Chapel of Indianapolis, members of Bethel organized both groups. It has been a vanguard in the advancement of African Methodism throughout its history and has occupied a unique place in the history of the black community of Indianapolis.

The Indianapolis Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was organized at Bethel Church in the early 1900s. The Ethical Culture Society, a cultural organization founded by Mrs. Sallie Henderson for the enlightenment of young people, met in the church for more than forty (40) years. On April 27, 1904, the State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs was organized at Bethel Church. This group later occupied a house at 2034 North Capitol Street (see Minor House, I.S.F.C.W.C., listed 4-7-87).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 4 Bethel A.M.E. Church

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Bethel Church is a member of the Riley-Lockerbie Association of Churches which serves the downtown area. In this connection Bethel Church maintains a food pantry, which serves hungry people regardless of background. A significant program instituted recently is a "Human Resources Program" which aids youth and senior citizens. There is a continuous collection of clothing which is given to the needy. The church, under the leadership of Reverend C. T. H. Watkins, formed a "Social Service" program which now has been incorporated into other relative programs.

Although the building is currently obscured in part by a 1974 facade, Bethel A.M.E. retains sufficient integrity to merit listing under Criterion A. It is hoped that listing will spur on preservation activities which would further enhance the original character of the building.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 1 Bethel A.M.E. Church

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Author.

Bethel A.M.E. Church, Wayne County 9-5-75, Thomas Reed, Author

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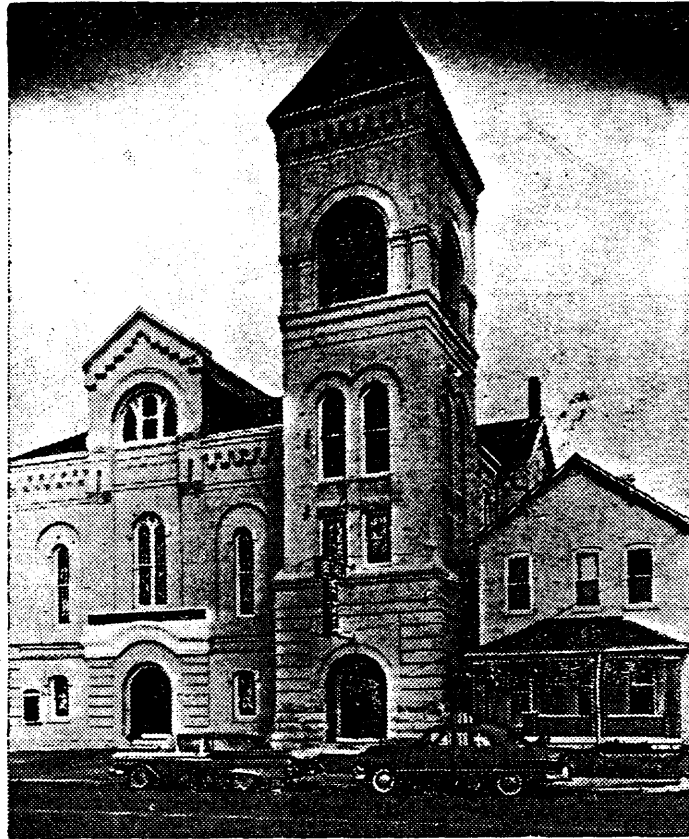
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# BETHEL A.M.E. CHURCH

INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

1836



## *The Motto of Bethel A.M.E. Church*

"I shall pass thru this world but once,  
Any good, therefore, that I can do  
Or any kindness that I can show  
To any human being  
Let me do it now, let me  
Not defer it or  
Neglect it for  
I shall not pass this way again."

C. 1950