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 for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.* If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: New Bethel Baptist Church
Other names/site number: Orient Theater, Oriole Theater
Name of related multiple property listing**:**
20th Century Civil Rights Sites in the City of Detroit, 1900-1976
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing

2. Location

Street & number: 8430 Linwood Street
City or town: Detroit State: Michigan County: Wayne
Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___national ___statewide ___local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

_X_A _X_B ___C ___D

Signature of certifying official/Title: **Date**

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official: **Date**

Title : **State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register

___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ determined not eligible for the National Register

___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:) _____

_____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:	X
Public – Local	
Public – State	
Public – Federal	

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)	X
District	
Site	
Structure	
Object	

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register NA

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6. Function or Use
Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)
RECREATION AND CULTURE: Theater: Movie Theater
RELIGION: Religious Facility: Church

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)
RELIGION: Religious Facility: Church

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)
MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)
Principal exterior materials of the property:
BRICK
STUCCO

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with **a summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

New Bethel Baptist Church was built in 1927 as the Orient Theater (renamed the Oriole Theater). It is located at the southeast corner of Linwood and Philadelphia Streets in the city of Detroit, Michigan. Spatially, the building consists of two volumes. On the west side, next to Linwood Street, is a two-story former commercial block with a taller section on the north side adjacent to Philadelphia Street surmounted by a bell tower/spire. East of that is a four-story volume that contains the theater/sanctuary with the taller fly loft at the south elevation. The building's front elevation centers on four sets of double stained wood-paneled doors sheltered under a shallow arched canopy with three stained glass windows above, while horizontal ribbon windows line the west elevation at the transition between floors. The interior is dominated by the two-story sanctuary, surrounded by a lobby and support spaces. The building's integrity has been diminished by the installation of a non-compatible exterior covering, but retains sufficient integrity to qualify under Criterion A.

Narrative Description

Site

New Bethel Baptist Church is located at the southeast corner of Linwood and Philadelphia Streets. Linwood Street is the current dividing line for the Wildemere Park and LaSalle Gardens neighborhoods. This area of Detroit, north of the Grand Boulevard and west of Woodward Avenue, was annexed as part of the early twentieth century expansion of Detroit. The land on which this property sits was annexed in 1915. To the east is the Lodge Freeway (M-10) and Detroit's New Center area, while to the west is one of the city's major radial streets, Grand River Avenue, and the Jeffries Freeway (I-96).

In terms of the geography of historically African American areas of the city, New Bethel Baptist Church is within the Twelfth Street neighborhood, one of the first of Detroit's neighborhoods to truly open to middle class blacks in the post-World War II era. Several blocks south on Linwood Street is the Shrine of the Black Madonna, where Reverend Albert B. Cleage Jr. led the militant black Nationalist movement. Two blocks west of the Shrine of the Black Madonna is the two-flat house at 3201 Virginia Park Street where Rosa Parks moved in 1961 and from which she would base many of her civil rights-related activities in the following decades. To the south is the Northwest Goldberg neighborhood, where a number of prominent black businesses, including Motown Records, relocated in the 1950s and 1960s as Black Bottom and Paradise Valley were razed for urban renewal. Southwest is one of the original black neighborhoods of the city, the Old West Side, settled by middle-class blacks in the 1920s.

The neighborhood is arranged in a typical city grid pattern (in this area of the city, the grid is angled off true north, such that north-south streets actually angle slightly northwest-southeast, while east-west blocks angle slightly northeast-southwest. For simplicity of description, cardinal directions are used throughout this nomination). The blocks are rectangular and longer east to west than north to south. While residential lots are oriented toward the east-west cross streets, the commercial corridor along Linwood Street has commercial blocks separated from the residential lots by an alley. The lots on the commercial blocks are oriented toward Linwood Street. There are a few small-scale apartment buildings in the neighborhood. In this area, east of Linwood Street is still relatively densely packed with houses, while west of Linwood Street there are more vacant lots due to demolitions. Linwood Street is a major north-south commercial corridor on the west side of the street, while farther north it expands to both sides of the street. New Bethel Baptist Church is one of the few buildings left on the east side of the street north of West Grand Boulevard.

The buildings in the neighborhood were largely constructed in the 1910s and 1920s, with some later additions scattered throughout. In the adjoining neighborhoods, these are largely one- and two-family homes with some apartment buildings. Commercial and institutional buildings along the corridor are mostly one to two story brick buildings with some larger ones such as the Shrine

of the Black Madonna several blocks south. The topography of the area is relatively flat. Vegetation includes residential lawns, mown vacant lots, and street trees and domestic plants.

Construction History

New Bethel Baptist Church was built in 1926-1927 as the Orient Theater.[1] Built for the Le-Win Development Company, it was designed by George D. Mason (1856-1948), termed by Detroit historian Clarence M. Burton as "the dean of Detroit architects." A native of Syracuse, NY, Mason moved with his family to Detroit in 1870 and studied under Henry T. Brush. Mason was partnered with Zachariah Rice from 1878 to 1898, during which time he hired a young Albert Kahn as an apprentice. During his time at Mason and Rice, and afterwards, when he formed his own firm, George D. Mason and Company, Mason was one of Detroit's most prolific and well-known architects, including the Detroit Masonic Temple, (second) Detroit Opera House, the Belle Isle Aquarium (with Kahn), the Charles T. Fisher house, and the Detroit Yacht Club. His other churches include First Presbyterian Church (with Rice), Central Woodward Christian Church, and Trinity United Methodist Church in Highland Park. Mason also designed Pilgrim Congregational Church, several blocks south of the theater, in 1925; this would become Shrine of the Black Madonna. The contractor was H. G. Christman Company, founded in 1894 in South Bend, Indiana. The company opened a branch office in Detroit in 1911, and at the same time as they were building the Orient Theater, they were directing the construction of two Detroit landmarks, the Masonic Temple and the Fisher Building.

The Orient Theater opened on March 21, 1927, with crowds stretching around the block before the doors opened. The *Detroit Free Press* noted that "The sumptuousness of its appointments and the splendor of its colors—Oriental in their brilliance and luster—were at once apparent." The opening week films included Dorothy Devore in "Money to Burn" and Clara Bow in "It."[2] In addition to films, the theater also hosted live entertainment, conventions and meetings, and Jewish community events such as high holy day services and an emergency relief benefit during the Depression. Shortly after it opened, radio station WJR began broadcasting "an hour's frolic" from the theater, including a stage presentation and organ music.[3]

The Orient had only been open for a few months when it was forced to change its name because it violated the trademark of another theater being built in Detroit, the Oriental Theater on Adams.[4] The Orient then changed its name to the Oriole Theater. A historic photograph from around this time depicts the main theater block as a large rectangular volume of brick with stone vertical and horizontal banding, and a bank of doors at the north end of the first floor. At the northwest corner was a two-story stone-veneered entry block featuring Classical Revival details. The main entry to the theater was through four sets of doors on the Linwood elevation. A curved marquee extended above the entry and wrapped around to the north side. Over the marquee on the west side was a large blade sign reading "Oriole" in Oriental-style letters. Extending down

[1] "New Northwest Theater to be Ready Next Week," *Detroit Free Press*, March 6, 1927, 43.
[2] "New Theater Opens Doors," *Detroit Free Press*, March 22, 1927, 7.
[3] "Orient Theater Goes on at WJR," *Detroit Free Press*, March 27, 1927, 14.
[4] "Miles Enjoins 'Orient' Theater." *Detroit Free Press*, August 19, 1927, 4.

Linwood Street to the south was a two-story retail block, containing three sets of storefronts with deep openings between them for theater exits, and paired windows above. The theater first appeared on Sanborn Fire Insurance maps in 1950. Listed as the Oriole Theater, the map noted that the building had a steel truss roof, a hi-rib drop ceiling, a curved balcony, and stage and scenery at the south end. The lobby was at the northwest corner of the building, and the marquee wrapped around the same corner. Three retail spaces were shown along Linwood Street with the theater exits between.

It is unclear when the Oriole Theater ceased showing movies. Newspaper listings were sparse after 1937, although there was a showing of "Mrs. Miniver" in 1942 and a mention of a PTA theater party in October 1951. The building was purchased in November 1952 by Prophet James F. Jones, a colorful and well-known preacher who headed the Church of the Universal Triumph, Dominion of God. [5] Jones spent over 200,000 dollars to "refurbish" the church and rededicated it in December 1952. It is unclear what changes Jones made, as the newspaper focused on the 5,000 dollars he spent to build and decorate a replica of King Solomon's throne furnished in red plush with canary yellow trim. The article also mentions that Jones purchased a 35,000-dollar organ, but it is unknown what happened to the original theater organ.[6] A photograph of the building from around this time show that the exterior had remained relatively unchanged except that the curved wraparound marquee and blade sign had been replaced (prior to Jones' ownership) by a V-shaped marquee projecting above the entry.

The building was then purchased in 1961 by New Bethel Baptist Church, and was remodeled by architect Nathan Johnson. A graduate of Kansas State University's architecture program, Johnson came to Detroit in 1950, and worked for several other firms before starting his own practice around 1957. Johnson was developing a broad portfolio of church commissions, including his first, the Pure in Heart Baptist Church at 3411 Holcomb Street, a "small box with a big glass front" that had been his first independent commission. Others included the Episcopal Church of the Resurrection in Ecorse, Michigan; Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church at Twelfth Street and Glendale Avenue, Grace Episcopal Church at 1926 Virginia Park Street, and Church of Christ of Conant Gardens, while he was concurrently working on an addition to Second Baptist Church at 441 Monroe Street, and Apostolic Faith of Christ Church in Inkster, Michigan, southwest of Detroit.[7]

Johnson completely transformed the former theater. He retained the brick and stone-banded exterior of the main block, but moved the main entry to the north elevation and added a gracefully arched canopy over the doors. Above that, he designed a large geometric metal screen extending from the top of the canopy to the roofline. The former corner entry block was refaced with brick, and on the north and west elevations Johnson created full height bays with glass curtain walls separated by metal spandrels and geometric metal panels above. On the roof of the block, he placed a square steeple consisting of graduated metal panels. At the elevation along Linwood, Johnson replaced the façade with a full height glass and aluminum curtain wall

[5] "Prophet Jones Buys Theater," *Detroit Free Press*, November 11, 1952, 10.
[6] "Prophet Jones Enthroned," *Detroit Free Press*, December 19, 1952, 40.
[7] Hiley Ward, "His Ideas Add Sparkle to 'Sidewalk' Churches," *Detroit Free Press*, March 16, 1963, 4.

separated by brick piers and with metal spandrels between the floors. It was a perfect expression of Johnson's design philosophy; like many Modernist architects, he rejected exhibitionism or dishonest copies of the past, preferring his buildings to be honest and to be beautiful because of their function. [8]

Exterior

New Bethel Baptist Church occupies the north half of a commercial block on the east side of Linwood Street where it intersects Philadelphia Street. The building is built out to the right of way (sidewalks) on the north and west side, and abuts an alley on the east side. The south half of the block is occupied by a service station that partially abuts the south elevation of the church.

Spatially, the building consists of two volumes that speak to its history as a theater and evolution as a church. On the west side, next to Linwood Street, is a two-story former commercial block with a taller section on the north side adjacent to Philadelphia Street surmounted by a bell tower/spire. East of that is a four-story volume that contains the theater/sanctuary with the taller fly loft at the south elevation. It has a flat roof.

The front elevation is on the north side (Philadelphia Street). The first floor is painted brick. At the first floor are four sets of double stained wood-paneled doors with leaded glass inset panels and flat transom panels above. A shallow-arched canopy extends over the entrance and is tied back to the main elevation by metal rods. Above the canopy are three rectangular stained-glass windows. At the east end of the first floor is a single-leaf aluminum and glass entry door with aluminum and glass sidelight and transoms. At the west end is a horizontal three-light wood window. The remainder of the elevation is covered with stucco painted tan and brown with stucco applied trim and the words "New Bethel Baptist Church."

The west elevation is brick on the first floor. It has three glass and aluminum single-leaf entry doors, one on the north end and two on the south end surrounded by stucco panels. Along the transition between the first and second floors are five sets of four-light horizontal window bands. The upper floor here is also covered by stucco painted tan and brown with stucco applied trim. This includes stylized lancet windows and the words "New Bethel Baptist Church."

The south elevation is painted common brick. There are no openings. The east elevation is also painted common brick. This elevation has several openings on the upper levels, including a six-light-window, a single-leaf steel entry door, and a four-paneled utility door. These are accessed by a metal fire escape. A painted brick chimney is located on the northwest corner of the fly loft. Rising from the roof above the northwest corner of the two-story section is the bell tower. It consists of two graduated rectangular metal boxes with corner finials, surmounted by a narrow metal spire with an attached cross.

[8] Hiley Ward, "His Ideas Add Sparkle to 'Sidewalk' Churches," *Detroit Free Press*, March 16, 1963, 4.

Interior

At the interior, the main entry doors (north elevation) open to a rectangular lobby with a curved rear wall. The lobby has ceramic tile floors and base, plaster walls with wood panel wainscot and trim, and a textured plaster ceiling with can lighting. At either end (east and west) are enclosed stairs to the balcony. Along the curved rear (south) wall are three sets of paired wood doors leading into the sanctuary. The lobby has two curved wood and laminate reception desks.

The sanctuary is two stories high and encompasses most of the interior space of the main volume. It is oriented north-south and has a flat ceiling. The floors are carpeted and the walls and ceilings are plaster. Plain shallow pilasters are spaced equidistant along the east and west walls. At the north end of the sanctuary is the balcony. It is tiered and has plain wood pews. The main level of the sanctuary has wood pews with paneled ends, and a small enclosed sound booth under the balcony. At the south end of the sanctuary is the raised alter set within a large square niche. The alter is reached by two steps. The niche walls are wood paneled about halfway up the wall, and above the niche is a large wood paneled arch. Set within the niche is a choir box with chairs set on tiers. To either side of the niche are wood paneled doors. Decorative grills cover the sound panels on the east and west walls to either side of the niche and arch. Below these are wood paneled doors.

To the west of the lobby and sanctuary, in the former commercial spaces, are a series of rooms include the church's history room, offices, and a multi-purpose/dining room. The multipurpose room has a linoleum tile floor while the rest of the rooms are carpeted. The walls and ceilings are flat plaster with no trim. At the northwest corner of this area is a small second floor open space adjacent to the balcony and stairs. It has a carpeted floor and flat plaster walls and ceilings.

Integrity

From its initial construction as a theater through its re-conception by Nathan Johnson to the more recent covering of the exterior, New Bethel Baptist Church has undergone multiple changes. Nathan Johnson's exterior design of the church was covered by a new skin in 2007 to attract younger worshippers. While interior renovations were carried out in 2001, these mostly included furnishings and alterations to the secondary spaces, leaving Johnson's sanctuary design intact.[9] It still retains the sense of a "vast expanse of whiteness" described following Nathan Johnson's renovation of the church. However, Johnson's exterior design was obscured by the installation of a stucco exterior in 2007. At this time, the building does not retain enough integrity to be nominated under Criterion C (design), but it does retain sufficient integrity to qualify under Criterion A.

[9] New Bethel Baptist Church, "About Us" (timeline, http://www.nbbcdetroit.org/about-us/index.html.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- [X] A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- [X] B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- [ ] C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- [ ] D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark “x” in all the boxes that apply.)

- [X] A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- [ ] B. Removed from its original location
- [ ] C. A birthplace or grave
- [ ] D. A cemetery
- [ ] E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- [ ] F. A commemorative property
- [ ] G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)
Ethnic Heritage
Politics/Government
Social History

Period of Significance
1963-1969

Significant Dates
1963

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)
Reverend Clarence LaVaughn Franklin

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder
George D. Mason
H. G. Christman Company

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

New Bethel Baptist Church at 8430 Linwood Street is significant under National Register Criteria A, at the national level, as the location where significant 20th century African American civil rights activities took place in the 1960s. It is also significant under National Register Criteria B, at the national level, for its association with the Reverend Clarence LaVaughn Franklin, a nationally significant African American civil rights leader who was a national leader in the civil rights movement during the 1960s. The period of significance for these two criteria is from 1963, when the building was remodeled and occupied by New Bethel Baptist Church, to 1969. While Rev. Franklin continued to quietly support the civil rights movement after that date, ill health and legal troubles limited his participation, and his contributions after that date do not rise to the level of exceptional significance that would be required under Criteria Consideration G. The building meets Criteria Consideration A, as a building owned by a religious institution and used for religious purposes, because its significance is directly connected to the history of political, social, and cultural activities of the civil rights movement.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

New Bethel Baptist Church, located at 8430 Linwood Street in Detroit, Michigan, is nominated under the Multiple Property Submission (prepared concurrently) for 20th Century African American Civil Rights Sites in the City of Detroit, Michigan, 1900-1976. It meets the registration requirements for the property type of Buildings, subtype Religious Institutions for that cover document under Criteria A and B, at the national level. Although its 1963 remodeling under African American architect Nathan Johnson may have qualified it under Criterion C, subsequent alterations have diminished its design integrity such that it no longer meets the registration requirements. The Multiple Property Documentation Form is organized according to four periods of significance identified in the National Park Service's *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites*. New Bethel Baptist Church's significance falls under the two final periods identified in the framework, "Modern Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1964," and "Second Revolution, 1964-1976." These two periods were characterized, nationally and in Detroit, by the maturation of the modern civil rights movement and the efforts of African Americans to capitalize on the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in enforcing and expanding gains made earlier in the century. Despite modest advances in employment and housing equality, African Americans still faced significant discrimination and barriers to equal access in all areas of their life and work. Two strands of activism developed during the period, one that focused on non-violent civil disobedience, modeled after the movement led nationally by Martin Luther King, Jr., and a more militant approach which, in the late 1960s and 1970s,

gave rise to the Black Power Movement and Black Nationalism, in which African Americans demanded self-determination, control over black institutions, and pride in their race, heritage, and achievements. The MPDF identifies black religious institutions and leaders as a key theme, under "The Role of Detroit's Black Churches in the Civil Rights Movement." Detroit's African American church leaders were at the forefront of the civil rights movement in Detroit, and a number of them became well known on a national level. Among them was Reverend Clarence LaVaughn (C.L.) Franklin, who leveraged his national fame as a preacher and his friendship with Martin Luther King, Jr. to bring attention to the cause of civil rights in Detroit and across the nation. Reverend Franklin drew King and other notable civil rights activists to speak at New Bethel Baptist, and it was the location of a notorious civil rights incident in 1969, when city police officers fired on a meeting of the radical civil rights group the Republic of New Afrika.

Because the building is owned by a religious institution, and is used for religious purposes, it must meet the requirements of Criteria Consideration A. As documented in the following text, New Bethel Baptist Church is significant for its connection to political, social, and cultural activities that took place within its walls or that are related to its leader, Reverend C. L. Franklin, who was a significant figure in the civil rights movement in Detroit and the United States.

New Bethel Baptist Church and the Early Leadership of Reverend C. L. Franklin

Detroit's New Bethel Baptist Church was founded in March 1932, growing out of a Christian women's prayer group called the "The Helping Hand Society." According to the church's history, it was organized in the home of Samuel and Mamie Varnadore at 2627 Leland Street (no longer extant), while Nicholas Salvatore, biographer of Reverend C. L. Franklin, places it in Eliza Butler's home in Paradise Valley (address unknown).[10] During this period, Paradise Valley was one of two contiguous neighborhoods on Detroit's lower East side that were home to the majority of Detroit's black population. Black Bottom, south of Gratiot Avenue, was the older residential community, but by the 1920s African Americans had begun moving north of Gratiot Avenue. While Paradise Valley was traditionally the commercial district, there were residential properties throughout the neighborhood.

For the first thirteen years, New Bethel Baptist was led by three successive pastors, Reverend H. H. Coleman, Reverend N. H. Armstrong, and Reverend William E. Ramsey. The church had around twelve hundred members by 1945, when Ramsey left the church to establish Gospel Temple Baptist, taking some of New Bethel's members with him. It was then that New Bethel called a Mississippi-born preacher named Clarence LaVaughn Franklin to lead them.[11]

Clarence LaVaughn Franklin, known as C. L. throughout most of his life (or sometimes "Frank" to friends), was born on January 22, 1915, in Sunflower, Mississippi, outside of Indianola. Franklin grew up in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, where he was poor but part of a "rural

[10] New Bethel Baptist Church, "About Us" (timeline), http://www.nbbcdetroit.org/about-us/index.html; Nicholas Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and the Transformation of America* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 112.
[11] Ibid., 113.

community sustained both by faith and by the Delta blues of fellow Mississippians such as B.B. King, Son House, and Charley Patton."[12] As a young man in the Jim Crow south, Franklin was also steeped in systemic racial discrimination, from the daily humiliations of second-class status to the horror of lynching. Decades later, Franklin noted, "I knew segregation in the raw…I vividly remember walking to school and being passed by a bus full of white kids, who shouted abuses…from the windows."[13]

As a teenager, Franklin experienced a powerful religious conversion during a revival at St. Peter's Rock Missionary Baptist Church in August 1929 and embarked on a religious career. Franklin preached on a "circuit" of multiple churches in Mississippi from 1933, when he turned eighteen, to 1938, also attending Greenville Industrial College (Afro-Baptist) during this period. He moved to Memphis in 1938, where he became pastor of the New Salem Baptist Church. In Memphis, Franklin and his wife Barbara Siggers Franklin had three of their four children, Erma (1938-2002), Cecil (1940-1989), and Aretha (1942-2018). Franklin moved his family north to Buffalo, New York, in 1944 (where their youngest child, Carolyn (1944-1988) was born) to take the pulpit of Friendship Baptist Church. While there, he was invited to speak at the National Baptist Convention held at Olympia Stadium in Detroit, in September 1945. When New Bethel Baptist's pastor resigned in February 1946, the congregation invited Franklin to deliver a trial sermon; they called him to their pulpit, where he preached his first sermon as New Bethel's pastor in June 1946.

The church Franklin joined in Detroit was located in a "somewhat shabby" converted bowling alley at the corner of Hastings and Willis Streets.[14] It was, however, at the heart of Paradise Valley, and Hastings Street was the principal commercial corridor along which there was a thriving business and entertainment district. Two of Franklin's first choices introduced his new congregation to the "flair" that would characterize his ministry for the next thirty years. Rather than holding his installation dinner in the church, he chose the Gotham Hotel, Detroit's premiere African American hotel. Franklin also moved into a mansion in one of Detroit's foremost neighborhoods on East Boston Boulevard. This district, historically the home of some of Detroit's most prominent white businessmen and leaders, was just opening up to African Americans in the late 1940s, as the city's white elite began moving to the suburbs. It was also not far from the North End, a more modest black neighborhood that was the northern extension of Paradise Valley. The North End was home to a thriving music scene and a number of future musical stars including Smokey Robinson, Diana Ross, Jackie Wilson, and the young men who would go on to form the Miracles, the Four Tops, the Temptations, and the Spinners. Mary Wilson, a founding member of the Supremes, worshipped in Franklin's congregation at New Bethel Baptist.

[12] Angela Dillard, *Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change in Detroit* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2017), 269.
[13] Barbara Young, "The Rev. Clarence Franklin: Civil Rights Firebrand of 1960s – a little weary, has changed his style," *The Detroit News*, September 26, 1977, 3A.
[14] Nicholas Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and the Transformation of America* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 112-113.

For his first ten years or so at New Bethel, Franklin concentrated on developing his ministry and building the reputation of himself and his church. He welcomed a wide swath of Black Bottom and Paradise Valley residents, from sex workers and drug dealers to blue collar workers and professionals. Franklin's daughter Erma later remembered that "People flocked to the church…they would show up at our home…seeking relief from whatever their problems were, i.e. sons in trouble, financial problems, marital problems, unfair civil rights, civic disputes, etc. He always listened and if he thought their situation warranted it—after investigation by church officials—he fought their battles for them." Among the people who spent time at the Franklin home were politicians like Detroit's mayor, the governor of Michigan, and civil rights leader and New York Congressman Adam Clayton Powell; civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr.; and musicians Sam Cooke, Berry Gordy, Smokey Robinson, and Marvin Gaye.[15]

Among Franklin's earliest accomplishments was the building of a new church. The old converted bowling alley church was torn down in 1948, and construction began on a new building in its place. When Franklin struggled to find the money to complete it, his earlier work in engaging the community paid off; as the local African American newspaper the *Michigan Chronicle* recorded, "night club owners, beauty and barber shop operators, numbers bankers, professional and business people, and plain citizens were all donating money to start a new building for the young minister they heavily admired."[16] Franklin had so gained the admiration of his congregation that they voted to give him a lifetime contract in 1950. For a Baptist church this was highly unusual, and even more so in that Franklin was only thirty-five.

The new church opened in October 1951. In its dedication sermon Franklin gave the first hint of his future civil rights leadership, taking up the theme of "second or third class citizenship" from the Bible and making the connection to the status of blacks in Detroit. As Salvatore observed, "Here, in this new building, C. L. took a great step forward, using for the first known time the ritual of the sermon to challenge his people to free themselves."[17]

The Preacher with the Golden Voice

Reverend Franklin became a nationally known religious figure for his charismatic preaching during the mid to late 1950s. In the course of learning his trade, Franklin had "developed a captivating preaching style based on his rich and sonorous singing voice…interweaving the secular and the sacred, the blues and the Bible."[18] For Reverend Franklin, there was no conflict between religion and popular music like the blues or even pop. "From the very beginning, he

[15] Erma V. Franklin, "Memories of the Franklin Family," typewritten manuscript in C. L. Franklin Papers, 1957-1991, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
[16] *Michigan Chronicle*, October 10, 1953.
[17] Nicholas Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and the Transformation of America* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2005),135.
[18] Angela Dillard, *Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change in Detroit* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2017), 269.

sensed the black sermon's intimate roots in an oral, black folk tradition that, together with blues, tales, and church music, carried the moral and ethical beliefs of a people across generations."[19] Franklin became particularly famous and beloved for his "whooping," a blend of spoken chanting, singing, and call-and-response preaching designed to evoke emotion and participation among the congregation. It often came toward the end of a sermon and segued into gospel singing.

Franklin had built his Memphis and Buffalo ministries through radio shows, a method he continued in Detroit. The local radio station WJLB began broadcasting Franklin's sermons in the early 1950s, and they were such a hit that people flocked to New Bethel Baptist to hear him in person. Hastings Street record store owner Joe Von Battle approached Franklin with a plan to record and sell his sermons, at a time when such records were virtually unheard of. Like Franklin's radio program, the recorded sermons were an "immediate sensation" and Von Battle could barely keep up with their popularity…his daughter Marsha remembered her father having to call the police to break up the crowds who had gathered to listen to the recordings at his store. Eventually, Von Battle leased the rights to press the recordings to Chess Records, and from 1953 to 1979, Franklin made seventy-six live recordings. Von Battle's 1953 recording of "The Eagle Stirreth Her Nest," perhaps Franklin's most well-known sermon, was added to the Library of Congress' National Recording Registry in 2010. In listing it, the Library of Congress noted that "Franklin's many and varied vocal devices inspired not only other preachers, but also gospel and rhythm-and-blues artists who appropriated many of his techniques. Franklin was a national figure in the African-American community from the 1950s on and a close friend and ally of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr."[20] In 1956 radio station WLAC in Nashville began broadcasting Franklin's sermons on a Sunday evening. WLAC had a powerful signal, reaching over a thousand miles, which further extended Franklin's national audience.[21]

On the strength of his radio and record reach, Reverend Franklin began touring around the country, becoming a "circuit flyer" harkening back to his days as a circuit rider preaching to multiple congregations. He flew to preach to congregations around the United States as well as internationally. Audiences crowded into auditoriums to hear him, prompting one publication to write in 1957 that "Today, there is hardly a spot in the United States where Negro Protestants have not heard of the sensational Rev. C. L. Franklin of Detroit."[22] While the "gospel tour" was already a well-established practice, a preaching tour like this was unusual, and Franklin was a pioneer. He was able to command large fees for his appearances, as much as four thousand dollars, an enormous sum at the time.

[19] Nicholas Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and the Transformation of America* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 32.
[20] Library of Congress National Recording Preservation Board, 2010 List of Recording Registry Inductions, https://www.loc.gov/programs/national-recording-preservation-board/recording-registry/registry-by-induction-years/2010/.
[21] Nicholas Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and the Transformation of America* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2005),155-156, 190.
[22] "The Preacher with the Golden Voice," *Color*, 11:14 (January 1957).

Franklin's daughter, Aretha, who was in her early teens, began accompanying him on these tours, where she sang as a "warm up" to his sermons. Joe Von Battle recorded Aretha singing and playing piano on nine tracks in 1956 at New Bethel Baptist Church, several of which were released as singles by Von Battle in the 1950s and on one side of Von Battle's 1956 album *Spirituals*.[23]

The Walk to Freedom and Northern Civil Rights Leadership

Reverend Franklin, like many of his fellow preachers, found the pulpit was a powerful medium for more than merely religious exhortation. Church was the black community's core institution, frequently serving as the most common gathering place for African Americans. Detroit's African American churches and clergy had a long record of using their moral authority to further the cause of progressive political activism, from Second Baptist Church, which had sheltered and assisted people escaping slavery, to St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, which hosted the Detroit branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in its early years, to Reverend Charles A. Hill of Hartford Baptist Church, who in the early to mid-twentieth century fought for equality in housing and employment and demonstrated against police brutality.

With nearly eight thousand members by the mid-1950s, New Bethel Baptist was poised to become an important vehicle for advancing the cause of racial justice, and Reverend Franklin increasingly joined the ranks of social activists during this period. He gave Detroit activists James and Grace Lee Boggs access to New Bethel's pulpit to discuss African independence in 1954, although he did not consider himself a "political comrade" of the revolutionaries. The following year, in the wake of the murder of Emmett Till, Franklin wrote a public letter in the *Michigan Chronicle* admonishing the NAACP for not doing enough to advance "racial progress." While Franklin was a member of the organization, he felt that their work was not relevant to the average working-class black person. It was a public assumption of the role of civil rights campaigner for Franklin, and he believed that black Detroiters were ready for political action.[24]

Franklin was, in general, not a natural grassroots organizer, preferring to act as a catalyst and encourage others to continue the work. This often took the form of opening New Bethel Baptist Church to political candidates and activist groups. Decades later, he recalled that this was not universally accepted by all members of the congregation, but he argued that "religious people gotta walk on sidewalks, use electricity, and drink water too – to say nothing of having a job…(t)herefore it behooves us to be concerned about who controls those services."[25] Nevertheless, Franklin did begin to take a more active role toward the end of the 1950s. An early attempt was the Metropolitan Civic League for Legal Action, an organization he founded in 1959

[23] Nicholas Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and the Transformation of America* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2005),184-185, 188.
[24] *Michigan Chronicle*, October 22, 1955.
[25] Barbara Young, "The Rev. Clarence Franklin: Civil Rights Firebrand of 1960s – a little weary, has changed his style," *The Detroit News*, September 26, 1977, 3A.

to provide legal aid for victims of police brutality. It never really got off the ground, and disbanded within a few years.[26]

The early 1960s were a very busy period for Franklin. He accepted the pastorship of a church in Los Angeles in 1960 while still retaining his position at New Bethel, dividing his time and loyalties. At the same he needed to look for a new home for New Bethel after the Hastings Street church, barely ten years old, was slated for demolition due to urban renewal in the Paradise Valley area. Urban renewal in Black Bottom and Paradise Valley displaced tens of thousands of residents, businesses, and institutions in the 1950s and 1960s. Many settled into the Twelfth Street neighborhood, a historically Jewish district where barriers to relocation were lower than in many white neighborhoods. It was here that Reverend Franklin relocated New Bethel Baptist Church, remodeling a 1920s movie palace into a religious institution.

The theater had been purchased in November 1952 to Prophet James F. Jones, a colorful and well-known preacher who headed the Church of the Universal Triumph, Dominion of God. Jones remodeled the theater's interior into a church, but his tenure in the building was short.[27] Reverend Franklin's purchase of the building from Jones through Detroit real estate broker James Del Rio in 1961 was not without controversy. Some members of church tried to block the sale as usurping the authority of the church board. However, a judge lifted the injunction when church members met and nearly all voted to support Franklin.[28]

While Prophet Jones had done little to change the exterior appearance of the church, Franklin commissioned the "first major all-Negro building project in the city."[29] Heading the team was architect Nathan Johnson, who had opened his own practice in 1957, which included many church commissions. Johnson completely transformed the former theater for Franklin over the next several years. On March 10, 1963, the congregation of New Bethel Baptist Church processed from their temporary home in the Gold Coast Theater at Twelfth and Seward (no longer extant) and held their first services in the new church. Reflecting Reverend Franklin's status as a national star, congratulatory telegrams arrived from President John F. Kennedy, Franklin's friend Martin Luther King Jr., and many others.[30]

New Bethel Baptist Church was now located in a neighborhood that was becoming the locus of Detroit's black consciousness movement. Already, Reverend Albert B. Cleage, a black nationalist, had moved his Central Congregational Church to a former white church a few blocks down Linwood Street, and many of Detroit's radical black activists were meeting in the area. It

[26] Nicholas Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and the Transformation of America* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 225-226.
[27] By 1956 there were reports that Jones was in debt of $21,000 for the building alone. He was arrested in February of that year on an "indecent proposal" charge. Although Jones was acquitted, his influence after this period waned and he spent much of his time commuting between Chicago and Detroit until he died in 1972.
[28] "The Troubles Down the Rev. Franklin's Road," *Detroit Free Press,* June 15, 1969, 1A, 4A.
[29] "New Glory for Old Theater," *Detroit Free Press*, March 11, 1963, 3. Although the article referred to "architects, contractors, financiers," it did not list the names of the project team.
[30] Nicholas Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and the Transformation of America* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 244-45.

was against this socio-geographic background that Reverend Franklin's most significant leadership in the local and national civil rights struggle would take place over the next several years. One of his most high-profile contributions to the movement was prompted by events in Birmingham, Alabama in late 1962 and early 1963. Alabama had been the site of one of the seminal events of the civil rights movement, the 1955-1956 Montgomery Bus Boycott, triggered by the refusal of Rosa Parks to surrender her seat to a white person (Parks was by 1963 also living in Detroit). It had also propelled the young Baptist minister Martin Luther King, Jr., to the forefront of the civil rights movement in America. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), an African American civil rights organization headed by King, targeted Birmingham, one of the most racially divided cities in the country, in a campaign to address segregation in public facilities. Whites dug their heels in, led by the militant Birmingham Commissioner of Public Safety, Eugene "Bull" Connor, who unleashed guard dogs and firehoses on protestors. King, fellow civil rights leader and Baptist minister Reverend Ralph Abernathy, and numerous other demonstrators were arrested on April 12, 1963. During the week that he was in custody, King wrote his famous "Letter From Birmingham Jail" defending his policy of non-violent civil disobedience. As a result of its activities in Birmingham and the legal expenses incurred to defend its members, the SCLC was running out of money in the spring of 1963. Martin Luther King, Jr. turned to the best fundraisers among his friends, including Mahalia Jackson, Harry Belafonte, and Reverend Franklin.

While King's friendship with Franklin is well known, it is unclear exactly how they met and became friends. Franklin's obituary in the *Michigan Chronicle* claimed that the two met while King was a student at Morehouse College. [31] King was at Morehouse, located in Atlanta, Georgia, from 1944 to 1947, while Franklin was still in Buffalo, or shortly after he arrived in Detroit (Franklin was fourteen years older than King). They may also have met and become friends through their mutual participation in the National Baptist Convention (NBC). The Convention, which had formed in 1894, was a cooperative organization of African American Baptist ministers, and by the mid twentieth century it was "the largest mass organization, sacred or secular, black Americans possessed" and its leaders were highly influential.[32] Reverend Franklin was a member as early as 1940, and it was his speech at the 1945 annual meeting in Detroit that secured him his position at New Bethel Baptist. By the mid 1950s Franklin was a national leader in the Convention when it became involved in an internal struggle over the appropriateness of participation in the civil disobedience activities of the civil rights movement. Franklin aligned himself with the progressives who supported this in contrast to the "self-help" approach of more conservative members, although Franklin remained with the organization when many of the progressives were expelled or left to form the Progressive National Baptist Convention. Franklin was the chair of the NBC's Evangelist Board for ten years (it is unclear exactly which years he served in this capacity, although it was at least partially during the 1960s).[33] Both Martin Luther King, Sr. and Jr. were active in the National Baptist Convention until the schism resulted in their departure in 1961, and Franklin was friends with both father and

[31] "Minister Mourned by Many," *Michigan Chronicle*, August 4, 1984, 4A.
[32] Nicholas Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and the Transformation of America* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 72, 192.
[33] Ibid., 228-230).

son; Franklin biographer Nicholas Salvatore claims that Franklin was King's "favorite preacher," a strong possibility given Franklin's national popularity at this time.[34]

In response to King's call for fundraising, Franklin helped Mahalia Jackson organize a SCLC fundraiser in Chicago in late May of 1963. Among the headliners at the concert was Reverend Franklin's daughter Aretha. By this time, Aretha Franklin was already a national star herself. In 1960 she had crossed over from gospel to pop, with her father's blessing, and within a year singles from her first secular album were Top 40 hits in the United States, Canada, and Australia. By the mid-1960s she had earned her sobriquet "The Queen of Soul." Although Aretha had moved to New York City to pursue her recording career prior to New Bethel Baptist's move to Linwood Street, she never abandoned her roots in the church or in gospel music. Aretha Franklin's brother Cecil noted that she prioritized "performing her civic duty" over her professional career by singing at civil rights-related events like the SCLC fundraiser. According to Cecil, "…if Daddy called and said 'Ree, I want you to sing for Dr. King,' she'd drop everything and do just that" even if it conflicted with an important professional opportunity. According to *Jet* magazine, at the SCLC fundraiser Franklin was in a "tough spot" at the end of the program and "literally broke up the show by sending the crowd home shouting when she closed with a back home rendition of 'Precious Lord'" and she then donated four hundred dollars to the benefit.[35]

The significance of Aretha Franklin's musical performances to the civil rights movement should not be underestimated. As historian Angela Dillard observes, music "is an integral part of social activism…it was a tradition that would continue to express itself over and over, from the performance of…Aretha Franklin in her father's church in Detroit to the explosion of Motown Records."[36] Indeed, the importance of music to the African American struggle for freedom from slavery and for civil rights is well documented, from the spirituals sung by enslaved people as a form not only of religious expression but of covert resistance, to the anthems of the mid twentieth century civil rights movement such as "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize" and "We Shall Overcome." Such songs, which were rooted in traditional religious songs, served as social commentary, protest, and as a means to bring people together. As Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon observed in "Wade in the Water," the seminal National Public Radio series that documented and celebrated African American sacred music traditions, "the songs of the movement were the voice of the struggle."[37]

At the same time as he helped to organize the Chicago benefit, Franklin was also planning a major civil rights demonstration in Detroit, one which would solidify his national credentials in the movement. The march was intended to solicit political and monetary support for the SCLC

[34] Nicholas Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and the Transformation of America* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 230.
[35] Both quotes from David Ritz, *Respect: The Life of Aretha Franklin* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2014), 110.
[36] Angela Dillard, *Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change in Detroit* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2017), 126.
[37] "Episode 5: The Power of Communal Song," *Wade in the Water* (radio series), National Public Radio, originally aired 1994, https://www.npr.org/2019/06/20/711806804/wade-in-the-water-ep-5-the-power-of-communal-song.

and the Birmingham demonstrators. Following a small invitation-only event on May 10, Franklin hosted a mass meeting on May 17 at New Bethel Baptist, where the group formed a new organization, the Detroit Council for Human Rights (DCHR), and began planning the march, eventually called the "Walk to Freedom" for the following month.[38] Franklin was joined in organizing the DCHR and the march by Reverend Albert Cleage, Jr. of Central Congregational Church. While Cleage and Franklin were not ideological allies, they were united in their criticism of the NAACP for being "too close" to whites and not aggressive enough in its pursuit of racial justice.[39] Both were, not surprisingly, disliked by the NAACP and more conservative civil rights campaigners in the city, who were also dismissive of Franklin's capacity to plan the march. Franklin refused to step aside, and Cleage supported him, seeing an opening to overturn the old guard. Franklin's ace in retaining control of the march was his friendship with Martin Luther King, Jr., who preferred to work with Franklin rather than any other of Detroit's civil rights leaders.

Despite the tensions in Detroit's civil rights community, the DCHR was able to bring together a broad-based coalition for the march. Churches like Franklin's New Bethel Baptist and Cleage's Central Congregational were in the vanguard, and much of the march's high attendance figures were due in large part to organizing by Franklin, Cleage, and their fellow religious leaders, who held pre-march rallies to generate enthusiasm.[40] Old line organizations like the NAACP, Urban League, and Booker T. Washington Business Association, recognizing the significance of the event, eventually participated wholeheartedly, joined by state and local politicians, powerful United Auto Workers president Walter Reuther, and local organizations from block clubs and businesses to school groups. While there had been some debate among the organizers as to whether it should be an exclusively African American event, eventually it was decided to allow whites to participate, although the march was dominated by blacks.

The Walk to Freedom, held on June 23, 1963, was incredibly successful. It was exactly twenty years since the 1943 racial conflict in Detroit, and Franklin, alone among organizers, tied it back to that event, arguing that nothing had changed since then. Michigan Governor George Romney issued a proclamation declaring June 23 "Freedom March Day," although he did not participate in the march. Martin Luther King, Jr. was at the forefront of the march, which began on Woodward Avenue north of Grand Circus Park. Beside him were Franklin, Cleage, U.S. Representative Charles Diggs, Jr., James Del Rio, former Governor John Swainson, and Walter Reuther. Detroit Mayor Jerome Cavanagh was in the second row. The march proceeded down Woodward Avenue to Detroit's convention center, Cobo Hall, where Martin Luther King gave a preliminary version of his now-famous "I Have a Dream" speech. Franklin didn't speak, unlike

[38] Joseph E. Coles, Interoffice Memo dated May 17, 1963, Mayor's Interracial Committee. In Folder "Detroit Council for Human Rights," Box 18, Part 3, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/Human Rights Department Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.
[39] Angela Dillard, *Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change in Detroit* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2017), 269-271.
[40] "James Boggs" in Elaine Latzman Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes: An Oral History of Detroit's African American Community, 1918-1967* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 155.

his colleague Reverend Cleage, but he did participate on stage, introducing dignitaries and raising the offering (Aretha Franklin was not at the march).

With about 125,000 participants (some estimates were as high as 200,000), the Walk to Freedom was the largest civil rights demonstration in the nation's history to that point. While it was eclipsed just two months later by the March on Washington, DC, also led by King, the Detroit march was a significant precursor for that event. A few weeks after the Detroit march, King wrote to Reverend Franklin to thank him for organizing the event, commend his leadership, and express his appreciation for the money raised for the SCLC from the rally. "Never before have I participated in a Freedom Rally and a public demonstration so profoundly meaningful and so numerically successful. I can assure you that America has never seen anything like the Detroit Freedom March."[41] A few days later, Hobart Taylor, Jr., special assistant to Vice President Lyndon Johnson, also wrote to Franklin to congratulate him for his "fine works…on behalf of all the citizens of Detroit" and especially the "now famous" Walk to Freedom.[42]

In the months following the Detroit march, the DCHR attempted to capitalize on the momentum it had built. Among the plans of the organization were an annual march on the fourth Sunday in June and support for the March on Washington then being planned. The DCHR voted to become a membership organization, with Franklin as chair and Cleage among the board of directors.[43] Following the death of Cynthia Scott, an African American sex worker, at the hands of Detroit police on July 5, the DCHR attempted to interest the United States Attorney General in investigating the case, while board member James Del Rio made plans to call a meeting of mayors of suburban cities to discuss police protection for African Americans who had purchased repossessed FHA and VA homes.[44]

Franklin and Cleage began organizing another national event in the late summer and early fall of 1963, this time a conference of national black civil rights leaders, to be held in Detroit in November. Called the Northern Negro Leadership Conference, the event would feature U.S. Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, a national civil rights leader, as its principal speaker, as well as Mahalia Jackson and several members of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s staff. In the months prior to the event, however, Franklin and Cleage's uneasy alliance deteriorated over their competing visions for the civil rights movement. Although both rejected gradualism, Franklin aligned with the nonviolent integrationist methods of his friend King, while Cleage increasingly embraced a militant separatist approach. In late October, a few weeks before the planned conference, Cleage abruptly quit the DCHR and organized a rival conference for the same

[41] Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., letter to Reverend C. L. Franklin, July 10, 1963, in folder "Martin Luther King, Jr., 1963," in C. L. Franklin Papers, 1957-1991, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
[42] Hobart Taylor, Jr., Special Assistant to the VP, July 19, 1963, C. L. Franklin Papers, 1957-1991, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
[43] Notes on Proceedings, June 28, 1963, in Folder "Council for Human Rights," in C. L. Franklin Papers, 1957-1991, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
[44] . Joseph E. Coles, Interoffice Memo, August 7, 1963, Mayor's Interracial Committee. In Folder "Detroit Council for Human Rights," Box 18, Part 3, Detroit Commission on Community Relations/Human Rights Department Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

weekend, the Northern Negro Grassroots Leadership Conference. Despite a last minute attempt by King to promote Franklin's conference, the event was overshadowed by the Grassroots conference, which was memorable for Malcolm X's "Message to the Grassroots."[45] In the wake of Cleage's departure and the failed conference, the DCHR faded away; although Franklin was identified as the chair as late as 1966, there is little evidence that the organization did any work after late 1963. Despite the very public falling out with Cleage, Franklin continued to collaborate with Cleage and other movement leaders where their goals aligned; later in the 1960s he spoke at Central United Congregational Church and appeared on panels with Cleage and other nationalists. As Salvatore observed, "The freedom struggle ultimately demanded that individuals transcend personal differences to work together whenever possible."[46]

Civil Rights Activism in the Turbulent Late 1960s

Although the failure of the leadership conference was a disappointment, Franklin remained active in both the local and national civil rights movement for the next several years. In 1964, the *Michigan Chronicle* named him as one of "eight outstanding religious leaders working on behalf of human rights." He opened New Bethel Baptist Church to political candidates, where John Conyers, Jr. began his successful 1964 campaign for United States Congress. Franklin continued to work closely with Martin Luther King, Jr., serving on the Executive Board of the SCLC and holding a rally at New Bethel Baptist Church to raise money for the Selma voting rights campaign in 1965, which culminated in three protest marches from Selma to Montgomery in March. Both Martin Luther King, Jr., and his wife Coretta Scott King came to New Bethel Baptist to speak, Mrs. King for Women's Day in November 1965, and Reverend King for Men's Day in October 1966. Reverend Franklin later remembered an incident from the latter visit. "Dr. King sat right in my basement one Sunday night…(h)e had spoken for my Men's Day, and he said, 'Frank, I will never live to see forty. Some of our white brothers are very, very sick, and they are dangerous. I'll never see forty.' And he was thirty-nine when he was killed."[47] The month after King's Men's Day visit, James Meredith, who had been shot at a rally during the March Against Fear earlier that year, spoke at a rally at New Bethel Baptist.

New Bethel Baptist Church was at the geographic heart of the July 1967 rebellion in Detroit, which was touched off by a police raid on an African American club several blocks away at Twelfth Street (now Rosa Parks Boulevard) and Clairmount Avenue. Fires burned on Linwood Street, and New Bethel Baptist suffered some fire damage. Reverend Franklin was among a number of African American leaders who spoke to the community on radio station WJLB during the rebellion. Following the end of the conflict, Franklin drafted "An Open Letter to White America" in which he framed the events of July 1967 in Detroit as a "rebellion against established authority" resulting from ongoing oppression by police and white businesses, not a

[45] Angela Dillard, *Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change in Detroit* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2017), 273.
[46] Nicholas Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and the Transformation of America* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 276.
[47] Jeff Todd Titon, "Reverend C. L. Franklin: Black American Preacher-Poet," *Folklife Annual 1987*, (American Folklife Center, 1988), 87.

"race riot." He called for treating the African American as a "man…who is not dehumanized and demoralized by his society, who has the opportunity to work wherever he has the ability to work, for the same wages as any other worker, who can live in any section of his city where he is financially able to live, whose opportunity for higher and quality education is the same as any other citizen…" It is unclear if this document was ever completed or published.[48] However, Franklin was appointed head of a committee to present African American "grievances" to political leaders in the city and state, further evidence that he remained a significant civil rights leader in the city.[49]

Martin Luther King, Jr. again called on Reverend Franklin to lend his voice to the civil rights movement in March 1968, at a rally for striking black sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee. The rally, originally planned for March 22, had been postponed to the 28th due to a snowstorm. Franklin did not participate in the pre-rally march, which erupted in violence. King called off the rally, and both he and Franklin left Memphis. Just one week later, on April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on the balcony of a hotel in Memphis. Franklin attended his friend's funeral, and two months later, he participated in the SCLC's Solidarity Day in Washington, DC, the culmination of the Poor People's Campaign in which participants converged on "Resurrection City," a campsite on the Southwest Mall near the Washington Monument to lobby for more equitable access to housing, employment, and welfare programs. Reverend Franklin preached a sermon at St. Stephen's Baptist Church in Washington on June 21 entitled "They Wouldn't Bow" in which he drew Biblical parallels to the practice of civil disobedience and criticized the government for putting law above justice. "I feel like if the state was as concerned about justice as they are about law and order—there wouldn't be any need for Resurrection City."[50] Several weeks later, Reverend Franklin was a speaker at the SCLC convention in Memphis.

Also featured at the 1968 SCLC convention was Franklin's daughter Aretha, who sang hymns. Aretha had continued to use her visibility to bring attention to the cause of civil rights during the previous years, as she became one of the most admired recording artists in the country. Her producer, Jerry Wexler, described her activism: "At the same time, she gave a large piece of her life over to the civil rights cause. She jumped into the political fray at this exact moment when everything was breaking loose [for her personally]. She could have easily excused herself from the political rallies and benefits that she headlined, but she didn't. When Dr. King called for her services, she was always there—in Chicago, in Atlanta, it didn't matter where. She was his staunch supporter."[51] King had flown into Detroit for Aretha's concert at Cobo Hall in February of 1968, as a thank you for her "extraordinary service" to the SCLC. Two months later, she sang at King's funeral.

[48] "An Open Letter to White America," Draft in C. L. Franklin Papers, 1957-1991, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
[49] "Lay Blame to Hoodlums, Hatemongers," *Detroit Free Press*, July 25, 1967, 12.
[50] Nicholas Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and the Transformation of America* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 268.
[51] Quoted in David Ritz, *Respect: The Life of Aretha Franklin* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2014), 180.

New Bethel Baptist, and Reverend Franklin, were involved in one the most notorious incidents in Detroit's civil rights history in March 1969. Franklin had given the nationalist Republic of New Afrika permission to hold a meeting at New Bethel Baptist after another church had withdrawn their invitation. After the program was over, two police officers arrived on the scene, there was a confrontation with an armed man near the Linwood Street door, and the officers were shot, killing one. Police, thinking it was an armed insurrection, massed and shot into the church. An investigation by the *Michigan Chronicle* suggested that members of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Central Intelligence Agency, and Detroit Police Department had been among the crowd, and used the melee as a pretext to attack.[52] According to Judge George Crockett, the New Bethel incident represented a "coming of age" for black Detroit. When Franklin was criticized for renting the church to the Republic of New Afrika, he pointed out that "we are in the throes of a revolution, a social revolution. Some people have lost their lives in this revolution. And we have lost a little glass." He refused to denounce the Republic of New Afrika members, instead criticized police for overreacting.[53]

Reverend C. L. Franklin and New Bethel Baptist's Later Years

Although Reverend Franklin's support for racial justice was as strong in 1969 as it had been in 1963, this would be his last major political role. His decision to step back from a visible national leadership role may have been influenced by the failure of his International Afro-American Musical and Cultural Foundation. Founded "to bring about a sense of unity among Afro peoples of their artistic values," its signature event was to be the "Soul Bowl," a massive benefit concert in Houston to raise money to aid African American businesses and promote low-cost housing. The Soul Bowl drew national attention and the support of SCLC President Ralph Abernathy, and the program was a who's who of African American performers. As the date drew nearer, though, the event was moved from its originally planned venue, the Houston Astrodome, to successively smaller locations, until it was eventually cancelled the week before the scheduled concert.[54] During the early 1970s, Reverend Franklin also struggled with health issues and legal troubles, and gradually reduced even his role in the pulpit. In 1977 he blamed his "fast paced lifestyle and constant investigation by the federal government" for his semi-retirement. "For 18 years I exposed myself to the physical wear and tear involved in crusading. Anybody would get tired after that steady grind."[55]

Franklin did continue to encourage and support the civil rights movement, but let a younger generation assume a leadership role. Among this generation was his daughter Aretha. In late 1970, she offered to post bond for Angela Davis, a feminist and civil rights activist who had been charged with involvement in the kidnapping and murder of a prison guard in California. Aretha

[52] "Informants May Have Seen All," *Michigan Chronicle*, April 19, 1969.
[53] Nicholas Salvatore, *Singing in a Strange Land: C. L. Franklin, the Black Church, and the Transformation of America* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2005),294-296.
[54] "Soul Bowl Set for June at Houston Astrodome," *The Journal News* (White Plains, NY), May 3, 1969, 12; "Soul Bowl Canceled by Pastor," *Detroit Free Press,* June 13, 1969, 1.
[55] Barbara Young, "The Rev. Clarence Franklin: Civil Rights Firebrand of 1960s – a little weary, has changed his style," *The Detroit News*, September 26, 1977, 3A.

spoke out publicly about her support of Davis, saying that "I'm going to see her free if there is any justice in our courts, not because I believe in communism, but because she's a Black woman and she wants freedom for Black people. I have the money; I got it from Black people—they've made me financially able to have it—and I want to use it in ways that will help our people."[56] She also helped to raise money for Reverend Jesse Jackson's Operation PUSH, an organization founded in 1971 to improve economic conditions in black communities, and would remain a lifelong supporter of the civil rights movement. Aretha returned to her gospel roots in the early 1970s, recording a live gospel album at New Temple Missionary Baptist Church in Los Angeles in early 1972 called *Amazing Grace*; it remains the highest selling live gospel music album of all time.

Reverend Franklin was at the altar of New Bethel Baptist Church in April 1978 to preside over his daughter Aretha's marriage in April 1978 (she had moved from New York City to California in 1976). A little over a year later, in June 1979, C. L. Franklin was shot by robbers in his home on LaSalle Boulevard and lingered, comatose, for five years. He died July 27, 1984. According to Detroit historian Herb Boyd, "It took two days of 'homegoing' at New Bethel to accommodate the mourners."[57] Following Franklin's injury, New Bethel Baptist was led by Reverend C.L. Moore. After Franklin's death, Reverend Robert B. Smith Jr. was elected as the new pastor, where he remains to the present. In 1985 Linwood Street from Grand River Avenue to Clairmount Avenue was renamed C. L. Franklin Boulevard to honor Reverend Franklin's contributions to Detroit and the nation. Two years later, Aretha Franklin recorded the gospel live album "One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism" at New Bethel Baptist Church.

Period of Significance

The period of significance for the church is from 1963, when the building was remodeled and occupied by New Bethel Baptist Church, to 1969. While Rev. Franklin continued to quietly support the civil rights movement after that date, ill health and legal troubles limited his participation, and his contributions after that date do not rise to the level of exceptional significance that would be required under Criteria Consideration G.

[56] Quoted in David Ritz, *Respect: The Life of Aretha Franklin* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2014), 228.
[57] Herb Boyd, *Black Detroit* (New York: Harper Collins Press, 2017), 250.

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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 # _____
____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

____ State Historic Preservation Office
____ Other State agency
____ Federal agency
____ Local government
____ University
____ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property <u>Less than one acre</u>

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)
Datum if other than WGS84:_____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: -83.061698 Longitude: 42.220480

2. Latitude: Longitude:

3. Latitude: Longitude:

4. Latitude: Longitude:

Or
UTM References
Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

1. Zone: Easting: Northing:

2. Zone: Easting: Northing:

3. Zone: Easting: Northing:

4. Zone: Easting : Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Lots 40 through 46 of Doran's La Salle Boulevard Annex Subdivision, City of Detroit.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes the entire footprint of the building, which is built out to the lot lines.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Saundra Little, Architect, and Ruth Mills, Senior Historian,
organization: Quinn Evans Architects
street & number: 4219 Woodward Avenue, Suite 301

city or town: Detroit state: Michigan zip code: 48201
e-mail rmills@quinnevans.com
telephone: 313-462-2550
date:

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

New Bethel Baptist Church
Detroit
Wayne County, Michigan

Photographer: Unknown
Date Photographed: Ca. 1927
Description: Historic view of Oriole Theater, looking southeast
0001 of 0012

Photographer: Unknown
Date Photographed: Ca. 1970s
Description: Historic view of New Bethel Baptist showing remodeling by Nathan Johnson, looking southeast
0002 of 0012

Photographer: Unknown
Date Photographed: Ca. 1960s
Description: Historic view of New Bethel Baptist interior following remodeling, looking north
0003 of 0012

Photographer: Quinn Evans
Date Photographed: February 2019
Description: Exterior looking south
0004 of 0012

Photographer: Quinn Evans
Date Photographed: February 2019
Description: Exterior looking southeast
0005 of 0012

Photographer: Quinn Evans
Date Photographed: February 2019
Description: Exterior looking east

0006 of 0012

Photographer: Quinn Evans
Date Photographed: February 2019
Description: Sanctuary looking south
0007 of 0012

Photographer: Quinn Evans
Date Photographed: February 2019
Description: Sanctuary looking north
0008 of 0012

Photographer: Quinn Evans
Date Photographed: February 2019
Description: Lobby looking southeast
0009 of 0012

Photographer: Quinn Evans
Date Photographed: February 2019
Description: History room, first floor looking west
0010 of 0012

Photographer: Quinn Evans
Date Photographed: February 2019
Description: Dining room, first floor looking north
0011 of 0012

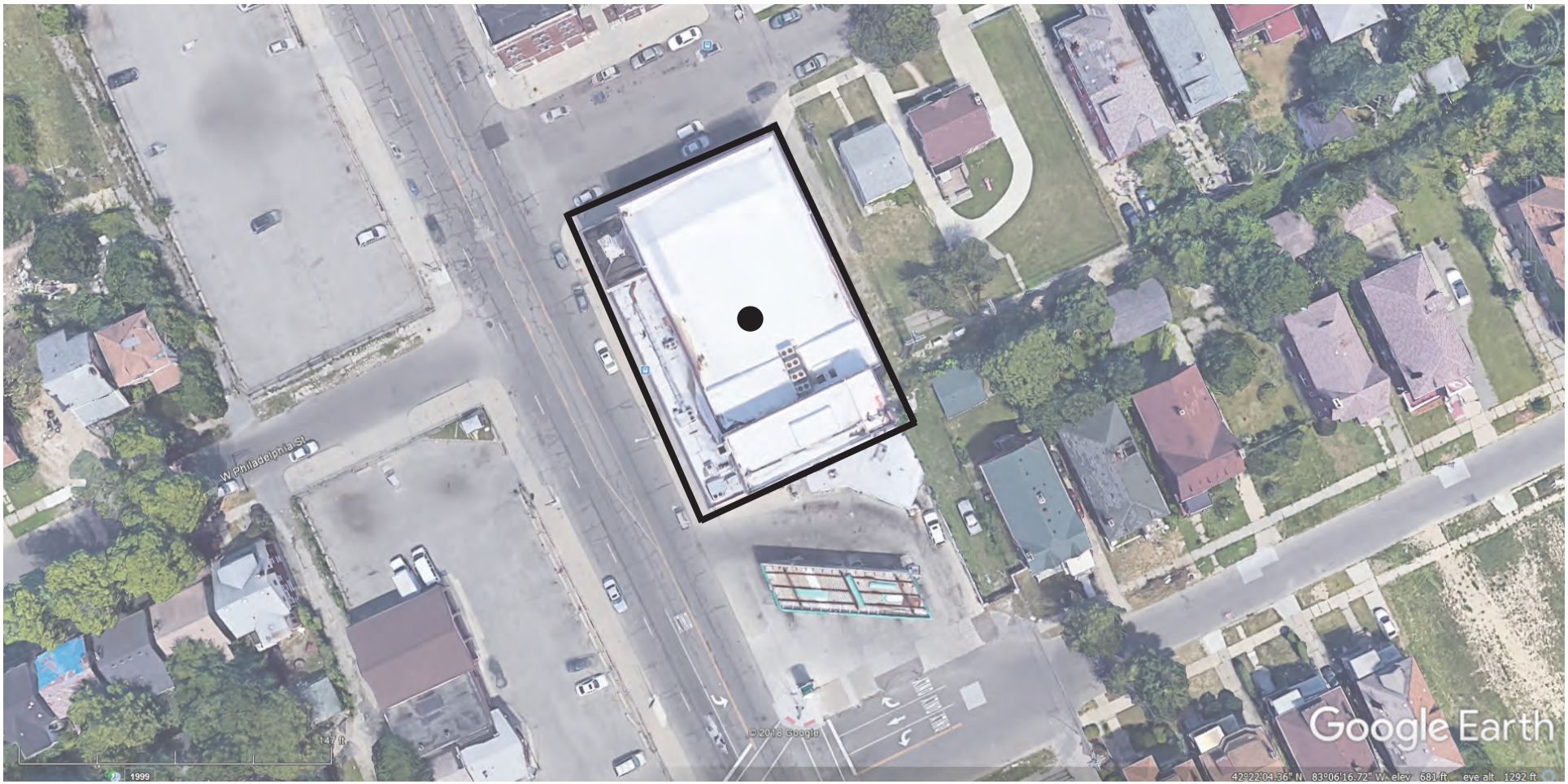
Photographer: Quinn Evans
Date Photographed: February 2019
Description: Second floor landing looking southeast
0012 of 0012

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

New Bethel Baptist Church, 8450 Linwood Street
National Register of Historic Places Nomination
Location Map 1

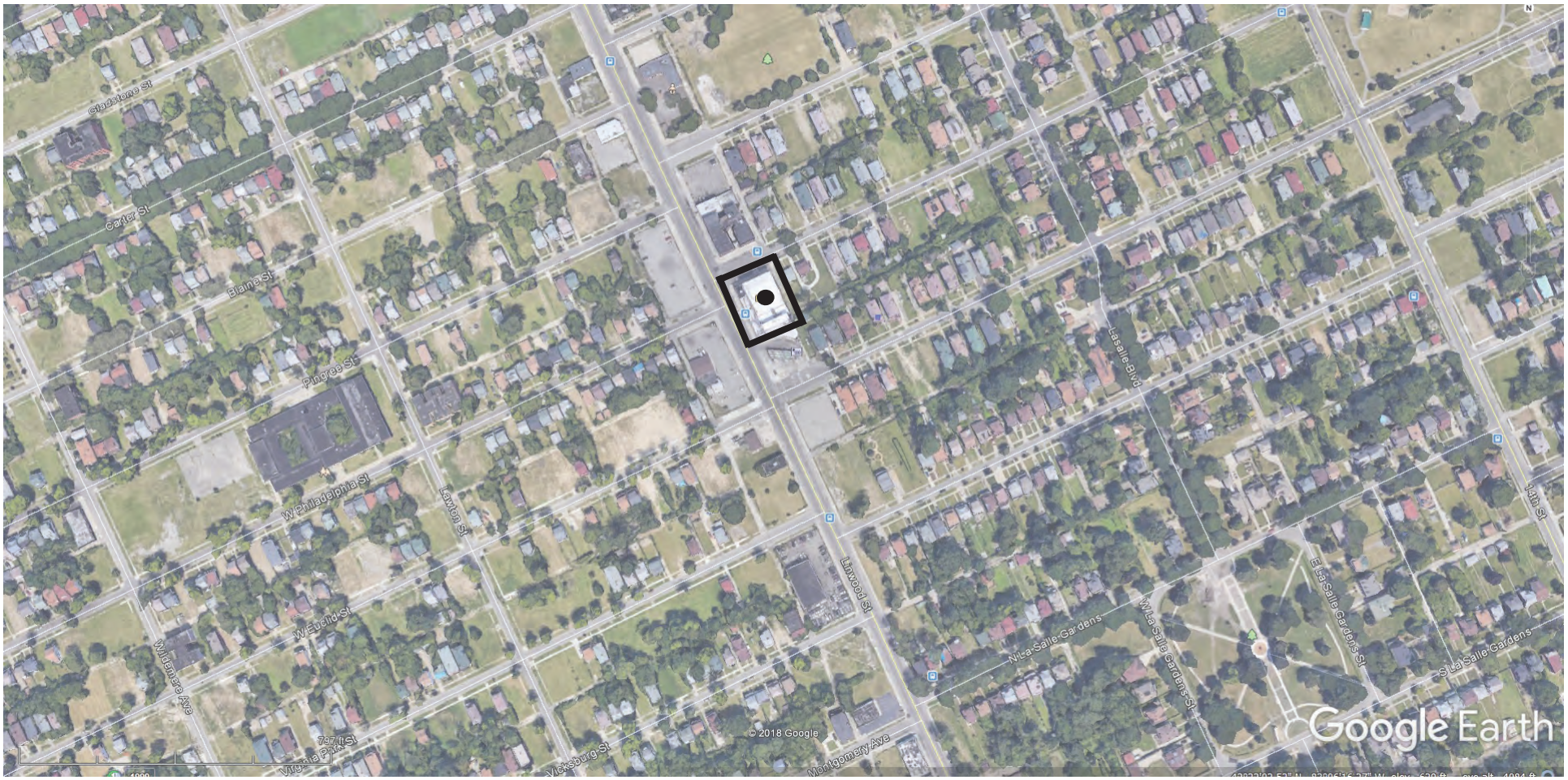
Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan
February 2019



N

Boundary

Geographical Coordinate
Latitude: -83.061698 Longitude: 42.220480



N

Boundary

Geographical Coordinate
Latitude: -83.061698 Longitude: 42.220480

New Bethel Baptist Church, 8450 Linwood Street
National Register of Historic Places Nomination
Boundary Map

Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan
February 2019

New Bethel Baptist Church Boundary

1 Contributing Building

N


ORIOLE


NEW BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH


NEW BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH
NEW BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH


NEW BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH
CITGO


ONE LORD
ONE FAITH ONE BAPTISM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THE VISION
FREE BOOKS
TECHNICAL INCLUSION PROJECT (TIP)
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TUESDAYS AND FRIDAYS
4:30 PM TO 7:00 PM


Rev. Dr. C. L. Franklin Blvd


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CHURCH
HALL
OF
DISTINCTION
LIGHT OF THE WORLD


WISH