



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## Mount Aaron Baptist Church, a Beacon of Hope and Safe Haven for the Community to Gather, Looks to Expand

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY August 20, 2013

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*After months of hard work, Mount Aaron Baptist Church is nearing their fundraising goals as they plan to expand services for youth and seniors.*

*Pastor Dwayne Jones has turned the once-struggling church into a thriving beacon of hope for the entire community.*

*Senator Kennedy and other community leaders express staunch support for Mount Aaron Baptist Church and its plans to expand its space and program offerings.*

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Mount Aaron Baptist Church, located at 540 Genesee St. in Buffalo, has seen a rapid increase in membership over the past few years under the leadership of Reverend Dwayne Jones. Since becoming pastor in 2006, he has helped turn the once-struggling church into a thriving beacon of hope for the entire community. Now, the expanding congregation has grown too large to comfortably fit within the walls of the church, and Pastor Jones is eager to expand the church-building to help fulfill the community's growing need for services to support local youth and seniors.

Pastor Jones developed plans to expand the church by 4,500 square-feet in order to provide additional programming for young people and senior citizens who live in the neighborhood surrounding Mount Aaron. With his plans in hand, Pastor Jones went to the community for support. He embarked on a significant fundraising campaign, and over the past year, Pastor Jones has gotten Mount Aaron close to its goals to finance the expansion project.

“Our community is growing stronger, but we still struggle with high poverty. The children, families and seniors who live in our neighborhood are relying on us to provide a helping hand,” said Pastor Jones. “There has been monumental progress over the last several years here at Mount Aaron, and now we’re in desperate need of more space. We’ve successfully raised funds to get us close to our goals, but we need additional financial support from the Western New York community. This neighborhood needs us. They need the hope and help we provide, and now we need our fellow Western New Yorkers to help us expand our church and the programs we’re able to offer to local youth and seniors.”

Pastor Jones also found an ally in Senator Tim Kennedy, D-Buffalo, who has helped get the word out and build community support behind this exciting project.

“Under the leadership of Pastor Jones, Mount Aaron Baptist Church has become an inspirational success story on Buffalo's East Side,” said Senator Kennedy. “Pastor Jones has

put in countless hours of work to grow his church and lift the entire community. Mount Aaron has become a beacon of hope and a safe haven for our community to gather – and they're just getting started. Their new plans will allow them to provide additional support services to even more young people and senior citizens. I'm proud to support Pastor Jones and the expansion plans for Mount Aaron Baptist Church, and I hope the entire Western New York community will join us in backing this exciting project.”

As a retired sheriff with an extensive background in law enforcement, Pastor Jones knew his first responsibility as pastor was ridding Genesee Street of any criminal element that would hinder the immediate community's access to the church. Pastor Jones took a proactive approach working with local law enforcement to increase police patrol around the church. Law enforcement also dismantled a local gang that previously had a foothold on the neighborhood.

With a decrease in crime and an increase in programming offered at Mount Aaron, Pastor Jones noticed more and more members of the surrounding community entering his church doors – even police officers on duty made an effort to stop and see the Pastor at the Sunday morning services. Mount Aaron had become a safe haven for the community to worship and gather. When Pastor Jones started at Mount Aaron, the congregation numbered just 40 members. Today, Pastor Jones sees an average attendance of almost 300 at his Sunday services.

As his congregation grew, so did the challenges and responsibilities of the church. The community surrounding Mount Aaron is transitioning; however, most nearby families live in poverty. Pastor Jones made it a priority to support seniors and youth who urgently need a safe place to gather. Current afterschool programs and Sunday school programs are very well attended, but they leave the church pressed for space. Once the expansion is complete, Mount Aaron will be able to open up new opportunities for local youth. The church also has

thriving senior-citizens programs, and the location has become a gathering place for community groups.

Mount Aaron is close to starting work on their expansion project, but they still need additional support from the community. According to Pastor Jones, the expansion will cost an estimated \$150,000, and through their fundraising campaign, they have gotten more than halfway there.

Under the plans, the church will construct a new, larger sanctuary, and the existing sanctuary will be used as classroom space for their afterschool and Sunday school programs. The added space will also allow for larger programs for area senior citizens. Plans include the construction of a kitchen to make meals for fellowship dinners and other events, as well as a parking lot with approximately 30 spaces to relieve congestion and parking concerns during Sunday services. Located near the growing Buffalo Niagara Medical Corridor, the new parking lot also presents an opportunity for the church to partner with a local health-care provider for employee or patient parking during the week.

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