

A Man With A Vision

By Kerry Craig

It's Sunday morning and not just any Sunday morning—it's Sunday Morning, September 18, 1994 and on this morning Dr. James E. Martin and his congregation at Mt. Olivet Baptist Church are dedicating their new building.

The parking lot is about full as I drive in, but I find a spot for my old truck and walk in the north entrance and pick up a bulletin. As we're standing in the hall outside the sanctuary, I discover from the bulletin that Dr. Curtis Mitchel, pastor of Antioch Progressive Baptist Church in Sacramento, and a long-time friend of Dr. Martin's will be delivering the message from God's word. Some shuffling and murmuring tells us it is time to move forward, down the hall, then up some stairs and . . . there it is, the new sanctuary. Silent, white-gloved ushers direct us to seats as soft piano music plays. And then the choir begins to sing and we begin to sing, and I think to myself, This is it! Another step in God's plan to fulfill the vision for a lot of Christian brothers and sisters; another example of God's faithfulness.

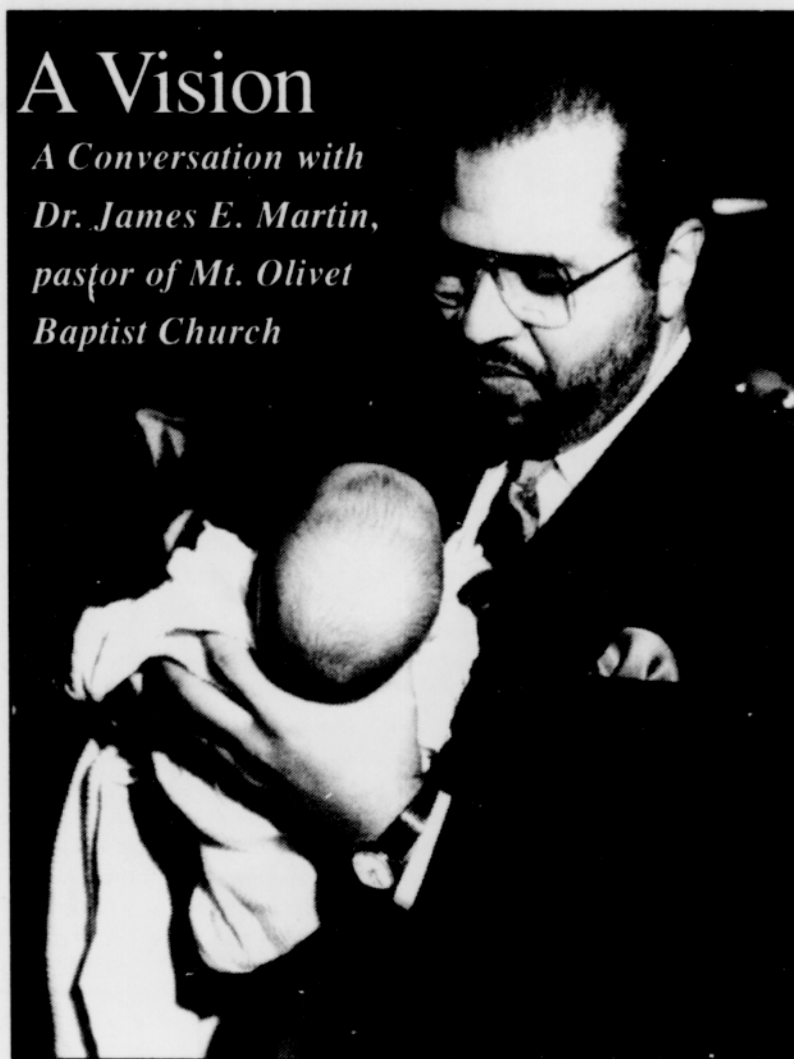
About four weeks before this day, I had the privilege of speaking with Dr. Martin at his office on the original church property for Mt. Olivet. We spoke of his life and his vision for the church. We spoke of a topic that we both love: our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our conversation started with Dr. Martin's youth; that starlit time when we all have ideas of what we want to be or where we want to go . . . right? Like most of us, Dr. Martin thought he knew where he was headed with life—thought he knew what was best. He worked hard at achieving those goals, but as you will see, God has plans and directions that become impossible to avoid. He knows just where and how to influence our lives.

If you look at a map of the USA sometime and find Virginia and West Virginia, take a minute to look down in the northwest area of Virginia and the southwest corner of West Virginia. You will see two cities called Bluefield. Dr. Martin was born in one (Virginia) and raised in the other (that leaves West Virginia). He went through school and vocational school there, and eventually joined the police force in Bluefield, West Virginia, working his way up to the rank of sergeant.

It was in Bluefield that Dr. Martin

*A Conversation with
Dr. James E. Martin,
pastor of Mt. Olivet
Baptist Church*



accepted Christ as his Savior at age 12. But from then on, he says, he backslid.

"Everything I put my hand on would work for awhile and then it would just disintegrate because the Lord would not let me be comfortable," says Dr. Martin. "Now, I did not know that then, but I know it now. Mother would tell me, 'You know, you're never going to be satisfied out there living that life until you come back to the Lord. You're a Prodigal Son. You're never going to be happy out there. Can't you see you're in the far country? Can't you see you're feeding pigs?' I just wasn't happy," Dr. Martin recounts.

Looking back at his spiritual life, Dr. Martin remembers the tone of his home. "My mother, I think, was the greatest influence in my life. My dad was not home much of the time."

Dr. Martin's father worked on the railroad, a job that would take him from Bluefield to the little town of Welch where he worked each week. Weekends saw the return of his father to Bluefield.

Remembering those days, Dr. Martin says, "He supported his family. He loved me and he loved my mother, but he drank—

although he never did it at home. He never was violent, never hurt anyone. He was a good man, but he was unsaved."

Retirement from the railroad brought the senior Martin home for good, and into a new life in Christ. The Holy Spirit, answering the earnest prayers of his faithful wife and other friends, moved Dr. Martin's father to accept Jesus Christ—a joyous occasion for Dr. Martin's mother and, as it would turn out, another notch up on the old conviction meter for Dr. Martin.

"Man, I tell you, that was really a day! Now, I was the only unsaved family member," he says. "So, when I'd come in from my band (I used to play drums in a band), I'd come in at three, four, five o'clock in the morning and Mother would come in and check on me and say 'Thank God.' She would always be praying for me. She'd make me mad praying for me. I'd say, 'Mother, would you quit?!' I knew the hand of the Lord was on me. I knew. I was angry because Mother prayed for me all the time and then Daddy started praying for me! I had two of them praying for me and I was uncomfortable."

The success of life did not wash away