Birmingham Baptist Churches Exploring their Black History Project

Leader's Story: Cassetta Williams – 'A Pastor in all but name'

Authors: Gale Richards with Edwin Daly

Cassetta came to England in 1963, at the age of 22, and within a week was attending Christ Church, Aston (today known as New Christ Church, Aston). This was the Baptist church nearest to where she was living. She arrived at the church with a letter of commendation from her church in Jamaica, that stated she had been a Sunday School teacher.

When she first started attending Christ Church it had a pastor (which records show would have been Revd Malcolm Watson). However, he left shortly after she arrived (records indicate in 1966). This left the church under the oversight of a team of deacons, until the next pastor arrived in 1968, Revd Eric Payne.

Cassetta recalls that there were some Black people attending the church when she arrived, but she does not recall them being particularly active in the life of the church. In contrast, she very quickly began to play an active role in the life of the church.

She remembers serving the congregation, by 'giving them choruses' in her words, from Jamaica. She feels this helped her win over the congregation – as they loved her singing. She recalls the church members

being good to her, and that she quickly became a Sunday School teacher there. She has fond memories of her and her daughter proposing and organising Caribbean evenings at the church, as well as working with fellow Caribbean church members, such as ‘Sister Pryce’ and ‘Sister Ellis’, in order to put on concerts, and annual church trips (sometimes filing as many as three coaches) to the seaside.

Over time, Cassetta went on to hold the following positions at the church – Sunday School Superintendent, Deacon, and Treasurer. During times that the church was without a minister (church records show 1993–1996 as the longest in recent times), Cassetta described herself as doing all the things a pastor would normally do. That was preaching, leading church members’ and deacons’ meetings, dedicating children, and leading church membership classes, and doing believer’s baptisms. This led to some people calling her ‘Pastor Williams’, in recognition of the fact that she was in effect operating in pastor in all but name.

Cassetta recalls taking every opportunity to receive training to do all that she did, well, such as becoming a recognised member of the Birmingham Preachers’ Association in the mid-1990s. She was also engaged in wider community action, through being one of the representatives of Christ Church on the Birmingham Baptist Inner City Project committee (1984–1993). The Project that described itself as enabling twelve inner city Baptist churches ‘to show God’s love and salvation in these communities, helping to heal people’s hurts and to change the structures which cause the inequalities and depravations of the inner city, by making the Gospel of Jesus Christ known and relevant.’

A combination of Cassetta's ministry gifts and fundraising abilities were pivotal in helping the church continue, after the original church building being destroyed by fires in 1989. Cassetta alongside Mr Plummer and Mr Bowers (all three deacons of the church), formed the building committee. They helped the church secure a new building, across the road from the old one. And so, her name appears alongside others to commemorate the opening of the new building in 1998.

Underpinning all Cassetta has achieved or enabled is a strong faith. This is perhaps best captured in a sermon she delivered on a Sunday morning (25 January 2009) at New Christ Church. In this sermon, Williams refers to a dream she had many years ago (that she has testified about for many years since), in which she heard Jesus say to her the grounding words 'Where is your faith?', as she found herself stuck at the top of a high tower. She proceeds to say in her sermon:

> Jesus taught people to have faith in him by the miraculous works he performed. By the remarkable life He lived and then he demonstrated His faith by dying on the Cross. He has faith and confidence that his Father would raised Him from the dead…We do not read the Bible merely as a record of the pass, but as a revelation of what can happen in the present. When we have faith and live in holiness and obedience to God, Miracles will happen in our every day life. Jesus himself says if we have faith as a mustard seed, we can says to the mountain remove and it shall be removed.[1]

[1] Cassetta's original spelling is retained to give recognition to her Jamaican language heritage.

Williams was clear in telling her hearers that they needed a holistic image of Christ Jesus (his life, death and resurrection), and needed to put their faith in Christ, into action. She like many Jamaicans, as descendants of those enslaved in the Caribbean, brought a similar spirit of challenging the oppression of slavery, to challenging the anti-Black discrimination that many of them experienced, in church and wider society, in Britain. This is partly captured in the image of the mustard seed found in Matthew 17:20, that Cassetta Williams referred to in her aforementioned sermon.

September 2026

Copyright: Creative Commons license BY (Attribution 4.0 International)
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

References

Cassetta Williams 'Where is your faith?' sermon delivered at New Christ Church, Aston, Birmingham, 25 January 2009.

'Birmingham Baptist Churches Exploring their Black History Project' oral history interview with Cassetta Williams, 4 July 2025, conducted by Gale Richards and Edwin Daly.

New Christ Church, Aston (2016) 150-year church anniversary booklet

Birmingham Baptist Inner City Project booklet [1989]

Birmingham Baptist Inner City Project Annual Report and Accounts (1986-1987)

Birmingham Baptist Preachers Full Contact List (May 2013)