

Big Bethel AME Church

"Where Jesus Saves"

November 07 & 08 7pm nightly

Heaven Bound

95th
year



Big Bethel AME Church
Dr. Jonathan C. Augustine Senior Pastor
220 Auburn Avenue, NE
Atlanta, GA 30303
www.bigbethelame.org

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"CHURCH STILL LIVES..."



**BIG BETHELS
FREEDOM OF
DEBT: "IT CAN
BE DONE".**



DIABOLICAL DOINGS IN ATLANTA



More Heaven Bound Memories





Heaven Bound



**Willa Watson
Henderson**



**Bernice Arrington
Walters**



Everett Garrett



BIG BETHEL

African Methodist Episcopal Church

The Reverend Dr. Jonathan C. Augustine
Senior Pastor

November 7-8, 2025

To My Big Bethel Family
and All Who Came to Enjoy *Heaven Bound*:

It is my honor to welcome you, not just to the historic Big Bethel AME Church, but also to a special part of history, only possible on Sweet Auburn Avenue, in Atlanta: You are privileged to be a part of **the 95th showing of *Heaven Bound***, a morality drama believed to be the longest running play in African American history.

This year's *Heaven Bound* production is sequenced at an inflection point in Big Bethel's 178th anniversary observance, as a reminder of our work to satisfy needs. *Heaven Bound* began in 1930, as a fundraiser to address the congregation's choral and physical needs, as Big Bethel was rebuilding. 95-years later, its 2025 performance is a gateway to again addressing needs, **as Big Bethel prepares to (re)launch a feeding ministry, in partnership with The Magnolia Chapter of The Links, Incorporated**, to assist our most needy siblings, in the food desert of the Sweet Auburn and Edgewood areas.

This year's church anniversary activities began last month, with amazing Sunday worship, a mid-week revival, and benevolent work (**Beauty for Ashes**), as Big Bethel members did their best to be a blessing to the community. Now, with the 95th consecutive showing of *Heaven Bound* as a gateway to a (re)launched feeding ministry, our work to serve others during Thanksgiving, and the highly anticipated Advent Season, the Big Bethel congregation prays you are spiritually blessed by the anointed performances and that you too will be motivated for benevolent work, to help someone in need, especially during the forthcoming holidays.

We pray you enjoy this historic **95th showing of *Heaven Bound*** and thank God for your presence and support of Big Bethel AME Church.

*Pastor Jay Augustine and
Lady Michelle Burks Augustine*



Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church

A Brief History

Significant milestones have been etched into the fabric of Atlanta's growth and development by members of Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church during its 177-year history. Prior to emancipation, slave masters of the Methodist Episcopal Church provided a facility for our ancestors to worship at Bethel Tabernacle Church on the corner of Courtland and Jenkins Streets (now Georgia State University). Our founders, however never lost sight of their vision to organize a church for self-expression, self-help, self-government and most of all worship.

A warm handclasp between Rev. James Lynch, sent to organize the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the South, and Rev. Joseph Wood, member of Bethel Tabernacle, in Atlanta, resulted in Bethel Tabernacle becoming united with the African Methodist Episcopal connection in 1866. ***Morris Brown College*** was established in 1881, when Big Bethel AME Church hosted the North Georgia Annual Conference.

The first National Convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was held at Big Bethel AME Church in 1919. A black Community Activist, Mr. Jesse O. Thomas, was able to convince the Atlanta City Council and the County Commission to each give \$5000 for rebuilding Big Bethel Church, after it was severely damaged by fire. The reason for supporting this request was due to Bethel's capacity to hold mass meetings of a non-denominational nature in the 1920's.

One of Atlanta's Historic Landmarks is Big Bethel's lighted cross, bearing the message "***Jesus Saves.***" The sign was installed in 1922. The blue neon-lighted sign on the church's steeple is still shining as a symbol of "***Hope for the World.***"

The Big Bethel AME Church's Heaven Bound Choir was featured at the premier of the film "***Gone With the Wind***," gaining an international reputation in 1930. The morality play "***Heaven Bound***," authored and produced at Big Bethel AME Church, has been performed for **92** successive years since that time.

In 1967 there was a legal change in the name of the church. The name was officially changed from Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Tabernacle to Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. The October 25, 1943, issue of The Christian Recorder commended Big Bethel Church for raising \$65,000 to clear the church indebtedness made in 1924. The article recognized the leadership of Rev. D. T. Babcock. Rev. Babcock's tenure of 14 years at the helm of Big Bethel Church has not been surpassed to this date.

During the administration of Rev. Reuben T. Bussey, the church celebrated its One Hundredth Birthday. One of the high points of his administration was the erection of Bethel Towers (a Resident Housing Facility) in 1968. On August 11, 2013, the mortgage for the \$3,514,700 building was burned.

Big Bethel's "Great Moller Organ" was initially installed in 1924 by the M.P. Moller Organ Company of Hagerstown, MD. The instrument was a three manual and pedal pipe, with 16 ranks. In 1987 the organ was completely restored and expanded under the pastorate of Rev. McKinley Young when the instrument was raised to 32 ranks.

Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church

A Brief History (Continued)

Rev. James L. Davis, appointed as pastor of Big Bethel AME Church in 1992, established several ambitious projects and programs. Among his greatest projects was PROCEED (Prayerfully, Proclaiming Our Community, Empowering Economic Development), a catalyst for revitalizing “Sweet Auburn” and other communities. Some of the positive outgrowths include: the Trinity-Bethel Partnership, Big Bethel Village Senior Residences, and Renaissance Walk.

Rev. Mark Thompson served as pastor from 2004-2005. He nurtured the Seed and Proceed, History and Heritage Ministry, Computer Lab Restoration from the Canadian Group, the Babcock -Young Voices of Unity choir, inception of the Praise Team (a small choral group singing selections as a prelude to the worship service), the Bearden-Scott Youth Choir (Reverend Maurice Wright) and the Katrina Relief project. Presiding Elder David Rhone, Jr. served as interim Pastor (several months in 2005). Additionally, the “Big Bethel Saturday Academy” was established during the Thompson, Rhone year.

During the administration of Rev. Gregory V. Eason, Sr., in addition to his mantra of “Radical Hospitality,” FOCUS (Faithfully Obeying Christ with Unwavering Stewardship) was launched to raise funds for the church to retire the debt incurred in purchasing the Parking facility from Beaudry Ford Company. The parking lot is on John Wesley Dobbs & Jesse Hill, Jr. Drive.

In May, 2013, Rev. John Foster, Ph.D., was appointed as pastor of Big Bethel AME Church. On his watch, Big Bethel celebrated a Mortgage Burning Ceremony for the church and parking lot properties in October 2018. In addition to continuing the excellent programs and projects that are in progress, he launched a Video Ministry. The church services are streamed LIVE on the web weekly. [www.bigbethelame.org click the blue **WATCH LIVE AND ON-DEMAND** bar] This ministry helped to keep the church fully operational throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, during Rev. Foster’s administration, a digital marquee was installed in front of the church and Big Bethel gained income and advertising access to major billboards along I-75 near the church. May 2024 marked the 11th year of service for Rev. John Foster, Ph.D.

In May 2025, after Dr. Foster’s retirement, **Bishop Michael Leon Mitchell** appointed **Reverend Dr. Jonathan C. Augustine** (“Pastor Jay”), vice president of the AME Church’s Judicial Council, as Big Bethel’s servant leader. Pastor Jay is leading a church revitalization, where weekly attendance has dramatically increased, children’s church was reinstituted, along with Youth Sundays, new ministries have been birthed, and Big Bethel has a renewed focus on social justice. Under Pastor Jay’s leadership, Big Bethel is once again garnering local and national news headlines as a church that is committed to fighting injustices and being a place of welcome for all, as the “**City Hall of Sweet Auburn.**”

In the 178 years of Big Bethel’s history, thirty-six ministers have served as pastors—“sainted spiritual leaders” of this flock. Three of those ministers, the Reverends Harold I. Bearden (1964), McKinley Young (1992), and James L. Davis (2004), were elected from Big Bethel’s pulpit and consecrated as bishops in the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

To God Be the Glory, Great Things He Hath Done!

“From eternity comes the sound of many voices, voices of the ransomed hosts of God, the saints and the angels. These are they which came out to the great tribulations and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb. They come singing-- the songs of the saints”

HEAVEN BOUND

Jory Young, Director
Ed Jones, Executive Producer
Jeremy Johnson, BBAMEC Worship & Arts Director & Keyboard Accompanist
Phillip V. Skerrett, Jr., Pipe Organ (39 years)
Vernon Kimbro, Choral Music Director(13 years)
Kelvin Thompson, Organist
Brenda G. Thomas Lyles, Pianist/Music Consultant (18 years)
Rev. Joyce Young, Scriptural Consultant(48 years)

***** THE CAST *****

NARRATORS.....Bill Petty (F), Rev. Gwen Senatle (S)

SATAN.....Jory Young (S), Glenn Samuels (F)
And the Lord said to **Satan**, “From where do you come?” So **Satan** answered the Lord and said,
“From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.” Job 1:7

IMP..... Christian Pettway(3rdGen)

SAINT PETER.....Gregory Eason, Jr.
And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this **rock** I will build My **church**, and the gates of
Hades shall not prevail against it. Matthew 16:18

SAINT CECELIA.....Juanita Aikens (F), Kristal Ammons (S)
Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Psalm 95:1

ANGELS

Juanita Aikens (15 years)	Avril Woodson Copeland(2ndGen)	Ruth McKenzie
Kristal Ammons (2nd Gen)	Kenyatta Copeland	Clarissa Robinson (2nd Gen)
Nala Bivins(2nd Gen)	Barbara Creamer	Janae Robinson(3rd Gen)
Lisa Herring Brooks(2nd Gen)	Georgetta Dye (46 years)	Ticole 'Colah' Smith

For He shall give His **angels** charge over you, To keep you in all your ways. Psalm 91:11

THE HIGHWAY HERALDCelestial Choir (F) Alexia Brookins (S)

THE PILGRIM TO ZION.....Tonretha Harris (F), Alexia Brookins (S)
Sing praises to the Lord, who dwells in Zion! Declare His deeds among the people. Psalm 9:11

(F)- Friday (S)-Saturday

THE WAYWORN TRAVELER.....Delvin Walker (F), William Petty (S)

The Lord shall preserve ^[a] your going out and your coming in From this time forth, and even forevermore. Psalm 121:8

**THE PILGRIM OF THE CROSS.....Danita Hines (F), Barbara Johnson (S)
Marla Williams (2nd Gen) (S)**

Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.
Mark 8:34b

THE STRIVER Cornelius Pettway

"Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able." Luke 13:24

THE WAYWARD GIRL..... Racquel Battle

But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. Luke 9:62

THE MOTHER'S GIRL.....Karon Stephens (F,S) Tonretha Harris (S)

Train up a child in the way she should go, And when she is old he will not depart from it. Proverbs 22:6

THE MOTHER IN HEAVEN.....Cynthia Crane

For whoever does the will of my Father **in heaven** is my brother and sister and **mother**." Matthew 12:50

THE RICH MAN.....Dr Stanley Pritchett (S).. Floyd Baxter (F)

And again Jesus said, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Matthew 19:24

THE ORPHANSTonretha Harris, Lehyani Lee, & Bella Johnson

I will not leave you as **orphans**; I will come to you. John 14:18

THE PILGRIM OF FAITH.....L. Samuel Stephens

Now faith is the ^[a] substance of things hoped for, the ^[b] evidence of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1a

THE PILGRIM TO THE PROMISE LAND.....Shelley Webster (F) Phyllis Lorena Smiley (S)

Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe *it*, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the Lord God of your fathers has **promised** you—a **land** flowing with milk and honey.' Deuteronomy 6:3

**THE GAMBLERS.....Jackson Kennedy, Terrence Eggleton,
& Christian Johnson**

For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Matthew 16:26



(F)- Friday (S)-Saturday

THE CHRISTIAN MOTHER.....Phyllislorena Smiley (F), Gwen Langley (S)

For whoever does the will of my Father **in heaven** is my brother and sister and **mother**." Matthew 12:50

THE PILGRIM OF SORROWAlexia Brookins (F), Grace Terrell McCoy (S)

Because narrow *is* the gate and [d]difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. Matthew 7:14

THE DETERMINED SOUL.....Dr. Jackie Washington (F), Kathryn Stanley (S)

Because narrow *is* the gate and [d]difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. Matthew 7:14

THE PREACHER.....Keith Burnett

Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, *that* someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." Luke 9:57

THE HYPOCRITELinda Jolly (F), Ja'Keilla Rouse (S)

Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: **8** 'These people [c] draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with *their* lips, But their heart is far from Me. Matthew 5:7-8

THE BEDRIDDEN SOUL..... Rose Schofield

8 For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light **9** (for the fruit of the [b]Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth) Ephesians 5:9

THE BURDEN BEARER.....Stephanie Moore

Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29** Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am [a]gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Matthew 11:28-29

THE REFORMED DRUNKARDJory Young (F), Glenn Samuels (S)

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, Ephesians 5:18

THE SOLDIER IN THE ARMY OF THE LORD.....Rev. Dr. Reginald Cleaver Jr.

You therefore must endure[a]hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 2 Timothy 2:3

FINALE

**All Hail Immanuel (F)
I Shall Wear A Crown (S)**



(F) - Friday (S) - Saturday

THE SPIRITUALS

STEAL AWAY.....Karon Stephens (F), Kathryn Stanley (S)

COULDN'T HEAR NOBODY PRAY.....Carol Ann Dove

WITNESS.....Phyllisloreana Smiley

DOWN BY THE RIVERSIDE..... Rev. Reginald Cleaver, Jr.. (F) Sam Stephens (S)

HAND ME DOWN.....Glenn Samuels (F) Jory Young (S)

HEAVENLY TRIO

"My Lord's Writing"

Barbara Johnson

Ja'Keilla Rouse

Shirley Woodson

HEAVENLY TRIO

"My Latest Sun Is Sinking"

Carol Ann Dove

Linda Pope

Dr. Jackie Washington

HEAVENLY SOLOS

"You Better Mind" arr. by Brenda G. Thomas Lyles

Bernice Bland

"Throw Out The Life Line"

Lonnie Masingill

THE CELESTIAL CHOIR

SOPRANO

Rev. Sharla Askin(25 years)

Racquel Battle (6 years)

Alexia Brookins (3 years)

Bernice Bland (6 years)

Carol Ann Dove (47 years)

Tonretha Harris (4 years) - 2nd Gen

Danita Hines (5 years -2nd Gen)

Barbara Johnson (7 years)

Gwendolyn Langley (50+ yrs- 2nd gen)

Clarissa Robinson (40+ years 2nd gen)

Karon Stephens (36 years- 2nd gen)

Phyllisloreana Smiley (10 years)

Stephanie Moore (26 Years- 2nd Gen)



(F) - Friday (S) - Saturday

THE CELESTIAL CHOIR (Continued)

ALTO

Barbara Creamer (2 years)
Cynthia Crane (23 years)
Linda Jolly (3 yrs)
Jacquelyn Jones (9 years)
Linda Pope (2 years)
Ja'Keilla Rouse (3 years)
Janae Robinson (2 years 3rd gen)
Catherine Wainwright (8 years)

TENOR

Cornelius Pettway (19 years 2nd gen)
Tawana Jones (9 years)
Keith Burnett (13 years)
Jackie Washington (30 years)
Michael Brown (5 years)
Jory Young (30 years/ 9 years as Satan- 2nd Gen)
Norris Walters (40+)
Glenn Samuels (35 years/ 25 years Satan)
Shirley Woodson (20+)

BASS

Lonnie Masingill (3 years)
Del Walker (6 years)
Bill Petty (20+ years)
Richard Marion (26)

PRE-SHOW MUSIC

Morris Brown College Choir (F)
Directed by:
Dr. Alonzo Taylor, Director of Choral Activities

EXPRESSIONS

Jory Young, Artistic Director

THE BENEDICTION

Rev. Dr. Jonathan C. Augustine, Senior Pastor



PRODUCTION STAFF

MUSICIANS

Jeremy Johnson, BBAMEC
Worship & Arts Director & Key-
board Accompanist

Phillip V. Skerrett, Jr.,
Pipe Organ (39 years)

Vernon Kimbro,
Choral
Music Director(13 years)

Kelvin Thompson,
Organist

Brenda G. Thomas Lyles,
Pianist/Music Consultant(18years)
Joshua Young,
Drums(2nd Gen)

AUDIO-VISUAL
Brandon Collins
Cornelius Pettway
Phyllislorena Smiley

ADVERTISING DESIGNER
Khamisi Walters (2nd Gen)

GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Martinique Mix

BODY PAK/AUDIO
Linda Davis-Banks
Clarissa Carmichael
Delaine Jones
Cornelius Pettway
Paige Thomas

LIGHTING

Joel Boykin II
Marcus Black
Marvin Fleming
Corey Baxter

PROGRAM

Phyllislorena Smiley
Jory Young
Ed Jones
Rev. Joyce Young

PROPS & RUNNERS

Lauren Blanchard Rajab
Kendall Rosby

STAGE CREW

Men of Trinity House Big Bethel :
Roderick Trice
Stephan Tesfaye
Ladarrian Jackson
Ryan Alexander
Keith Dillard
Felicia Jones: Stage Crew
Coordinator

PUBLICITY

Ed Jones
Jory Young
Phyllislorena Smiley
M. Paulyne Morgan White

SET DESIGN

Mark Jones
Jeremiah Jackson
Hezekiah Lomax

TICKET SALES

Joseph Patterson
Annette Petty
Rosaland Thomas
Olivia Alston

USHERS

Cyicoby Copeland
Everett Jolly
Felicia Jones
Payton Lowe
Joseph Purter
Shawn Tidwell
Louvenia Thomas
Paige Thomas
Kerry Westbrook
Rosaland Thomas: Lead
Usher(20+ years)

WARDROBE

Cynthia Copeland
Rose Schofield
Louvenia Thomas
PHOTOGRAPHY
Joshua Rowe

LOGISTICS

Ed Jones

PARKING

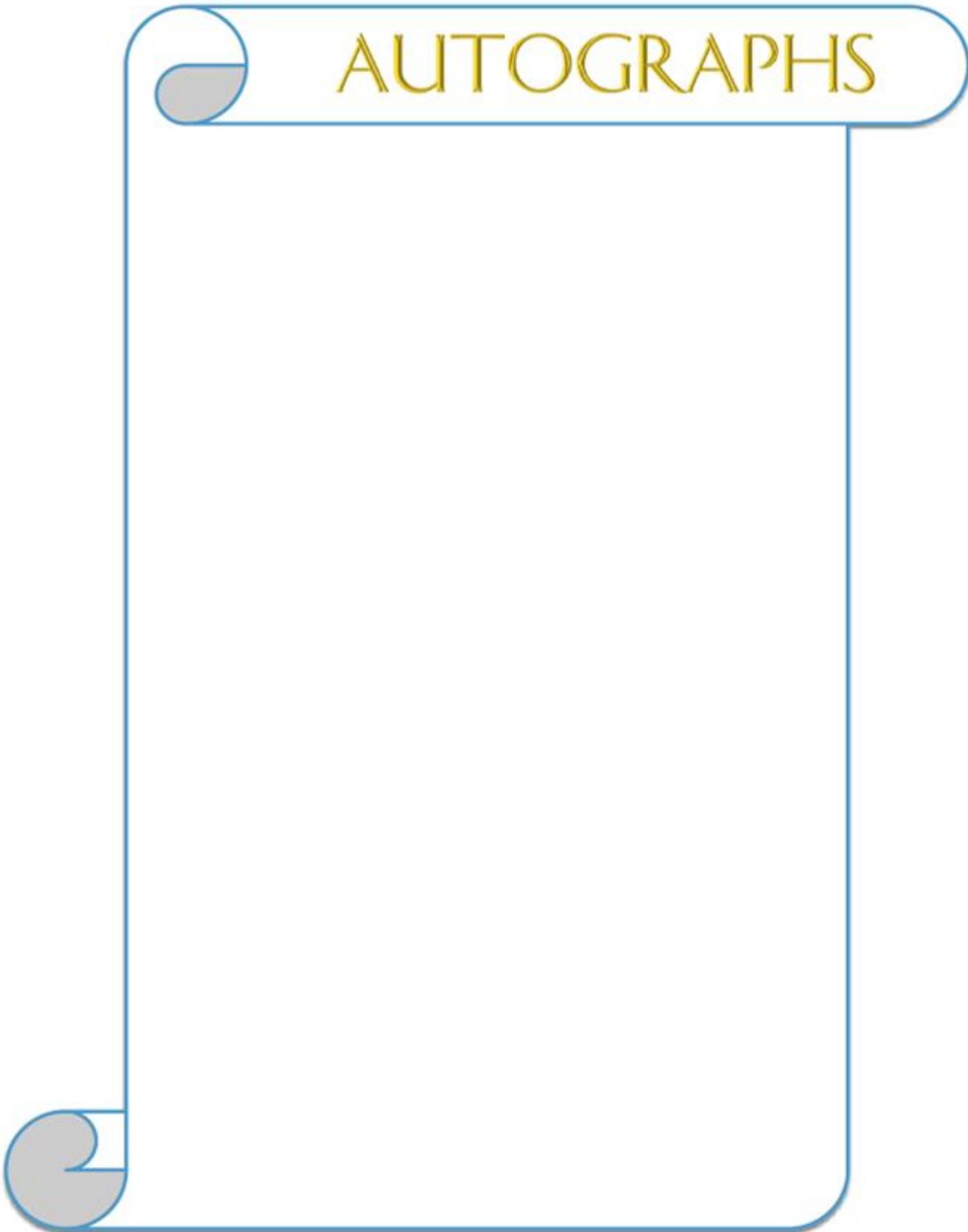
Victor Smith
James Rudd

CHURCH SECURITY

Ed Jones
Keith Burnett
Skylar Security



AUTOGRAPHS





SAVE THE DATE

12•21•25

@4:30PM

for Big Bethel's

Come On Home For
CHRISTMAS Event!!

More details

COMING

SOON!



SAVE THE DATE

FOR THE

96TH ANNIVERSARY

OF

HEAVEN BOUND

NOVEMBER 5 & 6, 2026

**Would you like to participate in the 2026 Production
of HEAVEN BOUND?**

Scan the code or go to the link below.

<https://form.jotform.com/223114192058146>

