A celebration to honor the oldest existing primarily African-American church in Minnesota is to be observed on June 27 and 28.

In1863, shortly after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, a group of former slaves escaped from Boone County Missouri and traveled north on a raft in search of work and a new way of life. Robert Thomas Hickman, who later became the first minister of Pilgrim Baptist Church, led this group. There are several accounts of assistance received by the former slaves along the way. However, since they did not know where they were going they called themselves pilgrims. It is thought that perhaps they landed at the present site of Harriet Island.

Pilgrim Baptist Church was formally organized on November 15, 1866, in St. Paul, MN. This act was celebrated by a baptismal service on the shores of the Mississippi River, climaxing years of frustration and hard work.

In addition to Pastor Hickman and Mrs. Robert Hickman, additional charter members were Fielding Combs, Henry Moffitt, John Trotter, Giles Crenshaw and members of their families. This group petitioned trustees of First Baptist to intercede and purchase a lot for $200. The first Pilgrim facility was built on the lot at Sibley near Morris Street in St. Paul.

In 1928 work was completed on the current Sanctuary and Fellowship Hall during the administration of Dr. L. W. Harris. In 1949 during the administration of Pastor Floyd Massey, the educational unit was completed. Under the leadership of its many capable leaders, Pilgrim has been a dominant force in making changes in the community. Over the years, its varied ministries and outreach programs have touched the lives of both members and non-members alike. These outreach and community programs have included:

NAACP; Urban League; Bailey Morris Plaza Housing Development; Senior Outreach; Alcoholic's Anonymous; Foreign Missions; My Sister's Keeper; Directions for Youth; Prison Ministry; Young Mothers; Social Services: Boy/Girl Scouts; Food/Clothing Shelf, housing assistance, and other referral services.

Educational Outreach efforts include: Summer Enrichment,. After School Tutoring, Benjamin Mays Elementary School, Early Childhood Education, Day Care Program
And Scholarship Programs

The Rev. Charles L. Gill, Jr. Senior Pastor, invites the community to celebrate the church's Founder's Day of 146 years. A celebratory banquet will be held Sat., June 27, 2009 at the downtown St. Paul Crown Plaza Hotel at 5 pm. Tickets are required to attend this event. For more information and to purchase a ticket, call the church at (651) 227-3220. The Sunday Service will be held at 9:45 am and the guest speaker for both events is the Rev. Dr. Cleophus J. LaRue, who currently serves on staff at Princeton University in the Department of Practical Theology.