



On any given Sunday, you may spot Dr. Bert Petersen at Abyssinian Baptist Church, quietly fulfilling his duties as an usher or rushing to assist a member in need of medical attention. What many may not know is that Dr. Petersen's connection to Abyssinian began on a deeply personal and spiritual note. In 2002, just a day before his birthday and shortly after returning from a missionary trip to Guyana, Dr. Petersen attended Abyssinian for the first time at the invitation of a colleague. He was drawn to the church's commitment to addressing health disparities in the Harlem community, aligning with his own passion for improving breast cancer care for Black women in underserved areas. Convinced that Abyssinian was the spiritual home he sought, Dr. Petersen was baptized the following month by

Reverend Dr. Violet Dease Lee, becoming the first man baptized by a female minister at Abyssinian.

Born in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, Dr. Petersen's early life was shaped by resilience and community. His Danish father was a butcher and farmer, while his mother worked tirelessly to support the family after their separation. Life on the island was far from the idyllic scenes portrayed in advertisements. Despite facing social rejection due to his parents' interracial relationship, young Bert found strength in the women of his community, who ensured he and his sister were nurtured and cared for.

Encouraged by this communal support and inspired by his mother's work ethic, Dr. Petersen excelled academically, graduating as valedictorian of his high school class. Despite his achievements, he received little encouragement to pursue higher education. Undeterred, he took matters into his own hands, applying to Johns Hopkins University, one of the world's most prestigious institutions. His determination paid off, and with scholarships and financial support from his Lutheran Church family, he embarked on a journey that would defy expectations.

At Johns Hopkins, Dr. Petersen faced isolation, finding himself excluded by both Black and white peers. Yet, the negativity only fueled his resolve. Ignoring the doubters, he earned top grades and was accepted into ten of the nation's top medical schools (including Harvard and Yale), ultimately graduating from Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in 1987.

Dr. Petersen's career has been nothing short of extraordinary. As a leading expert in breast cancer surgery, he currently serves as Chief of Breast Cancer Surgery at St. Barnabas Hospital in the Bronx. His impact extends far beyond the operating room. He co-founded Global Cancer Control, an organization focused on reducing cancer rates in developing nations, and the Charlotte Kimelman Cancer Institute, the first comprehensive cancer center in the Caribbean. Through his work with Dorcas Medical Missionary Ministry, he provides critical medical care to underserved communities worldwide.

At Abyssinian, Dr. Petersen's dedication is equally profound. He has served as Co-Chair of the Men's Ministry, a member of the Senior Men's Usher Ministry, and a contributor to the church's Strategic Planning Subcommittee. His commitment to Abyssinian's Health and Medical Ministries underscores his belief in the church as a hub for holistic community care.

Dr. Petersen's faith and compassion are the foundation of his life. Guided by the principle of "What would Jesus do?" he strives to uplift others and embody kindness. This ethos is evident in his family's tradition of serving breakfast to hundreds of carolers and friends each Christmas morning in St. Thomas's historic Emancipation Garden.

A devoted son, community servant, and medical pioneer, Dr. Bert Petersen is a shining example of faith in action. Abyssinian Baptist Church is proud and honored to count him as a cherished member of our congregation.