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# THE STAR OF ZION

AUGUST 2025 | VOL 149 NO. 8 | STAROFZION.ORG | THE OFFICIAL VOICE OF THE A.M.E. ZION CHURCH

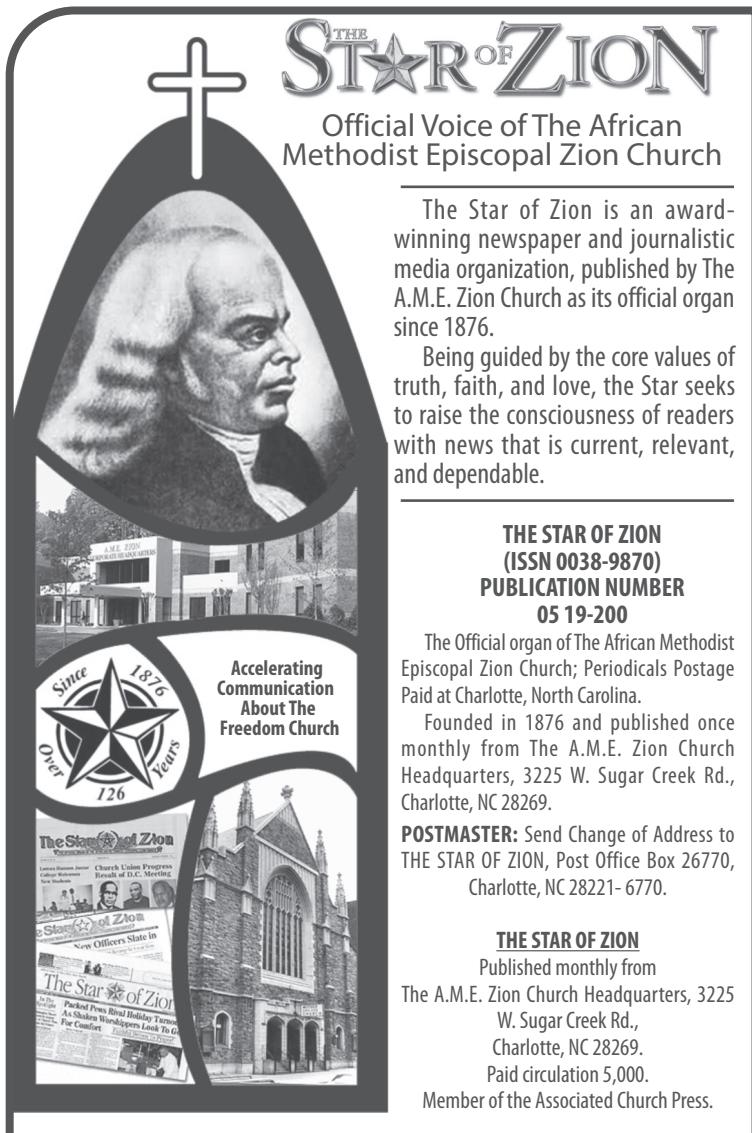
## 13TH QUADRENNIAL



**ZION**  
THE A.M.E. ZION CHURCH  
*The Freedom Church*

# CONNECTIONAL LAY COUNCIL CONVENTION





**THE STAR OF ZION**  
Official Voice of The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

The Star of Zion is an award-winning newspaper and journalistic media organization, published by The A.M.E. Zion Church as its official organ since 1876.

Being guided by the core values of truth, faith, and love, the Star seeks to raise the consciousness of readers with news that is current, relevant, and dependable.

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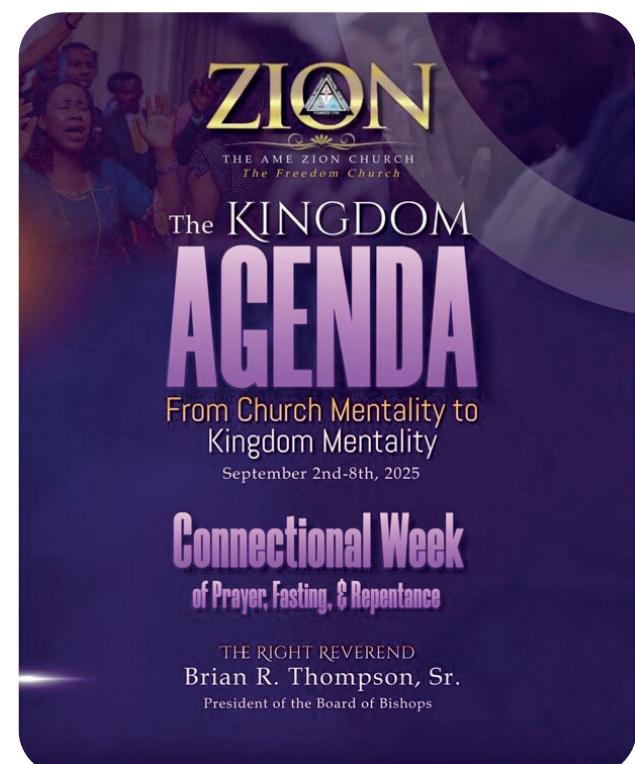
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OPINION

# The KINGDOM AGENDA: From Church Mentality to Kingdom Mentality

By Bishop Brian R. Thompson, Sr.

Winston Salem, July 2025 - At the 2025 Connectional Council Meeting, Bishop Brian R. Thompson Sr. was elected to serve as the President of the Board of Bishops. During his acceptance speech, he invited us to prepare our hearts and minds for a deeper spiritual shift by introducing Zion to "The KINGDOM AGENDA: From Church Mentality to Kingdom Mentality"—a sacred journey of prayer, fasting, and intentional reflection. This guided fast will begin on Monday, September 2nd at 12:01 AM and conclude on Sunday, September 8th at 11:59 PM. The experience will culminate in a powerful virtual Wesley Covenant Service on Zion's digital platforms at 7 PM on September 8th, 2025. This is more than a week of sacrifice—it is a divine invitation to realign



Scan for Guide

with God's Kingdom  
purpose for our lives,  
our churches, and our  
communities.

Bishop Brian R.



Continued on page 5



Mrs. Debra Chappelle-Polk  
Zion Spotlight Editor  
ZionSpotlight@StarOfZion.org

## The A.M.E. Zion Church: Serving This Present Age

*Committing to Our Mission, Being Creative in Our Methods, Concentrating on Our Ministries, and Connecting through Our Membership*

By The Star of Zion

At the 2025 Connectional Lay Council Convention of The A.M.E. Zion Church, Bishop Darryl B. Starnes, Sr. delivered a powerful and insightful presentation on the new Quadrennial Theme: “**The A.M.E. Zion Church—Serving This Present Age.**” Grounded in Scripture and tradition, Bishop Starnes emphasized that just as Jesus came to serve, so too must the Church continually find ways to serve in ways that are relevant to the challenges of today’s rapidly evolving, postmodern, and post-Christian culture. He challenged the Church to remain mission-focused and adapt its methods to remain effective witnesses in the current age.

Bishop introduced the four subthemes that frame the Church’s response: *Committing to Our Mission, Being Creative in Our Methods, Concentrating on Our Ministries, and Connecting through Our Membership*. Each subtheme was unpacked with biblical insight and practical reflection. He stressed the need to evaluate how church resources—time, money, and leadership expectations—align with Christ’s mandate to make disciples, preach the gospel, and nurture believers.



Creativity in ministry methods was presented as not only necessary but spiritually inspired. Bishop Starnes encouraged the Church to explore innovative worship, education, outreach, and use of technology—always rooted in timeless Christian principles. Concentrating on ministry, he said, means prioritizing service to members, communities, and making space for people’s spiritual gifts to flourish. Effective ministry should be life-giving, transformational, and centered on meeting real needs.

Finally, Bishop Starnes reminded the Church of the importance of authentic connection—through membership, discipleship, and leadership—founded on a commitment to godliness and scriptural holiness. With stirring words and hymns of encouragement, he closed by affirming that the God who brought Zion through past struggles will empower the Church to serve faithfully in this present age.

[Quadrennial Theme Page](#)

## Bishop Dwayne Anthony Walker Honored with Prestigious Order of the Long Leaf Pine Award

By Livingstone College

SALISBURY, NC – Bishop Dwayne Anthony Walker, presiding prelate of the Alabama-Florida Episcopal District, and former Pastor of Little Rock African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, was inducted into the Order of the Long Leaf Pine. This distinguished recognition, awarded by Gov. Josh Stein, celebrates Walker’s significant contributions and exemplary service to the state of North Carolina.

“I am extremely honored to receive this award. I’m grateful to our governor for considering me,” said Walker, who is the 111th bishop in the line of succession in The A.M.E. Zion Church. “I’m profoundly aware that whatever achievements I have attained were not on my own. I am blessed to have a wonderful family and church family who have undergirded me with their prayers, encouragement, and support.”

The honor, established in 1963, is awarded by the governor of North Carolina to civilians who have a proven record of extraordinary service to strengthen the state. Walker joins a distinguished roster of honorees, including Michael Jordan, Dale Earnhardt, and Maya Angelou.



Chair of the Board of Trustees at Clinton College.

“Not only did he faithfully serve and shepherd his church, but he also used his position to be a community leader in the city,” said Gov. Stein. “Last year, Little Rock A.M.E. Zion opened doors to 105 affordable housing units, helping Charlotteans live in the communities where they work...He also served as a member of Charlotte’s Planning Commission, where he worked to expand educational opportunities. Bishop Walker [leads with] the vision of purpose.”

Walker’s legacy of service is deeply rooted in his role as the former pastor of Charlotte’s Little Rock A.M.E. Zion Church. In 2006, he established the Little Rock Community Development Corporation (CDC), an organization dedicated to empowering the community through programs offering a “hand up instead of a handout.” One impactful initiative included a collaboration with the City of Charlotte to develop affordable housing, resulting in the successful creation of a 105-unit apartment complex, Varick on 7th, to address the pressing need for accessible housing.

Walker has also served on the Board of Trustees at Livingstone College since 2012, where he currently chairs the Governance Committee and is a member of the Institutional Advancement/Academic and Student Programs (IA/ASP) Committee. He also serves as Vice

# 115th Session Albemarle Annual Conference Convened With A Clear Focus: A Comeback Church

By Ms. Keisha Dobie & Mrs. Lucy Beamon  
Photos By P.E. Rev. Fondella Leigh

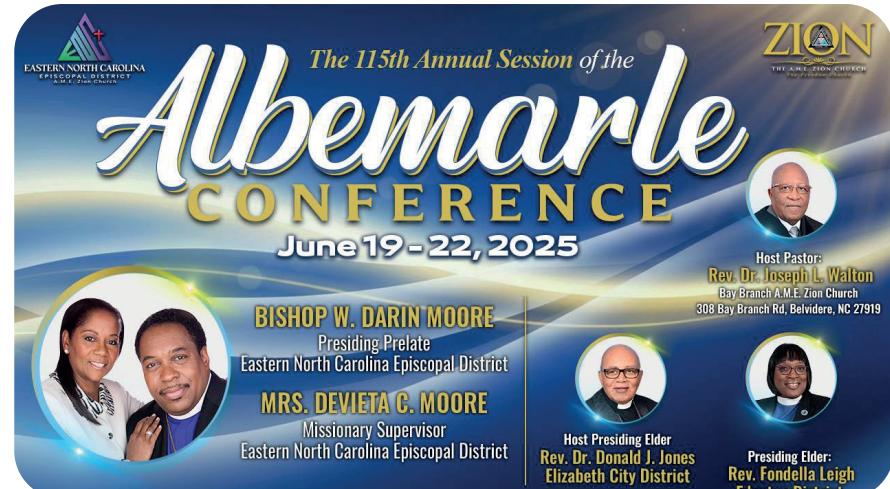
Elizabeth City, NC. July 2025... The 115th Annual Session of the Albemarle Conference convened from June 19–22, 2025, under the leadership of Bishop W. Darin Moore and the direction of Presiding Elders Reverend Donald L. Jones (Elizabeth City District) and Reverend Fondella A. Leigh (Edenton District).

Held across several days of worship, teaching, reports, and planning, the session brought pastors, laity, and leaders together around one central theme, “A Comeback Church,” drawn from Ezekiel 37. This powerful biblical image, the valley of dry bones brought back to life shaped the message, the tone, and the urgency of this year’s conference. It was clear from the opening worship to the final reading of pastoral appointments that the Albemarle Conference is preparing for spiritual renewal, deeper community engagement, and stronger church leadership in challenging times.

**Who Came and Why It Mattered:** Clergy and lay members from across northeastern North Carolina gathered to take part in the sacred and strategic work of the conference. Hosted by the Bay Branch A.M.E. Zion Church, and host pastor Rev. Joseph Walton, and supported by district music ministries, the spirit of unity was palpable. Bishop Moore’s leadership emphasized that now is the time for the Albemarle Conference to rise up, reclaim its voice in the community, strengthen its spiritual roots, and answer the call to serve. Attendees gathered not just to fulfill their duties, but also to seek divine direction, grow in spiritual understanding, and recommit to Methodism’s sacred calling to be salt and light in the world. Throughout the weekend, clergy and lay leaders lifted their voices in unity, calling for a renewed sense of intentionality, courageous leadership grounded in faith, and a return to the spiritual disciplines that anchor the mission of The A.M.E. Zion Church. Their collective witness reminded all present that the church exists not for personal comfort, but for God’s kingdom purpose.

**What Happened:** Worship, Teaching, and Realignment. The conference opened Thursday with a worship service that included Holy Communion and preaching, setting a reverent tone for the work ahead. Reverend Fondella A. Leigh gave the Communion Meditation, and the Bay Branch Music Ministry led the congregation in worship. That afternoon, official business began. The Credentials, Rules, Nominations, and Finance Committees presented their reports.

One of the key actions voted on was the scheduling of the 116th Session of the Albemarle Annual Conference for November 14–15, 2025. The Friday evening session will include the first-ever Freedom Awards Banquet, where one clergy and one lay member from each district will be honored for exceptional service to both church and community. On Saturday, November 15, the conference will reconvene for business in a structure similar to a Check-Up Meeting, concluding with the reading of pastoral appointments. Conference leaders scheduled the 117th session for November 12–15, 2026. In preparation for the upcoming conference year, the 2025–2026 Check-Up Meeting dates are also set. The first will take place on February 28, 2026, at Pleasant Grove



A.M.E. Zion in Edenton. The second follows on April 25, 2026, at St. James A.M.E. Zion in Elizabeth City. The third and final check-up will be a hybrid district-wide gathering on July 11, 2026, hosted at Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church in Washington, NC.

On Thursday evening, Education Night was celebrated with the teaching ministry of the Church. Mr. Julius Walker, Albemarle Lay Council President, led the Albemarle Conference Lay Hour Program. Mr. Seth Boyd of St. James A.M.E. Zion Church provided the youth message entitled, “The Role of Youth in Securing the Future of The A.M.E. Zion Church.” Following the Lay Hour, Education Night continued with Reverend Michael Gaddy. His sermon entitled “So, That” was preached with conviction about the need to remain grounded in biblical literacy and spiritual growth. Mrs. Gloria P. Spence, Conference Director of Christian Education, offered reflections on the progress and plans of the year’s educational work.

On Friday morning Bishop Moore’s Episcopal Address blended encouragement with challenge. He preached, “Certain Trust in Uncertain Times begins with strong spiritual roots. Churches must invest in deepening the faith and discipline of their members and re-evaluate their local mission through thoughtful re-envisioning. However, the action does not stop with hearing the Word.” Bishop Moore urged congregations to become more engaged in community and civic life, educating members about economic preparedness and voter rights, including supporting faithful members who feel called to public leadership. He also emphasized the importance of communication and visibility. Local churches need to improve how they share their message internally and externally, and more importantly, must be willing to address the real-life needs of the communities they serve. Whether dealing with food insecurity, housing, mental health, or justice issues, the church must be present and active. “Act with intentionality” became a recurring conference-wide refrain.

Friday afternoon continued with the WHOMS Convocation, where The Honorable Janice McKenzie Cole spoke with clarity and compassion on Equity and Justice. Reverend Dr. Sharon B. Newton followed with the equipping session “Committing to Our Mission,” reminding attendees that vision without application is just talk. Her message pressed home the importance of implementation, getting the work done, not just agreeing on what should be done. Rev. Newton reminded worshippers to be “Kingpins” in their willingness to serve, stepping forward as



central figures to carry out God's purpose with boldness and humility.

**Worship and Fellowship in Full Expression:** The Missionary Candlelight Service on Friday evening radiated solemnity and celebration as WHOMS marched in on Hezekiah Walker & LFCC's "Walk in the Light". Dr. Newton returned to the pulpit, delivering a message rooted in legacy and faithfulness, while Mrs. Devieta C. Moore, Missionary Supervisor, led the service with warmth and direction. The Stoling Ceremony reminded all in attendance that ministry is both a calling and a responsibility. District Missionary Presidents Mrs. Jackie Brown (Elizabeth City) and Mrs. Alice Clagon (Edenton) brought creativity, passion, and innovation to their annual reports, reflecting the vibrancy and impact of missionary work across the conference. Over 30 new missionaries were stoled as Life Matrons and Patrons, symbolizing their commitment to a life of service and discipleship.



Following the worship and teaching, the conference transitioned into its final business session. Committee reports were presented with matters related to admissions, disciplinary questions, and the Conference Board of Examiners Report addressed. The conference admitted Brother Ernest McPherson and continued his status as a minister on trial. Rev. Iasia Collier advanced to second-year conference studies. Sister Javita Bryant advanced to third-year

studies and received recommendations for full connection and ordination as a Deacon. Rev. Dr. Lopez Scott was also admitted to third-year conference studies. That evening, the Minister Spouses & Widows/ Widowers Dinner provided a space of warmth, gratitude, and joyful fellowship. It was filled with connection, appreciation, good food, and just the right amount of fun. A highlight of the evening was the "60-Second Sermons" activity, where participants delivered powerful, playful, and often poignant mini-sermons, bringing both laughter and reflection to those in attendance. It was a fitting reminder that even in moments of levity, ministry and relationships are necessary.

Saturday's Christian Education Convocation brought the full church body together, children, youth, young adults, and adults for a powerful morning of teaching, worship, and fellowship. Over 40 children and youth were present, engaging in educational breakout sessions designed for their age groups. Sessions were also held for young adults and adults, offering opportunities for spiritual growth and practical



learning. The Albemarle Conference Youth Choir rendered the music, lifting the atmosphere with spirited praise. Bishop Moore shared a heartfelt message tailored specifically to the youth, offering encouragement, instruction, and inspiration for their journey of faith. The service also featured preaching from Rev. Iasia Collier, whose message challenged all present to remember what God has already done while preparing faithfully for what is yet to come through a fresh fire and anointing.

**A Benediction and a Charge:** The conference closed with a powerful Sunday worship service led by Reverend Dr. Joseph L. Walton and Bay Branch A.M.E. Zion Church choir and ushers. Bishop Moore delivered the closing sermon, reminding the congregation that the same God who brought life to a valley of dry bones is still breathing life into the Albemarle Conference today. It was not a message of nostalgia or retreat, but of bold, Spirit-filled return. He issued a charge to every minister and layperson to go back to their local churches with a renewed spirit, a new attitude, and a deeper trust in God's power to restore, revive, and rebuild. The Church's comeback, he emphasized, is not about going back to what was, but moving forward with fresh fire, courageous faith, and an unshakable mission.



With the reading of pastoral appointments, the annual Usher's March, final committee acknowledgments, and the hymn "God Be with You Until We Meet Again," the 115th Albemarle Annual Conference came to a close. Now, the Albemarle Conference moves forward fully committed to rising, rebuilding, and becoming the comeback church God is calling it to be.

*Continued from page 2.....*

**Thompson Sr.'s (President, The Board of Bishops) newly released Fasting Guide offers a spiritually rich and deeply practical resource for individuals and faith communities seeking divine alignment through fasting and prayer.** The guide walks readers through a seven-day journey rooted in scriptural insight, reflection, and purposeful devotion. Each day emphasizes a central theme—from the heart behind fasting to God's timing—and includes guided prayers, reflective questions, and scriptural references designed to deepen one's relationship with God and increase spiritual sensitivity.

The guide goes beyond personal spiritual development and speaks prophetically to national and ecclesial concerns. Bishop Thompson calls on believers to fast not just for personal breakthrough, but for intercession on behalf of churches, communities, and the nation—particularly in times of social injustice, economic disparity, and spiritual warfare.

He highlights the burdens facing Black and Brown communities and calls for a collective, faith-driven response through fasting, aligning with biblical models like those of Daniel and Queen Esther, whose intercession shifted the fate of nations.

**Ultimately, the Fasting Guide is a call to intentional intimacy with God that yields personal transformation and social impact.** Bishop Thompson reminds readers that true fasting is not a diet but a discipline—meant to humble the flesh, elevate spiritual focus, and empower believers for righteous living. As readers fast, they are encouraged to worship, wait on God's timing, serve others, and prepare themselves for divine intervention. The guide affirms that while fasting may not change God, it will certainly change us—and through us, it can help change the world.

# Eastern North Carolina Episcopal District Hosts Leadership Training Institute

By The Star of Zion

The Eastern North Carolina Episcopal District of the A.M.E. Zion Church, stretching from the scenic beaches of Wilmington to the state capital of Raleigh, from New Bern—hometown of Pepsi-Cola—to Laurinburg, gathered for its annual Leadership Training Institute, June 12–14, 2025, at Simon Temple A.M.E. Zion Church in Fayetteville, NC. The institute, held under the leadership of Bishop W. Darin Moore and Missionary Supervisor Mrs. Devieta Moore, offered a dynamic and intentional weekend of learning, worship, and fellowship. The Dean for the Institute was Rev. Nathaniel B. Cox, pastor of Grace A.M.E. Zion Church in Raleigh, with Rev. Jessica Franks serving as Assistant Dean. The gracious host pastor was Rev. Dr. Keith Tillet and Mrs. Kerri Tillet.



The institute opened Wednesday evening with praise, worship, and greetings from Bishop Moore, who challenged attendees to be lifelong learners and to “be recharged and refilled to go back and do the work.” The opening plenary session was led by Rev. Dr. Lance Watson, Senior Pastor of St. Paul Baptist Church in Henrico, Virginia. Dr. Watson’s session, *Serving This Present Age: Committed to Our Mission*, highlighted the role of technology—particularly AI—in ministry, urging the Black church to remain adaptable and authentic. “This ain’t your momma’s church,” he reminded attendees, emphasizing the need to evolve with a changing world. That evening, Presiding Elder Erlinda Dobson and the ENC Mass Choir led a powerful worship service, followed by Dr. Watson’s sermon, *Never Give Up* (2 Kings 6:33), where he encouraged, “Don’t worry if people write you off because God is still writing.”

Friday began with a prayer led by Rev. Latisha Chapman, followed by plenary sessions split for clergy and laity. Rev. Dr. Otis T. McMillan, retired Director of Church Growth and Development, facilitated the laity session, *Embracing the Vision: Our Mission is the Great Com-*



mission, reminding participants that “making Christian disciples is the mission of the Church and its only assignment.” Clergy engaged in *Preaching with a Sound Mind: Reason in the Black Wesleyan Tradition*, presented by Rev. Dr. Dominique A. Robinson of the A.M.E. Zion Compelling Preaching Initiative. Additional workshops included

“Atomic Preachers” for pastors and evangelists, “Finding Our Place: Exploring Our Kingdom Assignments” for laity, “Understanding the Assignment” for music ministry, and “Media 101” for church communications. Lunch-and-learn sessions covered church administration and spiritual disciplines.

Friday afternoon’s plenary, *Methods for Today: Ministry Musings*, was led by Rev. Dr. Evalina



Huggins, Presiding Elder of the Baltimore District, who urged leaders to work collaboratively as “incubators of shared vision.” That evening, she preached *When God Does a New Thing* (Isaiah 43:16-19), reminding worshippers that God empowers us by recalling His past provisions. Both evening services featured music from the ENC Mass Choir and guest psalmist Nicole McLaughlin, who ministered songs from her latest release, *Great Is the Lord*.

Saturday featured Empowerment Sessions, including a Minister’s Forum with a panel of prominent clergy and concurrent programming



for adults, young adults, youth, and children. Highlights included a youth conversation with Bishop Moore, a financial stewardship workshop for church officers, and age-tailored worship experiences. The weekend concluded with closing worship: an Ordination Service in the Main Sanctuary, a ChosenGen service for ages 13–30, and Kingdom Kids Corner worship for ages 5–12. Rev.

Elizabeth Howze delivered the meditation for our ordination worship experience. The Chosen Generation preacher for our youth and young adults was Assistant Dean Rev. Jessica Franks. And our preacher for the children was the one and only Angela Marks.

From its opening praise to the final benediction, the Eastern North Carolina Episcopal District Leadership Training Institute fulfilled its mission: to equip, inspire, and empower leaders to serve this present age with renewed commitment and vision.



# North Charlotte District 100 Men Empowerment Summit

***Two-Day Event Focused on Faith, Family, and Finance Leaves Lasting Impact***

By Dianna Davis

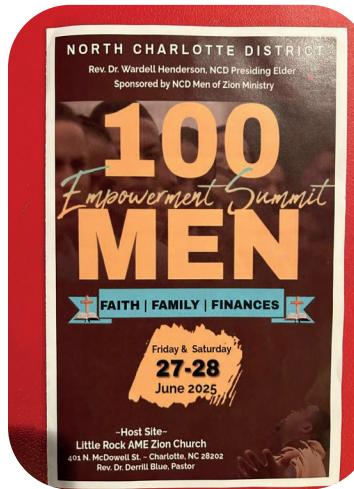
Charlotte, NC — The North Charlotte District of The A.M.E. Zion Church, under the dynamic leadership of Rev. Dr. Wardell Henderson, Presiding Elder, proudly hosted the 100 Men Empowerment Summit on June 27–28, 2025. Held at Little Rock A.M.E. Zion Church, this impactful two-day event brought together men from across the district for a transformative experience centered on faith, family, and finance.

The summit opened



were inspired by a message delivered by Rev. Mark Evans, pastor of Jonahville A.M.E. Zion Church.

Additional program participants included Mr. Ron Nelson, Rev. Kings-



ton Jones, Mr. Ivy Harwell, Rev. Steven Howard, and Mr. Thomas Payne, who each shared wisdom, experiences, and messages that uplifted all in attendance. The North Charlotte District Male Chorus added a stirring musical component, bringing worship to life with soul-stirring selections.

Pastor Dr. Derrill Blue and the men of Little Rock A.M.E. Zion Church were honored to host such a dynamic and meaningful event. The sum-

mit not only strengthened the bonds of brotherhood but also equipped men with spiritual tools to lead their families and communities with purpose and faith.

To God be the glory!



## Greensboro District's WH&OMS Fourth Mass Meeting Prayer Breakfast – Conference Year Ending 2024-2025

By Mrs. Nina R. Ingram, Greensboro District WH&OMS Reporter

*"But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth and called thee from the chief men thereof and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee and not cast thee away...For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the LORD, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." Isaiah 41:8-14 (KJV)*



Ingram was followed by the invocation by Ms. Michelle Davis, the opening song, "We've Come This Far by Faith", and Scripture reading, Isaiah 41:8-14, by Ms. Sara Evans.

Prayers for Equity and Justice were humbly lifted up to our Almighty God as following: Dr. Rosa Purcell, a prayer for Inner Strength and Peace; Mrs. Joanne Streeter, a prayer for Courage to Face Challenges; Mrs. Georgia Jones, a prayer for Strength to Overcome Fear, and Ms. Beverly Wallace, a prayer for Energy and Vitality.



The morning meditation speaker was Reverend Dr. Tracey Matthew, Pastor of Mt. Zion A.M.E. Zion Church, Mt. Gilead, NC. Following the introduction by Reverend Dr. Timothy Freeman, Pastor of Trinity A.M.E. Zion Church, Greensboro, NC and a song by Mt. Olivet A.M.E. Zion Church Choir, Reverend Dr. Tracey Matthew blessed the congregation with the morning meditation message incorporating themes from Isaiah 41:8-14 as related to her subject "We Ain't Scared" with language to reflect on support for equity and justice including—we can't be afraid; we must keep going because God is on our side; we must continue to take a stand against injustice; history shapes us, but doesn't define us; and our same God will give us victory. After the meditation, the congregation was extended by Reverend Dr. Keitt with

The Greensboro District Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society held its fourth Mass Meeting of the Conference Year on Saturday, April 12, 2025 at 10:00 a.m. at St. Stephen Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church, High Point, NC where the Reverend Dr. Reginald Keitt is Pastor. Reverend Dr. Keitt and the congregation served as host to the meeting. Mrs. Tawania Keitt extended gracious and beautiful welcome remarks.

The Greensboro District Bureau of Supply Secretary, Mrs. Janice Holt, presided over the first part of the Mass Meeting with emphasis on the 2024-2025 Missionary theme, "Reaching the Masses in an Ever-Changing World: The Journey Continues". Equity and Justice were the highlighted meeting focus. The Call to Worship by Mrs. Nina

*Continued on Next Page*

an invitation to Christian discipleship.

Our District President, Dr. Edna Adams-Fulton, presided over the second part of the Mass Meeting. The offering was received by Reverend Dr. Keitt, and Mrs. Linda Goins gave the financial report.

Dr. Adams-Fulton extended a special thank you to missionaries from all over the District for their support in gifting several baskets and boxes of toiletries and other supplies to the Carpenter House Shelter in High Point, NC. This was a very successful Outreach Project for the residents of the shelter.

Ms. Phyllis Marshall provided the Banner Attendance Award report. The following churches received recognition banners: Mt. Airy, Mt. Zion, and Trinity. The Courtesy Report was presented by Mrs. Alberta Clinton.

Additionally, Dr. Adams-Fulton extended thanks and appreciation to all who helped make the fourth Missionary Mass Meeting Prayer Breakfast a success; moreover, she thanked Bureau of Supply Secretary Holt for her leadership. Following announcements and remarks, the fourth Missionary Mass Meeting adjourned with the Missionary Benediction.

# SPIRITUAL MEANING OF AUGUST

By Debra Chappelle-Polk, Zion Spotlight Editor

August is often associated with abundance, harvest, and fruition in both agricultural and spiritual contexts. Throughout the Bible, there are numerous instances where God's provision and blessings are manifested during this time, signifying a season of abundance and great blessings. While the term "August" does not appear explicitly in the Bible, exploring the interconnected themes and events recorded within its pages reveals deep spiritual insights and prophetic symbolism.

August, being a month of abundant growth, can symbolize the spiritual harvest in our lives. Just as farmers reap the fruits of their labor during this time, we can reflect on the spiritual seeds we have sown and the blessings we receive from God.

*"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." – Galatians 6:9*

**Divine Provision:** The month of August reminds us of God's faithfulness in providing for our needs. As we witness the ripening of crops and the fulfillment of His promises in nature, we can trust that He will also meet our spiritual and physical needs.

*"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" – Matthew 6:26*

**Season of Spiritual Maturity:** Just as crops reach maturity in August, we can view this month as an opportunity for personal growth and spiritual maturity. It is a time to reflect on our journey of faith and seek a deeper relationship with God.

*"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." – Hebrews 10:24-25*

## Embracing the Spiritual Lessons of August

As we embrace the spiritual significance of August, let us remember that it is not just a time to reap but also to sow, to be grateful for God's provision, and to intentionally nurture our faith. May this month serve as a reminder of God's goodness and encourage us to continue growing in His grace and love.

## Meteorological and Historical Context of August

August is commonly associated with summer in many parts of the world. It is a time of warmth, productivity, and growth. In ancient times, the agricultural society depended on the abundance of summer to ensure a bountiful harvest. This connection between the season and the month of August sets the stage for understanding its deeper biblical meaning.



## Fun Facts About August

1. August was once the 6th month of the year. In the Roman calendar, August was known as "Sextilis", the Latin word for 6. It wasn't until 700 BC when January and February were added to the calendar that August was bumped down to become the 8th month of the year.
2. The number of days in August has changed many times. First, it was 30 days. Then, 31. When January and February came onto the scene, August got reduced to 29 days. Then, Julius Caesar changed it back to 31.
3. Eat your veggies! August is the month when most vegetables are ready to be harvested. Tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, and peas are at their freshest and most bountiful in August. Quick gardening tip: Anything that grows underground should not be harvested in August. It needs that warm August soil to grow larger.
4. The two zodiac signs that represent the month of August are Leo and Virgo. Leos, represented by the lion, are people born from August 1st to August 22nd. Virgos, represented by the Virgin, are people born from August 22nd to August 31st.
5. Famous Leos born in August: If you're looking for leaders of the highest caliber, look no further than the Leos of August. The 44th President, Barack Obama, was born on August 4th. 7-time Super Bowl champion Tom Brady was born on August 3rd. And the first man on the moon, Neil Armstrong, was born on August 5th.
6. Famous Virgos born in August: If you're looking for inspiration and unmatched achievement, look to the Virgos of August. Basketball legend Kobe Bryant was born on August 23rd. The King of Pop, Michael Jackson, was born on August 29th. Business tycoon Warren Buffett was born on August 30th, and even our very own Rev. Dr. Malcolm J. Byrd, Pastor of Mother A.M.E. Zion Church, was born on August 31st.
7. The most famous speech ever given: It was on August 28th, 1963, when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his "I Have a Dream" speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC. Over 250,000 people heard the speech, which called for the end of racial discrimination and equal rights for all.

## The strange days of August:

August is the Month of Sandwiches! This makes sense because the sandwich was invented in August of 1762 when the Earl of Sandwich (yes, that's a real guy) requested two pieces of bread with meat inside.

August 3rd is National Watermelon Day. August 10th is National Lazy Day. August 16th is National Roller Coaster Day. And finally, August 28th is fancy, it's National Bow Tie Day!

**HAPPY AUGUST!**

Reference Source: [biblicalchronology.com](http://biblicalchronology.com) [Johnbaptist.com](http://Johnbaptist.com); Exploring the Biblical Significance of August

# Lee's Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church Wraps Up Inspiring Vacation Bible School: "Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus"

By Karen Gates Matlock  
Photos By Tesha Thompson

Sharon, MS — Lee's Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church concluded its three-day Vacation Bible School (VBS), held June 24-26, 2025, under the uplifting theme "Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus." The event brought together children, youth, and adults for a time of learning, fellowship, and spiritual growth.

Each evening began with words of welcome and prayer from Rev. Dr. Moses E. Thompson, pastor of Lee's Chapel, setting the tone for engaging bible lessons and reflection. Classes were divided into elementary, youth, and adult groups, all centered on understanding the teachings of Jesus and applying them to our daily walk of faith.

A unique and memorable highlight came from the youth group, who crafted fishing poles to demonstrate the biblical call to become "fishers of men." Their presentation powerfully illustrated how Jesus and His disciples spread the Gospel—and how we, too, are called to share His love and message with others.

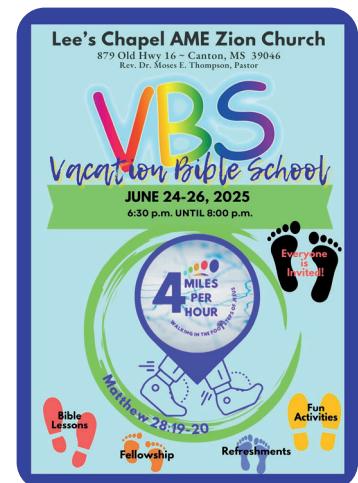


On the final evening, certificates of appreciation were presented to all participants, acknowledging their enthusiasm and dedication. Rev. Dr. Moses E. Thompson and Quantae Walker, Director of Christian Education, also honored the instructors

with heartfelt gifts of appreciation, recognizing their commitment to nurturing faith through Vacation Bible School.

Throughout the week, fellowship was sweetened by nightly refreshments, cheerful interactions, and a shared sense of purpose in walking together in the footsteps of Christ.

Lee's Chapel extends its deepest gratitude to all who participated and supported this year's Vacation Bible School. The seeds of faith planted during these three days will continue to grow in the hearts of all who attended.



# Laurinburg District Conference Church School Convention

By Kara McGougan

The 111th Session of the Laurinburg District Conference, held in conjunction with the Laurinburg District Church School Convention, convened on Saturday, June 28th at Little Marsh A.M.E. Zion Church in Saint Pauls, North Carolina. The host pastor, Dr. Earlene Baggett, and her dedicated team extended exceptional hospitality, truly embodying the spirit of radical welcome.

District officers, pastors, and members from across the district gathered promptly at 7:30 AM for a leadership meeting with our esteemed Presiding Elder, Dr. Chalmers McDougald. The day began on a high note with a delicious breakfast prepared by the church's outstanding culinary team.

The conference opened with a spirited praise and worship service led by our conference evangelist, followed by a productive business session presided over by Elder McDougald. This session included the examination of local preachers and exhorters, affirming our district's commitment to developing strong spiritual leadership.

Meanwhile, children and youth participated in age-specific breakout sessions as part of the Church School Convention's Elevate Academy. We were especially hon-



ored to welcome Mrs. Tyesha Harden, our newly appointed Christian Education Conference Director, as our special guest.

The conference featured two impactful plenary sessions. The first, titled "Securing Our Future," was delivered by the incomparable Rt. Reverend Kenneth Monroe (Retired), whose insights were both powerful and deeply inspiring. His message was enthusiastically received by pastors and lay members alike.



Following a hearty Southern-style lunch, once again beautifully prepared by Dr. Baggett and her culinary team, attendees gathered for our second plenary session: "Church Communications," presented by the charismatic Mr. Darin Kent, Chief Communications Officer and Editor-in-Chief of The Star of Zion. His presentation was both informative and engaging, equipping attendees with practical tools for enhancing communication within their ministries.



Special thanks and congratulations to Presiding Elder Dr. Chalmers McDougald for leading another outstanding District Conference. We also extend heartfelt appreciation to Ms. Kara McGougan, District Director of Christian Education, and her team for their excellent work in coordinating the Church School Convention and Elevate Academy.



# Connectional Lay Council Convenes in Winston-Salem

By Ms. Gloria Joyner-Johnson

The 13th Quadrennial Convention of the Connectional Lay Council Shows Up Strong in Winston-Salem

“Showing Up Strong: Purpose-Preparation-Practice”

An all-inclusive talent show, the Connectional Lay Council (CLC) Showcase was a great kick-off before the business of the convention began. In addition to the adult performers, the children, youth, and young adults brought various talents of praise, worship, and fun. Besides soloists and choirs, there were liturgical dancers, steppers, and rappers, all glorifying God the Father. The Master and Mistress of Ceremony were very uplifting and even hosted a Jeopardy-like game with participants from the audience. The categories of answers included “Zion History” and “A.M.E. Zion History.” This was fun and educational as well.

On Sunday, July 27, 2025, along with the Board of Bishops/Connectional Council, the registrants of the Lay Convention, along with a host of other Believers, convened for the Communion Worship Service at the Benton Convention Center. The grand processional of the Bishops of the A.M.E. Zion Church took place to the hymn, “Come Ye That Love the Lord.” Bishop U.U. Effiong was the worship leader for the service and led the congregants through the worship ritual. His sermon was entitled “A Nation in Need of Justice,” using the scripture Kings 21:17-19.

The International Choir, led by Dr. Lisa Moore, Director of the Music Ministry of The A.M.E. Zion Church, lifted the spirit of the congregation with excellent delivery of worship/praise songs of all genres, including hymns, anthems, spirituals, as well as contemporary renderings. Bishop Melanie Rogers Miller was the Chief Celebrant of the Lord’s Supper, with Bishops Michael A. French, Sr. (Ret.) and Dennis V. Proctor (Ret.) serving as concelebrants.

The grand opening of the convention was grand indeed as members of each episcopal district wandered through the crowded hallway of



the convention center to find their episcopal leaders and line up for the grand parade! As Rev. Patrick Barrett, Secretary-Treasurer, Department of Christian Education, with exuberance called out each episcopal district, the Bishop and Missionary Supervisor of said district proceeded into the ballroom/sanctuary, followed by their members, who followed some with jingles, some with fans, some with cheers, and others with



dances! Everyone enjoyed this fun time before getting to the business of the convention.

Dr. Joseph King Davis, Jr., the CLC International President, gave eloquent words of welcome and proceeded to organize the conference marshals, timekeepers, etc. Mrs. Leondras “Le-Le” Davis, the convention chairperson, gave directions and instructions throughout the convention to ensure that everyone knew their intended locations and the time of the sessions.

The official welcome program from the Piedmont Episcopal District (PED), Bishop Darryl B. Starnes, Sr., Presiding Prelate and Senior Bishop of The A.M.E. Zion Church, was filled with welcome greetings from Dr. Dorothy Gill-Smith, Regional Director-PED; J. City of Winston-Salem Mayor; Ms. Shontell Robinson, Forsyth County Manager; Mr. Anthony Hairston, NAACP President; and Chief William Penn of the Winston-Salem Police Department. Additional welcome remarks were given by Dr. Vergel Lattimore, President of Hood Theological Seminary, and Dr. Pamela Richardson Wilks, President of Clinton College. Dr. Anthony Davis, President of Livingstone College, gave remarks during the convention.

Bishop Daran H. Mitchell, Chairman of the Board of Lay Activities, gave a welcome message from Proverbs 3:31 entitled “Not Like Them.” He admonished us not to live cloistered and cluttered lives and not to envy the oppressor. Choose to follow Christ.

Each morning began with the morning watch prayer teleconference call led by Mr. Jerry McCombs, CLC Chaplain, and an exercise session by Mr. Clifford Barnett, Jr. To begin the day praying for each other, safety, the leadership, etc. had everything to do with the success of the convention proceedings. Intermittently, throughout the convention sessions, there were exercise breaks which included cardio, chair exercises and yoga. How refreshing those sessions were.



Bible study was conducted by Rev. Austin Young prior to the business session on Monday.

As this was designated “Stole Day”, the convention center was filled with over attendees dressed in black with either their gold Life Member stoles or gold and black scarves. It was a sight to behold.



Bishop Starnes presented the Quadrennial Theme: “Serving the Present Age: Committed to Our Mission, Creative in Our Methods, Concentrating on Our Ministries and Connecting Through Our Membership.” He referred to the General Conference address, as it detailed the theme for this quadrennium. People still need the Lord in this post-modern era



in a post-Christian culture. Our mission remains the same—The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20. To be creative is to have effective evangelism. Consider authentic, natural talents. He stated the three categories of membership: preparatory, full (connectional), and good standing. As leaders, making disciples shows evidence of witness. Spiritually mature Christians practice godliness, seek the power of godliness, and pursue holiness.

“Becoming Burden Bearers” was the title of Bishop Eric Leake’s challenge from Galatians 6:2,5-6. Some burdens we must bear alone, some burdens we need help to bear, and burden-bearing is the way of Christ and Christians. We must love each other as Christ loves us and help bear each other’s burdens.

Mrs. Connie Bell Wright, 2nd Vice President, reported a total of 39,584 active members, which included 4027 life members as of June 30, 2025. For the greatest increase in life members during the quadrennium, the Eastern North Carolina Episcopal District received the award, the Fayetteville District received the district award, Central North Carolina won the conference award, and Greater Centennial A.M.E. Zion Church won the local church award.

Mr. Jerry McCombs, CLC Chaplain, presided over the necrology worship service. The sermon was preached by Rev. Dr. Carolyn Dewberry, who used the scripture from Hebrews 12:1-3 for her sermon entitled “Stay in the Race.” Mr. Othello Jefferson provided the music, and Mr. Hurley Daye rendered the memorial prayer. Among the hundreds of names of those deceased members memorialized since July 2021 were Bishop Bonnie Hines, Bishop George E. Battle, Jr., and Ms. Rhandi Stith.

Mrs. Rynette Nixon and Ms. Patricia Jackson were the co-chairs of the Candidates Breakfast. The candidates for all offices of the CLC had the opportunity to present their platforms for office. There was an opportunity to talk with the candidates.

Ms. Patricia Hunter reported that the Outreach Project exceeded expectations. Over 500 bags had been packed for distribution to the Atrium dialysis and cancer outpatient centers in the Winston-Salem/Lexington, NC area. The balance of the donated items was given to the Global Missions project being led by Presiding Elder Laticia Goddette.

There were four Lay Academies spread over Monday and Tuesday. Two each for clergy and two for the laity. The presenters for the clergy were Rev Dr. Laticia Godette, Rev. Dr. Joel Miles, Rev. Dr. Jerret Fite, and Rev. Dr. Sheldon Shipman. The Lay presenters were Dr. Dorothy Gill-Smith, Dr. Lary B. Johnson, Mrs. Loranda Melton, and Mrs. Rynette Nixon. The lay presenters generally taught on the quadrants of the Quadrennial Theme.

The Young Adult Initiative’s presentation was on Mindfulness and Spiritual Wellness. The interaction with those in attendance resulted in the potential dialogue between the young adults and adult/seniors upon returning to the various districts and local churches throughout The A.M.E. Zion Church.

President Joseph King Davis’s report was factual, highly motivating, and spiritually

uplifting. He likened the Lay Council to a cruise ship as we sail into this new quadrennium; what was good in the past is not enough as we sail toward the promise. We are to create, innovate, revive, and renew, pulling into the harbor for rest, safety, and planning. Commendations to the president’s report were extended by various Lay Leaders (Connie Bell-Wright, Rene Nixon, Dr. Yvonne Tracey, and Dr. Mary Ponds. Bishop George W.C. Walker compared President Davis to a lamplighter, punching holes in the dark, and thanked him for a powerful and profound message.

The president reported that \$23,000 from the Lay Sunday offerings for the St. Mark A.M.E. Zion Church in Athens, TN. The pastor and presiding elder thanked the CLC and announced that an architect has been selected for rebuilding the church, and asked that prayers continue for the Buchanan family, who had her life violently taken before the fire was set, burning down the church.

The business of the convention was conducted per Robert’s Rules of Order at each business session. The executive board members gave their quadrennial reports, as did the regional directors.

The voting session was conducted by Dr. Elvin Sadler, General Secretary/Auditor, Coordinator. Confirmed credentialed voters using electronic voting on their personal devices voted in the affirmative for four of the twelve proposed resolutions previously presented by Dr. Mary Matthews and her committee.

The four resolutions that passed were #7, the CLC Quadrennial Theme Resolution, #10, Reinstate showing of “Constitution” in CLC Bylaws, #11, Wearing occasion and apparel (Life Member Stole), and #12, Conflicting Roles of CLC Elected Officers and Regional Directors. The results of the election of officers follow: International President - Mr. Joseph King Davis, Jr., 1st Vice President - Dr. Mary Matthews, 2nd Vice President - Ms. Rachel Highsmith, Secretary-Dr. Ian Jefferson, Treasurer-Mrs. Anita Scofield, Financial Secretary-Mr. William Manning and Chaplain-Mr. Jerry McCombs. Congratulations!



The convention concluded with the glitzy Victor J. Tulane Awards Banquet! At the request of the convention chairperson, Mrs. Leondras “Le-Le” Davis, the ballroom was filled with ladies in their black evening gowns and gentlemen in their black suits. The décor was top-notch notch and the atmosphere in the room was light as the mellow sounds from the saxophonist permeated throughout. Le-Le is to be commended for the planning and successful execution of the 13th Quadrennial CLC Convention as well as Lay Convocations. As she retires as the 1st Vice President, we say “Thank You Le-Le” for your tireless efforts throughout the last two quadrenniums.



Thank you to the hosts: Bishop Darryl B. Starnes, Sr., Presiding Prelate of the Piedmont Episcopal District and Senior Bishop of The A.M.E. Zion Church, Mrs. Camille C. Starnes, Missionary Supervisor; the Western North Carolina Conference, the Winston-Salem District, the host Church Goler Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church, and host pastor Rev. Dr. George C. Banks.

# OUR GOD REIGNS IN THE ELIZABETH CITY DISTRICT!

By Mrs. Lucy Beamon, SOZ Contributor  
Photos By Mr. Mark Brown, Sr.

**Elizabeth City, NC...** On March 29, 2025, the Elizabeth City District, under the leadership of Presiding Elder Donald Jones, experienced a spirit-filled Sunday School Convention at Mt. Lebanon A.M.E. Zion Church, where the pastor is Rev. Javan Leach. Our theme was *"Our God Reigns!"* Which is found in the Second Quarter edition of The A.M.E. Zion Church School Herald.

Mrs. Lucy Beamon, Elizabeth City District Director of Christian Education, opened the Convention. There was a processional of children, young adults and adults wearing crowns and waving purple and gold flags singing "Our God is an Awesome God" by Kirk Franklin. The purple and gold flags symbolized the royalty of God. This was followed by a worship service of scripture, hymns, and prayer.

After the worship service, we began our Sunday School sharing. Each church creatively presented summaries of its Sunday School activities, using banners, praise dances, and po-



ems. They informed us of their pastor, superintendent, teachers, class sizes, and Sunday School hours.

Once we finished the sharing, the Children and Youth Departments convened downstairs under the leadership of Mrs. Sandra Davis, District Director of Children, and Mrs. Mary Holley, Local Director of Youth at Whiteville Grove A.M.E. Zion Church, where the Pastor is Rev. Michael Gaddy. The Young Adult and Adult Departments remained upstairs under the leadership of Rev. Wanda Johnson, District Director of Young Adults, and Mrs. Lillian Dance, District Director of Adults.

The Children's Department made crafts illustrating that God is our King and we are His children. The Youth Department made armor to clothe a soldier, symbolizing that God is our King and has equipped us with His word, which we use as our armor to rebuke the enemy. The Young Adult and Adult Departments had a Q&A session derived from the books of Psalms and Matthew. We culminated the service with summaries from each department, the Sunday School Benediction, and the Wesleyan Grace before our meal.

Yes, God Reigns in the Elizabeth City District!

## The Dorothy S. Johnson Y Retreat Returns to Livingstone

By Melva Polk Wright, Connectional Secretary of Youth, Camryn Ivey, Director of Communications, WH&OM Society

### Friday Night Under the Lights

The Dorothy S. Johnson Youth Retreat, led by Connectional Secretary of the Youth Missionary Society, Melva Polk Wright, felt like a homecoming as Zion returned to where it all began 40 years ago on the historic campus of Livingstone College, where the retreat originated in 1985. On Friday, July 11, nearly 300 youth, chaperones gathered at Varick Auditorium for an unforgettable night.

This "Welcome to the Yard" experience had our youth feeling like true freshmen stepping onto their HBCU campus for the first time. From a high-energy roll call of the Divine 9 to presidential greetings from Livingstone College's very own Dr. Anthony Davis, it was the perfect mix of culture, connection, and community.



The crowd was energized by DJ J, Jared Gaston from Piedmont Episcopal District, while interactive moments like A.M.E. Zion trivia, snow cones courtesy of the President, and surprise cash giveaways kept the excitement high. Our youth also received heartfelt words from Mr. and Miss Livingstone, WH&OMS International President Mrs. Sandra B. Crowder, Salisbury District Presiding Elder Rev. Grant Harrison, and, of course, the visionary behind the retreat, our incredible Connectional Youth Secretary, Ms. Melva Polk Wright.

The atmosphere was authentic and refreshing. Youth were free to be themselves, build meaningful relationships, and deepen their knowledge of The A.M.E. Zion Church's rich history, all while getting a taste of college life at Zion's very own Livingstone College.

District Youth Secretaries Alexxis Hutchinson (Norfolk District, MAED) and Lindse' Owens (Laurinburg District, ENCED) set the tone as co-hosts of Friday Night Under the Lights.

As the night came to a close, one thing was certain: this wasn't just a retreat kickoff. It was a reminder that Zion's youth are vibrant, powerful, purposeful, and forever connected. This year's retreat ignited leadership within our youth through faith, legacy, and love.

### Harambe and Saturday Workshops

Saturday morning of the Y Retreat began with breakfast in the gym for all. The Youth and their chaperones rose early to refresh and be ready for all of the activities of the day. Harambe began on the historic lawn with all the Youth in a circle. Dr. Mallory Wright Gayle, MAED, skillfully led our opening exercise. Harambe is a Swahili word for "let's pull together," used by the Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools. It's a high-energy time when Youth and staff come together to celebrate themselves and each other. Our Youth were excited and actively engaged.



Workshops were designed for age groups, 13-15, 16-18, and 19-21. Due to the number of Youth registered, there were four groups of 13-15, 3 groups of 16-18, and one group of 19-21. Workshop topics for the Youth were: The 3 Word Prayer, Real Life Balance, I Think I Want to Go to College, Now What? Financial Literacy, I've graduated, now what? Career Connections and Igniting the Leader in You. Concurrently, there were sessions for the Y Secretaries and other adults present, Becoming the Leader OUR Youth Deserve, and Y Secretaries Play and Plan. We thank all the presenters for their service. The



presenters were as follows: Kimberly Ivey, PED; Anita Bullock, SAED; Cynthia Miller, SAED; Rev. ShaCarolyn Stephens, SAED; Rev. Benson Watt III, SAED; Rev. Veronica Oney, MAED; Rachel Means, MAED; Brooke Waller, PED; Karonda Hardrick, SAED; and Ashley Melton, SAED.

We were excited to be a blessing to the greater Salisbury Community during our time together at Livingstone. Charlene Smalls, the District Youth Secretary of the Salisbury District, led the collection and packaging of the items. We gave the list of items and asked each person attending to bring at least 5 trial-sized items. Our goal was to create 100 hygiene bags for young women and men. With the contribution of items, we were able to create 210 bags and a couple of boxes of additional items. Our items were donated to Rowan County: One Church, One Child. We thank all of Zion for helping us be a blessing to the Salisbury community.

### Saturday Night: The Main Event

Saturday night was an inspiring and spirit-filled evening as the youth of the WH&OMS came together for an open mic night led by the dynamic worship leader, Tiana Arline. The night opened with a powerful session of praise and worship, setting a joyful and reverent tone for the rest of the evening. Attendees were uplifted as voices joined together in song, ushering in a sense of unity and excitement for what was to come.

Following worship, the stage came alive with seven unique performances showcasing the gifts and talents of our youth. The lineup included an energizing drum solo, two passionate oratorical pieces, a soulful piano performance, an expressive dance number, a heartfelt vo-



cal selection, and a moving spoken word presentation. Each participant poured their heart into their moment on stage, leaving the audience encouraged, engaged, and inspired by their boldness and creativity. As an intermission between performances, the winners of the youth scavenger hunt were announced by Dedra Glenn, PED. Youth were tasked with locating various landmarks and identifying current students and alumni of Livingstone College. The winning group, who even competed in the rain, shared a heartfelt prayer for victory—and their faith and teamwork paid off. A job well done!

Participants were evaluated based on numerous key categories: stage presence, content/message, and creativity. The WH&OMS executive members served as judges for the evening, offering thoughtful feedback and encouragement to each performer. At the close of the night, the winners of the open mic competition were announced by Director of Communications, Camryn Ivey. To celebrate their courage and participation, every youth received a Chick-fil-A gift card as a token of appreciation. The night was a beautiful testament to the power of faith, community, and the next generation of leaders using their voices for good.

### Y Retreat Sunday Morning Worship

Sunday morning worship opened to a sea of yellow as all Y Retreat participants wore the retreat T-shirt. We were blessed to have a Youth from each of our nine stateside Episcopal Areas participate in our morning worship. The following Youth boldly stood to share with the congregants of over 350 persons: Seven-Hazel Boone, PED; Bailey McCoy, SWDED; Journey Griffin, ALFLED; February Ellison, NEED; Daeyon DeArmond, WED; Kiyanna Fleming, ENCED; Akera King, MWED;



Paisley Melton, SAED; and Domenique Sexton, MAED. We were blessed again on Sunday morning with the anointed singing of the Y Retreat Choir led by Rev. Tyquan Alston, MAED, and Jon Rankins, SAED. The Y Retreat Dancers ministered again on Sunday as well. We thank Jenna Wright, MAED, and Tanazah Kinsey for allowing God to use them to guide our blessed dancers, both male and female. Our morning preacher, Rev. Arkia Stroud, SAED, brought a timely, relevant word. The Youth, youth workers, and parents were moved greatly by the spirit of God, which was visible as the altar call was extended. God met us there again on Sunday morning.

Our International President, Mrs. Sandra B. Crowder, reflected on the Y Retreat by asking 3 questions.

#### 1. Why did we have the retreat?

Yes, it is Constitutional, but beyond that, our Connectional Youth Secretary, Melva Polk Wright, expanded the vision of Dorothy S. Johnson to connect, engage, empower, and prepare Zion's youth to be Ambassadors for Christ with excitement and relevance.

#### 2. What was the impact of the retreat?

Zion's Youth now understand that the WH&OM Society believes in them and needs them to help us fulfill our mission. The move of God throughout the retreat manifested the theme as "Ignite the Leader in us," as we witnessed lives spiritually changed and commitments to salvation made.

#### 3. Would we do it again? Most definitely YES! We all left the grounds of Livingstone with a challenge to be bold and walk in assurance with the attitude of "I'm like that!" shared by the preacher, Rev. Arkia Stroud.

YES, I would return to Livingstone to see how God's miracle on Monroe will be revealed... we must support our own. Dr. Anthony Davis and staff showed us that they wanted us there.



A special thank you to my oldest daughter, Dr. Mallory Wright Gayle, MAED, for handling most of the logistical concerns so that I could focus. Kudos to the Y Retreat Staff, Jenna Wright, Retreat Photographer, MAED, Sis. Tiana Arline, NEED, Camryn Covington, PED, and Madison Demming, ALFLED for being there and working in multiple capacities. A special thank you to the Amazing Executive Board of the WH&OM Society for your presence and assistance as needed. They all supported the Y Retreat. The Youth and I thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Dr. Anthony Davis, President of Livingstone College, has been amazing throughout this process. Thank you to the team led by Dr. Miller and Ms. Green.



And finally, to all of the District Secretaries of Youth of the A.M.E. Zion Church, you all hold up my arms all of the time.

I thank you for motivating the Youth to come to the Y Retreat. I love each of you. "I sought the Lord, He heard, and He answered. That's why I trust in God". Zion is yet alive and well, and it was witnessed on the campus of Livingstone College, July 11-13, 2025.

# The A.M.E. Zion Church

## 2025 Connectional Council Meeting

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church's 2025 Board of Bishops and Connectional Council convened July 22–25, 2025, at the Benton Convention Center (Twin City Quarter) in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Under the leadership of Host Bishop Darryl B. Starnes, Sr. of the Piedmont District, leaders from every corner of Zion gathered for worship, fellowship, and strategic planning. Bishops in attendance included Darryl B. Starnes, Sr. (Piedmont); W. Darin Moore (Eastern North Carolina); George D. Crenshaw (Northeastern); Uduak Effiong (Eastern West Africa); Brian R. Thompson, Sr. (Mid-Atlantic); Eric Leake (South Atlantic); Daran H. Mitchell (Midwest); Anthony Witherspoon (Southwestern Delta); Melanie Rogers-Miller (Western); Dwayne A. Walker (Alabama-Florida); and Bernardo J. Ngunza (Central Southern Africa). Bishop Hilliard Dogbe of the Western West Africa Episcopal District was absent due to surgery, and the Council's Communion Service, held that Sunday, included special prayers for his healing. Retired bishops present included Bishop Dennis V. Proctor, Bishop Warren M. Brown, Bishop George W.C. Walker, Sr., Bishop S. Chukka Ekemam, Sr., Bishop Kenneth Monroe, and Bishop Michael A. Frencher, Sr. The presence of these retired leaders was warmly acknowledged and celebrated as a blessing to the gathering.

Worship and prayer were central to the week. On Wednesday evening, attendees were transported to Goler Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church for a powerful Connectional Intercessory Prayer service. Thursday began with a gathering of Presiding Elders for a breakfast fellowship, followed by the official Opening Worship Service of the Connectional Council. The A.M.E. Zion International Music Ministry, along with district and conference choirs, led inspiring music and praise. Clergy and lay leaders delivered powerful sermons and reflections. Bishop Brian R. Thompson, Sr., the newly elected President of the Board of Bishops, urged Zionites to prepare for a "deeper spiritual shift"

**KINGDOM AGENDA:**  
From Church Mentality to Kingdom Mentality." Each service was marked by congregational singing,



fervent prayer, and holy communion.

The worship services during the Council were especially memorable. On **Thursday morning**, Bishop Anthony Witherspoon (Southwestern Delta) preached a stirring word that set a powerful tone for the day. On **Thursday night**, Bishop Melanie Rogers-Miller (Western) delivered a dynamic message that inspired the congregation with vision and hope.

On **Friday night**, Rev. Michael A. Frencher, Jr., Pastor of New Hope A.M.E. Zion Church in Union, South Carolina, preached with passion and conviction, leaving the assembly encouraged and spiritually renewed. On **Sunday morning**, the closing Communion Service was led with reverence and power as the past President of the Board of Bishops, Bishop Uduak Effiong (Eastern West Africa), preached the final sermon, reminding the church of its mission to remain steadfast in unity and service as they returned to their respective fields of ministry.

A highlight of the Council was the election of Bishop Brian R. Thompson, Sr. of the Mid-Atlantic District as the new President of the Board of Bishops. In a spirited and unanimous vote, Bishop Thompson was chosen to lead the Council of Bishops for the next term. In his acceptance remarks, he voiced a bold vision for Zion's future. He invited the church to "prepare our hearts and minds for a deeper spiritual shift by introducing Zion to 'The KINGDOM AGENDA: From Church Mentality to Kingdom Mentality.'" He explained that this sacred journey of prayer, fasting, and intentional reflection would guide the denomination through the coming months. Specifically, Bishop Thompson announced a

church-wide fast from September 2 to 8, 2025, culminating in a virtual Wesley Covenant Service on the evening of September 8. Emphasizing the transformative purpose of this fast, he reminded listeners that

"while fasting may not change God, it will certainly change us—and through us, it can help change the world." This remark, drawn from his

newly released Fasting Guide, became a rallying theme for attendees. Bishop Thompson's "Kingdom Agenda" thus sets the tone for Zion's spiritual focus in the months ahead, urging members to move beyond church routine into a mindset of intentional kingdom living.

Ultimately, the 2025 Council was remembered as a period of profound fellowship and renewal. Leaders left inspired by stirring sermons, uplifting music, and the clear example of collaborative ministry. With Bishop Thompson's presidency and the Kingdom Agenda, Zion embarks on a season of prayerful intentionality, trusting that this collective spiritual effort will unify the Church and strengthen its mission. The gathering reaffirmed that, in Zion, leadership and unity go hand in hand—guided by faith, grounded in worship, and directed toward the Kingdom of God.



Rev. Roderick J. Josey  
Education Editor  
education@starofzion.org

# A New Chapter Begins at Clinton College: Welcoming Our 14th President, Dr. Pamela Richardson Wilks

By Rev. Roderick J. Josey, Education Editor

Clinton College proudly announces the appointment of Dr. Pamela Richardson Wilks as its 14th President, marking a significant milestone in the institution's storied history. A native of Hollister, North Carolina, and a proud first-generation college graduate, Dr. Wilks brings more than 25 years of leadership experience in higher education—particularly within historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

Before joining Clinton College, Dr. Wilks served as Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Coppin State University in Baltimore, Maryland. Her tenure there was marked by bold academic innovation, launching new programs, expanding research infrastructure, and increasing external funding by over 150%. She has also held key leadership roles at Paine College, Edward Waters University, and Shaw University, consistently driving academic excellence, institutional effectiveness, and student-centered innovation.

Dr. Wilks's academic journey began at North Carolina A&T State University, where she earned both her bachelor's degree in Professional English and her master's degree in English/Afro-American Literature. She later earned a Ph.D. in English, Literature & Criticism from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Her teaching career spans both K-12 and higher education, beginning as a high school English teacher and advancing to roles as a college professor, mentor, and academic strategist.



Throughout her career, she has served at institutions including Johnson C. Smith University, Winston-Salem State University, and UNC Greensboro, passionately advocating for African-American literature and student empowerment. Her leadership has consistently emphasized student success, accreditation readiness, strategic planning, and the advancement of mission-driven education.

Dr. Wilks is also a W.E.B. Du Bois Fellow, a member of Phi Kappa Phi and Golden Key Honor Society, and a proud member of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. In 2023, she was named a Distinguished Alumna by her alma mater, NC A&T. Her civic involvement includes participation in numerous educational and cultural boards, including the HBCU Campaign Fund and local arts councils.

In her new role at Clinton College, Dr. Wilks is poised to lead the institution into a bold and bright future. Her vision encompasses not only academic excellence but also a deep commitment to community engagement, equity, and the holistic development of students. She joins Clinton College with an unwavering dedication to the faith-based mission of The A.M.E. Zion Church and a clear commitment to institutional transformation and sustainability.

As we embark on this new chapter, the Clinton College community extends a warm welcome to Dr. Pamela Richardson Wilks. We look forward to the transformative leadership she will bring, guiding us toward continued growth, innovation, and success.

## Clinton College Issues Summer Appeal to Alumni and Supporters

By Rev. Roderick J. Josey,  
Education Editor

Clinton College, a historic institution of The A.M.E. Zion Church, founded in 1894, has issued a summer giving appeal to help address a seasonal decline in contributions known as the "Summer Slump." The dip in financial support during the summer months can place a strain on the college's ability to maintain regular operations and campus upkeep.



In response, the college is reaching out to its alumni, local churches, and broader supporters to stand with them during this critical time. The following message was issued from Bishop Eric Leake, Chairman of the Board of Trustees for Clinton College and Presiding Prelate of the South Atlantic Episcopal District

*Greetings!*

*I trust this message finds you well. This message is on behalf of Clinton College. Clinton College has hit a financial downturn for the Summer. We call it the "Summer Slump." Please join us in supporting Clinton College and our new President,*



*Dr. Pamela Wilks. Whatever support you can give will be greatly appreciated. You may give via Givelify (<https://givelify.com/9xo6ln>) or mail to Clinton College at 1029 Crawford Ave., Rock Hill, SC 29730. Let's do #MoreGoodTogether. Peace and Blessings, Bishop Eric Leake*



The appeal encourages all who believe in Clinton's mission to give what they can, reminding supporters that every contribution helps the college continue its day-to-day functions and preserve its legacy as a faith-based center for learning and leadership.

Clinton College is now under the leadership of its 14th president, Dr. Pamela Richardson Wilks, who brings a renewed vision and energy for growth. Her administration is working diligently to strengthen the college's foundation and ensure it remains a thriving institution within Zion.

Those who feel led to give may contribute through Givelify at <https://givelify.com/9xo6ln>, or by mailing their gift to:

Clinton College  
1029 Crawford Avenue  
Rock Hill, SC 29730

# Dr. Da'Tarvia Parrish Takes on New Leadership Role with AAUW North Carolina

By AAUW Salisbury

Salisbury, NC - Dr. Da'Tarvia Parrish, a prominent figure in the Salisbury community and dedicated advocate for women's equity, has been named Vice President of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) North Carolina. This appointment signifies a significant step in her leadership journey with the organization and a testament to her ongoing commitment to advancing opportunities for women and girls.

Dr. Parrish's move into this statewide leadership role follows her successful tenure as the President of the AAUW Salisbury Branch. Her leadership within the Salisbury branch has been praised for its commitment to supporting and celebrating the achievements of young women. Notably, under her guidance, the Salisbury branch has actively recognized and honored Goldman Scholars, high-achieving young women who represent the future of leadership, hosted notable speakers such as Congresswoman Alma Adams and Judge Carla Archie, and supported a record number of young women to attend national AAUW events such as the National Conference for Collegiate Women Student Leaders (NCCWSL) where she was also a national presenter.



Dr. Parrish brings a wealth of experience to her new position. As a professor of Humanities, English, and History at Livingstone College, she has been a tireless advocate for education and empowerment. Her work at Livingstone College includes serving as the founding director of the Honors Program and receiving numerous accolades for her contributions to both the academic community and the wider community.

Beyond her academic achievements, Dr. Parrish is known for her insightful perspectives on issues related to women's and Black studies, drawing from her personal experiences and extensive research. She is the author of "Jailbirds Don't Fly," a memoir that sheds light on the experiences of children with incarcerated mothers.

Dr. Parrish's commitment to service extends to numerous professional and community organizations, including the National Council of Negro Women and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated. Her multifaceted involvement demonstrates a deep dedication to creating a more equitable society.

As Vice President of AAUW North Carolina, Dr. Parrish will play a vital role in supporting the organization's statewide initiatives aimed at advancing equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, philanthropy, and research. Her leadership promises to further strengthen AAUW's presence and impact across North Carolina.

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# Livingstone College helps International Students Cope with Emotional Struggles During BIPOC Mental Health Month - & Every day

By Mai Li Munoz, Chief Communications Officer

SALISBURY, NC – July marks BIPOC Mental Health Month, a time dedicated to amplifying the unique mental health challenges faced by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. At Livingstone College, where 86.7% of the student population identifies as African American, international students can be weighted by the heaviness of cultural displacement, immigration stress, and academic pressure, all converging to shape the mental health of students who are doing more than just adjusting, they're trying to find a sense of home while navigating two worlds.

Homesickness isn't just anecdotal; it's nearly universal. According to a 2017 study published in the journal *Emotion*, about 94% of college freshmen reported feeling homesick at least once during their first 10 weeks on campus. Additional research suggests that around 70% experience symptoms of homesickness that significantly affect their daily lives. These emotional issues are not isolated; they thread through regular moments, such as when a holiday is missed, a favorite meal is unavailable, or language becomes a barrier to interaction.

Shambhabi Sinha, a senior Business Administration major from India, arrived at Livingstone as part of an exchange group. But while the others returned home after their semester ended, she chose to stay and enroll as a full-time student.

"I grew up moving often, so I thought I'd be okay, until they left. Then homesickness hit me. I missed speaking my language, celebrating festivals, and being understood."

One festival in particular honoring the Goddess of Education and celebrating the arrival of spring, knowledge, wisdom, and the creative arts was especially difficult to observe alone, as she's used to celebrating it surrounded by friends and family.

"I went to a Hindu temple in Charlotte, but it still felt empty." Presidential scholar Bright Osei Karlkari, a sophomore biology major from Ghana, echoed that longing.

"I thought I'd be strong, but I really miss my parents. Their hugs, their love. We talk at midnight, but nothing replaces presence."

For sophomore Nancy Siopong, also from Ghana, homesickness reveals itself in subtle, quiet ways.

"It sneaks up... music, food scents. It reminds me that I'm alone, even after talking to my family. I especially miss my twin sister, and we do everything together."

While current students navigate their daily transitions, Livingstone College alumnus Colline Ajidra from Entebbe, Uganda offers a retrospective look at how the journey left a lasting impact.

Recruited to play for the golf team, Ajidra arrived right after Christmas in 2019 to begin the spring semester, in freezing weather wearing the wrong clothes, eating processed food, unfamiliar to his garden-fresh life back home.

"I didn't have friends when I arrived. I didn't even have the right clothes; it was freezing, and I wasn't prepared," he said. "The food tasted unfamiliar, and I didn't realize why it was affecting me so much until I learned that most of it was processed. Back home, everything comes straight from the garden."

Ajidra's homesickness ran deeper than just environmental adjustment – it was tied to grief and emotional experiences he had never had space

to explore.

"When my father died, I fought. I didn't know it was grief," he said. "In Uganda, people keep moving. We don't really stop to think about how we're feeling."

Livingstone provided him with the words and assistance he needed to begin processing it.

"My mind opened up: I learned grief, anger, anxiety, they all have names. Naming them made them less scary. America takes mental health seriously, and I respect that. But I also think the media here needs to be more careful. Constant exposure to traumatic news can be just as damaging."

According to the Center for Collegiate Mental Health, only 9.5% of international students who present to counseling centers report social isolation as a concern, compared to 6.7% of domestic students. Moreover, international students face stigma, cultural unfamiliarity, and language barriers that further reduce their use of mental health services.

Ajidra also noted he'd never feared police until moving to the U.S. In Uganda, only law enforcement carry guns. "That was a new and honestly, frightening reality." Cultural differences and the overwhelming responsibility of starting a life in a new country add to the emotional toll. From dealing with school stress in the absence of a familial safety net to navigating strange time zones, adolescents are forced to mature quickly. Ajidra and his international peers are just entering their early 20s, carrying the weight of immigration, independence, and identity at an age when many are just beginning to figure out who they are.

"In India, my parents handled everything: bank accounts, scholarships, everything," said Sinha. "Here, I have to do all of that by myself. It's empowering to see how much I'm capable of, but it's also extremely overwhelming."

Karlkari echoed that statement, noting that international students must be emotionally resilient to succeed.

"If you're not mentally strong, this experience can break you. That's why mental health is so important."

Students are embracing the concept of mental health in new ways. In many of their home nations, emotional difficulties are not freely mentioned.

Karlkari noted that mental health conversations in Ghana have only recently gained momentum. "In Ghana, mental health wasn't taken seriously until recently," he explained. "But now, with advocates like Ambambila—a social media influencer who creates content discussing spiritual wisdom with psychological insight, people are beginning to speak up and recognize how essential mental wellness really is."

"In India, it depends on who and where you are," said Sinha. "In some places, therapy is still seen as strange and looked down upon. But I believe Western culture and social media is slowly changing how people view it."

Despite the distance, these students find creative ways to connect with their cultures. Food, music, and clothing function as anchors. Some people visit religious sites or engage in virtual cultural encounters. At Livingstone, instructors and staff have made a significant difference.

"There aren't many Indian students here, but I stay connected through food, traditional dress, and visits to the temple. I also love sharing my culture with many of the students. They are always wanting to learn more about where I come from, and that has made me fall in love with



my culture even more," said Sinha. "Even small moments of understanding from the staff mean a lot." Karkari shared that on his toughest days, a smile from Dr. Jacqueline Davis, the college's first lady, shifts his spirit reminding him that he isn't alone.

"Her smile felt like a mom from home. That warmth...it gave me strength."

Davis, who also serves as the Wellness and Well-Being Coordinator on the college's Mental Health Task Force, an extension of the college's counseling services program, emphasized the importance of creating a supportive campus for all students, especially those far from home.

"When students leave their countries and families to come to Livingstone College, our goal is to ensure they feel seen, valued, and cared for every step of the way."

Students also share concerns about the uncertainty of immigration policies. The constant stream of news about deportations and visa restric-

tions has added a layer of fear to their daily lives. "We've built a life here and we just want stability," one student shared. "It's exhausting to carry that fear while trying to focus on school."

As Livingstone continues its efforts to support mental health through its Mental Health Task Force, students say they would benefit from additional resources tailored to their unique needs: on-campus advisors who understand immigration, mentorship for new international students, more cultural events, and clearer access to mental health services.

Despite the hardships, the students are proud of their experiences. They carry their cultures with them, find strength in the community, and continue to pursue the goals that brought them to Livingstone in the first place.

"We're all just trying to build something better," Karkari said. "And that takes courage."

## Morris Brown College Steps Up for Displaced Job Corps Students

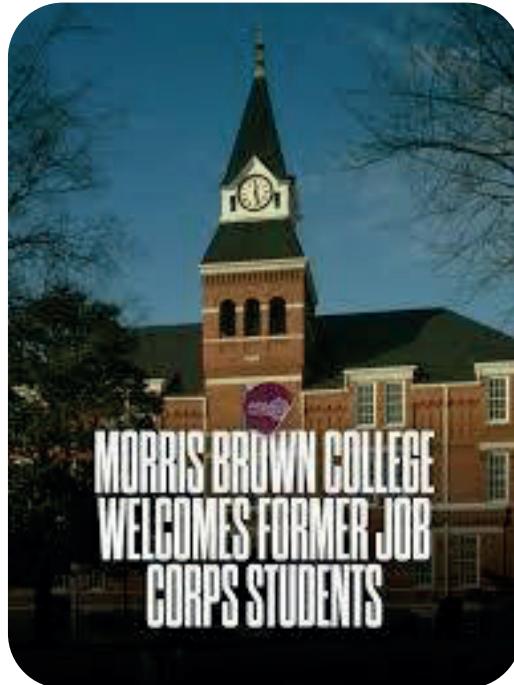
By Rev. Roderick J. Joysey, Education Editor

In the wake of the U.S. Department of Labor's decision to pause the national Job Corps program, Morris Brown College in Atlanta has emerged as a beacon of support for hundreds of students left without direction. The institution, which has seen a remarkable resurgence since regaining its accreditation in 2022, is opening its doors to young people impacted by the program's unexpected disruption.

The Job Corps program, which provides career training and residential support for low-income youth ages 16 to 24, was abruptly halted in early June due to budget uncertainty. The decision sent shockwaves across the country, leaving students in limbo, many of whom were mid-training, without housing or clear guidance on what would come next.

Morris Brown College, led by President Dr. Kevin James, responded swiftly and with heart. A former Job Corps educator himself, Dr. James saw the crisis not just as an administrative issue but as a personal calling. He invited displaced students to explore Morris Brown as a place where they could continue their education and vocational preparation, stating, "You are not alone." He and his team are offering one-on-one counseling, help navigating admissions and financial aid, and, most importantly, a place to belong.

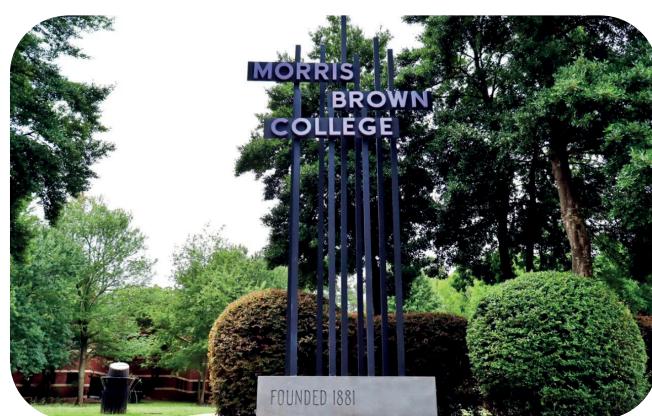
Beyond emergency response, Morris Brown is positioning itself as a long-term partner in student success. The college has a growing slate of



career-focused academic programs and a revitalized Career and Community Development office. Starting this fall, all students—new and returning—will have access to a structured four-year pathway that

includes resume building, internships, career fairs, and preparation for graduate school. The goal is not only to help students find jobs but also to equip them with the tools for lifelong success.

This is not a temporary effort. The college is actively integrating displaced Job Corps students into the broader student body and academic life. Housing, scholarships, and support services are being made available, and faculty are preparing to help students transition from vocational training into college-level coursework.



Morris Brown's actions are part of a broader movement among historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), many of which are stepping up to support underserved and displaced youth in times of crisis. But for Morris Brown, the mission is particularly resonant. This is a college that knows what it means to fight for survival—and win. Its outreach to Job Corps students is not just a handout; it's a hand-up rooted in empathy, resilience, and a firm belief in the power of second chances.

As the 2025–2026 academic year approaches, Morris Brown College stands as a powerful example of what it means to be mission-driven. In the face of instability and uncertainty, the college is providing a stable

# Livingstone College Honors Donors, Highlighting Impact and Future Vision

By Star of Zion News

Livingstone College, under the leadership of its 13th President, Dr. Anthony J. Davis, hosted a heartwarming Donor Appreciation Banquet on Friday, June 27, 2025, at the Livingstone College Hospitality Management and Culinary Arts Center. The semi-formal event, which commenced at 6:00 p.m., served as a sincere expression of gratitude to the college's dedicated supporters, recognizing their invaluable role in the institution's ongoing success and the fulfillment of its mission.

The banquet provided a significant opportunity for the college to acknowledge and thank the generous donors whose contributions have significantly impacted various initiatives and programs that benefit Livingstone's students, faculty, and the broader community. The evening was led by the Institution of Advancement Office, with inspiring entertainment from student leaders, alongside heartfelt remarks from alumni reunion class agents and committed friends.

With a warm welcome from Miss Livingstone College, Christian Oliver, whose greetings set a celebratory tone, Mister Livingstone College, Kaiyon Courtney, and Miss Maple, Mia Mason, added to the spirit of the occasion with musical performances. Their contributions highlighted the diverse talents within the student body, showcasing the vibrant arts culture fostered at Livingstone College.

A particularly touching segment of the program was an ode to donors, delivered by Presidential Scholar Joel Thompson, a rising sophomore student from Ghana. Thompson's words eloquently captured the transformative impact of donor support, emphasizing how their generosity empowers students like himself to pursue their educational goals and contribute to the world.

These moments underscored the profound impact of philanthropic



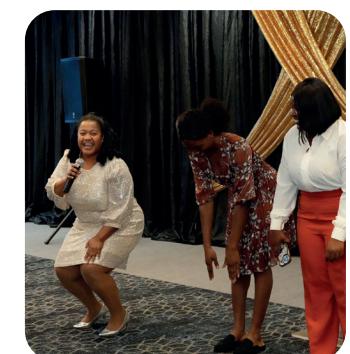
support on the Livingstone community. Highlighting the evening, President Davis expressed his deep appreciation, saying, "May your heart continue to expand and may your generous spirit continue to deepen . . ." This sentiment echoed the transformative power of the donors' commitment to the college's mission.



Livingstone College has experienced remarkable momentum in recent times, largely due to substantial philanthropic contributions, particularly from an anonymous donor. Furthermore, the college aims to be intentional in showing its esteemed appreciation for the collective of giving to The A.M.E. Zion Church, and its alumni and friends like Greg Alcorn, who have been committed to the college through the years.



The continuous support demonstrates a strong belief in Livingstone's vision and the transformative power of education. Moreover, these contributions have been instrumental in supporting the college's ambitious "Miracle on Monroe Street" project, which aims to enhance campus facilities and improve the overall student experience, such as renovations to resident halls and the dining facility.



President Davis conveyed the profound effect of this support, stating, "You have given us the opportunity to change lives and make dreams come true. Thank you for standing with us".

The Donor Appreciation Banquet is a component of the Alumni and Friends Weekend, emphasizing the vital partnership between Livingstone College and its donors. The college acknowledges that this support is essential to furthering its commitment to providing a quality education and fostering a nurturing environment for its students. With the continued generosity of its benefactors, Livingstone College is confident it is well-positioned to achieve even greater heights, empowering its students to become leaders and contribute positively to society.

## Zion's Support Makes Way for Livingstone Scholars at Atrium Health

By Star of Zion News

Livingstone College Presidential Scholars are benefiting from valuable hands-on experience through internships at Atrium Health, and The A.M.E. Zion Church has played a significant role.

Emeglad Boakye-Yiadom, Emmanuella Nyarko, Daniel Frimpong, and Nana Adusei are four rising sophomore Biology majors from Ghana who found a home away from home in Zion. "Marable has been ev-

erything to us. Not only have we found a kinship in the congregation, but we have found commitment and love," said Emeglad. A strong connection with Marable Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church in Kannapolis led to internship opportunities and transportation support for the four scholars as they secured positions at Atrium Health's Cabarrus College of Health Sciences, gaining broad exposure to healthcare fields and working with medical professionals. Their placements provide exposure to a range of healthcare disciplines and educational settings within the evolving environment of a health sciences institution.

*Continued on Next Page*

Moreover, junior Biology major Nahum Bullo of Ethiopia has been placed at Atrium Health Kenilworth Pharmacy as a student intern, and senior Biology major Thomyka Valcent of Saint Lucia is working as a pharmacy technician student intern at Atrium Health MCP Pharmacy in Charlotte. Both scholars aim to develop skills relevant to the role of pharmacy professionals, as they gain hands-on experience in a pharmacy setting, assisting with various tasks under the supervision of licensed professionals with direct tasks of medication interpretation and preparation, and distribution.

These internship opportunities aligns with the 13th President's vision to create early opportunities for students for career readiness. President Anthony J. Davis, who is also a member of The A.M.E. Zion Church, developed the Career Readiness Institute to equip current students and recent graduates with the essential skills, knowledge, and experiences necessary to successfully transition from education to employment and thrive in the modern workforce.

In an internship capacity, students gain practical experience that bridges the gap between academia and the professional world, enabling them to apply their knowledge and develop valuable skills. Internships also serve as a pathway for career exploration, allowing students to experience diverse roles and settings within an industry to inform their future decisions. Beyond experience, internships facilitate networking,



mentorship, and résumé enhancement, significantly improving post-graduation job prospects.

Dr. Da'Tarvia Parrish, who serves as the Director of the Honors Program and a member of New Hope A.M.E. Zion Church in Salisbury, said, "The invaluable support offered by The A.M.E. Zion Church to Livingstone College is firm, and our international Presidential Scholars are a witness of this framework through their summer experience. Rev. Tamica Robinson, Ms. Andrea Black, and all members at Marable Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church have provided exceptional care and guidance to these students. Additionally, Livingstone College employees such as Ranzeno Frazier, a member of Little Rock in Charlotte who has assisted with housing, and Miriam Rush, a member of Soldiers Memorial in Salisbury, have played a vital role in ensuring the success of our students in these internship positions.

This experience and many more underscore the impact and illustrate the power of the church and school connection and what we can accomplish together as a collective. We are one."

Livingstone College's engagement with the church and Atrium Health provides crucial opportunities for students to gain valuable skills and experience, contributing to their academic and professional development. These opportunities not only benefit the students but also contribute to building a skilled workforce in the healthcare sector, a stronger Livingstone College, and a global Zion.

## SOCIAL JUSTICE

# REV. AL SHARPTON REACTS TO NEW IRS RULING ALLOWING CHURCHES TO ENDORSE POLITICAL CANDIDATES



Rev. Dr. Allison Lee  
Social Justice Editor  
SocialJustice@StarOfZion.org

By National Action Network Public Relations Office

**New York, NY (July 8, 2025)** – Rev. Al Sharpton, Founder and President of National Action Network (NAN), issued the following statement after the Internal Revenue Service said churches can endorse political candidates to their congregations.

"While many Black churches and others have been victims of harassment for organizing non-partisan rallies, this new ruling says something that we must study to ensure it does not create a double-edged sword. We cannot have a system in which right-wing congregations may endorse political candidates and others of a different political persuasion remain under scrutiny and lead to a situation that is not beneficial to all. In that spirit NAN and the Conference of National Black Churches, which is also led by our Chairman Dr. W. Franklyn Richardson, will have a Zoom call with Black pastors in the coming days to explore the pros and cons of this decision. We will have legal experts, headed by Attorney Jennifer Jones Austin, the Vice Chair of the NAN national board, to give a legal analysis to the ministers."



### About National Action Network (NAN)

*National Action Network is one of the leading civil rights organizations in the Nation with chapters throughout the entire United States. Founded in 1991 by Reverend Al Sharpton, NAN works within the spirit and tradition of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to promote a modern civil rights agenda that includes the fight for one standard of justice, decency, and equal opportunities for all people regardless of race, religion, nationality, or gender.*



*For more information go to [www.nationalactionnetwork.net](http://www.nationalactionnetwork.net) (<http://www.nationalactionnetwork.net/>).*

# LETTER TO POPE LEO XIV

By Debra Chappelle-Polk, Star of Zion Spotlight Editor

August 2025, New York, NY... On July 16, 2025, Rev. Nicolle Jean-Simon wrote to Pope Leo XIV, who, on May 8, 2025, was elected the 267th pope by the College of Cardinals as the 266th successor of St. Peter.

Rev. Jean-Simon was inspired to write to Pope Leo because of his affiliation with Jubilee USA 2025 and his support of legislation and social policies to eradicate global poverty. "The 160+ Churches that serve the North Eastern Episcopal District of The A.M.E. Zion Church will be praying. Your commitment to economic justice offers hope to millions around the world. Raising awareness of the moral aspects of economic life and advocating for policy changes can help create a world where every person can live with dignity and thrive. Thank you for promoting a more just and compassionate world." (The letter is printed in its entirety below.)

Rev. Nicolle Jean-Simon is the pastor at St. Paul A.M.E. Zion Church in Ewing, NJ, and an Adjunct Professor at Clinton College. She also serves on the Board of Directors for Jubilee USA, an interfaith, non-profit alliance of religious, development, and advocacy organizations. Jubilee USA works with more than 750 faith-based institutions across the United States and around the globe, addressing the structural causes of poverty and inequality around the world. Jubilee USA consists of Christians, Jews, Muslims, and other faith traditions working to build an economy that serves, protects, and promotes the participation of the most vulnerable. If your church would like to learn more about Jubilee USA and join as a partner faith community, you can visit the website at [www.jubileeusa.org](http://www.jubileeusa.org).

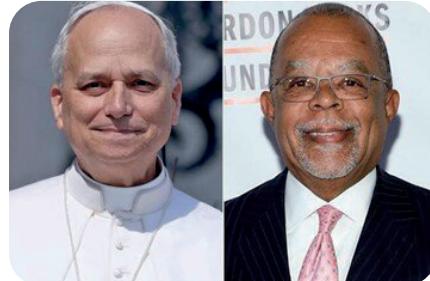
## REPRINT OF REV. DR. NICOLLE D. JEAN-SIMON'S LETTER

**African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church**  
**North Eastern Episcopal District**  
**1130 Lower Ferry Road**  
**Ewing, NJ 08618**

June 16, 2025

His Holiness Pope Leo XIV  
 Apostolic Palace  
 00120 Vatican City  
 To: His Holiness Pope Leo XIV  
 Your Holiness,

Please accept my sincerest congratulations on your election as the 267th Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church. This is a moment of great significance for the Universal Church and the world. The Church rejoices in this historic moment, and The A.M.E. Zion Church offers prayers and best wishes for the papacy. Prayers are offered for the Holy Spirit to guide you with wisdom, courage, and compassion in leading the Church forward in faith. We are en-



Shortly after Pope Leo's election, journalists, reporters, media pundits, etc., began a deep dive into the new Pope's life's work. Pope Leo XIV was born Robert Francis Prevost on September 14, 1955, in Chicago and raised in the nearby suburb of Dolton, Illinois. Further examination of the pope's ancestry revealed his Creole and African roots in

New Orleans. Jari Honora, a family historian with the Historic New Orleans Collection, began researching the Pope's roots because of the Prevost last name. "I did not expect to find a Creole connection," Honora said. "I was expecting to find a French-Canadian connection." According to Honora, Pope Leo XIV's grandparents, Joseph Martinez and Louise Baqué, lived in New Orleans' Seventh Ward, whose historic residents are African, Caribbean, European, and Catholic. A marriage certificate shows they were married

in the Seventh Ward in 1887.

Mildred Prevost with her sons outside Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago. Pope Leo XIV is on the left

Erick Johnson, writer for The Voice Online, wrote, "The historic election of the first American pope has sparked pride in Black communities who trace his roots to Louisiana, Haiti, and the city's Black community."

Henry Louis Gates Jr., the host and executive producer of the Emmy-nominated PBS show *Finding Your Roots*, traveled to the Vatican on July 5 to meet with Pope Leo XIV to present his genealogical research. His research confirmed that Pope Leo had mixed Black and European ancestry.

In January 2023, Rev. Dr. Nicolle D. Jean-Simon (affectionally called "Rev. Nikki") wrote an article entitled "WOMEN IN THE PULPIT IS STILL AN ACT OF RESISTANCE" for The Clergywomen in Zion series in which she stated, "I approach this role and everything I do in life while making sure it's aligned with what God has called for me to do. I'm not just appointed to a church; I'm appointed to a community. So, it's not, 'Nicolle, go over there and be the pastor of that church,' it's 'Nicolle, go there and serve that community.' And I look at it that way. When God sent me here, he wasn't just sending me to the church; he was sending me to the community."

**couraged by the ways your leadership will shape the Ecclesiastical and influence the world.**

**The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church joins the Jubilee USA Network in voicing our concerns for the suffering caused around the world by global poverty. We support Jubilee's mission to build an economy that serves, protects, and promotes the participation of the most vulnerable. We regard your dedication to the poor and consistent calls for a more just and equitable global economy to be an inspiration. Poverty is not merely a lack of resources, but a complex issue based on unjust social structures. It is heartbreaking that in a world of abundance. In a world where God has provided all the resources needed for His children, many are denied basic necessities and opportunities for a dignified life.**

**Your Holiness, we will be praying for you as you continue to use your voice to advocate for economic policies that focus on the needs of the poor and address the causes of poverty. Advocating for the equitable distribution of capital and resources, challenging systems that increase inequality, and promoting policies that ensure everyone can benefit from God's resources. As you encourage international cooperation to foster a global economic system that serves all humanity, especially the most vulnerable, the 160+ Churches that serve the North Eastern Episcopal District of the A.M.E. Zion Church will be praying. Your commitment to eco-**

*Continued on Next Page*

nomic justice offers hope to millions around the world. Raising awareness of the moral aspects of economic life and advocating for policy changes can help create a world where every person can live with dignity and thrive. Thank you for promoting a more just and compassionate world.

Respectfully yours,  
Rev. Dr. Nicolle D. Jean-Simon



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Health and Wellness Editor  
Health\_Wellness@StarOfZion.org

cc: Mr. Eric LeCompte, Executive Director  
Jubilee USA Network  
Bishop George D. Crenshaw, Presiding Prelate  
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, North Eastern Episcopal District

## HEALTH & *Wellness*

# Alzheimer's Association Launches Free Mobile App to Support Newly Diagnosed Individuals & Care Partners

*New app is available to help North Carolina individuals and families affected by dementia with support, guidance & connection*

By Kara Harrington, Alzheimer's Association – North Carolina

CHARLOTTE, N.C., June 18, 2025 — The Alzheimer's Association – Western Carolina Chapter is encouraging individuals and families affected by dementia in North Carolina to download its new My ALZ Journey app. The free app is aimed at helping newly diagnosed, early-stage individuals and their care partners navigate their journey with Alzheimer's and other dementias.

"An Alzheimer's or dementia diagnosis can be overwhelming and isolating," said Katherine Lambert, CEO, Alzheimer's Association – Western Carolina Chapter.

"Our new app helps connect North Carolina families affected by Alzheimer's and other dementias to needed information and resources following a diagnosis. It provides personalized guidance, education, planning tools, interactive activities and local community resources."

Currently, there are more than 7 million Americans living with Alzheimer's disease, including more than 210,000 in North Carolina. A 2024 Alzheimer's Association survey found 66% of dementia caregivers report difficulty finding resources and support following a dementia diagnosis.

People living with dementia, including current and former members of the Alzheimer's Association National Early Stage Advisory Group (ESAG), were instrumental in the app's development – identifying the need for it, helping shape and test its content, and eventually naming it.

Ideal for those who already enjoy using apps in their daily lives, My ALZ Journey features a simple, intuitive design that guides users through a personalized experience. The Home screen offers a curated path with step-by-step guidance

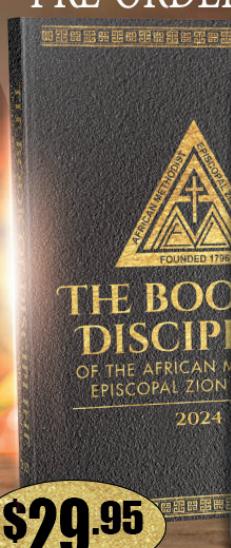
and resources that evolve over time to reflect the user's journey. The app's Library provides easy access to topic-based educational content from alz.org, answering common questions about Alzheimer's, caregiving and planning for the future. Users can connect directly to the Alzheimer's Association through the Community section, which highlights nearby support groups, events and programs. The Activity Center offers interactive tools, planning resources and brain-stimulating activities to help users stay engaged and supported.

"We're excited to have this new app to help our local families," said Lambert. "In addition to connecting them to important disease-related information, we hope it will encourage their participation in the various local programs we offer. We want families affected by Alzheimer's and other dementia to know they are not alone."

My ALZ Journey is available now for free in the Apple App Store and Google Play Store. For more information, visit [alz.org/MyALZJourney](https://alz.org/MyALZJourney).

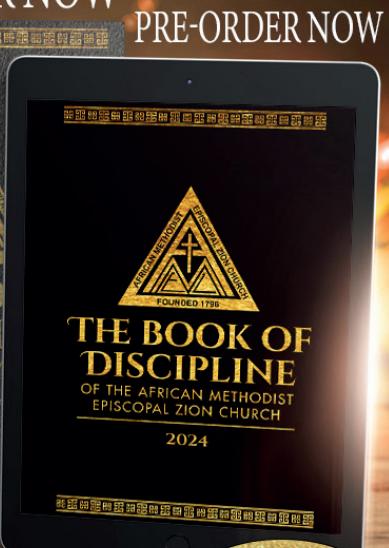
For more information about local programs, support groups and resources, visit [alz.org/northcarolina](https://alz.org/northcarolina) or call our 24/7 Helpline at (800) 272-3900.

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# Stress and the Black Divide

By Daman De Leon, Health & Wellness Editor

Heart disease and stress in Black communities are both common due to racism and socioeconomic factors that impact the general health of Black people. Lack of access to healthy food and inadequate medical care also contribute to high rates of stress and cardiovascular disease.

The impact of chronic stress and heart damage leads to cumulative health problems that affect both quality of life and life expectancy.

## How Stress Impacts Heart Health

Chronic stress increases cortisol, the main stress hormone in the body. Increases in cortisol are helpful over a short period of time. However, high levels over a long period of time can negatively affect a wide range of bodily functions, including:

- Blood cholesterol
- Triglycerides
- Blood sugar
- Blood pressure

As a result, heightened levels of cortisol raise your blood pressure and lower your HDL (good cholesterol), increasing the risk of heart disease over time.

Chronic stress is also associated with many health-compromising behaviors that may affect your heart indirectly. These include:

- Sleeping poorly
- Exercising less
- Making poor food choices
- Not maintaining a healthy weight

## Racism and Stress

Racism has been found to contribute to disproportionate levels of stress among Black people.

More than 70% of Black Americans report having experienced some form of racial discrimination or mistreatment during their lifetimes. Nearly half said that they felt that their life was in danger at some point because of their race.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, Blacks were much more likely than Latinx and White respondents to report feeling like they have been denied a job for which they were qualified (40%, 15%, and 8%, respectively) or denied housing they could afford due to their race (26%, 8%, and 3%, respectively).

According to researchers:

- Repeated exposure to discrimination and systemic inequity is associated with the biological aging of the cells.<sup>5</sup>
- Just anticipating prejudice can lead to cardiovascular stress responses, which can also increase the risk of heart disease in Black people.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, racism contributes to a phenomenon called biological weathering in which chronic exposure to racial bias accelerates a decline in physical health.

## The Stress of Prejudice and Hate

The institution of slavery and mass genocide are two race-based events that characterize the magnitude of hate, prejudice, and moral blindness that Black Americans have had to endure throughout U.S. history.

The trauma of events like slavery, coupled with continued racism, may negatively impact Black people to this day.



## Racial Disparities and Heart Health

Social determinants of health—such as education, access to quality care, neighborhood safety, and proximity to pollution—are influenced by race-based differences in these areas.<sup>7</sup> For African Americans, disparities in key areas can greatly increase the risk of heart disease.

These stressors include:

- **Obesity:** Having obesity directly raises cardiovascular risk factors, including dyslipidemia, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and sleep disorders. Obesity is more prevalent among African Americans. Approximately 50% of Black Americans have obesity, versus about 42% of White Americans.
- **Access to equal medical care:** Research has shown that there is a disparity in how Black Americans are treated in a medical setting versus White Americans. This includes studies that show Black people are less likely to get medication that will help prevent a heart attack and are less likely to be given a test to diagnose heart disease.<sup>9</sup>

- **Lack of nutritious food:** Black households have experienced higher rates of food insecurity when compared to other populations in the United States.<sup>10</sup> This stems from issues that make food less available for African Americans as well as factors that make it hard to properly prepare nutritious meals.

## Strategies and Interventions

The evidence of the high incidence of chronic stress and heart disease among Blacks has led researchers to develop programs and strategies to help reduce the health risks for people throughout these communities.

- Programs focus on how to cope with discrimination that can cause disease may be most effective when targeted to Black women.<sup>11</sup>
- Strategies focus on the impact of neighborhood violence, that impacts stress, may be more important for Black men.

• With only about 40% of Black adults seeking treatment for mental illness due to barriers such as cost and a lack of providers, it's necessary to work to improve access to mental health therapies in Black communities.<sup>12</sup>

Find a Black Healthcare Provider. Websites that can help you connect with Black healthcare providers include:

- Blackdoctor.org
- Findablaclkdoctor.com

In addition, the following healthy habits may greatly prevent or reduce your stress, protecting your heart in the process:<sup>14</sup>

- Regular exercise
- Eating a heart-healthy diet
- Quitting smoking and limiting alcohol
- Getting quality sleep
- Enjoying activities and talking with supportive groups of friends and family

In conclusion, African Americans are disproportionately impacted by stress and stress-related disease due to systemic inequality. High levels of cumulative stress put many Black people at high risk of heart disease, which can lead to heart attack and stroke.

Limiting stress and living a healthy lifestyle are surefire ways to lower your heart disease risk. The importance of taking every measure possible to curb stress cannot be understated, especially in Black communities that have been historically marginalized.

## References

- *African Americans and Mental Health: Practical and Strategic Solutions to Barriers, Needs, and Challenges*
- *The Unapologetic Guide to Black Mental Health* by Rheeda Walker
- *African Americans and Depression: Signs, Awareness, Treatments, and Interventions*

# The Symbiosis of Self-Care!

By Daman De Leon, Health & Wellness Editor

So, the main health and wellness theme for the month of August is National Wellness Month, which focuses on self-care, stress management, and promoting healthy routines. It's a time to prioritize overall well-being and build habits that support both physical and mental health. Sounds like the opening intro to an article or blog, right? Well, the introduction is very well articulated; however, there is a methodology to understanding what "wellness" is, thus avoiding so much of the ambiguity of the term.

From a theological, faith-based perspective, since we are given one physical body, those of us in the body of Christ are biblically instructed to be good stewards of these bodies (1 Cor. 6: 19-20), so we should make well-being a priority all year long.

Companies with a robust culture of well-being know that it's about more than offering a meditation app or an on-site fitness center. A true well-being culture includes support for multiple aspects of employees' lives, including mental health, family and caregiving responsibilities, financial wellness, social connections, and chronic condition management, among others. After all, organizations can't operate at their best—let alone innovate or grow—when their employees are struggling.

Organizations that place a priority on employee well-being reap the benefits. Research shows that there's a strong, positive correlation between well-being and organizational performance.<sup>1</sup> And, WebMD Health Services' research recently found that employees who feel their organization cares about their well-being tend to be stronger perform-



ers who are more engaged in the workplace and less likely to leave. Why do I mention this? Simply because stress begins more so at our places of employment than anywhere else in our lives. Finances are also a significant source of stress. Consider ways to alleviate some of it by implementing financial wellness benefits that help with student loan debt repayment, monthly budgeting, or saving for a significant purchase. Alternative pay cycles—like those that allow people to be paid daily or weekly—can also help.

Staying hydrated has many benefits, from improving the look and quality of skin to keeping the body functioning at optimal levels and controlling calories. Make it easy for employees to drink water throughout the day with conveniently located water coolers. You could also host a wellness challenge around increasing water consumption and give a free water bottle away as an incentive. For employees who work remotely, consider subsidizing a monthly water service. Also, make it easier to focus more on nutrition.

In conclusion, the best version of ourselves are not just our spiritual bodies, but our physical ones as well. I'm sure Jesus was in great physical shape, as since he owned no chariot or horses, he walked everywhere he went (which walking is the best form of physical exercise).



Alexxis Hutchinson  
Sports Editor

## SPORTS

# Cheer Squad Continues to Raise the Bar

By Tashira Patterson

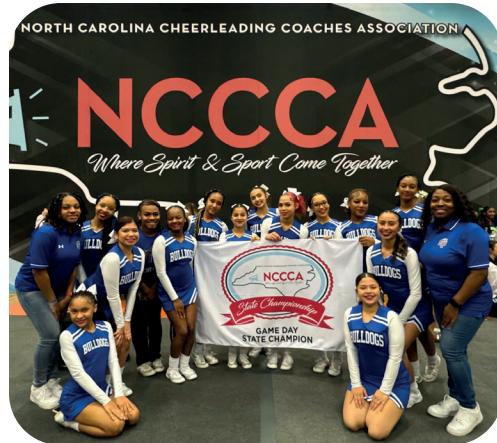
Tashira Patterson, a proud member of St. James A.M.E. Zion Church in Red Springs, NC, is a trailblazing leader who continues to set the gold standard for cheerleading across the state of North Carolina.

Coach Patterson has guided the St. Paul's Bulldogs Cheerleading Program to incredible heights, including five State Championships, historic first-place finishes across all divisions, and the prestigious title of 2024–2025 Southeastern Athletic Conference Coach of the Year.

Her passion, dedication, and influence are evident in the way she coaches athletes of all ages—from middle school to high school—instilling discipline, teamwork, and school spirit that radiates far beyond the sidelines.

### HISTORIC MOMENT: ROBESON COUNTY FAIR SWEEP

In a record-breaking achievement, Coach Patterson choreographed three first-place routines at the 2024 Robeson County Fair—leading



Middle School, Junior Varsity, and Varsity squads to victory. This marks the first time in Robeson County history that a single coach has secured 1st place in all three divisions at the same event!

### 5x STATE CHAMPS

Patterson has led her team to back-to-back titles at both the North Carolina Cheerleading Coaches Association (NCCCA) and the North Carolina High School Athletic Association (NCHSAA) state championships, further solidifying her program as one of the most decorated in the region.

### AWARDS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- 2024–2025 Southeastern Athletic Conference Coach of the Year
- 2024 & 2025 North Carolina Cheerleading Coaches Association State Champions
- 2022, 2023 & 2024 North Carolina High School Athletic Association State Champions
- 1st Place: 2024 Robeson County Fair Cheer Competition
- 1st Place: 2024 Varsity Spirit Triangle Regional Competition
- 1st Place: 2019 Robeson County Fair Cheer Competition
- Superior Team Award: 2019 Varsity Spirit Cheer Camp
- 1st Place: 2018 Varsity Spirit Coastal Regional
- 1st Place: 2018 Robeson County Fair Cheer Competition – Junior Varsity





Mr. Thomas Umstead  
Entertainment & The Arts Editor  
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# Livingstone College Alumnus Returns to Lead Marching Band; Pledges “Musical Excellence Without Excuses”

By Deborah Walker

SALISBURY, N.C. - Livingstone College alumnus Sir Davis has returned to his alma mater as the new Executive Director of Band and Band Operations, bringing with him a student-centered vision rooted in discipline, innovation, and relevance.

A former tuba player in the college’s “Blue Thunder” marching band, Davis is determined to “restore the storm” and reestablish the program’s legacy of musical excellence.

“When I was a student here, we prided ourselves on excellence,” Davis said. “That foundation shaped me, and now it’s time to pass it forward, to restore the legacy and raise the bar.”

Since graduating from Livingstone in 2011, Davis has taught music and led award-winning ensembles across the region. Most recently, he served as the band director at Mallard Creek High School in Charlotte, where he revitalized the school’s jazz program and led students to perform at the prestigious National Jazz Festival in Philadelphia and in New Jersey, a first for many of the students involved.

“I took a group that didn’t think they’d ever get to that level, and they did,” he said. “I love to witness the aha moment. It changed their perspective. That’s the kind of transformative experience I want to bring to Livingstone.”

With new band uniforms on the way—thanks to funds raised by Living-



stone alumni and community supporters—Davis steps into leadership at a pivotal time. He is focused on building a competitive, well-equipped program where students will be prepared and ready to perform, from halftime shows to concert halls.

Along with enhancing the band’s infrastructure, Davis is working to increase its visibility. He is cultivating partnerships with high school programs across the region and positioning Livingstone’s band to re-enter national conversations around events like the Battle of the Bands.

“I want people to say, ‘Have you seen Livingstone?’ That’s the energy we’re bringing back,” he said. “This program is about more than just playing notes. It’s about relationships, discipline, and setting high expectations. I want our students to carry themselves with integrity on and off the field. That’s what makes a true musician and a strong leader.”

Davis blends technical expertise with deep institutional knowledge. As a Livingstone student, he was involved in nearly every aspect of campus music life: from jazz and symphonic bands to the gospel choir and local ministry. That experience, he said, makes his return especially meaningful.

“It’s a full circle. This campus shaped me, and now I get to shape the next generation. Musical excellence without excuses – that’s what I want to leave behind. No matter the resources, you show up, you give your best, and you make no excuses. That’s the standard I want Livingstone to represent.”

## The A.M.E. Zion International Music Ministry Official Statement Regarding the Passing of “Mama” Mosie Burks

By Dr. Lisa Moore, International Director of Music Ministry

Official Statement of The African Methodist Episcopal Zion International Music Ministry Regarding the Death of “Mama” Mosie Burks

*“Brothers and Sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him.” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 New International Version)*

It is with profound sadness and heartfelt sympathy that we express our condolences to the family and all who cherished “Mama” Moses Burks during this time of her transition. The passing of “Mama” Mosie Burks represents not only a personal loss for those who knew and loved her, but also a significant loss to the world of gospel music and to the countless hearts she uplifted through her ministry.

“Mama” Mosie Burks was more than a singer; she was a true vessel of God’s power and presence. Her voice resonated with generations, delivering messages of faith and hope.

Rising from humble beginnings to achieve international acclaim, she remained a shining example of humility, grace, and unwavering devotion to the Lord. Her electrifying singing and contributions with the Mississippi Mass Choir, her solo endeavors, and her inspiring testimony have motivated millions and will continue to uplift spirits for years to come.

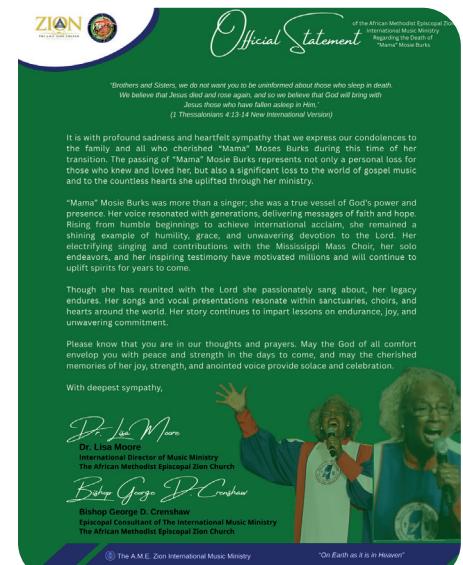
Though she has reunited with the Lord she passionately sang about, her legacy endures. Her songs and vocal presentations resonate within sanctuaries, choirs, and hearts around the world. Her story continues to impart lessons on endurance, joy, and unwavering commitment.

taries, choirs, and hearts around the world. Her story continues to impart lessons on endurance, joy, and unwavering commitment.

Please know that you are in our thoughts and prayers. May the God of all comfort envelop you with peace and strength in the days to come, and may the cherished memories of her joy, strength, and anointed voice provide solace and celebration. With deepest sympathy and respect,

**Dr. Lisa Moore**  
International Director of Music Ministry  
The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

**Bishop George D. Crenshaw**  
Episcopal Consultant of The International Music Ministry  
The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church  
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# Statement from the Board of Bishops of The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church Regarding the Recent Guilty Plea of Staccato Powell

By The Board of Bishops, The A.M.E. Zion Church

*"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." — Micah 6:8*

With heavy hearts and unwavering resolve, the Board of Bishops of The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church acknowledges the recent guilty plea of Staccato Powell, a disrobed Bishop in our Church. On Tuesday, July 15, 2025, in federal court in Oakland, CA, he admitted under oath that he is guilty of wire fraud, mail fraud, and conspiracy charges related to the misappropriation of church properties across California and other parts of the Western Episcopal District.

These crimes were not only deliberate and deeply deceptive—they were spiritually, ethically, and financially devastating. They betrayed the trust of congregations, caused real harm to our churches, and cast a shadow on the integrity of our Zion Connection and the broader body of Christ. As under shepherds of the Church, we are grieved beyond words by the magnitude of this breach and by the pain it has inflicted upon faithful members, pastors, and entire communities who have labored in love and faith.

Let it be known unequivocally: What occurred under the guise of ecclesiastical authority was not sanctioned by the church and stands in direct violation of the laws of the land, *The Doctrine and Discipline of The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church 2012 and 2016 Editions* and the teachings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The overwhelming vote of the General Conference in 2021, finding Staccato Powell guilty of violation of our church law and disrobing him as a bishop, were a clear demonstration of the severity of his actions.

The deception, forgery, abuse of episcopal authority, and financial exploitation committed in the name of church stewardship are not only unlawful—they are sin. And sin, though forgivable by God, carries consequences. Justice is not antithetical to mercy; in fact, it is an expression of divine order. As stewards of God's people, we cannot minimize or excuse wrongdoing, especially when that wrongdoing results in reputational, spiritual, and material harm to those we are called to serve.



We acknowledge the profound damage done—not just to the local congregations impacted, and not only to the Western Episcopal District—but to the witness of the Church universal. Trust, once broken, must be carefully and prayerfully rebuilt. We are committed to walking alongside every affected church, providing pastoral care and support to restore stability and ensure transparency. We thank God for those congregations who have remained faithful in the midst of chaos and commend the civil authorities, investigators, and those within our own connection — including your Board of Bishops -- who worked tirelessly to uncover the truth.

The A.M.E. Zion Church has always stood on the foundation of faith, justice, and accountability. We are a church of liberation and lifting, of holiness and hope. And though this moment is painful, it is also clarifying. It reaffirms our responsibility as bishops, clergy, and lay leaders to protect the sacred trust given to us. It reminds us that titles do not exempt one from righteousness, and that no position in the church places one above accountability.

To the congregations harmed: We see you. We grieve with you. And we will not rest until your voices are heard, your losses addressed, and your futures secured. To the broader Christian community: We understand the hurt and confusion this brings to the name of the Church. We pledge to do better—not just in practice, but in posture, in humility, and in the vigilance that stewardship demands.

Even in this dark moment, we find guidance in the Gospel. For ours is a God who redeems, who restores, and who always brings light out of darkness. We do not offer shallow platitudes, rather we commit to work towards a path forward—a path rooted in confession, repentance, restitution, shared accountability, and renewal.

We ask our members, partners, and friends across the Connection to continue praying for healing, for justice, and for the restoration of trust. We pray also for Dr. Powell and all others involved—that they might face accountability with honesty and ultimately turn toward true repentance.

Let this be a defining moment not of disgrace, but of decisive action—one that reclaims the moral clarity of our calling and reestablishes our collective commitment to righteousness, truth, and servant leadership.

In the matchless Name of Jesus the Christ, the Chief Shepherd and Bishop of our souls;

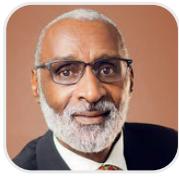
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*Done this the 17th Day of July, 2025*



Rev. Ronald Nathan  
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# Weaponising Visas: A Global Power Tool

By Ronald A. Nathan, World Politics Editor

One might assume that possession of a valid passport is a golden ticket to global mobility — an official endorsement to travel wherever your finances can take you. But in the modern world, the reality is more complex and deeply unequal. Suppose your passport hails from an African, Caribbean, or many Asian nations. In that case, the simple act of planning a vacation, studying abroad, or attending a conference can become an exercise in bureaucracy, scrutiny, and, too often, humiliation. At the heart of this systemic disparity is the visa.

The standard justification, particularly from the United States of America and other Western countries, is that visa systems exist “to ensure that foreign travellers do not pose a threat to national security and public safety.” On the surface, this seems reasonable — every country has the right to protect its borders.

But scratch the surface, and another picture emerges — one in which the visa becomes less about individual security risks and more about collective punishment, geopolitical leverage, and economic stratification. In this world, the visa is not merely a piece of paper — it is a symbol of global hierarchy, wielded as a tool of control.

Not all passports are created equal. The Henley Passport Index, which ranks passports according to the number of countries their holders can access visa-free, makes this painfully clear. Citizens of Germany, Japan, or Singapore can travel to over 190 countries visa-free or with visa-on-arrival access. Conversely, nationals from countries like Nigeria, Pakistan, or Haiti may be required to apply for visas to enter even neighbouring or less affluent states, often enduring long wait times, intrusive questioning, and high fees, only to be denied.

This inequality reflects deeper colonial legacies. Former imperial powers still enjoy the mobility their historical dominance afforded them, while former colonies remain trapped behind borders, subject to suspicion and endless documentation.

Beyond politics, visas play a powerful role in global economic control. Visa regimes help developed countries curate their labor markets, selectively importing skilled labor from the Global South while preventing large-scale migration. For example, while tech workers from India or doctors from Nigeria may be granted employment visas, millions of others from the same countries are rejected — regardless of their potential contribution or the humanitarian circumstances they face.

Student visas, too, are selectively granted, turning education into a trans-

actional commodity. Wealthy students from abroad are welcomed, while others, often more qualified but less resourced, are barred from entry — effectively monetizing access to knowledge and networks.

Visa denials also undermine regional development by blocking knowledge exchange and international collaboration. A researcher from Ghana may be invited to speak at a conference in London, only to be denied a visa due to perceived “risk of overstaying” — a subjective decision rooted more in economic profiling than security. Take, for example, according to the London-based research and arts organisation LAGO Collective, African countries have lost an estimated \$67.5 million in non-refundable Schengen visa application fees since 2024.

Visas can also be explicitly used as a diplomatic weapon. Countries impose or lift visa restrictions based on political alignment, retaliation, or strategic considerations. The United States, for instance, has used visa bans to punish governments it deems hostile, denying entry to politicians, businesspeople, or entire populations from countries like Iran, Venezuela, and Russia.

In some cases, entire visa regimes shift overnight due to political fallout, punishing ordinary citizens for the actions of their governments. The result is a punitive form of diplomacy that prioritizes control over dialogue.

For many in the Global South, the visa process is not just burdensome — it is psychologically dehumanizing. Applicants must demonstrate their intention to return home, provide extensive financial documentation, and often undergo an interview with officials who may be suspicious of them. The unspoken message is clear: your presence is not welcome unless you can prove your worth.

This presumption of guilt — that you might overstay, claim asylum, or become a burden — is rarely applied to citizens from Western nations. It reflects a broader narrative about whose freedom is taken for granted and whose is subject to surveillance.

If global mobility is a right — a key to opportunity, education, family reunion, and cultural exchange — then the current visa system stands as a gatekeeping mechanism for a neo-feudal world order. Reforming it requires not just technical changes, but a fundamental rethinking of how we define security, fairness, and human dignity in a globalized era.

Until then, visas will remain more than travel documents. They will remain weapons in the quiet war of borders — tools that reinforce inequality, shape global hierarchies, and remind millions that, in the eyes of the world, not all passports — or people — are equal.

## OPINION

# Beware of Modern Day Balaam

By Richard M. Gadzekpo

This sermon is a timely and prophetic call to spiritual discernment in an age of religious deception. Drawing from the biblical account of Balaam and Paul’s warning in 2 Timothy 3:1–9, the message exposes the characteristics of modern-day false teachers who prioritize profit over purpose, manipulate the Word of God, and lead believers astray. Through robust Scripture exposition and practical application, the Church is challenged to test every spirit, hold every preacher accountable, and return to the unshakable truth of God’s Word. This is a message for a Church that seeks purity over popularity and truth over trends.

### Sermon Manuscript

#### Beware of Modern Day Balaam

2 Timothy 3:1–9 (NLT)

Proposition



Not everyone who claims to speak for God has been sent by God; some are motivated by greed, glory, and deception. The Church must discern truth from error by testing every spirit and holding every preacher accountable to the Word of God.

### Introduction: The Rise of False Voices

Beloved, we live in a time where charisma is often mistaken for calling, popularity is confused with power, and influence is wrongly equated with anointing.

But Scripture warns us repeatedly:

“Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” (Matthew 7:21, NLT)

And so today, I rise with a warning: **Beware of Modern Day Balaam.**

### 1. Who Was Balaam? A Biblical Survey

Balaam is one of the most peculiar figures in Scripture, a prophet-for-hire, whose name appears in four major books of the Bible.

### Numbers 22–24

- Balaam was summoned by Balak, king

*Continued on Next Page*

of Moab, to curse Israel.

- Balaam appeared to hear from God, but his heart was divided.
- Though he initially refused to curse Israel, he was eventually enticed by greed (*Numbers 22:7; 2 Peter 2:15*).
- He tried to manipulate God's word for personal gain.

#### **Numbers 31:16**

- Balaam was held responsible for leading Israel into sin through sexual immorality and idolatry at Peor.

• His strategy? "*If I cannot curse them, I will corrupt them.*"

#### **Deuteronomy 23:4–5**

- Balaam was condemned for taking money to curse God's people.

#### **New Testament References**

- **2 Peter 2:15 (NLT)** – "They have wandered off the right road and followed the footsteps of Balaam... who loved to earn money by doing wrong."
- **Jude 11 (NLT)** – "Like Balaam, they deceive people for money."
- **Revelation 2:14 (NLT)** – "You tolerate some among you whose teaching is like that of Balaam..."

#### **The Authorial Intent & Audience**

The biblical writers used Balaam's name as a symbol of false, greedy, and manipulative prophets. He becomes a prototype for those who appear spiritual but are corrupt, who speak well but serve evil.

#### **1 2 Timothy 3:1–9 – Paul's End-Time Warning**

Paul wrote to his son in the faith, Timothy, and warned him of dangerous people in the last days. Not just people outside the church, but leaders, teachers, and so-called prophets inside the church. Paul noted: "*They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that!*" (2 Timothy 3:5, NLT)

#### **Three Parallels Between Paul's Warning and Balaam:**

##### **1. Lovers of Self and Money (v.2)**

Just as Balaam loved the wages of unrighteousness, modern Balaams are motivated by profit, not purpose.

##### **2. Deceivers of the Gullible (v.6)**

Balaam seduced Israel into sin. Today, false teachers creep into homes through media, pulpits, and platforms, to corrupt minds and distort truth.

##### **3. Resistance to Truth (v.8)**

Like Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, modern Balaams oppose sound doctrine with polished lies and self-serving messages.

#### **III. How the Modern Day Balaam Is Manifested**

The spirit of Balaam is alive today, and it wears many disguises. Let's pull back the curtain:

#### **Signs of a Modern Balaam:**

1. They turn ministry into a marketplace, prophesying for pay, preaching for applause, and prioritizing profit over people.
2. They mix truth with manipulation, using Scripture to justify sin or cover scandal.
3. They bless what God has cursed and curse what God has blessed for a price.
4. They promote platforms over the Person of Christ.
5. They are driven by ego and entitlement, not by a burden for souls.

Some are sent by money, some are sent by fame, and some are sent by Satan.

But not all are sent by God.

**Modern Balaams are not just false prophets, they are talented liars in religious robes.**

#### **1. Life Application: What Must the Church Do?**

##### **1. Test Every Spirit (1 John 4:1)**

Just because someone says, "God told me," doesn't mean God actually did.

Ask:

- Does their life reflect the fruit of the Spirit?
- Do they align with the Word of God?
- Do they glorify Jesus or themselves?

This is not a call to suspicion, but to discernment. Even sincere leaders

can fall into error, and God's grace calls them, and us, to repentance and restoration.

#### **2. Hold Every Preacher Accountable to the Word**

Don't just quote a preacher, quote the Word. Don't just be entertained, be discerning. Be like the Christians in Berea who "searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth." (*Acts 17:11, NLT*)

#### **3. Know the Word for Yourself**

False teaching thrives where biblical illiteracy abounds. A Church that knows God's Word is hard to deceive.

#### **Choose the Way of the Cross, Not the Path of Profit**

God's people must wake up. Beware of the smooth-talking preacher whose message strokes your ego but neglects your soul. Beware of the prophet who can name your address but won't call you to repentance. The spirit of Balaam is not only outside, but also infiltrating pulpits, platforms, and prayer lines. But God is raising up a discerning church. As Jesus said, "*If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me.*" (*Luke 9:23, NLT*) Let us follow the way of the Cross, not the way of compromise. In a world of fame and filtered truth, where Balaam's spirit walks in a preacher's suit, do not be deceived by the polished sound, for wolves wear wool where sheep are found.

Test every word by the Book and the Blood, be led by the Spirit, not by the flood.

In days of deception, stand bold and strong, truth still triumphs; the Word is not wrong.

So rise, Church of God, with eyes full of fire, not swayed by greed, nor worldly desire.

Beware of Balaam and his modern disguise, stand in the Truth, where no falsehood survives.

#### **Conclusion: A Prayer and Call to Rededication**

Beloved, we are living in perilous times. The spirit of Balaam is not a myth or a metaphor. It is a real and present danger in the modern Church. But Christ is still calling His people to truth, to holiness, and to unwavering commitment.

#### **Prayer of Consecration**

Let us pray.

Father, in the name of Jesus, we come before You humbled and awakened. We confess that at times we've followed voices that sounded right but were rooted in deception. Forgive us for any place in our hearts where we have tolerated Balaam's influence, where we have exchanged truth for comfort, or purity for popularity.

Today, Lord, we ask for discernment. Cleanse our hearts. Renew our minds. Sharpen our ears to Your voice. Empower us to stand boldly on Your Word, even when it costs us.

Raise us up as a discerning people, anchored in Scripture, filled with Your Spirit, and committed to the Cross. And may the Church walk in truth, no matter the cost. In Jesus' name, amen.

#### **Invitation to Rededicate Your Life to Christ**

If you've felt the Holy Spirit stirring your heart today, whether you're in ministry, in the pew, or even on the fringe of the faith, this is your moment. You don't have to keep walking a compromised path. You don't have to remain entangled with voices that pull you away from Jesus. He is calling you back, not to performance, not to public approval, but to a personal, purified walk with Him.

Right where you are, lift your heart and say:

"Lord Jesus, I surrender. I rededicate my life to You. Cleanse me, fill me, use me. Let me be a voice for truth in an age of deception. I belong to You—fully, freely, and forever. Amen."

If you've prayed that prayer in faith, know this: He receives you, He restores you, and He will walk with you forward.

#### **Final Charge:**

Church, beware of Balaam, but even more, become the people God can trust with truth.

Don't follow the crowd, follow Christ. Don't be swayed by trends, be anchored in truth.

"You must remain faithful to the things you have been taught... All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true..." (*2 Timothy 3:14–16, NLT*)

May we be the Church that tests every spirit, lives by the Word, and glorifies Christ alone.

# sankofa



## Looking Back to Move Forward Fulfilling The Need To Know

By Dr. Anthony Browder

### Fulfilling the Need to Know

I've often marveled at the inquisitive nature of a child. I have a young daughter, and every other word from her mouth is centered around a question. Why? How come? Where? When?

Children are born into this world with a natural desire to know. They are bright and observant; nothing escapes their gaze. Hey, take in information and formulate questions based on what they've been exposed to.

Children are natural scientists. The word **scientist** is derived from the Latin word **scri**--which means to *know*. Somewhere between grades 4 and 8, many of our children lose this natural "God-given" talent. Their minds become stifled, and the door to the path of knowledge is shut.

Since we are all born with a natural desire "to know," if we lose this desire somewhere along the road, we have to find out where we lost it in order to get back on the path. Many people feel that the educational system is at fault. Oftentimes, when we're seeking the answer as to who is at fault, if we look within ourselves, we'll find that the answer was right under our noses all the time.

We'll find the key to developing effective educational systems by understanding the meaning of the word **education**. The term is derived from the Latin **educere**, meaning to bring out. The process of education is, therefore, the process of bringing out knowledge that is already inside you. This age-old methodology was first developed and cultivated by our African fore-parents in ancient Egypt.

The institutions for learning, called the *Mystery Schools*, gradually introduced education, progressing through varying levels of instruction. Students in educational environments that are conducive to learning will naturally learn more.

Contrast this situation with modern times. Today, people are force-fed information that often contradicts what they instinctively know to be true. Imagine being taught that in 1492, Columbus discovered America, when **instinctively** you know that there were people already living here who were fully aware of where they were. It's no wonder people don't learn!

The mind is like a computer. If you put nonsense in, you'll get nonsense out. Consistently feeding misinformation into a fertile mind causes it to stagnate. This process is referred to as **atrophy**. This is the failure of an organ to grow because of insufficient nourishment.

As a parent, I made a pledge to myself to keep my mind as fertile as possible so that I could provide positive and meaningful information for my child. In order to fulfill her need to know, I must fulfill mine.

Education is a continuous, ongoing process. It doesn't stop with elementary or high school, college, or graduate school. It continues until you die. A mind is truly a terrible thing to waste.

In the summer of '74, my first year out of college. I began to realize how much I didn't know. That year, I began my enrollment in a life-long educational program which has allowed me to view my existence from a totally new perspective.

For many years, I have devoted my time to the study of Egypt and its impact on world civilizations. I have experienced a profound re-awakening and appreciation of knowledge and history. As I share this information with children and adults in my lectures and seminars, I see in their eyes and feel from their hearts a deep sense of gratitude.

There's more to it than that; however, the knowledge of prior accomplishments establishes a link with the past, which lays a foundation for the future. Everything is rooted in the past. Knowledge is the common pathway between the two. Knowledge can be obtained at any time.

If I were to suggest a daily regimen for African Americans, it would be that we rededicate ourselves to fulfilling the need to know. It is our birthright and our obligation to our children.

### Commentary

When this article was first written, my daughter, Atlantis, was 5 years old and just beginning kindergarten. As a single parent, my responsibilities extended beyond overseeing her physical, spiritual, and mental well-being; I assumed responsibility for teaching her African history and culture.

My daughter attended most of my lectures. She operated the slide projector and took on other responsibilities as she grew older. Atlantis met all the scholars who participated in the seminars that I sponsored, and she attended numerous other forums. When she was seven, I felt she was ready to travel with me on one of my study tours to Egypt.

The following year, we co-authored her first book, which was appropriately titled, *My First Trip To Africa*. She began doing her own lectures when she was eight, and we published her second book when she was 13. This second book detailed her trip to West Africa when she was ten.

Through her books and lectures, Atlantis has been teaching youth and adults the history, culture, and people of Africa. I've gotten many wonderful testimonials from people who gained favorable impressions of Africa as a result of hearing about it through the eyes of a child, instead of biased media.

My daughter is now 17 years old and she will be attending college in the fall. We are currently working on her next two books. One will be on her trip to South Africa, and the other will discuss her trip to Mexico and Brazil. It has been our intention, from the very beginning of our writing projects, that her book sales would help pay for her college education.

I present this story to you as an example of the benefits and power of pursuing an education, fulfilling the need to know, and then sharing your knowledge with others. This desire was planted in me as a youth, and I passed it on to my daughter. Together, we're passing it on to others. It is my hope that we have modeled a tradition that will be passed on down through the generations for centuries to come.

