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2025 Board of  
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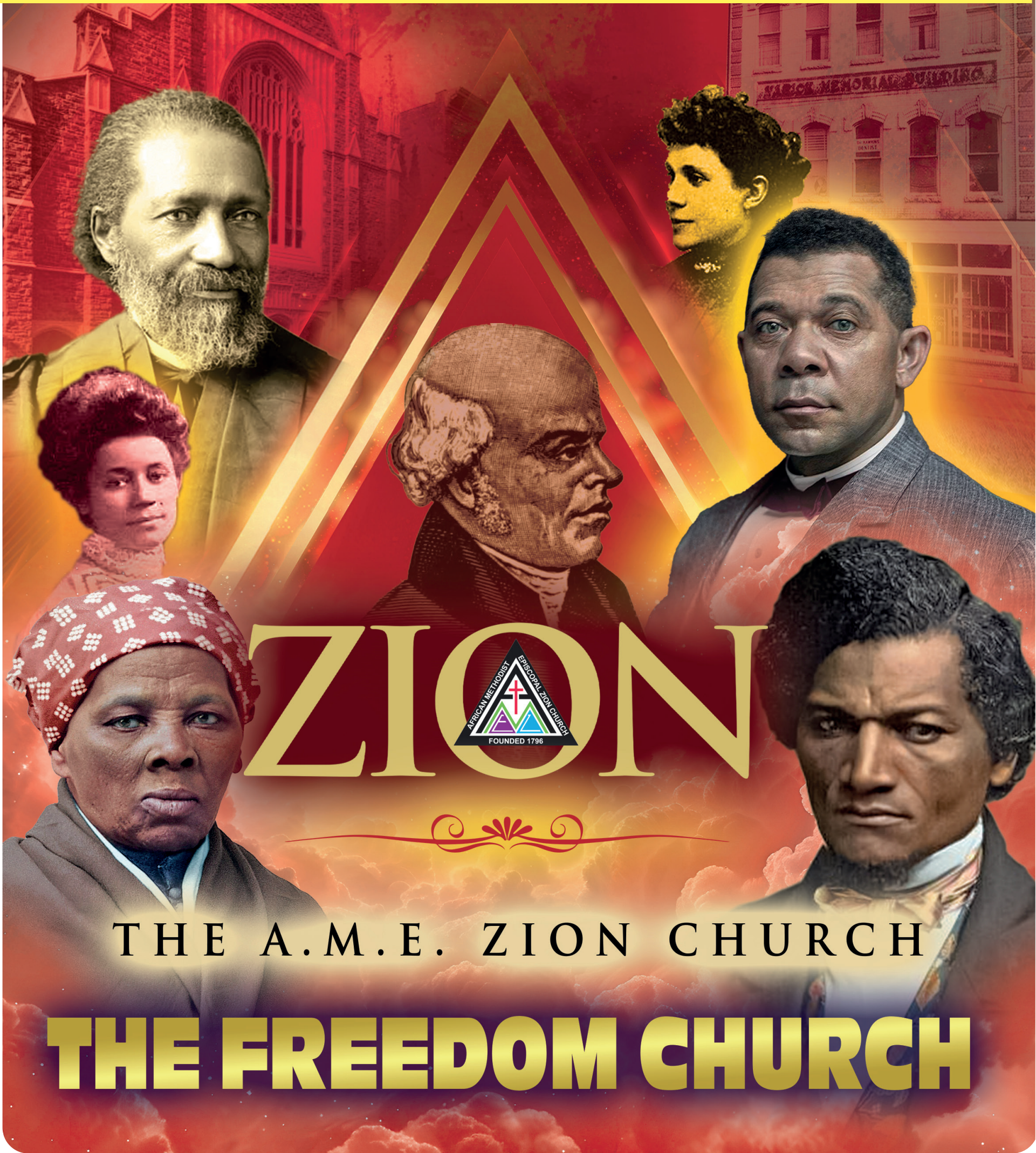
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sankofa Looking Back  
to Move Forward.  
A Conversation  
with Dr. King


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# THE STAR OF ZION

OCTOBER 2025 | VOL 149 NO. 10 | STAROFZION.ORG | THE OFFICIAL VOICE OF THE A.M.E. ZION CHURCH










## 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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Editor@StarOfZion.org

## Zion Spotlight Editor

Mrs. Debra Chappelle-Polk  
ZionSpotlight@StarOfZion.org

## Education Editor

Rev. Roderick J. Josey  
Education@StarOfZion.org

## World Politics Editor

Rev. Ronald Nathan  
WorldPolitics@StarOfZion.org

## Health and Wellness Editor

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## Social Justice Editor

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## Financial Freedom Editor

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## Lifestyle Editor

Ms. Angel Eason  
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## Sports Editor

Ms. Alexxis Hutchinson  
Sports@StarOfZion.org

## Star of Zion Office

704-688-2577  
Office@StarOfZion.org

## Subscriptions Department

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THROUGH  
CHANGE:

“A Global Perspective!”

By Angelia J. Poole

God has charged His people to *“Go ye therefore...”* (Matthew 28:1S-20) and *“to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”* (Micah c:8). To lead God’s people in provoking change across the globe externally, while internally promoting change individually across our denomination is an interesting challenge that can be intimidating for some. I had the distinct privilege of speaking with Retired Bishop Michael A. Frencher, Bishop Daran H. Mitchell, and Bishop Darryl B. Starnes during the 2025 Piedmont Episcopal District Leadership Institute. Hearing their hearts about leading through change globally was quite enlightening and inspiring.

Retired Bishop Frencher, who is currently serving primarily through mentoring in educational settings, began with, *“Everything should be measured from scriptures’ perspective, and we must be grounded in The Word regardless of what’s going on around us.”* He believes wholeheartedly that the church must continue to take its stand. And we stand courageously, for our foundation never changes; it is built on Jesus Christ!

Reflecting on changes in the world reminded Bishop Mitchell of the soap opera, *“As The World Turns”*. He remembered a Tampa church which had the slogan: *“Presenting A Changeless Christ To A Changing World!”* He extended Bishop Frencher’s response with understanding how *‘The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Bible, Tradition, Reason, & Experience’* plays in our faith as we navigate these spaces. He stated, *“Transactional relationships abound which makes the church opposite of the culture. We can’t negotiate in this Christless culture, but Jesus shows us how to navigate when we can’t negotiate.”* He believes it’s imperative we be guided by the mind of Christ, anchored in The Word, and teach it responsibly showing concern for the oppressed and being mindful of what they are facing.

Bishop Starnes expounded even further. *“It’s important for the church to be true to its mission no matter what may be happening politically.”* He cited making disciples, proclaiming the Gospel, and championing the cause of the oppressed as that mission. Championing is part of The A.M.E. Zion Church legacy, which is also part of the prophetic ministry of The Old C New Testaments. He stated, *“The church must at times speak truth*

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| April 2026 Issue.....    | March 15, 2026    |





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

# St. DAVID A.M.E. ZION CHURCH, THE COME BACK CHURCH

By Debra Chappelle-Polk, Zion Spotlight Editor



## THE FIRST “NEW MEMBERS” OF ST. DAVID A.M.E. ZION CHURCH, SAG HARBOR, NEW YORK

October 2025, New York, NY..., St. David A.M.E. Zion Church, located in Sag Harbor, had not held a worship service in 25 years. That all changed on Sunday, August 31st. Members and friends of Mother A.M.E. Zion Church in Harlem got on a bus (and in their cars) and traveled to Sag Harbor for Rev. Dr. Malcolm J. Byrd’s inaugural sermon at St. David. Rev. Byrd, who is pastor at Mother Zion, was also appointed pastor at St. David A.M.E. Zion Church by Bishop George D. Crenshaw, the presiding prelate of the Northeastern Episcopal District, after the New York Annual Conference in July 2025.

St. David is the second-oldest A.M.E. Zion building and is still located at its original location in the Eastville section of Sag Harbor, New York. The Eastville section is one of three African American enclaves in Sag Harbor. St. David A.M.E. Zion Church was founded in 1838 and erected in 1840 by Rev. J.P. Thompson, an abolitionist and confidante of Frederick Douglass, to provide a safe harbor for escaping slaves passing through Sag Harbor, and is recognized as a stop on the Underground Railroad. In fact, the trap door, which concealed a crawlspace in the basement used by fleeing slaves, is still underneath the pulpit at St. David. Many of the congregants took pictures of the tunnel after the service.

## REV. BYRD IN THE BASEMENT LOOKING UP AT THE CRAWLSPACE USED BY FLEEING SLAVES

Established during the 1830s and coinciding with the boom times of Sag Harbor, the Eastville community was a mixed diaspora of Irish, Native American, and African-American workers. It was known as Snooksville (named after the Irish Snooks-Hicks family) and later renamed Eastville for its location east of the village.

The Eastville Community Historical Society of Sag Harbor (founded 1981) also owns, maintains, and preserves the adjacent century-old cemetery where many members of St. David were buried.

Rev. Byrd welcomed all to St. David A.M.E. Zion Church. He said, “Thankfully, this place is filled with preachers and we can’t have them here



without hearing ‘Words from the Ministers’ on this special occasion.” He added, “It will be noted, perhaps 100 years from now, that when a Black church came back alive after 25 years, you were in the room.” Reverend Audrey Williamson, Dr. Demetrius Lawrence, and Bro. Kermit Morris and all shared their thoughts on what a profound and moving experience it was to be at St. David’s for the historic service. Ambassador Rev. Dr. Suzan (Sujay) Johnson Cook, who is also a resident of Sag Harbor, and her houseguest, the Reverend Naomi Tyler Lloyd, Pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in the Bronx, shared similar sentiments.

Following the Call to Worship, the congregation sang a rousing rendition of “This Little Light of Mine,” accompanied by Bro. Timothy G. Smith on the keyboard. Rev. Byrd said, “These are the songs of our people. It doesn’t matter who’s in the White House because we know who’s in the Lighthouse!”

Before beginning his sermon, Rev. Byrd talked about African and Native American influence in Sag Harbor, as well as the history of St. David A.M.E. Zion Church. Rev. Byrd’s “history lesson” was brief, but informative. He urged everyone to learn more about Sag Harbor and St. David A.M.E. Zion Church.

Rev. Byrd’s sermon was lifted from Joshua 4:19-24, the scripture previously read by Rev. Dr. Demetrius Lawrence. “And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. He said to the Israelites, ‘In the future when your descendants ask their parents, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’...He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and so that you might always fear the Lord your God.” Rev. Byrd said, “The 12 stones remain a symbol of God’s faithfulness, just as St. David remains a symbol of our faithfulness, our resilience, and our trust in God. It stands as a beacon of hope for generations to come.”

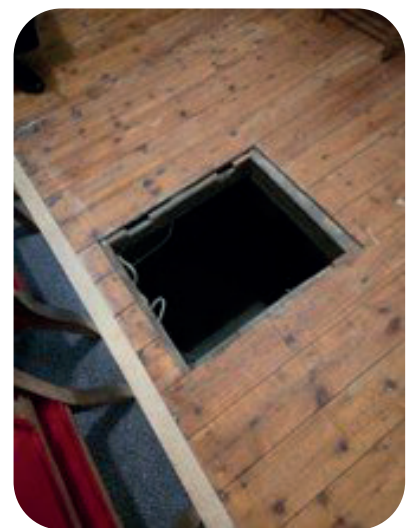
Rev. Byrd said many churches close, but few reopen, and called St. David a Come Back Church. “God,” he said, “has seen fit to revive St. David, and with God’s help and yours, St. David will once again be a thriving church.” Rev. Byrd said, “My plan is to hold services at St. David from Memorial Day to Labor Day, as well as other church and community events. In addition, we will make Harlem at Sag Harbor an annual Labor Day event.”

After the service, the congregation enjoyed a celebratory brunch at the Parish Hall of the Christ Episcopal Church, located a few blocks from St. David, where the Reverend Dr. Cicely Broderick-Guerra is Pastor. There was a huge cake honoring Rev. Byrd’s 42nd birthday, and everyone sang Happy Birthday as he cut his cake.

It was warm and the sun was shining brightly. A perfect day befitting the historic reopening of St. David A.M.E. Zion Church. Before leaving, Rev. Byrd rang the bell in the tower, letting the community and God know that St. David A.M.E. Zion Church is ready to do God’s work.

To God be the glory!

The service will be uploaded to the Mother Zion Facebook page within the next several days.





# Restoration's Camp Embrace 2025

By Rev. Donna Richardson

Restoration A.M.E. Zion Church is a two-year-old church plant being led by the Rev. Donna M. Richardson. This new ministry is part of the Baltimore District, where Rev. Dr. Evalina Huggins serves as the Presiding Elder, and is under the Mid-Atlantic Episcopal District (MAED), with Bishop Brian R. Thompson and Missionary Supervisor Rev. Felica R. Thompson providing episcopal leadership.

Restoration A.M.E. Zion Church marked a historic milestone this summer with the launch of its very first children's camp—Camp Embrace. Thanks to a generous grant from The Foundation for Evangelism, what began as a vision blossomed into a reality on July 17, 2025, in the heart of inner-city Baltimore.

With the support of Bishop Michael Evans of Adonai Ministries, who graciously opened his church as the host site, Camp Embrace welcomed children ages 5–13 for four weeks of faith, fun, and enrichment.

At Restoration, we exemplify the spirit of “EMBRACE” toward all people. This concept of extending a warm “EMBRACE” is rooted in our commitment to **engage, minister, and mentor; build, respect, accept, care for, and encourage** all who enter our doors.

All the children enrolled in Camp Embrace were beautiful and unique in their own way. Many were living through various traumatic life experiences, yet each one showed up ready to receive the relief and joy the camp offered in the midst of their chaotic lives. The theme of the camp was grounded in **Psalm 139:14-16**, reminding the children that they are all part of God's divine plan.

- **Week 1:** *Created With Purpose*
- **Week 2:** *Different by Design (God Made No Mistakes)*
- **Week 3:** *Empowered With Purpose*
- **Week 4:** *We All Need Each Other – Every Part of the Body Matters*

The camp also participated in a **Service Gratitude Project** for the host church by planting flower pots to beautify the exterior, leaving a lasting reminder of their time together.

## Special Thanks

We extend heartfelt gratitude to the many individuals and organizations who made Camp Embrace possible:

- **The Foundation for Evangelism** for their generous grant support
- **Bishop Michael Evans, First Lady Evan, and the Deacons of Adonai Ministries** for their radical hospitality
- **Rev. Dr. Eleazar Merriweather, CGD, Mentorship**
- **Rev. Jeanette Banks, Judah Temple, Co-Camp Director**
- **Ms. Francis Watkins, Judah Temple, Volunteer Camp Leader**
- **Mr. Isiah Bank, Judah Temple, who worked in various capacities over the four weeks**
- **Bria Gittens, Restoration A.M.E. Zion, Camp Leader**
- **Kendal Ingram, Adonai Ministries, Camp Leader**
- **Dr. Patricia Webley-Bethune, STEM**
- **Rev. Leslie Barnett Davis, Christian Education Director**
- **Kyra Baker, Health & Movement**
- **Sharon Hassan, Baltimore District Missionary President,**

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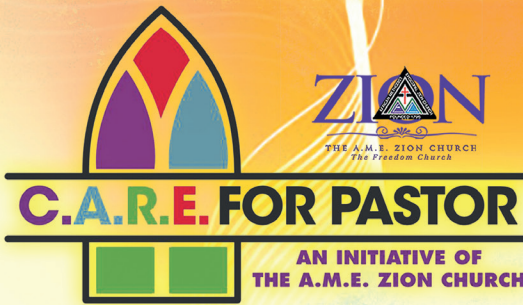
- **Carletta Jones, Art & Self-Expression**
- **Attorney Karla Moses, Penn Ave. A.M.E. Zion, Legal Advisor**
- **Deoleous Parker, Baltimore District Lay, Penn Ave., Guidance**
- **Nalicia Good, MSW, LMSW, Baltimore State Compliance Guidance**
- **Greg Lewis and American Limousine, Generous Transportation Assistance**
- **Kimberly Campbell, for covering the complete financial obligation for the Top Golf trip**

Restoration also extends heartfelt thanks to the **Church Growth and Development Department** and **Rev. Dr. Eleazar Merriweather**, whose tremendous support and wise guidance have strengthened both the leadership and long-term vision of this ministry. Under the direction of **Pastor Donna Richardson**, Camp Embrace stands as a shining example of what can happen when faith, community, and vision come together.

This first year of Camp Embrace is only the beginning. Restoration looks forward to expanding its impact and continuing to provide children with a place where they can **grow, dream, and embrace the fullness of who God created them to be.**

In light of the vision to continue this initiative, **if you are interested in helping us build out and sustain this necessary work, please consider donating to this worthy cause.** You can visit our website at [www.restorationamezion.com](http://www.restorationamezion.com) and give as God leads your heart.

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*Continued from page 2.....*



*ing now, they see voting matters!”* He challenges us to make this our opportunity to galvanize those who didn’t exercise their right to vote into actively engaged voters so that right leaders are placed, not just in the presidency, but across all political platforms.

*to power when power is operating in a way that oppresses a people.”*

It was Bishop Starnes’ closing thoughts that hit home. *“We have consistently said that voting matters, and for many years, many people have thought it didn’t matter, but because of what they are experienc-*

As I listened to our senior leaders discuss leading through change, I began recognizing the unique difficulties of their charge. As they faithfully forge ahead, God calls us to support them in prayer and to stoically stand on our mission... As we faithfully lead through change, FOCUS Is Our Fuel!



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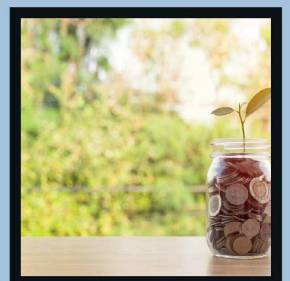
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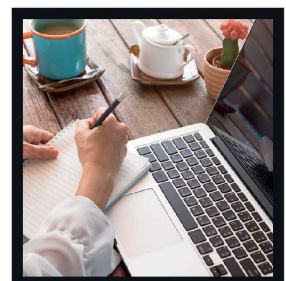
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# A.M.E. Zion Church 2025 Board of Bishops and Connectional Council



By Rev. Roderick J. Josey, Education Editor

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 Efi-fiong (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. Chuka 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” into “**The KINGDOM AGENDA: From Church Mentality to Kingdom Mentality.**” Each service was marked by congregational singing,





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

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



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.

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



# Greensboro District Holds its First Mass Meeting of the 2025-2026 Conference Year

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

*Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. 2 Timothy 2:1-2 (KJV)*

The Greensboro District Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society (WH&OMS) held its first Mass Meeting of the 2025-2026 Conference Year on Saturday, August 9, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. at Wesley Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, Asheboro, NC, where Pastor Reverend Dr. Tracii Miller and her congregation served as hosts for the meeting.

The Mass Meeting, as always, was truly an inspiration and a blessing. Dr. Edna Y. Adams-Fulton, our Missionary District President, presided over the meeting.



The Call to Worship and Invocation preceded the morning hymn "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less," which was followed by the Scripture reading, 2 Timothy 2:1-2 (KJV), by Ms. Janie Cunningham, and a loving prayer by Reverend Linda Robinson. Words of Welcome were extended by Mrs. Loretta Woodle on behalf of the Wesley Chapel Church family. Following the words of welcome, a musical selection, 'For the Rest of My Life, I'll Serve the Lord,' was enjoyed by all. The morning meditation speaker, Reverend Dr. Timothy Freeman, Pastor of [Trinity A.M.E. Zion Church](#), was introduced by Presiding Elder Reverend Dr. Kevin W. McGill, Sr. After which, Pastor Freeman blessed us with a mighty and thought-provoking message. His text was taken from 2 Timothy 2:1-2. The subject was entitled, "The Ripple Effect". Pastor Freeman reminded us to be strong in the Grace



of Christ, to trust yourself to trust someone else, and to be rooted in God's Word. He noted that when 'a rock' hits the body (of Christ), there can be a ripple effect, but we should know that Grace and Trust will get things moving again; we must be able to lean on Jesus—walking by faith and not by sight. Following the powerful meditation message, Pastor Miller extended an invitation to

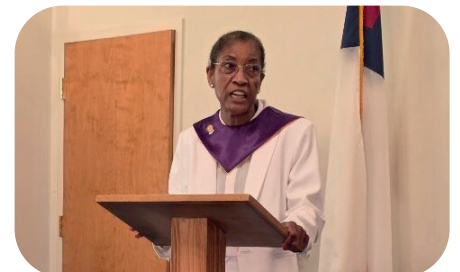
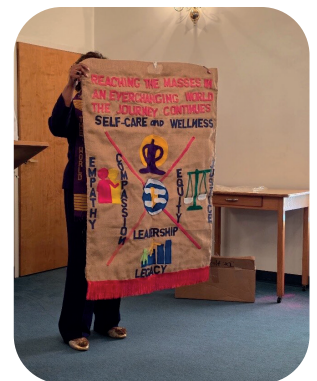
Christian discipleship.

Mrs. Linda Goins provided the financial report.

Following the financial report, a banner presentation representing 'attendance support' was presented by Ms. Phyllis Marshall to the following churches: Trinity, McAuley, and Bellview. An election of officers followed—administered by Presiding Elder Reverend Dr. McGill. The election concluded that the Greensboro District Women's Home & Overseas Missionary Society Officers will remain the same for the 2025-2026 Conference Year. Elections were held for the following positions: Treasurer, Recording Secretary, and Corresponding Secretary. It was moved and properly seconded that Mrs. Linda Goins, Ms. Dwan Covington, and Ms. Phyllis Marshall be retained in these positions, respectively.



As a beginning to the new Conference Year, President Adams-Fulton provided a teachable moment presentation on 'Know Your Missionaries'. She also presented the Piedmont WH&OMS Banner, which was the winner of the national competition at the General Convention in New Orleans, Louisiana. The Banner was designed by Ms. Selenia Hinson and Dr. Edna Adams-Fulton from the WCNC Conference. It uniquely displayed our Missionary theme for this Quadrennial—Reaching the Masses in an ever-Changing World: The Journey Continues 'Self-Care and Wellness, Equity and Justice, Lead-



ership and Legacy, and Empathy and Compassion'. Simultaneously, during the Banner presentation, Director of Mission Education, Mrs. Nina Ingram, introduced the current theme—Leadership and Legacy—explaining its significance and importance to missionaries of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society as we strive to lift up our motto, which is 'The World for Christ'.

Mrs. Christine Murdock provided the courtesy report expressing gratitude and thanks to all as she lifted highlights from the service, noting that love was prevalent upon arrival. She thanked everyone for sharing their time and talents.

Closing remarks were given by President Adams-Fulton and Presiding Elder Dr. Kevin W. McGill, Sr. President Adams-Fulton graciously thanked everyone for their participation and presence at the **First Greensboro District Mass Meeting of the 2025-2026 Conference Year**, and Presiding Elder Dr. McGill commended all for their dedication and hard work. Following announcements and grace, the meeting adjourned with the Missionary Benediction. Lunch was served from the Fellowship Hall.





# MRS. CANDICE HAMPTON APPOINTED CED DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN- *KNOXVILLE DISTRICT TENNESSEE ANNUAL CONFERENCE*

By Rose Davis, Church Clerk, First  
A.M.E. Zion  
Photos By Candice Hampton

Knoxville, TN, October 2025..., Mrs. Candice Hampton has been appointed the Director of Children for the Knoxville District of the Tennessee Annual Conference. She is a member of First A.M.E. Zion Church located at 1900 McCalla Ave., Knoxville, TN. The pastor is Rev. Michael J. McNair.

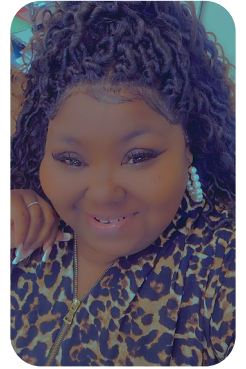
Candice is very active in her local church as well as across the District. She loves working with children and thoroughly enjoys working with the Christian Education Department (CED). She feels that her contribution to kingdom building is the training up of the children. Candice has been involved with many CED projects for this conference year and contributed to the wonderful turnout for the Back to School Bash held at First A.M.E. Zion Church.

Candice also assists with the Knoxville District Dance Ministry, directed by Sis. Lawana Smith, who is also the Director of Youth, Knoxville District.



Knoxville District Dance Ministry

This past summer, Candice worked with the children who attended the District Vacation Bible School. Candice surely is no stranger to children on the district level and will be a most valuable asset to the CED, making her appointment as director a more



attainable endeavor. She's planning a banner year for children of the Knoxville District, Tennessee Conference, including activities and other projects, and events that contribute to growth and development.



Being around children and sharing the love of Christ with them gives Candice great joy. The children all love "Mrs. Candice," and she reciprocates.

The Knoxville District welcomes Mrs. Candice Hampton aboard.

## Womanhood Weekend at the Hood

By Annette W. Braden

It was good to be at the Hood on August 29th, 30th, and 31st. These days will be long remembered by the women, other members, and guests of Hood Temple A.M.E. Zion Church.



On Friday evening, we enjoyed fellowship with a light meal and a movie. The following morning at 10:00 a.m., a prayer breakfast was held. Rev. Amanda Harper, associate pastor to youth and young adults at First Baptist Church, Mechanicsville, VA, brought us the message from Psalm 39. Her subject was "A Unique God for a Unique You". This was spiritual food to nourish our souls and fill our minds with the message of faith, hope, and love for our unique selves as teachers, students, encouragers, listeners, helpers, or whatever He made us to be. Following her message, she was presented a gift for her insightful, thoughtful, and provoking discourse from the hospitality representative, Mrs. Annette Braden.

A prayer circle was then formed, and several women prayed specific prayers. "God Made Me With Purpose": Ms. Valerie Marks; "My Worth Comes From Christ": Mrs. Jessie Batchelor; "I'm Being Renewed Daily": Mrs. LaKeisha Johnson Wyatt; "My Life Has Eternal Value": Mrs. Regina Rivera; and concluding the program was the prayer by Rev. Gloria Coleman, "We are Master-Pieces Together".



On Sunday morning, we were blessed with a powerful and dynamic sermon delivered by our guest minister, Rev. Anita Frencher, Associate Minister and first lady of New Hope A.M.E. Zion Church. Her text was taken from Joshua 2:1-18, and her title was "Lessons From a Prostitute, the story of Rehab". She stated, "There is more than what meets the eye, you are more than what meets the eye. Rehab did not pretend to be someone else, neither should you, for you are enough".

Mrs. Alethea Holmes, our first lady and the leader of our Womanhood group, keeps us motivated, energized, and seeking to grow spiritually. Mrs. Karen Isaac was the program chairman for the Sunday worship service. Mrs. Armeta Allen was the worship leader, and guest soloists were Elder Rosalind Christian and Rev. Almata Ingram Miller.

We were grateful to have had the mother of Mrs. Holmes, Mrs. Venessa Sellars, her sister, Kenita McLaughlin, and niece, Sydni McLaughlin, from Durham, NC, visit with us, and many other guests from the city.

Rev. Joshua D. Holmes is the pastor of Hood Temple A.M.E. Zion Church. We thank him for his encouragement and assistance in all that we attempt to accomplish. May our next "Womanhood at the Hood" be as spiritual and uplifting as was this our first.





# Mt. Tabor is at it again! Supporting Students and Teachers with Backpacks and School Supplies

By Rev. Roderick J. Josey, Education Editor

Mt. Tabor A.M.E. Zion Church in Avondale, PA, has once again demonstrated its commitment to the community by giving back to students and teachers in need. For the **second consecutive year**, the church, under the leadership of **Reverend Roderick J. Josey, Senior Pastor**, successfully provided backpacks filled with school supplies to local students while also supplying essential items to teachers to help them prepare for a successful school year. This year, Mt. Tabor's generosity extended to two key locations: the **Community Youth and Women's Alliance (CYWA) in Coatesville, Pennsylvania**, and **Kenilworth Elementary School in Bowie, Maryland**.

The initiative stems from the church's ongoing mission to support education and uplift the lives of young people in surrounding communities. Leaders at Mt. Tabor recognize that having the proper tools for learning is critical for academic success. For many students, access to basic school supplies can make a significant difference in their ability to focus, engage, and thrive in the classroom. By providing backpacks stocked with notebooks, pencils, pens, markers, and other essential supplies, Mt. Tabor is helping to remove barriers to learning and give students the confidence to succeed.

"We believe that education is one of the most powerful ways to create opportunities for our youth," said Reverend Roderick J. Josey. "By equipping students and teachers with the supplies they need, we hope to inspire confidence, motivation, and a love for learning that will last throughout the school year and beyond."

At the **Community Youth and Women's Alliance in Coatesville**, Mt. Tabor volunteers distributed backpacks and supplies directly to students. The atmosphere was filled with excitement and gratitude as children received colorful backpacks filled with the tools they need to succeed. Teachers at the organization also received classroom supplies, allowing them to better serve their students and create engaging, resource-rich learning environments.

In **Bowie, Maryland**, at Kenilworth Elementary School, the church's outreach continued with a similar focus. Students and teachers alike were thrilled to receive backpacks and classroom resources. For many children, these donations represent more than just school supplies—they are a tangible reminder that their community believes in their potential and wants to see them succeed. Teachers also expressed their appreciation, noting that the additional supplies will help them better support their students throughout the academic year.

Mt. Tabor's efforts highlight the importance of community engagement, and the role faith-based organizations play in supporting education. By focusing on both students and teachers, the church is addressing multiple layers of need: students gain the tools to thrive, while teachers are empowered to create more effective, engaging learning



experiences.

One of the remarkable aspects of Mt. Tabor's initiative is that it is part of a broader, ongoing commitment to the community. This annual effort is a continuation of the church's long-standing dedication to uplifting those around them, particularly underserved populations who may not have access to essential resources. Over the years, Mt. Tabor has organized numerous outreach programs,

including holiday giving drives, food donations, and community events, all aimed at strengthening the bonds within the community and providing practical support where it is most needed.

Volunteers from the church played an instrumental role in the success of this year's backpack and school supply drive. From organizing donations to personally delivering backpacks and supplies, the volunteers demonstrated the church's commitment to hands-on service. Their efforts not only ensured that the students and teachers received the materials they needed but also created meaningful interactions, leaving a lasting impression on both the recipients and those giving back.

"This isn't just about giving out backpacks," a volunteer shared. "It's about showing these students that their community cares, that people are rooting for them, and that their success matters. We hope this small gesture encourages them to dream big and pursue their goals with determination."

The impact of Mt. Tabor's efforts is already evident. Students are entering the school year with the confidence that comes from having the right tools, and teachers are better equipped to create engaging, effective classrooms. Beyond the tangible benefits of the supplies themselves, the initiative fosters a sense of community, belonging, and encouragement—reminding everyone involved that support, care, and generosity can have a powerful ripple effect.

Looking ahead, Mt. Tabor A.M.E. Zion Church, under Reverend Josey's leadership, plans to continue this annual tradition, expanding its reach to more schools and community organizations in the coming years. By doing so, the church hopes to touch even more lives, inspiring both students and teachers to reach their full potential and reinforcing the importance of community, faith, and service.

Mt. Tabor's dedication to giving back is a shining example of how faith-based organizations can play a transformative role in the lives of young people. Through initiatives like this backpack and school supply drive, the church is not only meeting immediate needs but also investing in the future of the communities it serves.

For those interested in supporting Mt. Tabor A.M.E. Zion Church's ongoing outreach programs, donations of school supplies, backpacks, or volunteer time are always welcome. Together, the church and community can continue to make a lasting difference in the lives of students, teachers, and families across Pennsylvania and Maryland.





# Presiding Elder Kenneth Crowder Among Top Honorees at 2025 HBCU Living Legends Scholarship Gala

By Star of Zion News

Winston-Salem, NC The Benton Convention Center was alive with excitement and celebration on Saturday, August 16, as the HBCU Living Legends Scholarship Gala honored 33 exceptional individuals while raising funds for future generations of leaders. Three distinguished alumni from each of North Carolina's current Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were celebrated for their outstanding contributions and unwavering dedication. Among them was Rev. Kenneth Crowder, Presiding Elder of the Norfolk District Virginia Conference of the A.M.E Zion Church, who truly exemplifies the spirit of an HBCU Living Legend.

A proud alumnus of Barber-Scotia College, Rev. Crowder's impressive resume boasts a wealth of leadership and entrepreneurial en-



deavors. He served as a member of the Norfolk State University Board of Visitors and is a retired Trustee member of Livingstone College.

Moreover, Crowder has achieved remarkable entrepreneurial success, including a 36-year tenure with the Kenneth W. Crowder State Farm Agency and founding Sole Right Men's Fine Footwear, where Crowder is noted as the largest independent Mezlan dealer in the United States. A testament to his lifelong commitment to service is his over 40 years of ministry in the Hampton Roads, Virginia area, and his 50-year membership in Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Incorporated. His dedication to community is mirrored by his wife,



Sandra B. Crowder, who holds the prestigious position of eighteenth International President of the Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society.

Along with Rev. Crowder, three Livingstone College alumni were also recognized. Thomas Rudy Abrams, the college's former CIAA Football title coach, April Davis Hamilton, a former track-n-field athlete who is a distinguished accountant and non-profit treasurer, and

Olympic Gold Medalist, Quanera Hayes, were acknowledged for their exceptional accomplishments.

The HBCU Living Legends Scholarship Gala serves a dual mission to increase awareness of the excellence within these institutions by celebrating the achievements of their alumni and to provide scholarships to deserving students currently enrolled in North Carolina's HBCUs. The gala acknowledged and supported the next wave of talented students by awarding scholarships to 18 undergraduates, and three are Livingstone College Presidential Scholars. Sophomores Muhammad Ibrahim, Madalyn Jones, and Emmanuella Nyarko were among the talented students who were awarded \$1,000 scholarships.



This year's gala, under the leadership of honorary co-chairs Chief

William Penn Jr. of the Winston Salem Police Department, Dr. Terra Phelps Jones, United States Inspector General, and Coach George Williams, Olympic track coach and former track coach, was a resounding success. The event showcased the profound impact of HBCUs on individuals and communities alike, demonstrating how the legacy of these institutions continues to shape future generations of leaders and change-makers.





# Clinton College Golden Bears Shine at Fall 2025 Convocation



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

By Rev. Roderick J. Josey, Education Editor

Photos By Clinton College

Clinton College's Fall 2025 Opening Convocation drew a remarkable turnout at the Rock Hill, South Carolina campus on September 10, 2025. Students, faculty, and staff alike – the proud Golden Bears – filled the hall in a sea of sharp attire and academic robes, each person exuding school pride. As a distinguished HBCU, Clinton College's tradition of “academic excellence” and community was on full display. Attendees cheered and greeted one another in celebration, underscoring the college's supportive spirit as everyone gathered to launch the new academic year.



The atmosphere was festive and energetic from start to finish. Upbeat music and applause accompanied the processional, and students happily sang the alma mater with smiles and school colors everywhere. A highlight was the formal induction of new students into the Clinton family – a time-honored tradition at HBCUs – as student leaders presented freshmen with symbolic tokens of welcome. Such moments reflected the college's



mission of empowering each Golden Bear with “the knowledge, skills, and confidence to succeed”. Faculty mentors and upperclassmen beamed as they handed down this support and wisdom, reinforcing the **vibrant, closeknit community** that Clinton College prides itself on.

Clinton College's 14th president, **Dr. Pamela Richardson Wilks**, delivered the keynote address, energizing the crowd with her vision for the







year ahead. Just weeks into her tenure, Dr. Wilks praised the Golden Bears for their resilience and vowed to uphold the college's sacred legacy of faith and scholarship. She challenged students to pursue bold goals – echoing the Board's high hopes that Clinton would “continue to thrive as one of the strong beacons of education and empowerment”. Special recognitions also punctuated the program: leaders announced awards for outstanding students and faculty, shining a spotlight on those who exemplify Clinton's commitment to excellence. The convocation concluded with cheers and campus songs, uniting everyone in optimism for the new semester.



Every detail of the day – from the formal ceremony to the songs and speeches – reinforced Clinton College's longstanding mission “**to transform lives through liberal arts education, spiritual development, and leadership**”. In her closing remarks, Dr. Wilks reminded the community that this convocation was a recommitment to those goals. With strong turnout and Golden Bear spirit on full display, the Fall 2025 Convocation set an upbeat tone for the year, leaving Clinton College energized and ready to achieve greater things together.

## Clinton College Volleyball Raises \$21,530 in Just 21 Days!

### By Clinton College Communications

The Clinton College Volleyball Team has scored a major victory off the court, raising an impressive **\$21,530 in just 21 days** through a successful online fundraising campaign. Partnering with **Anython Carolinas** and their innovative platform **Anython.com**, the team averaged nearly \$1,000 a day to support equipment upgrades and travel expenses for the upcoming season.

Support poured in from across the nation, with donations received from **24 different states** — a true testament to the wide reach and strong community that stands behind Golden Bear athletics.

One standout in the campaign was **Jayme Reynolds**, who raised an incredible **\$5,775**, making her the top individual performer. Her com-



mitment and determination helped push the campaign past its goal and inspired her teammates and supporters alike.

Head Coach and players alike expressed their gratitude to **Anython Carolinas** for providing a platform that made the campaign both successful and engaging. “This effort shows what can happen when a community rallies behind its student-athletes,” one supporter shared.

Clinton College extends heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed. Each gift, large or small, played a role in strengthening the program and ensuring that student-athletes have the resources they need to succeed both on and off the court.

**The Golden Bears are ready to take the season by storm — and it's all thanks to you!**



# Hood Seminary Launches 2025–26 Academic Year with Convocation

## *A Sacred Gathering to Begin the Year*

By Rev. Roderick J. Josey, Education Editor

Hood Theological Seminary kicked off the 2025–2026 academic year with an inspiring Opening Convocation on **Friday, September 12, 2025**. The ceremony was held at 6:00 p.m. in the Aymer Center on the Salisbury, N.C. campus. In a spirit of worship and reflection, students, faculty, alumni, and friends gathered for prayer and song to mark this new beginning. The theme of unity and community was made clear by reading **Psalm 133:1**: “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity”. Organizers encouraged everyone to “step into this new season with hope, courage, and expectation of what God will do,” setting a hopeful tone for the year ahead.

The convocation service emphasized **fellowship and shared purpose**. Attendees sang hymns and joined in prayer, welcoming God’s presence as they embarked on the academic journey together. Scripture and reflections underscored the value of unity in the faith community. In keeping with Hood’s broad mission, the event drew participants from the seminary’s diverse community – students, alumni, staff, and church leaders from many backgrounds. By invoking Psalm 133, the convocation highlighted that sense of harmony and cooperation: the verse likens unity to “precious oil” and *dew of Hermon*, blessings symbolizing God’s favor. After the formal service, the gathering continued with time for fellowship. Alumni and returning students connected with newcomers over refreshments, celebrating the seminary’s community life before the semester’s work begins.

The featured speaker for the evening was **Rev. Dr. Dominique A. Robinson, DMin**, who delivered a keynote address to inspire the new year.

Dr. Robinson is the John E. Hines Assistant Professor of Preaching at the Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Texas, and is also an ordained itinerant Elder in The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. In her remarks, she drew on her pastoral and academic experience in preaching and ministry, reminding the Hood community of the

strength found in faith and unity. She urged students and faculty to face the coming year with bold faith and courage, echoing the convocation’s theme of unity. Her address wove together biblical inspiration and practical encouragement, leaving attendees uplifted and focused on their shared mission.



Overall, the 2025 Opening Convocation set a tone of **hope and purpose** for Hood Seminary’s community. Hood Theological Seminary – “a graduate and professional school sponsored by The A.M.E. Zion Church” – is committed to preparing students for “bold and creative leadership for the Christian church for a diverse world”. The convocation’s focus on unity, worship, and mutual support reflected that mission, reminding all that they are embarking together on a year of learning and service. As the academic year begins, students and faculty leave the gathering inspired and confident, ready to pursue their studies “with hope, courage, and expectation” of what God will do in and through their community.



**Sources:** Hood Theological Seminary announced the convocation date, time, and details on its website. Psalm 133:1 and other biblical references are from the New International Version of the Bible. Background on Rev. Dr. Dominique A. Robinson and Hood Seminary’s missions are drawn from official seminary sources.



# Hood Theological Seminary Celebrates Historic Double Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

By Dierdre R. Parker

Salisbury, N.C. – August 27, 2025 – Hood Theological Seminary made history on Wednesday, August 27, by hosting a *double ribbon-cutting ceremony*, a first for the Rowan County Chamber of Commerce. The Seminary officially celebrated the opening of the **George E. Battle Jr. Welcome and Student Center** and the **Iris Miller Battle Auditorium**, marking a significant milestone in its ongoing commitment to excellence in theological education and community engagement.



The event brought together Seminary leadership, students, community members, and Chamber representatives to witness this historic occasion. The double ribbon cutting highlights the Seminary's continued growth and underscores its role as a vital institution in Rowan County and beyond.



"We are deeply honored to dedicate these two spaces that will serve as hubs for learning, fellowship, and worship," said President Vergel

Lattimore. "This milestone affirms Hood's commitment to preparing visionary leaders for the church and the world while strengthening our ties to the community."

The George E. Battle Jr. Welcome and Student Center will serve as a



warm gathering space for students and visitors. At the same time, the Iris Miller Battle Auditorium will provide a state-of-the-art venue for worship, lectures, and community events.

The Rowan County Chamber of Commerce praised the Seminary for this unique achievement, noting that no organization had ever held a double ribbon-cutting.

Hood Theological Seminary remains dedicated to its mission of providing a Christ-centered education that empowers students to lead with integrity, compassion, and vision.

<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1K6xaDHFmr/>

For more information about Hood Theological Seminary, visit [www.hoodseminary.edu](http://www.hoodseminary.edu)

## Media Contact:

Dierdre R. Parker  
Marketing & Communications Coordinator  
704-636-7611  
[dparker@hoodseminary.edu](mailto:dparker@hoodseminary.edu)

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# Saying Yes to Livingstone, Saying Yes to Myself: The Journey of Kamari Scales

By Kamari Scales, Junior English Education Student

**“FULL RIDE”.** When I found the fateful email, buried in my spam folder like a wonderfully kept secret, I was coincidentally ranting to a friend about the expenses of college. We had been going to the gym together, but I could not focus on exercising. The two bold words kept dancing around in my head. I was closing in on the last few months of my senior year of high school; I did not have enough money to cover tuition for the school I had originally chosen. Then, there was Livingstone College, a small school I had never heard of before. Out of the twenty or so schools I applied to, Livingstone was the only school to fully celebrate my academic achievements, offering to absorb the full cost of my education. The burden of paying for college, heavy as the dumbbells I struggled to hold, had finally been dropped.

My parents were excited for me, but I was hesitant to change my mind about my college decision. My high school was in the small but growing town of Gibsonville. Even though I had Black and Brown classmates, the population was still predominantly white. I secretly longed for the HBCU experience, so I took advantage of CFNC’s Free Application Week and applied to many different HBCUs. I knew deep down that I wanted to be somewhere that had history and a connection to those who came before me. I wanted that sense of belonging, of being surrounded by people who looked like me, of being immersed in a culturally unique environment. Despite my desire for this experience, my hesitancy to change my mind was fueled by uncertainty. Was Livingstone the place for me? Was I an idiot for not wanting to accept a full ride to a school I had never heard of? What did it say about my character? How did I know I was making the right choice?



Later that night, I spoke with my father. He understood my hesitation to make such a big decision because he had to make a similar one. Instead of attending his father’s alma mater, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, he chose to attend a predominantly white institution far from home to begin his own legacy. Eventually, he came back home to AggieLand for his graduate studies and is now a proud alumnus of both institutions. Knowing my father’s story was another reason I chose Livingstone, because I wanted to be different from my other classmates who were all going to the same schools. Knowing my indecisiveness gets in the way of my decision-making, my father kept his advice simple and short: “Go to Salisbury and try it out. If you don’t like it, you can come back home, and we’ll do something else. At least say you tried.”

With my father’s encouragement, I scheduled a campus tour and quickly decided that

Livingstone was where I needed to be.

However, adjusting to college life presented me with some ups and downs. I had never been away from my parents for a long period of time. I cried like a baby on freshmen move-in day and every day after. My social anxiety skyrocketed around all the new people, who all seemed like they had been friends forever. I had never felt so alone.

Despite my discomfort in the new environment, I eventually became more comfortable and made a few friends.

Freshman year ended, and I realized that I only took a few steps outside of my comfort zone. I joined some clubs, most notably the Student Activities Board, placing myself in more social situations than I was used to. But I had not gone anywhere. I declined to go to the CIAA tournament in Baltimore because I did not want to miss class. I did not go to the Honda Campus All-Star Challenge Quiz Bowl Tournament in California because...I did not want to miss class.



Opportunities, and life, were passing by just as quickly as freshman year ended. I looked back and thought, “What did I even do this year? What do I tell people when I go back home? What was the point of joining all these things but not reaping the rewards for my hard work?”

There was only one answer: Instead of saying no, I had to say yes.

So, in my sophomore year, I vowed to use my time at Livingstone to become the woman I was destined to be. I planned to leave behind my fears and uncertainty by embracing saying, “Yes”.

One of the first things I said yes to was attending the National Championship Tournament in California with our Honda Campus All-Star Challenge Quiz Bowl team. I had never been on a plane, nor had I been on the West Coast. Going to California was an amazing trip! The highlight was going to Disneyland and meeting my favorite Disney princess, Tiana, eating at her restaurant, and riding on her new park attraction. Seeing Princess Tiana, a character who looked like me and who I deeply admire for her work ethic, reaffirmed that I had made the right decision to say yes to the trip and to attending Livingstone.

I did a lot more last school year, but of everything I did, perhaps my proudest achievement is becoming a member of the Sigma chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. During the campus tour that helped solidify my decision to attend Livingstone, I was introduced to Alyssa Walker-Gurnell, the first Zeta I had ever met. She was knowledgeable and opinionated, and her pride in the school impressed me.

Two years later, I stood behind Alyssa as she helped lead my sisters and me to the stage on the night of our new members’ presentation. The auditorium lights beamed down strong and bright, blinding me from seeing my proud family and friends in the crowd, but I could hear my mother loud and clear in the front row: “That’s my baby!” After the show, I stood inside the gate of our Zeta plot, basking in the cool rain, silently celebrating the new path added to my Livingstone journey. The road to Zeta, another story in itself, was not easy, yet it was undeniably one of the most fulfilling moments of my life so far. Saying, “Yes!” to joining a sorority was just one step on the list of things I planned to accomplish. Most importantly, I realize that saying yes to attending Livingstone was the catalyst of my inevitable growth and success.

As I embark on my junior year at Livingstone, I cannot think of a reason why I would not return. Livingstone has given me more than a chance to further my education – it has given me the opportunity to grow and learn, a safe place to make mistakes, and life lessons that I will carry with me forever.

If given the chance to do it all over again, there would be only one concrete answer: “Yes”.





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

# Livingstone College Community Demands Justice After Student Traumatized at Florida Traffic Stop

By Rev. Roderick J. Josey, Education Editor

On a routine February traffic stop in Jacksonville, Florida, William McNeil Jr., a 22-year-old biology major and member of the Livingstone College Blue Thunder Marching Band, found himself at the center of a violent confrontation that has since sparked outrage and calls for accountability.



Footage captured by a camera mounted inside McNeil's car shows him seated behind the wheel, asking officers why he was being pulled over and repeatedly requesting a supervisor. Moments later, a deputy shatters the driver-side window, striking McNeil in the face, dragging him from the vehicle, and delivering multiple punches. According to police reports, once on the ground, McNeil was punched six times in the hamstring of his right thigh. He sustained a concussion, a broken tooth that pierced his lip, and required stitches.

At a subsequent news conference in Jacksonville, McNeil, speaking



softly, recounted the ordeal: "That day I just really wanted to know why I was getting pulled over ... I knew I didn't do anything wrong. I was really just scared." His legal team, led by civil rights attorney Ben Crump, denounced conflicting statements within official reports—particularly an assertion that McNeil reached for a knife, a claim disputed by both video footage and a second officer's account. Crump and other advocates are pursuing a federal lawsuit and urging the termination

of the involved officers.

Livingstone College President Dr. Anthony J. Davis responded swiftly. In a heartfelt statement, he expressed disbelief upon learning of McNeil's identity in the distressing video: "This young man checks all the boxes," Davis said, highlighting McNeil's character, volunteer efforts,



and academic dedication. He affirmed, "The entire Blue Bear Nation stands behind and beside Will, who is fighting for his, and all of our, civil rights to be protected from police brutality."

The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office and the Florida State Attorney's Office cleared the officers of criminal wrongdoing, sparking criticism from McNeil's legal team, who accused authorities of attempting to "whitewash" the events. An internal investigation by the sheriff's



office remains ongoing amid mounting public scrutiny.

McNeil's ordeal has resonated across HBCU and faith communities. His peers and leaders have rallied behind him, demanding transparency and reform. Dr. Davis invoked the enduring words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," urging readers to stand alongside Will in seeking justice.

As this case unfolds, the Livingstone College community stands firm: this is more than one student's trauma—it is a sober reminder of the urgent need for equity, protection, and respect for Black lives.



# OMEGAS PROVIDE SCHOOL SUPPLIES, HAIRCUTS TO LOCAL

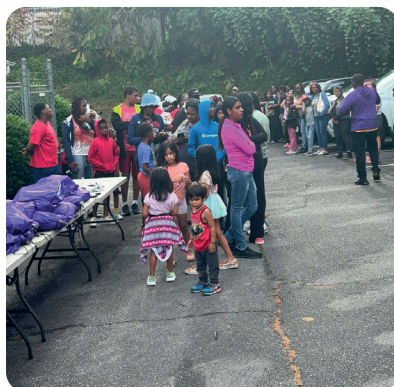
By Richard L. Williams

WINSTON-SALEM, NC — Members of Psi Phi chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc. made sure students had necessary school supplies – as well as a fresh look – when they returned to class after the summer break. This month, Psi Phi, in conjunction with local organizations and businesses, handed out more than 300 backpacks to students. In conjunction with Operation Home Front and Dollar Tree Stores, the chapter collected school supplies from eight stores throughout the area for students of all grade levels.

Fraternity members met at the Omega Friendship Center on Patterson and filled more than 200 backpacks with school.

An additional 100 backpacks from local law enforcement brought the total to 300 backpacks distributed on August 5 in conjunction with the National Night Out. Murray Miller, chair of the Social Action committee that coordinated the event also expressed gratitude to Studio Kimiko hair salon of Winston-Salem for a donation of more than a dozen backpacks.

“We do this in the spirit of uplifting our community,” Miller said. “One of Psi Phi chapter’s goals is to make a positive impact in our community.”



A week later, the Winston-Salem REACH Foundation partnered with Dynasty Barbershop to provide free haircuts to about a dozen youths, making sure the students had fresh haircuts to go with their swag as they began the school year. Richard Watkins, the chapter basileus and president of REACH, said this is another example of supporting the community and local Black-owned businesses.

“As many families have been forced to tighten their budgets, the school supply giveaway provides much-needed relief,” he said. “And, of course, what young man doesn’t want to show up on the first day of school with a fresh cut. Many thanks to Brother Marc Raye and Dynasty Barbershop. Your support ensures our young men step into the school year with confidence, pride, and a winning attitude.”

Psi Phi remains intentional about support of education and local businesses. In May, the chapter provided \$11,000 in scholarships to 11 local high school students and donated \$2,000 to Cook Literacy Model School – formerly Cook Elementary School. In February, the chapter coordinated several initiatives to support local business establishments.



## ENTERTAINMENT & THE ARTS

# Black Consumers Cutting Back on Subscription Streaming Spending in 2025



Mr. Thomas Umstead  
Entertainment & The Arts Editor  
Entertainment\_Arts@StarofZion.org

By R. Thomas Umstead, Entertainment and Arts Editor

TV and Sling TV, down from 37% in 2024.

Despite the increase in the number of streaming services available to TV viewers, Black TV consumers are spending less on subscription streaming services in 2025 compared to 2024, according to Horowitz Research.

The media research organization’s FOCUS Black Volume 1: Subscriptions 2025 survey, conducted earlier this year, found that 30% of self-reporting Black households spend between \$51 and \$100 monthly on subscription platforms like Netflix and HBO Max, as well as live streaming services such as YouTube



Another 31% spent \$30 or less on streaming services, up from 23% for the same period in 2024. Overall, Black consumers spend an average of \$52.91 per month on subscription streaming services, down from \$60.70 in 2024, according to the survey.

Leading the list of Black-focused premium streaming services that Black consumers subscribe to include entertainment-based services Zeus TV, Black World Cinema, ALLBLK, and BLK Prime, according to Horowitz.



As Black consumers are spending less on streaming services, a new Samba TV report says that onscreen Black representation is more prevalent on traditional broadcast and cable channels than on streaming services. Black actors represented 23% of cast members within the top 50 linear shows compared to 13% of the top 50 streaming shows, according to the Samba TV 2025 Diversity Report.

The report also found that scripted television shows on linear and

streaming services are more inclusive of Black performers than reality programming, with comedy and crime-themed content the most inclusive. Black actors account for 20% of the cast in crime shows and comedy content, slightly above the 17% featured in drama series, according to the report. All three genres rank higher than reality programming, for which Black stars comprise 16% of the cast, said Samba TV.

# From Healing Bodies to Healing Souls

## *Rev. Sandra Comerie-Smith, M.D. Reflects on Her Journey of Faith and Transformation*

**By Sandra Comerie-Smith**

When Rev. Dr. Sandra Comerie-Smith walked away from a successful medical career to answer God's call to pastoral ministry, many of her peers were astonished. "You did what?" they asked. Yet for Sandra, a double board-certified physician and healthcare executive, it was not a reckless leap—it was obedience. "There are times in life when the only way to get through is to do it afraid," she writes in her new memoir, *Becoming the Face of God*. "You'll have to do it anyway."

Born and raised in Jamaica, Sandra's early life was shaped by profound faith and resilience. Orphaned as a teenager, she clung to God's promises, a trust that guided her through medical school and eventually across an ocean. She and her husband, Maurice, migrated to the United States in 1986, navigating the grueling demands of medical residencies and cultural transition while raising three young children. Her career flourished—she became a respected internist, ophthalmologist, and health care executive. Yet an inner stirring reminded her that God's plans were not finished.



After three decades of medical practice, Sandra pursued a Master of Divinity at Drew Theological Seminary, was ordained in The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and faithfully served as a parish pastor for eight years. Sandra also became a certified leadership coach and member of the John Maxwell Team and is passionate about ministry leaders' journeys toward emotional and spiritual health. Later, she returned to healthcare as a board-certified chaplain and Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) Educator. Through every season, Sandra discerned what she calls "the call within the CALL"—God's gentle invitations to new forms of service.

Her memoir, *Becoming the Face of God*, written in her retirement, reflects on these transitions with humility and vulnerability. "Often, those of us who offer spiritual care feel called to change others, only to discover that the real transformation happens in us," she writes. Through personal stories and practical wisdom, Sandra invites clergy,

caregivers, and lay leaders to embrace growth and freedom as they follow God's leading.

The book resonates deeply with ministry leaders who may feel weary, stuck, or unsure of their next steps. Sandra's experiences—whether navigating loss, pivoting careers, or mentoring leaders—remind readers that God's orchestration is both strategic and compassionate. "Being the Face of God entails new beginnings and learnings while trusting God that none of our past experiences have been wasted," she notes.

Sandra's life also bears witness to love and family. She was married to her late husband, Maurice, for forty-five years, and their partnership anchored her through every major transition. Today, she delights in her three adult children and two grandchildren, finding joy in both solitude and community.

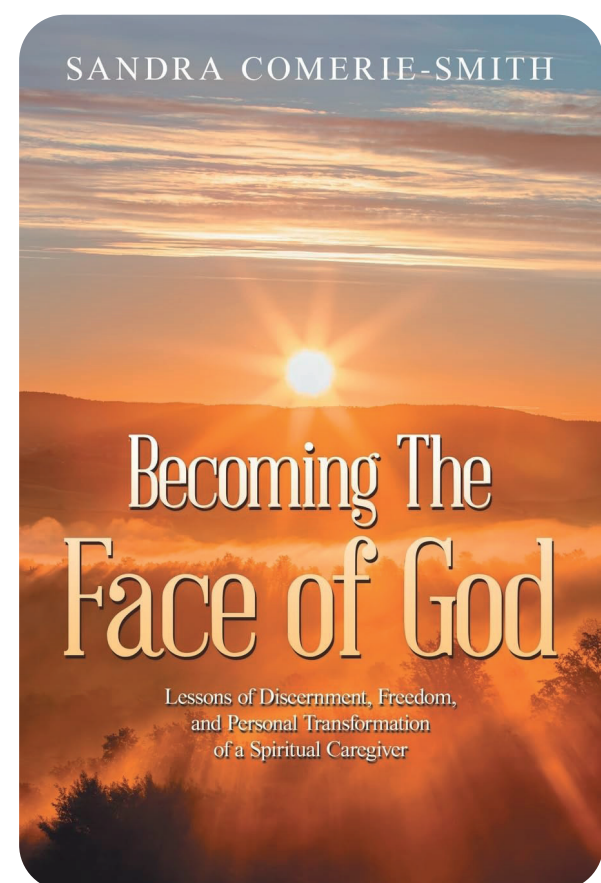
For readers within The A.M.E. Zion Church and beyond, *Becoming the Face of God* offers more than a memoir—it is a companion for discerning God's will and stepping forward with courage. Sandra's story calls each of us to trust the God who orchestrates our journeys and to "do it anyway," even when the path is uncertain.

*Becoming the Face of God* is available on Amazon.

Available on Amazon: <https://a.co/d/b42vhQe>

Balboa Publishing: <https://www.balboapress.com/en/bookstore/book-details/863373-becoming-the-face-of-god>

To connect with Rev. Dr. Sandra Comerie-Smith online, visit and follow her on her Facebook Author's page to connect with her website.







Mr. Daman De Leon  
Health and Wellness Editor  
Health\_Wellness@StarOfZion.org

# Breaking Down the Walls: Men, Stigma, and Suicide Awareness at Livingstone College

By Deborah Walker

Outside of Livingstone College's counseling center in the W.J. Walls Student Center, a student lingers by the door against the wall, phone in hand, pretending to scroll until the hallway clears. When it does, he quietly slips in to meet with the Director of Counseling, Dr. Rhonda Flowers-Corpening. Moments like this reveal the implicit guilt in the African American community of asking for mental health help – especially among Black men – and how it can create a wall of silence, shame, and unrealistic expectations.

"The problem with (conversations about) mental health is the stigma," Flowers-Corpening says.

"Most of the time, people associate mental health with 'crazy'. I've had students say, 'Dr. Flowers, can you meet me outside, so nobody sees me going into your office?' Sometimes they'll sneak in when nobody's looking. The idea is that if you need counseling, something must be wrong with you."

September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, a month that the National Alliance on Mental Illness calls "a time to raise awareness, spread hope and spark meaningful action around one of the most urgent mental health issues of our time". The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention reports that, each year, approximately 24,000 college students attempt suicide and 1,100 do not survive the attempts, making suicide the second-leading cause of death among American college students. The numbers don't suggest that African American students suffer more or less, but anecdotally, the cultural stigma often blocks their willingness to name their pain and solicit help.

At HBCUs like Livingstone, where men make up 58% of the student population, the hidden struggles are not just statistics; they are realities that college leaders confront every day. While conversations about mental health in the white community are more common and candid, African American men often remain on the margins – standing behind walls built too high for them to scale alone. Erecting and living behind the proverbial wall of mental health struggles can be deadly for them.

"Most Black men are raised...to be hard. You're raised not to show a lot of sympathy," says sophomore sports management major Bryce Gay, who also serves as Mr. Sophomore. "It gets to people's heads. You grow up with it drilled in: 'I'm a man, I'm supposed to be strong.'"

Gay has watched friends name their depression only to be dismissed at home. "'You're a man, be a man now.'" That attitude doesn't sit well with Gay, "especially with all the deaths we've seen—classmates, friends, family. This should be higher on our agenda of support."

As a student leader who also lives with anxiety, Gay wants to make the first step easier. "I feel it's our responsibility to make sure classmates feel seen and heard," he said. "As men, we don't always have to be strong all the time...Men can cry."

Gay's own toolkit is simple: breathing techniques, stepping into a quiet space, headphones on—often Brent Faiyaz—and time alone in his room to decompress. This fall, he plans to host drop-in one-on-one hours and a "Barbershop Talk" conversation for male students, which he describes as "a space where somebody can come in and let everything go and talk without being judged."

College staff often encounter students struggling with myriad mental health challenges, even in safe spaces like residence halls. Maurice Roper, Livingstone's director of residence life, sees the effects of male students' walled silence.



"Some of what I've recognized has really been emotional detachment (from) separation anxiety, being away from family and friends, being in a new environment," he says. His team of residence hall directors and resident advisors are trained to notice when a student begins to withdraw or isolate. "We ask (residence hall directors) to create four programs a month. Some are fun, some are educational, and some focus on things like loneliness. I tell them: if you see something off about a student, talk to them. We can't diagnose, but we can listen. And sometimes students will tell you a lot without directly saying it. If it's deeper, we call Dr. Flowers-Corpening and her team."

In addition to leading the college's counseling center, Flowers-Corpening is a member of Livingstone's award-winning mental health task force, led by First Lady Jacqueline Davis, who holds a doctorate in nursing practice. The task force aims to dismantle the invisible walls blocking students' mental health brick by brick, and their efforts have gained national attention: in August, the task force received Insight into Academia's Mental Health and Well-Being Award, making Livingstone the only HBCU in North Carolina to earn the recognition.

And off campus, mental health support is available in the city of Salisbury. Students can access Behavioral Health Urgent Care for 24/7 walk-in crisis support—an alternative to the ER where walls of embarrassment often keep young men away.

The college's faith leaders also understand how high those walls are. The Rev. Lloyd Nivens, IV, knows the pressure many young men bring with them.

"Men are raised so differently," he says. "Some young Black men are raising themselves, some have had to survive, and then we all converge on a college campus. You've got a whole lot of different backgrounds, different ways of being raised, coming together in one place. That in itself can be a mental health trigger. Too often, men are taught to bottle everything up. In the Black community, especially, we hear, 'pray it away.' And prayer is powerful, but sometimes prayer and counseling must go hand in hand. God can work through a therapist, too."

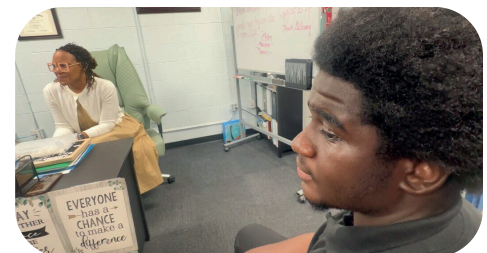
For him, dismantling the idea that strength means silence is essential. "When we teach young men that manhood means never crying, never asking for help, we're not building strength, we're building pressure cookers. And sooner or later, that explodes. Real strength is being able to say, 'I need help,' and not be ashamed of it."

For him, the key is relationships. "Rebuke without relationship leads to rebellion," he says. "Without trust, even the right advice won't stick. But when men feel safe enough to talk, to cry, to admit, 'I'm not okay,' that's when healing begins."

From Livingstone's residence halls to the chapel to the counseling center, and now a 24/7 urgent care in the city of Salisbury, the message is the same: men, you are seen, you are valued, and you do not have to carry this alone.

Even in the digital world, walls are beginning to crumble. Social media has opened unexpected doors. "I've had students tell me they first learned about therapy through a TikTok," Flowers-Corpening noted. "That tells us the conversation is changing...even if slowly."

Speaking up is not a weakness; it is where healing begins. And at Livingstone, students are learning that walls don't have to stand forever—they can be broken down, brick by brick, together.





# Domestic Violence and the Church: Pray or Protect?

By Daman De Leon, Health and Wellness Editor

One of the most underlying issues that plagues our communities is that of all forms of abuse at the hands of loved ones. What makes the issue “underlying” is that it is minimally addressed, or not at all, by some of our most outspoken and powerful voices in our communities. October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and the Church has just as much of a voice in this matter as does any other charitable entity.

There are a number of racial disparities when it comes to domestic violence. African American women and men experience domestic violence at disproportionately high rates compared to other groups, particularly Black women who face higher risks of severe physical and sexual violence, stalking, and intimate partner homicide. Contributing factors include systemic racism and lack of economic opportunity, leading to unique challenges in seeking help, as survivors often distrust systems due to past experiences with discrimination, including from law enforcement and domestic violence providers. Culturally sensitive support, increased awareness, and increased access to resources are crucial for addressing this systemic issue.

The Black Church plays a complex role in domestic violence awareness, acting as both a potential site for support and a barrier to help due to stigma, silence, and patriarchal structures that can prioritize perpetrators over victims. While there is a growing effort within the community to educate pastors and leaders, train congregations, and create safer spaces through observances like Purple Sundays and survivor support, the church’s response is mixed, often failing to confront abusers and providing harmful advice like staying in the abusive relationship. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, more than 40% of Black women have experienced intimate partner physical violence, intimate partner sexual violence, and/or intimate partner stalking in their lifetimes. And more than half of Black adult female homicides are related to intimate partner violence.

Cecily Johnson, director of strategic initiatives at the Domestic Violence Network, agrees it’s a systemic issue. “Because of the history, because of the 400-year gap and 400 years of being left at the starting line while other groups have moved forward with ease, that holds us back,” she says. “That’s the root cause. It’s a combination of things we’re not given. We’re just not given opportunities in education that generally would be made available to other populations, specifically white populations. And it’s socioeconomic. Typically, the higher you are in that socioeconomic strata, the greater access you have to education and resources where you can get some of this information, where you can receive services. There’s a lack of trust due to all the things we’re seeing right now and what we’ve seen over the years. They are often treated differently from a white survivor reaching out for support. Survivors think they won’t be believed, and they’re also scared they’re going to be attacked. Is this going to be flipped on them and turned into something else? I’ve worked with minority survivors over the years who ended up getting criminal cases due to trying to protect themselves when it’s more than apparent that’s what it was. So, people of color suffer in silence because of that – not being believed, being arrested, being looked at as the aggressor.”

Black women also don’t necessarily want to turn an abusive partner into law enforcement. “I have been told personally [by a survivor] they can’t get help because they don’t want their partner to become a statistic,” says Johnson. “There’s a genuine and legitimate fear that if they call the police, their partner could be killed or they, as the survivor, could be killed, and we know that African American men are more apt to go through the criminal justice system, and we don’t want to send them – even if they shot us in the head. We don’t trust the police because we don’t want to get our man in trouble, but there has to be a way to break that cycle.”

But the community has its own cultural reasons for not reporting as well. One is religion.

“We take things to God,” says Coburn Place Intake and Well-Being Services Coordinator Jacqueline Willett, MSW. “...and sometimes in Black culture, it’s looked down upon when you ask for help. You lean

on your support systems. You don’t let others know what’s going on inside of your home. That’s what your church family is for, that’s what God is there for. That also leads to why a lot of minorities don’t seek counseling or therapy, or don’t address mental health issues. They would go to a pastor.”

The belief that the Black church could play a bigger role in talking about what domestic violence is and how it happens, and in sharing the resources available to women and men in abusive relationships, is fortunately advancing.

“Speaking personally, from women I know and have worked with, yes, you’re told by leadership in the church that you don’t air your dirty laundry,” says Johnson. “That’s not to say there aren’t some wonderful church leaders and members who are there day one to drive someone to a shelter or fill out a protective order, but historically, there have been churches where you pray about it, you don’t talk about it, and you stay no matter what, which is dangerous. And that’s just not the Black church – it’s churches across the board, no matter the demographic.”

“On our part, it’s our ride or die mentality to be in a relationship, to make it work, to give it 100% – even though we’re giving 100% to an abuser,” says Indiana State Rep. Vanessa Summers. Of course, Black women are not a monolith, says Johnson, “but I have heard things from survivors like ‘You should be grateful to have a Black man, especially if he is educated and has a job.’”

Staying no matter what also plays into the “Strong Black Woman” stereotype, which is empowering on one side of the coin, but dangerous on the other.

“We could be bleeding from the mouth, one arm off, but we’re still going to put that dinner on the table,” says Summers. “And it’s not necessarily the right thing to do. It’s just what we are in tune to do instead of taking care of ourselves first.”

“There’s nothing wrong with being a strong woman, but not at the point of wreaking havoc on mental and physical health,” says Johnson. “Sure, Black women can handle pain. Sure, Black women can handle what’s thrown at them, but they should not have to. Not at the expense of our health and safety.”

The solution, says all three women, is outreach and education.

The DVN created the Black and African American Women’s Coalition, which includes four Black advocates from Coburn Place, including Willett, to bring awareness to domestic violence in the community. “It’s not just ‘Hey, it’s happening,’” says Johnson. “We want to educate and inform in an impactful way.”

DVN is currently focusing on domestic violence in two communities – in the Black and African American community and in the LGBTQ+ community – and the intersections between the two because Black trans women experience violence at a rate higher than any other group. Johnson says they are going into places of worship, schools, places of business, and anywhere where people will listen.

While the task force is a domestic violence-focused organization, it also wants to address many issues that overlap with it.

“Economics is often a factor in domestic violence, so how do we get these Black women rising up in the ranks so they can leave a violent relationship, potentially, understand their worth, and support their family without having to be in an abusive situation?” asks Johnson. “It all connects to help keep someone out of the cycle of violence. That education, the financial literacy, all of that, if we’re going to be a true prevention effort, if we can get ahead of it in as many ways as possible,



*Continued on Next Page*



then hopefully we can prevent a future survivor and a future perpetrator.” DVN is also reaching Black youth with its healthy relationship programming.

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## Genetic Variants and The Connection to Breast Cancer

By Daman De Leon, Health and Wellness Editor

It's the time of year again, when, during the month of October, there is an increased advocacy for Breast Cancer Awareness. Breast cancer is the most often diagnosed cancer in many parts of the world, including the U.S. More than 310,000 new cases are expected nationwide this year.

Black women tend to develop breast cancer at a younger age than White women. Black women are also more likely than White women to die from the disease, and they are twice as likely to develop an aggressive subtype called triple-negative breast cancer. But despite the increased risks faced by women of African descent, most large-scale genetic studies of breast cancer to date have focused on women of European ancestry.



To better understand their unique genetic risks, a research team led by Dr. Wei Zheng of Vanderbilt University analyzed genetic data from over 40,000 females of African descent. About 18,000 had been diagnosed with breast cancer. The data were gathered as part of the NIH-funded African Ancestry Breast Cancer Genetic consortium, which combined data from 26 studies. Most participants (85%) were African Americans. The rest were from Barbados or Africa.

The researchers conducted a genome-wide association study (GWAS) to look for genetic variants that are found more often in participants with breast cancer than in those without. This is believed to be the most significant GWAS study to date of breast cancer in this population. Results were reported in *Nature Genetics* on May 13, 2024.

The analysis pinpointed 12 genetic regions, or loci, associated with breast cancer. Three of these loci were linked to the aggressive triple-negative cancer. About 8% of the women carried two genetic copies of risk variants in all three of these loci. Such women, the researchers found, were 4.2 times more likely to be diagnosed with triple-negative breast cancer than women who had only one or no copies of the variants.

Because this type of cancer lacks specific cell receptors often seen with breast cancer (like estrogen or HER2 receptors), there are fewer targeted options for treatment. These findings may help researchers identify new treatment targets.

The researchers also confirmed many breast cancer risk variants that were found earlier in other populations. And they identified an uncommon risk variant in the gene *ARHGEF38*, which had been previously linked to aggressive prostate and lung cancers.

The scientists used their findings to create polygenic risk scores (PRS) for breast cancer risk in females of African descent. PRS uses genomic data to gauge the chance that a person will develop a certain medical condition. PRS created previously, using results from other populations, tend to perform poorly at predicting breast cancer risk for Black women. The new PRS, based on genomic data from African descendants, outperformed previous PRS at predicting breast cancer risk in this population.

The findings and data could lead to improved detection of breast cancer in this at-risk population and provide clues for potential treatment targets. Studies with even larger, more diverse populations will be needed to further improve the prediction of breast cancer risk.

“We have worked with researchers from more than 15 institutions in the U.S. and Africa to establish this large genetic consortium,” Zheng says. “Data put together in this consortium have been and will continue to be used by researchers around the world.”

#### LIFESTYLE

## Norfolk District CED Youth Department: School Prayer in the Park to Breast Cancer



Ms. Angel Eason  
Lifestyle Editor  
Lifestyle@StarOfZion.org

By Angel Eason, Lifestyle Editor

On Friday, August 22nd, the Norfolk District Christian Education Youth Department, under the leadership of Angel Eason, VICYC President Tranee Carter, and Co-Directors Rev. Tracy Marcus and Mrs. Jennifer Thomas, hosted the Back-to-School Prayer in the Park at Lakeside



Park in Chesapeake, Virginia.

Youth and pastors from across the Norfolk District joined hands in a large prayer circle, joined by community members who came to lift up students, educators, and families. Prayers were offered for those preparing







to return to school and those beginning careers, entering the military, or learning trades, asking God's blessing over each path.

One of the most memorable parts of the evening was hearing the youth boldly lead prayers of covering and protection. Tranee' Carter prayed for colleges, the military, and trades; Ma'Jore Little prayed for high school students; Jayden Nichols prayed for middle school students; Amaya Brewer prayed for elementary children; Nasir Spence prayed for teachers and professors; Amore' Hines prayed for protection; and Tiona Hines prayed for mental health. Their words were heartfelt and uplifting, leaving a lasting impact on all who attended.



Pastors and preachers also lifted their voices in prayer, focusing on protection, wisdom, understanding, and peace. Those who participated included Rev. Wilmer Williams, Rev. Brandon Praileau, Rev. Samuel Warren, and Rev. Alvania Eason. The evening ended with powerful prayers from Presiding Elder Kenneth Crowder and Mrs. Sanda Crowder, sealing the night in blessing.

Following the prayers, families enjoyed refreshments, and each child received a treat bag to take home. The Back-to-School Prayer in the Park was an amazing inaugural event that brought the community together and reminded every student that they are loved, supported, and covered in prayer and community as they begin a new school year.



Alexis Hutchinson  
Sports Editor  
Sports@StarofZion.org

## SPORTS

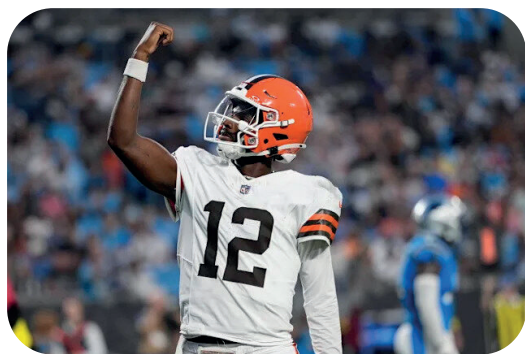
## Stand on Business and Shine this 2025-2026 school year

**By Rev. Roderick Josey,  
Education Editor**

As the 2025–2026 school year begins, students from preschool to college are stepping into a brand-new season filled with opportunity. My message for you is simple but powerful: Stand on business. That means taking responsibility for your learning, showing up ready, and giving your very best—no matter who's watching or what obstacles come your way.

Shedeur Sanders, rookie quarterback for the Cleveland Browns, didn't enter his NFL preseason debut with everyone believing in him. Some doubted whether he was ready, but when his moment came, he delivered. Completing 14 of 23 passes for 138 yards and throwing two first-half touchdowns, Sanders helped lead his team to a 30–10 victory over the Carolina Panthers. What can students learn from that? You may not always be the first choice, the top of the class, or the one everyone expects to shine—but preparation, focus, and faith in your ability can help you rise to the occasion when it's your turn.

Sanders' story echoes one of the most well-known moments in



Scripture: the young shepherd David facing the giant Goliath. David wasn't the strongest or the most experienced warrior, but he trusted God and used the skills he had. With just a sling and a stone, he won a victory that seemed impossible to everyone else. Like David, you may face giants this school year—big tests, challenging subjects, new environments, or self-doubt—but with faith, focus, and determination, you can overcome them.

This call to action isn't just for students. Parents, you have a vital role in this process. Be active in your child's education. Know what's happening in their schools. Show up for the parent meetings, volunteer when you can, and communicate with teachers. Let your children see that their education is important to you, and push yourself to encourage them daily. A strong partnership between home and school can make the difference between simply passing and truly thriving.

So here's the motivation for every student and parent this year: never give up, never doubt yourself, and never forget who you are. You are a child of the Most High God, created with purpose and equipped for success. You can do this. You will do this. And that's On God!







# A GLOBAL LEADERSHIP VIEW OF THE A.M.E. ZION CHURCH



## 1. Bishop Darryl B. Starnes, Sr.

### PIEDMONT EPISCOPAL DISTRICT

Office Address: West Sugar Creek Road, Charlotte, NC 28269

Office Ph: (919) 554-8994; Fax: (919) 556-6049

Email: BishopDBStarnes@amezion.org

District includes: Blue Ridge, West Central North Carolina, Western North Carolina, Jamaica (all divisions)

Mrs. Camille C. Starnes, Missionary Supervisor



## 2. Bishop W. Darin Moore

### EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA EPISCOPAL DISTRICT

Office Address: P.O. Box 97395, Raleigh, NC 27624

Office Ph: (910) 773-6491; Fax: (919) 556-6049

Email: BishopWDarinMoore@amezion.org

District includes: Albemarle, Cape Fear, Central North Carolina, North Carolina, Virgin Islands

Mrs. Devieta C. Moore, Missionary Supervisor



## 3. Bishop George Dwayne Crenshaw

### NORTH EASTERN EPISCOPAL DISTRICT

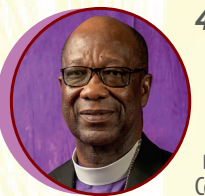
Office Address: 3605 Sandy Planes Rd. 240-238 Marietta, GA 30066

Office Ph: TBA

Email: BishopGDCrenshaw@amezion.org

District includes: New England, New Jersey, New York, Western New York, Bahamas and London-Midland

Mrs. Laurenna H. Crenshaw, Missionary Supervisor



## 4. Bishop Hilliard K. Dogbe

### WESTERN WEST AFRICA EPISCOPAL DISTRICT

Office Address: A.M.E. Zion Church Episcopal Residence/Office; P.O. Box GP 22220, Accra, Ghana

Office Ph: 233-30-703-0241

Email: BishopHKDogbe@amezion.org

District includes: North Ghana, West Ghana, Mid-Ghana, Liberia, East Ghana, Cote D'voire, Togo, Rwanda, Burundi, North Kivu, and South Kivu

Mrs. Cynthia Dogbe, Missionary Supervisor



## 5. Bishop U. U. Effiong

### EASTERN WEST AFRICA EPISCOPAL DISTRICT

Office Address: Anderson Memorial A.M.E Zion Church, Diamond Hill, Calabar Annex/Postal:

57 School Road, Satellite Town, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

Office Ph: +234 803 6765 479 Email: BishopUUEffiong@amezion.org

District includes: Nigeria, Central Nigeria, Rivers Nigeria, Lagos-West Nigeria, Mainland Nigeria, Northern Nigeria, Cross River Nigeria, South-Eastern Nigeria, Southern and Akwa Nigeria, Port Harcourt, Uganda, Kenya\*, and Tanzania\*

Mrs. Promise Effiong, Missionary Supervisor



## 6. Bishop Brian R. Thompson, Sr.

### MID-ATLANTIC EPISCOPAL DISTRICT

Office Address: 9701 Apollo Drive - Suite 245, Largo, MD 20774

Office Ph: (301) 322-3866; Fax: (301) 322-3862

Email: BishopThompson106@amezion.org

District includes: Allegheny, East Tennessee-Virginia, Ohio, Philadelphia-Baltimore, Virginia, Barbados, Guyana-Suriname, St. Vincent

Rev. Felica Thompson, Missionary Supervisor



## 7. Bishop Eric L. Leake

### SOUTH ATLANTIC EPISCOPAL DISTRICT

Office Address: 745 Saluda Street, Rock Hill, SC 29730

Office Ph: (803) 980-2462

Email: BishopEricLeake@amezion.org

District includes: Georgia, India, Palmetto, Pee Dee, South Carolina

Mrs. H. Jean McMurray-Leake, Missionary Supervisor



## 8. Bishop Daran H. Mitchell

### MIDWEST EPISCOPAL DISTRICT

Office Address: 101 South Elm Street, Suite 4, Greensboro, NC 27406

Office Ph: (336) 285 6232

Email: BishopDMitchell108@amezion.org

District includes: Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, Tennessee, Trinidad-Tobago

Rev. L. Lynn Mitchell, Missionary Supervisor



## 9. Bishop Anthony Witherspoon

### SOUTHWESTERN DELTA EPISCOPAL DISTRICT

Office Address: 3225W. Sugar Creek Rd. Charlotte, NC 28269

Office Ph: (704) 900-3607

Email: BishopWitherspoon109@amezion.org

District includes: Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, South Mississippi, Texas, and West Tennessee-Mississippi

Rev. Dr. Kay M. Gabriel, Missionary Supervisor



## 10. Bishop Melanie Rogers-Miller

### WESTERN EPISCOPAL DISTRICT

Office Address: P.O. Box 218, Stockbridge, GA 30281

Office Ph: (347) 729-9139 Fax: (215)-689-0865

Email: BishopMelanieMiller110@amezion.org

District includes: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Oregon-Washington, and Southwest Rocky Mountains

Mr. Jimmie Lewis Miller Sr. & Mrs. Rosalyn "Terry" Holland



## 11. Bishop Dwayne A. Walker

### ALABAMA-FLORIDA EPISCOPAL DISTRICT

Office Address: 808 South Lawrence, Montgomery AL, 36104-5055

Office Ph: (334) 269-6365; Fax: (334)-269-6369

Email: BishopDwayneAWalker111@amezion.org

District includes: Alabama, North Alabama, South Alabama, Central Alabama, West Alabama, Cahaba, Florida, S. Florida, and South Korea

Mrs. Donna Smith-Walker, Missionary Supervisor



## 12. Bishop Bernardo J. Ngunza

### CENTRAL SOUTHERN AFRICA EPISCOPAL DISTRICT

Office Address: Morro Bento II, Zona 3, Rua da Gameck

Office Ph 1: +244 933 894 506 Office Ph 2: +244 993 922 263

Email: BishopBNgunza112@amezion.org

District Includes: East Angola, West Angola, North Angola, South Angola, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, and Zambia\*

Ms. Isabel António Ngunza, Missionary Supervisor



## 13. Bishop Seth O. Lartey

### LOCATED

Office Address: 2361 Olivet Church Rd, Winston-Salem, NC 27106

Office Ph: (336) 529-8496



## Bishop George W. Walker Sr. (Retired)

Ph: (708) 799-5599 Fax: (708) 799-5584

Email: BishopGeorgeWWalkerSr@amezion.org



## Bishop S. Chuka Ekemam Sr. (Retired)

Tel: +234-803-213-3767 (Nigeria) or +19802426935 (US)

Email: BishopSChukaEkemamSr@amezion.org



## Bishop George E. Battle Jr. (Deceased)

Ph: (704)-895-2236 (H) (704)-332-7600

Email: BishopGeorgeEBattleJr@amezion.org



## Bishop Joseph Johnson (Retired)

Ph: (704) 877-9646

Email: BishopJJohnson@amezion.org



## Bishop Marshall H. Strickland (Retired)

Ph: (410) 744-7330 Fax: (410) 788-5510

Email: BishopMHStrickland@amezion.org



## Bishop Nathaniel Jarrett (Retired)

PH: (708) 802-9873

Email: BishopNJarrett@amezion.org



## Bishop Warren M. Brown (Retired)

Ph: (678) 574-2725

Email: BishopWMBrown@amezion.org



## Bishop Kenneth Monroe (Retired)

Ph: (910) 843-8274

Email: BishopKMonroe@amezion.org



## Bishop Dennis V. Proctor (Retired)

Ph: (410)-215-8741

Email: BishopProctor@amezion.org



## Bishop Michael A. Frencher Sr. (Retired)

Ph: (336)-312-8245

Email: BishopMAFrencher@amezion.org

\*Provisional Annual Conferences



## GENERAL OFFICERS

**Rev. Dr. J. Elvin Sadler, General Secretary-Auditor**

P.O. Box 26770, Charlotte, NC 28221-6770

**Ph:** (704) 599-4630; **Fax:** (704) 688-2549; **Email:** jesadler@amezion.org**Rev. Al Hamilton, Chief Financial Officer, Department of Finance**

P.O. Box 26770, Charlotte, NC 28221-6770

**Ph:** (704) 599-4630; **Fax:** (704) 919-5580; **Email:** alchamilton@amezion.org**Rev. Julius Walls, Chief Operating Officer / Business Manager**

P.O. Box 26770, Charlotte, NC 28221-6770

**Ph:** (704) 599-4630; **Fax:** (704) 688-2541; **Email:** jwalls@amezion.org**Mr. Darin Kent, Chief Communications Officer  
Editor, The Star of Zion**

P.O. Box 26770, Charlotte, NC 28221-6770

**Ph:** (704) 599-4630, ext. 2577; **Email:** cco@amezion.org**Rev. Dr. D.B. Cannon,****Dept. of Global Missions Office & Missionary Seer Editor**P.O. Box 26770, Charlotte, NC 28221-6770 **Ph:** (704) 599-4630;**Email:** dbcannon@amezion.org **For articles/info:** missionaryseergm@gmail.com**Rev. Patrick Barrett, Secretary-Treasurer,  
Christian Education Department**

P.O. Box 26770, Charlotte, NC 28221-6770

**Ph:** (704) 599-4630 **Fax:** (704) 688-2550; **Email:** pbarrett@amezion.org**Dr. Eleazar Merriweather, Director  
Dept. of Church Growth & Development**

3225 West Sugar Creek Road, Charlotte, NC 28269

**Ph:** (704) 631-2172;**Email:** emerriw721@amezion.org**Rev. Dr. Darrell Williams, Executive Director, Zion's Benefit Services**P.O. Box 217114, Charlotte, NC 28221; **Ph:** (704) 714-1505;**Email:** dwilliams@amezion.org

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625 Ellsworth Drive, Trotwood, Ohio 45426

**Email:** mariley310@yahoo.com**Rev. Dr. Brandon Fisher, Vice-President**

2940 42nd Street, Sacramento, CA 95817

**Rev. Dr. Lisa T. McDow, Esq., Clerk**

Post Office Box 2541, Wilmington, NC 28402-2541

**Dr. Yvonne A. Tracey, Asst. Clerk**

502 Ferndale Drive, Salisbury, NC 28147

**Rev. Dr. Derrick R. Anderson, Chaplain**

4650 Shookstown Drive, Knapolis, NC 28081

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1415 Earlham Drive, Dayton, OH 45406

**Dr. Marsha C. Grayson, Esq.**

88 Roberts Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15219

**Rev. Dr. Reid R. White, Jr., Esq**

6608 Cartwright Drive, Columbia, SC 29223

**Dr. William Stokes**

5821 West Tree Drive, Anchorage, AK 99507

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104 Black Avenue, Bessemer, Alabama 35020

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1018 Southpoint Crossing Durham, NC 27713

**Ph:** (919) 238-3749; **Email:** jkdjr1911@frontier.com**Dr. Mary J. Mathews, 1st Vice President**

Post Office Box 3155, Sanford, NC 27331

**Ph:** (910) 775-2056; **Cell:** (910) 624-3684; **Email:** clcpresident10@aol.com**Ms. Rachel Highsmith, 2nd Vice President**

7696 Proud St, Pfafftown, NC 27040

**Ph:** (336) 473-0060; **Email:** rdhighsmith@gmail.com**Dr. Ian Bell-Jefferson, Recording Secretary**

744 Oak Street, Apt 5, San Francisco, CA 94117

**Ph:** (916) 284-4444; **Email:** meijoi2002@yahoo.com**Mr. William Manning, Sr., Financial Secretary**

620 Holiday Road, Gastonia, NC 28054;

**Ph:** (704) 747-0873; **Email:** wfm258@msn.com**Ms. Anita Scofield, Treasurer**

207 Plaza Drive, Middleton, CT 06457

**Ph:** (203) 982-3036; **Email:** ascotfield@yahoo.com**Mr. Jerry McCombs, Chaplain**

P. O Box 1444 Newton, NC 28658

**Home:** (828) 310-6918; **Cell:** (828) 464-9609; **Email:** clcchaplain21@charter.net**Mrs. Lula K. Howard, President Emeritus**

4009 Landside Dr., Louisville, KY 40220

**Cell:** (502) 494-9527; **Email:** lmkhoward330@gmail.comWOMEN'S HOME & OVERSEAS  
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100 East Ocean View, Suite 1110, Norfolk, VA 23503

**PH:** 757-761-6280 **Email:** sandrabcrowder@yahoo.com**Dr. Peggy Lindsey-Owens, First Vice President**

503 McLean Street, Raeford, NC 28376

**Ph:** 910-875-5803; **Email:** mspeggys@earthlink.net**Rev. Patricia "Patty" Surratt-Smith, Second Vice President**PO Box 1424, Shelby, NC 28151 **Ph:** 704-281-1544;**Email:** ladypattysmith@gmail.com**Mrs. Rosetta J. Dunham, Executive Director**

P.O. Box 26846, Charlotte, NC 28221-6846

**Email:** rodunham@amezion.org**Mrs. Effie B. Woodard, Recording Secretary**108 Effie Lane/PO Box 662, Broadway, NC 27505 **Cell:** 919-356-6608;**Email:** effiewoodard@gmail.com**Ms. Verdelle Cunningham, Treasurer**

P.O. Box 142, Lugoff, SC 29078

**Ph:** (917) 742-5565; **Email:** oliver1447@att.net**Ms. Karlease M. Smalls, Connectional Coordinator of YAMS**

1436 McBeth Drive, Knapolis, NC 28083

**Ph:** (H) 704-298-0487; (C) 917-371-3464 **Email:** karleasemails@yahoo.com**Ms. Melva Polk Wright, Connectional Secretary, Youth Missionary Society**

438 Parkview Court, Unit C, Salisbury, MD 21804

**Ph:** (443) 880-5728; **Email:** principalmelva1960@gmail.com**Mrs. April C. Davis, Connectional Superintendent, Buds of Promise**9233 Mountain Aire Circle, Charlotte, NC 28214; **Home:** 704-394-0577; **Cell:**980-298-0298; **Email:** apriladavisforbuds@yahoo.com**Mrs. Jo-Ann Monroe, Connectional Secretary, Bureau of Supply**

40 East Sidney Ave., #12B, Mt. Vernon, NY 10550

**Ph:** 914-224-7621; **Email:** jom4supply@gmail.com**Mrs. Joy Williamson Foster, Connectional Chairman, Life Members Council**

229 Academy Lane, Middletown, DE 19709

**Ph:** 302-563-0222; **Email:** mailto:Joy2023LM@gmail.com**Ms. Camryn Ivey, Director of Communications**

1610 Cox Road, Matthews, NC 28104

**Ph:** 704-907-0208; **Email:** camrynivey@gmail.comINTERNATIONAL MINISTERS  
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P.O. Box 6753, Harrisburg, PA 17112

**Ph:** (717) 712-4709; **Email:** revdmillersigma@icloud.com**Rev. J. Martin Boulter, Sr., First Vice President**

114 Pelham Lane, Fort Mill, SC 29715

**Ph:** (803) 448-7100; **Email:** jmboulter@comporium.net**Ms. Connie Bell-Wright, Second Vice President**

822 Polk Street, Charlotte, NC 28206-2930

**Ph:** 704-724-2759; **Email:** cbellwill1351@gmail.com**Rev. Dorothy Patterson, Executive Director**

48 West 17th Street, Bayonne, NJ 07002

**Ph:** (551) 206-1499 **Email:** Klein1@aol.com**Rev. Dr. Edwin Ferguson, Treasurer**

3320 Whitlock Dr. N, Wilson, NC 27896

**Ph:** (910) 876-4727; **Email:** pastorferguson14@gmail.com**Rev. Dr. Kely G. L. Steele, Financial Secretary**

242 Dixwell Ave, New Haven, CT, 06511

**Ph:** 704-430-7826; **Email:** Drkglsteele@gmail.com**Mrs. Carlous Elaine Tyrance, Secretary****Ph:** 704-591-0702; **Email:** ctyrnc@bellsouth.net**Ms. Marie D. Niles, Assistant Secretary**

718 Decatur Street, Brooklyn, NY 11233

**Ph:** (917) 373-5237 ; **Email:** mdn929@gmail.com**Mr. Willie Landrum, Chaplain****Ph:** (205) 515-5353 **Alt:** (678) 809-5253; **Email:** landrumwil@gmail.comDEPARTMENT OF  
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**Rev. Johngerlyn "Jonse" Young, President,  
President, Assembly of Christian Educators (ACE)****Ph:** (616) 581-5358; **Email:** jyoungace@gmail.com**Bro. Dion Harris, Chairperson****Young Adults in Christian Ministries (YACM)****Email:** Djharris2012@gmail.com**Mr. Ezekiel A. Perez, President****Varick International Christian Youth Council (VICYC)****Ph:** (408) 757-9249 **Email:** ezekiel1132@gmail.com**Mr. Andre Griffin, Parliamentarian (VICYC)**Phone Number: (336) 660-8745 **Email:** griffinatrf@gmail.com

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**Ph:** (803) 327-7402; **Fax:** (803) 327-3261; **Internet:** www.clintoncollege.edu**Dr. Vergel Lattimore, President, Hood Theological Seminary**

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Ndon Ebom, Uruan.LGA, P.O. Box 2503, UYO, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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3705 Rosedown Dr. Matthews, NC 28105;

**Ph:** (704) 287-3608; **Email:** rahbyn10@gmail.com**Mrs. E. Delores Cowherd, First Vice President**

41 Edge Lane Willingboro, NJ 08046

**Ph:** ( 609) 491-0355(C) 609-871-5933( H); **Email:** edcowherd@gmail.com**Rev. Michelle Long, Second Vice President**

4146 Thomas Sam Dr. Rock Hill, SC 29732

**Ph:** 803-684-3520 (H) 803-627-6129 (C); **Email:** settav@bellsouth.net**Mrs. Tojuna McLendon, Third Vice President**

6020 Kempton Court, Salisbury, MD 21801

**Email:** tojunamac41@yahoo.com**Rev. Andrea A. Wiley, Recording Secretary**

1660 Woodberry Drive Mobile, AL 36695

**Ph:** 419-350-6019 (C) 251-635-0099 (H); **Email:** sylviaav614@gmail.com**Mrs. Tawanda Harris, Assistant Recording Secretary**

125 St. Pauls Rd. North Hempstead, NY 11550

**Ph:** (916) 996-9149 **Email:** zwrddirector@gmail.com**Mrs. Jeryl Anderson, Treasurer**

12803 Bald Eagle Dr. Charlotte ,NC 28215

**Ph:** 919-749-3000; **Email:** jzanderson12@yaho.com**Mrs. Bessie Baker, Financial Secretary**



# A Statement from the Board of Bishops of The A.M.E. Zion Church - A Message of Safety and Awareness



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

*“Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love.”*

- (1 Corinthians 16:13–14)



To Our Beloved Zion Family:

We write with heavy hearts in light of the violence that has once again struck our land. A church in Michigan was turned into a place of mourning. Public servants in Pennsylvania and Minnesota have been attacked. And our schools continue to carry the trauma of shootings that traumatize children and communities. These events grieve the Spirit and burden us all.

As Bishops of The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, we are reminded of the Apostle Paul’s counsel: *“Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good”* (Romans 12:21). Evil has shown its face through hatred and violence, but our calling is to stand in the strength of Christ and to be vigilant in protecting His people.

We therefore urge every pastor and congregation to prayerfully examine and update their church safety protocols. Make sure your leaders, ushers, trustees, and stewards know what to do in a crisis. Work together with local officials where appropriate. Let every sanctuary be not only a place of spiritual refuge but also a place where people can worship without fear.

This does not mean we live in panic. Our hope remains in God, who is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1). Yet faith and wisdom walk hand in hand. Just as Joseph prepared Egypt for famine, and Nehemiah stationed guards at the wall, we too must act with foresight, trusting that God honors preparation as well as prayer.

Finally, let us model a different spirit in this divided age. While the rhetoric around us grows harsh, let Zion’s witness be one of grace and truth. *“Blessed are the peacemakers,”* Jesus declared, *“for they will be called children of God”* (Matthew 5:9). May our words and deeds bring peace in a world starved for it.

We assure you that your Board of Bishops is praying for you and with you. May the Lord keep Zion strong, united, and steadfast until that day when *“they shall beat their swords into plowshares”* and we study war no more (Isaiah 2:4).

Sincerely,

## The Board of Bishops of The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

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# A Statement from the Board of Bishops of The A.M.E. Zion Church Regarding Charlie Kirk

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

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Freedom Church, joins millions across this nation in condemning the horrendous murder of Charlie Kirk. Violence is never the answer. It destroys families, communities, and souls. We extend heartfelt sympathy to his wife and their two children as they endure this time of deep grief. May God's peace surround them.



We also recognize that Mr. Kirk identified as a Christian. We do not question his profession of faith, for judgment belongs to God alone. What we can say is that Christian witness is always measured against the standard of love. As the Apostle Paul declared, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass."

Our concern is not whether a family grieves — for of course they do. Our concern is how this nation chooses to respond. Once again, we are confronted with the ugly reality of unequal honor. Congress has found room to immortalize one public figure, while the names of others — Ahmaud Arbery, Philando Castile, Botham Jean, Atatiana Jefferson, Rayshard Brooks, Oscar Grant, Tyre Nichols — remain absent from the nation's official calendar. Their blood still cries out from the ground: "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground."

Racism is not always hooded and marching. Sometimes it is polite, procedural, and dressed in the language of respectability. At its core, racism is the sin of believing that one group is superior to another, and then shaping systems, laws, and memories to reinforce that lie. It shows up in slavery and segregation, yes, but also in redlining, mass incarceration, racial profiling, and in disparities in health care and housing. It shows up when unarmed Black men and women are killed without accountability. And it shows up when Congress elevates a figure whose rhetoric demeaned Black women and immigrants, while refusing to honor those who died because of systemic racism.

As bishops of The A.M.E. Zion Church, we take our stand: we reject racism in all its forms. It is incompatible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Racism is not merely a social problem; it is a spiritual disease.

It mocks the truth that all people are created in God's image. It violates the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself. And it grieves the heart of God, who shows no favoritism.

We also reaffirm our church's historic commitment to peace and non-violence. From Bishop James Varick and the other founders of The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church — who carved out a place of worship and witness free from the indignities of racism and slavery — to generations of Zion leaders who nurtured voices for justice such as Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Tubman, our church has testified that violence cannot cure violence. As followers of the Prince of Peace, we are called to overcome evil with good. That calling demands that we resist both the violence of weapons and the violence of racism, with the spiritual weapons of prayer, truth, and steadfast love.

We say to America: you cannot heal by hiding. You cannot unify by lifting up some while ignoring others. You cannot honor justice while practicing partiality. "My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism." To glorify some lives while disregarding others is favoritism dressed as patriotism. It is sin.



We also say to our pastors and churches: this is your charge. Preach against racism. Teach your congregations what it looks like, not only in the past but in the present. Name it in your pulpits, confront it in your communities, resist it in your personal lives. Do not let your people believe that racism is someone else's problem or only the work of extremists. Racism is a daily temptation to which this nation too often surrenders. As shepherds of God's flock, you must be clear: racism is sin, and silence in the face of it is complicity.

To Erika Kirk and her children, we say: your grief is real, and our prayers are with you. To the families of Arbery, Castile, Jean, Jefferson, Brooks, Grant, Nichols, and so many others, we say: your grief is real too, and we will not stop calling your loved ones' names before God and before this

nation.

The A.M.E. Zion Church is committed to peace, but peace without justice is counterfeit. As long as racism distorts memory, we will raise our voices. We will comfort the afflicted, confront the comfortable, and echo the words of Amos: "Let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."

Until that day comes, let every pastor, every congregation, every disciple of Christ in Zion be faithful to the charge: proclaim the truth, protect the vulnerable, and pursue justice with courage. For only then can we hope to see a nation where memory is not fractured, but sanctified by love, truth, and equality under God.

## The Board of Bishops of The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

Bishop Brian R. Thompson, Sr.,  
President

Bishop Darryl B. Starnes, Senior Bishop

Bishop W. Darin Moore

Bishop George D. Crenshaw

Bishop Hilliard Dogbe

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Bishop Dwayne A. Walker

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Bishop George W. C. Walker, Sr., Retired

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Bishop Warren M. Brown, Retired

Bishop Kenneth Monroe, Retired

Bishop Dennis V. Proctor, Retired

Bishop Michael A. Frencher, Sr., Retired



# Strengthening Our Global Church: *A Strategic Call to Action*



Rev. Ronald Nathan  
World Politics Editor  
WorldPolitics@StarOfZion.org

By Ronald A. Nathan, World Politics Editor

In a recent and powerful presentation, Dr. Jamal Bryant delivered a timely and sobering assessment of the current state of the U.S. African American Church, the broader African American community, and the potential realities we face under a second Trump presidency. He highlighted profound vulnerabilities—social, political, institutional, and spiritual—that pose significant threats not only to our domestic ministries but to the global mission of The A.M.E. Zion Church.

A disproportionate share of our Church's financial resources originates in the United States. Our denomination's headquarters, General Conferences, departmental centers, and most academic and theological institutions are U.S.-based. Should the U.S. face significant political repression, economic instability, or institutional disruption, the consequences would reverberate across our global connection—from Africa and the Caribbean to Europe and Asia.

This moment calls for more than reflection—decisive strategic action.

To that end, a forward-looking strategic plan must offer a clear path to safeguard our mission, ministry, and long-term viability. At a minimum, this plan should focus on five key priorities:

1. **Financial Diversification** – Encouraging increased giving from international districts and launching sustainable income-generating projects globally.
2. **Leadership & Governance Decentralization** – Empowering regional leadership to operate with greater autonomy and resilience.
3. **Digital Infrastructure** – Investing in robust global platforms for worship, education, communication, and administration.

4. **Theological and Social Response** – Equipping the Church to respond prophetically to rising political threats and systemic injustices.

5. **Institutional Redundancy & Continuity Planning** – Establishing alternative conference sites, digital backups, and regional training hubs to safeguard our operations.

This is not solely a U.S. issue or an international concern—it is a shared responsibility. In a global Church, what affects one part of the body affects us all.

The A.M.E. Zion Church's strategic process must be prayerfully grounded and action-oriented, reflecting both our spiritual calling and the realities of an interconnected world. It must begin with collective discernment—through prayer, consultation, and inclusive engagement with clergy and laity across continents. A thorough analysis of our operational dependencies—especially our reliance on U.S.-based infrastructure—will inform measurable, sustainable goals that strengthen our global resilience.

We are a Church with a proud legacy of prophetic witness, spiritual depth, and international reach. We thank our Board of Bishops for their wisdom in inviting Dr. Bryant to address us at this critical juncture. Their leadership in creating space for this vital conversation reflects a deep commitment to our Church's spiritual and institutional well-being. Now is the time to act—not in fear but in faith. Let us unite to build a stronger, more resilient A.M.E. Zion Church for generations to come.

*Ronald A. Nathan is the Star of Zion's World Politics Editor and an ordained elder of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church based in London, England.*

## OPINION

# Ebenezer A.M.E. Zion Church, Seattle, Uncovers Historic Roots

By Rev. Dr. Garrett M. Thomas

The roots of Ebenezer A.M.E. Zion Church in Seattle were planted in the home of Edward Alexander Pitter and his wife, Marjorie Allen-Pitter, at 1532 24th Avenue, where Mrs. Pitter, a direct descendant of A.M.E. Founder, Bishop Richard Allen (Henry, 2008), taught Sunday School to nearly fifty children weekly. Mr. Pitter, born in Jamaica in 1892, was the captain's steward on a passenger liner. When the ship docked in Seattle, Pitter found himself a new home. He was a Sheriff's Officer, a King County Court Clerk, a mason, and he helped establish the King County Colored Democratic Club, Inc., of which the first pastor of Ebenezer was elected the first president (Pitter, 1971). In 1963, he was honored as Democrat of the Year. Marjorie Allen Pitter helped establish the Colored Woman's Progressive Democratic Club of King County. The Power Couple raised three daughters, Constance, Marjorie, and Maxine, who would all grow to become influential in the life of academics, politics, economics, and ecclesiastics in Seattle (Brown, 2006; Henry, 2008).

As children, the three girls helped their parents to establish and support Ebenezer by visiting their neighbors and evangelizing in the community. To help support the church, they sold baked goods and homemade root beer. Over many months, the membership grew and eventually became too large to be accommodated in the Pitter Home, so Chandler's Hall was rented for worship services. As adults, the sisters proved to be just as fierce and formidable as their parents. All attended Washington University and fought against racism and sexism to earn degrees and begin careers (Brown, 2006).

Constance completed a student teaching assignment in Seattle Public Schools, which refused to hire her upon her college graduation. She traveled to New York City to seek an acting career and was voted The Most Promising Actress of 1941. She left acting to return home and pursue her dream of becoming a teacher, and had to serve as a substitute for eleven years before she was offered a permanent teaching position (Brown, 2006).

Marjorie, the most militant of the trio, was challenged by bigotry and



misogyny at every turn. She never completed her degree but entered politics and became the first Black female state legislator in the history of the State of Washington. Marjorie organized youth groups and a new group of young Democrats in Seattle; for these efforts, she received a letter of thanks and commendation from First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. She also attended the 1964 National Democratic Convention held in Atlantic City and fought to help seat the Mississippi Delta Freedom Party; and she was tear-gassed when the police rioted during the 1968 Convention in Chicago (Brown, 2006; Henry, 2008).



At the University of Washington, Maxine was refused admittance to the nursing program because of her race, despite the fact that she completed the first three years of the course requirements. Undaunted, she switched her major, earned a degree in sociology in 1941, and then relocated and enrolled at the Lincoln School of Nursing in New York City, from which she earned a nursing degree. She then returned to Seattle, became the first African American nurse at Providence Hospital, now known as Swedish Medical Center/Providence Campus, and became the educational director for the Odessa Brown Children's Clinic. Maxine then took her journey full circle when she accepted a position as a professor of nursing at the University of Washington (Royster, 2007).

Rev. Henry Leo Johnson was assigned to Seattle in 1926 by Bishop John William Martin and was received by the Pitter family, who invited him to live in their home until more comfortable living arrangements could be acquired. Working with Mr. Pitter, a community and political activist, Peter DuBow, a newspaper editor, and George Moore, the former secretary of The Honorable Booker T. Washington, and gaining assistance from philanthropist Lawrence Coleman, the crew, under the leadership of Rev. Johnson, broke ground to erect Ebenezer in 1927, laying the cornerstone, and establishing the edifice in 1930 (Pitter, 1967). Ebenezer literally means "Stone of Help," but is often translated as "Stone of Hope" or "Rock of Faith." God promises that upon this Rock of Faith, He would build His Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

African Americans have never surrendered to the gates of hell since the inception of the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave. Throughout slavery, Jim Crow, redlining, and gentrification, African Americans have always known that God would "hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope" (King, 1963). During the Great Depression, Ebenezer, under the Works Progress Administration, offered her space for the textile industry. During the Civil Rights Movement, Ebenezer served breakfast for the Head Start Program and has a long history of feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. On 30 November 1991, the holy sanctuary was shaken but not broken when the stained-glass windows were shattered by eight Molotov cocktails launched by unknown perpetrators, sickened by hatred, who set the church ablaze. Yet, steeped in love, the Ebenezer family and the greater community came together to pray, to praise God, and preserve the Ebenezer legacy by restoring the sanctuary to its beatific form (Moriwaki, 1992).

Historically, Ebenezer has been a solid rock in the life of The A.M.E. Zion Church, also known as The Freedom Church. The deep roots have flourished and blossomed, establishing a legacy of cultural heritage and a significant contribution of Christian values in the lives of Seattleites. Today, Ebenezer continues to serve as a Rock of Faith, as we make efforts to draw nearer to Christ that we may increase our Love for God and increase the Family of God by growing in right relationship with Christ and with one another. We are a church where non-believers are welcome and the unchurched find a home. Our current pastor is Rev. Dr. Garrett M. Thomas, assigned in August 2025 by The Rt. Rev. Dr.

Melanie Miller, Presiding Prelate of the Western Episcopal District. Other notable pastors of Ebenezer include Rev. L.J. Thompson, Rev. Leon B. Carson, Rev. John Wyatt, and Rev. Alphonso H. Meadows.

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#### About Rev. Dr. Garrett M. Thomas

*In June 2025, Rev. Dr. Garrett Maurice Thomas was appointed Pastor of Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Seattle, WA., by Bishop Melanie Rogers-Miller. Previously, Dr. Thomas founded and pastored Douglass Memorial Methodist Church and pastored St. Michael Methodist Church, both in Jersey City. Originally from the N.J. Annual Conference of The A.M.E. Zion Church, Rev. Dr. Thomas served as pastor of Antioch in Linden, New St. Mark in Westwood, and St. Thomas Church in Somerville. Born and raised in Paterson, N.J., Rev. Thomas answered the call to preach and served at First A.M.E. Zion Church under the tutelage of Rev. Dr. Douglas L. Maven.*

*Rev. Thomas earned a Doctorate in Education from Rutgers University, 2023, a Master of Divinity from Drew University in 2012, and a Bachelor of Science, Summa cum laude, in Organizational Management and Pastoral Ministry from Nyack College, 2009. In 2008, Dr. Thomas retired after twenty-five years of service with Verizon, Inc., where he worked as a supervisor. In 2014, he began a new career as a Teacher of English Language Arts in Paterson Public Schools. His past community activities have included coaching girls' softball and pee-wee football.*

*The youngest child born to Rev. Ernest Thomas & Mrs. Maggie Thomas of Paterson, Dr. Thomas has been married to his high school sweetheart for forty years. Sis. Dawn R. Thomas, Esq., is an accomplished attorney and a faithful helpmeet to her husband. The couple has four children: Nikima Thomas-Stewart, Maurisa Thomas-Gainer, Garrett Thomas Jr., and John Thomas, two sons-in-law, Shaun Stewart and Jason Gainer; and they are the proud grandparents of Shaun Stewart Jr., Layla Stewart, and Liyanna Stewart. The Good Rev. Dr. Garrett M. Thomas is a powerful preacher, compassionate pastor, and a constant scholar who energetically and tirelessly has devoted his life to serving the Lord. He declares that his life shall be a testament to the goodness and graciousness of Christ Jesus. One of his favorite scriptures is Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His Purpose." TO GOD BE THE GLORY FOR THE GREAT THINGS HE HAS DONE!*



# sankofa

Looking Back to Move Forward

## A Conversation with Dr. King

By Dr. Anthony T. Browder, Submitted by Rev. Dr. Sarah Fleming

I had a dream the other night. In that dream, I was afforded a rare opportunity to do what could only be possible in a dream. I dreamt that I conducted a personal interview with the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

I questioned Dr. King about the state of the nation, the progress that had been made since his untimely death, and what he saw in our immediate future.

I would like to share some excerpts from my dream.

**AB:** Dr. King, almost 20 years have passed since you left us. How would you describe the changes that have taken place in the struggle for civil rights?

**MLK:** I feel that the tactics we used in the 1960s would not work very well in today's society.

You see, racism is a systematic way of life, and all systems adapt to change. Our protests forced the government to acknowledge our rights as citizens. Then the system changed. Now our people are struggling to hold on to the changes that so many of us fought and died for.

**AB:** In 1986, the president signed into law a bill declaring your birthday a national holiday. Has that pleased you?

**MLK:** the idea of a holiday is gratifying, very gratifying indeed. But I truly hope that people remember the things that I try to do for humanity. I believe that equality for all people must be realized if we are ever to have justice and freedom in this country.

I do have one nagging concern, and that is the constant perception of me as a "dreamer." My life was devoted to change and action---in a conscious state. Dreams, on the other hand, take place when one is unconscious. People need to stop dreaming and start focusing their attention on what is happening around them. It is time to wake up. I made my 'I Have A Dream' speech 25 years ago, and I've had numerous dreams since then. Yes, some were idealistic. But others were dreams of a profound change in tactics.

**AB:** What tactics would work best in today's struggle for human rights?

**MLK:** I had a conversation with Frederick Douglass the other day on that very subject. We both agreed that power concedes nothing without a struggle. Sometimes a struggle may begin nonviolently and then turn violent because of the opposition against it.

Today, the U.S. Government is supporting armed "liberation struggles" all over the world, and to them it is justified. Meanwhile, just brothers and sisters in South Africa are told to wait for their freedom, just as we were told to wait for ours. The time for waiting is long gone. I concur completely with my dear brother Malcolm and his feelings that we must achieve freedom "by any means necessary." You can quote me on that.

**AB:** Since the latter part of the 80s, we have seen a dramatic increase in racial incidents. Do you think racism is staging a comeback?

**MLK:** Racism has always been present; it does not go away. I dare say that racism is as prevalent today as it was 30 years ago, and in some ways, it is even worse. In my day, we knew that society saw us as second-class citizens. We formed our own societies, within our own

communities, and we respected each other as first-class citizens. Now, most Negro communities are riddled with crime, poverty, drugs, and underemployment. There is little self-respect, and we are still regarded as second-class or third-world people.

**AB:** Dr. King, are you saying that the civil rights movement was a failure?

**MLK:** No, not at all. The civil rights movement was a means to an end. The movement focused world attention of the treatment of the Negro in America, and we forced the government to loosen its death grip on us. We gained some breathing room, and we were in the process of shifting our attention towards worldwide human rights when I was assassinated.

**AB:** Dr. King, if you were to give a message to those of us who were inspired by your work, what would that message be?

**MLK:** I would say. In the 50s, we sat-in at lunch counters, we boycotted businesses, and we demanded the right to vote. Today, you own many restaurants, you operate multi-million dollar businesses, you elect your own officials, but you are not free.

Freedom comes only when people are truly dedicated to liberty. We cannot take one step and two steps back and call that progress. Many of our youth today know little or nothing about their history, let alone the struggles of those who lived a generation before them. We've taken two gigantic steps backward, and it deeply concerns me.

People can no longer afford to waste time, they must wake up, wipe the sleep from their eyes and continue the struggle. I would hate to think that I gave my life in vain. From where I stand, I know that we will reach the Promised Land but when, is the abiding question



Dr. King's last words echoed in my mind as my sleep was broken by the sound of my radio alarm clock. I was awakened to the tune of *Herold Melvin and the Blue Notes* singing *Wake up Everybody*. How appropriate.



# Loyal and Laid Off

By Da'Tarvia Parrish

The unwavering loyalty of Black women to the Democratic Party is one of the most consistent facts of American politics. Yet, because of the 2024 election, their economic stability is under assault, a reality that should be a loud warning for the entire nation. While exit polls reported Black women voted overwhelmingly for Kamala Harris, some analyses put their support at 92%, making them her most reliable base; the economic returns on that political investment appear to be dwindling rapidly.

The warning signs are flashing, echoing concerns from economists. While the overall U.S. job market shows signs of growth, the unemployment rate for Black women is rising faster than for any other demographic group. This disparity is not a random fluctuation; it is a systemic problem, one that gender economist Katica Roy has called a “canary in the coal mine,” signaling deeper trouble for the entire economy.

Moreover, this economic precarity has been exacerbated by the recent political shift. Experts point to federal job cuts, budget reductions, and the dismantling of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives under the incoming Trump administration as major factors. Black women, who are overrepresented in the federal workforce, have been disproportionately affected. In an August report, *The New York Times* highlighted Black women lost 319,000 jobs between February and July 2025 across public and private sectors, a period that saw other demographics gain jobs. In a separate report, NBC News cited research from the Economic Policy Institute showing attacks on federal agencies would have steep implications for Black workers. The full extent of job losses specifically for Black women in federal roles is still being quantified, but their overrepresentation in federal agencies means they will bear the brunt of these reductions.

This raises a critical question for the faith communities that are pillars of the Black community. What role can and should The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and institutions like it, play in this deepening crisis?

For a church historically dedicated to social justice and the uplift of its people, the answer must be more than just spiritual solace. As we are already engaged in empowerment and leadership training, we as a collective can respond to this crisis with an elevated response. Drawing from existing networks, our churches are positioned to create specialized job training and placement programs to support Black women facing career transitions. This moves beyond conventional community service to offer tangible and concrete assistance for those

impacted by federal and private sector cuts. By leveraging connections with congregants in various industries, churches can facilitate mentorships, skills workshops, and job pipelines, directly connecting members with employment opportunities. This approach not only addresses immediate employment needs but also builds long-term economic resilience for Black women within the church and wider community.

Also, beyond direct placement, churches can mobilize their substantial moral and social authority to launch national advocacy campaigns addressing economic injustice. By speaking out on behalf of their mem-

bers and other affected individuals, faith leaders can demand accountability from political leaders and corporations. Such advocacy could draw national attention to the disproportionate economic impacts on Black women and lead to broader policy changes. A strong, unified voice from the faith community provides a powerful counter-narrative and places pressure on institutions to create a more equitable economic landscape.

Most of all, churches can serve as central hubs for resource mobilization, using their infrastructure to host workshops on

financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and mental health support. Recognizing the significant stress that job loss places on individuals and families, these community-based services provide vital tools for personal and professional development. These workshops can help Black women develop new business plans, navigate complex financial situations, and build the emotional and psychological resilience needed to overcome adversity and thrive in new careers. By providing this holistic support, churches can play an essential role in fostering sustainable, long-term success.

For too long, the political loyalty of Black women has been taken for granted. As the economic ground shifts beneath their feet, their trusted institutions must step up. The A.M.E. Zion Church has a historic opportunity to demonstrate its relevance by not only offering spiritual comfort but also providing a lifeline to its most dedicated members during this period of profound economic uncertainty.

*Da'Tarvia Parrish is a member of New Hope A.M.E. Zion Church in Salisbury, North Carolina and serves as the Salisbury Branch President of American Association of University Women.*



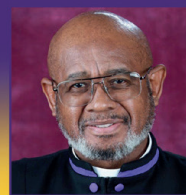




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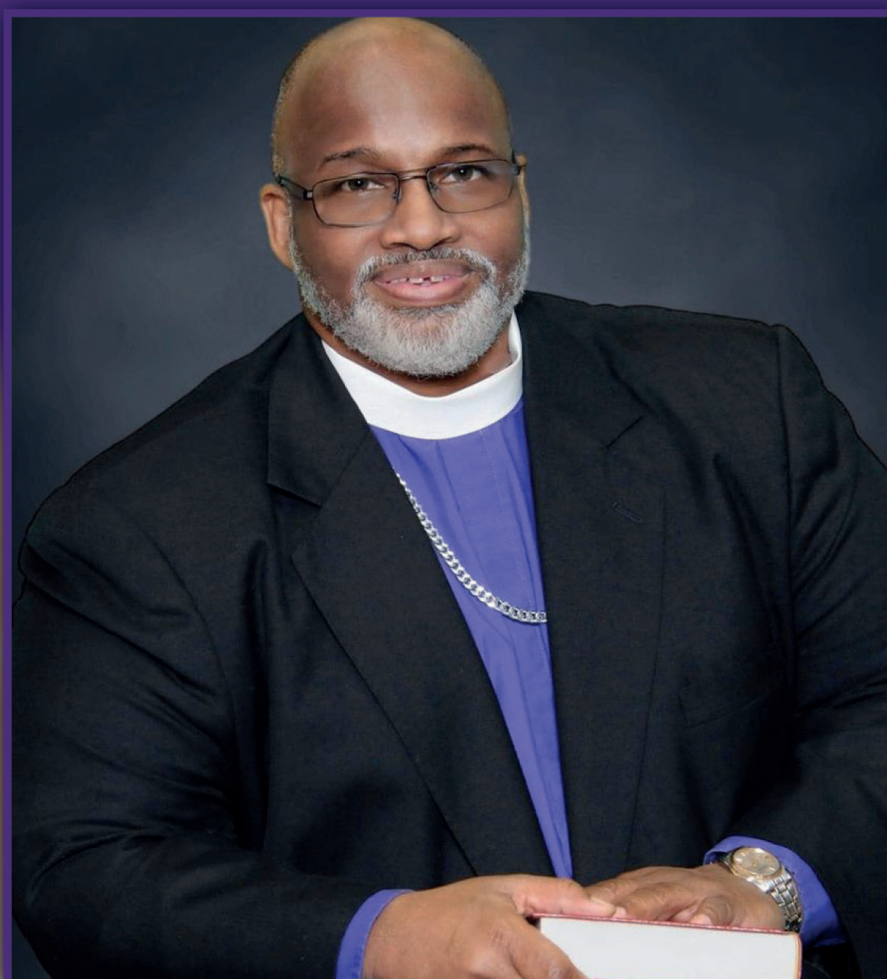
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