

The 135th  
Annual Palmetto  
Conference  
Emphasizes "Being  
Creative in Our Methods"

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Sankofa:  
Looking Back to  
Move Forward

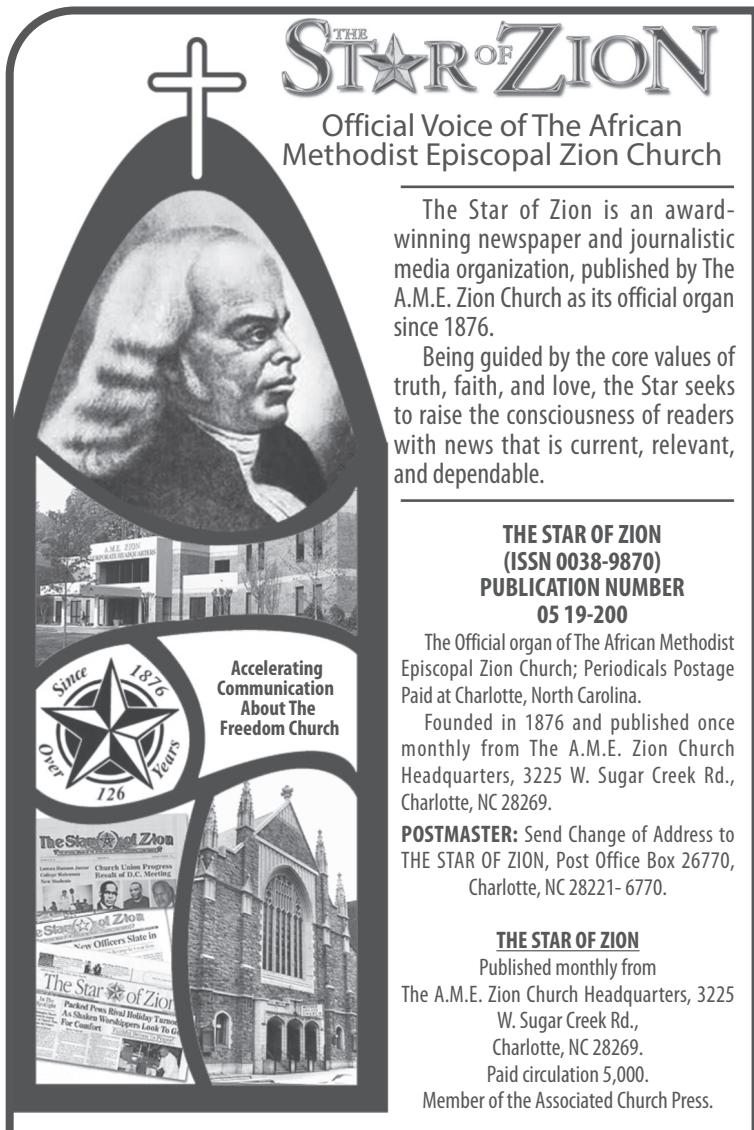
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# THE STAR OF ZION

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



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

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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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## OPINION

LEADING  
THROUGH  
CHANGE:“Being Creative In Our  
Methods!”

By Angelia J. Poole

In today's climate, the world is experiencing an unprecedented time of rapid change that challenges core values, changes moral paradigms, and chips away at foundational beliefs. With God having charged His people to **“Go ye therefore...”** (Matthew 28:18-20) and **“to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”** (Micah 6:8), God's church is charged with an interesting challenge: To lead God's people in provoking change across the globe externally, while internally promoting change individually across our denomination. We recognize the importance of creatively changing our methods to committedly channeling God's message. This assignment charges each of us as leaders to allow God to continue changing us as we lead others through change, even as times swiftly change.

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, also known as **“The Freedom Church”**, has a wide variety of leaders with diverse and differing roles, backgrounds, resources, perspectives, and skillsets. It was at this year's Piedmont Episcopal District Leadership Institute, led by Bishop Darryl B. Starnes, that speakers and workshop presenters consistently challenged attendees in the areas of personal growth and spiritual development. For us to make the changes that God has assigned to our hands, we must be willing to become holistically submitted to our changeless God, who constantly changes us, while we creatively change our methods of delivering an unchanging message to a continually changing world. To make positive impacts for God's Kingdom, we must endure, implement, and navigate a plethora of changes while maintaining the integrity of God's changeless message.

This important component of change requires not just a sincere commitment to our connectional congregation, but it also requires our complete submission to the Immutable One, the God Who does not change. Consistently, Leadership Institute speakers continued to point us back to personal reflection about our individual and intimate relationships with God. We were corporately redirected from focusing on success to assessing levels of impact. Are we making positive impacts within our families, our churches, our communities, our world? Does what we do meet the need for change that God has called us to initiate, and have those changes been sparked within us so they attract others to Him as they clearly see Him through us?

Continued on page 5



Mrs. Debra Chappelle-Polk  
Zion Spotlight Editor  
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# 1st Mass Meeting-Baltimore District

By Shannon Owens Harden, YAMS Coordinator and Emma Smith, Executive Committee Secretary

The Baltimore District's Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society's First Mass Meeting, where the Bureau of Supply was highlighted, started off with a spirit-filled praise and worship session, led by the Scotland A.M.E. Zion Church Praise Team. In undeniable Baltimore District style, several local Supply Secretaries were included on the program, including Sis. Vickie Lomax, delivering a heartfelt prayer, and Sis. Sharon Brown, who delivered the morning scripture, Hebrews 13:1-7. Sis. Mary Jackson delivered the REV. DR. FLORENCE RANDOLPH LEGACY LITANY. The Litany encouraged Missionaries to celebrate the legacy of faithful leaders, and give thanks for their sacrifices, service, and steadfast love. The litany offered a prayer for Mission Leaders to be blessed with wisdom and endowed with grace, that the legacy left would glorify God.



Following the powerful Litany, the Baltimore District was warmly welcomed by several members of the Scotland A.M.E. Zion Church, an absolutely beautiful structure. The business of the Baltimore District Mass Meeting was kicked off by our leader, Baltimore District President, Sis. Sharon Hassan. Sis. Hassan shared details about the West Africa Project, and encouraged individual Missionaries, as well as local Missionary Boards, to make and keep their pledges toward this one-of-a-kind structure, an opportunity to be a part of history. Sis. Hassan shared that all persons and churches would have a year to complete their pledges. Sis. Hassan also provided information on the impending celebration of the Life Member's Council 90th Anniversary. She encouraged local Boards to submit the names and photos of their Missionaries, ages 90 and above to Joy Williams Foster immediately. The President's segment ended with a reminder that each church is expected to nominate one person for the Community Service/Leadership and Legacy Recognition. This will be our 2nd program.



After the business of the District was handled, we were treated to a wonderful Guest Speaker. Ms. Terri Mason, Esq., 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President of the National Council of Negro Women, shared on the life and legacy of Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune. She highlighted the rich history NCNW has with WHOMS. This included recognition of former International WHOMS President Dr. Barbara Shaw, who served as President of NCNW after the death of Dr. Dorothy Height. Rev. Donna Richardson taught a thought-provoking and inspirational Mission Study. She reminded us that



stellar leadership of Sis. Ellen Ike, Baltimore District Superintendent of Buds, and the Rev. Ericka Butler, Baltimore District Y's Secretary, the Buds and Y's were introduced to the 2025-2026 theme of Legacy and Leadership. The Buds and Y's session began with an opening prayer, followed by an icebreaker activity where participants viewed an image of a person breaking an ice sculpture with a heart inside and were asked to identify the emotion being conveyed. The Buds and Y's were presented with the question of what legacy meant to them. They were given the following options to choose from: 1) Money or property passed down to future generations, 2) Values and beliefs

transmitted to others, 3) Knowledge and wisdom that create a legacy of learning, 4) Family traditions, stories, and experiences that become part of a lasting legacy. From there, Sis. Ike and Rev. Butler used Proverbs 1:8-9 as a biblical reference for legacy: *"My child, listen to your father's teachings. And do not forget your mother's advice. Their teachings will beautify your life."* This scripture outlines the responsibility of parents to plant a legacy in their children, and the children's responsibility to carry it forward.

Community Outreach is an integral part of all Mass Meetings. Baltimore District Missionaries were charged with providing diapers, baby wipes, and toiletries for mothers and their children, fleeing Domestic Violence.

As always, the Baltimore District showed up, and God showed out! Over 3000 diapers were collected, thousands of baby wipes and other special gifts for babies and children were collected, along with shampoos, lotions, and soaps for the women. Baltimore District Secretary of the Bureau of Supply, Sis. Francine Jefferson and Baltimore District YAMS Coordinator, Sis. Shannon Owens Harden worked in concert to identify two Domestic Violence Shelters that were served by this Outreach. The Baltimore District Missionaries continue in prayer for all persons and families fleeing domestic violence situations, but specifically lift in prayer, the families being served at Baltimore's Helping Up Mission Women's Shelter, and the Betty Anne Krauchke Domestic Violence Shelter, in Rockville Maryland.



# A September to Remember: Edenton District Vacation Bible School

By Ms. Keisha Dobie

Photos By Ms. Keisha Dobie

November 2025, Edenton, NC..., "Who has Vacation Bible School in September?" That was the question Rev. Fondella A. Leigh, Presiding Elder of the Edenton District, kept hearing. Her answer was always the same: *we do*. This year, the Edenton District of the Albemarle Annual Conference tried something a little different and held VBS in early September, right at the start of Christian Education Month. And what a blessing it turned out to be.

For three evenings, September 3–5, Union Grove A.M.E. Zion Church in Edenton, North Carolina, opened its doors to children, teens, and adults for a time of study, fun, and fellowship. Rev. Randy Griffin, Sr., host pastor and the church family, welcomed more than 40 young people ages 2 through 16, along with 25–30 adults, each night from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. The theme, "Ten X Flex: Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus," tied everything together and guided the lessons and activities each night.

Much of the credit goes to Mrs. Gwen Brown, Edenton District VBS Director, who worked alongside Presiding Elder Leigh and a host of teachers, volunteers, and community partners to make the week a success.

#### Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus:

Each night of Vacation Bible School carried its own theme, building on the message of walking in the footsteps of Jesus. The first evening, "Flex Your Faith," focused on the call of the disciples. Mrs. Vanessa Jackson taught the adults while Mrs. Alice Hines guided the children, with support from activity leaders, Mrs. Sadie Riddick, Mrs. Doris Etheridge, Ms. Sharon Bunch, and Mrs. Alice Bunch. The lesson centered on Matthew 4:19, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men," reminding everyone that when we follow Jesus, our lives shine with His light. To bring the message to life, two large feet were displayed as a backdrop, and participants placed sticky notes on them with personal commitments about how they would follow Jesus. Responses such as "praying," "being obedient," and "serving others" showed hearts open to growth.

The second night, "Balance in Prayer," highlighted the importance of staying connected to God. The adults, led by Ms. Keisha Dobie, studied *The Lord's Prayer* in detail, while Mrs. Cheryl Bembry guided the children through the story of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Everyone then took part in a hands-on activity, planting seeds in small pots as a symbol of how prayer, like a seed, must be cared for and tended if it is to grow. The simple act of planting became a living reminder that prayer anchors a life of faith.

By the third evening, the theme turned to "Strong in Service," showing how faith is best expressed through action. Mrs. Angela Taylor taught the adult lesson, while the children and youth were divided into age groups. Younger children, taught by Mrs. Alice Clagon, made flower crafts and learned the poem "I Am Special," celebrating the worth each person has in God's eyes. At the same time, teens worked with Ms. Keisha Dobie on a lively QR Code Escape Hunt. Using video clues, they solved puzzles that revealed the word "Serve." It was a fun,



modern activity that carried a timeless message, just as Jesus said in Mark 10:45, "He came not to be served, but to serve."

**Youth Explosion:** The week ended on Saturday with a powerful Youth Explosion that brought together all the lessons of VBS. The service was led almost entirely by young people, showing their growth and excitement from the week. The scripture lesson was read by Zy-meire Askew, prayer was offered by Teyana Sanderlin, the welcome came from Ilyjah Pulliam, and Nia Bembry gave the introduction of the preacher. Their enthusiasm set the tone for a service filled with energy and faith.

The message was delivered by Pastor Darius Ballard of York Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church in Greenville, NC. Preaching from Psalm 27: 13-14, Pastor Ballard encouraged the congregation not to give up when life gets hard. He reminded everyone that even in dark times, God's presence brings strength and hope. His words, "Don't quit now, because your 'not yet' has come to pass," rang out as both challenge and encouragement.

A highlight of the service was the Community Praise Team, a group of 14 young ladies who told the story of David through dance. Their performances of "We Need the Fire" and "Why Not Me" moved the congregation and added a creative expression of worship that connected with people of all ages.

The most memorable moment came at the altar call. About 45 young people crowded to the front, raising their hands and declaring together, "I will follow Jesus." It was a sight that captured the heart of the entire week, youth stepping forward in faith and worshipping Christ.

**Community Support:** The week was made possible with the support of sponsors and friends of the district. Texas Roadhouse encouraged scripture memorization by offering free meal vouchers to children who learned three Bible verses. The Edenton Police Department provided hot dogs and hamburgers for Saturday's lunch and even handled the cooking. Other sponsors included LeBlue Waters, Pepsi, and Gospel DJ Junior Barrow. Sisters of Strength donated feminine hygiene products to help families in need.

The Edenton District WH&OM Society, Lay Council, and Christian Education directors all pitched in to teach, lead activities, or help with organization. Volunteers like Ms. Vera Riddick and the Community Praise Dancers gave their time and talent, showing how strong the district can be when everyone works together.

**Reflections:** Presiding Elder Leigh described the turnout as "a blessing" and gave thanks to God for such a strong showing of youth and adults. The joy of the week could be seen in the children and teens as they shared their favorite parts, planting seeds, solving the escape hunt, making crafts, and taking part in the Youth Explosion. For many, those moments are lessons they will carry forward. Thirteen-year-old Tylashia Privott of Edenton summed it up best when she said, "Don't give up. God will help you be successful." Her words echoed the very heart of the week. The Edenton District showed that the timing of Vacation Bible School is not what matters most. What matters is the purpose, to draw people closer to Jesus.



## Continued from page 2.....



Learning to change within the midst of change is a skill that many learn in real time, even while change is occurring in and around us. This series of articles will be a deeper dive into the challenges A.M.E. Zion leaders face while embracing the commitment of leading through change. Each group of leaders who've contributed to this important conversation addresses this pivotal challenge from the perspective of their respective peer groups. This series is intended to help those of us who

answer the calling of this charge to recognize the shared responsibility of the assignment and to further support the partnerships within Zion that prepare us for "The Go" by increasing our justness, magnifying our kindness, and solidifying our humbleness as we are changed while we lead through change.



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# Fairview A.M.E. Zion Church presents SHE READY.. For Purpose, Power and Presence Women's Conference

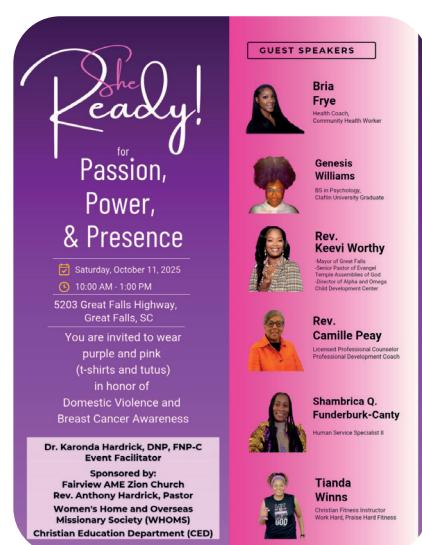
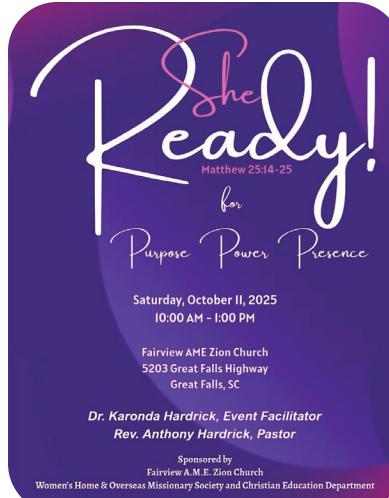
By Dr. Karonda Hardrick, DNP,  
APRN, FNP-C

She Ready: For Purpose, Power & Presence was an idea presented by Marcine Cloud, a member of Fairview, out of concern regarding family members who were impacted by Domestic Violence in the community of Great Falls, SC. The WHOMS of Fairview brainstormed the idea, and SHE READY was born.

Our theme colors, Purple and Pink, were selected to bring awareness to Breast Cancer and Domestic Violence. The theme Scripture was Matthew 25:14-25, the Parable of the Talents, a lesson on equity and justice that also reminds us that God gives each of us unique gifts, time, and opportunities. It's not about how much we have, but how we use what we're given.

The prevailing essence of the conference aimed to empower youth and young and adult women to use their God given talents, emphasizing the importance of being responsible, productive, and accountable. We also provided the opportunity for everyone to participate in our outreach efforts to develop Domestic Violence kits to create and donate to one of the local women's shelters in Chester County. We also offered opportunities for salvation and prayer. Six remarkable speakers were asked to discuss their professional journey, along with sharing biblical principles, on how their Christian faith shaped their lives and professional roles. Each speaker uniquely integrated scripture references and biblical principles for everyday living.

Brye Frye, a health coach and community health worker, discussed how she was able to see the hand of God through the timeline of her life, having been distracted at times, but remembering the words, scriptures, and biblical principles her grandmother, who is an attorney, taught her to keep her grounded. Ultimately, she shared how she was able to institute what she learned intimately of the knowledge of Christ to remain grounded on her own. Genesis Williams,



a graduate psychology major and certified in mental health first aid, spoke about how having a disability is not an excuse from our responsibility as disciples of Christ to share the good news. She reminded us, with scrip-

ture references, that sometimes sharing God's word doesn't always produce immediate change, and we have to trust that God's timing is the best timing. And in our anxious and depressive moments, we should have a mental health plan to help us navigate the distractions and challenges of life and discipleship.

Keevi Worthy, newly elected and first female Mayor of Great Falls, SC, and owner of Alpha and Omega Child Development Center, reminded us not to give up on our dreams, even when the odds are stacked against us and trouble is at every turn. When God gives you a dream, a goal, or a vision, He will make provisions for it to come to fruition. Tianda Winns, fitness instructor and owner of Work Hard, Praise Hard, reiterated the importance of moving our bodies. She discusses statistics, the risks, and the benefits of moderate physical activity. She encouraged us to keep it simple, make physical activity fun, and find an accountability partner. It's imperative that we make moderate physical activity a priority—movement is not punishment, it's a privilege.

Shambrica Funderburk-Canty, Human Service Specialist II for Chester County DSS, explained that her job as an assessment/investigator case manager is to ensure children have what they need to survive and thrive safely within their homes, and respond when parents are not being responsible to provide basic care needs in situations that threaten a child's livelihood. She intervenes to help and ensure that both the children and their families have access to food, shelter, and safety. She encourages both the young and the old to seek God, learn about Him through reading this word in the bible, keep God first, and trust with all your might because He is worth the fight. Having a positive attitude and being respectful goes a long way, and remember to stay ready so you don't have to get ready.

Rev. Camille Peay, Licensed Professional Counselor and Professional Development Coach, encouraged us to reflect on buried purpose, power, and unearth the presence of God in our lives. She provided us with hand shovels and biblical scriptures (tools) to dig up our buried dreams, talents, gifts, and unearth God's power within us. We were blessed to exceed our attendance with nearly 60



participants, and over 20 Domestic Violence kits were presented to Mrs. Simmons, representative from the local Women's Shelter, who brought greetings at the opening of the conference program. Women left spiritually filled with God's words, refreshments, and fellowship long after the benediction.

This author, Dr. Karonda Hardrick, is thankful to have been the event coordinator, First Lady, and Local WHOMS President for Fairview A.M.E. Zion Church. Professionally, Karonda's nursing career spans over 20 + years. She currently practices as a Family Nurse Practitioner at a federally qualified health center (FQHC). Her passion for nursing simply describes her commitment to her faith, family, and service. It's more than a career for her; it's both a mission and a ministry. Ultimately, as a missionary, she wants to share my passion for being healthy (mind, body, spirit) with people as she aspires to help them build their capacity for mental, physical, and spiritual success, while empowering them to help others to do the same.



By doing so, Karonda hopes to encourage believers to live in a "healthy" way, one that reflects their faith and inspires others to come unto Christ, learn of His love and His mission. She Ready. We Ready. Are you Ready? Because if you stay ready, you won't have to get ready. You are Ready.



*Rev. Anthony Hardrick, Pastor  
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Great Falls, SC 29055  
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*Motto: Each one Reach One,  
Invite a friend to worship with us!!  
Holy Spirit, You Are Welcome Here  
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"Through our faithfulness, fairness, and motivation, we  
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## First Checkup Meeting MAC

By Rev. Phyllis Mealing-Hightower

*Bishop Daran H. Mitchell*

*Missionary Supervisor Rev.  
Lynn K. Mitchell*

*Host Church St. Paul  
AMEZ Detroit Rev. Todd  
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Distinguished Detroit West-  
ern and Advancing Chica-  
go district*

*Presiding Elder Dr. Derrick  
Simmons. And Rev. Austin  
Young of Trinidad-Tobago  
District*

Saturday, October 4, 2025, our first checkup meeting was held at St. Paul A.M.E.Z. Detroit After our business sessions were conducted, we went into a powerful Word preached by our Bishop, Dr. Daran H. Mitchell. The St. Paul Choir rendered the music with a soul-stirring version of "Is Your All On The Alter?" Bishop's scripture was John 16:25-33. Special information from John 16:33 subject: "I Refuse To Be A Victim." Bishop Mitchell made it very clear that the world

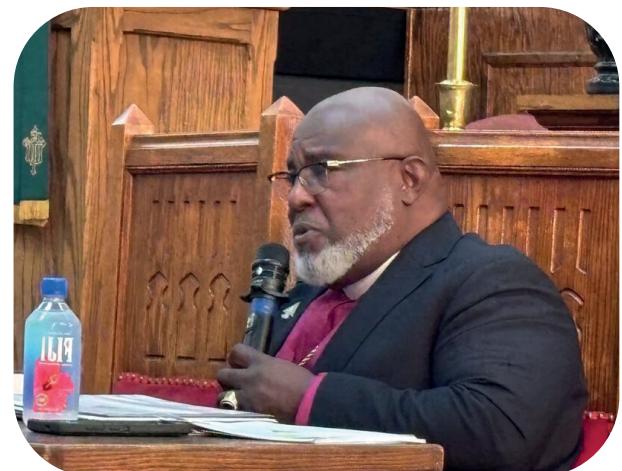


gives us chaos, but God, Jesus, gives us PEACE. He said, "God grows us up and pushes us into a new place to liberate us and sustain us."

He also said, "Transition is NOT TRAGIC, but it's necessary for teaching us. A few points to convey

1. God has done good things in me.
2. Failure is not faith; it will not keep us from acting foolishly at times. But there are times we need to encourage ourselves. Learn from our mistakes. Faith will not keep us from failure, but it will give us the strength to get up and keep moving.
3. Whose up ahead is greater than what's up ahead.

Bishop Mitchell truly set our souls on fire. The steps of a good person are ordered by the Lord. Your failure is not final. In "ME JESUS," there is peace. In the world, there is tribulations and trouble. He gave us a wonderful analogy about Noah's Ark. There is a storm out on the ocean, but if my soul is anchored in Jesus, we will never drift away. It's not about what; it's about Who be of good cheer because we have overcome the world. What a spiritually uplifting worship experience we share. All because we refuse to be A VICTIM. Know that Jesus paid it all, and all to Him we owe, so SAINTS REFUSE TO BE A



# Knoxville District Missionaries Highlight Equity and Justice During Mass Meeting

By Knoxville Missionary Team

The Knoxville District WHOMS of the Tennessee Conference held their Third Missionary Mass Meeting on Sunday, August 28, 2025, at 4:00 pm at Wallace Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, where Reverend Alvin W. Gwathney is the pastor. Our newly appointed Presiding Elder, Barbara Haigler, was greeted with big smiles and warm welcomes from the congregation prior to her opening remarks.

The meeting was supported by the Knoxville District churches and ministers. Christine Hill-Gwathney, president, opened the Education portion of the meeting with a warm welcome and an opening prayer.

During the Education Session, each District Officer gave a presentation of the roles and responsibilities of their respective department, with some bringing their department colors. The Health Coordinator, Cynthia J. Finch, explained the Health Corners Project and tested the congregation's knowledge of acceptable blood pressure levels by asking if they knew what their blood pressure levels should be.

After the presentations, all the WHOMS Local presidents were acknowledged and applauded for their obedience to the Call to Serve. During the Question-and-Answer Session, five missionaries participated by standing consecutively to answer the question: What is the purpose of the Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society of The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church? To end the Education Session, the entire congregation joined in to recite the Missionary Benediction, which led immediately into the Worship Service.

Our worship component was opened by Angela McNair, who led the Call to Worship with scripture taken from Matthew 28:19-20. She set the tone for the remainder of the afternoon by encouraging all present to stand to their feet and join in joyfully singing 'Oh How I Love



Jesus'. The invocation was read by Bernetta Hardin of Concord Church, and the scripture, Matthew 28:19-20, was read by Cynthia J. Finch of Greater Warner. The opening prayer was offered by Marie Battle of Logan Temple.

Stephanie Jones of Wallace Chapel then introduced our guest speaker, Denise Jackson, Ph.D. Dr. Jackson delivered a presentation on Equity and Justice, which she titled "Jesus, Our Standard: A 5W,2H Analysis." She used as her theme verse Micah 6:8 and read the ESV translation: "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to

love mercy (kindness) and to walk humbly with your God." This Old Testament verse gives us three areas to uphold for Christian living. To better understand it and its application in our lives as followers of Christ, Dr. Jackson did an engineering analysis (5W,2H – Who, What, When, Where, Why, How, and How Much). She asked each question and offered a scripture-based answer to reach a recommendation of how we can apply Justice, Mercy, and Humility to our everyday walk with Christ. The conclusion was if Jesus is indeed our standard, the world will see Jesus reflected in what we do and say. They shall know we are Christians by our love, by our actions, by our talk, and by our walk. They will see justice and mercy lived out in our interactions, and they will wonder how we do it without fear in an unjust society. They will know us and wonder what then is our standard for living. And we will answer "Jesus" by acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God.

Reverend Alvin W. Gwathney, pastor of Wallace Chapel, extended the Invitation and the Altar Call. The service concluded with the congregation singing 'Lift Him Up' and closing remarks were given by Presiding Elder Barbara Haigler.

# NEW YORK CONFERENCE CHECK-UP MEETING AT THE MOTHER CHURCH, BISHOP GEORGE D. CRENSHAW, PRESIDING

By Debra Chappelle-Polk, Zion Spotlight Editor

Photo By Arilla Whitehurst, Solomon Green

November 2025, New York, NY..., On September 27, 2025, the New York Conference convened a Check-Up Meeting, Bishop George D. Crenshaw, Prelate for the Northeastern Episcopal District (N.E.E.D.), presiding. Nearly 300 members attended the meeting which was hosted by Mother A.M.E. Zion Church in Harlem, New York, where Rev. Dr. Malcolm J. Byrd is Senior Pastor.

Upon his arrival, Bishop Crenshaw visited the crypt of Bishop James Varick, which is housed in the Dabney N. Montgomery Heritage Museum. Bishop Crenshaw had previously expressed his desire to visit the Varick Crypt.

After breakfast, everyone gathered in the sanctuary for Bishop Crenshaw's Bible Study Presentation. The handout was entitled. *"Is Bible Study Still Relevant? The presentation of Bible Study as we presented it in the 80s and 90s is a thing of the past. If you are looking for a crowd, your method must be updated."* The handout offered a guideline to enhance Bible Study, which included a book series authored by



Thom Rainer. Bishop Crenshaw said, "One size does not fit all," and recommended Semester Sessions: The Millennial Approach, Generational Approach, Current Issue Approach, Specific Biblical Issues, African Presence in the Bible, and the 19 Spiritual Gifts. Bible Study for Youth & Children, Dramatizations, and Relationship Series were also recommended. It was an informative session.

The Check-Up Meeting opened with a Devotional led by the Praise & Worship Team. The Invocation by the Worship Leader, Rev. Dr. Malcolm J. Byrd, followed.

Rev. Byrd welcomed the New York Conference and said, "Rejoice. Our God is worthy! You've come from Newburgh, Hudson Valley, Poughkeepsie, Long Island, Queens, the Boogie-down Bronx, Brooklyn, and Manhattan, so come on, New York Conference, let's go up for God!"

The opening hymn was "Holy, Holy, Holy." Rev. Byrd said, "It was on September 25, 1925, that this building where you are now seated was formally dedicated and, on that day, 100 years ago, they sang a grand hymn, a rousing, robust hymn, 'Holy, Holy, Holy.'"

The scripture lesson, Genesis 12: 1-3, was read by Rev. Natalie R. Wimberly. Presiding Elder Keith I. Harris delivered the morning prayer. Presiding Elder A. Alfred Carson presented the Right Reverend George D. Crenshaw, the 103<sup>rd</sup> Bishop in the line of succession. P.E. Carson said, "We have already been blessed this morning by Bishop Crenshaw, showing us the relevancy of bible study. He comes to us not only as a great administrator, but a great teacher and a great preacher." Carson added, "He has definitely graced this Episcopal area."

Following the sermonic selection, Bishop Crenshaw took the pulpit. He thanked Presiding Elder Carson for the kind introduction, Presiding Elders Harris and Pogue, the host church, and pastor, Rev. Dr. Malcolm J. Byrd.

Bishop Crenshaw said, "I asked God what he would have me say today for our Check-Up Meeting and God led me to the book of beginnings, Genesis, Chapter 12." He asked the New York Conference to

"dream again." He said, "The concept of dreaming in its purest sense is God's method of conveying to you where God wants to take you next. God told Abram to leave his homeland. He took Abram out of his comfort zone. "Get out of here, because when I am finished with you, your children will be as numerous as the stars in the sky and sands by the seashore." Bishop Crenshaw said, "As soon as we move out of our comfort zone, God is going to open the door you've been praying about for years. When you find the boldness to step out of your comfort zone and step out on God, you're going to hear God say, 'Everywhere the souls of your feet shall touch, I've already given it to you. Nothing will be withheld.' Bishop Crenshaw said, God designed Abraham's journey so that he would grow into the person who could handle being the father of a nation. "Regardless of what you're going through, God is expanding and equipping you for your next assignment. He is preparing you for your next level and your next blessing." The Bishop ended his "little homily" by saying the last thing that Abraham told me to tell you is this: "Favor is the reward for obedience. God operates on principle, not personality. God is not a Christian nationalist. I dare you to dream again. I dare you to trust God with your dream and watch God turn that thing around. He never promised you easy, but he promised that he'd be with you always. You've got to keep dreaming."

The Call to Christian Discipleship was led by Presiding Elder Stephen W. Pogue. The Finance Committee lifted the Offering. The business of the Conference followed. After all reports were presented and announcements made, Bishop Crenshaw delivered the Benediction, thus ending the New York Conference Check-Up Meeting.

Lunch was served by members of the Mother Zion Women's Home & Overseas Missionary Society, Sis. Wendy Grimes Jones, Local Parent Body President and Stewardess Board, Sis. Orris Upshaw Grimes, President.

All agreed Bishop Crenshaw conducted an effective and enlightening meeting. Rev. Byrd said, "The check-up meeting was well-run and well-attended."

# Rock Hill District Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society Concludes Year with Bud's Roundup

By Chantay Forney-Bouler

The final mass meeting of the South Carolina Conference year for the Rock Hill District Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society emerged in the form of a Bud's Roundup. On September 27, 2025, all roads led to Camp Thunderbird, Lake Wylie, South Carolina, with more than four hundred (400) buds, youth, and adults converging on the campus.

Miss Barbara J. Epps, Rock Hill District Superintendent of Buds of Promise and former General Superintendent of the Buds of Promise Juvenile Missionary Society, The A.M.E. Zion Church, was the mastermind behind this massive gathering, planning and executing a fun-filled, reaching, teaching experience second to none! Mrs. Chantay Forney-Bouler, District President and former Connectional Recording Secretary of the Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society, The A.M.E. Zion Church, collaborated with Miss Epps, contributing some additional components primarily to celebrate a fruitful year and recognize those local societies and individuals who went beyond the call.

The camp opened with greetings from Superintendent Epps and President Bouler. Devotion followed with singing, in unison, "We are Little Buds of Promise", scripture read by Taraji Jones of Red Oak A.M.E. Zion Church; Prayer offered by Amariana Houser of New Loves Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, and Buds Rituals led by Megan Wilkes of Clover A.M.E. Zion Church, which included the Buds colors, motto, slogan, and pledge. Devotion culminated with a selection by the melodious voices of the buds and youth choir of New Loves Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church.



Superintendent Epps came forth with a spirited pep rally exercise on what it means to be a Bud with the intent of reinforcing the purpose and the commitment of the Buds Society.

In preparation for the teaching time, Reverend Sharon A. Browning, the fearless, animated, and energetic Presiding Elder of the

Rock Hill District, guided the audience through an interactive musical exercise that left many breathless (children excluded)!

Superintendent Epps's teachable moment, entitled "Don't Forget What You Learned; The Theme Goes On," brought out the importance of not forgetting by introducing key points aligned with three of the quadrennial theme components, namely "Self-Care & Wellness", "Equity & Justice," and "Leadership &



growth along life's journey.



The session shifted to the mass meeting segment where President Bouler presided. This was a time of reflection on the year's work, God's blessing of the work and all the time, talent and energy put forth by the local missionaries to make an impact in the lives of those who needed it most. She, along with district officers, recognized all for their efforts and celebrated the following for going beyond the call:

- Parent Body awarded the Parent Body President of the Year award to Ms. Melvina Dial, Parent Body President of Clover A.M.E. Zion Church



- Young Adult Missionary Society gave two YAMS awards, one to Ms. Melanie Cantey of United A.M.E. Zion Church and the other to Mr. Myles Blake of Rock Grove A.M.E. Zion Church



- Youth Missionary Society presented the Victoria Richardson Service award to Ms. Quentilla Boatwright and the New Home A.M.E. Zion Church Youth Missionary Society

- Buds of Promise Juvenile Missionary Society presented the Super Superintendent award to Clover A.M.E. Zion Church and the Coins for Kids award to OZion A.M.E. Zion Church



- Life Members Council presented the Life Members award to Catawba Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church

- Affiliate Partner Recognition



Legacy".

Her final lesson was focused on positive influence, separating the right from the wrong, and following positive examples.

The Buds transferring service was the featured highlight. Fifteen (15) buds transferred to the Youth Missionary Society. Each was given a student's bible to aid them in their personal/spiritual



was presented to New Mt. Olivet A.M.E. Zion Church in support of the Balm in Gilead, Inc.'s Healthy Churches 2030 Virtual Conference for the 2024 year, with the most virtual registrants

- Mass Meeting Registration award was presented to O'Zion A.M.E. Zion

Church

- Second Mile Offering award was presented to Pineville A.M.E. Zion Church
- Communion Offering award was presented to New Home A.M.E. Zion Church

Food and fun were the climax of this enriching experience. Cooks were on the grill, mastering this popular artistry while the crowd



stood still, anxiously awaiting to indulge. A variety of engaging games, plenty of water activities, and walking trails were among the things to do.

What an amazing time had by all, enjoying the creative teachings and basking in the beauty of God's green earth so strategically arranged on the grounds of Camp Thunderbird.

The Rock Hill District Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society expressed gratitude to God for his patience and provision and to Bishop and Mrs. Eric Leake, Episcopal Leadership, Reverend Sharon A. Browning, Presiding Elder, pastors, and laity of the Rock Hill District family for their unwavering support.



# The 135th Annual Palmetto Conference Emphasizes “Being Creative in Our Methods”

By Reverend Wilma M. Jordan and Mrs. Linda P. Jones

Photos By Reverend Tomisha Ford

## The 135<sup>th</sup> Annual Palmetto Conference Emphasizes “Being Creative in Our Methods”

The 135<sup>th</sup> Session of the Palmetto Annual Conference convened from September 11-13, 2025, in Rock Hill, SC, at the Kenneth Monroe Transformation Center. The Conference was convened under the leadership of the Presiding Prelate of the South Atlantic Episcopal District, Bishop Eric Leake, along with the Presiding Elders, Reverend Dr. Victor C. Wilson of the Spartanburg District and Reverend Dr. Alvin W. McLamb of the Columbia-Camden District.

Bishop Leake began this Conference with an 8:45 AM Chat with the Pastors. Bishop Leake's message to the presiding elders, pastors, ministers, ministers' spouses, delegates, and laity was one of gratefulness for the work that had been in existence for over 135 years. He noted that The A.M.E Zion Church is tremendously blessed because of its faithfulness in the work of ministry. The Quadrennial Theme focus for this year's Conference was “Being Creative in Our Methods.” The Bishop stated that “although the mission and the messages do not change, methods often change according to the times, the culture, and the needs that are before us. Therefore, it is imperative to constantly remind ourselves of who we are and whose we are, our identity as the Freedom Church, and remain committed to our mission; strengthened in our resolve to develop ministries in service to our mission to the glory of God.”

Pastors, delegates, and lay mem-



bers descended upon the grounds of the Kenneth Monroe Transformation with the love and enthusiasm reminiscent of a great family reunion.



Reverend Pamela Wofford, Palmetto Conference Prayer Coordinator, ushered in the Holy Spirit each day with a Spirit-filled Praise and Worship and intercessory prayer. This gave way to the solemn Opening Worship



Service, where Reverend James Whitaker drew his sermon, “He's On My Case,” from 1 John 2:1. The Sacrament of Holy Communion was offered by Bishop Eric Leake, Celebrant, and Bishop Warren Brown, Concelebrant.



The theme of being creative permeated throughout the conference with a Welcome Program choreographed by the host church Pastor, Reverend Dr. Robert T. Benton, and First Lady, Reverend Melissa S. Benton, who took the Conference attendees on a magical trip to Bridgerton, the land of nobility, where everyone received gifts and were made to feel like royalty.



The Bishop's Episcopal Address, “Being Creative in Our Methods,” profoundly addresses issues within this country: Effective Evangelism, Christian Education, Christian Discipleship, and Church Planting. The scripture chosen for this address and read by Reverend Salika Bailey was

*Continued on Next Page*

taken from Ephesians 4:11-16.

One of the recommendations that emerged from this visionary address is that congregations should sing one hymn during every worship service. In our creative efforts of worship, we need wonder, witness, warfare, and wisdom.

This message of much substance invoked a response from Bishop Warren Brown, Retired, who noted that Bishop Leake's address has "Disturbed the dead and kept the living alive". Presiding Elder Reverend Dr. Alvin McLamb called for a response, and Presiding Elder Reverend Dr. Victor C. Wilson quickly responded by thanking the Bishop for yielding to the spirit of the Lord, as he told the congregation we have been given a prescription outlined by the Bishop. He then moved that the Episcopal Address be received, published, and shared around the globe.

During the Lay Hour. Mrs. Annie William gave her 28<sup>th</sup> and final report as the Palmetto Conference President of the Laymen's Council. After the conclusion of her report, Mrs. Williams received many commendations on her stellar years of service from Bishop Leake, the Presiding Elders of both districts, the Southeastern Regional Director, Mrs. Loranda Melton, who presented gifts along with other officers and members of both Districts. Mrs. Elvira Faulkner-McIlwain, 3<sup>rd</sup> VP of the Connectional Lay Council, was on hand to assist in the stolling ceremony.



to do through this Department.

The soul-stirring preached word was eloquently delivered by Reverend Solomon McAuley, pastor of Jones Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church in Columbia, SC. His subject, "Watch Your Mouth," was drawn from 2 Kings 7:1-2.

The Home Missions Luncheon was beautifully coordinated by the Conference Chair, Reverend Vanessa Wilson. The winners were: Category 1 Winner: Columbia-Camden District, Jones Memorial- Mrs. Clara Satterfield. Runner-Up: Columbia-Camden District Antioch- Ms. Myia Bacon, Category 2 Winner; Columbia-Camden District, Mrs. Ella Fulton. Category 2 Runner-Up Spartanburg District Bethel A.M.E. Zion, Mr. Charles Ford.

On Friday Evening, the Missionary Supervisor, Mrs. Jean McMurray, led the congregation in a glorious candlelight March and Ceremony. Reverend Samontra Carter figuratively brought the house down as she expounded on her sermon, which

was drawn from Matthew 16:18, "It's Time to Square Up".

Christian Education Hour began on Saturday morning with all departments engaged, children, youth, young adults, and adults coming together with a Palmetto Conference Song Fest introduced by VICYC

President, Ms. Paisley Melton. Workshops were creatively designed by Conference Director, Ms. Ashley Melton, for each department.

Youth elections were held and yielded the following results:



President- Paisley Melton, Columbia-Camden



Vice President- Derricka Scurry, Spartanburg



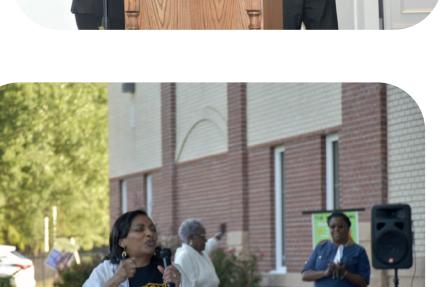
Recording Secretary- Aushundra Nesbitt, Spartanburg



Treasurer- Zach Stevens, Columbia-Camden



Public Relations- Neveah McNeil, Spartanburg



Parliamentary- Arieal Nesbitt, Spartanburg



Chaplain-Elijah Stevens, Spartanburg



During the Closing Worship Service, Bishop Leake chose Ezekiel 37 9-10 with the sermon topic, "A Breath of Fresh Air."



After the issuing of the charge, Bishop Leake reminded both the clergy and the laity to return to their churches with grace for the race and strength for the journey.



The Missionary Convocation, with Supervisor, Mrs. Jean McMurray Leake at the helm, greeted members with godly love and excitement. Mrs. Chantay Bouler expounded on the 3<sup>rd</sup> component of the Missionary Theme, "Leadership and Legacy". Mrs. Leake then called for the reports of the Districts' Presidents, Reverend Patty Smith-Spartanburg and Reverend Vanessa McLamb-Columbia-Camden, who both produced excellent videos that chronicled accounts of the numerous ministries of outreach and abundance provided throughout the conference years. They were both showered with gifts of love from their officers, members of their districts, and their loving spouses.

The Christian Education Worship Service was spiritually electric as Reverend Sherri Ashbee presided and gave the Call to Worship. After the rendering of musical selections by Clinton College Choir and remarks by the newly appointed President, Dr. Pamela Wilks, who wowed the congregation with her energetic greetings and love for Clinton College. The Report of the CED Conference Director was presented by the Conference Director, Ms. Ashley Melton, who shared a thorough recap via video of the Conference year's many learning opportunities, programs, and activities. She received many accolades and commendations for the outstanding work she continues

# The Wilmington District Lay Council Celebrates Serving the Present Age

By Laverna Hargrove

Photos By Deborah Price

On Sunday, September 29, 2025, the Wilmington District Lay Council held its 2025 Lay Day Service hosted by the lay council of St. Mark A.M.E. Zion Church, Whiteville, NC. This event was a celebration of milestones and unifying practices that propelled the WDLC into the new quadrennial focus of Serving the Present Age with commitment to our Mission. The CLC Lay Day Guide served as the model for this service.

A rousing rendition of the theme song, Onward Christian Soldiers, opened the devotion, followed by the scripture lesson from the Old Testament, Proverbs 3:6, by William Evans, and from the New Testament, Matthew 4:1-10, by Reginald Ballard. The congregation prayed in unison.

Rev. Dr. Luther McKinney, host pastor and St. Mark Lay Council President Ruth Nadine Ward, welcomed the district with warm greetings and refreshments. Rev. Dr. McKinney presented Presiding Elder Rev. Dr. Alexander Jones, Sr.

Rev. Dr. Alexander Jones, Sr. presented the teacher-messenger as one who had not only accepted a position that had been occupied by giants in Zion, but has already proven that not only could he fill the shoes of those he followed but is leading the WDLC to greater heights using tools and techniques, strategies and practices that are digitally driven in order to serve the present age which comprises multi-generations. Dr. Jones noted that President Dyson has received two appointments from the International President, Dr. Joseph King Davis. One appointment is the CLC Official Marshall of The A.M.E. Zion Church, and the second position is a CLC Regional Directorship for some of the African Lay Councils.

The President of the Wilmington District Lay Council (WDLC), Darryl Dyson, was the teacher-messenger for this service. Using the summation of the previous lay council messengers, President Dyson used three points, the life cycle of the butterfly, listening, and day 41, to teach the practice and process of what happens on "The 41st Day." The life cycle of the butterfly was the example of the spiritual formation of a disciple; the poem "Listen", was the illustration of the first step that applies to helping ourselves and others through the process to the 41st Day; and the 41st day is the freedom, the celebration milestone, the outcome one receives when moving through the stages of transformation to discipleship. The illustrations of this were Elijah traveled 40 days to get to Mt. Sinai; Moses fasted on Mt. Sinai for 40 days; Jesus appeared for 40 days before ascending to the Father; Noah and the flood, and Jesus' time in the desert. He reminded the congregation that the 41st day is by the time measure of God, but when the 41st day is reached, we are no longer the same creature spiritually. We have achieved some spiritual growth, spiritual strength, and spiritual freedom. He also noted that there are levels of transformation, and one can experience the 41st Day scenario many times.

The installation of the 27 new life members served to highlight the support for the ministry of the lay council, with 11 pastors and 16 laity becoming Life Members. This brings the WDLC total of Life Members to 80. 12 of the 22 pastors, or 54%, are now CLC life members. Those who received their Life Membership are: Rev. Dr. Clifford Barnett, Bro. Maduka Ballard, Rev. Dr. Edith Davis, Bro. Gregory Clemmons, Rev. Nathaniel Johnson, Sis. Letitia Clemmons, Rev. Dr. Charlrean



Mapson, Sis. Margret Clemmons, Rev. Avery McAllister, Sis. Arnetta Farrington, Rev. Charlotte McKinney, Sis. Johnetta Franks, Rev. Dr. Luther McKinney, Bro. Gregory Harrison, Rev. Dr. Mary C Nixon, Sis. Marjorie Hansley, Rev. Carol Robbins, Sis. Joycette Jackson, Rev. Patricia Smith, Sis Sylvia Jenrette, Rev. Joshua Walker, Sis Viola Jones, Sis. Annette Ballard, Sis. Letisha Kirby, Bro. Clifton Ballard, Sis. Shelia Monroe, and Sis. Louise Willis. Sis Louise Willis was celebrated not only as a new Life Member, but she was celebrated as a new centenarian.

Mrs. Willis is a member of Johnson Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, Leland, NC pastored by Rev. Avery McAllister, with Maduka Ballard Lay Council President. Mrs. Willis served her church and community in several capacities while raising her three sons and one daughter. Her husband, Herbert Lee Willis, Sr., was killed in an attempt to save the lives of his comrades in 1954 while serving in the United States Navy aboard the USS Bennington, thus making her a Gold Star Widow. Mrs. Willis guided all four children to become college graduates and civic-minded citizens. Hank Dobson, Eastern North Carolina Regional Director, and Monte Forte, Cape Fear Conference Lay Council President, were present to assist President Dyson, 2nd Vice President Linda Simpson, and Rev. Dr. Alexander Jones, Sr. in this momentous occasion. Dr. Joseph King Davis sent a letter of encouragement and congratulations to the new Life Members.

The Election of Officers for the 2025-2026 Cape Fear Conference Year was conducted by President Emeritus William Evans. The slate of officers elected is Darryl Dyson, President; Reginald Ballard, 1st Vice President; Linda Simpson, 2nd Vice President; LaVerna Hargrove, Secretary; Janice Robbins, Treasurer; and Brenda Brown, Chaplain.

The WDLC observed National Clergy Month (October) with gifts of appreciation for all they do to get others to come with us to Christ to the 22 pastors of the Wilmington District.

Concerning the upcoming municipal elections, the congregation was reminded that civic duty is in our DNA because we are the Freedom Church, but it is our responsibility to help others to make their voice heard through their vote. Voting information on time and place was presented for the upcoming Municipal elections to be held in the three counties that comprise the Wilmington District.

Mr. Raymond Best was selected as Wilmington District Lay Person of the Year in April 2025. Due to health concerns, he could not be present to receive his award. The WDLC made a formal presentation to Mr. Best for his outstanding discipleship and his quest to meet others where they are and show them the way to come with us to Christ.

October is National Pastor Appreciation Month. To show the appreciation of the Wilmington District for the many hours, sermons, teaching, and disciple-making they invest, the pastors and presiding elder were presented with gift bags containing a monogrammed towel, a few sweet treats, and a note pad and pen embossed with affirmations.

To further enhance the lines of communication within the district, the Wilmington District Connect (WDC) was added to allow members to respond to the daily reflection questions, participate in trivia questions, pose questions, send and request prayers, and have other interactions that will deepen the spiritual life of the WDLC members. One can become connected to The (WDC) by scanning the QR code or by using the URL.

Presiding Elder Rev. Dr. Jones acknowledged that when he became Presiding Elder of the Wilmington District, Mr. Lloyd Best, a member of St. Mark, was the WDLC president. Mr. James Price, also a member of St. Mark, followed him in that position. Dr. Jones told the congregation that the foundation that had been laid then had been steadily and securely built upon. In acknowledging the stewardship of the WDLC during the 2025 Conference Year as stellar, he gave words of encouragement to continue with the same enthusiasm, vigor, and vitality that

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ensure productivity in ministry. Let the light of Christ shine through all you do, and success as measured by Christ will be assured, he said. A brief reception was held in the fellowship hall of St. Mark following the Lay Council benediction.

#### About our President

*Mr. Darryl Wayne Dyson, Sr. President of the WDLC has recently received two elevations within the Connectional Lay Council, Connectional Lay Council Official Marshall and Connectional Lay Council Regional Director of the Central Southern Africa Episcopal District. As the Connectional Lay Council Official Marshall, he is charged with the security of Connectional Lay Council meetings and attendant to Dr. Joesph King Davis, Jr. Mr. Dyson has received another post, that of Connectional Lay Council Regional Director Central Southern Africa Episcopal District (East Angola, West Angola, North Angola, South Angola, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia). Master Gunnery Sergeant Dyson is a 1986 graduate of Abraham Clark HS in Roselle, NJ, after attending North Brunswick HS as a freshman. Darryl enlisted in the United States Marine Corps during his junior year of high school and reported to Paris Island, SC the day after graduation. Darryl has served all around the world which included approximately 15 years in Okinawa, Japan, several deployments to the Republic of Korea (ROK) in support of United States-ROK Combined Military Exercises known as Team Spirit, one assignment aboard the USS Dubuque for shipboard naval maneuvers and two tours of duty in Iraq; Operation Iraqi Freedom II and Operation Iraqi Freedom 05-07 where he served as the Base Telecommunications Infrastructure Upgrade Project, Project Manager and Outside Plant – Contingency Operating Base Commercialization Chief for Marine Wing Communications Squadron 38, Marine Air Control Group 38, 3D Marine Aircraft Wing (FWD), and Al Asad Air Base, Iraq. Darryl served twenty-six plus years from June 1986 until his retirement in July 2012. During this time, he rose to the rank of Master Gunnery Sergeant/E-9, one of the two senior enlisted ranks in the Marine Corps. During his years of service, Darryl received the following personal awards: three Merito-*



*rious Service Medal Awards, eight Good Conduct Medals, two National Defense Service Medals, two Iraq Campaign Medals, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Korean Defense Service Medal, and a Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal, as well as several commendations.*

*Darryl's military education is vast and transverses many areas within the military services including: Cable Splicing & Maintenance Systems, Technician Repairs School (Communications Cable Systems Apprentice, Cable Splicer and Outside Plant Distribution Specialist, Primary Marksmanship Instructor/Enlisted Range Officer, Maintenance Manager; BiCSi Institute in Designing Telecommunications Distribution Systems, Telecommunications Distribution Systems Review, Telecommunications Project Management, Introduction to Customer-Owned Outside Plant and Telecommunications Cable Installation Technicians Course; Harrison Consulting in*

*Project Management; Compass University under the Telecommunications Project Management Association, where he was nationally certified as a Telecommunications Project Management. In addition, he was internationally certified by Xtend as an Xtend Communications' 911 Emergency Dispatcher. Darryl was also in the first Senior Marine Corps Martial Arts Program Class on Okinawa and completed the course of instruction after several months as a 1st Degree Black Belt.*

*In addition, Darryl attended the University of Strayer for Business Management, where he stands just five classes short of his Bachelor of Administration Degree in Business Management.*

*Upon his retirement, he and his bride, LaShonna, established their home in Leland, NC, and joined Johnson Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church. His skills were immediately used as a steward and a trustee. He has also served as Sunday School Teacher, Local Lay Council President, church videographer, and Director of Bible Studies. He is the co-founder and CFO of Harvest of Hope Outreach Ministries. He is an avid fisherman and lawn manicurist. Mr. Dyson is the high school track and field coach for North Brunswick High School.*

*He is married to Dr. LaShonna S. Dyson, and they are the proud parents of 6 children, one of which is deceased, and 14 grandchildren.*

## Young's Temple Holds 144th Homecoming

By Ms. Ruth L. Thompson, Church Historian

Young's Temple A.M.E. Zion Church of Morristown, Tennessee, held its 144<sup>th</sup> Homecoming Service on September 21, 2025.

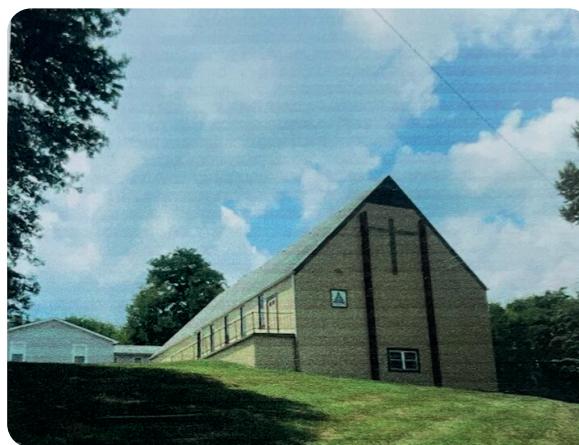
The church is a part of the Blue Ridge Conference- Piedmont Episcopal District. Host pastor is Reverend Bernice Osborne. Presiding Elder is Rev. Dr. Herbert Grant.

Bishop is the Rt. Reverend Darryl B. Starnes. The theme for this glorious occasion was "Looking Forward to the Future with Renewed Purpose and Vision".

The morning message was delivered by Reverend Osborne. Her subject was "Joy in serving" (Philippians 2:1-11)

A home-cooked meal was served by the church's culinary staff following the service. The afternoon service was held at 3:00. Trustee Chairman Mr. Matthew Thompson presided.

The speaker for the afternoon service was Reverend Johnny Jones of Macedonia Church, Jefferson City, Tennessee. Assisting in the devotion was Rev. Alicia Starnes of Young's Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church, New Market, TN. Also, in attendance was Presiding Elder, Reverend Dr. Herbert Grant. Music was provided by the Macedonia



Church Choir. The welcome was given by Trustee, Mr. Michael Dailey who also read a poem he had personally written for the occasion entitled "The Old Ship of Zion".

Reverend Jones delivered a powerful moving message on "The Homecoming". (Luke 15)

Young's Temple is one of the oldest churches in the Blue Ridge Conference. It has a unique and illustrious history. The church has been through many trials and tribulations. In 1942, it was

destined to be sold as a dance hall, but due to the efforts of the pastor and faithful prayer warriors was saved. Later, Urban renewal acquired the property, and it was moved to its present location. Covic wreaked havoc, and the membership decreased greatly. By the grace of God, the faithful few continue.

To date, the church has had 35 pastors to grace its pulpits (Reverends Warren Brown and J.W. Wactor), being elevated to the Bishopric.



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

# ANNA L. ANDERSON LIFE MEMBERS CELEBRATION

By Joy Williamson-Foster, Connectional Chairman  
Life Members Council

The Anna L. Anderson Life Member Celebration was observed on Sunday, October 5, 2025, on AMEZTV and various media platforms. This momentous celebration commemorates 90 years of the service for the Life Members Council of the Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society from 1935 to 2025. The 13th Connectional Chairman of the Life Members Council, Mrs. Joy Williamson-Foster, envisioned a celebration that would not only highlight the significance of this milestone but also feature Life Members from all around Zion who are 90+ years old. Mrs. Foster set forth on a journey that resulted in 213 photos, and names of 90–104-year-old Life Members, Matrons, and Patrons were included in the Life Members Legacy Circle for special recognition.



An atmosphere of history, achievements, and salutations was on full display as the Life Members Council shared the journey from the symbolic Tree of Hope "stump" that represented the beginning of the Life Members Council from 1916-1917 under the direction of Mrs. Anna L. Anderson. Following one year of what may have been viewed as a failed attempt to get the department established, Mrs. Anderson remained steadfast, and the fifth department of the Society came to fruition in 1935.

Through the tenacity of Mrs. Anderson, we are able to see a stump with roots flowing into a blossoming Tree of Hope with many branches representing the current structure of the Life Members Council as we see it today.



The spirit-filled worship service included greetings from Bishop George D. Crenshaw, Presiding Prelate of the North Eastern Episcopal District and the Chairman of the Board of Global Missions, along with Mrs. Sandra B. Crowder, 18th International President of the Women's Home and Overseas Mis-

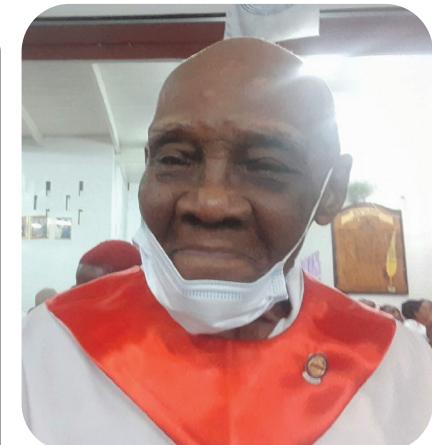


sionary Society. Special guests were Mrs. Loveleen "Dee" Perkins, 11th General Chairman Life Members Council (2007-2015), and Mrs. Vanessa Clayton, 12th General/Connectional Chairman Life Members Council (2015-2023), as they shared Life Members moments during their tenures.



Rev. Donna Richardson, Pastor, Restoration A.M.E. Zion Church in Baltimore, MD, preached an inspiring sermon reminding the missionaries to "Stick to the Code." From the text 2 Timothy 2:2. Rev. Richardson's sermon will resonate within our hearts for years to come.

Thank you to the Mentor/Mentee Initiative for the Life Members Council for preparing and participating in the worship service broadcast. Rev. Roderick Josey and members of the Mt. Tabor A.M.E. Zion Church, Avondale, PA, for providing the beautiful sanctuary for the worship experience. Mr. Darin Kent, Communications Director for The A.M.E. Zion Church, for doing what God has called him to do in the area of stellar video productions.



We look forward to what God has in store for the Life Members Council in the future as the Tree of Hope continues to flourish in Zion's rich soil. "At least there is hope for a tree; If it is cut down, it will sprout again, and its new shoots will not fail." Job 14:7 Happy 90th Anniversary Life Members Council, for there's JOY in Life Members.

# Bethune's Legacy through New NCNW Section at Livingstone College

By Aleah Mattis

Livingstone College chartered a new collegiate section of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) and held its inaugural induction ceremony on Saturday, October 4, in the Event Center. The celebration marks a significant moment for the campus community and the young women dedicated to NCNW's mission of advocating for and empowering women of African descent.

The official "N'Duction" program met the undergraduate charter members with rousing greetings, inspiration, and encouragement from



state-level NCNW leaders. Initiates were addressed by Mia Eley, President of the NC State Coalition, who reaffirmed the importance of sisterhood and service in the NCNW. She was joined by Kierra Kearney, the NC State Coalition Third Vice President, and Jovan Tuner, a state office representative, who officially inducted the members. Dr. Da'Tarvia Parrish, the chartering advisor of the group, served as speaker for the occasion and offered words of wisdom and a call to action for the inductees.

Esinam Dedoo, the Section President, expressed enthusiasm about the new chapter's potential, stating, "I am excited to lead a group of purposeful women in doing our part to uplift our campus and community in unity and self-reliance."

As the organization was founded by the late and great Mary McLeod Bethune, it is important to note Bethune holds a lasting legacy at Livingstone, underscored by her deep commitment to higher education and her specific engagement with the institution.

During Bethune's 1942 visit with Eleanor Roosevelt to Livingstone College, she was important in both elevating the college's national profile and reaffirming its mission to a large, prominent audience. Bethune, a renowned educator and advisor to the Roosevelt administration, brought the First Lady to Livingstone for a General School

**NCNW**  
Commitment. Unity. Self Reliance

Convention of The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. The visit brought significant national attention to Livingstone at a time when Black institutions often received little media coverage or support.

Another key aspect of Bethune's legacy is her role in identifying and elevating capable Black leaders for national service. By selecting Livingstone's President William J. Trent, Sr., to join President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Black Cabinet," Bethune demonstrated her confidence in both Trent and the caliber of leadership being cultivated at Livingstone.

"Bethune's selection of Trent was a personal endorsement and a strategic move that placed Livingstone College and The A.M.E. Zion Church on a national stage, showcasing us as vital centers for producing intellectual talent critical to advancing civil rights and economic opportunity. With a mobilized and influential audience to rally behind the cause of civil rights and educational opportunity, Livingstone reinforced its position of leadership. Today, we aim to continue in those efforts with these young people, and we're praying this establishment is a start," said Da'Tarvia Parrish.

The newly chartered section has already begun engaging the campus and community through various initiatives. Members participated in radio programming supporting Purple Power Advocacy Day, promoting legislation to advocate for women and families at the North Carolina General Assembly, hosted platforms dedicated to Domestic Violence Awareness, and facilitated workshops on financial literacy.



The women have a Purple Power week of activities from October 12-17, focusing on key areas of healthcare, education, and economic empowerment for the Livingstone College campus. In November, members will collaborate with the North Carolina Department of Justice to address health issues

among youth and the dangers of vaping.

The chartering of this new section adds to the rich tradition of leadership and service at Livingstone College.

The institution has long been a hub for empowering its students, and the addition of an

NCNW section provides another platform for developing future leaders. NCNW's "Core Four" priorities: education, healthcare, economic empowerment, and social justice are areas, a new generation of leaders will be equipped with the tools to make an impact on campus and beyond.



# Livingstone College Delegation Competes in Prestigious Penny Games

By Esinam Dedoo

Livingstone College proudly sent a delegation to compete in the second annual Penny Games: HBCU Debate + Esports Invitational, held in Birmingham, Alabama, from October 1–3, 2025. The event brought together more than 50 students from over 16 Historically Black Colleges and Universities for a showcase of academic and technological talent.



Representing Livingstone at the national event were students Carter Thompson and Joel Thompson, who participated in the high-stakes competitions. Carter Thompson, a sophomore from Indiana, is known for his performance in quiz bowls, while Joel Thompson, a computer information systems major from Ghana, has been active in inter-faith leadership and fellowships. The two teamed up to debate AI's adverse effect on the economic landscape of Gen Z and Gen Alpha.



A vision of Rev. Lloyd Watson, The Penny Games, hosted by The Penny Foundation in partnership with Miles College and Birmingham City Schools, included a series of events designed to connect students with career pathways. The three-day event included a cultural immersion that began with guided tours of Birmingham's historic landmarks, debate competitions at Birmingham high schools, and an Esports and college fair held at Miles College and Topgolf, and debate finals culminated in a leadership breakfast at the BJCC.



For Carter Thompson, who has also been recognized for his talent in music and academics, and Joel Thompson, who was recently named a Black Student Leadership Network Fellow, the event was a platform to connect with peers and gain exposure to future opportunities. Though the debate championship was ultimately won by Alabama A&M University, the experience offered valuable professional networking and cultural exchange. "This was a great opportunity for me to learn about history, progress, and struggles, and connect in kinship with African Americans, all the while impacting youth and bringing them a global perspective. I am inspired by what I've seen and learned regarding the history of Birmingham and the resilience of people of African descent," said Joel, who is a Ghana native.



The Penny Games highlight Birmingham as a growing hub for innovation and opportunity for HBCU students. According to Penny Foundation CEO Lloyd Watson, Jr., "This is more than a tournament, it's a launchpad". For Livingstone College and its student ambassadors, the invitation signifies a growing recognition of their talent and leadership on a national stage.



Mr. Thomas Umstead  
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# Angela Cannon Spearheads UP Entertainment's Vision for Uplifting, Faith-Friendly Television

By R. Thomas Umstead, Entertainment and Arts

Veteran television executive Angela Cannon has spent more than two decades at the forefront of TV's evolution—from broadcast to cable to the streaming era. Recently appointed Executive Vice President of Networks and Content Strategy for Atlanta-based UP Entertainment and General Manager of AspireTV, Cannon now leads content strategy and development across UP's diverse portfolio. Her oversight includes the family-friendly cable network UPtv (formerly the Gospel Music Channel), the urban lifestyle and entertainment network AspireTV, and the faith-friendly streaming platform UP Faith & Family, all dedicated to delivering uplifting and inspiring programming.

I recently had the opportunity to speak with Cannon about her vision for UP Entertainment, with a special focus on AspireTV — the network launched in 2012 by NBA Hall of Famer Earvin "Magic" Johnson to serve Black audiences across multiple platforms. She also shared her insights on UP Entertainment's commitment to family-friendly storytelling and her goal to expand uplifting, faith-friendly content across the company's portfolio of services.

What approach are you looking to take in shaping the programming strategy for the UP Entertainment networks under your leadership?

Ultimately, UP Entertainment is all about uplifting others and uplifting souls. Our networks bring amazing content and amazing stories that will live across all of our different platforms, whether that's streaming or linear. Now I get a chance to look at it from a whole other perspective, not just AspireTV, but I'm looking at it from UP Entertainment as a whole. My goal is to be able to bring about a new sense of camaraderie across the different networks, whether that's Faith and Family, Ovation, UPtv, or our other services. From a programming perspective, I am really excited about this new position to be able to really understand how uplifting television can be seen across multiple platforms. It's going to be exciting, and it's definitely going to be a little bit of a challenge, but I'm up for it for sure.

You've led AspireTV for the past three years. How would you define the network's brand as it seeks to serve Black viewers?

Aspire TV launched in 2012, and at that time, we really were underneath the Magic Johnson banner. He was our owner at the time, and the one thing that he would say is, 'I want a television network that reminds me of how I grew up; I want to be able to sit down with my family, my friends, and not have to worry about anything that's not positive and family-oriented.' And I can say, since I was on the launch team to bring Aspire to fruition, we really have leaned into that even more so now. But it's really about bridging that gap of authentic representation, cultural pride, and joyful connections.

How would you describe the programming that AspireTV is providing viewers?

What I always say is we're about Black life, Black style, and Black culture. We buy homes, we travel, we cook, and do all of those things, but we don't necessarily see ourselves represented on those types of shows. With our Fall slate, we focus on all of that, from travel to food



to our iconic partnership with the Harlem Globetrotters, and of course, on our ongoing opportunity to showcase content creators through our 'Urban Indie Film Block.' We want to make sure that when people come to Aspire, they can see something that resonates with them in some way, shape, form, or fashion.

How does faith-based programming figure into your overall content development plans?

I feel like faith-based programming has been a major part of my career, ever since we started out as Gospel Music Channel, and that at the time was a complete void in the market. You could not find gospel Christian music in one place at all, but we were able to fill that void. Beyond that, we were able to fill a void of faith movies, faith content, faith series, which we are able to put together onto our streaming service, Faith and Family. When we think about all the things that we've done just linearly, whether that's partnering with the Dove Awards or partnering with the Stellar Awards, I think we have at one point or another in our iteration of entertainment tapped into all those different places.

You spoke of a void in the faith-based marketplace back in the day, but do you feel that a void still exists today?

So right now, when you think about what's missing in the market, you have a lot of players out there that are dubbing themselves to be a faith outlet. But I think what differentiates us is that we do it in a way that's uplifting and positive. We're not hitting you over the head with ministry, but it's about real stories, real storytelling, authentic faith, and redemption

stories that you just don't see anywhere else. I also believe that we don't see a lot of diversity in the faith platform, and that is something that I really would like to tap into. We are watching this content, but we don't always see ourselves represented in these storylines or in these movies. I think UP Entertainment has a really nice opportunity to bridge that gap, particularly now with what's happening in our world and in our country. There are opportunities for us to be bigger than what our politics are. There's an opportunity for us to be bigger than blue or red. We have an opportunity to lead with our hearts, to lead with compassion, to lead with empathy, and to be able to tell authentic stories across the board.

Why don't we see more faith-based content across the various distribution platforms?

It's a great question, and it's one of those that I wish I could answer. Having worked in and around the faith-based space, beginning with the Gospel Music Channel, I believe there is a true, distinct difference between who has access and opportunities for distribution and who doesn't. The other reason is when you think about the [faith-based] content that has been out there, let's be honest, some of it is not the best. There have been people and companies that have tapped into it at certain times, but the support may or may not have been there for them to continue to do it. It may also just be the fact that there are only a few people who can authentically do it well. There are also a lot of content creators who just don't believe that faith-based programming is a moneymaker and revenue generator. So when you're up against those forces of disbelief, it makes it really hard to continue to have a diverse slate of content across that. I am really praying that I'll be able to make a difference and be able to help bridge some of those gaps.



Mr. Daman De Leon  
Health and Wellness Editor  
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# How to Eat Healthy During Thanksgiving



By Daman De Leon, Health and Wellness Editor

It's that time of year again. So here are 10 tips for enjoying your favorite Thanksgiving treats without guilt.

1. Get physical. It's important to be active all year long, but it's especially key to squeeze in a workout on or around the Thanksgiving holiday. Exercise will boost your metabolism and help offset some of the calories you'll consume during that big meal at Grandma's house.
2. Plan ahead of time what you'll eat. Decide which Turkey-Day dishes you can't live without — grandma's homemade stuffing, etc. — and which aren't worth the extra calories.
3. Eat something light and healthy for breakfast. While some people skip breakfast on Thanksgiving morning in preparation for the big meal, it's never a good idea. Keep your hunger and metabolism in check with a light and nutritious morning meal. Try oatmeal and fruit, egg whites and sautéed veggies, or peanut butter and bananas on whole wheat toast.
4. Choose healthy dishes whenever possible. There are plenty of healthy options you can serve at Thanksgiving, including fresh cranberry sauce, roasted vegetables (minus the creamy sauces) and fresh crudités.
5. Limit the gravy. You don't have to drench everything in gravy for your food to be delicious — use the smallest amount possible. You'll still

get the gravy flavor but with less fat and calories.

6. Choose white meat over dark. White meat, like turkey breast, is naturally leaner than dark meat, like turkey thighs. It's a simple way to cut excess calories from your meal.
7. Trick your brain. Use a smaller dish, like a salad plate, to trick your mind into thinking you're eating more food than you really are.
8. Watch what you drink. You can really curb the amount of calories you consume by limiting sweetened and alcoholic beverages. Think about it — would you rather have a slice of homemade pumpkin pie or three glasses of sweet tea?
9. Avoid a "going all in" approach. If you end up splurging, don't beat yourself up. One day of indulgence isn't going to wreck your healthy lifestyle or cause you to gain 10 pounds. Rather than feel guilty, get back on track the next day and don't let your splurge serve as an excuse to overdo it every day until the New Year.
10. You can have it all — just not a lot of everything. You don't have to give up the creamy casseroles or the decadent desserts on Thanksgiving. Just have a small helping of your favorite foods and savor each bite.

Have a happy Thanksgiving!

# Livingstone College's Mental Health Task Force Receives Insight Into Academia's 2025 Excellence in Mental Health and Well-Being Award

**Livingstone is one of only two HBCUs to receive the national recognition of institutions that commit to campus-wide integration of mental health initiatives, including accessible services, peer support, emotional resilience, and proactive privacy**

**By Dr. Jacqueline Davis, Well-being Coordinator, Mental Health Task Force**

SALISBURY, N.C. -- The Livingstone College Mental Health Task Force is one of more than 70 such programs at colleges and universities across the country to receive the 2025 Excellence in Mental Health and Well-Being

Award from *Insight Into Academia* magazine, the largest and oldest diversity and inclusion publication in higher education. The Excellence in Mental Health and Well-Being Award is a measure of an institution's individual programs and initiatives that significantly advance the core values of inclusive excellence and belonging through programs, initiatives, and many other campus priorities deserving of this national recognition.

"It is incredibly humbling to be recognized for something you're already passionate about. We don't do this work for recognition, we do it because it matters, and that's what makes it meaningful," said Dr. Jacqueline Davis, Livingstone College's first lady, and well-being co-



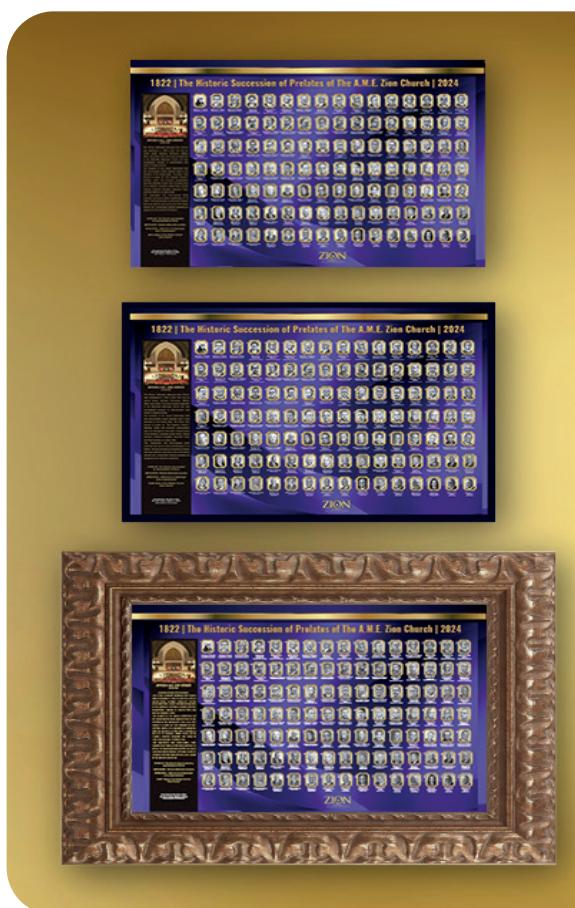
## LIVINGSTONE COLLEGE

ordinator of the task force, an extension of the college's slate of counseling services.

Livingstone is one of only two Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) nationwide to receive the recognition this year. The college will be featured in the September 2025 issue of the magazine.

"The Mental Health Task Force is a collaborative effort made up of staff, faculty and students (with) a mission...to promote mental health and well-being for faculty, students and staff," Davis said. "This year, our goal is to engage students at a leadership level, creating programs that are not only designed for them but by them. President Anthony J. Davis always says he wants Livingstone to be healthy and whole, physically and mentally."

*Insight Into Academia* selected Livingstone College's Mental Health Task Force for this award because of its intentional, student-centered programming and commitment to culturally responsive mental health support. "We know that institutions are not always recognized for their dedication to their mental health and well-being services and support for their students and employees," said Lenore Pearlstein, owner and publisher of *Insight into Academia* magazine. "We are proud to honor these colleges and universities as role models for other institutions of higher education."



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# STATEMENT OF THE BOARD OF BISHOPS OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL ZION CHURCH

## REGARDING THE FEDERAL CRIMINAL SENTENCE OF DR. STACCATO POWELL FOR DEFRAUDING A.M.E. ZION CHURCHES IN THE WESTERN EPISCOPAL DISTRICT

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

As has been reported in public-facing documents, on July 15, 2025, Dr. Staccato Powell, a disrobed bishop of The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (“A.M.E. Zion”), pled guilty in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California to wire fraud, mail fraud, and conspiracy to commit wire fraud and mail fraud. Dr. Powell’s guilty plea resulted from a far-reaching scheme to obtain control of A.M.E. Zion Church properties in California using false statements, forged documents, concealment, and deception. His scheme resulted in Dr. Powell pleading guilty to the criminal offenses brought against him, as well as agreeing to pay restitution in an amount no less than \$3,000,000 and no greater than \$12,475,453. Dr. Powell also agreed to forfeit any interest, claim, or right in the properties of the A.M.E. Zion Church denomination.

Recently, on September 23, 2025, in connection with his guilty plea, Dr. Powell was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Jeffrey White. Prior to being sentenced, Dr. Powell stated: “I regret and have remorse for my actions and behavior and do not take lightly that I defrauded and shamed the church of my birth.”

(<https://www.courthousenews.com/ousted-bishop-who-defrauded-west-coast-churches-avoids-jail-time/>)

With that final admission, Dr. Powell was sentenced to three years of supervised release for each felony charge, which included mail fraud, wire fraud, and conspiracy to commit both. He also was sentenced to 18 months of home confinement, with stipulations to forfeit the deeds to church properties, not open any new lines of credit, and be subject to search at any time. Restitution is also an aspect of Dr. Powell’s sentence. A hearing to settle the final amount of restitution is scheduled for October, but at minimum, Dr. Powell will be required to pay \$3 million in restitution.

**We know that many members of The A.M.E. Zion Church are disappointed that Dr. Powell will not face any additional prison time beyond what he has already served, especially since Dr. Powell personally financially benefited in some respects from his fraudulent conduct. We understand the sentiment among the members within our denomination that Dr. Powell violated a sacred trust, which was bestowed upon him when he was consecrated a bishop by The A.M.E. Zion Church. For in our polity and by our tradition, “Bishops are set apart to serve as models of servant leadership and must exercise their**



responsibilities consistent with an ethic of Christian love.” (*The Book of Discipline of The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church* (2016), ¶ 225) We understand the reasonable sentiment that Dr. Powell has inflicted ongoing harm and institutional damage as a direct result of his criminal conduct imposed upon nine different A.M.E. Zion congregations, who remain at risk of being foreclosed upon to satisfy outstanding and fraudulently obtained loans in excess of \$12.5 million. Yes, at present, many of the local congregations in the Western Episcopal District are in financial and legal jeopardy through no fault of their own. And so, we lament that the reputation of The A.M.E. Zion Church has been impugned.

But Psalm 44:1-3 (NRSV), an appropriate lament, reminds us of this:

We have heard with our ears, O God, our ancestors have told us, what deeds you performed in their days, in the days of old: you with your own hand drove out the nations, but them you planted; you afflicted the peoples, but them you set free; for not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm give victory; but you right hand, and your arm, and the light of your countenance, for you delighted in them.

And so, as God has been with The A.M.E. Zion Church in the past, we believe that God is with us presently and making provisions for a glorious future for our denomination and the local churches in the Western Episcopal District. Dr. Powell has been criminally sentenced. The A.M.E. Zion Church will receive restitution. And we believe that the bankruptcy matter, which is addressing the financial and property issues resulting from Dr. Powell’s criminal conduct, will ultimately be resolved in favor of The A.M.E. Zion Church, her members, and our local congregations. By faith, we believe that our denomination, people, and churches will be made whole through the bankruptcy proceedings that will adjudicate the financial and ownership issues stemming from Dr. Powell’s criminal conduct in concert with certain predatory lending institutions.

Justice and mercy are part of the character of God. We are reminded that our God is a merciful God. And so, as a Christian denomination, we continue to pray for those impacted by Dr. Powell’s criminal conduct, as well as Dr. Powell himself. As Paul reminds us, “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God: it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” (Romans 12:19 NRSV). We respect the judicial system’s outcome, but God has the final say in these matters! And so, we call upon everyone to continue praying for God’s will to be done in the ongoing bankruptcy matter.

Sincerely, Your Chief Pastors,

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

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# Statement From The Board of Bishops of The A.M.E. Zion Church Regarding Recent Church Shooting

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

“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” (Isaiah 56:7)

To our brothers and sisters across this nation,

With broken hearts and holy anger, we speak today as Bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. We are grieving and outraged that once again, violence has defiled the sacred. Just this week, a church in Michigan was turned from a sanctuary of worship into a scene of horror. Lives were taken. Families shattered. A community’s peace was destroyed.



congregations. Vigilance is not fear—it is stewardship of the flock.

But our cry is not only to our churches. We cry out to our leaders at every level of government. Do not grow numb to this bloodshed. Do not treat these tragedies as mere headlines. Your duty is to safeguard the freedom of all people to worship without terror. That requires more than words—it requires the courage to act.

We also speak to the nation’s conscience. Words matter. When the air is thick with harsh rhetoric, suspicion, and disrespect, it gives permission to those already harboring hate. From the highest offices to the smallest circles, we need words that heal, not words that wound.



This is not an isolated tragedy. From Charleston’s Mother Emanuel A.M.E. Church to Pittsburgh’s Tree of Life Synagogue, from mosques and temples to churches of every denomination, houses of prayer have been invaded by hatred and gunfire. These are sacred spaces—meant for praise, fellowship, and healing—that have been desecrated by violence. And we say with one voice: enough.

The Psalmist declares, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). Yet refuge is being stolen from God’s people when they gather in prayer. Outrage is the right response, but outrage must lead to action. We call upon the faithful in Zion and beyond to be vigilant: to review security plans, to train leaders, to prepare

Beloved, we still believe that light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it (John 1:5). As long as people of faith lift their voices in prayer, hatred will not have the last word. But we must stand together—Black and white, Christian and Jew, Muslim and Sikh, believer and nonbeliever—to say that violence in sacred places will never be normalized, and silence in the face of evil will never be acceptable.

We mourn. We pray. We demand change. And we will not stop until every house of worship is once again what God intended it to be: a house of prayer, a house of peace, a house of life.

Sincerely,

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

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Rev. Ronald Nathan  
World Politics Editor  
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# Bridging Faith and Mental Health: A Church Visit to Springfield Hospital

By Ronald A. Nathan, World Politics Editor

**Bridging Faith and Mental Health:** On Saturday, 11 October 2025, members and ministers of the Ransom Pentecostal A.M.E. Zion Church embarked on a mission of compassion and awareness by visiting Springfield University Hospital in Tooting, South London, United Kingdom. Established in 1841, Springfield is the primary psychiatric hospital in the borough of Wandsworth and a longstanding pillar in the care of individuals living with mental health challenges.



Coinciding with World Mental Health Day, the visit was a meaningful step towards healing, understanding, and advocacy—reflecting the church's commitment to both spiritual and social wellbeing.

Sixteen church members gathered at the hospital's Trinity Building to meet staff, learn about the hospital's outreach programs, and explore ways the church could offer practical and pastoral support. The aim was precise: to help bridge the gap between faith and mental health, and to address the inequalities faced by Black communities within the mental health care system.



In a written message, Rev. Dr Marcus Tillery, Senior minister of the Ransom Pentecostal A.M.E. Zion Church, highlighted the church's long-standing commitment to community engagement:

*"Since 1970, this Church has hosted health fairs, educational workshops, and cultural events, fostering a strong sense of support. As society has evolved, so too has our mission—now actively addressing justice, equality, and social welfare in ways that reflect the needs of our congregation."*



The visit included a heartfelt exchange of experiences and ideas. Hospital staff shared insights into the challenges of mental health care, the needs of patients, and the critical role of spiritual care in recovery. A moving prayer session, led by a church minister, was followed by reflections from the hospital chaplain on the healing power of faith in clinical settings.

Central to the discussion was the urgent need for culturally sensitive care. Church leaders emphasized their commitment to being part of the solution, especially in light of troubling statistics:

- Black individuals in the UK are **8 times more likely** to receive compulsory mental health treatment.
- They are **4.6 times more likely** to be detained under the Mental Health Act.
- Black youth are **10 times more likely** to enter mental health services through the criminal justice system.



*Continued on Next Page*

- Yet, they are **76% less likely** to receive appropriate mental health treatment overall.

These disparities underscore the importance of proactive involvement by faith communities. Church members described the visit as eye-opening and humbling, reinforcing the need for trust, confidentiality, and compassion in their own pastoral work.

The emotional and spiritual impact of the visit was deeply felt. Hospital staff expressed gratitude for the church's engagement. At the same time, participants left with a renewed sense of purpose—recognizing that faith is not only preached, but lived, especially in spaces where pain and isolation are



often hidden.

Looking ahead, the church plans to establish an ongoing partnership with Springfield Hospital. Initiatives under consideration include annual visits, joint workshops, donation drives, and support groups—offering sustained support in both practical and spiritual ways.

In a world where mental health is often stigmatized or overlooked, this visit stood as a powerful declaration: healing begins when faith shows up. The Ransom Pentecostal A.M.E. Zion Church now calls on all faith communities to take part in this essential work of compassion, justice, and hope.

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

## Celebrate 90 Years with the North Carolina Council of Churches!

By Rachel Baker

Saturday, November 1, 1 – 5 p.m.  
Edenton Street UMC, 228 W Edenton Street, Raleigh

Join us for an unforgettable afternoon of inspiration, connection, and fun for the whole family. Experience a spirit-filled worship service with The Right Reverend Michael B. Curry, and be part of a live Everything Happens podcast recording with Kate Bowler. Enjoy live music, hors d'oeuvres, activities for children, opportunities to connect with friends - new and old - and explore partner organizations sharing resources and ways to take action. Registration is \$20.

This is a joyous moment in our shared journey of radical love, unyielding justice, and hope in action, and we'd love for it to be shared! Here's how you and your congregation can help promote the celebration:

Register to Attend: Invite your staff, members, and friends to join the celebration: [act.ncchurches.org/a/90th](http://act.ncchurches.org/a/90th)  
Share the event with your friends and family!

Let's celebrate 90 years together. All are welcome to this once-in-a-lifetime day of worship, joy, and community!



**North Carolina Council of Churches**  
*Strength in Unity, Peace through Justice*

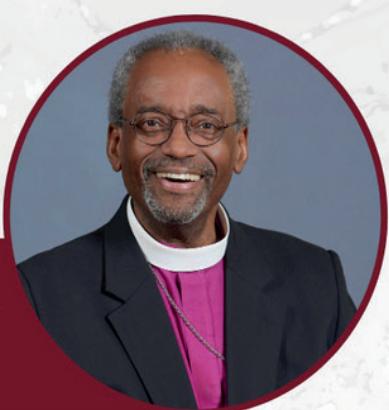
**Celebrating 90 YEARS**  
*Rooted in faith*

# 90th Anniversary Grand Celebration

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**Kate Bowler, PhD**  
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# The Black Church and the Idea of Africa Rising

By Ronald A. Nathan, World Politics Editor

Photo By © Planet Geography, Trinity College, Dublin

The “Africa Rising” narrative, which gained prominence in the early 2000s, marks a decisive shift in global consciousness—from viewing Africa as a continent of crisis to one of opportunity, growth, and innovation. With expanding economies, a young and dynamic population, and rapid technological advances, Africa’s emergence has become a beacon of hope for many in the African diaspora. For the Black Church, this moment is not just economic or political—it is deeply spiritual. It resonates as a prophetic call to re-engage with the continent, not as outsiders, but as descendants, co-labourers, and visionaries in partnership with a rising Africa.

The relationship between the Black Church and the African Church is becoming more dynamic and reciprocal. What was once primarily a missionary impulse from the West to Africa has evolved into a two-way exchange of spiritual resources, leadership models, and cultural affirmation. Joint conferences, theological dialogues, and ministry partnerships reflect a growing mutual respect. African pastors now preach in American pulpits, and diaspora clergy collaborate with African counterparts on education, health care, economic development, and evangelism. These transcontinental alliances embody the very spirit of “Africa Rising”—not as a solitary event, but as a shared and spiritual renaissance.

This shared movement is most visible in areas such as **youth development, economic empowerment, and technology**. The Black Church’s historical emphasis on education and leadership development finds fertile ground in Africa’s young population. Meanwhile, African churches

are innovating with digital worship, entrepreneurial ministries, and community-based solutions to systemic challenges—models from which diaspora churches are increasingly learning.

Technological leapfrogging, such as Kenya’s mobile banking revolution or Nigeria’s vibrant digital ministry scene, resonates deeply with the Black Church’s embrace of new tools for social and spiritual transformation. The rise of livestreamed worship, online theological education, and cross-border giving platforms shows how Africa and its diaspora are increasingly moving in sync—spiritually, economically, and culturally.

Still, both the Black Church and the Af-

ican Church must remain vigilant. The “Africa Rising” narrative can sometimes obscure persistent challenges—inequality, climate vulnerability, political instability—that still affect millions. But together, these churches offer a prophetic witness that insists on hope without denial, faith without naivety, and action grounded in justice.

For the Black Church, Africa’s rise is not just about statistics—it is a divine moment, a call to reconnection, partnership, and mutual transformation. In communion with the African Church, the diaspora is rediscovering its role—not as saviors, but as siblings in a global, Spirit-led movement. Africa is not rising alone. It is rising in sacred dialogue with its scattered children, with the Black Church as both witness and participant in this redemptive journey.

Ronald A. Nathan is the Star of Zion World Politics Editor and an elder of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church



Historically, the Black Church has operated as more than a religious institution. It has been a vital center for spiritual formation, political activism, cultural affirmation, and global consciousness. Its theology of liberation, restoration, and healing aligns closely with the renewed image of Africa as a land of promise and purpose. As countries like Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, and Kenya experienced rapid growth through the 2000s and 2010s, many in the diaspora began to reimagine Africa as a place of reconnection and future investment.

This reconnection is increasingly lived out in collaboration with the **African Church**, which has seen explosive growth in recent decades. Churches across sub-Saharan Africa are not only expanding numerically but also asserting theological, cultural, and social leadership in ways that challenge Western paradigms. The **booming African Church** represents a theological and missional power in its own right—rooted in African contexts, speaking to African realities, and yet open to global dialogue.

# sankofa



## Looking Back to Move Forward

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

### Author's Introduction

I am continually amazed by the ability of words to expand the human mind and open new doors for mental consideration. Everything that we think and know is a result of the information that comes into our consciousness and is stored in our mental computers. This information forms the perspective through which we view reality. It also determines how we function within society and how others respond to us.

To inform means to form or shape the mind or character through study, learning experiences, or instruction. The mind, like any computer, is only capable of responding to the information that is in its memory. If the information is not there, you cannot draw upon it. If the information is incorrect, then your responses will also be incorrect. The equation is simple; if limits are placed on your thinking, then limits are automatically placed on your ability to view reality and act intelligently.

Educational systems are designed to control the thinking of people through the control and manipulation of images and information. We are all a product of the education we have received in school, at home, and in society. But sometimes, traditional education is not enough, particularly if key elements essential to this education process are omitted.

Many years of my life have been dedicated to re-examining information that was not a part of my formal education. Needless to say, I have learned more about myself and reality than I could have ever imagined. I have come to understand that whatever a person believes, with feeling, becomes the sum total of their existence. I believe that absolute knowledge of self is the ultimate objective of my life.

As I speak to audiences across the country, in numerous lectures, seminars, and interviews, I'm often asked, by those who have truly been overwhelmed by my presentations, "How do you know all of this information?" Usually, I reply by saying, "Rather than asking me how I know all of this information, you should ask yourself, 'Why is it that you don't know it?'"

The feelings of powerlessness and misinformation which pervade the African American community have simultaneously created, in one segment of this community, a real sense of urgency for obtaining accurate information of oneself. The lack of specific information denies you the opportunity to make intelligent decisions about your life. This, in turn, affects the quality of your life in this world and in the next.

Dick Gregory said it best when he stated, "Information is power. Education is not power. Money is not power. Information is power." It is only through the acquisition of information that any group of people can develop the ability to control their destiny.

The current conditions that plague the African American community are manifestations of a pervading sense of powerlessness brought about by misinformation. But even under the dire circumstances, a unique form of karma is evolving.

Everything in our world is based on the "Law of Karma," which is the

universal principle of "cause and effect." For every action, there is a reaction. The popular media campaign promoting "Beautiful babies... right from the start" addresses the relationship between prenatal care and birth defects. This is karma. This is cause and effect.

The same karmic principles apply in relation to knowledge and information. Despite all evidence to the contrary, we are standing on the threshold of a renaissance of the African American consciousness. This mental rebirth is being spearheaded by the efforts of numerous men and women who are rescuing and reconstructing African History.

We are being shown a new version of history that documents advanced African culture and civilization that preceded slavery by thousands of years. We are now introduced to irrefutable evidence that brings to light the African origins of mankind, the development of the concept of time, the first solar calendar of 365-1/4 days, medicine, law, algebra, architecture, engineering, religion, and so much more.

Imagine the effect this new information will have on the minds of school children when they learn that Hippocrates is not the father of medicine, or that Christopher Columbus did not prove that the world was round, and that conceptually it is impossible to discover a land when there are people already there. These are indeed important times.

It is only through the positive portrayal of the African contribution to world civilization that people, especially African Americans, will begin to see the worth of African people and the necessity of an Afrocentric worldview. It is a historical fact that Africans were the first people on the planet, that they developed the earliest civilizations, and that there has been a concerted effort to deny the world these great truths.

The lack of an Afrocentric worldview in my early education left me mentally malnourished. The completion of my "formal education" signaled the beginning of my pursuit of seemingly unrelated fields of study, which have tremendously influenced my concepts of myself, my people, and the world in which I live.

My training as an artist has cultivated within me the ability to perceive information through a profound understanding of symbolic imagery and its effects on the subconscious mind. An Afrocentric view of world history has allowed me to look at myself and America from a totally different perspective. The combined effects of these two methods of knowing are earth-shattering.

Allow me to share an Afrocentric epistemological view of this process. Look at the back of a dollar bill. You'll see firsthand the differences between an Afrocentric worldview and a Eurocentric view. The symbols on our currency represent the ideology of the "Founding Fathers" and the source of their ideology.

Sharon Bisdee, Keeper of the Seal for the Secretary of State, describes the front of the seal featuring the bald eagle. "Its wings are outstretched, representing dignity, freedom, strength, and vision. Above the eagle are 13 stars known as the constellation, which signify that the United States has taken its place among the nations of the world. On the eagle's breast is the shield. The bar at the top of the shield represents Congress. The 13 stripes below the bar represent the 13 original colonies supporting the Congress.

The eagle carries in its beak a ribbon that displays the Latin phrase *E pluribus unum*, which means out of many, one. This signifies that the 13 colonies have become one nation. In its right talons, the eagle grasps an olive branch symbolizing war. The eagle's head is turned toward the olive branch to indicate our nation's preference for peace.

On the left side of the dollar bill is the reverse of the Great Seal. It features a pyramid (comprised of 13 courses of stone which represent the original colonies) and the eye of God encased in a pyramid. According to Bisdee, "The unfinished pyramid symbolizes strength and foundation for future growth."

"Above the pyramid, in a glory burst, is an eye inside a triangle which represents the many interventions of 'Providence' in favor of the American cause. Above the eye is the Latin phrase *Annuit Coeptis*, which means that 'He has favored our understanding.'"

"At the bottom of the pyramid are the Roman numerals for 1776, the date of the Declaration of Independence. Under that are the Latin words *Novus Ordo Sec. orum*, (which were suggested by Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson) meaning 'A new order of the Ages.'"

The front of the Great Seal was designed by Charles Thomson, secretary of Congress; the reverse was designed by William Barton, a specialist in heraldry, and on June 20, 1782, the emblem was adopted by an Act of Congress. It has long been suggested that the "Soul of America" is reflected in this Great Seal.

In 1822, a Frenchman named Jean Champollion deciphered the Rosetta stone and revealed the mysteries of the Egyptian hieroglyphs, which paved the way for the European interpretation of ancient African history. Today, an Afrocentric decipherment of the Great Seal will also shed new light on the establishment of the United States of America and its relationship with African people.

It is a known fact that the "Founding Fathers" were Freemasons who studied astrology and other ancient metaphysical sciences. Of the men who signed the Declaration of Independence, 51 were Masons, as were all of the generals of the Revolutionary War. In addition, 14 U.S. Presidents have been acknowledged as belonging to Masonic organizations.

All of the men involved in the creation of the Great Seal were practicing Masons who sought to incorporate "specific values" into the symbolism of the new nation. The link between masonry and ancient Egyptian science and metaphysics has been proudly heralded by European Masons for centuries. Nowhere is this relationship more clearly defined than in George G.M. James' book *Stolen Legacy*.

James documented the relationship between the Egyptian Mystery Schools and the European mason lodges. The word Mason, which means child of the sun, is derived from the African terms Sons and Daughters of the Light and Children of the Sun. The sun is symbolic of enlightenment. Therefore, these metaphors describe the people who had acquired knowledge and enlightenment.

When viewed from this perspective, the significance of the Great Seal takes on new meaning. The front of the Great Seal bears a striking resemblance to the African symbol of Horus (the falcon). The use of this symbol preceded the creation of the Great Seal by over 5,000 years.

Above the falcon is the sun, which is symbolic of power and knowledge. Horus is holding in both talons the "shen," which is the African symbol of infinity, and above the shen is the "ankh," the African symbol of life. These combined images represent the belief in infinite life,

not only in this world but in the next. Contrast this ideology to that of the eagle, which carries the symbols of war and peace.

The front of the Great Seal is also replete with the repetition of the number 13. There are 13 leaves and 13 berries on the olive branch, 13 arrows, 13 stripes on the shield, 13 letters in the words "E pluribus Unum," and 13 stars in the constellation above the eagle's head. Throughout the seal the number 13 is used 8 times.

What is the significance of the number 13? The logical explanation is that 13 represents the 13 original colonies. But why 13 colonies? Why not 10, or an even dozen? Why not 15 colonies?

In Masonic, esoteric, and metaphysical literature, 13 is the number of transformation. The completion of a cycle is represented by 12, and 12+1 is the transformation of energy of that completed cycle to a higher, or spiritual level. We see this philosophy expressed in the symbolism of Christ and the 12 disciples, the sun and the 12 signs of the zodiac, King Arthur and the 12 Knights of the Round Table, and December 25 and the 12 days of Christmas. There are many other examples.

On the reverse of the Great Seal, we find a pyramid comprised of 13 steps, and above the pyramid, we see the "Eye Heru." History shows that the construction of pyramids occurred in lands occupied by African people in Egypt. Ethiopia and Sudan, as well as by the Africans who migrated to Central America in the century B.C.

The combined use of the pyramid and eye of Horus, represented a clear desire to incorporate Egyptian values in the founding of this nation. A translation of the Latin words surrounding these two symbols further reinforces this point.

*Novus Ordo Seclorum* represents the establishment of a New Secret Order, which was founded on Ancient esoteric principles. *Annuit Coeptis* means that God has favored this undertaking and has blessed it with Annual endowments of unlimited wealth.

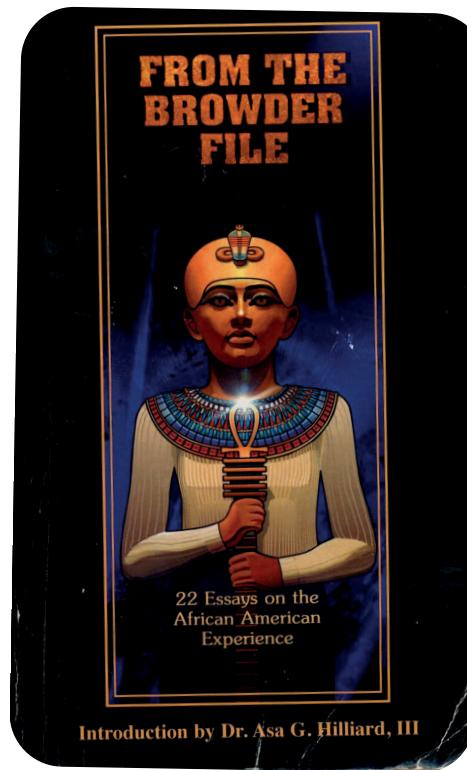
Although the Eurocentric view was that America became great because of God's blessings, in reality, this country emerged as an economic world power because of 400 years of free slave labor.

The history of this nation is truly unique. America is the only world power established on African principles. African people were enslaved and forced to build this country in order to bring these principles into manifestation. Suffice it to say, without either of these two components, this nation would not be what it is today.

There are numerous examples of the African influence interwoven into the fabric of the United States of America. The prevalence of these examples is given in Washington, D.C. During the many years that I have resided in the Metropolitan District of Columbia area, I have identified a number of sights, such as monuments, parks, and statues, throughout the city, which both architecturally and symbolically "quietly commemorate" the African contributions to this nation.

Two years ago, I had the opportunity of sharing my research on the "Cathy Hughes Morning Show" on WOL Radio, 1450 AM. The "Morning Show," hosted by Hughes, owner and general manager of the station, is a "drive time" talk show which features stimulating news items, discussions, and interviews.

The information presented on the program held both the host and the audience spellbound. Ms. Hughes admitted unashamedly that the knowledge shared on the show was so phenomenal and vitally import-



ant to her audience that she invited me to return on the next program. Since that first appearance, I have been a guest on numerous occasions and have even hosted the show many times. However, it was my first appearance on the "Morning Show" which caught attention of Mrs. Francis Murphy, publisher of the Washington Afro-American newspaper.

I was approached by Mrs. Murphy to write an article on one of the topics I had discussed on the show, the origins of the word negro. That first article, The Creation of the Negro, led to a by-weekly column entitled From the Browder File. The collection of essays in this book were written over a two year period and published in my newspaper column.

The information contained in this book is designed to touch your consciousness in a special way and thereby stimulate thoughtful and meaningful discussions with friends, relatives, and associates. I have also included references which will assist in investigating certain subjects in greater detail. I certainly hope you will do so.

We must be ever mindful of the fact that just 150 years ago, African

Americans were still slaves. By law, we were forbidden from learning to read or write. The reasons were very obvious. "Information is power." Information holds the key to freedom from mental and physical bondage.

If you deny any people the knowledge of their history and culture, you deny them the ability to develop to their full potential. "Information is Power." We must be ever mindful of the fact that the time we have here on Earth provides us with a lifelong opportunity to gather information and use it to improve the quality of our lives.

It is the responsibility of every adult to know their history and culture, to preserve it, and then pass it on to the next generation. The youth the responsibility of using that knowledge, assuming their rightful place in history, and then passing this information on to the next generation. This is an obligation, not a luxury. "Information is power." Information provides you with the food for thought to "Free Your Mind" ...use it!

Anthony "Tony" Browder

December 21, 1988

## "The Pew of Political Punditry"

By Kenneth I. Lewis, Jr., Presiding Elder, Pastor, Teacher  
The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

There is a new sanctuary in America—not built of stone or glass, but of spin and spectacle. It is not the church that gathers on Sunday; it's the congregation that assembles each night around the glow of the television or the endless scroll of a feed. They sit faithfully, week after week, in the pew of political punditry.

In this new temple, the creed is cynicism, the hymns are hashtags, and the offering is outrage. Truth is not preached—it's performed. Facts are not discerned—they're dramatized. The pundits have become priests of polarization, baptizing bias and calling it analysis. They preach from pulpits of privilege, collecting ratings where repentance should be.

And the people—tired, anxious, and hungry for belonging—bow at the altar of opinion because conviction takes too much courage. The pew of political punditry promises clarity without conscience, noise without nuance, certainty without sacrifice. It sells division as destiny and dares to call it democracy.

But prophets are not pundits. Prophets do not chase clicks or court applause. They speak truth to power, not to please their followers but to free their people. Prophets live on the edges—where pain cries out and truth costs something. They are not hired for commentary; they are called for conscience.

Our nation has confused commentary for conviction. We have mistaken volume for vision. The pundit's pulpit has drowned out the prophet's voice. And in the process, we've lost our moral compass.

What we need is not another shouting match between ideologues, but a reawakening of moral imagination. We need voices that see beyond left and right—voices that remember the least, the lost, and the left behind. We need elders with endurance and youth with urgency. We need wisdom that listens before it lectures, and courage that loves before it condemns.

America doesn't need more pundits; it needs prophets. Prophets who will name the idols of our age—greed, cruelty, deception, and fear—and call us back to the higher ground of justice and mercy. Prophets who will remind us that compassion is not weakness, that integrity is not naivety, and that truth is not negotiable.

Let the pundits have their panels and platforms. Let the networks have their noise. But let the people of conscience rise from the pew of political punditry. Let us stand again in the public square—not to shout, but to speak truth in love.



Because the salvation of this democracy will not come from another broadcast, poll, or panel. It will come from a people willing to tell the truth, live the truth, and demand the truth—even when it costs them.

The nation doesn't need more commentary—it needs conviction. It doesn't need more punditry—it needs prophecy. And prophecy begins when we leave the pew, take up our purpose, and speak what's right—even when the world calls it radical.

All the best!

# THE FANNIE LOU HAMER QUESTION

By Rev. DeForest L. Raphael, Pastor  
The A.M.E. Zion Church on the Hill

November 2025, New York, NY...., Just over 61 years ago, Fannie Lou Hamer rattled the Democratic National Convention and the nation to its core with three (3) little words: "Is this America?" So disruptive was it that President Lyndon Baines Johnson attempted to preempt her with a hastily called press conference. His attempt failed miserably, for long before there was a term to describe what happened on that hot summer day in Atlantic City, NJ, Fannie's question went "Viral." Her "Question" still troubles me. To this day, I am terribly saddened—almost to the point of depression—by the specter of what America is becoming. I remain haunted by Fannie's Question and the formidable boldness with which she posed it. We have all heard the urgent squeal, "This is NOT America!" Born of a desperate need to stave off the inevitable condemnation. What we are presently witnessing, what is being unveiled across the length and breadth of America, actually shouts, "This IS America!"



From the highest to the lowest—a president, scowling at his constituents, while legends of masked cowards, troll our streets, throwing women to the ground, and zip-tying children—reveals all we need to know about the "land of the free and the home of the brave." I am sickened by the godless display of wanton, mindless cruelty. I am sickened by the silence, prompted by America's penchant for shielding profits while shattering people. I am sickened by their obvious frauds, their hatreds, and their coldness. But mostly it is their nauseating "smiles" that I find most repulsive. Their smiles are not an authentic expression of joy—for they are monumentally joyless. They are more like the faces I've seen adorning postcards. Those sold at apothecaries. Snarling Sunday Christian Crackers, their children in tow, feeding on the unspeakable wretchedness of "...black bodies swinging in the southern

breeze, strange fruit hangin' from the poplar trees."

Then I realized I'd been looking through the wrong end of the telescope. They hate us, not because we THINK we are better than they; they hate us because they KNOW we are better than they. What makes us better is not "...the color of our skin, but the content of our character." You know we are better than you; otherwise, why stack every imaginable deck against us? If you are superior, wouldn't that render laws codifying inferiority superfluous? If you are better, why red line our communities, miseducating our children, destroy our hospitals, burn down our churches, our businesses, our neighborhoods, kill our leaders? If you're so proud of your history, why don't you want it taught? Why? Neither do they hate us because they know us—they don't know us—they don't even know themselves. What do they know and hate? What suckles loathing and channels deceitfulness? It must be rehearsed to perfection if it has any hope of vindicating their monstrous cruelty. Until you tell the truth about me and mine, you will never know the truth about you and yours. But secretly—down deep—there is a haunting, gnawing truth you have tried, but cannot ignore. Denying it is what drives you to ever deeper expressions of unadulterated wickedness. It's a stubborn truth that propels your fury. The secretion leaks through the pores of your pitiful skin. You stink from the revulsion, murder, and violence you've visited upon your darker kin. Your guns are all you have. You read your sacred texts with one eye open and a closed heart. But you know this. The nations of the world know it too and are making plans for the future of a planet that does not include you ... a planet that does not need you ... a planet that smells your self-inflicted irrelevance.

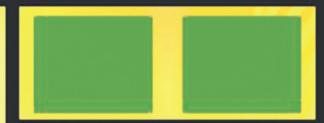
Your shamefulness is as plain to see as is the glory of the Lady of the Harbor. You brazenly intone the word meritocracy. Question: Has anyone ever seen a more incompetent group of dunderheads than those who now hold forth in the Executive Branch of the United States of America? (I'll wait!) In some small way, we owe a debt of gratitude to the one my friend, Playthell Benjamin, calls Donnie Dim Wit. He has singlehandedly shined a discerning light on the grotesque falsehood of white superiority. And yet, these cretins think they are winning. Alas, nothing could be further from the truth. How CAN you win, when you ARE lost? Trump, as the quintessential ugly American, is an unmistakable loser. That's why he cheats at everything. Only a loser is compelled to cheat. I asked AI to define the word compelled in psychological terms. This is what came back: *In psychology, the word "compelled" denotes a feeling of being forced, driven, or having an irresistible urge to perform an action, often against one's conscious will. This concept is central to understanding a range of psychological phenomena, particularly compulsive behaviors.* Where Trump is concerned, I would be inclined to take exception to the clause "...often against one's conscious will." Otherwise, doesn't this sound familiar? No, they are a company of losers. Those who never could win fairly would prefer dismantling the nation to sharing it. It was Grover Norquist who stated unequivocally, "Our goal is to make government small enough so that we can drag it into the bathroom and drown it in the tub." Finally, this: During the height of Jim Crow, several southern cities, when faced with court orders to integrate their swimming pools, instead drained them of water and refilled them with cement. You would inflict misery upon your own children, then allow my children to enjoy a cool dip on a hot summer day. You are not just sick of hearing about racism; you are sick with racism.

***The Rev. DeForest L. Raphael is the Pastor of The A.M.E. Zion Church on the Hill in New York City's Sugar Hill. He received an M.Div. and a S.T.M. from Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York. His studies focused on the enormous theological contribution of African theologians to the first 1,000 years of Early Christianity.***

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