

Livingstone  
Inducts 18 in UNCF  
Hall of Fame

Pg  
**11**

A TIME TO LOVE:  
A Sermon in  
Commemoration of  
the Passion and  
Love of Christ

Pg  
**34**

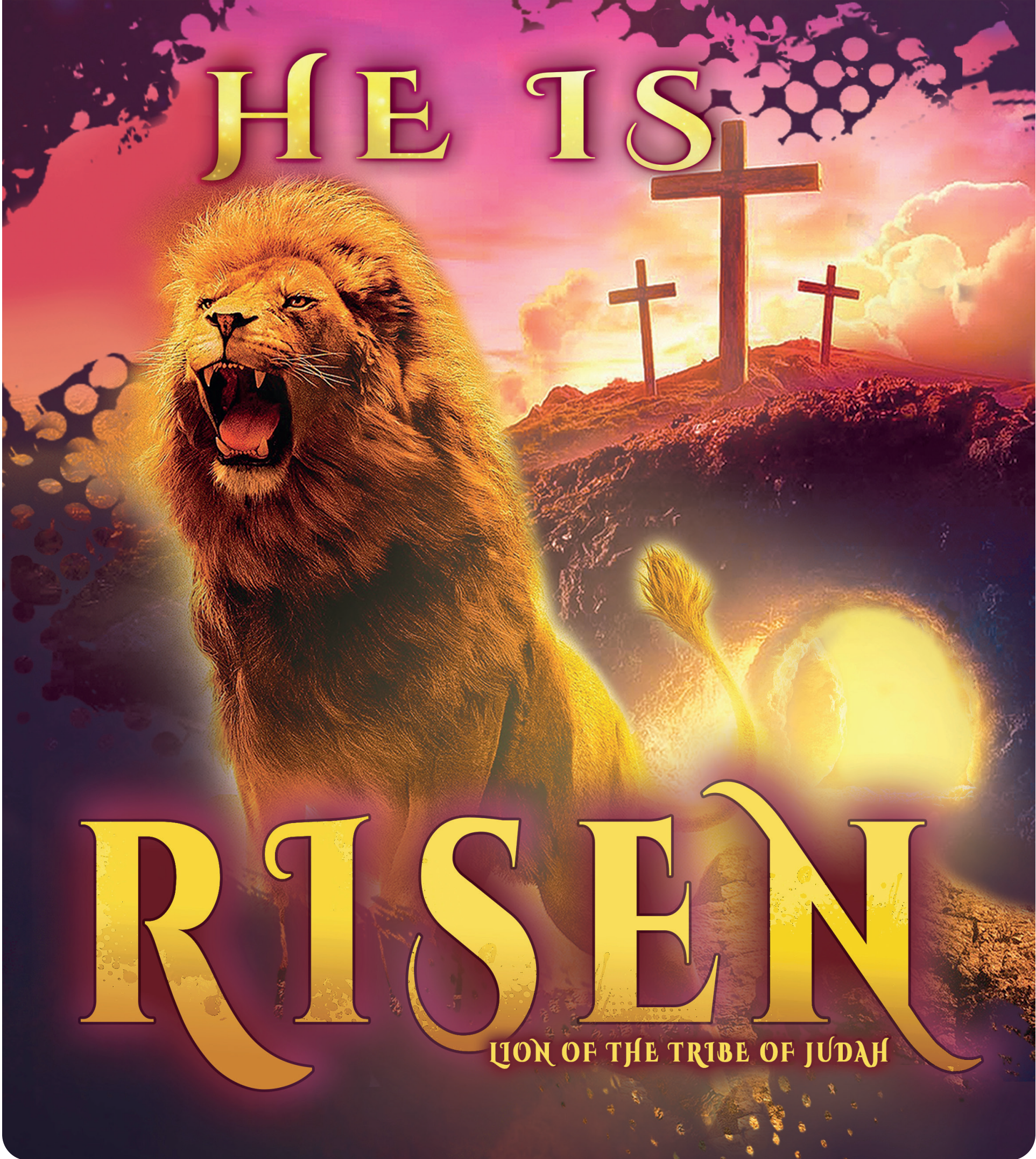
# THE STAR OF ZION

APRIL 2024 | VOL 148 NO. 4 | STAROFZION.ORG | THE OFFICIAL VOICE OF THE A.M.E. ZION CHURCH


# HE IS

# RISEN

LION OF THE TRIBE OF JUDAH







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

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



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IN THIS  
ISSUE  
PAGES

LOOK  
INSIDE  
↓

03-11  
ZION  
SPOTLIGHT

11-13  
EDUCATION

13-14  
SOCIAL  
JUSTICE

14-17  
ENTERTAINMENT  
& THE ARTS

18-23  
HEALTH &  
WELLNESS

23  
FINANCIAL  
FREEDOM

24-25  
GLOBAL  
LEADERSHIP

26-28  
ROAD TO  
GENERAL CONFENCE

28  
SPORTS

29-30  
OBITUARIES

30-32  
WORLD POLITICS

34-35  
OPINION

# CLC CONVOCATION ADDRESS EXCERPTS

By Mr. Joseph King Davis, Jr.  
International President, Connectional Lay Council  
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

Humbled by God's grace, greetings to each of you in the majesty of His power and the beauty of His might, for I am keenly aware that it has only been by those traits of the Master that has granted me this opportunity to travel safely and stand before you, the servants of our God. My gratitude is infinite to the church of my birth and nurture, providing me with opportunities to serve the denomination in this pinnacle of privilege, the 11<sup>th</sup> President of the Connectional Lay Council of the Freedom Church, for I stand greatly privileged and highly favored. To be in that number, increases the depth of my humility and gratitude, an assignment only by God, which has proven to be a tapestry of achievements and challenges, elected at the 12<sup>th</sup> Quadrennial Convention of our beloved Lay Council. My life has been enriched and tremendously blessed through this work, igniting brightly my love for lay ministry, causing that love to expand and elevate because of the people I serve and the opportunities shared to better understand our God.



Acknowledging my Bishop, the 95<sup>th</sup> Prince of the church and Senior Bishop, His Grace, the Right Reverend Dr. Kenneth Monroe and Missionary Supervisor Sheila Wells Monroe; to the President of the Board of Bishops, the Right Reverend Dr. George Crenshaw; to the Right Reverend Dr. Michael Angelo Frencher, Sr., Chairman of the Connectional Board of Lay Activities; to the family of lay leaders, the Executive Board of the Connectional Lay Council; Ministerial staffs; General, Connectional, Conference and District personnel and representatives across the boundaries of our Zion, the Sons and Daughters of Varick of the Freedom Church, and all in the protocol of God's Kingdom. I am filled with esteemed joy to plant my feet behind this sacred desk to share this Convocation address, with gratitude for this distinct opportunity to hasten & share with you a few crumbs gathered from droppings of the Master's table.

The Freedom Church, A Movement Empowered by the Holy Spirit, from Strengthening Our Fellowship and now by Sharing Our Faith, reflects our mission and vision as a church and serves as our guiding light in dark times, our bridge over troubled waters, and the glue that will hold us together as a denomination even as circumstances seek to rip us apart. However, we must always remember that even with these circumstances, we are kept by the strength of His hand, the power of his love, and the reassurance of His promises. This quadrennial theme possesses the

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Continued on page 4





Mrs. Debra Chappelle-Polk  
Zion Spotlight Editor  
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# April: New Beginnings Renewal, Rejuvenation, & Redemption

By Debra Chappelle-Polk, Zion Spotlight Editor

April 2024

New York, NY - January, the first month of the year, is the month of resolutions and good intentions. Similarly, April, the fourth month of the year, is the month of new beginnings, redemption, and salvation. The biblical and spiritual interpretations of April remind us of God's power and grace. They symbolize the victory of light over darkness and the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ. April's significance in the Bible encourages believers to reflect on their own lives, seek new beginnings, and embrace the redemption offered through Jesus Christ. "But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." Isaiah 40:31 ESV.



The word "April" is derived from the Latin word "aperire," which means to open – a reference to the blossoming flowers and trees during this month. April is often associated with the beginning of the spring season. It is a time when nature comes back to life after a long winter, with flowers blooming and trees regaining their leaves. As the environment starts to revive, so too should our spiritual and emotional well-being.

April has several spiritual meanings. The month symbolizes spiritual awakening and the opening of one's heart and mind to new experiences. It is a time for new beginnings and the importance of evolving and growing with life.

According to SpiritualDetails.com: "April's transformation is not limited to the greenery around us. The blossoming of flowers and the rejuvenation of nature mirror our own capacity for personal growth and spiritual evolution."

April's birthstone is the diamond. The diamond symbolizes invincibility, strength, and clarity. These qualities resonate with the spiritual energy of April because they help us tap into our inner strengths, enabling us to overcome challenges while maintaining a clear vision of our goals and aspirations.

The various spiritual meanings of April are insightful and "transcends beyond the physical changes happening in nature and serves as an invitation to grow, change, and develop on a deeper, more personal level. By tapping into the rejuvenating energy of April, we can come closer to fulfilling our true potential and achieving a more balanced, harmonious life." (SpiritualDesk.com.)

The Highest and Holiest Seasons in the Christian calendar, Lent and Easter, often fall in April. The Lenten Season is a time for fasting, praying, and renewing our relationship with Jesus. Like the Lenten Season, April is also a month of renewal. It gives us an opportunity to manifest our highest potential

and to live our lives with purpose and meaning. It provides a time for reflecting on the past, celebrating the present, and looking forward to the future.

Practical Tips On How To Connect With April's Spiritual Meaning:

**Meditation:** Meditation helps you connect with your inner self and with the universe. Spend time in quiet reflection, breathing deeply, allowing your mind to relax.

**Gratitude:** Take time to be grateful for everything that you have in your life. Gratitude is a powerful tool for shifting your focus from scarcity to abundance and from negativity to positivity. When you focus on the good things in your life, you attract more of them.

**Spend time in nature:** Take a walk in the park, hike in the mountains, or sit by a river. Spending time in nature is a great way to connect with the energy of April and its spiritual meaning. It's also a way to recharge your batteries, get some fresh air, and connect with the natural world.

**Increased awareness:** When we connect with the spiritual meaning of April, we become more aware of our surroundings, of ourselves, and of our place in the universe. We begin to see things more clearly and to understand ourselves and others better.

**Inner peace:** The spiritual meaning of April is all about new beginnings, growth, and transformation. When we embrace these concepts, we can find inner peace and contentment. We can let go of the past, embrace the present, and look forward to the future with hope and optimism.

**Improved well-being:** When we connect with the energy of April and its spiritual meaning, we can improve our physical health, mental well-being, and emotional balance. We feel more energized, more focused, and more positive about life.

April represents transformation and the prospect of spiritual development. It is a time to let go of old habits and thought patterns that no longer serve us, making room for new opportunities and experiences.

Remember the adage -- April showers bring May flowers!

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## Continued from Page 2

momentum needed for us to ascend to the heights God has set for us to build a strong future, even for our beloved Connectional Lay Council. The Black Church continues to be confronted with the rising issues that impinge on race and identity and social concerns such as poverty, gang violence, prison concerns, drug use, unemployment, homelessness, and blatant racism, just to name a few beloved.

Our next level of service requires the laity to increase commitment, redouble their efforts, retool, and restore with a strong focus for this task ahead in this quadrennial, towards Strengthening Our Fellowship, Serving Our Flock, and Sharing Our Faith. Quadrennial addresses in the past remind us of how we eradicate some of these issues, but I speak specifically to our Lay Council in this address utilizing the thoughts of our Episcopal leaders. How will the Lay Council “Share Our Faith” and respond to the pandemic of gun violence that has terrorized many of our communities, where our children are being slaughtered in the streets, devastating the families of all impacted by these tragic murders and robbing us of the potential of greatness deposited in these young men and women? How will the Lay Council “Secure Our Future” and respond in serving the flock, calling for greater accountability from the police departments who are given lethal authority and are sworn to “protect and serve” their communities? How will Lay Councils respond and address complex issues in urban areas that have resulted in gun violence and gang warfare that has spiraled out of control, all while our African American communities are drowning in a sea of poverty? We cannot sit silently on the sidelines, with our hands folded, while our communities are destroyed, our people held hostage, knowing that we are confronted with some of the most profound issues of our time. We cannot remain paralyzed Lay Councils with fear and hopelessness but find ways to restore order and tranquility to our neighborhoods.

Witnessing the passing of years is much like climbing a ladder; the higher you climb, the more you can see. I find this especially true, as I have witnessed the swift passing of the months and years since my election, providing leadership, many times virtually and now more in-person across the spectrum of our Zion. The view of the landscape is different from where I now stand; I simply request beloveds, as International President, to trust my sight and offer prayers for my success at every opportunity. The Lay Council is blessed with highly competent, visionary supervision and leadership across numerous Episcopal Districts, dedicated, committed officers who should be keeping their program agendas fresh, innovative, and focused on the significance of being prepared for Christian service, strengthening fellowships, serving the flock and sharing faith. However, please remember that any credit or success in this work first belongs to God and, secondly, to the people who have offered fervent prayers for success in programming. Sadly, to say my beloved, I am sure that there have been times when selfishness and unsympathetic comments, gestures, and attitudes have attempted to discourage you in kingdom building from uninformed laity, those who continue to pout, plot, poison, and pollute people and their ideas. We must be about praying, praising, and promoting the Kingdom of our God. Be also reminded that this work of lay ministry is not about you or me; it is about giving God the glory and the honor due to His name. It is not about our church membership; it is about the movement of God to edify His people. In order to share our faith, we must be strong advocates and witnesses of the litanies and statements we recite at our programs and Lay Day observances and fully understand our role as laity in fulfilling our mission. Have we really attempted to deepen the spiritual life of the laity by disseminating information to cultivate denominational loyalty across your boundaries, the local, district, conference, and Episcopal region? What have you done to expand the denomination through education and evangelism by promoting any other interest of the Kingdom of God? As we continue to Strengthen Our Fellowships, Serve the Flock, and Sharing Our Faith, are you mindful that the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church is a connection that has endured more than 200 years, where countless laypersons are nurtured with nourishment from the bosom of this church. Every generation ought to be more creative than the preceding one; this is the road to progress and success on every front. To strengthen our fellowship and share our faith, we must eliminate churches caught up in the web of shortcomings, ditches of despair, weaknesses, and failures, petty traditions that build monuments and unnecessary barriers for continued and consistent growth, but

we must gain momentum and steam for effective change.

Even amidst changing events, conditions, and circumstances, God has remained unchanged. God knows God cares, God can, God has, and God will again. God is a missionary God. The Bible is a missionary book. The gospel is a missionary message, and the church is a missionary institution. Even in this cold and callous world and our attempts to share our faith, we cannot let our motto of “*Come with Us to Christ*,” Christian character, evangelistic outreach, and strong beliefs in reciting our Affirmation of Laity take a backseat or placed on the back burner. We have a duty Lay Councils, a mission and vision, an assignment and objectives for action, for which Christ calls us out and sends us into the world on our various fields of labor. We must be willing instruments and vessels of clay, which will eliminate suffering devastating consequences in the years ahead. We have been reminded how fragile life is by the road we are now traveling, witnessing the pandemic challenges of our health and the human condition, as well as a pandemic of blatant racism, inequities, inequalities, and injustices against our people, while the “knee on our necks” drains the energy and life from our existence.

Change is not our enemy; change is indeed our friend. Laity, there is still an enormous amount of work to be done in the vineyard. To call it quits now, or even turn your back on lay ministry, as we have ushered in the new quadrennial theme, now with the curtain lowering on its teaching, would jeopardize what we have accomplished as an organization with a motto of “*Come with Us to Christ*.” The church must leave the cloistered caverns that separate us, serene settings, the hallowed walls of its sanctuaries, where plush carpet and stained glass windows adequately muffle the sound of the cries for help within our reach, but we must venture into the community laity, and be the foot soldiers to establish ministries to build character and values, a sense of worth and self-esteem; ministries that seek out the least and the lost must now be our focal point to share our faith. We must continue to develop a deeper appreciation for the history of the denomination and the history of the Connectional Lay Council as we serve in these positions of trust. As laity in the Church of God, we must be inspired to take seriously the challenges of our day and time, an awesome task of leading and managing ministry, which is more than any one of us can master without God. Our quadrennial theme, embraced by the Connectional Lay Council at the 12<sup>th</sup> Quadrennial Convention in Atlanta, Georgia, must be the fabric in the life of every congregation in Zion Methodism. The Lay Council must continue to evaluate our position, expand our presence, equip our people, and explore our possibilities by communicating a transforming message with knowledge, discipline, insight, compassion, tolerance, and, more importantly, love for God and love for His people.

What kind of organization does it take for all of this? It takes a need-conscious Lay Council, a gift-oriented Lay Council, a ministry-balanced Lay Council, a biblical Lay Council, a motivated and mobilized Lay Council, and a failure-resistant Lay Council. Do you really believe what you stand and recite as the *Affirmation of Laity*? Do you solemnly believe, firmly advocate, and admirably support the need to articulate a self-purpose with open minds and faith in the Christian religion? Do you endorse and need people who understand all sides of a question to gain wisdom? Is human decency your priority, coupled with good manners, humor, compassion, endorsing openness, truthfulness, and honesty, thereby possessing the courage to stand for each creedal, our rock of affirmation? We stand and recite these statements. Are you serious about your willingness to be empowered through a series of educational experiences in Bible Study, theological reflections, the study of Zion Methodism, its history, doctrines, polity, Christian fellowship, and lay ministries and services that meet contemporary needs, thereby strengthening the integrity of the A.M.E. Zion Church? Do you believe our *Lay Council Scripture* in Proverbs 3:6, “In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths?” Do you really believe in our *Lay Council Closing Prayer* that God our Father will pour out





His steadfast love upon us and keep us forever in His care? Do you believe our *Lay Council Mission* of actively involving more people for peace and justice, and Christian teaching for the brotherhood of man? Do you believe our theme song that we can be truly guided by our "Great Jehovah" as pilgrims through this barren land? Do you believe that God is mighty and will hold us with His powerful hand and will feed us bread from heaven until we want no more? Yes, we have accomplished much, but our work is still undone. People still need an encouraging and empowering word; lay councils must be the providers of help for the helpless, hope for those endangered by hopelessness, and a healer providing ministries that should be vital to the life and witness of the church. Yes, you may have to work and walk with weary legs, walk and witness on tired feet, and work with calloused hands to make a difference while sharing your faith.

I acknowledge and cherish the confidence you have placed in my leadership to lead this organization to a higher plateau. As I move by God's grace further into this quadrennial as a servant leader, together, we must hear God's voice calling us to step up our efforts, to reach our potential, to seize the opportunities to move in a new dimension,

to another level, to a different horizon. The call will beckon us out of our comfort zones and established boundaries, demanding we live more boldly than we otherwise would. What you have heard and witnessed here this morning is not my work or even my thoughts; it is the work that God gave to me as leader to people and people to leader for this celebration, for I have attempted to do my best to please Him. My love for this denomination has no boundary, for I have been nurtured in its bosom, and I know no other milk; who and what I am, comes from the qualities of the church. I only hope and pray, for I dare not consider my deeds worthy, that God will look upon what I have done here today as your speaker and accept it as my offering of praise. As International President, I know "A charge to keep I have, a God to glorify; a never dying soul to save and fit it for the sky. To serve the present age, my calling to fulfill; O may it all my powers engage to do thy Master's will. Arm me with jealous care, as in thy sight to live; and O thy servant, Lord prepare a strict account to give." The deed is done; the Convocation address is now completed for your record and chronicled in the minutes of this great organization, but the struggle continues. It is in the name of Him who is to know is to love, and to love is to serve, Jesus, who by faith we call the Christ. Amen.

## Little Rock's Heritage and Cultural Awareness Weekend

*Annual Heritage and Cultural Awareness Weekend at The Rock: Celebrating the Principal of UJAMAA (Cooperative Economics)*

By Rev. Diane Commander  
Photos by Mrs. Antionette Cody, Mrs. Linda Kennedy, and Mrs. Anika Robinson



During the month of February, we focus on our "Heritage." Under the direction of Mrs. Robin and Mr. Keith Bradford, we had a very successful Heritage Celebration. As we focus on the Kwanzaa

Principal "Ujamaa" (Cooperative Economics) we strive to build and keep our own stores, shops, and other businesses and to make money from them together. This celebration also pays homage to the many African-American trailblazers who gave of their blood, sweat, and tears fighting for equality for their people.

Our African Market Placed opened on Saturday, February 24, 2024, where vendors greeted us with African art, jewelry, clothing, lotions, oils, and many other items.

The celebration culminated with our Sunday, February 25 Morning Worship, where members and visitors very proudly and excitedly sang our Black National Anthem, Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing, which tells our story, acknowledging where the Lord has brought us from.

Among our many visitors, we were blessed and honored to have worshiped with us Retired Bishop S. Chuka Ekemam, Sr., 83rd Bishop in the Line of Succession, A.M.E. Zion Church, and Ms. Black Charlotte. Our Adult Liturgical Dance Ministry blessed us through movement with the song "My Help Comes from The Lord."



Our Guest Preacher, Rev. Al C. Hamilton, Chief Financial Officer of the A.M.E. Zion Church, was accompanied by his lovely wife, Mrs. Marguerite Hamilton. Rev. Hamilton used 2 Samuel 6: 13-20 to preach a powerful and uplifting sermon with the Subject, "There Is A Story Behind My Praise." He stated that people look at the glory, but they don't know your story. He reminded us that when we look back over our lives and see where the Lord has brought us from, we can truly say, "Like David, there is a story behind our praise; we have been blessed."



Mrs. Narcissus Lowery, our 96-year-old active Matriarch, has been a member of Little Rock for 70 years. On this day, she rededicated her life to God and sang her favorite song, Nine-nine and a Half (Won't Do). Mrs. Lowery has served as the President of Little Rock's Usher Board for 47 years, and all ushers gathered around her as she sang her song.



We praise God for the two souls that were added to our roll and for the sixteen members who entered "Full Connection." Mr. Gilbert McRae, Leader of Leaders, serves as the Class Leader for new members.



Immediately following morning worship, we greeted our vendors to continue our Heritage shopping spree. It was a good day - God was Glorified, Jesus was Magnified, Faith was Fortified, the People were Edified, and Ministry was Multiplied. God Gets the Glory...





# Wallace Temple A.M.E. Zion Church of Anderson, Indiana, makes a GLOBAL IMPACT with their Shoe Drive Fundraiser

By Debra Chappelle-Polk  
Zion Spotlight Editor

Wallace Temple A.M.E. Zion Church has been located on Forkner Street in Anderson, Indiana, for over 100 years. It was founded in 1921 by Reverend Henry H. Horton, and the First Lady and Missionary President was Mrs. Cora D. Horton. Currently, the Reverend Antwaun J. Johnson is the Pastor, and Mrs. Tawana E. Johnson is the First Lady. Mrs. Belinda R. Gibson serves as the WH&OMS Indianapolis District President, and The Reverend Dr. Anthony K.R. Gibson is the Presiding Elder of the Indianapolis District.

In December 2023, the Women of Wallace (W.O.W.) Temple A.M.E. Zion Church organized a Shoe Drive Fundraiser in partnership with Funds2Orgs to raise funds for local and world mission outreach. W.O.W. will earn funds based on the total weight of the gently worn, used, and new shoes, as Funds2Org will issue a check for the shoes collected. The proceeds will benefit the work of the A.M.E. Zion Church Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society. The donated shoes will be redistributed throughout the Funds2Orgs network of micro-entrepreneur (small business) partners. Funds2Orgs works with micro-entrepreneurs, helping them create, maintain, and grow small businesses in developing countries where economic opportunity and jobs are limited.

Celena Bostic Perry, who headed up the Shoe Drive Communications Team, said, "We launched our labor of love in early December 2023 with a goal of collecting a minimum of 100 bags of shoes long before March 2024. 25 pairs of shoes are required per bag by Funds2Org, which is a total of 2500 pairs of shoes." A special request was made for men's shoes and boots as they are heavier in weight. It was Perry's Golf Club's Shoe Drive, which raised funds last Fall to support the youth golf club program and scholarship fund, that led her, a resident of California, to share the Funds2Orgs information with her hometown church.

Pamela Willis Bell served as the Shoe Drive Chairperson. Sis. Bell was praised for doing a "great job" and for "stepping up to chair the event when no one else would." Sis. Perry said, "Sis. Bell and her team of women and men were the boots on the ground working and doing the heavy lifting." Kudos to Sis. Bell's husband, Brian Bell, for the use of his truck to pick up and transport the donated shoes to the church, and for John Bostic, Jr., who secured the help of Man4Man Ministries to help load the Funds2Orgs truck. They, along with DeCarlo Evans and Michael Johnson, were the Men of Wallace who helped collect, store, and organize the donated shoes.

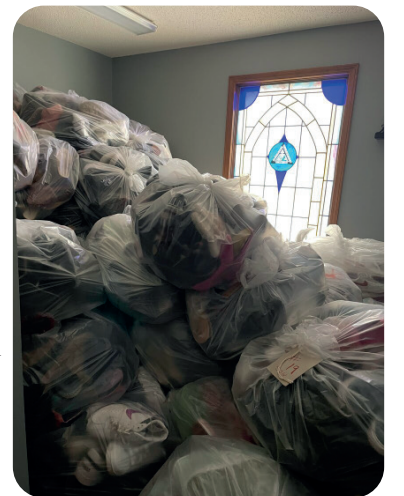
Chairperson Bell and Sis. Shirley J. Weatherly (Shoe Drive Collections Coordinator) brought in the most bags of shoes from local businesses, organizations, and individuals, with 43 bags and 21 bags, respectively. Sis. Perry said, "It was RAINING SHOES!!! They were coming in by the trunk load and truckload." In fact, the W.O.W. Team cleared out a church office to use as a storeroom and enlisted the aid of the Men of Wallace to help carry over 100 bags of shoes into the storeroom. During the holiday season, the Team asked members, community residents and local businesses to help Wallace "DECK THE HALLS with shoes," and they did.

Truddie Evans, Logistics; Mae Gray, Public Relations; Sharon Hudson, Logistics; and Cheryl "Cissy" Wright, Support, are also members of the W.O.W. Team. All of Wallace's Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society participated; however, a special shoutout goes to missionaries Diane Davis and Kimberly Harris for their Team support that went above and beyond.

In her final report and thank you letter to donors and supporters, Sis. Perry wrote, "We are absolutely elated to announce that with your loving support, we achieved our goal and more despite delays due to inclement weather. WOW! We collected and processed 5000 plus SHOES! Double WOW! We could not have done it without you and God's favor. We are grateful, thankful, and so blessed to have had an opportunity to work with such wonderful people, businesses, and organizations throughout the city, state, and beyond. What a blessing! You touched our hearts with your generosity, and TOGETHER, we will touch the hearts, souls, and soles of many with shoes to wear, share, and sell in developing countries around the world, e.g., Cambodia, Botswana, and Haiti. Additionally, we are contributing to the work of those dedicated to protecting the planet by recycling shoes and keeping discarded shoes out of landfills. God is so good, and we give Him all the glory and praise for the work He has done through all of us."

Sis. Mae Gray, PR, sent several press releases about the Shoe Drive to Editorial Asst. Tammy Talley at The Anderson Herald Bulletin, which published the dates, times, and shoe drop-off locations. Several local businesses, organizations and churches, including Church Women United of Madison County and A.M.E. Zion Churches in the Indianapolis District agreed to serve as contacts and collection points. Sis. Gray told the Herald Bulletin, "We are so excited about our shoe drive and the community support."

The W.O.W. Shoe Drive Fundraiser goal was to raise \$1500 to \$2000. All indications are that they have probably met and exceeded the goal, which includes monetary donations. Chairperson Pamela Bell said, "This was about more than raising funds. We did it for the win-win for so many people and entities that benefitted from this effort in so many ways." Local Black-owned businesses: Cultured Urban Winery, The Arrangement Flowers, and MDS Pack, Ship & Print, all who agreed to serve as shoe drop-off locations from the start, told the W.O.W. Team they experienced an increase in business after people read press releases and dropped by to donate shoes.



According to Sis. Perry, "the W.O.W. Team considers the shoe drive as much more than raising funds to support the WH&OMS with its local work and to pay the assessment which goes to global work. We see it, as one A.M.E. Zion minister said, 'as mission work in action.'"

## WALLACE TEMPLE A.M.E. ZION CHURCH LEGACY AND THE W.O.W. TEAM CONNECTION

Rev. Henry H. Horton migrated north from Montgomery, AL, during the Great Migration in the early 1900s and settled in Anderson, IN. Desiring to worship as he was accustomed to in Alabama, he started the A.M.E. Zion church in his home in 1921. A carpenter, he then built the first wood structure in 1925 on the same street where the third and current church building was built in 1985. The Church now owns most of the block. The tradition of A.M.E. Zion's service continues for many of Horton's family and the family of charter members who are active members of the church today. Although everyone was invited to join the Shoe Drive Team, the labor of love ended up being a family affair for the most part. Most all W.O.W. Team members are related and connected as lifelong members of Wallace Temple with mothers who were WH&OMS missionaries.

Sis. Shirley J. Weatherly was born and reared at Wallace Temple, and



at age 84, she is one of the oldest members. Her father was a former pastor of the church and presiding elder of the district. Her grandfather, Rev. Jesse Weatherly, was the first associate pastor at the time of the founding of the church. Her mother was a former president of Wallace's WH&OMS. Bishop Paris Wallace, for whom the church is named, officiated the wedding of her parents, Rev. Isaac Weatherly, Sr. and Mrs. Gertie Weatherly. Their granddaughter, Deborah K. Weatherly, heads up Wallace's Culinary Committee that provides a Sunday meal for the hard-working W.O.W. Team.



following in his grandfather's footsteps. Mr. Wright passed away in 2018 at age 94. His daughters and grandson were inspired to donate a pair of his work boots, which were the last pair to go into the 100<sup>th</sup> bag, and helped the W.O.W. Team reach its goal of 2500 pairs of shoes.

Sis. Bell and the entire W.O.W. Team's efforts are to be commended. Summing it up, she said, "With the blessings of the Pastor, a small group of women from a small church, in a short amount of time, with the help of a few good men, and a lot of support from the church and community, Wallace Temple A.M.E. Zion Church has made a global impact, and to God, we give the glory."

Also born and reared at Wallace are W.O.W. Team members Sharon Bostic Hudson, Celena Bostic Perry, and John Bostic, Jr. They are siblings, and the founding Pastor is their maternal great-uncle. The Bostic family has a history of serving God through the A.M.E. Zion Church since the 1800s.

Funds2Org creates powerful events that help churches, schools, and other nonprofit organizations raise funds by collecting, distributing, and repurposing discarded articles such as shoes, clothing, purses, cell phones, and other electronic goods. Funds2Org distributes the discarded articles to countries around the world that need these items. Visit [www.Funds2Orgs.com](http://www.Funds2Orgs.com) for more information.

W.O.W. Team members Mae Gray and Truddie Evans are sisters and lifelong members of Wallace Temple, whose mother, Barbara Wright, was a Missionary. Their father, Theada Wright, Sr., devoted most of his life to serving Wallace Temple as a Trustee. A plumber by trade, he gave tirelessly of his time, talent, and resources. DeCarlo Evans is

able contributions as an Exhorter and Deaconess, faithfully attending Jones Memorial.

## Jones Memorial Celebrates Nadine Anderson's 99th Birthday

By Priscilla Murrell

The Pastor, Reverend Thelma Gordon, and members of Jones Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church in Columbia, South Carolina, joyously sponsored a 99th Birthday Celebration Drop-In for Mrs. Nadine Anderson, who gracefully turned ninety-nine years old on December 16, 2023. At the age of 99, she holds the esteemed title of being the church's oldest member. The celebration warmly welcomed Mrs. Anderson's family, friends, and fellow church members, with her only surviving sibling, 91-year-old Talmadge Coleman, gracing the occasion with his presence.



Elder Reid R. White Jr. extended a heartfelt welcome, followed by Reverend Carolyn Dixon's touching recitation of a poem crafted especially for Mrs. Anderson. Mrs. Geraldine Goddard then shared a congratulatory letter from the honorable Mayor of Columbia, S.C., Daniel J. Rickenmann.

Amidst the delightful servings of food, cherished tributes poured in from family, friends, and community members, all expressing their deep admiration for Mrs. Anderson's remarkable life.

Mrs. Anderson stands as a stalwart member of the A.M.E. Zion Church, embarking on her Christian journey through the Sunday School and Vacation Bible Schools of Jones Memorial at an early age. Throughout the years, she has selflessly dedicated herself to various leadership roles within the church, including her pioneering tenure as the first Lay Council President, her esteemed thirty-one years as President of the Senior Usher Board, her impactful twenty-eight years as Missionary President, and her steadfast commitment as a Conference Worker since 1975. Retiring as a Class Leader in 2023 after years of faithful service, Mrs. Anderson's legacy also includes over thirty-five years of dedicated service as the church secretary. Presently, she continues her invaluable

able contributions as an Exhorter and Deaconess, faithfully attending Jones Memorial.

Under the guidance of former pastor Reverend J. R. Williams, Mrs. Anderson assumed the pivotal role of Chair of the History Committee, culminating in the publication of the church's inaugural edition of its history.

Beyond her commendable service at Jones Memorial, Mrs. Anderson's leadership within the Columbia-Camden District and her unwavering dedication to the Zion Church have earned her widespread recognition as a loyal and devoted Zionite.

The festivities resonated with heartfelt birthday wishes showered upon the beloved "birthday girl" by numerous well-wishers. In her gracious remarks, Mrs. Anderson expressed her profound gratitude, emphasizing her enduring love for the Lord and for all people. While her earlier years were marked by

devotedly caring for the sick and shut-in, she continues to embody her compassion by sending cards, making phone calls, and offering prayers to those in need.

In her closing remarks, Pastor Gordon reflected on her admiration for Mrs. Nadine Anderson, recounting her prior knowledge of Mrs. Anderson's remarkable legacy before her assignment to Jones Memorial. She also highlighted Mrs. Anderson's ongoing efforts towards the publication of the church's next edition of history, a testament to her enduring commitment to preserving the church's rich heritage.

The event garnered local media attention, with a television station capturing the warmth and jubilation shared by all in celebrating Mrs. Anderson's remarkable milestone.



# Greensboro District Holds Third Mass Meeting – Conference Year 2023-2024

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

*“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (KJV)*

The Greensboro District Women’s Home and Overseas Missionary Society held its third Mass Meeting of the Conference Year on Saturday, January 27, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. at Troy Chapel AME Zion Church, Troy, NC, where the Pastor Reverend Dr. Tyrone Rigsby and his congregation served as meeting hosts. Beautiful welcome remarks were extended by Youth Aiyden Johnson. Youth King Tweed presided over the Order of Service.

The Buds of Promise (BUDs) and The Youth Missionary Society (Y’s) were the program participants for the first part of the meeting. These departments are led by Superintendent of BUDs Mrs. Tamekia Lockhart and Secretary of Youth Mrs. Janice Spearman, respectively.



The devotion participants were as follows: Secretary of Youth Mrs. Janice Spearman, Call to Worship; Markel Ingram, Invocation; Kayden Milton, Scripture (1 Corinthians 3:16-17); Jermaine Melton, Prayer; and St. Phillip Boys’ Choir provided musical selections.

The BUDs and the Y’s shared compelling message presentations highlighting ‘Why We Celebrate’ in honor of Mrs. Marie Clinton Day and Victoria Richardson. The BUDs presented ‘Our History/Symbols and Rituals’ led by Superintendent of BUDs Mrs. Tamekia Lockhart, and the Youth with ‘Our History-led by Kameil Surgeon and Naihla Boswell, and Symbols and Rituals – Motto and Colors, Jayla-Ann McCallum; Watchword, Kobii Forney; Hymn, Trinity Thomas; Theme Song, Morgan Robinson; Anniversary, DeAndra Conrad; and a Poem by Peyton Withers.



St. Phillip AME Zion Dance Team-Anointed Angels provided a beautiful liturgical dance performance interpretation to *Wade in the Water*.



presentation on physical aspects of self-care and mental health was presented by Mrs. Tawania Keitt, Healthy Church Representative, and Superintendent of BUDs Mrs. Tamekia Lockhart, respectively. The congregation had an opportunity to participate in a physical exercise demonstration.

Mrs. Jacquelyn Covington provided the courtesy report expressing thanks to Troy Chapel for their hospitality and gratitude and appreciation to the BUDs and Y’s for their outstanding presentations.



Ms. Phyllis Marshall provided the attendance report, which is always a high point during the missionary mass meetings. The following churches received recognition banners: Oak Grove (Lower level), Pleasant Hill (Middle level), and St. Phillip (Upper level). The offering was received by Reverend Dr. Reginald Keitt, and the Finance report was presented by Mrs. Linda Goins.

Missionary President Dr. Edna Adams-Fulton and Mrs. Renee Ellis thanked participants and everyone for the worship service, including an acknowledgment of the very creative work of the Y’s and BUDs as initiated through their leaders, Secretary of Youth Spearman and Superintendent of BUDs Lockhart. In a very special moment, Dr. Adams-Fulton initiated a telephone call to Presiding Elder Michael E. Ellis, and the entire congregation had an opportunity to extend to Elder Ellis a telephone greeting. Following the closing selection, ‘Lift Him Up,’ the Third Missionary Mass Meeting was adjourned with the Missionary Benediction.

## Columbia-Camden District Pastor Awarded Clergy Renewal Grant

By Linda P. Jones, District Reporter

The Reverend Thelma Thompson Gordon has been awarded a grant through the Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Program. The Lilly Endowment Inc. funds this program, and it is administered by Christian Theological Seminary (CTS). Grants of up to \$60,000 are awarded to congregations to fund a sabbatical for the Clergy and help cover the cost of interim pastoral leadership while the pastor is away.

Rev. Gordon is the senior pastor of the Greater Jones Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Columbia, South Carolina, where she has diligently served for more than four years. Pastor Gordon, along with her husband, Sir Christopher Gordon, will embark upon approximately three months of travel to Italy, Greece, and Trinidad and Tobago. The Gordons are excitedly looking forward to spending quality, relaxed,



and uninterrupted time with family and friends in Trinidad and Tobago. Their travels will also include planned excursions and beach and mountain retreats that will allow them time for rest, rejuvenation, reflection, and spiritual renewal.

The Lilly Endowment grant for clergy renewal is a gift that honors the vocation of pastoral ministry and lifts up the importance of congregational work as well. This program was established in 1999 to honor Pastors for their extraordinary service and enable them to engage in a brief period of rest and renewal. It seeks to strengthen Christian congregations through renewal and reflection. CTS recently announced that 229 congregations across the United States were selected to receive grants through the Lilly National Clergy Renewal Program.

Congratulations to Reverend Thelma Thompson Gordon on this outstanding achievement. To God Be All the Glory!



# Posey Johnson, Living Legend

By LaVerna Hargrove, Wilmington District Reporter  
 Photos by Deborah Price, Wilmington District Photographer

## Happy Birthday to a Living Legend of the A.M.E. Zion Church, Mrs. Posey Johnson.

How do you say Happy Birthday to a living legend? A woman of God who has lived through the

administrations of 16 US presidents and 68 A.M.E. Zion bishops; who has served her church in every lay capacity on all levels of the church; one who has been a mentor, servant, teacher, and watchwoman of the community in which she lives was celebrated on her 100th birthday. On Saturday, February 17, 2024, Mrs. Posey Johnson was celebrated as she reached her milestone 100th birthday. Her St. Andrew A.M.E. Zion Church family, pastored by Rev. Patricia Smith, executed a stellar birthday celebration orchestrated by the honoree. Fashionably attired in the colors of the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, royal blue and white, and a mink jacket. Mrs. Johnson was escorted by her nephew Edward Smith, who had flown in from California for this occasion as a surprise, and family members to the accompaniment of *We Have Come This Far By Faith*.

Reverend Patricia Smith gave an open arms welcome followed by a devotion of 1 Corinthians 15:1-13, prayer, and *Love Lifted Me*. Mr. Willie Nixon paid tribute with *It's Your Time*. Mrs. Connie Morrison, a great-niece of the honoree, gave the Statement of the Occasion. She gave thanks to the honoree for the value she placed on family, for helping to provide spiritual guidance, and for teaching her how to make pies. Mrs. Nannie Mapson, a contemporary, read Mrs. Johnson's favorite poem *Myself* by Edgar Guest.

Accolades and tributes gave witness to a life of service to every quarter of her family, the church, the community, and her profession of teaching. The Johnson family presented valued memories of knowing their Aunt Posey and presented a financial gift to St. Andrew A.M.E. Zion Church in her honor, as well as floral arrangements and cards to their aunt. The family spokesman characterized her as valuing education, as evidenced by the degrees she holds: A BA degree (Born Again), a Masters degree (Jesus Christ is her master), a MBD degree (more blessings every day), and a Ph.D. degree (Praising Him Daily) all from Heaven's University. 93-year-old Mrs. Pearsall of Payne Temple A.M.E. Zion Church, Mt. Olive, NC, with a very sharp and clear memory, gave a glimpse of the very young Posey Johnson as she lived with her family following her graduation from Winston Salem as a young teacher in 1945. Mrs. Pearsall told the congregation that Mrs. Johnson was involved in every part of the church, from choir to Christian Education to church administration, though the mother of Mrs. Pearsall told the young Posey Smith, "You are as green as that green suit you're wearing." As memories came floating back, she concluded by saying Mrs. Posey was just like a member of the family. Mrs. Johnson became a member of St. Andrew as the wife of Reverend RW Johnson. The tributes from St. Andrew A.M.E. Zion Church came from the leaders of each of the departments of the church, sitting reflections of her church work as a faithful, loyal, stalwart church member. Letters from Senior Bishop Kenneth Monroe and the Board of Bishops gave thanks to God for her longevity as a "gracious act of God." Bishops Proctor and Battle (retired) sent letters of congratulations and admiration for her work. Presiding Elder Dr. Alexander Jones called her a real church person. One in which the church lives within. Presiding Elders from the Goldsboro and Lumberton Districts also sent letters of tribute. Former members of her Sunday School class remembered her for her attention to detail and "wanting to do things in

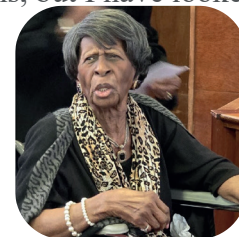


the right way," especially when using the King's English. Her method of discipline was to become quiet. The WH&OMS of the Wilmington District launched a campaign to generate 100 birthday cards. President Delma Jones said the goal was more than accomplished. Not to mention the many, many gifts that were presented. Cards and acts of kindness are still arriving at the church.

Tributes from local government officials, New Hanover County, and the City of Wilmington were given. Professional tributes came from New Hanover Retired Teachers, Ministers Spouses, Widows, and Widowers, Ministers Wives and Widows, Miss June-teenth, her alma mater, Winston Salem State University, and the state and local branch of the NAACP. The local chapter of Zeta Phi Beta tribute encircled Mrs. Johnson, and she joined them in singing the Zeta Phi Beta Hymn. In addition, they have begun a Posey Johnson Scholarship for students who graduate from a high school in Brunswick, New Hanover, or Columbus County and attend a HBCU.

Mr. Lawrence Epps brought congratulations from her alma mater, Winston Salem State University, using the university's hymn and from the interim chancellor of the university, Dr. Anthony Graham. The music for this occasion featured *I'll Make It Somehow* by M and L Gospel Singers Mychal Robinson and LeRon Montgomery; the piano virtuoso of Mychal Robinson; and Marva Robinson sang *This is My Time* and *If I Can Help Somebody* at the request of Mrs. Johnson.

Mrs. Johnson, in her most eloquent voice, said she was thankful for the memories and for having people in her life who were and are 'there' for her. She said she had been blessed all of her life. "I have not been a saint; I've had my ups and downs, but I have looked and continue to



look to God for strength. I advise you all to always trust Him. Hold to His unchanging hand and bountiful grace. Thank all of you for being the sunshine of my life."



Following the program, a birthday dinner featuring Mrs. Johnson's favorite dishes was served in the fellowship hall. Tributes, thank-you's, and gifts were continued digitally from former pastors, her roommate, and persons who could not be present.

Mrs. Posey Johnson has seen the election of 16 Presidents of the United States, 68 Bishops of the A.M.E. Zion Church, wars, and technological advances from the radio to the internet, yet she still mentors, participates in church and community associations as well as carries out the social obligations that she was taught as a well-mannered lady. She makes the every-ready bunny look like an amateur, moving not as quickly but as focused and as deliberately with a memory that is the envy of a computer and the marvel of all who know her.

**May you enjoy many more Happy Birthdays!**





# Missionary Legend Gwendolyn S. Smith Honored

By Debra Chappelle-Polk  
Zion Spotlight Editor  
Contributing Writer - Carolyn M. Jacobs  
Jackson District WHOMS

April 2024

Mobile, AL - On February 17, 2024, Mrs. Gwendolyn S. Smith was honored by the Jackson District Women's Home & Overseas Missionary Society (WHOMS) under the leadership of the newly appointed president, Mrs. Melissa Grannum, at the First Mass Meeting held at Mt. Olive A. M. E. Zion Church. The theme of the celebration was "May the work I've done speak for me"—based on Colossians 3:23-24. Musical selections were rendered by Ms. Mary Wilson and the Ebenezer A.M.E. Zion Church Choir. A digital presentation of Mrs. Smith's missionary journey was shown. Accolades were given by Rev. John P. Gant, Presiding Elder of the Jackson District, Jackson District Departments, Pastors, along with friends and members of her family. Mrs. Smith was blessed by the presence of her sons, Rev. Dr. Malone D. Smith, Presiding Elder of the Tallahassee District, Duane Smith, Byron Smith, and Ethan Smith, one of her three grandchildren. Mrs. Smith is the widow of the late Rev. Malone Smith, Jr., former Presiding Elder of the Jackson District. They labored faithfully together in God's kingdom side-by-side until he was called home to be with the Lord.

The close of the West Alabama Annual Conference in November 2023 marked the end of an era of Mrs. Smith's service to the Jackson District Women's Home & Overseas Missionary Society. She has faithfully served the Society for 37 years. In 1986, she was appointed YAMS Coordinator of the Jackson District in 1986. She was appointed president in 1991 and



served as president until her retirement.

Mrs. Smith's legacy is one of love and dedication to mission work. She was always available to lend a listening ear to the district officers and local church missionary officers, often serving as a wise and gentle mother figure to many. Under her leadership, along with the Area Agency on Aging of South Alabama, the Caregivers College was instituted in the Jackson District to provide resources for area caregivers. This event is held every November at the State Street A. M. E. Zion Church. Her compassion for the success of our youth inspired her, along with Rev. Erika Horn (former Jackson District Youth Secretary), to establish a Career Fair, which is annually held in July at the Kiwanis Boys & Girls Club in Mobile, AL. Youth from the A. M. E. Zion Church and Boys & Girls Clubs in Mobile County attend this event. Mrs. Smith and Rev. Horn work with local industries, government agencies, hospitals, clinics, and non-profits to have representatives present to inspire youth in their career choices. Mrs. Smith has been instrumental in organizing the Back-2-School Bash, the Women's Retreat, ACT Mock Testing, the Legends of Zion Gala, food, shoe drives, and eyeglass drives.

Mrs. Smith is retiring as President of the Jackson District Women's Home & Overseas Missionary Society, but by no means is she slowing down. She plans to continue to serve as WHOMS President at her local church, Mt. Olive A.M.E. Zion Church. She plans to work with her sorority, Delta Sigma Theta, to be involved in civic engagements, volunteering, take line dance and exercise classes, and spend more time with her grandchildren.

Yes! Mrs. Gwendolyn S. Smith has left her mark on the Jackson District, and her tireless efforts and unwavering commitment have not gone unnoticed. She is a beacon of hope and inspiration to all who follow in her footsteps.

# Promotion Ceremony of Brigadier General Peggy R. McManus

By Cynthia Brown  
West Central NC Conference Reporter

On February 22, 2024, a Promotion Ceremony was held in honor of Colonel Peggy Ratliff McManus to Brigadier General at the Pentagon, Washington, DC. BG McManus is a native of Morven, North Carolina, and a member of the Galilee A.M.E. Zion Church in the Rockingham District of the West Central NC Conference, Piedmont Episcopal District. Presiding Prelate, Bishop Darryl B. Starnes, Sr. She is an Ordained Elder in the A.M.E. Zion Church, receiving her ordination under Bishop George W. Walker, Sr.

She was transferred in January 2023 to her current position as the Deputy Commanding officer and Director, Reserve Personnel Management Directorate, U.S. Army Human Resources Command, Fort Knox, KY.

BG McManus was commissioned from Benedict College, Columbia, South Carolina. Commissioned as an Ordnance officer in 1992 through the Reserve Officers Training Corps.

BG McManus began her career as a Platoon Leader at 175th Maintenance Company, Columbia SC 1994-1995; Operations Officer, 460th Replacement Company, Florence SC 1998-2000; and Company Commander, 460th Replacement Company, Florence SC 2000-2002.

BG McManus entered the Active Guard Reserve (AGR) program in



2002, serving her initial assignment with the 390th Personnel Group Richmond, Virginia, Operation Officer. Follow-on assignments include Adjutant, 108th Training Command, Charlotte NC, Team Chief, Officer Branch Chief, 108th Training Command, Charlotte NC, Team Chief Acquisition/System United States Army Reserve Command, Fort Bragg NC, Branch Chief Accessions/Training Manning Division, Fort Bragg, NC and Deputy Division Chief, United States Army Reserve Command, Fort Bragg, NC. BG McManus deployed to Camp Arifjan, Kuwait in 2013-2014 where she served as the Army Reserve G-1 Theater Liaison Officer and Acting Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff, Third Army, 2014-2016 Assistant Chief of Staff, 11th TAC Aviation Command, Fort Knox KY, Jul 2016-June 2017 United States Army War College (Resident), Carlisle Barrack, PA, June 2017-September 2018 Personnel Policy Integrator, Pentagon, Washington DC, 2018-2020 Officer Management Division Chief, and Operations Readiness Division Chief at the Human Resources Command, Fort Knox KY. 2020-2022 Deputy Director of Military Personnel Management, Pentagon, Washington DC. August 2022-December 2022 Case Officer Board Member, Department of the Army Review Board Agency (ARBA), Arlington, VA.



BG McManus received her Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice from Benedict College, Columbia, South Carolina. Her military education includes the Ordnance Officer Basic Course, Adjutant General Officer Advance Course, Command and General Staff



College, and Senior Service College, where she received a Master of Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College.

Her military awards and decorations include the Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal with seven oak leaf clusters, Army Commendation Medal with oak leaf cluster, Army Achievement Medal with two oak leaf clusters, Army Reserve Component Achievement Medal with two oak leaf clusters, National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Army Service Ribbon,



Overseas Service Ribbon, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, and Armed Forces Reserve Medal w/ hourglass.

She is married to Robert McManus Jr., and they have one son, Andre McManus. The West Central NC Conference is also family, and we Salute BG McManus.

EDUCATION

# Livingstone Inducts 18 in UNCF Hall of Fame

By Star of Zion News

Livingstone College hosted its annual UNCF “Share Your Love” Hall of Fame banquet on Thursday, February 8, 2024, at its School of Hospitality Management and Culinary Arts on Jake Alexander Boulevard. The black-tie banquet is a celebration of Livingstone College leaders, whereas this year, the event welcomed 18 recipients into the hall of fame. “As inductees this year, you have the special distinction of being honored during my inaugural year as 13th president. As we recognize your achievements and selflessness for the greater good in your communities, it underscores the legacy of this great institution,” said Livingstone President Dr. Anthony J. Davis. “Livingstone College is committed to ensuring each of our students have the capacity to compete and contribute in a global context with confidence and competence. You, my friends, are the epitome of this vision statement. You have made an impact in your corners of the world that is notable and worthy of celebration,” he said.



The honors are bestowed upon those who demonstrate the characteris-

tics of good stewardship and commitment to personal growth toward others, said Deborah Johnson, Livingstone’s UNCF director. “As this prestigious award is given to honor individuals for their love, it is also a major fundraiser for our UNCF campaign at Livingstone College,” she said.



The event’s programming included shares by Bishop Eric Leake, Dr. Catreliia Hunter, Leon Gatewood, students Ma’at

Senghor, Zanya Works, and Madison Wright, and Dr. Da’Tarvia Parrish, who served as the mistress of ceremony. Wideman’s Catering provided the night’s cuisine, as the 2024 UNCF HOF recipients were: Reverend Gary Adams, Sr., Ms. Cynthia A. Baez ’71, Mr. William C. Chiselom ’88, Mr. Bobby Ray Connor ’71, The Right Reverend Hilliard Dogbe, Mr. Leonard Hall, Mrs. Charletta Mack Hines ’73, Dr. Marcono Hines ’71, Reverend Dr. Evalina Huggins, Dr. Pamela I. Hunter ’68, The Honorable William K. “Pete” Hunter ’66, Dr. Wanda Lewis-Campbell ’75, Mr. Michael McCoy ’87, The Reverend Dr. Melanie Miller, Reverend Julian Pridgen, Ms. Deborah L. Smith ’81, Mr. Carlton Webb ’94, and Presiding Elder Victor C. Wilson ’99.



# VICYC Announces Appointment of New Officers

By VICYC Public Relations

Charlotte, NC - The Varick International Christian Youth Council (VICYC) proudly announces the appointment of five individuals to key positions within the organization. These appointments reflect VICYC’s commitment to fostering leadership and innovation among youth across Zion.

1. Mr. Kordell Green has been appointed to the position of Member at Large.
2. Ms. Hope Henderson has been appointed as the organization’s Treasurer.
3. Ms. Yvette Branch has been appointed as a Member at Large.
4. Ms. Neveah Thomas has been appointed as a Member at Large.
5. Mr. Remington Goodman has been appointed as a Member at Large.

“We are excited to welcome Mr. Kordell Green, Ms. Hope Henderson, Ms. Yvette Branch, Ms. Neveah Thomas, and Mr. Remington Goodman to their new roles within VICYC,” said Mr. Ezekiel Perez, President of VICYC. “Their contributions will help advance our mission and empower young Christians in our church today.”

Please join us in congratulating the new appointees to the Varick International Christian Youth Council.

For more information about VICYC and its initiatives, please email [vicycpublicrelations22@gmail.com](mailto:vicycpublicrelations22@gmail.com)





# Livingstone College's Annual Honors Induction Ceremony



By Star of Zion News

The Honors Program of Livingstone College hosted its annual collaborative academic honors induction ceremony on Friday, February 16, in Little Tubman Theatre during the holistic hour, 11:00 a.m.



Assembled included Livingstone College students who were members and inductees of Alpha Kappa Mu representing the top 10% of juniors and seniors and Alpha Lambda Delta for first-year students advised by Dr. Da'Tarvia Parrish, Alpha Phi Sigma for criminal justice majors advised by Prof. Bessie Hutchins, Pi Gamma Mu for social science majors advised by Career

Readiness Institute director Nailah McDowell, Pi Lambda Theta for education majors advised by Dr. Tarsha Reid, Sigma Tau Delta for English majors advised by Dr. Tiffany Adams, Phi Alpha for social work majors advised by Dr. Walter Ellis, Beta Kappa Chi for science majors advised by Dr. Josette Wilkes, Theta Alpha Kappa for Religious Studies majors advised by Rev. Drs. Michael Ellis, Johnnie Henderson, and Troy Russell, ENACTUS for business majors advised by Dr. Nisha Singh, and the Solomon Carter Fuller Honor Society for psychology majors at Livingstone, named in honor of an alumnus who is noted as the first African American psychiatrist, and a pioneer in Alzheimer's disease research, advised by Drs. Alvin Kidd and Angela Thorpe-Moss.

Junior criminal justice major from Jacksonville, Florida, and president

of Alpha Phi Sigma Ne'Khia Ray served as the mistress of ceremony. The event welcomed over 60 inductees into international, national, regional, and campus honors societies that not only provide academic and professional recognition to high-performing students but also establish a professional and social network that will aid in the development of scholars well beyond their college years. "Our President has been intentional about developing this body of scholars as this year is the first year we've had over 25 presidential scholars," said Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Dawn McNair. "Congratulations on setting the bar and on your achievements," McNair added.

Students recited pledges, raised their hands in oaths, lit candles, and much more to declare their membership and affirm their commitment to academic excellence.

Alpha Lambda Delta inductee Jahmier Hew-Harris said, "It's Black History Month, and as a new member of Alpha Lambda Delta, I realize I, along with my cohorts, are creating our own footprints of Black History as charter members, and it feels pretty amazing." Freshman Ellis Dogbe-Gakpetor added, "This honor is not just a recognition of academic achievement but a testament to the values of resilience, diligence, and lifelong learning. I am excited and motivated."

The event concluded with prayer by Rev. Dr. Johnnie P. Henderson and a lunch reception sponsored by Vice President of Business Mr. Greg Petzke.



## Mike Morgan Visits Livingstone College for African American Read-In

By Star of Zion News

Livingstone College hosted the campus African American Read-In on Tuesday, February 20, from 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. in Little Tubman Theatre. The event welcomed over 300 campus readers and a special community guest, NC Supreme Court Justice retiree Michael Morgan. During the morning session, Morgan joined faculty, students, and staff as an audience listener and quickly approached the podium to read an excerpt from *A Lesson Before Dying* by Ernest Gaines, depicting a legal scene of an African American interfacing with the American judicial system.

Considering Morgan's current political aspirations as Governor for the state of North Carolina, event host Dr. Da'Tarvia Parrish asked Morgan to use a few minutes to share with students the importance of voting, social responsibility, and civic engagement. Morgan told students,



"The future belongs to young people, but most of all, today belongs to you. There are people who fought for you to have rights, and you must exercise them." Morgan, a native of New Bern, also

shared with students his connection to them, highlighting his faith-based foundation as a youth member of St. Peter's A.M.E. Zion Church and HBCU graduate and his recent visitation to Livingstone College in the swearing-in ceremony of the 13th President, Dr. Anthony J. Davis.

Freshman student Velson Seide said, "It was a blessing to meet an NC Supreme Court Justice. I spoke with him privately and am inspired by his courage and his journey. I am ready to cast my vote."

The National African American Read-In (AARI) is an effort to encour-



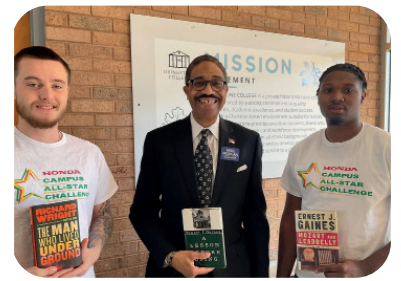




age communities to read together, centering African American books and authors. It was established

in 1990 by the Black Caucus of the National Council of Teachers of English to make literacy a significant part of Black History Month whereas this initiative has reached more than 6 million participants around the world.

English Education major Kamari Scales of Gibsonville, North Carolina, said, “Being able to hear and share literary works and personal voices and perspectives of African American authors, poets, playwrights, and even activists was an incredibly enlightening experience. The Read-In is a literacy effort, and for me – it is the best way to celebrate excellence during Black History Month.”



For more information on how you can host a Read-In, visit <https://ncte.org/get-involved/african-american-read-in/>.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

# A Black History Celebration: Celebrating Our History, Heritage, & Humanity



Rev. Dr. Allison Lee  
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By Rev. Allison N. Lee Ed.D., MTS  
Social Justice Editor

On Sunday, February 18<sup>th</sup> at 3 pm in Broadway, North Carolina, the Cameron Grove African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church held a Black History program focused on the theme, Celebrating Our History, Heritage, & Humanity. Mr. Demetrius Dowdy, Director of Christian Education, organized this worship experience. The program was uplifting, inspiring, and permeated with Black Culture and Excellence. The celebration opened with a Call to Worship by Rev. Kenneth Lamont Swann, Pastor of Cameron Grove, followed by a Worship Leader and Congregational Litany by Ms. Effie B. Woodard, who serves as Director of the Dunn-Lillington District Christian Education Department. The atmosphere - already charged with purpose and power – was only further stirred as the congregation stood to sing a rousing rendition of the Celebration Hymn in the form of the Black National Anthem written in 1900 by James Weldon Johnson, “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” For all three verses, the congregation energetically and earnestly lifted up the words that are, in the words of the NAACP, “...set against the religious invocation of God and the promises of freedom.”



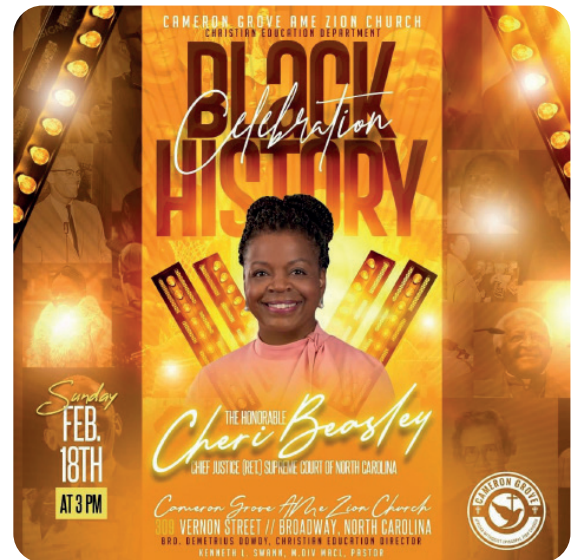
The program moved intentionally and diligently through the reading of the Scripture (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, 3: 17) and prayer. The Occasion and Welcome, given by Mrs. Minnie B. Ragland, Varick Christian Endeavor Society Director, was a reminder of the importance of Black History Month, an affirmation that *Black people matter*, and a reminder that it won’t always be night. As she was talking, Mrs. Ragland quoted American author and abolitionist by the name of Harriet Beecher Stowe, “When you get into a tight place, and everything goes against you till it seems as though you could not hang on a minute longer, never give up then, for that is just the place and time that *the tide will turn*.”

Following a musical selection of “I Love to Call Him” by the choir for the afternoon named “Sadie’s Grands,” members of the community rose one at a time for the Clarion Call. According to Oxford Languages, a clarion call is typically known as “A strongly expressed demand or request for action.” Mr. Walter Ferguson, Council Member at Large for the City of Sanford, NC, described the significance of Black History Month and the reality that American history does not exist without Black history. Ferguson communicated that he learned in school about the mainstream Black history names, but it was the church that gave him a wider and deeper perspective of those involved in the movement and the meaning of Black History. Councilman Ferguson called for continued preservation of “the history of the Black church, the Black church itself, and Black history” by expressing the importance of exercising the right to vote. President of the Harnett County Chapter

of the NAACP, Mr. Tony Spears, and Ms. Denise Thurman from the Harnett County African American Heritage Center also offered words of wisdom. Following the act of stewardship, introduction of the speaker, and a soul-stirring rendition of CeCe Winans’ “The Goodness of God,” the keynote address was given by former NC Supreme Court Chief Justice, The Honorable Cherie Beasley.



Beasley highlighted the Black History Month 2024 theme, “African Americans and the Arts.” She began by talking about the importance of Black art to history and our current context today. She stated, “We know that for our communities and people around us, that the arts have really offered an opportunity for freedom of expression, even in the most difficult of circumstances.” Beasley underscored the arts and faith as common core tenets that anchor the Black community. She expressed that language of the arts - through music, especially, “...gives us the same foundation of richness, of hope, of Jesus, of love, of aspiration, and of fulfillment of seeing our children, and our children’s children go forward and do great things.” Beasley verbalized the significance of artists who paved the way for those who came after them and emphasized the work of legends such as John Coltrane and Nina Simone.



Former NC Supreme Court Chief Justice Beasley described the arts as being born out of “an emergent people,” out of “a need to fight for justice, and to allow people of color to have a voice.” She eloquently framed the lived experience of many and the perceived experience of others: the arts within the African American culture go hand-in-hand with the church. Themes of faith and storytelling were interwoven throughout her message as critical elements of the fight for justice and equity. As she closed, Beasley challenged the hearers and each of us to recognize that “voting is a value set...we must spend our values and vote our values,” serve those around us, “embrace justice and empowerment,” and use our voices to make a difference. As we uplift Black History throughout the year, may we continue to celebrate our history, heritage, and humanity.



# A Steadying

By Rev. Allison N. Lee, Ed.D., MTS  
Social Justice Editor

Recently, I crossed paths with a college student who is an aspiring humanitarian. Our conversation focused on the state of the world, hopes for the future, the use of self in conflict management, and how care of self interfaces with calling. During our time together, she pondered and processed, "How do I take it all in and still live my life?"

2024 has entered the chat, and it is not holding anything back. On Monday, January 1<sup>st</sup>, a 7.5 magnitude earthquake hit Japan, rocking the country at its core. This year has seen continued uncertainty about incoming leadership within the United States government, gun violence, and mass shootings (one in Kansas City, Missouri, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February), repeated lack of accountability for current and former elected officials, emergency exit doors blowing off of airplanes mid-flight, and ongoing unrest in the form of the Israel-Hamas war. Within the first quarter of the year, a man has been the nation's first individual to be executed by nitrogen gas in what many have deemed to be a violation of the US Constitution's 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment protection from cruel and unusual punishment. Five United States Marines lost their lives in a helicopter crash. Certain cellphone network carriers have had at least one widespread outage. North Carolina is now requiring a photo ID in order to vote. Concerns about the future of IVF are in question. Significant turmoil has accompanied the year 2024 as it crossed the threshold both nationally and globally.

Not only has the world been in chaos, but we as individuals have seen hard days. Some are grieving the loss of loved ones and striving to adjust to a new normal. Others are saddled underneath the weight of an economy that promotes labor but lacks fair wages. People are attempting to remain connected with self while simultaneously making a conscious effort to be actively present for loved ones and in places that require their attention. 2024 has come in swinging. To be fair, perhaps we can remove the blame of a wild first three months of the year from 2024 and instead place it on life. Life is challenging.

This piece is not necessarily a plea for action that will move the needle of progress for social justice in our nation and the world forward. This is simply an acknowledgment that it is both important and okay to name the feeling(s) associated with one's present reality and to enact a ritual of release or recognition that helps to manage awareness. "How do I take it all in and still live my life?" Writer Cole Arthur Riley, in her book *Black Liturgies: Prayer, Poems, and Meditations for Staying Human States*,

"When you practice lament with intentionality, you claim agency in your own emotional life. It's not sinking; it's a steadying. You light the candle on the altar for the one you lost. You linger in your parked car, letting that song move you. You cry and don't apologize for it. You tell stories. You name exactly what has been stolen."

Riley reminds us of the path through which we are able to deliberately speak our lived experiences and, in doing so, take ownership of and affirm power related to our inner being. In the raising of voice and "practicing of lament with intentionality" we give ourselves permission to become more deeply rooted. As we process the difficult things and even find joy in the good ones, may we be open to exploring and implementing pragmatic approaches to balance self. May we be reminded that there is power in our acknowledgment and safety in our ritual practices. May we be assured that we have the power to create a safe space in order to process, decompress, and live.



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## ENTERTAINMENT & THE ARTS

# Fleming Street: Cooking with Love, Serving Humanity

By Dierdre Parker  
Entertainment & the Arts Editor

Spencer, NC - March is Women's History Month. I love hearing the stories of all the famous women who have broken glass ceilings and stained glass ceilings and all kinds of barriers to achieve greatness. But there is greatness in even women who are not famous. There are wives and mothers and daughters and nieces and granddaughters out here changing the world. Not necessarily the wide world but the world they live in every day. One such woman is Quinta Ellis, a former educator and current restaurateur. From the time she was a little girl, she wanted two things: to own a restaurant and be the first female NFL head coach. She hasn't reached the coaching goal...yet, but she is certainly walking in her destiny with the restaurant. After seeing articles about her soft opening shared on social media, I decided to go and show some support. I reached out to Ellis and asked if I could interview her. She generously agreed to meet me at the restaurant on her day off.



Even in repose, with no customers, there was a feeling of home about the place. The décor is simple and elegant. As you enter the restaurant, immediately to the left is a wall that features some of the recipes from which Ellis draws her inspiration. They are her grandmother's recipes in her grandmother's handwriting. This leads to the welcoming feeling that hits you when you walk in the door. Ellis credits her grandmother with fostering her love of creating with her cooking. Beautiful art created by local artists adorns the walls.

The art is for sale. This speaks to Ellis' desire to foster community. In living out her dream, she is creating opportunities for others to live theirs as well. Ellis did her theological master's work with a focus on social justice and non-profit work. The community table that







sits in the middle of the restaurant speaks to her desire to create a beloved community. She believes in the divinity of food and coming together around the table as sacred.

The menu boasts such items as Collard green dip, Deviled Eggs with Bacon Jam, and Beef Tenderloin & Gnocchi. There is also a Grilled Cheese on sourdough with grilled onions, collard greens, and bacon Jam. For my lunch, I chose the grilled chicken sandwich. It is a chicken sandwich that is more than a chicken sandwich. The chicken was grilled and seasoned to perfection. There was a lovely sear on both sides of the breast, but it was tender

and juicy. The gouda was melted in a halo of flavor that trapped the seasonings nicely between the chicken and the cheese. The sandwich rested on a grilled brioche bun, but it was the Bacon Jam for me. Ellis loves to experiment with creating her own sauces, and there is something in that bacon jam that elevated that chicken sandwich to levels of deliciousity that I simply must try again.

This restaurant also carries a cacophony of confections that would delight even the most sensitive pallet. From cupcakes to cobblers, Fleming Street Bakery & Southern Cuisine is a wonderful dining experience for the entire family. Let us show love and support to this community-conscious restaurant, where gathering at the table is sacred, and the food is divine.



## Freedom Sings!



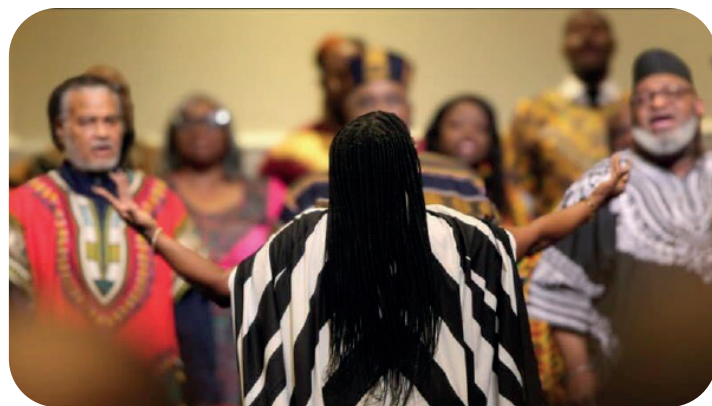
By Angelia J. Poole

My excitement grew as I walked into my first in-person station rehearsal, which was held at Little Rock A.M.E. Zion Church and led by Minstrel Sid Oliver. My excitement continued to grow as we began learning a repertoire of music spanning times and genres. The atmosphere was charged with eagerness as vocalists embraced the assignment to worship in song. Additional stations, including a virtual option, were also equipped and energized! All about Zion, the A.M.E. Zion International Mass Choir was preparing to minister at the Board of Bishops and International Ministers and Lay Association meeting in Rock Hill, South Carolina.

In the Piedmont Leadership Training Institute (September 2023), Bishop Darryl B. Starnes challenged leaders in his Keynote Message: “We prove that we are thriving as a dynamic movement by what we are becoming.” Under the leadership of Dr. Lisa Moore (Director of Music Ministry), the A.M.E. Zion Church International Mass Choir began the process of becoming. When this mighty musical machine connected before the first worship assignment, the presence of God with the people was evident; the power of God through the music was apparent. A unified body mounted the choir stand and rendered, “All Hail The Power Of Jesus Name.” ... The command to praise was unmistakably established!

To say I enjoyed engaging in this experience would be a gross understatement! Dr. Moore strategically selected each piece - the goal: “To present an array of songs allowing attendees to find their worship voice within the music.” The anointing and humbleness of Dr. Moore and the team made learning the music a pleasure; they made singing the music a praise! The engulfing fire there inspired me for my local worship assignment. And I am not alone.

The musicians who served alongside Dr. Moore shared their feelings, and one of several recurring themes was the respect of the gifted for the gifted – the comradery of the different aspects that made up the whole. All the anointings unified, made the whole much stronger, and glorified God greater! Willingness, servanthood, excitement, communication, variety, and unification made this team a powerful replica of the 5-fold ministry model.



Vocalists who served had similar sentiments. The overarching feeling was JOY about having participated! Vocalists sang, but there was an overwhelming sadness

when the end arrived. Sis. Sarita Garrett remarked, “It was an amazing experience... I love how everyone was able to come together from different areas and be on one accord to sing praises to God. The presence of God did not only meet us at every service but also dwelled with us during our rehearsals. I’m looking forward to singing with the Mass Choir again.”

People entered as attendees and left, having engaged as worshipers. My favorite moment was the spontaneous worship provoked through the impromptu rendering of “Draw Me Nearer!” A unified Zion fervently called out for God!!! Zion’s International Mass Choir is becoming a mighty movement for God! This mighty movement sings of A Mighty Fortress and continues to become for General Conference 2024!



# The Swans of Harlem

## A Story of Sisterhood from an Unlikely Source

By Rev. Dierdre' R. Parker  
Entertainment and The Arts Editor

We all love Misty Copeland. While it is true that she is the first African American Female Principal dancer in American Ballet Theater, the first principal dancer of an American Ballet Company was Lydia Abarca (Mitchell) of Dance Theater of Harlem. I know, right? I didn't know either!



I learned of this hidden gem when the author's publicist contacted me. The book is titled *The Swans of Harlem* by Karen Valby. The book tells the story of the five trailblazing dancers who helped to put the first permanent professional black ballet company on the map. The book tells the story of the discrimination they faced, but the more beautiful underlying tale is the sisterhood that the Swans developed and maintained over the years. According to Valby, it was when Abarca-Mitchell's daughter wanted to prove to a friend that her mother was the first black prima ballerina. Google did not have that information, and the Swans decided it was time to tell their story. The Swans are Abarca-Mitchell, Gayle McKinney-Griffith, Sheila Rohan, Karlya Shelton, and Maria Sells.

I was excited to learn of this book but withheld my excitement when I discovered that the author was of the less melanated persuasion. I was a little insulted. How would she tell this story? What kind of spin would she put on it? I guess I will find out because I have an interview with her. Here is how it went down.

*SOZ: The first thing I want to ask you is how did you hear about this story.*

*Valby: One of the agents lives on the same Harlem block as one of the Swans, Marcia Sells. Our families have been long-time friends. She met my young daughters, who are black and who grew up in an Austin (TX) dance studio called Ballet Afrique. I would always post photos of my girls in their recitals. She just knew how much a black dance studio meant to my family. She introduced us. I had an initial Zoom call with the women just for them to get a sense of who I am and to see if they felt comfortable with me. We hit it off immediately; they thought they could trust me. I was grateful for that, but I also wanted to have more conversations to ensure they didn't feel like I was intruding on their story.*

*SOZ: That is amazing. I have to ask you this question, or I wouldn't be me. How did you end up adopting? I'm assuming it's adoption, two black daughters. How did that come about?*

*VALBY: Circuitously, like life does. We had an infertility diagnosis. My stepmother is black, so I felt very humbled by the idea that I dared to think I was up for this, that my husband and I were up for this. We just jumped in. My older daughter is everything. We didn't want her to be outnumbered in our immediate family, so we adopted another daughter. I want my daughters to have each other in ways my husband and I cannot be there for them or model for them. I think I was always aware of how dangerous transracial adoption can be for a black child's soul and how foolhardy and arrogant it could be for a white person to think they could give a black child what they need. When I was in love with my children, and they were in my house, I realized the responsibility was so enormous, and this job was so precious. It is so easy to get wrong. I want to provide scaffolding for them to be healthy, proud black women. How will I build a life for them so they have the tools to develop that skill set for themselves? Having the *Swans of Harlem* come into my life was such a gift. It feels like I have five new family members from whom my daughters can take inspiration.*

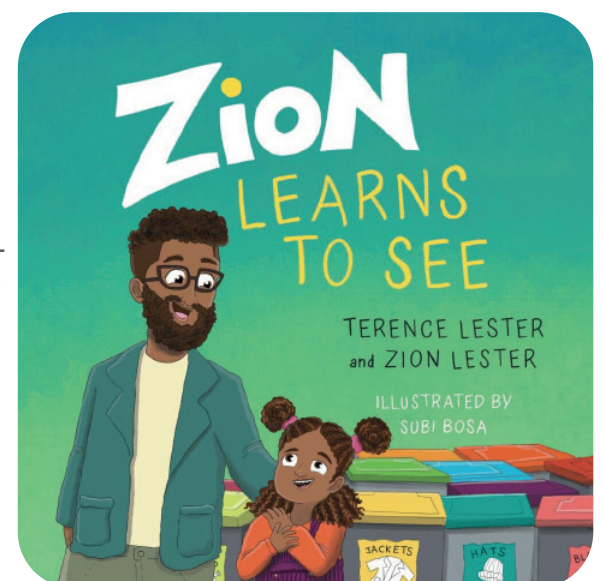
## Georgia Student Authors Children's Book on Homelessness Empowering Youth to Practice Compassion and Share Their Voice for Good

By Eugenia Johnson, Love Beyond Walls

Atlanta, GA - Zion, a high school scholar, student-athlete, and now author, pens her first book: "Zion Learns To See," a heartwarming children's book fostering empathy and awareness about homelessness. Co-authored alongside her father and founder of Love Beyond Walls, Dr. Terence Lester, "Zion Learns To See" invites young readers to see the world through a lens of hope and compassion while empowering youth to take action in their communities. Published by InterVarsity Press Kids, "Zion Learns to See" releases Tuesday, March 12<sup>th</sup>, on Amazon and all major book retailers.

The prevalence of homelessness is not just an adult issue. According to the National Center for Homeless Education, over 1.2 million school-aged children are experiencing homelessness or transitional housing, citing the impact on their school work and performance. Witnessing the plague of homelessness ravage schools and communities through-

out the U.S, Zion was inspired to join her father, Dr. Terence Lester, in addressing systemic poverty, mobilizing aid to families, and now launching Zion's Closet, a collaboration with various school districts powered by Love Beyond Walls to provide clothing, school supplies, and hygiene products for K-12 students in disproportionately impacted communities across the country.





“Zion Learns To See” is more than just a children’s book; it equips families with tools to have meaningful conversations about empathy, kindness, and celebrating the power of community,” says Zion Lester. “Zion Learns to See” shows that our youth can be catalysts for change regardless of age, inspiring others to serve, too.

“I am incredibly grateful to have co-authored this book with my daughter,” says Dr. Lester. “Teaching my children that service is not merely an activity but a way of life has been a deeply rewarding experience. We hope that “Zion Learns To See” inspires parents to cultivate a generation that loves without condition, respecting the dignity and worth of every individual.”

To request “Zion Learns To See” at your school, media interviews, or speaking engagements, contact [pr@lovebeyondwalls.org](mailto:pr@lovebeyondwalls.org).

To purchase or learn more about “Zion Learns To See,” visit [Zion-JoyLester.com](http://Zion-JoyLester.com). Join and follow the conversation on social @Zion-JoyLester, @ImTerenceLester and @LoveBeyondWalls.

**About Zion Lester**  
Zion’s interest and curiosity about her dad, Dr. Terence Lester’s work, launched a Since then, she has become a community leader, writer, and speaker. She has also continued to regularly serve with Love Beyond Walls and encourages others her



age and younger to volunteer.

**About Dr. Terence Lester**

Dr. Terence Lester is a minister, speaker, community activist, author, and founder of Love Beyond Walls, a not-for-profit organization focused on poverty awareness and community mobilization. After completing his doctorate studies in Social Change, Dr. Lester is known nationwide for his campaigns that bring awareness to issues surrounding homelessness, poverty, and economic inequality.

He has been featured on The Today Show, Good Morning America, NBC, USA Today, Black Enterprise, and Essence, among others. Dr. Lester’s unique approach to confronting systemic issues starts with challenging the public’s perception of the least of these and equipping communities with the power of empathy to influence social change.

**About Love Beyond Walls**

Love Beyond Walls is a movement birthed out of the hope that love is greater than walls. One of the most distinguishable characteristics of our organization is our focus on telling the stories of the unseen. We are committed to the people that the world passes by because we believe the people struggling with poverty and sleeping on the streets have lives and stories that are just as valuable as ours. For more information on Love Beyond Walls, visit [LoveBeyondWalls.org](http://LoveBeyondWalls.org).

## Reflections On My First Slam Poetry Performance

**By Asia Briana Brown**

March 22, 2012, marked my debut as a spoken word artist. The late Dr. Maurice Martinez, Professor Emeritus at UNCW, introduced me to the stage of the spring 2012 semester by inviting me to participate in UNCW’s Spring Poetry Slam. After that first performance, my soul was lit on fire for spoken word as I learned the power of my voice.

Prior to meeting Dr. Martinez and even prior to enrolling at UNCW in the fall of 2010, my goal was never to become a spoken word artist. I had been writing poetry for a little over a year after a series of emotional events—including the death of Michael Jackson—prompted me to go deeper into my heart space. Although I come from a family of writers and poets, that gift was not revealed to me until the summer of 2009. During the next couple of years, I desired to publish my own poetry collection one day, like my older brother, Johnny, did while in college. Johnny printed a few unofficial poetry books for me that for years, I only shared with him and our mother.

During my freshman and sophomore years at UNCW, the only spoken word events that I witnessed on campus were performances by The Sacrificial Poets, North Carolina’s premier youth slam poetry team and non-profit organization. After meeting Dr. Martinez in the spring of 2012, after he MCed the Sac Poets’ performance on campus, he invited me to a screening on campus of his latest documentary film,



Black Fraülein. Dr. Martinez told me about an upcoming poetry slam in March 2012: “The winner will receive a cash prize.”

Afraid to speak my poems publicly, I visited Dr. Martinez’s office at the Watson College of Education to recite a couple of poems that I planned to perform. I remember when I finished and looked up at him, he looked slightly surprised. I do not know if it was the content of my poems or the tone of my voice that changed (I have been told many times by various people that my personality seems to come out onstage).

The night prior to UNCW’s spring poetry slam, March 21, 2012, my mom watched me rehearse in Cameron Hall auditorium, the site of the poetry slam, during my last day of spring break. Although Mom had to travel back to work the next day during the poetry slam, March 22—which also was her birthday—she was proud and supported me throughout my spoken word journey in college.

On the day of the poetry slam, I was so nervous and afraid of judgment from friends and people who knew me to see me in a different light—speaking boldly onstage—that I only told two people on campus that I was performing. Once I started speaking, my nerves left me, and I recognized at that moment how powerful it was to command a room full of people to silence. Performing poetry does that, and having witnessed its transforming power through young adults, poetry heals people, too.





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# Don't Be a Victim!

## Self-Preservation and Protection

By Daman De Leon  
Health and Wellness Editor

Violence within our communities continues to run rampant now more so than ever before. Men, Women, and Children continue to suffer at the hands of offenders at an all-time high. Over 1 in 3 women (35.6%) and 1 in 4 men (28.5%) in the US have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime, in the U.S., have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime. Globally, 1 in 2 children aged 2-17 years suffer some form of violence each year. According to a global review, an estimated 58% of children in Latin America and 61% in North America experienced physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse in the past year.



The Month of April is National Sexual Assault Awareness Month, also known as "SAAM". April 2024 marks the official 23rd anniversary of Sexual Assault Awareness Month — but did you know we can trace its history even longer? Sexual Assault Awareness Month calls attention to the fact that sexual violence is widespread and impacts every person in the community. It is also important to note that we, as the Church, are not immune to those aspects of life that affect our communities

and society as a whole (2 Timothy 3:10-17). However, the Church has also played a pivotal role in the cultural preservation, education, and movements that have benefitted believers in more ways than one (i.e., the Underground Railroad, the Civil Rights Movement, etc.) It is also important for the Church to advocate becoming a voice for those, both within and without the Fellowship, who suffer in silence as victims of such dilemmas as sexual assault.

Sexual Assault, Molestation, and Rape have inadvertently become taboo topics within communities of color due to the high statistical numbers of victims who have suffered at the hands of family members, family friends, and/or other loved ones. SAAM was about both awareness and prevention of sexual assault, harassment, and abuse. Looking at the history of the movement to end sexual violence, it's clear why: It's impossible to prevent an issue no one knows about, and it's difficult to make people aware of a problem without providing a solution. The two work in tandem, and they always have. From the civil rights movement to the founding of the first rape crisis centers to national legislation and beyond.

In the United States, movements for social change and equality began to gain traction in the 1940s and 50s with the civil rights era. Although open discussions of the realities of sexual assault and domestic violence were limited at these times, activists for equal rights began to challenge the status quo. Efforts during this time were championed by Black women and women of color. Advocates like Rosa Parks worked at the intersections of race-based and gender-based violence (a framework that years later, in 1989, advocate and professor Kimberlé Crenshaw would call "intersectionality").

Wide social activism around the issue of sexual assault continued into the 1970s, bringing with it support for survivors and heightened awareness. The first rape crisis center was founded in San Francisco in 1971, the same city where the first U.S. Take Back the Night event was held seven years later. The following decades mobilized survivors and advocates to call for legislation and funding that would support survivors, such as the Violence Against Women Act of 1993 (VAWA).

Monumental changes like VAWA demonstrated that national efforts promoting sexual violence prevention were needed. Even before

SAAM was first nationally observed in 2001, advocates had been holding events, marches, and observances related to sexual violence during the month of April, sometimes during a week-long "Sexual Assault Awareness Week." In an effort to further coordinate awareness and prevention efforts, in 2000, the newly launched National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) and the Resource Sharing Project polled sexual violence coalitions. The results showed that those in the movement preferred a teal ribbon as a symbol for sexual assault awareness, and SAAM as we know it was born. Each year, NSVRC solicits feedback on SAAM, asking constituents about preferred topics to focus on. This feedback then informs the creation of the theme, which spans from the slogan to the design elements to the type of resources created. Once those resources and supplies are created, NSVRC shares them with a wide range of state, territory, and local organizations working to end sexual violence as well as individuals who want to make change in their communities. In the early 2000s, the primary goal of SAAM was awareness — both raising the visibility of the teal ribbon and the meaning behind it. By the mid-2000s, SAAM incorporated prevention more heavily, focusing on areas such as communities, workplaces, and college campuses. These campaigns discussed ways that individuals and communities can stop sexual assault before it happens by changing behaviors and promoting respect. These two goals of awareness and prevention carried over into the 2010s, laying the groundwork for the SAAM that we see today. While each campaign has a different theme, they all share the same common goal: to raise visibility about sexual assault and share how it can be prevented, whether that's through education about healthy sexuality, consent, or bystander intervention.

Most sexual assault incidents go unreported for these reasons:

- Fear of Retaliation
- Shame
- Unattended Complaints
- Not wanting their family or friends to know
- Feeling the crime was not "serious enough."
- Who is the aggressor, and if they are a person of status
- Men are less likely to report a sexual assault
- Immigration Status

Ways to prevent or reduce the risk of sexual violence:

- Teach everyone (especially children and adolescents) you know about the myths and realities of sexual violence.
- Support women and men working to end sexual violence by volunteering your time, donating money, and/or lobbying legislators.
- Be aware of controlling behavior in your date or relationship. Rape is a crime of power and control. Most rape survivors recall feeling "uncomfortable" about some of their partner's behaviors.
- Avoid secluded places where you could be vulnerable.
- Learn and practice self-defense. Knowing in advance how you would respond to a physical threat greatly increases your chances of escape.

Awareness and Prevention should always be at the forefront as it pertains to issues of safety, and unified efforts that stem from the Church, organizations, and the community-at-large will continue to further the cause that will enhance our communities.

24-hour Crisis Hotline

Toll free: 1-888-999-5545 (English) and 1-888-568-8332 (En Espanol)

Women and Families Direct Hotline: 203-235-4444

Remember, don't be a victim!

References

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# Thriving For the Cause: Living With and Understanding Autism

By Daman De Leon  
Health and Wellness Editor

The month of April is National Autism Awareness Month, and many Americans are affected by this condition. It is important to consistently bring awareness to what Autism is and what it isn't in attempts to educate those who may have a loved one who is autistic and empower those who may be diagnosed as well. According to Autism Speaks (2023), approximately 1 in 44 children in the U.S. is diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder annually. Out of these 44 children diagnosed, approximately 1 in 27 boys identified with autism, and 1 in 116 girls identified with autism (Autism Speaks, 2022). Over the next decade, an estimated 707,000 to 1,116,000 teens (70,700 to 111,600 each year) will enter adulthood and age out of school-based autism services (Autism Speaks, 2023). Specific challenges for children/teens within the autism spectrum can include the following:

- Nearly two-thirds of autistic children between the ages of 6 and 15 have been bullied.
- Nearly 28 percent of 8-year-olds with autism spectrum disorder have self-injurious behaviors. Head banging, arm biting, and skin scratching are among the most common.
- Attention Deficient Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) affects an estimated 30 to 61 percent of autistic children (Autism Speaks, 2022).

In addition, executive functioning abilities are often compromised among autistic children and teens. Executive functioning skills are crucial for higher-level cognitive abilities such as impulse control, emotion regulation, and problem-solving.



February 14, 2010 – Jadon with Dr. Temple Grandin at UNCW

In a special Exclusive of the Health and Wellness Section for the April 2024 Issue of The Star of Zion, I had the privilege to interview Zion's very own Rev. Dr. Charlrean Mapson, Pastor of Price Cathedral A.M.E. Zion Church in Wilmington, NC, Eastern North Carolina Episcopal District. Dr. Mapson currently holds a Master's Degree in Divinity from Hood Theological Seminary, as well as a Doctorate in Ministry from Duke University. Upon receiving her Doctorate in 2021, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper appointed Dr. Mapson to the North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities, where she currently serves as the Community Living Committee Chair for the Council.

1. *What exactly is the clinical definition of Autism? Autism Spectrum Disorder is a developmental disorder that impacts the nervous system and impairs the ability to communicate and interact socially. While the symptoms are wide and varied, some common symptoms are difficulty with communication, difficulty with social interactions, obsessive interests, and repetitive behaviors.*
2. *What are some of the stereotypes that you are aware of that have unfortunately become identified with Autism? The inability to perform as other neuro-typical people do. People on the Autism spectrum are highly intelligent despite their condition.*
3. *What was the foundational motivation for you becoming an advocate of Autism Awareness? I am the parent of an 18-year-old male with Autism Spectrum Disorder.*
4. *What are the risk factors, if any, that can contribute to someone producing an autistic child? There are no known prenatal risks associated with Autism. The condition affects those whose mothers are extremely careful about their diets, etc., while pregnant and those who*

A few things every child with Autism wishes you knew:  
 ++ I am first and foremost a child. I have autism. I am not primarily "autistic." My autism is only one aspect of my total character. It does not define me as a person."  
 ++ I am a concrete thinker. This means I interpret language very literally. It's very confusing for me when you say "Hold your horses, cowboy!" when what you really mean is "Please stop running."

Some tips for starting Autism ministries at your church:  
 ++ Survey your parishioners to gauge their empathy or ability for involvement in such a ministry.  
 ++ Pull supporters together and make a plan. Seek volunteers within the church, the community, local colleges/universities, local elementary, middle, and high school special needs program teachers and/or healthcare professionals.

Personal Motto: "There is no excuse!"  
 Contact Dr. Charlrean B. Mapson (aka Dr. C) if you wish to discuss ways to include the Autism population in your church  
 Email - CharlreanM@Alumni.Duke.edu

Like me on Facebook  
LET'S TALK AUTISM WITH DR. C.

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LET'S TALK AUTISM WITH DR. C.

Dr. Charlrean Batten Mapson | Duke Divinity School | Class of 2021  
 (910) 233-0012 - Mobile (800) 940-0250 - Toll Free Fax

are not so careful. It is difficult to determine the root cause, but there are several theories, and none have been proven yet.



July 3, 2023 – Jadon and I attended one of MANY sensory-friendly movies

5. *Is there a known cure for Autism? Unfortunately, no. However, early intervention can drastically reduce the symptoms of Autism. In other words, receiving the necessary therapies and other assistance will help the child with Autism better function as an adolescent and eventually an adult with Autism.*
6. *In your opinion, has our Healthcare System provided the most efficient care for the Autistic Community? It depends on where an individual resides. I have spoken with parents in various parts of the country who have varied experiences with healthcare. Some regions of the country seem to have better help than others.*
7. *Are there reports of Autistic individuals battling additional mental conditions? Yes. Autism can, at times, be overlapped with ADD or ADHD and other conditions.*
8. *Is there any proof of a connection between Autism and genetic disorders? I have not found any; however, my son has two male relatives on his father's side who have been diagnosed with Autism.*
9. *Why do you think there is a significant increase in child-autistic cases now in comparison to 50 or 60 years ago? I think we now have knowledge that we did not have years ago, and we are able to name the diagnosis and are better equipped to treat it. In the past, we simply institutionalized individuals.*
10. *Please share what makes Autistic Awareness personal for you. I live it every day...*
11. *What are the important factors of effectively raising Autistic children and/or caring for Autistic adults? The most important factor is a statement I make repeatedly – "children with Autism become adults with Autism..." so it is imperative that we employ any and all resources to assist children with Autism so they will be able to function better as adults with Autism.*
12. *What should/could the Church do to play a more effective role in addressing Autism and other Mental illnesses within our communities? Look for opportunities to include this population and make any necessary modifications to allow them to be included. Some of them may be affected by loud sounds, fragrances, or certain people. Find out what they need to feel welcome and included, then make the necessary changes.*
13. *What are the communal and global challenges we face as it pertains to Autism and other Mental illnesses? Lack of understanding. I read an article about a family in the UK who was asked to leave Catholic Mass because their son with Autism was "too loud." He was simply excited by the chorale during the service. This is a global issue.*
14. *What are some societal efforts that you think will be more effective than what is already being done? What does improved/increased awareness look like? My largest fear is that I am the mother of an African American male with Autism who has meltdowns at times. I have spoken with parents and have had some of these experiences myself where the response from police officers has been to handcuff, arrest, injure, and even shoot those with Autism. There is a need for sensitivity training for these individuals (and those with mental illness also). Awareness to me looks like a society that is educated and prepared to assist those with these conditions – to not be REACTIVE but be PROACTIVE.*



January 26, 2020 – Jadon's (silent) 15th birthday party

Check out Dr. Charlrean B. Mapson's podcast on SPOTIFY – "Let's Talk Autism with Dr. C..."

As diagnoses of autism appear to be increasingly common, it is crucial to address strategies for supporting these children and teenagers in navigating societal challenges and personal obstacles and ultimately equipping them with the skills to thrive as capable adults.



# Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. announces new \$2 million fundraising commitment for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

*In more than 20 years of partnership, the fraternity has raised more than \$3M to advance ongoing research and treatment for childhood cancer and other life-threatening diseases.*

By John F. Burrell, Executive Director

MEMPHIS, Tenn.--Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., a beacon of service and commitment, celebrated its enduring alliance with St. Jude Children's Research Hospital® at the Vicennium Partnership Banquet at the Masonic Temple. The event was hosted by the Memphis (TN) Alumni Chapter, the University of Memphis Chapter, the Kappa Beta of Kappa Alpha Psi, and sponsored by the local Memphis Kappa Alpha Psi @Achievement Foundation.

For more than two decades, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. has stood shoulder-to-shoulder with St.

Jude in efforts to create impactful change in the lives of children worldwide with cancer and other catastrophic diseases. Since 2003, the fraternity has raised more than \$3 million for the renowned children's hospital through programs like St. Jude Sunday of Hope and the annual St. Jude Walk/Run, held during Childhood Cancer Awareness Month each September. At the event, the fraternity announced a new goal of raising an additional \$2 million in the next three years.

"Our friends at Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. have humbled us with their dedication and sense of service over the past 20 years in their support of the kids and families of St. Jude," said Richard C.

Shadyac Jr., President and CEO of ALSAC, the fundraising and awareness organization for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. "With this latest commitment, together, they are not only building



a legacy – but they are helping save lives and create hope where it is needed most. Thanks to this partnership, St. Jude can impact more of the 400,000 kids around the world with cancer and other life-threatening diseases each year."

Fundraising by the fraternity and other partner organizations of the National Pan-Hellenic Council helps ensure that families never receive a bill from St. Jude for treatment, travel, housing, or food so they can focus on helping their child live.

"We value our partnership with St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, and this new fundraising commitment will further help us support research and treatment of catastrophic childhood diseases and illness,"



said Jimmy McMikle, Kappa Alpha Psi's Grand Polemarch [International President].

"I encourage our members, filiates, and friends across the globe to help the fraternity continue our efforts to assist St. Jude in fulfilling its vision."

Help Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. and St. Jude give every child a chance to live their best life and celebrate every moment.

About Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.

Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. is an international Greek-letter organization founded on January 5, 1911, on the campus of Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. Under the motto "Training for Leadership in Every Field of Human Endeavor," the fraternity has initiated hundreds of thousands of members across 644 active undergraduate and alumni chapters across the United States since its inception. It has international chapters in Abu Dhabi UAE, the Bahamas, Bermuda, Canada, the Dominican Republic, Grand Bahamas, Germany, Japan, Nigeria, South Korea, and the US Virgin Islands. The Fraternity's International Headquarters is in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Additional information about Kappa Alpha Psi® is available at [www.KappaAlphaPsi1911.com](http://www.KappaAlphaPsi1911.com). St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®

St. Jude Children's Research Hospital is leading the way the world understands, treats, and defeats childhood cancer and other life-threatening diseases. Its purpose is clear: Finding cures. Saving children.® It is the only National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center devoted solely to children. When St. Jude opened in 1962, childhood cancer was largely considered incurable. Since then, St. Jude has helped push the overall survival rate from 20% to more than 80%, and it won't stop until no child dies from cancer. St. Jude shares the breakthroughs it makes to help doctors and researchers at local hospitals and cancer centers around the world improve the quality of treatment and care for even more children. Because of generous donors, families never receive a bill from St. Jude for treatment, travel, housing, or food, so they can focus on helping their child live. Visit St. Jude Inspire to discover powerful St. Jude stories of hope, strength, love, and kindness. Support the St. Jude mission by donating at [stjude.org](http://stjude.org), liking St. Jude on Facebook, following St. Jude on X, Instagram, LinkedIn and TikTok, and subscribing to its YouTube channel.

Source: St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

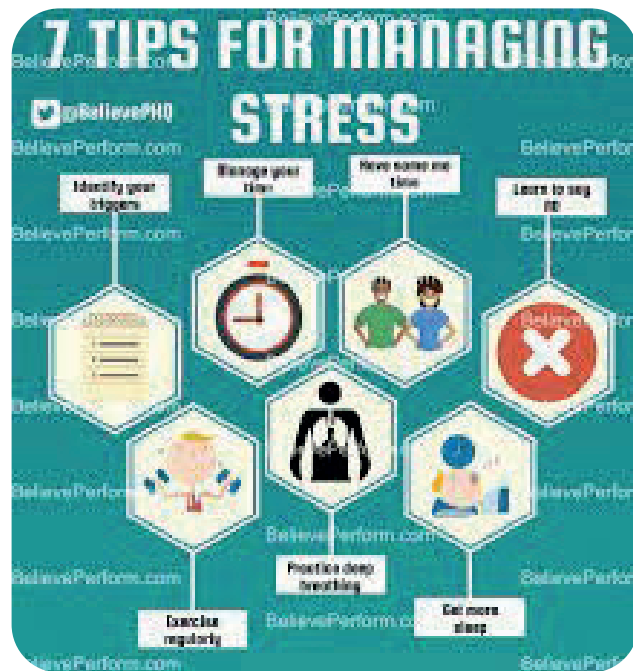




# Stress: The Silent Assassin

By Daman De Leon,  
Health and Wellness Editor

Long hours at the Job. Challenges within our relationships be they marriages, courtships, or platonic friendships. Obstacles with the school. Kids acting a fool. Financial Challenges (i.e., Destiny's Child 1990s R&B Hit "Bills, Bills, Bills"). All of the aforementioned are components within our daily lives that can contribute to that sneaky little demon known as STRESS.



Now, here's the tricky part. Stress is our body's natural response to pressure. Now, how we manage it is another thing altogether. The month of April is recognized as National Stress Awareness Month to bring attention to the negative impact of stress. Managing Stress is an essential component of a healthy lifestyle. Knowing how to manage stress can improve mental and physical well-being as well as minimize the exacerbation of health-related issues. It's critical to recognize what stress and anxiety look like, take steps to build resilience and know where to go for help. The Mental Health American (MHA) provides some tips on how to reduce your stress by utilizing a *Stress Screener*. Also, take some time to visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) website](#) and familiarize yourself with strategies for stress management.

The brain responds automatically to stress. You can anticipate stress due to a previous experience, such as a doctor's appointment, a traffic delay, or a monthly work meeting. You can lessen the stress caused by these situations (stressors) by changing how you react to them.

In order to better manage stress, you should utilize the "5 A's," which include:

1. **Avoid**
2. **Alter**
3. **Adapt**
4. **Accept**
5. **Active**

### Avoid

1. Some types of stress are unavoidable, such as stress induced by death, disease, or an accident. Other stress caused by carelessness or postponement is avoidable. You must address an issue or a task as soon as it arises. If it is postponed, an important task may become urgent, increasing stress levels in your body. Prioritizing important tasks avoids unnecessary stress.
2. Take control of your environment and make changes if they are causing you stress. If that bit of news stresses you out, close the app, set your phone away, and drink some water.

### Alter

3. Stress may be caused by situations that you usually address as your daily routine. For example, you handle various meetings in a day. However, situations, where you have back-to-back meetings arranged and discover that one of them will take place across town will spike your stress levels. Rather than becoming stressed, seek variables that may be altered to change the situation, such as postponing one meeting or changing the venue of one appointment.

### 4. **Two ways to achieve this:**

1. **Have a well-balanced schedule:** When the level of stress exceeds your ability to cope, you enter a state called burnout. The reasons

could be you want to accomplish so much in less time, manage something that is out of your hand, or do all things on a long to-do list that you are unable to fulfill. Making a schedule for your day is the greatest method to get this straight. Make sure it is well-balanced with work, family, pleasure, and some solo activities.

2. **Express your feelings:** It is crucial to express your emotions rather than keep them bottled up. Do not end up using <I> statements. For example, if you are being disturbed by any activity done by your sibling, such as playing loud music when you need your utmost concentration to finish your office work, you may ask them to put on earbuds and let them know that you are doing something important rather than stressing yourself.

### Adapt

5. Recognize that things happen, plans alter, and emergencies occur. Take a big breath, keep calm, and deal with it when they occur. If a stressor cannot be avoided or changed, adjust as best as you can and continue regardless of the circumstances.
6. Adapting to stressful conditions can help you gain control of the situation.
1. **5\*5\*5 rule:** Though it is ideally an anger control method, it helps you see the big picture. Before you become stressed, wait for 5 minutes and consider whether it will matter to you in the next five years. Do not waste another 5 minutes if your answer is "no."
2. **Bend a little (compromise):** It is acceptable if things do not go as smoothly as you had hoped. Don't worry about it. On some days, lowering your standards can help you feel less anxious about a specific issue.
3. **Change your perception:** Sometimes, you may perceive a scenario as stressful, but if you adjust the way you see the situation, you may get a different perspective on the circumstance. You will undoubtedly feel less frustrated and more joyful and content in each scenario if you do this.

### Accept

7. You must be ready to accept mindfully that you may experience stress from any source or situation. Instead of opposing or getting affected by an unchangeable situation, accept it and take steps to overcome it.
8. The following are some measures that can help you become more accepting:
  1. **Know your power:** Know what you have control over and what you don't. Resolve the things that are under control and not fret over the latter. Because things over which you have no control should not be stressed but rather accepted as they are.
  2. **Look for opportunities:** If the stressful situation is caused by anything outside of you, see it as a chance for personal growth. If it is caused by your own poor decisions, learn from it.
  3. **Learn to forgive:** Forgiving is an act of liberation from all negative or negative energy. It is pointless to carry that sack of rage and hatred on your shoulders. Simply let go of it, and you will feel lighter and kinder.

### Active

9. A brain, like a muscle, needs to be exercised to function optimally. Being active enhances your memory, mood, and sleep and reduces tension and worry. Thirty minutes of aerobic exercise increases blood flow to the brain.
10. According to some experts, a walk for 10 minutes may release endorphins, which reduce stress.
11. Other strategies to stay active and boost cognitive processes include meditation, cooking, dancing, singing, listening to or playing music, playing cards, puzzles, and board games, and attempting to learn a new language.



# Vaccines are not just for Kids!!

By **Iyabode (Yabo) Beysolow, MD, MPH,**  
 Director of Health Ministry, The A.M.E. Zion Church

Babies, older children, teens, and even adults need vaccines. Vaccines protect us from serious diseases that can lead to severe complications, such as going deaf from the mumps, getting seriously ill, or dying from measles or the flu. The protection from some of the vaccines that we get as babies and young children wears off (waned) over time. Older children, teens, and adults need ‘booster’ shots to help continue protecting us from these same diseases as we grow older; for example, getting a tetanus booster every ten years to protect us if we get infected from a cut, dirty wound, or needle prick.

World Immunization Week is April 24-30, 2024!!

## Vaccines work!

- We have seen dramatic drops in the number of vaccine-preventable diseases compared to when vaccines were not in place.
- We all need to stay up to date on our vaccines to prevent diseases from returning — diseases that we have not seen in large numbers for decades, like measles, whooping cough, and polio.
- Vaccines are also the best way to protect our loved ones from preventable diseases. When we get vaccinated, we protect not only ourselves but also avoid spreading preventable diseases to others close to us. Especially those who may have a weakened immune system, those with other serious health conditions, and those who are either too young or too old to get certain vaccines.
- As we get older, some of these diseases can have serious complications for us, such as the flu, COVID-19, and hepatitis B; hence, the need to keep up to date on all our vaccines.

## How do vaccines work?

- Vaccines work by strengthening our immune system. Immunity is how our bodies prevent disease. Vaccination helps build up our

## Vaccines Work!

**CDC statistics demonstrate dramatic declines in vaccine-preventable diseases when compared with the pre-vaccine era**

DISEASE	PRE-VACCINE ERA ESTIMATED ANNUAL MORBIDITY <sup>1</sup>	MOST RECENT REPORTS OR ESTIMATES OF U.S. CASES	PERCENT DECREASE
Diphtheria	21,053	2 <sup>2</sup>	>99%
<i>H. influenzae</i> serotype B (invasive, <5 years of age)	20,000	18 <sup>2</sup>	>99%
Hepatitis A	117,333	(est) 37,700 <sup>3</sup>	68%
Hepatitis B (acute)	66,232	(est) 20,700 <sup>3</sup>	69%
Measles	530,217	1,275 <sup>2</sup>	>99%
Meningococcal disease (all serotypes)	2,886 <sup>4</sup>	371 <sup>2</sup>	87%
Mumps	162,344	3,780 <sup>2</sup>	98%
Pertussis	200,752	18,617 <sup>2</sup>	91%
Pneumococcal disease (invasive, <5 years of age)	16,009	1,700 <sup>4</sup>	89%
Polio (paralytic)	16,316	0 <sup>2</sup>	100%
Rotavirus (hospitalizations, <3 years of age)	62,500 <sup>5</sup>	30,625 <sup>7</sup>	51%
Rubella	47,745	6 <sup>2</sup>	>99%
Congenital Rubella Syndrome	152	1 <sup>2</sup>	>99%
Smallpox	29,005	0 <sup>2</sup>	100%
Tetanus	580	26 <sup>2</sup>	96%
Varicella	4,085,120	8,297 <sup>8</sup>	>99%

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 8. CDC, Varicella Program, 2017 data (unpublished)

natural defenses by teaching our immune systems how to defend against germs.

- When we get vaccinated, our bodies think we are getting the real germ/infection, which is not true. The vaccine only imitates an infection. The vaccine trains our bodies to protect us from germs by making protective cells called ‘antibodies.’ These antibodies stick

around in our bodies. In the future, if we are exposed to the real germ, we are ready to fight it off; we already have a plan of attack.

- If we have not been vaccinated against a specific disease and come into contact with the real germ, we are significantly more susceptible to serious complications from the illness.

## Which vaccines should I receive as an adult?

All adults should make sure they’re up to date on these routine vaccines:

- COVID-19
- Influenza
- Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, and whooping cough) vaccines

**You need vaccines throughout your life!**  
 2024 Recommended Immunizations for Adults Aged 19 Years and Older

Want to learn more? Scan this QR code to find out which vaccines you may need. Or visit: [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults.html](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults.html)

Staying up to date on your vaccines is one of the best things you can do to protect your health. If you are pregnant or have a medical condition that puts you at higher risk for infections, talk to your health care provider about which vaccines are right for you.

**KEY**  
 ● All adults in age group should get the vaccine.  
 ● Some adults in age group should get the vaccine.  
 ● Adults should talk to their health care provider to decide if this vaccine is right for them.

VACCINE	19-26 YEARS	27-49 YEARS	50-64 YEARS	65+ YEARS
COVID-19	At least 1 dose of an updated COVID-19 vaccine			
Influenza/Flu	Every Year			
RSV	If pregnant during RSV season		If aged 60 years or older	
Tdap/Td	Tdap every pregnancy, Td/Tdap every 10 years for all adults			
MMR	If aged 66 years or younger			
Chickenpox	If U.S. born and aged 43 years or younger			
Shingles	Through 64 years			
HPV	27-45 years			
Pneumococcal	Through 64 years			
Hepatitis A	Through 64 years			
Hepatitis B	Through 64 years			
Meningococcal	Through 64 years			
Hib	Through 64 years			
Mpxv	Through 64 years			

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**  
 Call toll-free: 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-6236)  
 Or visit: [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

**AAFP** American Academy of Family Physicians  
**ACP** American College of Physicians

- Older adults should also receive pneumococcal and shingles (zoster) vaccines.
- Depending on one’s health condition or travel plans, additional vaccines may be needed.

When should I get vaccinated, and how often?

For Children and Teens, visit the CDC schedules at [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/schedules/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/schedules/index.html).

## For Adults:

Did you know there was a vaccine schedule for adults as well?

In fact, there are two (2). One is for all adults based on age, and the second is for adults with chronic medical conditions or factors that put them at high risk for the disease.

Here is an easy-to-read version:

### Vaccine safety

It is okay to have questions about vaccines.

Know that vaccines are studied thoroughly before they are licensed for use in the public.

Scientists continually monitor vaccines for safety even after vaccines have been licensed.

Any medicine can cause side effects – this includes vaccines. Luckily, serious side effects from vaccines are rare. The most common side effects from all vaccines (shots) include redness, pain, and swelling to the area of the body where the vaccine was administered. These symptoms usually go away in a day or so and are mild. These are all signs that our immune system is reacting to what it thinks is a true germ entering our body. Our body acts as if it’s fighting a mild form of the germ, not because we are actually infected with the germ. Fever is one example of a side effect we may experience. Other side effects can include headaches and body aches/chills. All these also go away in a day or so and are mild. Some people may not experience side effects, but their immune systems are still working to provide protection.

It is okay to receive multiple vaccines (shots) in one day. Scientists have studied this for years.



What diseases do these vaccines protect against?

ADULTS AGED 19 YEARS AND OLDER

VACCINE-PREVENTABLE DISEASE	DISEASE COMPLICATIONS	NUMBER OF VACCINE DOSES
<b>COVID-19</b> Coronavirus viral infection of the nose, throat, or lungs; may feel like a cold or flu	Pneumonia, blood clots, liver, heart, or kidney damage, long COVID, death	1 or more doses of updated COVID-19 vaccine depending on health status. For more information: <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/covid19/vaccine/">www.cdc.gov/covid19/vaccine/</a>
<b>Influenza (Flu)</b> Contagious viral infection of the nose, throat, and sometimes lungs	Pneumonia, sinus and ear infections, worsening of underlying health conditions like heart and lung disease, death	1 dose each year
<b>RSV (Respiratory syncytial virus)</b> Contagious viral infection of the nose, throat, and sometimes lungs	Pneumonia, inflammation of the small airways in the lung; especially dangerous for infants, young children, and older adults	1 dose
<b>Tetanus (Lockjaw)</b> Infection caused by bacterial spores found in soil and dust everywhere; spores enter the body through wounds or broken skin	Sudden, involuntary muscle spasms, jaw cramping, neck pain, broken bones, difficulty breathing, death	3 doses if not already vaccinated 1 booster every 10 years 1 dose for dirty wounds
<b>Diphtheria</b> Contagious viral infection of the nose, throat, and sometimes lungs	Thick, gray, build up in throat or nose makes breathing and swallowing difficult, heart failure, brain injury, coma, death	3 doses if not already vaccinated 1 booster every 10 years
<b>Pertussis (Whooping Cough)</b> Contagious bacterial infection of the lungs and airway	Severe coughing fits, life-threatening pauses in breathing, pneumonia, death; especially dangerous for babies	3 doses if not already vaccinated 1 dose every pregnancy
<b>Measles (Rubella)</b> Contagious viral infection that causes high fever, cough, red eyes, runny nose, and rash	Brain swelling, pneumonia, death	1 or 2 doses
<b>Mumps</b> Contagious viral infection that causes fever, tiredness, swollen cheeks, and tender swollen jaw	Brain swelling, painful and swollen testicles or ovaries, deafness, death	1 or 2 doses
<b>Rubella (German Measles)</b> Contagious viral infection that causes low-grade fever, sore throat, and rash	Very dangerous in pregnant people; can cause miscarriage or stillbirth, premature delivery, severe birth defects	1 or 2 doses
<b>Chickenspox (Varicella)</b> Contagious viral infection that causes fever, headache, and an itchy, blistering rash	Infected sores, brain swelling, pneumonia, death	2 doses
<b>Shingles (Zoster)</b> Caused by the chickenpox virus, which hides in the body and sometimes reactivates later in life	Severe blistering rash on one side of the face or body; long-term nerve pain, hearing damage, blindness, death	2 doses
<b>HPV (Human papillomavirus)</b> Contagious viral infection spread by sexual contact; sometimes causes genital warts	Many types of cancers including cancers of the cervix, vagina, penis, anus, and throat	3 or 4 doses
<b>Pneumococcal</b> Bacterial infection of ears, sinuses, lungs, or bloodstream	Depends on the part of the body infected, but can include pneumonia, blood poisoning, infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord, death	1 or 2 doses
<b>Hepatitis A</b> Contagious viral infection of the liver spread by contaminated food or drink or close contact with an infected person	Liver failure, yellow skin or eyes, stomach pain, vomiting, fever, diarrhea, fatigue, death	1, 2, or 4 doses depending on vaccine used
<b>Hepatitis B</b> Contagious viral infection of the liver spread through contact with infected body fluids such as blood or semen	Liver failure, yellow skin or eyes, stomach pain, vomiting, fever, diarrhea, fatigue, death	1, 2, or 4 doses depending on vaccine used
<b>Meningococcal</b> Bacterial infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord or the bloodstream	Fever, headache, stiff neck, light sensitivity, confusion, loss of arm or leg, deafness, seizures, death	1 or more doses depending on vaccine used, medical condition, where patient lives or works
<b>Hib (Haemophilus influenzae type b)</b> Bacterial infection that can attach to the lungs, brain and spinal cord, or bloodstream	Brain damage, hearing loss, loss of arm or leg, death	1 or 2 doses depending on medical condition
<b>Mening</b> Contagious viral infection spread by sexual contact; causes a painful rash, fever, headache, tiredness, cough, runny nose, sore throat, swollen lymph nodes	Infected sores, brain swelling, pneumonia, eye infection, blindness, death	2 doses

Ingredients in vaccines serve a purpose – either to help our bodies build immunity (protection), to help keep the vaccine safe and long-lasting, or to make the vaccines more effective (work better). Neither vaccines nor the ingredients in vaccines cause autism. Decades of research and studies have shown that administering vaccines to children on the recommended childhood immunization schedule will not cause autism.

Vaccine Costs

Finding vaccines for your family is easy. First, check with your primary care provider’s office (pediatric provider, family practice provider, internist) and local health departments. Pharmacies are another option for receiving vaccines. Each state, however, has its own rules on which vaccines pharmacists can administer and to which ages.

Most private insurance companies cover vaccines. For people without

insurance coverage:

- CDC’s Vaccines for Children (VFC) program provides vaccines at no cost to eligible children who are eligible for the program at the offices of health care providers enrolled in the program.
- Adults without health insurance and those whose insurance does not cover all vaccine costs can get a free updated COVID-19 vaccine from healthcare providers, federally supported health centers, and retail pharmacies participating in the CDC’s Bridge Access Program. Visit gov to find an updated COVID-19 vaccine or flu vaccine and providers who have these vaccines.
- If you do not currently have health insurance, visit HealthCare.gov to learn more about affordable health coverage options.
- Use this handy online tool to help you answer the question: How will I pay for my family’s vaccinations?

Keep your vaccine records!

Keeping track of your family’s vaccine records is important. Ideally, you should receive a copy of your vaccine record every time a vaccine is administered. Records should be kept in a safe, secure space. States and some large cities also have secure immunization information systems (IIS) that keep electronic vaccine records for people in their state or city. Most of these registries only carry records for children and not adults, however.

Resources:

- CDC: *Vaccines for your Children*
- CDC: *Vaccine Schedules for your Child and Teen*
- CDC: *Vaccine Information for Adults*
- Video: *Vaccines and Immunity*
- WHO: *World Immunization Week 2024*

For information about COVID-19 and Flu vaccines, visit the article in Star of Zion Staying Well This Winter



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FINANCIAL FREEDOM

Benefits of Being the Early Bird

By Dana G. Stilley  
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If you are anything like me, you looked up a few short weeks ago and realized that the deadline to file income taxes was fast approaching. While I set out each year to have everything in order so that I can file before the due date, somehow, life’s circumstances always interfere, and I find myself scrambling at the last minute to meet the deadline or to file for an extension. Determined not to chastise myself too much for not changing my behavior, I decided to take a different approach and concentrate on the benefits of filing early. It is my hope that focusing on the benefits of early filing will motivate me to have a different outcome in 2025.



you should receive your refund sooner! Filing electronically and opting to receive your refund by direct deposit will also help you get your refund faster.

Your refund may help you pay bills, purchase essential items, or help you reach your financial freedom goals. If you owe funds, early filing allows for additional time to plan. Will the funds bust the budget come from savings, or will I need a payment plan? Remember, if you file early and owe, your payment is not due until the deadline date.

Other benefits of filing early include the opportunity to maximize your claim and decrease stress. Carefully reviewing all possible tax deductions and tax credits may produce a larger refund. Delaying a filing until the last minute may result in claiming only the standard deductions and a smaller tax refund. Filing an early tax return can eliminate all kinds of stress that may occur when a daunting task or assignment remains undone. Plan to file early and eliminate stress that might

otherwise affect mental and physical health, as well as wealth.

When all the paperwork is completed for a tax filing, the taxpayer will know whether to expect a refund or if a payment is due. Filing early is beneficial to both scenarios. When taxes are filed early, the processing is completed earlier. That means that if you are anticipating a refund,

I may have missed the opportunity to file early this year, but having a better understanding of the benefits of early filing certainly makes it a priority for me in the future.



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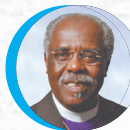
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# A.R.I.S.E. WITH ADAMS

Advancing the Kingdom through Resource Development, Inspired Integrity, Strategic Planning, and Economic Development

**A**dvancing the Kingdom through

**R**esource Development,

**I**nspired Integrity,

**S**trategic Planning and

**E**conomic Development

**Rev. Gary D. Adams, Sr.**

2024 Episcopal Candidate  
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church



[www.Adams4Bishop.com](http://www.Adams4Bishop.com)



# Pastor Gary Adams Biography

## Advancing the Kingdom of God

Pastor Gary D. Adams, Sr. is described as a servant leader among his peers, parishioners, and other acquaintances. Pastor Adams lives by the philosophy, “Whatever you do, do it with all your heart as unto the Lord and not man.” As he engages in ministry, his emphasis as a leader is to serve and not to be served. Pastor Adams can also be described as one who “Cares for the sheep” regardless of their denominational affiliation or lack thereof.

To further advance the Kingdom, Rev. Gary D. Adams, Sr. organized Victory A.M.E. Zion Church in South Jackson (MS). With God’s leading, he desired to do a new thing in Zion by planting a new society in an area where Zion was not present. With this in mind, he reached out to Bishop Nathaniel Jarrett, shared the vision, and asked to be pulled out of the rotation after pastoring for nine years. With Bishop Jarrett’s blessing, Pastor Adams started a bible class in the home of a couple. This bible class of eight, including Rev. Adams and his family, grew into what has become known as the Victory A.M.E. Zion Church. As the church grew under Pastor Adams’ leadership, Victory Church relocated to having services in the local YMCA. Afterward, they rented a location on Cooper Road, across the street from the present-day location of Victory A.M.E. Zion Church. In 2001, pastor Adams and the congregation went from being lessors to owners, purchasing the property across the street, including a sanctuary, classrooms, administrative offices, a fellowship hall, and four acres of land. With the help of the denomination, Victory A.M.E. Zion Church burned its mortgage in April 2022 under the pastorate of Rev. Aurelia Jones-Smith and the leadership of Bishop Eric Leake.

While pastoring Victory, God used Pastor Adams to increase its membership to over 100 members, providing computer classes, hosting summer camps, organizing a 501(C) 3: Victory Community Association, organizing a Leadership Training Institute (VCLC), conducting tutorial clinics, sponsoring scholarships, etc. Since organizing Victory, Pastor Adams has lent his wisdom and experience to assist other pastors in planting, organizing, and growing churches.

Gary has also served the following stations as a passionate servant leader:

<p><b>Cathedral</b> (2014 – Present) - *Paid off Mortgage *Extinguished all old debt * Completed and paid for over \$500,000 in renovations and improvements * Remodeled gymnasium and added rooms (without loan) * Purchased 2 vans (cash) *Organized and implemented new ministries * Installed new air and heating unit *Continue to provide learning institute for training community leaders *Support struggling churches and pastors through Ministry of Kindness and counsel *Raised the highest amount in support of Home Mission in history of conference *Provide leadership training for leadership within the church</p>
<p><b>Zion Chapel</b> (2008 – 2014) - *Purchased church bus (24 passenger) *Refinanced church loan to create savings and options for funds saved *Installed new roof on educational building (cash) *Generated over \$75,000 in liquid assets *Continued to provide learning institute for training community leaders *Made improvements and renovations campus (cash) *Supported struggling churches and pastors through Ministry of Kindness *Raise the highest amount for Home Mission is history of conference</p>
<p><b>St. Paul</b> (2007 – 2008) - *Stabilized church’s financial health *Grew membership *Stabilized membership</p>
<p><b>Victory</b> (1997 – 2007) - *Organized and planted church *Purchased church sanctuary (4 acres) to house congregation *Purchase a van (cash) *Started a 501(C)3 corporation *Started a learning institute for training community and church leaders *Grew membership *Started a radio broadcast</p>
<p><b>Greater Blair Street</b> (1994 – 1997) - *Renovations to church bathrooms *Created a saving plan for church *Started and implemented the Save the Neighborhood Project *Stabilized membership</p>
<p><b>Salem</b> (1989 – 1994) - *Added new offices and bathrooms *Grew finances *Implemented new ministries *Supported struggling churches and pastors in the area</p>
<p><b>Free Chapel</b> (1/1989 – 11/1989) - *Increased attendance *Paid all claims and assessments</p>

## Resource Development

Gary D. Adams, Sr. is resourceful because of his unselfish nature and his willingness to share his gifts and graces with others to help them improve their station in life. In 1999, while pastoring Victory A.M.E. Zion Church, God gave him the vision to start a learning institute. This was an ideal location within the capital City of Jackson, MS. The learning institute was designed to be a catalyst for learning for clergy as well as laity. Because he understood that not all pastors would pursue a formal higher education, he wanted to provide a landscape that allowed them to attain the knowledge at an affordable cost. The first school he started was Victory Christian Learning Institute. Within this institute, he hired certified educators, professionals, and subject matter experts to teach classes such as Computers, Church Administration, Church Polity, Contemporary Issues in the Black Church, Understanding Your Call, and the Old Testament. Due to the itinerant nature of the church, when he was moved to his next assignment, VCLC was paused. However, Rev. Adams never lost his zeal for hosting classes and improving on each of his assignments. During his current assignment at Cathedral A.M.E. Zion Church, he reinstated the Learning Institute as the Azusa Leadership Institute.

## Increased Integrity

As a pastor, Gary Adams strives to have a culture of integrity where church leaders take their commitments seriously, are proactive, and are accountable for their results. Gary fosters a positive, open work environment to promote strong, resilient teams.

Gary served as the District Manager for Rev. Dr. Jimmie C. Hicks in the Canton-Jackson District from 2002 – 2007. During this time, he worked to build trust with Dr. Hicks and his colleagues. Gary is dependable, reliable, and trustworthy.

Gary Adams is honest and has strong moral principles. He is an ethical person and does the right thing, even behind closed doors. He delivers on his commitments. He is accountable for his actions and is able to admit when he has made a mistake. He views challenges as another opportunity for growth. He faces life and overcomes obstacles with resilience.

## Strategic Planning

Rev. Adams served seven years (2008–2015) as a Presiding Elder at the South MS Annual Conference. He served four years under Bishop Darryl Starnes and three years under Bishop Mildred Hines. After being appointed Presiding Elder by Bishop Starnes, Rev. Adams rallied the District together to begin to plan the work. Although Rev. Adams was the Presiding Elder, he welcomed the District’s concerns, passions, and inputs. This gathering helped him and the district navigate as a team, and the work proved to be amazing.

Rev. Adams worked to strengthen pastors and congregations in administrative roles, developing mission, casting vision, goal setting, budget development and implementation, procurement of funds, organizational structure, etc. Often, Presiding Elder Adams would go back to churches after quarterly conferences to provide workshops and training to help congregations with the mission, vision casting, and goals.

On the occasion that the newly organized district, under Bishop Hines’s leadership, could not raise their Connectional, Conference, and District assessment, Presiding Elder Adams organized a strategic plan. Presiding Elder Adams coordinated a three-day event that raised over \$12,000 to pay assessments for all churches. As a Presiding Elder, it was not uncommon for Rev. Adams to donate his salary to pastors who were not getting full salaries because of the congregation’s financial challenges. Presiding Elder Adams provided fundraising assistance for these congregations and pastors to procure new funds and to share the responsibility for improving the church’s fiscal health.

For seven years as a Presiding Elder, Adams was known to be an advocate for his pastors, ministers, district officers, and lay. Many considered him to be pastoral. It could be clearly seen across the districts that he presided over that he was adamant about sharpening the skills and tools of leadership.

## Economic/Fiscal Responsibility

Early on, Pastor Adams realized that being a pastor went beyond preaching, teaching, coaching, administration of Sacraments, caring for the sheep, etc. He realized that a major part of the pastor’s role was a character-driven leader/administrator. Acknowledging that the rise



or fall of ministry was strongly predicated upon the proficiency of the leader's administrative abilities. Soon, Pastor Adams came to acknowledge that one of his strengths as a pastor was in administration, organization, and fiscal policy. In every charge that he has led, he has coached the church's growth fiscally and spiritually and improved the overall administrative roles.

Pastor Adams has over thirty-four years of experience in pastoral leadership but considers himself a sound fiscal manager. In every appointment that he has served, he has always gone in with an attitude to improve upon the work of his predecessor and leave it better work for his successor. All seven churches that he has served have experienced improvement and growth, numerically and financially. Pastor Adams' emphasis has been on developing and deploying disciples (the people he served). Pastor Adams has stressed stronger familial and church relationships, fiscal stewardship, ministry involvement, community service, and leadership development.

Upon being appointed to the Cathedral A.M.E. Zion Church, under the leadership of Bishop Mildred Hines, Pastor Adams spent the first few months completing a thorough assessment of the church dynamics. During that time, he met with trustees, stewards, ministry leaders, and lay to gain greater clarity regarding the culture, disposition, financial

solvency, challenges, and congregational concerns. These things were important for the continuous development of the mission and vision casting.

About seven months into the appointment, Pastor Adams led the leadership and congregation in borrowing two hundred thousand dollars for needed renovations and improvements. These funds were used to purchase new air conditioning and heating units, upgrade bathrooms, remodel the foyer and front breezeway, change lighting fixtures, purchase and install projectors and screens, remodel the fellowship hall, remodel offices, and renovate the meeting rooms of the gym.

This loan served a dual purpose of structural improvements, as well as to give the church a stronger Dun & Bradstreet credibility, to build relationships with a lending institution, and to model sound debt management and extinguishment practices. Although this loan held a fifteen-year amortization, the church extinguished the debt in seven years by using creative methods. During the course of seven years, Cathedral was able to complete other projects and improvements in addition to this loan in excess of \$500,000 from funds generated through tithes and offerings. Those projects included a total gym renovation, adding a kitchen, bathrooms, and upstairs loft, purchasing two vans, and remodeling other properties.

## SPORTS

## Beyond the Diamond

By **Alexxis D. Hutchinson**  
Sports Editor  
Photos by Ole Miss Softball

In the world of collegiate athletics, few stories captivate the imagination quite like that of Jaden Pone, a standout junior at the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) from Hope Mills, NC. Jaden's story is one of resilience, determination, and unwavering faith—a testament to the transformative power of sports and the boundless potential within each of us. As she continues to inspire others with her remarkable journey, her impact beyond the diamond is an inspiration to us all.

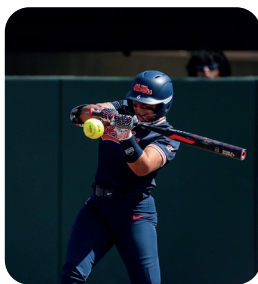
At the heart of Jaden's journey is her deep-rooted passion for softball, a sport she embraced from a young age. As a three-sport high school student-athlete, playing both tennis and running track at Gray's Creek High School, Jaden's ability on the softball field earned her accolades such as conference player of the year as both a freshman and sophomore, First Team All-Conference nods, and District and 3A State Player of the Year titles in North Carolina.

Her commitment to excellence saw her excel at Longwood University, where she earned prestigious titles such as the Big South Player of the Year and Freshman of the Year. Memorable victories against formidable opponents, such as Florida State, highlighted her exceptional skills and leadership on the field.

However, it was her transfer to Ole Miss that marked the beginning of a new chapter. Navigating the demands of student-athlete life requires resilience and discipline. Jaden's commitment to academic excellence is evident, thanks to the support of dedicated academic advisors and structured study sessions during travel. Jaden acknowledges that she is primarily a student and always prioritizes her academics. Balancing rigorous coursework with grueling game schedules is no easy feat, but Jaden rises to the challenge with grace and determination.

"One of my highlights from this season was the big diving catch I made," Jaden recalls. "Once I saw it was out of reach, it's just like an automatic reaction to dive for it. That play closed the inning and brought a lot of momentum to our team, so it definitely felt good to make that catch. I love making diving catches and laying out to make a play, especially when we need it." Jaden's spectacular diving catch, showcased on the team's Instagram account boasting over eighty thousand followers, epitomizes her athleticism and lightning-fast reflexes.

Off the field, Jaden remains deeply connected to her roots at Willis Creek A.M.E. Zion Church (Eastern North Carolina Episcopal District, Central North Carolina Conference, Fayetteville District), where she



serves as an acolyte and usher. "Even though I am away from home, I want to continue to give back and have those same morals that the church has taught me," she explains. "This year alone, my teammates and I have participated in multiple community service initiatives that supported the Oxford community." During the recent fall semester, Jaden volunteered at the local elementary school, assisting with morning carpool lines and engaging in reading sessions with the students. These interactions hold special significance for the young students, who deeply appreciate the presence and involvement of Ole Miss student-athletes in their school community.

Her commitment to giving back and uplifting others reflects her values of compassion and empathy, transcending the boundaries of sport. Over the years, she's become passionate about working with youth and has been educating youth softball teams on the importance of mental and physical health as an athlete.

Jaden draws inspiration from her tight-knit family, whose unwavering support and guidance have shaped her into the formidable athlete and compassionate individual she is today. Their influence serves as a constant reminder of the values she holds dear. From her parents to her aunt and grandmother, they all have played a major role in her support system. "My biggest inspiration is definitely my family," she emphasizes. "They have encouraged me and taught me things that have stuck with me for life."

For Jaden, the journey is far from over. With graduation on the horizon, she sets her sights on a future in coaching, eager to share her passion for softball with the next generation of athletes. Her message to aspiring athletes is simple yet profound: Believe in yourself, work tirelessly towards your dreams, and never lose sight of the values that define you. Jaden said, "My softball journey started from me being a 4-year-old little girl hitting off a tee to me playing for an SEC team," one of the top Power 5 conferences in the nation. "Good things take time, and you should give it your all with anything you do on the field, in the classroom, and for others," said Jaden.

As you can see, success is a journey, and perseverance is key to overcoming obstacles both on and off the field. As Jaden continues to inspire others with her remarkable journey, her impact on the softball field and beyond is sure to endure for years to come. In a world often defined by adversity, she serves as a beacon of hope, proving that with determination and unwavering faith, anything is possible. Jaden's journey to becoming a star player on the softball field is nothing short of inspiring.



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# Celebrating the Life of Bro. Edwin Eason Sr.

## August 4, 1953 - March 2, 2024

By Angel Eason, Lifestyle Editor



Edwin Eason Sr. “Rip Saw,” beloved husband, dad, granddad, brother, first man, and friend, was called to eternal rest on March 2, 2024. Edwin was born in Norfolk County, Virginia, on August 4, 1953, to Ella Eason and Linwood Eason Sr. He attended New Foreman Temple A.M.E. Zion Church, where he accepted Jesus as his personal savior.

Edwin attended Chesapeake public schools and went on to work for Arnette Construction Company. In 1973, he married his childhood sweetheart, Alvania Tillett. He worked for the International Longshoremen’s Association for several years. Edwin was well-loved by all.

Edwin worked faithfully in the church throughout the years as the trustee, janitor, soloist, preacher’s steward, and first man to Pastor Alvania Eason. Edwin’s voice was one of a kind, and he was often asked about joining quartet/choir groups in the area. He loved his suits and dressing well to serve in the Lord’s house on Sundays. He loved spending time

with his family and friends, taking care of lawns, and sitting on his porch. He was a lawn manicurist for years and was loved by his community. One of his favorite songs was “I’m on my home” by the Canton Spirituals. He knew that one of these days, he would make it to his heavenly home.

He was preceded in his journey to rest by his parents, Ella Eason and Linwood Eason Sr., maternal and paternal grandparents, daughter La’Vania Eason, sister Harriett Burgess, and brother Isaiah “Ike” Eason Sr.

He leaves to cherish his glorious memories: his beloved wife, Alvania Eason; two children, Edwin Eason Jr. and Angel Eason; two grandchildren, Markayle Ferebee and Destiny Ferebee; two sisters, Mary F. Edwards and Debora Eason; four brothers, Linwood Eason Jr., Shelton Eason (Evelyn), Neal Eason, and Leroy Eason; mother-in-law Rev. Lillie Gray, three aunts, and one uncle, as well as a host of in-laws, nieces, nephews, cousins, and dear friends.

Edwin will truly be missed as he was deeply loved by his family, New Foreman Temple A.M.E. Zion Church family, and friends. More than anything, he was loved by God. He may no longer be with us in body, but he will always be with us in spirit, for his memory will live on in our hearts forever.

# Malcolm Curtis Russell

## December 15, 1946 - February 7, 2024



Malcolm Curtis Russell was born December 15, 1946, to PC Russell and Essie Mae Russell in Laurel, Mississippi. Malcolm spent his entire childhood in Laurel and graduated from Earl Travillion Attendance Center in 1965. He earned his BS in Business Administration and a minor in Accounting from Mississippi Valley State University in 1969.

After graduating from college, Malcolm began his career at Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, Mississippi, as a Cost Analyst. In 1979, he accepted a

job at General Dynamics in Fort Worth, Texas. After moving to Texas, he married Paulette Parker, and they bought a home in Benbrook, where they lived as Texans for 45 years.

While working at General Dynamics (later acquired by Lockheed Martin), Malcolm had the opportunity to travel internationally as a Cost Analyst and then become an International Finance Manager. Malcolm enjoyed a long career of 38 years before he retired from Lockheed Martin in 2017.

Malcolm was rich in wisdom and knew the importance of integrity and honesty. He loved reading the Bible and stood firm in his relationship with God. He was guided by the principles stated in 1 Corinthians 16:13, “be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.”

Malcolm was an avid Bible reader and participated in the prestigious Bible Study Fellowship for more than ten years. A longtime member of Outland Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church, he faithfully rendered service as a Sunday School Teacher, Chairman of the Trustee Board, Member

of the Steward Board, Treasurer of Texas Conference, President of the Texas Conference Lay Council, and a Hall of Famer for the Lay Council. Malcolm’s diligence in service and his proclamation of living and walking by faith were his firm testimony.

Malcolm loved the Lord; he loved his wife, his family, and his church. He also enjoyed watching sports. Malcolm was rich in so many ways that aren’t readily measured by material possessions. He truly lived by the scripture, which says, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:19-21

Our heavenly Father, the maker, and creator of us all, calls His saints one by one to receive indwelling power from above without looking back to ponder the trials and tribulations of this present age. Malcolm died peacefully on Tuesday, February 7, 2024, with his wife by his side.

He is survived by his loving wife of 45 years, Paulette Russell; three daughters, Monique Fields (Louis), Angela Russell-Adeyemi (Woley), Roshanda Spillers (Warren); one son, John Garraway (Valerie); two grandchildren, Parker Spillers and Kristin Garraway, one brother, Eddie Russell, one sister in law Barbara Jean Atkins (Clem), two brother-in-laws, John H. Snider (Velma), Bobby Joe Parker (Barbara) and a host of nieces, nephews, cousins and close friends.

He is preceded in death by his parents, PC and Essie Mae Russell, two sisters, Diane Russell and Judy Russel, and daughter Michelle Russell.



# The Obituary of Mrs. Rose Marie Starnes Kelly

June 17, 1945 – February 23, 2024

*"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."*

2 Timothy 4:7

Mrs. Rose Marie Starnes Kelly was born June 17, 1945, in York, SC, to the late Mr. Samuel and Mary Allison Starnes. She entered into eternal rest on Friday morning, February 23, 2024, at Prisma Health Hospital, Columbia, SC., after a courageous 2 ½ year battle with cancer.



Rose Starnes confessed the Lord Jesus Christ early in life while growing up in White Hill A.M.E. Zion Church in York, SC. Rose was a 1963 graduate of Jefferson High School in York, SC. She sang in the high school Glee Club and Girl's Ensemble while performing throughout South Carolina. She received a Diploma in Secretarial Science from the Durham Business School in Durham, NC, in 1964. On August 17, 1966, she married the love of her life, James Arthur Kelly, Jr., and with this union, they had two sons: James Arthur Kelly, III, and Michael Adrian Kelly.

Rose Starnes Kelly joined Jones Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church in Columbia, SC, in 1972. As an active member of Jones Memorial, Rose gave her time and talents to serve God and was a true disciple of Jesus Christ. She served as President of the Deaconess Board, President - Conference and Home Mission Workers, Secretary - Stewardess Board,

Bereavement Committee Coordinator, Sanctuary Choir member/so-loist, Life Member and Life Matron of the WH&OM Society, Former Sunday School Teacher, and many other church organizations. She was also a Mother of the Year award recipient. One of her most rewarding and cherished moments occurred while serving as the Coordinator of the Free Summer Feeding Program for Jones Memorial's Youth Summer Camp. She had a strong desire to positively impact the lives of young children and single mothers in the community.

Rose had a passion for singing, cooking, traveling, and, most importantly, serving others. She loved her family and especially her husband of 57 years, "Kell".

Rose retired in 2003 from Companion Life Insurance Company, a subsidiary company of BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina. During her 34 years of service, she garnered many awards and finished her career as a Compliance Coordinator.

Rose leaves to cherish her memories: her husband, James A. Kelly, Jr.; two sons, James A. Kelly, III (Sandra) of Charlotte, NC and Michael A. Kelly of Columbia, SC; three grandchildren, James A. Kelly, IV; Sierra N. Kelly, and Mason A. Kelly. Other survivors include her siblings, Johnnie S. Gray of York, SC, Georgia S. Glenn of Chicago, IL, Oliver M. Starnes of York, SC, and Perry L. Starnes (Rita) of York, SC, and a host of nephews, nieces, family members, and friends.

She is preceded in death by her parents, Samuel and Mary Allison Starnes of York, SC; her siblings, Margaret Ann Starnes, Thomas Jefferson Starnes, Samuel Starnes, Jr., Sitrena S. Berry; her sister-in-law's Jeanetta K. Hall and Diane K.

## WORLD POLITICS

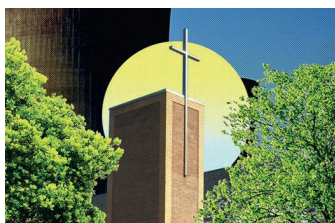
# A Black 'Green' Church



Rev. Ronald Nathan  
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By Rev. Ronald A. Nathan  
World Politics Editor

The question as to where the Black Church is when it comes to climate justice issues is a relevant one. The politicizing and polarizing nature of the climate justice debate seems to have numbed many Christians and churches. The Black Church, in the past, mobilized a 'hermeneutic of freedom' that motivated and mobilized the African American community in its response to oppression. It was, historically, the embodiment and organizational strength that ensured the African American community's survival, sanity, and self-worth.



Over the past three decades, with the rise of secularization, prosperity theology, gentrification, and the upward mobility of the black professional classes, this prophetic voice of the Black Church seems to have been quietened. Environmental justice is at the top of the youth and millennials' agenda and almost at the bottom of the Black Church priorities. The stereotype that 'black people are always late' seems to be true when it relates to the climate crisis and the Black Church.

The reality is that the matter of climate justice lacks a prominent presence in the pulpit, noticeboards, committees, outreaches, prayer meetings, and budgets of many of our congregations. This is so even though there is so much overlap between climate justice and racial and social justice.

The term 'climate change' is a catch-all phrase used for the long-term shift in the earth's average temperatures and weather conditions, which threatens our present ability to live healthy and productive lives. The majority of the world's opinion is that this long-term climate change has been caused primarily by our human activities. What is indeed troubling

and, therefore, of even greater significance for the African American community is that the ill effects of the climate crisis are being felt disproportionately in our communities.



Though Christian climate change advocacy groups have played a proactive role in addressing environmental concerns, oftentimes, they do so in the absence of many voices of color. So why is there an absence or reluctance of Black Christians at the climate debate table? Some have said it is because this "new injustice" is shrouded in academic-speak and political obfuscation. Furthermore, others point out that climate conversations seldom use language or images that come from the spaces and places where 'black people' hang out. There is a call for the culturizing of the issues into 'black speak.'

The 'prophetic fire' to use a Cornel West expression, is the responsibility of the Black Church's clergy and laity. We must find and raise our voices to speak up and speak out on the ways we abuse the planet and devise ways and means to limit our contributions to the climate crisis. The creation of a Black 'Green' Church movement requires urgency. That sense of urgency will raise the profile of climate justice and creation care before our congregations and communities. A theology of creation care must be communicated in our sermons, bible studies, Christian literature, and church programs. Discipleship programs and evangelism convocations must be infused with practical activities that educate and mobilize green options.

In this election year in the United States of America, may the environmental lobby from the Black "Green" Church impact the proposed lawmakers with the urgency of our times.



# T20 World Cup Cricket Coming to America

By Rev. Ronald A. Nathan  
World Politics Editor

The United States of America will co-host the 2024 International Cricket Council Men's T20 World Cup along with the West Indies. Yes, you read it right: the premier 'gentleman's game' is coming Stateside. This is the first International Cricket Council (ICC) World Cup that will take place from 1-29 June 2024. Although not as popular as basketball and baseball in the United States of America, cricket is the second-most widely played sport in the world after soccer.



There is tremendous excitement among the 6,000 cricket teams and the 250,000 persons who currently play and watch the game of cricket in the USA. It is the hope of the organizers that the T20 tournament will boost the popularity of cricket in schools, colleges, and universities across the fifty states of America.

Cricket is called the 'gentleman's game' because it was first played by the aristocratic classes in England in the mid-15th century. However, cricket is no stranger to America; it was played in the United States of America as early as 1709. There are historical records to show that the slave owner William Byrd II played cricket on his plantation in Westover, Virginia, and several of the cricket players were enslaved persons. Cricket was widely played across the British American colonies, especially in the Eastern seaboard states prior to the Civil War.

It is incredible to think that the first international cricket game was played between the USA and Canada in Manhattan, New York, on the

grounds of St. George's Cricket Club in 1844. The St. George's Cricket Club, which still exists today, got its name from the St. George's Episcopal Church, Stuyvesant Square, Manhattan, New York.

In the United States of America, the governing body for the sport of cricket is \*USA Cricket. As the national federation for cricket in the United States, it is recognized by the International Cricket Council as an associate member.

The T20 World Cup cricket tournament consists of 20 international teams. They will represent the top twenty (20) qualifying teams and will be divided into four groups of five.

The top two teams from each group will advance from the group stage to the Super 8 stage. In the Super 8 stage, the qualifying teams will then be split into two groups of four; the top two teams from each group will play to qualify for the third knockout stage, which will consist of two semi-finals and a final.

Four (4) of these cricket games, or matches as they are also called, will be played in Florida, four (4) will be played in the state of Texas, and eight (8) in the state of New York.

All the other cricket games will be played in the West Indian nations of Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Guyana, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. Avid cricket fans and curious onlookers can get all the latest cricket news from ESPN.



International  
Cricket Council

## Hakuna Matata Haiti

By Rev. Ronald A. Nathan  
World Politics Editor



'Hakuna Matata,' the Swahili language term for 'no worries,' seemed to be the declaration of President William Ruto as he and Prime Minister Ariel Henry witnessed the signing of a reciprocal agreement between their respective nations, Kenya and Haiti on Friday, March 1, 2024. This agreement will allow Kenya to lead a United Nations-backed Multinational Security

Support mission (MSS), which will see the posting of 1,000 Kenyan police personnel on Haitian soil.

'Hakuna Matata,' this Kenyan philosophical optimism made popular by the Walt Disney animation film *Lion King*, meaning 'no trouble,' 'no worries,' and 'take it easy' cannot and should not be applied to the Haitian crisis. Haiti is a nation under siege by an impoverished population, violent gangs, and weakened governing and security institutions since 2016. Most of the nation's basic services are not functioning under pressure from the escalating gang violence and a succession of recent natural disasters.

The one thing all members of the United Nations agree with is that Haiti needs help. However, their reluctance to commit personnel to the mission is due to their realization that going into Haiti has multiple dangers that can get out of hand very quickly.

So why would Kenya wish to be involved in the MSS? Part of it has to do with what Haiti represents. Haiti is a physical and symbolic representation of African resistance, determination, resilience, and pride. It was the first nation to defeat a European colonial power, i.e., the French, in 1803. Haiti was inspirational for all African and Caribbean nations desirous of gaining independence. Haiti became the first Black republic in 1804 and was the first black nation to join the League of

Nations, the precursor to the United Nations, in 1945. The overwhelming majority of Haitians are Africans who were transported to the Caribbean through the inhumane trafficking of African bodies, known as the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

The stated goal of the United Nations MSS mission is to protect the Haitian population from extreme violence by gangs, strengthen the Haitian National Police, and protect key strategic infrastructure. This, it is believed will help to restore democratic institutions and constitutional order.

What would be critical for the success of the MSS and, therefore, the Kenyans is their respect for Haitian human rights, which are regularly violated through exploitation and sexual abuse, and the ensuring of accountability when those regulations are broken.

For now, the Multinational Security Support mission to Haiti conveys hope for the ordinary Haitians and a measure of stability. Much more would be required by the United Nations and the Haitian population and its diaspora if it is to develop into a stable country under its own sovereignty. Alongside Kenya, the Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Chad, and Benin have all pledged troops towards the mission.

Africa's growing concern for Haiti was reflected in its humanitarian response to the 12 January 2010 earthquake. African nations responded unprecedentedly by pledging US\$51 million to the relief effort. One of the relief initiatives was said to be the delivery of a message from Mother Africa to her sons and daughters across the Atlantic. What is certain is that 'hakuna matata' may very well represent the best in African philosophical and philanthropic efforts, as reflected in the popular proverb 'the load is lighter when two people carry it.'







# *Official Statement*

## *Of The Board of Bishops Of The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church Calling for A Ceasefire in Gaza*

*“And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”  
(James 3:18 NRSVUE)*

Our faith and our heritage demand a consistent stand for the value of all life. Whenever we witness acts of violence and human suffering, we have no choice but to raise our collective voices in prayer but also in protest. It is in this spirit that the Board of Bishops of the AME Zion Church joins with other Faith Leaders, including Bishops of the AME Church, our sister denomination, to call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and the immediate release of all remaining hostages.

We categorically condemn the abhorrent attacks on innocent Israeli civilians that were conducted by Hamas and aligned groups on October 7, 2023. Many of the victims of this act of terrorism were peace activists who were working towards harmony with the Palestinian people. The more than 1,160 people killed and approximately 200 individuals taken hostage on that tragic day were each made in the image of GOD and are precious in GOD’s sight, but so are the more than 30,000 Palestinians killed since October 7th. Some 1.7 million Palestinians, nearly 80% of the population, has been displaced resulting in a continuing humanitarian crisis of epic proportions.

The International Court of Justice has issued a ruling calling on Israel to take all measures to prevent genocide and ensure access to humanitarian aid. We believe that line has been crossed.

According to UN human rights experts, much of the population in Gaza is starving and struggling to find food, drinkable water, healthcare, and fuel. Women and children are the disproportionate victims of this humanitarian crisis. It must be ended immediately.

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We forcefully object to the United States continuing to provide military aid to Israel without any accountability for protecting civilians in Gaza, granting access to humanitarian assistance, and ending the displacement of Palestinians.

The peoples of Israel and Palestine deserve peace and the right to live their respective lives with security and self-determination. They deserve leadership better than they currently have.

We call upon President Biden and the members of Congress to issue a call for an immediate ceasefire, the release of all remaining hostages, and reviving efforts towards a two-state solution where both Israelis and Palestinians can live with security, prosperity, and peace.

**United in both prayer and protest for a just peace; we are the Board of Bishops of The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church - The Freedom Church:**

Bishop George D. Crenshaw,  
President of the Board of Bishops  
Bishop Kenneth Monroe, Senior Bishop  
Bishop Darryl B. Starnes, Sr.  
Bishop Dennis V. Proctor  
Bishop Mildred B. Hines (Deceased)

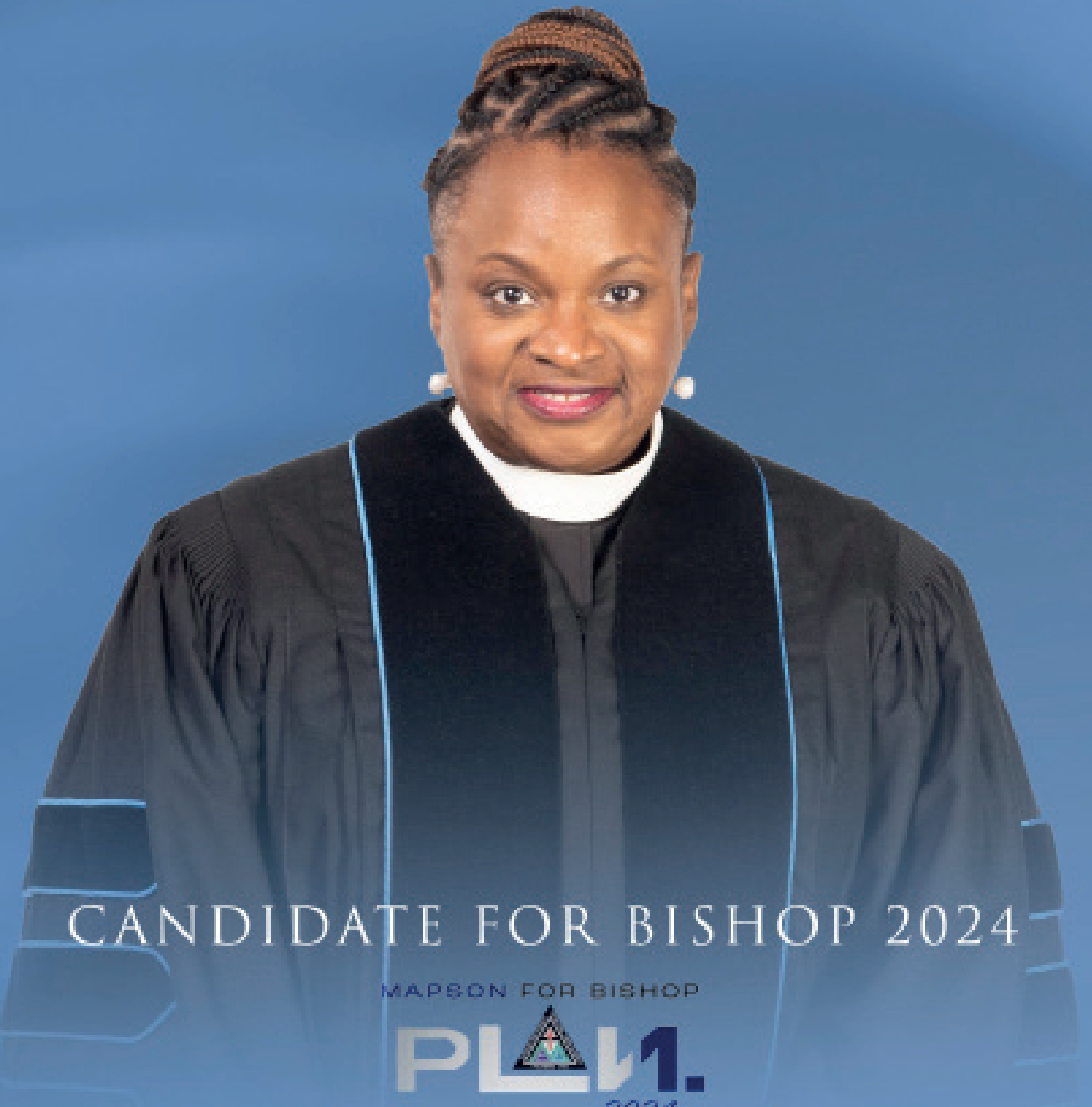
Bishop W. Darin Moore  
Bishop Michael A. Frencher, Sr.  
Bishop Hilliard Dogbe  
Bishop Uduak Effiong  
Bishop Brian R. Thompson, Sr.  
Bishop Eric Leake

Bishop Joseph Johnson (Retired)  
Bishop Marshall H. Strickland (Retired)  
Bishop Nathaniel Jarrett, Jr. (Retired)  
Bishop George W.C. Walker, Sr. (Retired)  
Bishop Samuel Chuka Ekemam, Sr. (Retired)  
Bishop Warren Matthew Brown (Retired)  
Bishop George Edward Battle, Jr. (Retired)

**DONE THIS THE 27TH DAY OF FEBRUARY, 2024**



*Rev. Dr. Charbreaan*  
**BATTEN MAPSON**



CANDIDATE FOR BISHOP 2024

MAPSON FOR BISHOP





## Dear Zion: If I May...

By Sandra "Muffin" Newman  
New Jersey Conference Y.A.I. Chairperson



It is imperative that we, as members of the great African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, be either hot or cold! The climate of the United States of America is one of disarray and darkness. Our communities are under attack spiritually, physically, economically, and psychologically. I am very active in the "life of the church" but I still don't know how we are living. What I mean is that it is unclear on every level what this organization stands for when it comes to the daily lives of our members, fellow believers, and the non-believers we are to serve. It is very clear we stand on the A.M.E. Zion Discipline, it is very clear we base our discipline on the word of God, and it is very transparent that we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. That much is clear. What is not made plain is where we, as a connection, stand in this world. In the book of James chapter 2, we as a whole should feel conviction. How dare we say we are praying for the non-believers, the lost, the sick, and the poor, and yet we have not fulfilled their basic needs to survive and live? Yes, there are a variety of wonderful ministries and departments that help many people, yet it is not enough. Yes, we have an extensive connectional organization and yet there remains a disconnect. Are we worthy to hold the banner of "The Freedom Church" that our predecessors forged and carried? I know we don't want to say it; however, the answer is not yet available.

We are at war. The family infrastructure is being dismantled, our men

are being emasculated, our women are being hardened, and our children are literally killing themselves. Our people are being lied to, our economic power is being used to destroy us, and our freedom is being taken away. Yet, here we are, sitting in meetings every other day, discussing how we need to fix these issues. We are so busy trying to bridge a gap that isn't there that we are neglecting our duties as disciples of Christ. It is scary to acknowledge how close to Pharisees we have become. We wear our white when we are supposed to, but I have yet to see that white gets dirty in service of someone in need except while feeding our faces. We wear our black and gold when it's time, and I have yet to see that black and gold in formation fighting for our God-given rights. When it's time, we put on our blue, but we own no schools that teach the truth. The Bishops wear their royal purple and the Elders in their royal blue, and I have yet to see those colors lead our people anywhere but to the throne of grace! Yes, we must go there, but we were not supposed to stop there.

There is work being done, and still, it is not enough. We have to press on if we are to build the Kingdom of God. We acknowledge the Kingdom of God is in the hearts of men, and right now, the hearts of men are broken, poor, confused, lustful, full of greed, and selfishness. That doesn't seem like the kingdom of God, so it is our job to clean up the house! Thankfully, there are the remnants. The few who do not come for form or fashion, those who do not mind being disliked or not called front and center. Those few who are willing to sacrifice self for the good of the Kingdom of God. The people of God who can see past denomination, past color, past financial status, and educational debt are the very people who are needed right now!

## A TIME TO LOVE: A Sermon in Commemoration of the Passion and Love of Christ

By Reverend Leona Nicholas Welch

*Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 building on verse 8, ...A Time for Love...*

The following scenario is from my (Holy) Imagination but adheres to the Holy Relationship in the Godhead and is meant only to create a visual experience for this sermon.

Once upon an eternity – one day in heaven, the godhead, father, son, and holy spirit sat down at the dinner table and had a talk. As they passed around the heavenly manna and sipped sweet, cool dew from gold goblets, they talked. The conversation that evening was all about the day that Jesus was to die on the cross for humankind.

"You know, son, this is going to be one of the most dramatic moments of time and eternity, and I really want my children to know that this sacrifice of your life..." At that, the father's eyes grew sad, and his voice trembled as he reached and tenderly touched his son's face. Jesus reciprocated with a slight touch to his father's hand and a knowing nod.

At that moment, love took a giant step up to the plate of humanity. Love made a commitment that would last for all time, all eternity. Love made a decision to save all humankind. Love moved through the heavens wrapped itself in human flesh, and traveled from the realms of eternity to the fragile walls of time. This is a picture of love.

Let us switch from eternity to time. Let us rejoin the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

PEOPLE HURT PEOPLE. People kill people. People gossip about peo-



ple. People deny people what they could and should give to them. People cold-heartedly break promises to people. People turn their backs on people when they need them the most. People just outright lie to people. People watch other people hurt and do nothing about it. People slander people's good names. People add slander to people's bad names. People conspire to cause other people to fall. People take what belongs to other people. People take other people's money, their jobs, their spouses, their homes, their friends, their reputation. People's hearts have grown cold, and hatred seems to be the order of the day. THIS IS A PICTURE OF THE ABSENCE OF LOVE.

QUESTION: Is there a God to be found around here, anywhere today

QUESTION: Is there a Christ to be found around here, anywhere today?

QUESTION: Is there a person who knows Christ to be found around here, anywhere today?

ONE MORE QUESTION: Christian woman or man, are you here today?

And to answer my own questions:

YES, there is a God around here EVERYWHERE! YES, there is a Christ around here EVERYWHERE! And YES, there are some people who know this Christ, and they are all around here today! Yes, there are people who know

and love Christ, and they are here in this church today. THERE YOU ARE, MY FRIEND! I found you, and I am calling you out. I am calling out!

My Dear Sisters and Brothers, I stand today to remind us- God's people who know love and who are loved- I stand to remind us of why we are



really in this Christian walk. We know well that we are here, first, to love God and, secondly, to love one another. We carry this understanding deep in our hearts, minds, and spirits, but from time to time, we just need a little reminder. This is for us all.

Today's Scripture makes it plain and simple and brings it up close and personal for God's people—Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. Four words from this group of verses say it all for us today: A TIME TO LOVE. These verses tell us that there is a time for everything, but I have chosen to use these words in verse 8 as my title. For such a time as this, for such a time that we find ourselves living right now, we need these words: A TIME FOR LOVE. What better time than during the season of church life in which we commemorate the ultimate act of love, that of Jesus' passion and death on the cross – what better time to speak of love?

We live in a tough, catastrophic, apathetic, frightening world. Epic song artist Barbara Streisand and several others sang years ago, What the world needs now is love sweet love...

Today, that need has grown exponentially. What the world desperately needs now is love. What the world needs now is people who can love as Jesus loves: RADICALLY, SELFLESSLY, COMMITTED, ENDURING, HARDY, AND REAL. Not a whimsical, on-today-and-off-tomorrow kind of love. Not a what-am-I-going-to-get-out-of-it kind of love. Not an If-I feel -like-it kind of love.

Let's think about Jesus here for a moment with this If-I-fee-like-it kind of love. Do you think that Jesus felt like getting whipped mercilessly that night after he was arrested? Do you think Jesus felt like carrying that heavy cross beam of wood up a hill that day to be nailed to? Do you think that He felt like dying? Remember what he cried out to His Father that night, the Same Father of our imagined scenario, the Father who looked sadly on Him as He prepared to come to earth to die for us. Remember what he cried in the Garden of Gethsemane while His dear, well-intended friends slept the night away. FATHER TAKE THIS CUP AWAY FROM ME. No. Jesus did not feel like dying.

But Jesus pulled Himself together and told His Father, NOT AS I WILL, BUT YOUR WILL BE DONE. And He went on and died. THIS IS RADICAL LOVE!

Today, Christian man and woman, Jesus is calling you out! Jesus is putting you on blast. Come out and dare to show them how bold your love is. The world is hurting too badly for us to offer God's people a wimpy, whiny, weak, wallowing love. Hard times call for a hardy love. This is why Jesus left the comfort of His Daddy's home in heaven. When Jesus left His Father's side to become flesh, He was committing the most radical act of love ever, and today, Jesus calls for you and me to commit to a radical love.

We got wars. We have hatred crimes. We have crooked, ungodly, hateful politicians and leaders in high places. We got hungry. We got the broken and the broken-hearted. IT'S A TIME FOR LOVE, Dear saints of the Most High God. IT'S A TIME FOR LOVE like we have never loved before. Jesus is calling us out. People are scared. People are nervous. People are worried. People grieve. People are on edge. People are ready to give up. IT'S A TIME FOR LOVE!

MY MOST SINCERE WORD TODAY, MY Friends – my challenge, and my encouragement is: Don't give UP- give IN. Go INside someone's bad situation, INside someone's pain, INside someone's needs, and offer some help. GIVE, and GIVE IN. Families need to get close and be generous with love and acts of kindness. Churches need to be more constant in reaching out. The people in the pews need to be more genuine. THIS IS A TIME FOR LOVE

This is a call for a LOVE that doesn't mind losing some sleep now and then to help get someone else through a hard and scary night. This is a call for a LOVE that takes feet and walks hospital floors. This kind of LOVE takes hands and soothes a brow wrinkled from grief, fear, and rejection- even though those hands are dead tired themselves. RADICAL! This kind of LOVE has eyes that are not afraid to see the wounded and the lonely, the dying, the doubtful, and the desperate. This selfless, people-serving love gives up its comfort zone to help bring someone else comfort.

This is a Jesus kind of Love, this I-won't -stop-until – I-get-you-there kind of love; as Jesus did not stop until He finished His work on the cross, until He got us there. Our love must have ears that don't mind hearing the cries and screams of those who just lost everything in a flood or a tornado. Our love must be able to listen and to embrace the cries and get up and do something about the screams of others. This sacrifi-

cial, radical kind of love goes to the bank and empties an account on account of someone else's need. This LAY-DOWN-YOUR-LIFE- kind of love makes you forget that pain in your leg and notice that someone else does not even have a leg to feel pain.

IT'S A TIME FOR LOVE, Saints IT'S A TIME FOR LOVE! Here's proof, straight from God's Word:

And Jesus says: Feed my lambs -feed my sheep (John 21:15,16) LOVE!

And Jesus says: And the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost (Lk 19:10) LOVE!

And Jesus says: In as much as you did it to the least of these, you did it to me (Mt 25:40) LOVE!

And Jesus says. That you love one another as I have loved you... (John 15:12) UNCONDITIONAL LOVE!

Do not just look out for your own personal interest, but also for the interest of others, Says God's Word Phil 2:4.) RADICAL LOVE!

Be devoted to one another in brotherly(sisterly) love; give preference to one another in honor, says God's Word (Romans 12:10). LOVE!

So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the house of faith, says God's Word (Gal 6:10) LOVE!

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God, in Christ, has also forgiven you, says God's Word (Eph 4:32) HARDY LOVE!

But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother(sister) in need, and closes his heart against him(her), how does the love of God Abide in him(her)? Says God's Word (1 John 3:17,18) LOVE!

**IT'S A TIME FOR LOVE, DEAR PEOPLE! IT IS A TIME FOR LOVE!**

Funny thing about love, though:

You do not always get to choose whom you love or to love those you love to love. The Word says, AND THUS FULFILL THE LAW OF GOD. It is not optional, Dear People. When it comes right down to it, it is not optional- IT IS GOD'S LAW TO LOVE.... (GAL 6:2)

You do not always know around which corner there is someone whom God wants to love through you. We are sometimes taken by surprise, back to our imagined heavenly scenario. There was Jesus. He sat at dinner with His Daddy and Counselor there, and the call came. We needed to be saved. Jesus put down His chilled gold goblet of heavenly dew. He had to go. It was His will to go. He had to take on flesh. He had to love.

There you were, servant of God. There you were, sitting in the comfort of your own home with your family, pulling up a chair to a plate of hot fried chicken, greens, and some piping hot cornbread, dripping with butter – minding your own business. Somebody hit you up on your cell phone. Somebody needed your help right away. You put down your tall glass of iced tea, with the ice still clinking against the chilled glass. You had to go. You had to love.

It all depends on whether you are willing to make the sacrifice, whether you can get up from the table, or whether you can crawl from under that Christian comforter you have settled under and make your way out to comfort someone else. It all depends on your love. Do I need to say more?

The bottom line, dear people, is that let's just become more available to God, and then we will automatically become more available to God's people. Let us all step outside our comfort zones. WHAT YOU DO FOR OTHERS YOU DO FOR HIM. True, the picture of our world is far too often ugly; but as for us and our God, our Jesus, and God's dear people – IT'S A TIME FOR LOVE. Can we say it together - IT'S A TIME FOR LOVE!

Amen!



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