

PRESERVING
OUR
HISTORY

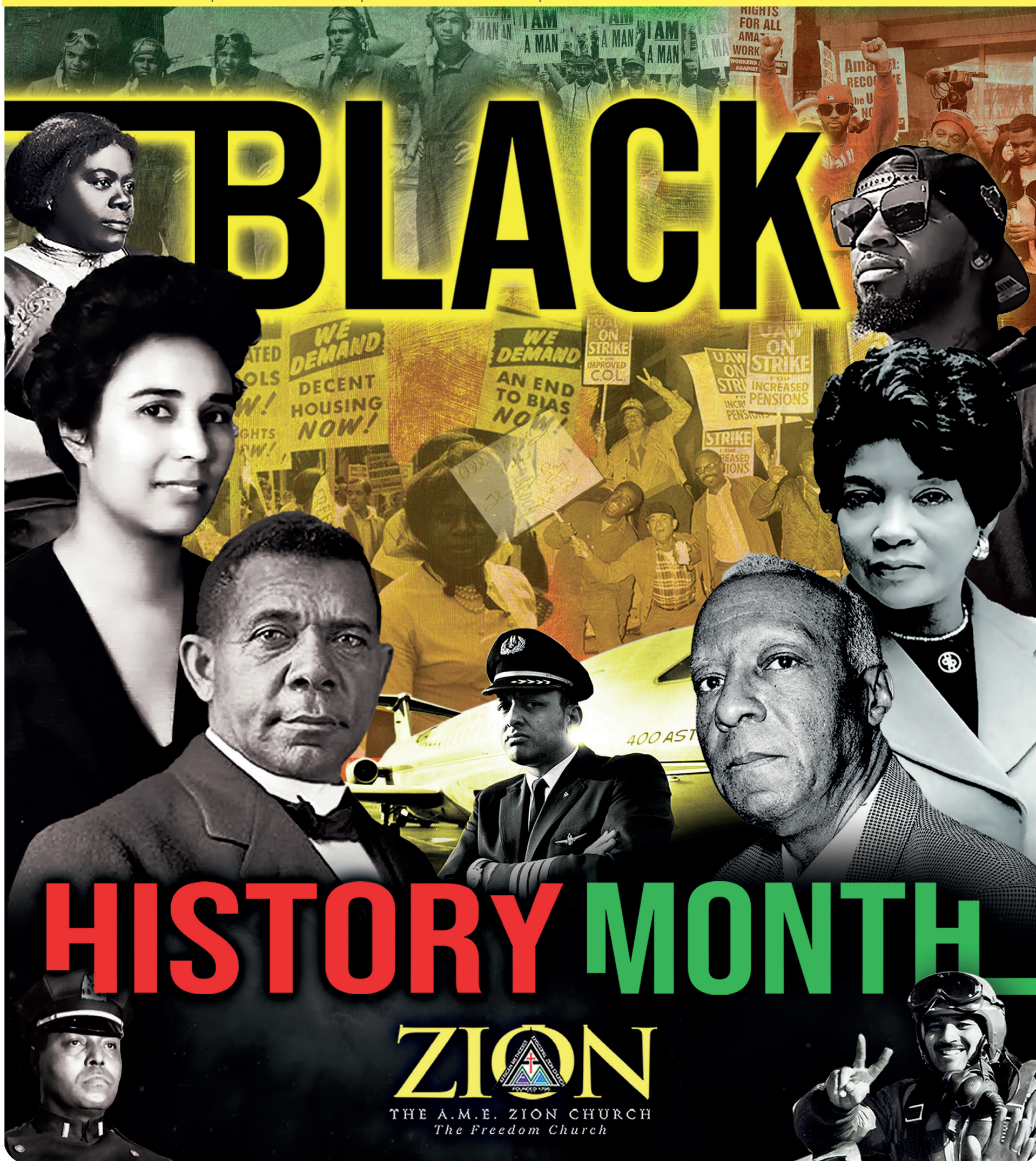
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THE STAR OF ZION

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Mrs. Debra Chappelle-Polk
Zion Spotlight Editor
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PRESERVING OUR HISTORY

"A man without any history is like a tree without roots." - Malcolm X

By Debra Chappelle-Polk, Zion Spotlight Editor

February 2025, New York, NY... "You can't really know where you're going until you know where you have been." Those are words of wisdom from the phenomenal poet and author Maya Angelou. The late Dr. Carter G. Woodson, and "Father of Black History Month," was a Harvard-educated Black American historian who dedicated his life to educating African Americans about the achievements and contributions of their ancestors.

The Ebony Society of Philatelic Events and Reflections (ESPER) is preserving Black History through stamp collecting. ES-
PER, whose initials spell the founder's name, Esper G. Hayes, was organized in 1988 and is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the collecting of stamps and philatelic material depicting people and events related to the African Diaspora and to encouraging and supporting the interest and participation of Black people in all aspects of philately.



Dr. Esper G. Hayes started the club based on her promise to the great Olympian Jesse Owens. Esper met the famous track star at a stamp show in the '70s. She stood in line for hours to get his autograph. When she got to the table, he stood up and shook her hand. She and Jesse were the only African Americans at the stamp show that day. During their conversation, Jesse mentioned that maybe Esper could do something to help Black people take pride in themselves, and she agreed. After he died in 1980, Esper turned her promise into a commitment.

ESPER has close to 300 members in over 32 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Canada, the Netherlands, and New Zealand. Many members visit schools to share their knowledge with children. Others give presentations at stamp shows, local libraries, and civic centers to spread the hobby of philately and the history of African Americans.

Katherine Penn, who regularly attends services at Mother A.M.E. Zion Church, is a member of ESPER. Mrs. Penn recently put together a



beautiful collection of stamps from The Ebony Society of Philatelic Events and Reflections.

Clarence McKnight has used stamp collecting to preserve our history for several years. He, too, visits schools and discusses his stamp collection. His presentations include stamps about social justice and stamps and posters of African American inventors, teachers, military figures, and athletes. He says, "A love of history doesn't have to be dry and dusty. In fact, one of the most interesting ways to explore history is through stamp collecting. Not only does it give you a tangible connection to the past, but it can also be a fun and rewarding hobby."

Harriet Tubman was the first honoree in the Black Heritage series. This stamp was issued February 1, 1978.

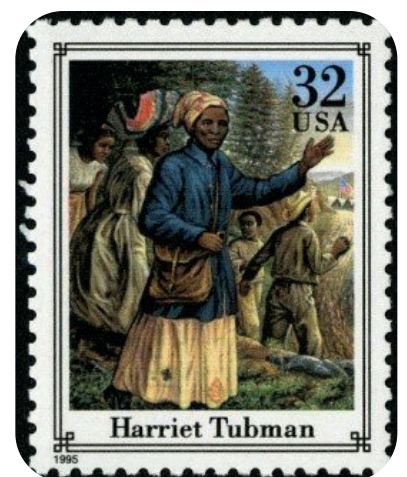
Harriet Tubman's stamp was issued June 29, 1995, in the year of the 130th Anniversary of the end of the Civil War.

In December 2024, *Truthout** published an article by Brandon Tensley, Capital B. Mr. Tensley wrote, "Preserving Black History has never been more vital as the country braces for an administration that's anti-diversity, equity, and inclusion and that has pledged to punish any person who challenges it. At least five of President-elect Donald Trump's picks for positions in his Cabinet and administration are contributors to Project 2025, the conservative manifesto that would radically scale back some of the country's most significant civil rights gains of the past half a century."

Preserving our history is vital. We must keep our history alive.

For more information, visit www.esperstamps.org; contact the Star of Zion Spotlight Editor at polkdebra27@gmail.com for information about Ms. Penn's stamp collection. Also see, YouTube Clarence McKnight – Stamping Through History.

**Truthout* is a nonprofit news organization dedicated to providing independent reporting and commentary on a diverse range of social justice issues.



EMANCIPATION DAY SERVICE AT MOTHER A.M.E. ZION CHURCH

By Debra Chappelle-Polk, Zion Spotlight Editor

February 2025, New York, NY..., On January 1, 2025, an Emancipation Day Service was held at Mother A.M.E. Zion Church in Harlem, where the Reverend Dr. Malcolm J. Byrd is Senior Pastor. Rev. Byrd said, "Just as the Watch Night Service was not a New Year's Eve celebration, this is not a New Year's Day celebration. This is Emancipation Day, and 'the mere fact that we're here is a testament to our survival skills.'" He told those gathered that the nation's first Emancipation Day Service was held on January 1, 1863, at Mother Zion Church. On that day, Frederick Douglass was the preacher. "On January 1, 2025", he said, "God has blessed us with an upgrade – the Reverend Dr. Suzan Johnson-Cook, a woman of God." He added, "To say that she is brilliant would simply be an understatement." Dr. Cook is a U.S. presidential advisor, pastor, theologian, author, activist, and former United States Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom.

Dr. Cook thanked "the imitable" Rev. Malcolm Byrd for extending the invitation to preach. She wished family, friends, and her "co-sojourners in this gospel ministry" a Happy New Year. She said, "It is good to be back home in Harlem, and it is fitting that we celebrate this day of emancipation and liberation with a word from the Lord at Mother Zion, where the first Emancipation Day service was held."

Rev. Cook read Jeremiah 29:11, "*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future,*" and Isaiah 43:18. "*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.*" She said she wanted to preach on the theme, "If you see something, then you got to say something."

Rev. Cook said Isaiah 43 gives us the remedy, the recipe, the reasoning for how we are going to get ahead in 2025, and the only way to go is forward. She said, "Forget those things holding us back and stop holding onto things holding us back. Twenty-twenty-four is gone. The only things that stay out of season are institutions, even churches." She gave a few humorous examples to make her point. She said God is telling us to get the old stuff out the way --- I'm about to blow your mind. "Can't you see it?" she asked. "Well, if you see something, then you've got to say something. God is giving us a vision of where we're going. It's not insight, nor hindsight, but foresight because He is taking us somewhere."



Rev. Cook said one of her favorite books is *The Other Side of Midnight* by Sidney Shelton, in which the main character goes through difficult times and comes out on the "other side of midnight." She said it doesn't mean we won't have midnights, but God is showing us how to come out on the other side. "That's what ministry is all about...., getting folks to the other side of whatever their midnight is." As a

people, we have to get to the other side of emancipation. "Do not put the car in reverse; put the car in drive." God has plans for us. "I don't care who's in the White House, He is not going to take us down. We've been through narcissistic, racist people before." Liberation is a journey. God has been with us through suffering, slavery, and sacrifices. Now, he's taking us "to stratospheric proportions." She asked, "Can you see it?" He took a Black girl from Harlem to stratospheric heights, working for the first Black president of this country. She asked again, "Can you see it? That's why our ancestors sang *The Lord is Blessing Me.*"

Just as God was with Martin, Malcolm X, Baynard Rustin, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Paul Robeson, He will be with us. If you can see it, then you've got to say something. That also means on Emancipation Day, we've got to do something. We stand on the shoulders of our ancestors who have already done their work. Now, it's our



turn. We still have work to do. We've got to keep on going, always giving glory to God and remembering who we are and whose we are.

The doors of the Church were opened. Before leaving, Rev. Byrd thanked the Paul Robeson Singers for their musical participation and fellow clergy Rev. Audrey Williamson, Rev. Demetrius Lawrence, Sr., and Bro. Kermit Morris for their assistance. He acknowledged community activist Rev. Ruth McDaniel and Adrian Council, Publisher of The Positive Community Magazine.

Rev. Cook delivered the benediction.

Notes: The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church has always fought for social justice. James Varick, the denomination's first Bishop, was a leader in the abolitionist movement in the State of New York. Slavery was abolished in New York State on July 4, 1867. Three weeks later, on July 22, 1867, he died at his home. Originally, he was buried in the Colored Union Cemetery (now Woodlawn). His remains now repose in the crypt at the Dabney N. Montgomery Museum at Mother African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Harlem.

Dr. Suzan Johnson-Cook has served as a policy advisor to President Bill Clinton and later to the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Henry Cisneros, a dean and professor of communications at Harvard University, a professor of theology at New York Theological Seminary, a pastor at a number of churches, a television producer, and the author of nearly a dozen books. She was the first female senior pastor in the 200-year history of the Mariners Temple Baptist Church in NYC, part of the American Baptist Churches USA, and a close friend of the late Coretta Scott King. She is an honorary member of Delta Sigma Theta sorority.

AN ELEVATING EXPERIENCE 2024 MID-WINTER MEETING

By Mrs. Lucy Beamon, Elizabeth City District CED Director
Photos by: Mrs. Lucy Beamon

February 2025, Elizabeth City, NC., The Albemarle Conference is still **ELEVATING** on a high platform of Spiritual Growth experienced during the wonderful Christian Education Mid-Winter Meeting held in Kansas City, Missouri from December 27-30. We had a tremendously **ELEVATED** amount of teaching, activities, singing, and fellowship!



The Albemarle Conference, which consists of The Elizabeth City and Edenton Districts, had 40 members in attendance in Kansas City to witness the inspiring children, youth, and adults to praise God and exalt Him on high. Rev. Dr. Donald Jones, Presiding Elder of the Elizabeth City District, was in attendance along with Rev. Ernest Cole Jr., Pastor of St. James A.M.E. Zion Church, and Rev. Iasia Collier, Pastor of St. Paul and Ebenezer A.M.E. Zion Churches. District Directors and Conference VICYC Officers were also in attendance.

The **ELEVATE 2024** Kick-Off Program on Friday was a wonderful opportunity for the Eastern North Carolina area to sit together and cheer for our Bishop, The Right Reverend W. Darin Moore, Presiding Prelate, and Missionary Supervisor Mrs. Devieta Moore, using signs, maracas, whistles, and noise makers! Episcopal Director Ms. Portia Jacobs "**ELEVATED**" us as she led our team of "cheerleaders," wearing TEAL in support of unity and comradery!



A Roundtable Lunch with CED Conference and District Directors hosted by our motivationally energetic General Secretary, Rev. Patrick Barrett II, allowed a safe space for nonjudgemental conversation about what our strengths or hindrances are as a united team of Zion Educators in our



pursuit of growth in our local churches. We used our phones and other devices to log into an App, which asked various questions about our opinions on a variety of topics. This promoted our engagement and interaction. Rev. Barrett explained the results of our answers and prompted a Q&A session. This conversation "**ELEVATED**" our zeal for Kingdom Building!

We experienced an "**ELEVATED**" night of glamour during The Kathryn G. Brown Black Excellence Gala & Elevation Showcase, which was a marvelously beautiful affair! Dressed in our "*Sunday Best*," we enjoyed in-person and virtual tributes to the late Rev. Kathryn G. Brown. We were in awe of the many lives she touched. Students also received scholarships; two were from our Albemarle Conference! Rev. Iasia Collier, Pastor of St. Paul and Ebenezer A.M.E. Zion Churches, and Mr. Seth Boyd, member of St. James A.M.E. Zion, where the Pastor is Rev. Ernest Cole Jr. Both received \$1,000.00 scholarships and are pictured below with Bishop W. Darin Moore and Missionary Supervisor Mrs. Devieta Moore. We are proud of you!

A huge takeaway was the Devotional Guide, based on Ephesians 3:20, given to each registered guest to refer to after the **ELEVATE 2024** Winter Meeting. The book is a guide shared with us by Editors Rev. Angela Boyd and Rev. Gwendolyn Peters to enrich our faith walk. It's a wonderful way to keep the spiritual fire burning while daily rekindling the Kansas City experience!

Continued from pg 2

Be Supportive – If you desire to assist any of our members, churches or the community, you may send your support to the Western Episcopal District for distribution using the following means:

- 1) Mail check or money order made payable to WED to 2940 42nd Street, Sacramento, CA 95827
- 2) Zelle: 626-639-9687, First Name: Western, Last Name: District
- 3) Givelify: Western Episcopal District A.M.E. Zion Church
- 4) CashApp: \$westernamez

Should you have any questions or concerns, please email me at bishop-melaniemiller110@amezion.org.

May the Lord bless you for your compassion and willingness to help during these challenging times. Your contribution of any kind will not only provide essential aid to those affected by these fires but will also be a testament to God's love and grace at work in our world.

In His Service,

Melanie Miller

Bishop of the A. M. E. Zion Church

Presiding Prelate of the Western Episcopal District

MUSINGS FROM THE LAST QUARTER OF 2024

The A.M.E. Zion International Ministers' Spouses & Widows(ers) Fellowship Prayer Call-in Service Reflective Analysis

By J. Fairbanks Leach

February 2025, Xenia, OH., The A.M.E. Zion International Ministers' Spouses & Widows(ers) Fellowship (IMSWF) "Prayer Call-in Service" earnestly strives to serve as a 'Spiritual Ignition System' for the Spouses and Widows(ers) of Zion Methodism. Our intent is to be all-inclusive and prayerfully connected with District and Conference Fellowships while "Drawing Wide the Circle" of as many Spouses and Widows(ers) in Zion with a Prayer Service curated by the Holy Spirit. Further, we believe if, with prayer, we can ignite Spouses & Widows(ers) of Zion, we can gird up our loins and be an engine with all parts working harmoniously, spiritually, and prayerfully for the journey God has on His agenda for each of us individually and collectively. This was a part of Miss Beulah Crockett's penchant when she initiated the organization of the 'Minister's Spouses and Widows Fellowship' in 1976.

ASSESSING OUR STEWARDSHIP AND FAITHFULNESS DURING THE LAST QUARTER OF THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 2024

October 21, 2024 - "Giving Prayerful Homage to A.M.E. Zion Clergywomen"

We gave prayerful deference to National Clergy Month with the theme. 2nd V.P. Rev. Michelle Long extended 'Gathering Words.' Each participant accepted the call to be a 'Woman of the Cloth': Rev. Patty Smith, NC; Sister Belinda Gibson, IN; Rev. Brenda Hobbs, AR; Rev. Sharon Hawkins, AL; Rev. Ruby Miles, IL; Sister Evera Cammon, AL; Rev. Margaret Anderson, NC; Sister Mamie Armond, NC; Rev. Lula G. Williams, MD; Rev. Andrea Wiley, AL and Rev. Esther Rose, TX. With intention, prayers were offered to cover situations Clergywomen face in their pursuit to preach, teach, and pastor, along with the loss of their spouses. Rev. Margaret Anderson, Past President, offered a special prayer for Bishop Melanie Rogers Miller.

Spirit-filled soloists undergirded the prayers with "Sweet, Sweet, Spirit," "I Will Trust in the Lord," "'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus," "Christ Is All," The Goodness of God," and "Father, I Stretch My Hands to Thee." These are songs Clergywomen hum and sing in their daily pursuits. Veteran Pastor Rev. Esther Rose delivered a spiritually inspiring commentary followed by a compelling rendition of "Hold to God's Unchanging Hand" by Mamie Armond.

We delighted in a boon from the Holy Spirit who had graciously baked a 'Pound Prayer Cake,' and the heat was still misty among callers trying to digest a mountaintop experience when it was discovered that a delightful 'frosting' for our 'Cake' was masterfully mixed and well-prepared at the 52nd Quadrennial General Conference was in our midst. The 'Frosting' was the 2nd Clergywoman elected to the Episcopacy in The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Bishop Melanie Rogers Miller, who accepted our invitation and joined our Prayer Service unheralded by the usual protocol due to the presence of a Presiding Prelate. She had called in to specifically engage in worship. Rev. Michele Long, Zoom Administrator, acknowledged her presence and



invited Bishop Miller to greet the Body. With spiritual and Episcopal mastery, she blessed our Body. The Prayer Service was designed by the Executive Chef of the Heavenly Universe, who fed us sumptuously by the Holy Spirit and then blessed us with an epoch-making 'frosting' for our IMSWF Service. Thank you, Bishop Melanie Rogers Miller, for sharing this service dedicated to the Clergywomen of Zion Methodism. This signal service will be written in the IMSWF narratives as a historical first IMSWF worship occasion with the Chief Episcopal Clergywoman in Zion Methodism.

NOVEMBER 18, 2024 - "Kept for the Master's Use"

The IMSWF has a special artery in our hearts for the widows(ers) of our denomination, and we chose to dedicate our November Service to these special persons. All participants were widows: Rosa Randall, NJ; Winifred Still Davis, NJ; Lucille Gooden, I; Posey Johnson, NC; Lillie Carter, AR; Rev. Sharon Hawkins, AL; Barbara Carr, GA; Brenda Hobbs, AR; Georgia Thompson, DC; Rev. Esther Rose, TX; Lovetta Holmes, IL; Henalmol Hickman, NC; Delores Cowherd, NJ, and J. Fairbanks Leach, OH. The Prelude, "Lord Keep Me Day by Day," was sung by our 95-year-old NJ songbird, Rosa Randall, who set things ablaze early in the Service. Additional musical supplications and affirmations were rendered by Winifred Davis and Lillie Carter, "Take My Life and Let It Be", Winfred Davis, NJ, and Lillie Carter, AR; "God Will Take Care of You," Lillie Carter and Barbara Carr, GA; "The Lord Will Make A Way", "Never Alone", Rosa Randall, NJ; "My Task", Winifred Davis NJ.; "Fill My Cup", Barbara Carr; "Jesus Is All the World to Me", Winifred Davis and Lillie Carter; "I Trust in God"

and “Leave It There”, Rosa Randall. Such music embodied the prayers offered on behalf of our Widows and Widowers. Our departure hymn was a stirring rendition of “Down Through the Years, God’s Been Good to Me” by Rosa Randall. 1st Vice President Delores Cowherd led the Benediction for yet another warm, spirited Service. The Spirit urged us to sing, in our spaces, the Andre’ Crouch version of “Let the Church say Amen.”

DECEMBER 16, 2024 – A Chancel Drama – “BORN to DIE”

Our December Prayer Call-in Service incited many prayers for “The Birth of Jesus” and something that might not seem to be thankful for: His Death. Members of the IMSWF Executive Board were invited to serve as Observers, who explained the distinct parallels of the circumstances between **Jesus’ Birth** and **His Crucifixion**. Soloists musically painted the picture of the similarities being depicted. Jesus was “**Born to Die**”. Each read this article with a dichotomy of glee and sorrow and belted out the Masterpiece by Kenneth W. Louis, who musically declared that Jesus began a stable-born trip in Bethlehem that led Him to a hill called Golgotha and, “**He did all that, Just for Me.**”

The drama began with a Prologue by Rev. Michelle Long, 2nd Vice President, in which the Easter Gospel was proclaimed: “**Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again!**”

The curtain rises as Rosa Randall sings “Bethlehem,” a beautiful song about the Birth and Crucifixion of our Lord and Savior. First Observer Delores Cowherd (1st Vice President) began the story of The Messianic drama; “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” sung by Syteria Puryear (Newsletter Editor), and “Were You There.” As the story unfolds, Winifred Davis renders “Sweet Little Jesus Boy,” “Glory to God” from the Messiah, and “They Crucified My Lord.” Rev. Andrea

Wiley (Recording Secretary) continued as Observer II, relating how they had gone outside an enclosed Inn for his birth, and they had gone outside the Jerusalem wall for his death. Rosa Randall sang “Down at the Cross.” As Observer III, Rev. Wiley took us to yet another scene where Mary began to experience the pain and sorrow of childbirth. “Rev. Sharon Hawkins shed musical enlightenment with “Away in A Manger.” Rev. Wiley reminded us through John 16:21 that “joy follows sorrow.” Observer IV, Belinda Gibson (Parliamentarian), invited us to look over our shoulders to examine the personalities involved in Jesus’ Birth and Death. Winifred Davis questioned Mary, asking if she knew that her Baby Boy was “Heaven’s Perfect Lamb” and if she knew the child she held was the “Great I Am”? Belinda brought to our attention that Joseph possibly wrapped Jesus in swaddling clothes, as did Joseph of Arimathea with fine linen following Jesus’ death. Jeryl Anderson, Treasurer, and Observer V, related the Shepherds’ involvement with Jesus’ birth, and Winifred Davis sang “There’s Star in the East.” Jeryl continued depicting how the Shepherds engaged with the Herald Angel, as did the women who brought spices to the sepulcher. Rev. Hawkins suggested that since we know the story, we must, this very day, “Go Tell it on the Mountain.” Delores Cowherd observed that the Shepherds, like the women at the tomb, were “sore afraid.” Winifred sang “The First Noel,” and Syteria sang “Up from the Grave He Arose.” Jeryl Anderson noted further particulars of “**Jesus being Born to Die.**” The Chapters were closed with Rosa Randall singing “**Just for Me.**” Rev. Esther Rose knitted all these events with our everyday lives. As the curtain closed, Rosa Randall sang “**Because He Lives.**”

The Curtain Dropped on the 2024 IMSWF Prayer Call-in Service. Amen.



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Praise for the Coming King

By Laverna Hargrove
Photo By Deborah Price

The Wilmington District Lay Council sponsored the First Annual Wilmington District Christmas Celebration on December 14, 2024, at Warner Temple A.M.E. Zion Church, 620 Nixon Street, Wilmington, NC.

This celebration was hosted by Mr. Darryl Dyson, newly elected President of the Wilmington District Lay Council.

The Wilmington District, under the leadership of Reverend Dr. Alexander L. Jones celebrated the season of Christmas with Praise! for the Coming King! The spirit of the season was exhibited with vibrant praise in many genres, featuring every department of the Wilmington District.

A unique welcome that told a brief history of Warner Temple A.M.E. Zion Church was given by Mrs. Sonja Green, President of the Warner Temple Lay Council. The welcome set the celebratory atmosphere of the program. A prayer was given by Mr. Aaron Everett, Jr., who was representing the WD Christian Education department.

The scriptural focus, Isaiah 9:6 and Luke 2:10-12 was given by Xavien Bolling of St. Paul A.M.E Zion Church, Bolton, NC, and Mrs. Shelia Monroe, President of the WD Home Missions Workers, respectively.

Mrs. Marva Robinson, acclaimed vocal artist, presented Lord, We Didn't Know Who You Were, and O Holy Night accompanied by Pianist Monnie Swepson. Mrs. Robinson is an operatic soprano and has traveled extensively throughout the United States, presenting her extraordinary talent.

Miss Nalani Ballard, Johnson Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, Leland, NC, presented an original poem entitled The Coming King. Ms. Ballard is a published poet. Her work was published in the Accolades Collection of the American Library of Poetry.

The Wilmington District Youth Choir gave a stellar two-part concert directed by Reverend Celeste Navarro, Pastor of Zion Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, Wilmington, NC, assisted by Ms. Juanita James of St. James A.M.E. Zion Church, Leland, NC. The choir consisted of 36 youths from the Wilmington District ages 4-21 from churches all over the district. The choir members are Jeremiah Brown, Majorie Brown, Ivory Graham, Anyia Little, Amelia Jacobs, Isla Johnson, Jefferson McCracken, George Desent, Kamorah Lamb, Zakhari Thomas-Hall, Ericka Brown, Sionna Tucker, Azide Massey, Kylee Pittman, Kaseim Barnes, Avome Thomas-Hall, Yehome McCallum, Jr., Noah McCallum, Jamente Fendersen, Brooke Hobbs-Harris, Aubriana Hobbs-Harris, Kaleb Jones, Isis Jones, Zaraya Navarro, Indya McBride, Kalina Jackson, Avery Bannerman, Kierra Bannerman, Lorizia Powe, Santania Powe, Grace Newton, Malaya Sykes, Alora Trotter, Jean Turner, Camden Ross, Cannon Paige.

Their first set consisted of What If God, It's Gonna' Rain, and a duet, Emmanuel, by Zaraya Navarro and Indya McBride. The WD Youth Choir began the second set dressed in festive red shirts and dark pants in an original procession step to the stage. The second set consisted of Shabach and Jesus is the Reason. Many standing ovations were given during their performances.

Santa (Rev. Dr. Jermaine Armour, Pastor of St. Luke A.M.E. Zion Church, Wilmington) made a surprise visit to give a selection of his theme song, Jingle Bells, to bring wishes for a Merry Christmas and



to make sure everyone knew the meaning of Christmas using the candy cane with scriptures that tell the story of Jesus. He and his elves made this special trip to make sure all that were present received a gift as they left the celebration. Gifts are demonstrations of love, not whether you have been bad or good. When you give or receive gifts because of love, you have celebrated the greatest gift of all time. The jolly ole elf had to cut his visit short due to making preparations for upcoming commitments.

Each member of the choir received a Christmas stocking filled with treats during the cast reception of pizza, refreshments, and desserts following the program. The choir directors, program participants, Presiding Elder, and Mrs. Jones were given gifts from the Wilmington District with love. Gifts of love and appreciation were presented to the choir directors and to the Presiding Elder and Mrs. Jones.

The Wilmington District Lay Council extends many thanks to the churches, pastors, departments and parents of the Wilmington District, the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., Davis Funeral Home, John H. Shaw and Sons Funeral Home, and Domino's Pizza for their generosity in bring this project to fruition.

Presiding Elder Alexander Jones, Sr. cited this event as the best Christmas gift that could be given anywhere because of the enthusiasm not only of the choir and its directors but also of all in attendance; because of the cooperative efforts of the churches, departments, and communities; and because of the Christmas atmosphere of love and hope that saturated the place. He, in very definitive terms, acknowledged the efforts of the Youth Choir members, their parents, and their directors in bringing together a group of youth of an expansive range of ages from churches that cover the three counties that comprise the Wilmington District. "This choir is the crowning event to the 2023-2024 Cape Fear Conference year and is a testament that God has a plan and has given us a place in His plan."

The Wilmington District lay council has begun the planning process for the Second Annual Wilmington District Christmas Celebration 2025.

The Western West Africa Episcopal District Joint Check-Up Meeting

By Rev. Derek Ben Kwofie
Photos By Media Team, WWAED

The Joint Check-Up Conference for the Western West Africa Episcopal District of The A.M.E. Zion Church was an inspiring and forward-looking event. It began with a moment of solemn praise led by Rev. Righteous Brako, followed by a prayer. The Bishop's address set the tone, highlighting leadership as the Church's greatest challenge, emphasizing that with strong leadership, other challenges would be addressed.

collective effort in its realization. He introduced Mr. Edward Ampoma as the new Director of Audit to ensure financial integrity within the Church and acknowledged the importance of improving communication across districts.

The theme for 2025 was revealed as *The A.M.E. Zion Church, Serving the Present Age; Com-*



The Bishop introduced key initiatives, such as revitalizing the Missions imperative of The A.M.E. Zion Church and bringing the Board of Bishops to Ghana, both of which were well received. He also shared significant achievements under his leadership, including the transition of many churches from meeting under trees to having proper chapels and the Church's growing influence within ecumenical organizations.



mitting to Our Mission, with study materials to support this vision. The conference also celebrated milestones, including the dedication of a new facility at the Afrancho Teaching Hospital and the Bible Bee Team's success.



Looking to the future, the Bishop unveiled the Retreat and Conference Center Project, a 5-10-year vision, and emphasized the importance of



Overall, the Joint Check-Up Conference was a vibrant and hopeful gathering, full of energy, as the Western West Africa Episcopal District looks toward a brighter future with strengthened leadership, mission focus, and commitment to the Church's vision.



Spiritual Emphasis Week: Laying the Foundation of a Welcoming Church

By Laverna Hargrove

The Wilmington District Director of Evangelism, Reverend Nathaniel Johnson, led the charge for the district to becoming a welcoming church on Sunday, January 5 at St. Andrew A.M.E. Zion Church, Wilmington, NC with Reverend Patricia Smith, host pastor.

Reverend Johnson began his ministerial journey in 1997 under the leadership of Reverend Dr. Terry L. Jones, then Pastor of Warner Temple A.M.E. Zion Church, Wilmington, NC. Over the 26 years, he has pastored several churches in the Cape Fear Conference. He has fruitfully pastored Summerville A.M.E. Zion Church, Leland, NC, for the past 13 years. Since 2022, he has guided the Department of Evangelism by providing resources, planning and executing events that strengthen discipleship, and giving training assistance for effective evangelistic efforts at the local churches. He also works closely with the directors of evangelism at the conference and episcopal levels to foster growth. He has led the Wilmington District to facilitate Spiritual Emphasis Week, Holy Week Services, District Revival, and evangelism training sessions. As the Director of Evangelism, his board is comprised of every member of the Wilmington District. He is poised to use the talents of all who willingly come to participate and all of those who provide feedback. One of the guiding forces in planning and executing evangelism projects is to listen to the feedback from local congregations



The Spiritual Emphasis Week Event format combined two in-person services and four virtual presentations by four of the district's pastors that discussed the book by Thom Rainer, *Becoming A Welcoming Church*.

Spiritual Emphasis Week (January 5-10, 2024) in the Wilmington District began with a reminder from Reverend Nathaniel Johnson, the Wilmington District Director of Evangelism and Pastor of Summerville A.M.E. Zion Church, Leland, NC, that before we can welcome anyone to the 'house,' we must first have a 'house,' and that 'house' must be built on a secure foundation. Reverend Johnson, using Matthew 16:13-18 as the focus scripture, introduced the topic, "A Solid Foundation," by using his melodious baritone voice to lead his choir in *My Heart is Filled With Praise*. The purpose of a foundation is to provide stability, withstand threats from the inside out and from the outside in, and foster all other aspects of being a home. To be a welcoming church, the mission of Christ is central. The church is a body of believers, not the place where the body of believers meets. The foundation is strengthened by the membership, secured in the Word of God, and safeguarded by Christ, who was, of all things, welcoming. The church can and will make a difference in our neighborhoods, communities, and even our world by becoming welcoming.



Monday evening, Reverend Dr. Charleean Mapson, Pastor of Evergreen A.M.E. Zion Church, Delco, NC, led the study of the book *Becoming a Welcoming Church* by Thom S. Rainer, giving great emphasis to the author's purpose: (1) to set aside preconceived notions about your church, (2) to look at your church more honestly and clearly; and

(3) to do what it takes to be a welcoming, gospel-centered church. Dr. Mapson invited the Zoom audience to respond to the discussion using the tools available to them through Zoom. Dr. Mapson called Chapter 1 the 'wake-up' call chapter to put oneself in the shoes of a first-time guest and apply the hard question, "If I were not already a member here, would I become a member here?" Rainer gives some avenues to explore that will help answer this question, including surveys. The 10 most important survey findings were discussed considering personal experience of Dr. Mapson and members of the Zoom audience. Some of these findings, such as lighting, were a total surprise to be found high ranking reasons for not returning to a church. The digital age has moved the front door of the church to become the website of the church; if a church does not have a website, social media platforms can and should be used. The foundation of chapters 1 and 2 is comprised of relevant, accessible information about the church, genuine, authentic practices by members of the church, and recognizing that what is now being practiced is not working effectively to attract guests to become disciples. No church is perfect, but to want to be a church where worshippers and guests feel they fit and belong is the optimum goal for making disciples.



Tuesday evening, Reverend Jermaine Armour, Pastor of Saint Luke A.M.E. Zion Church in Wilmington, NC, presented Chapter 3: Signs and Sites of Becoming A Welcoming Church. Using a description from Rainer, "A Resurgence Not Yet Realized," Dr. Armour began with a caution that there is always room for improvement. Room for the status quo is not an option. He dispelled the myths presented in the book using his church as an example, thus showing that though signage is present and their website is being reconstructed, there is room for improvement at the first church of the district. Dr. Armour reiterated the initial premise of Reverend Nathaniel Johnson: the foundation must be Christ-centered so that the welcome comes from within and is driven by the mission of Christ, which he calls the intrinsic source. No stone should be left unturned when announcing the presence of our churches because different age groups use different platforms when seeking information. We must be intentional when inviting guests to our churches, ensuring the welcome is heartfelt and warm and encouraging guests to return. In conclusion, Dr. Armour agreed with the author in his conclusion that good signage and sites reflect the church's hospitality and should be done in such a way that it can be sustainable and repeatable.

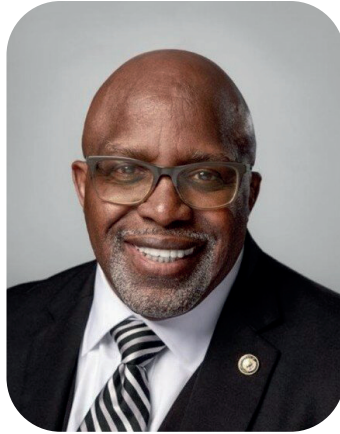


Chapter 4 of the book study, *Safe Church/Clean Church*, was led by Reverend Dr. Mary Nixon, Pastor of Walters Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, Bolton, NC. Dr. Nixon placed emphasis on the second objective of the author's purpose to look at the church more honestly and clearly so that a "let it go" approach can be adopted in ridding the church of unpreserved, uncared-for items such as outdated hymnals that have somehow become monuments of clutter to the work of those who have gone before the current generation. Such conditions 'reflect the energy of leadership,' can become safety hazards, insurance issues, and deter guests. Dr. Nixon advised that the church should (1) conduct a member survey of



the property; (2) inventory all the property of the church; (3) conduct a safety check using a safety checklist from the church's insurance company; (4) organize a church cleanup/cleanout day and (5) document the success of the project from objectives to conclusions and reactions. The second part of Safe Church/Clean Church dealt with keeping children safe while they are attending church services. Dr. Nixon said the time has long gone when we can take someone's word for who a person is or is not. Use official documents issued by agencies that apply objective criteria to determine if someone has the capability to care for children. Dr. Nixon concluded her presentation by reminding the listeners that "all we do is done for Christ and the upbuilding of His kingdom."

Chapters 5 and 6 of Becoming a Welcoming Church were presented by Reverend Dr. Clifford Barnett, pastor of Warner Temple A.M.E. Zion Church, Wilmington, NC. Dr. Barnett compared the Soup Nazi of the 1990's sitcom to the greeters at a national big box store chain. Exploring the characteristics of both, he then posed the questions, which one would you feel most welcome, and why would you return to the atmosphere and treatment of the soup nazi restaurant? Greeters are strategically placed with specified duties and are the first 'physical responders' of the church. They have perfected the open-arm welcome technique. Dr. Barnett advised that every church, regardless of physical size or budget, should have and maintain a welcoming center. It should contain important information that creates interest in the church, list its services, and give a brief overview of its ministries. The path to becoming a welcoming church must be varied, changed, involving, and evolving. When we



continue to do the same thing, we get the same results. Living in this different culture whose values are different from the values we grew up with, we must still be on a quest for everyone to become a part of the body of Christ; we cannot wait for them to come to us. We must go after them.

The Path to Becoming a Welcoming Church, as seen through the eyes of the laity, was expressed by Darryl Dyson, Wilmington District Lay Council President, and Trudy Evans, Conference and Episcopal Director of Ushers. Mr. Dyson began by asking the audience, "Did you read chapter 7?" Thom S. Rainer did not write chapter 7 of this book. Chapter 7 is the chapter we, individually and corporately, will write. How will we best use the information presented in the six chapters of the book? How have we digested the suggestions and conclusions presented through surveys, secret shoppers, interviews, and introspective examinations? It begins, Mr. Dyson says, when we reexamine our purpose and remember for whom it is we are working. The process evolves but never ends. Mrs. Trudy Evans cautioned the audience that greeters and ushers are two different ministries and that combining them is not a good idea. She advised that ushers in their dress and deportment reflect their duties to set the atmosphere for worship, be welcoming to new and returning worshipers, and minimize distractions to worship. She advises her ushers to have a special devotion the morning before they take on their duties and treat each worshiper as though they were angels sent to brighten the day.

The Friday evening session of Spiritual Emphasis Week was scheduled to be a town hall platform, giving pastors and laity an opportunity to ask questions about the presentations, get information on how-to's, and share planning suggestions on how churches can write their Chapter 7. However, this session had to be postponed because of impending inclement weather.

Connectional Lay Council Elected Offices Open

By Thomascena LeGrand

Dear Laity, greetings in the beloved name of our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

The Connectional Lay Council is convening its Thirteenth Quadrennial Lay Convention in **Winston-Salem, North Carolina, from July 26 to 31, 2025.**

CLC ELECTED OFFICES ARE OPEN FOR THE 2025-2029.

In accordance with the Book of Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and Bylaws of the Connectional Lay Council (CLC), individuals who offer themselves as candidates for election to the position of International President, First Vice President, Second Vice President, Recording Secretary, Treasurer, Financial Secretary and Chaplain of the CLC must have been a member of the CLC for a minimum of four (4) consecutive years. Candidates must obtain letters of recommendation from their Pastors, Presiding Elders, and Presiding Bishops.

Candidates who wish to be considered for an office in the CLC will need to send an email indicating their interest in the desired position to Mrs. Thomascena L. LeGrand, Chair, CLC Election Committee at tlegrand@nc.rr.com, or send a letter by mail to the CLC Office - PO Box 26770, Charlotte, NC 28221-6770, Attn: Mrs. Thomascena L. LeGrand, Chair, Election Committee.



Qualified Candidates will receive an application using the same method the request was received unless otherwise requested.

Following the receipt of the applicant's letter:

1. **The CLC Application and CLC Candidate's Package will be sent to the applicant and must be returned within 45 days to be eligible for the interview.**
2. **Following receipt of the applicant's CLC Application and CLC Candidate's Package, the applicant will be contacted to schedule an interview.**
3. **Following the applicant's interview, the applicant will be notified within one week of their eligibility to campaign for the respective Elected Officer's position.**

***Candidates are NOT allowed to campaign until the Application process is complete.**

***The Interview process must be completed 90 days before the start of the CLC Convention, July 26, 2025.**

In His Service,

Mrs. Thomascena L. LeGrand, Chair
CLC Elections Committee

Mr. Joseph King Davis, Jr., International President
Connectional Lay Council, A.M.E. Zion Church

LUMINOUS PAST YEAR ENDING HIGHLIGHTS OF THE LOVING LUMINOUS LOUISVILLE DISTRICT

By Y. Michelle Washington

Lifting the LORD in the Loving Luminous Louisville District – “GOD IS ABLE”

What was once a painful eyesore in the community has now become a purposeful blessing to others. Isaiah 61:3 fittingly describes what the Lord has done for the Hughlett Temple A.M.E. Zion Church family led by Pastor Rev. Dr. Valerie J. Washington of the Kentucky Conference, Louisville District, where the Presiding Elder is Rev. O. Lacy Evans. The Lord has consoled those who mourn in Zion, gave them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified. God has been glorified through their planting, cultivating, and sewing a seed.

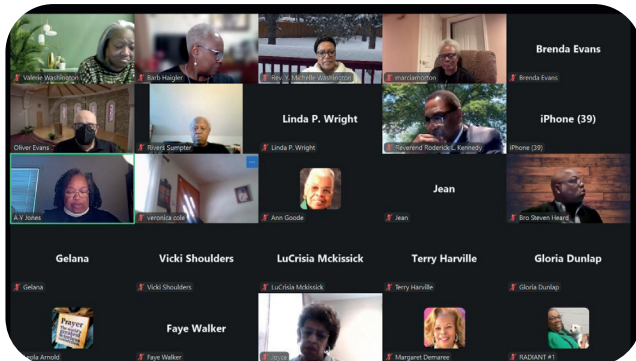
According to Rev. Dr. Valerie Washington, one day in 2014, three men of Hughlett Temple Church were outside the kitchen looking at the apartments parallel to the church, and one of the men, who was in a wheelchair, stated, “Pastor Washington, if we had the apartments, I could come to church every Sunday” since he had to take public transportation, Transit City Authority of River City (TARC) 3 bus to attend church. It usually took 2 hours to get to church and 2 hours for this man to get back home. According to Pastor Valerie, “My wheels went to clicking, I started praying, and God started working. The following week, one of the members was cutting the grass, and a gentleman approached him and asked, “Do you think your Pastor would be interested in purchasing these apartments.” He said, “Yes, let me call her. She is out of town.” He was a bank employee, and the apartments were being auctioned off the next week. Of course, I say yes.”

While at an evangelism meeting at Black Mountain, NC, the then Episcopal leader, Bishop Darryl B. Starnes Sr., was there where Pastor Washington presented her idea to receive episcopal concurrence to move forward. Reverend Dr. Washington called a member’s meeting and agreed to get a loan from whatever institution, and the church agreed to a loan, pledges, and asked each member who could give \$1,000.00 toward the purchase. At the auction, the church was able to obtain two of the three apartments that week and the other one the following week. All of the apartments needed major repairs and renovations. The plan was to renovate the apartments one at a time and use any profits to renovate the next one, so funds were desperately needed. The church applied for a four-million-dollar grant from the Louisville Metro government and was sent a letter that, per Pastor Valerie’s words, “graciously turned us down.” Yet we have not because we ask not. Determined not to be denied, the church continued to pursue its goal and hired grant writers while keeping up with the city code and building requirements notices.



The hiring of grant writers still did not produce the funding needed, and then it is 2020, and someone asked the Pastor are you sure you heard from God. Perhaps we should just tear them down and extend the parking lot. Rev. Valerie just smiled and said, “Yes, I am sure. It is in his time.” Praise God for A.M.E. Zionite connections. We are a connectional church, and it always helps to have connections in life.

The late Ben Richmond, who at that time was President of the Urban League of Louisville, Kentucky, and since Pastor Washington knew Mr. Richmond’s parents in Jackson, MS., she contacted Mr. Richmond as soon as Hughlett Temple A.M.E. Zion church had the apartments. Mr. Richmond connected Pastor Washington with Mr. Kevin Dunlap, the president of Rebound. He helped prepare the first grant and has been there from the beginning. Mr. Dunlap stated he was tired of us trying, and if we would give it to him, he would get it done, and in June 2021, the grant was approved for 1.2 million dollars. What the devil meant for bad (one of the apartments an arsonist burned the building), but God meant it for our good. The grant was amended for \$1.4 million, and after much legal clarification, the work started in December 2022. The dedication took place in March 2024, and three buildings with 12 apartments are all rented as low-income housing to help with the housing crisis of those in underserved communities in our city. To God be the glory!



ADDITIONAL LUMINOUS LIGHTS IN THE LOUISVILLE DISTRICT has proved true the saying the family that prays together stays together as Jones Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church in New Albany, IN, where Rev. Y. Michelle Washington, Pastor, witness the church’s long-time church members and married couple, Dr. Irving Joshua and Mary Joshua received community awards and recognition. On May 8, 2024, Dr. Irving Joshua received the distinction of having the New Albany Housing Authority dedicate a building, the “Dr. Irving Joshua Security Center,” for youth engagement in his honor because of his selfless dedication and determination to enrich the lives of youth and young adults in church, in college and in the community. The building will be a place where youth in the housing community come after school to study, interact with others, and learn. A safe space dedicated to them.



Later in the year, on September 14, 2024, Mrs. Mary Joshua, wife of Dr. Joshua, was recognized by The Community Women for Unity and Equality organization in New Albany, IN, and received the honor as the “Grandparent of the Year”

attended by her pastor, church members, and family. The Louisville District began 2024 with their continued observance of Spiritual Emphasis Week and continued in January 2025 observing spiritual emphasis week as instruction was led by Rev. Valerie Washington, Hughlett Temple A.M.E.Z Church, and Rev. Barbara A. Haigler, Broadway Temple A.M.E.Z Church. Although January 2025 in Louisville district was a snowy beginning, the fire of the Lord illuminates our hearts as Rev. Audrey Jones, District Evangelism Coordinator and Hughlett Temple A.M.E.Z church member, closed our Spiritual Emphasis Culmination service via Zoom on 01/11/2025 with passionate message ‘being committed to our mission requires the church to pray God will send workers to minister to the lost’ reminding us compassionate workers are needed, and the harvest is everywhere.

The South Atlantic Episcopal District Welcomes Bishop Eric and Missionary Supervisor Jean McMurray Leake

By Linda Jones, Palmetto Conference

The Kenneth Monroe Transformation Center was the setting for the grand celebration of praise to God for sending The Right Reverend Eric L. Leake and Missionary Supervisor Jean McMurray Leake to lead the South Atlantic Episcopal District (SAED). In addition to hundreds of clergy and laity of this Episcopal District in attendance, there was a multitude of family, friends, and former parishioners who traveled great distances to show their love and respect to Bishop and Mrs. Leake. The proverbial red carpet was rolled out for the honorees as the officers, members, family, civic and community officials strode to the podium to welcome and offer loving tributes.

The Celebration Committee led by the Reverend Eldren Morrison and Mrs. Chantay Forney-Bouler did a tremendous job of assembling a cadre of presenters who expressed their love and appreciation for the Leake’s 40 years of stellar service in the ministry. Salutations of welcome and congratulatory remarks were expressed by the Rock Hill City Council Ward 5, the Honorable Perry Sutton, Rock Hill District Superintendent, Dr. Tommy Schmolze, President of Livingstone College, Dr. Anthony J. Davis (via video) Interim President of Clinton College, Ms. Archinya Ingram, and Community Activist, Ms. Gwendolyn Finley. Reflections and tributes continued to flow from the Honorable Robert Stucks, Reverend Dr. Joel D. Miles, Bishop Warren M. Brown, Retired. Family tributes included Reverend Charles Mathews, nephew, Mrs. Benita McGuine, and Dr. Barbara Johnson, sisters, and Mr. Elijah Leake, son.

There were also numerous presentations and tributes from the Episcopal Conference and District Ministries: Ushers Ms. Maxine Tunstall, Christian Education-Mrs. Yolandar Knox, Lay Council-Mrs. Loranda Melton, Ministers Spouses & Widow(ers)- Mrs. Marilyn Scurry, India Annual Conference-Ms. Florence Mahita Mare and Women’s Home and Overseas Missionary Society- Reverend Patricia S. Smith and, as the senior Presiding Elder of the South Atlantic Episcopal District, the Reverend Dr. John Paul Ruth.

Bishop and Missionary Supervisor Leake were given a huge replica of a key, not a key to the city, but a key to the hearts of the members of the South Atlantic Episcopal District. In her response, Supervisor Leake, who was warmly presented by Missionary Supervisor Aurelia Brown, Retired, expressed her extreme gratitude and love to all the attendees for coming and sharing in this beautiful celebration. Bishop Leake, upon being presented by Bishop Michael A. Frencher, Sr., Retired, thanked God for the gracious hospitality shown to him and the Leake family. He also thanked God for partnering them with the SAED to advance God’s kingdom for such a time. He noted, “The Lord has been good to all of us.” He cited the scripture from Isaiah 41:10, noting that “These are words that will guide us through 2025



and beyond. They are promises that we can live by and count on. *“Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous hand”.*

The Welcome Celebration came on the heels of Bishop Leake’s first Winter Convocation in the SAED, which was coordinated by the Winter Convocation Committee Chairpersons, Reverend Dr. Jerret C. Fite, and Reverend Angela W. Boyd. In addition to the spirit-filled worship services and informative workshop sessions, Bishop Leake introduced and promoted the ministry of HELP, Health, Evangelism, Leadership, and Prayer. The workshop sessions were effectively led by a group of powerful presenters: Reverend Charles Mathews-Health, Reverend Dr. Eleazer Merriweather-Evangelism, Reverend Dr. Tajuan Kyles - Leadership for Clergy, Reverend Crystal Burns-Leadership for Laity and Reverend Cathy Henderson - Prayer. The preached word for HELP brought during the worship service was offered by Reverend Sandra Sistare - Health, Reverend Dr. Christopher Tony White - Evangelism, Reverend Leconte Nedab - Leadership, and Reverend Alyce Walker Johnson- Prayer.

God was praised throughout this glorious three-day Convocation, Ordination of 6 Deacons and 14 Elders, a combined productive check-up meeting, and culminated with an awesome Welcome Celebration. To God be the glory for all He is doing within the South Atlantic Episcopal District with Bishop Eric L. and Missionary Supervisor Jean McMurray Leake at its helm.

Groundbreaking Ceremony: Western West Africa Episcopal District New Retreat and Conference Center in Edumfa

By Rev. Roderick J. Josey, Education Editor
Photos By J.C. Price Media Team

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Western West Africa Episcopal Districts, made history on Saturday, October 26, 2024, with the groundbreaking ceremony for a new retreat and conference center in Edumfa, Central Region, Ghana. This transformative project marks a significant milestone in the church's mission to establish a serene and state-of-the-art facility for spiritual retreats, conferences, and community events.



The event was attended by prominent leaders, including Bishop and Missionary Supervisor Hilliard Dogbe, the Bishop's Deputy for the Ghana Region, Rev. Seth Coleman, and Project Chairman Prof. Adinyira. They were joined by members of the Retreat Center Team, the Episcopal Cabinet, Presiding Elders, pastors, and church members from across the Western West Africa Episcopal District.



The day began with a prayer for traveling mercies led by Rev. Anthony Nartey in Winneba, as attendees prepared to journey to the ceremonial site in Edumfa. The atmosphere was filled with spiritual anticipation and unity as church leaders and members gathered to dedicate the project to God.





During the evening session, Rev. Anthony Nartey led a powerful time of prayer. Bishop Dogbe delivered an inspiring message, emphasizing the need for collective transformation in attitudes and behaviors to align with God's vision for the church. "To achieve His set target," he said.



The retreat and conference center are envisioned as a beacon of faith and fellowship, providing a space for spiritual growth and community engagement. This groundbreaking event not only celebrates the tangible beginning of the project but also reflects the unwavering faith and dedication of The A.M.E. Zion Church in the Western West Africa region in advancing God's kingdom.



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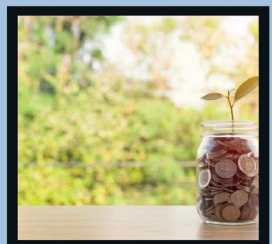
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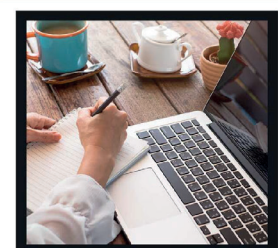
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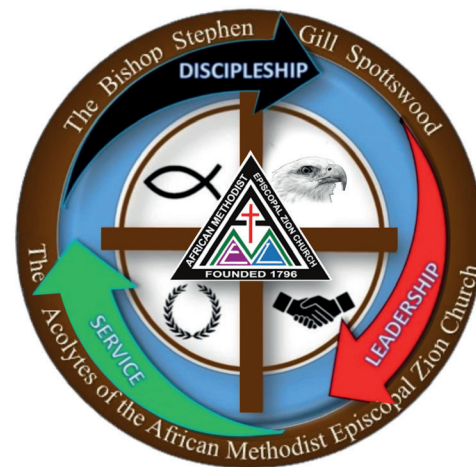


On-Campus and Online Classes Available



STAY LIT!

Miss Samia Richardson, President
Simon Temple AME Zion Church
Fayetteville, NC



**THE 145TH ANNUAL SESSION
OF THE CENTRAL NORTH CAROLINA CONFERENCE**
NOVEMBER 7 - 10, 2024

**HOST CHURCH
SIMON TEMPLE A.M.E. ZION CHURCH**
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MRS. DEVIETA C. MOORE
MISSIONARY SUPERVISOR,
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**HOST PRESIDING ELDER:
PRESIDING ELDER JOSEPH
AND MRS. SANDRA BROWN**



ACOLYTES HONOR OUR VETERANS



Acolytes saluted the Veterans in honor of Veterans Day.

(Left to right
Amere Neal, Mekhi Small,
Aaleyah Martin, Za'qiyah
Dewberry)

St. Stephens AME Zion Church
Gastonia, NC

Rev. Dr. Carolyn Dewberry, Pastor

ACOLYTES PARTICIPATE IN HOLY BAPTISM



On Sunday,
November 10,
2024, the Bishop
Stephen Gill
Spottswood
Acolytes of
Freedom Temple
AME Zion
Church located
in Baltimore,
MD.

participated in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. The Acolytes held the Book of Discipline and microphones as the ministers led by Rev. Dr. R.J. Chandler Sr., performed the baptism of two infants and one child.

The Acolytes continue to play a pivotal role during worship in the life of the church.

SAVE THE DATE

ACOLYTE VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

THEME: THE SEASONS OF CHANGE
Ephesians 4:20-24 - "ALL thingz NEW!"

Rev. Dr. R.J. Chandler Sr., International Director of Acolytes

\$25.00 Registration

MEZTV

MORNING PREACHER
Rev. Irene R. Pyke
Wallace Temple AME Zion Church
Bayonne, New Jersey

AFTERNOON PREACHER
Rev. Quavon Newton
St. Stephen AME Zion Church
Asbury Park, New Jersey

**3.29.25
11AM - 3PM EST**

Upon the decision of the 52nd Quadrennial Session of the General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Acolytes are now under

Music & Worship

Bishop U.U. Effiong

Eastern West Africa Episcopal District
Chairman

Nigeria, Central Nigeria, Rivers Nigeria, Lagos-West Nigeria, Mainland Nigeria, Northern Nigeria, Cross River Nigeria, South-Eastern Nigeria, Southern and Akwa Nigeria, Port Harcourt



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

Clinton College Hosts First Beacon Forum of the Year 2025

By Rev. Roderick J. Josey, Education Editor
Photos By Clinton College

ROCK HILL, SC – Clinton College kicked off the new year with its first Beacon Forum, an event that brought together students, faculty, and staff in a moment of inspiration and unity. The college community was especially thrilled to have Interim President Ms. Archinya Ingram address the students, sharing an encouraging vision for the semester ahead.



Adding to the excitement, Clinton College was honored to welcome Board Chair Bishop Eric Leake to the campus. Bishop Leake's presence underscored the strong leadership and spiritual foundation that continues to guide our great institution in its mission to provide excellence in education while fostering Christian values.



The Beacon Forum serves as a vital platform for Clinton College to highlight important updates, celebrate achievements, and reinforce its commitment to holistic student development. The event was a resounding success, setting the tone for a productive and impactful year ahead.



FAFSA Season Is Here!!!

By Rev. Roderick J. Josey, Education Editor

FAFSA Season Is Here! Don't Miss Your Chance to Get Money for School



It's that time of year again — FAFSA season! The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for the **2025-2026** academic year is now open, and students across the country are encouraged to apply as soon as possible. Completing the FAFSA is a crucial step in securing finan-

cial aid for college, including grants, scholarships, work-study opportunities, and federal student loans.

Filing your FAFSA early can make a big difference in how much financial aid you receive. Many states, schools, and scholarship programs award aid on a first-come, first-served basis. The earlier you apply, the better your chances of receiving a more substantial financial aid package. Waiting until the last minute could mean missing out on valuable grant money or other forms of aid.

What You'll Need to Complete the FAFSA

To fill out the FAFSA, you'll need several key pieces of information, including:

- **Your Social Security number** (or Alien Registration Number if you're not a U.S. citizen)
- **Your Federal Student Aid (FSA) ID** (a username and password to log in)
- **Your 2023 tax returns** and any other financial records for you and your parents (if you're a dependent student)
- **Records of untaxed income** (like child support or veterans' benefits)
- **Information on your family's assets** (like savings, investments, and real estate)

What's New for the 2025-2026 FAFSA?

This year's FAFSA features some significant changes aimed at making the process simpler and more accessible. The number of questions

.....
Continued on next page

has been reduced, and the overall process has been streamlined. Additionally, new rules for how parental and student financial information is calculated may impact your eligibility for aid, so it's important to review these changes before you start your application.

How to Apply

You can complete the FAFSA online at studentaid.gov. The application is mobile-friendly, so you can even fill it out on your phone. Be sure to submit your application as soon as possible to increase your chances of receiving aid.

Key Deadlines to Remember

While the federal deadline for FAFSA submission is typically June 30, 2026, many states and schools have much earlier deadlines. Missing these deadlines could mean losing out on certain grants and scholarships. Check your state's financial aid deadlines and your school's priority deadline to ensure you submit your application on time.



Don't Miss Out on Free Money for College

Completing the FAFSA is one of the most important steps in making college more affordable. It's free to fill out, and the potential rewards are significant.

Even if you think you won't qualify for aid, it's worth applying — you may be surprised by what you're eligible for.

Don't wait! FAFSA season is here, and the earlier you apply, the better your chances of getting the financial support you need for college. Take action now and set yourself up for success.



From Canada to Wilberforce: Exploring Why Black Canadian Students Are Choosing HBCUs

By Vann R. Newkirk, Ph.D.

For generations, Black Canadians have shared a deep and intertwined history with the United States, one marked by resilience, migration, and the pursuit of freedom and opportunity. From the 1800s, when an estimated 30,000 Black people escaped slavery via the Underground Railroad to settle in Canada, to modern times, the movement of Black Canadians has often been motivated by a quest for a better future.

In a fascinating historical twist, a reverse migration began in the 1860s and 1870s, with Black Canadians traveling south to attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Among these trailblazers was Hallie Quinn Brown, who left Ontario to attend Wilberforce University, earning a Bachelor of Science in 1873 and becoming one of the first Black women to graduate from college in the U.S. Similarly, former long-term Wilberforce University faculty member Sophia Bethena Jones, was born in Chatham, Ontario. Prior to coming to Wilberforce University, she achieved a milestone as the first Black woman to graduate from the University of Michigan's Medical School in 1880.

Today, this trend continues as Black Canadian students embrace the unique cultural, academic, and personal growth opportunities offered by HBCUs. These institutions, steeped in the legacy of educating Black leaders, provide a supportive environment for students exploring their heritage and building pathways to success. This cross-border exchange reflects a deep commitment to advancing heritage, community, and personal growth.

A Historical Connection to HBCUs

Today, Black Canadian students are continuing this legacy, drawn by the unique cultural and academic environment offered by HBCUs. Institutions like Wilberforce University, Morehouse College, and Spelman College, provide spaces where students can engage with their heritage while building the skills and networks needed to create positive change.

Stories of Modern Black Canadian HBCU Students

Kiora Peart-Williams and Mikayla Clements, both from Brampton, Ontario, are prime examples of this modern movement. As members of Wilberforce University's newly established gymnastics program, they have found not only athletic opportunities but also a sense of belonging.

Peart-Williams, a sophomore, exemplifies the modern-day connection

between Black Canadians and HBCUs. After transferring from Talladega College, Kiora found a welcoming community at Wilberforce, aided by the university's staff, who smoothed her transition. For Kiora, the journey to an HBCU was about more than academics—it was about finding a place where her identity and aspirations could flourish. "I'm grateful to have a school to go to," she shared, emphasizing her excitement for the opportunities that Wilberforce offers both in and out of the classroom.



Similarly, Clements, a first-year biology major, discovered Wilberforce after learning that her initial choice, Talladega College, was ending its gymnastics program. Determined to attend an HBCU, Mikayla embraced Wilberforce's welcoming environment and quickly adjusted to life in the U.S.

"Here in the U.S., people are more social," she observed. "At Wilberforce, specifically, everyone is friendly and kind, especially the staff and professors." Mikayla also appreciates the university's affiliation with The African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church, which aligns with her personal religious beliefs and values.

Their experiences parallel those of Black Canadian students at Morehouse College, as detailed in an article by Matt Kwong in The Toronto Star. Nathaniel Goulbourne, an accounting student from the Jane-Finch neighborhood in Toronto, found inspiration in Morehouse's legacy of excellence, describing the college as an "incubator" for his ideas. Similarly, kinesiology student Jan-Michael Coke, originally from Bolton, Ontario, noted that living in the South and attending More-



house gave him a deeper connection to Black history and heritage.

The Benefits of Attending HBCUs

For Black Canadian students, HBCUs provide a unique blend of academic rigor, cultural engagement, and community support. These institutions offer:

A Sense of Belonging: HBCUs foster inclusive environments where Black students can explore their identities and feel empowered.

Cultural and Historical Context: Institutions like Morehouse and Wilberforce connect students to the rich history of Black resilience and achievement.

Leadership Development: From alumni networks to rigorous academic standards, HBCUs prepare students to lead in their communities and beyond.

Opportunities to “Pay It Forward”: Inspired by the generosity of donors like Bay Street trader Michael Wekerle, students like Goulbourne are committed to returning home to mentor and uplift the next generation.

Bridging Borders, Building Legacies

Canadian Dr. Ian Newbould, former president of Mount Allison University in New Brunswick, Canada, has worked as a consultant with several HBCUs, including Wilberforce, where he spoke last year. “HBCUs provide an opportunity for Canadian students of African heritage to inform their identities by an environment not available in Canada,” he said. “HBCUs have a unique distinctiveness, a caring and inclusive academic environment that would serve them well.”

The continued movement of Black Canadians to HBCUs reflects a powerful exchange of knowledge, culture, and community. By attending these institutions, students like Kiora, Mikayla, Nathaniel, and Jan-Michael not only advance their education but also strengthen the historical ties between Canada and the U.S.

Why HBCUs?

For Black Canadian students like Kiora and Mikayla, HBCUs offer more than just an education—they provide a cultural connection, a sense of belonging, and a unique academic environment that fosters Black excellence. These institutions:

Celebrate Black heritage and culture while nurturing leadership and professional skills.

Offer close-knit communities where students receive personalized attention from faculty and staff.

Promote diversity within a framework of shared history and resilience.

Bridging the Gap

The stories of Hallie Quinn Brown and Sophia Bethena Jones, alongside the modern journeys of students like Kiora and Mikayla, highlight a powerful continuum of Black Canadians seeking educational opportunities in the U.S. By attending HBCUs, they not only achieve academic success but also contribute to a legacy of cultural exchange, solidarity, and progress that transcends borders.

For today’s Black Canadian students, the decision to attend an HBCU is more than a step toward a degree—it’s a step toward reclaiming and celebrating a shared history, discovering new opportunities, and building a future rooted in resilience and excellence.

Sources

Matt Kwong, “Black students from Ontario find hush-puppies, higher education, and their heritage at U.S. college,” *The Toronto Star*, April 17, 2013.

Wilberforce University press release and student testimonials.

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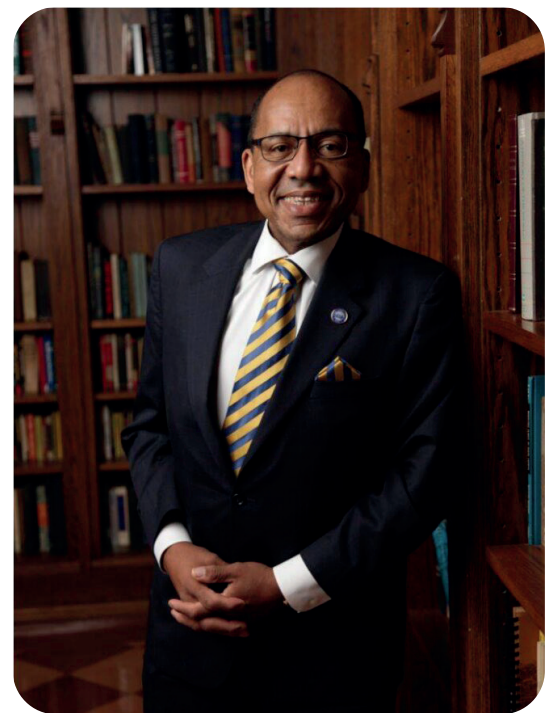
About the Author

Vann R. Newkirk, Ph.D.

Dr. Vann R. Newkirk, the 22nd President of Wilberforce University, brings a distinguished background in higher education and a passion for fostering student success. Before his presidency, Dr. Newkirk served as Provost and Chief Academic Officer at Fisk University, where he played a pivotal role in increasing enrollment and improving retention rates.

A historian by training, Dr. Newkirk earned his Ph.D. in History from Howard University, focusing on African American history and culture. His scholarly work includes several publications exploring the contributions of African Americans to U.S. history.

Under his leadership, Wilberforce University has embraced innovation and growth, launching new academic programs and initiatives to support the holistic development of its students. Dr. Newkirk’s vision emphasizes the importance of community, tradition, and academic excellence, ensuring that Wilberforce continues its legacy as a trailblazer in higher education.



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Jalen Robinson: Livingstone's Legacy Keeper, One Future Blue Bear at a Time

By Ezekiel Perez

Jalen Robinson is proof that Livingstone College doesn't just build students; it shapes legacies. From walking the campus as a student leader with boundless ambition to now traveling as an Admissions Recruiter with a mission, Jalen is a living testament to the transformative power of this storied HBCU. With his roots firmly planted at Livingstone, he's now spreading the seeds of opportunity far and wide.

The Blueprint of a Leader

As a student, Jalen Robinson was engrained in the very fabric of Livingstone. "I had to balance a lot, being in the classroom, working with the school radio station, serving on the Royal Court, playing for campus ministries, and being a part of a fraternity," Jalen says. His roles included serving as Mr. Freshman, Mr. Sophomore, Mr. Junior, and eventually as the 19th Mr. Livingstone College. A position that allowed him to be the face and voice of student advocacy.

However, Jalen didn't stop there. He also represented Livingstone as an Ambassador for Common Cause North Carolina, mentored younger students through the Blue Bear Buddy program, and worked to empower voters as an LC Votes ambassador. These opportunities didn't just fill his schedule; they filled his life with purpose.

"They taught me to see beyond being a student," he reflects. "I built connections, represented Livingstone across the country, and became someone who's recognized in the HBCU world. It has truly shaped who I am today."

For Jalen, moving into the role of Admissions Recruiter was a homecoming for him. "I've been recruiting students and giving tours since my freshman year," he shares. "By the time I was wrapping up my senior year, I already knew I wanted to be part of the admissions team."

What sets Jalen apart is his proximity to the student experience. "I know Livingstone as it is right now. That gives me an advantage over someone who graduated years ago," he explains. "I can relate to students and parents in a way that's fresh and real."

A Livingstone Like No Other



Jalen's pitch to prospective students is polished and personal. He highlights Livingstone's top-ranked culinary program, its innovative Career Readiness Institute that prepares students for internships and jobs starting freshman year, and its scholarship system that stacks academic, athletic, and need-based awards.

"Livingstone may be a smaller campus, but that means bigger connections," he says. "We're a family here, and families take care of each other."

Lessons for the Next Generation

When asked, Jalen's advice for current students, it's as practical as it is heartfelt: "Stay connected to your professors, they're your biggest allies. Learn everything you can about the college so you can represent it well after graduation. And, most importantly, stay balanced. Don't let distractions throw you off course."

As a recruiter, Jalen's goals reach far beyond just bringing students to Livingstone. "I want to help students build their GPAs, mentor them through their college years, and make sure they get the same opportunities I did," he says. He dreams of expanding Livingstone's reach internationally and promoting its STEM and liberal arts programs.

"It's about showing the world that HBCUs like Livingstone aren't just for African-Americans, but they're for anyone ready to succeed," Jalen emphasizes. "The same education you'd get at Howard or A&T, you can find here and with even more heart."

Jalen's success story is also a testament to the transformative impact of the United Negro College Fund, an organization dedicated to providing scholarships and support to students attending HBCUs. During his time at Livingstone, Jalen was a recipient of several UNCF scholarships, which alleviated financial burdens and allowed him to focus on his academic and leadership pursuits.

The UNCF, established in 1944, has awarded over \$5 billion in scholarships, enabling countless students to achieve their dreams of higher education. Jalen credits the organization's support as pivotal in his journey, noting, "The scholarships I received from UNCF weren't just financial assistance but confidence in my potential and a reminder of those rooting for my success." This support reflects the broader mission of the UNCF to ensure that education remains accessible for all.

For Jalen, Livingstone College isn't just where he found his footing; it's where he found his purpose. Now, he's committed to sharing that gift with as many students as possible. Whether through heartfelt conversations with families or inspiring high school seniors to believe in themselves, Jalen is ensuring that the legacy of Livingstone College shines brighter with every new Blue Bear he recruits.

In Jalen's own words: "This place gave me everything. Now, it's my turn to give it back—with interest."



Livingstone College Student Shines at Scholars Showcase, Connects with NBA Officials

By Rev. Roderick J. Josey, Education Editor

SALISBURY, NC – On January 15, 2025, Livingstone College hosted a Scholars Showcase, an event aimed at providing students with access to mentorship, internships, and career guidance from industry leaders. This year's showcase featured a distinguished group of NBA officials who visited the campus to share their expertise and connect with students.

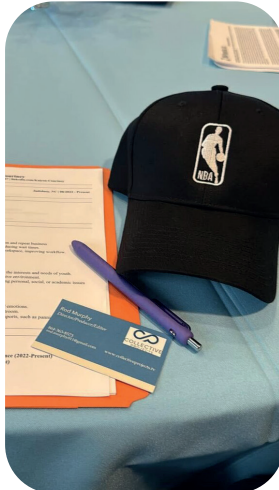
Among the standout participants was Mr. Kaiyon Courtney, a junior at Livingstone College, who joined his peers in seizing this unique opportunity to engage with professionals in the sports industry. The event not only served as an avenue for networking but also offered students a chance to showcase their skills and explore potential career paths.

Mr. Courtney reflected on the experience on his social media, emphasizing the preparation he received from Livingstone College that helped him succeed during the showcase. "Livingstone College helped me create a strong resume and craft an effective elevator pitch, equipping me to make a positive impression on the esteemed NBA guests," he shared.

The Scholars Showcase gave Courtney the opportunity to discuss his aspirations and demonstrate his talent, further inspiring him to pursue a career in sports photography. "Participating in this panel boosted my confidence and provided valuable connections that will help me in my future endeavors," he added.

Livingstone College continues to uphold its mission of empowering students with the tools and resources they need to excel beyond the classroom. Events like the Scholars Showcase highlight the institution's dedication to student success and its ability to connect scholars with influential leaders who can open doors to exciting career opportunities.

Mr. Courtney's experience is a testament to the transformative power of such initiatives, inspiring not only his peers but also future generations of Livingstone College students to dream big and achieve their goals.



Livingstone Honors Students Headed to Notre Dame

By Star of Zion News

Four Livingstone College Honors students will travel to the University of Notre Dame for the institution's Our Futures Weekend, January 30–February 2, 2025. The graduate recruitment event brings highly talented and driven undergraduates who have been historically underrepresented in higher education to the South Bend, Indiana, campus. After undergoing an application and interview process, juniors Christian Oliver, a psychology major from Houston, Texas, Thomyka Valcent, a biology major; computer information systems major Isatu Kruah; and Mia Mason, a music major from Salisbury, North Carolina, were selected among 80 others from institutions across the nation because of their promising performance at a Research 1 rated institution.

Junior Mia Mason said, "I am grateful for this opportunity as I am excited to learn more about their Master of Sacred Music program that could eventually lead me into the Doctor of Musical Arts program. I am ready for the adventure."



During Our Futures Weekend, participants will learn about Notre Dame's advanced degree programs offered through the Graduate School, visit their academic area of interest to tour facilities and interact with faculty, staff, and potential future mentors, hear directly from the Graduate School's admissions team on navigating the graduate application process, discover available financial resources, make connections with other driven peers who share similar interests and goals, network with and hear from current Notre Dame graduate students about their research

and experience, and experience the University's history and traditions.

For more information about Notre Dame's Our Futures Weekend, visit <https://graduateschool.nd.edu/admissions/recruitment/our-futures-week-end/>

Livingstone Presidential Scholars Selected as National BRAID Fellows

By Star of Zion News

Livingstone College freshmen Presidential Scholars Robert Osei Bonsu and Joel Thompson have been selected as fellows for BRAID (Bridge-builders Relating Across Interfaith Differences). An Interfaith America (IA) initiative designed in response to the recent increase of prejudice and polarization in institutions of higher learning, IA selected a diverse cohort of 20 student fellows representing colleges and universities across the nation.



In alignment with IA's commitment to promoting religious and civic pluralism as foundational principles for achieving the common good, the BRAID Fellowship aims to develop a national network of undergraduate student leaders who will foster an ethos of respect, relationship building, and cooperation across differences in the United States. Fellow Robert Osei Bonsu, a freshman from Ghana majoring in Biology, says he is excited to embrace the goals of IA that includes the development of fundamental literacy in interfaith leadership and

bridge building, cultivating meaningful connections with peers and mentors from a variety of backgrounds and institutions, and gaining confidence in engaging and working collaboratively across differences. Bonsu added, "At a time when divisions often dominate headlines, I am humbled to be a part of a platform that explores solutions filled with changemakers to bring our world together."

The defining program feature of BRAID is fellows learning in community (through specialized training and education), from community (through interpersonal dialogue and engagement), and with community (through collaborative program development and facilitation). As principles of interfaith cooperation and bridge building are intentionally embedded into the design, Livingstone's fellows will partner with their Honors Director, Dr. Da'Tarvia Parrish, and a joint mentor across worldviews.

Fellow Joel Thompson said, "As a native of Ghana, a country celebrated for its diversity but not without its challenges, I have seen how religious misunderstandings and misconceptions can sow seeds of division. My experiences have fueled my passion for promoting interfaith dialogue and mutual understanding, and I believe BRAID is the perfect avenue to expand this mission."

The eight (8) month program concludes with a creative narrative capstone project that encompasses student fellows working collaboratively with each other and IA staff to design a medium for sharing their fellowship experiences at IA's annual Interfaith Leadership Summit in Chicago, Illinois.

For more information about Interfaith America (IA) and its programs, visit interfaithamerica.org.

Ministry in Rural Areas and Small-Towns Initiative

By John C. Everett

Hood Theological Seminary has received a grant of **\$1.5 million** from Lilly Endowment Inc. through its Ministry in Rural Areas and Small Towns Initiative. The grant will support the **Institute for Ministry in Rural Areas and Small-Towns at Hood Theological Seminary (HTS)**. The aim of the initiative is to provide resources to help churches in rural areas and small towns enhance the vitality of their ministries and strengthen the leadership of the pastors and lay leaders who guide them.

The Institute for Ministry in Rural Areas and Small-Towns at HTS is designed to help rural and small-town churches in North Carolina as they prioritize and respond to very pressing challenges that Christian congregations and ministries are facing now and will continue to face in the future.

Rev. Damita Wilder, Program Director, and her program coordinator will lead the four-point grant initiatives:

1. Continuing Education Program and Workshops for Rural and



Small-Town Churches

2. Rural and Small-Town Academic Programs
3. Rural and Small-Town Funding Center
4. Rural and Small-Town Information and Referral Center

Dr. Vergel Lattimore, President of Hood Theological Seminary, stated, "He is grateful to the Lilly Endowment for entrusting Hood to be a part of a focused effort to support the many rural and small-town churches and ministries in North Carolina. Hood has a strong history of supporting churches and rural communities and looks forward to impacting these communities in a most positive manner."

Hood Theological Seminary is one of 20 organizations from across the United States receiving grants through the initiative, including colleges and universities, denominational agencies, church networks, and parachurch organizations, among others.

“Our hope is that these grants will provide much-needed resources and support to rural and small-town churches to help them address their challenges and enhance and extend the many ways that they serve their communities,” said **Christopher L. Coble**, Lilly Endowment’s vice president for religion.

About Lilly Endowment Inc

Lilly Endowment Inc. is an Indianapolis-based private philanthropic foundation created in 1937 by J.K. Lilly, Sr. and his sons Eli and J.K. Jr. through gifts of stock in their pharmaceutical business, Eli Lilly and Company. Although the gifts of stock remain a financial bedrock of the Endowment, it is a separate entity from the company, with a distinct governing board, staff and location. In keeping with the founders’ wishes, the Endowment supports the causes of community development, education and religion and maintains a special commitment to its founders’ hometown, Indianapolis, and home state, Indiana. A primary aim of its grantmaking in religion is to deepen the religious lives of Christians, principally by supporting efforts that enhance congregational vitality and strengthen the leadership of Christian communities. The Endowment values the broad diversity of Christian traditions and endeavors to support them in a wide variety of contexts. The Endowment also seeks to foster public understanding about religion by encouraging fair, accurate and balanced portrayals of the positive and negative effects of religion on the world and lifting up the contributions that people of all faiths make to our greater civic well-being.



About Hood Theological Seminary



Hood Theological Seminary (HTS) is a graduate and professional theological school in Salisbury, North Carolina, dedicated to the education and preparation of women and men for bold and creative leadership in the Christian church and for a diverse world. In January of 2024, the Board of Commissioners of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS) reaffirmed the accreditation of Hood Theological Seminary through 2034. The Seminary is approved for the following degree programs: General Theological Studies Certificate, Biblical Studies Certificate, Certificate in United Methodist Studies, Certificate in Christian Education, Master of Divinity, Master of Theological Studies, Master of Arts in Chaplaincy, Master of Arts in Christian Education, Master Arts in Christian Ministry, and Doctor of Ministry. The Seminary is approved by the University Senate of The United Methodist Church (UMC) and is the only Seminary in the United States sponsored by The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (A.M.E.Z).

The HBCU Experience: Something You Will Always Cherish for the Rest of Your Life

By Rev. Roderick J. Josey, Education Editor



Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have long been pillars of education and empowerment for African Americans, providing a space to learn, grow, and excel in an environment rich with culture, history, and community. Attending an HBCU is more than just earning a degree—it’s an experience that leaves a lasting imprint on the hearts and minds of its graduates.



Why Supporting HBCUs Matters: HBCUs were founded during a time when African Americans were excluded from most predominantly white institutions (PWIs). These schools have historically provided Black students with the opportunity to gain higher education while fostering an environment that celebrates Black culture and identity. Today, HBCUs continue to play a crucial role in producing leaders across various industries.

Supporting HBCUs ensures their legacy endures for future generations. These institutions often operate with smaller endowments than PWIs but still manage to produce graduates who make outsized contributions to society. By choosing an HBCU, students are investing in their communities and in the preservation of an essential part of American history.

HBCUs have produced an impressive roster of alumni who have made significant contributions in politics, entertainment, science, and more. Vice President Kamala Harris, a graduate of Howard University, broke barriers as the first female, Black, and South Asian vice president of the United States. Filmmaker Spike Lee, who attended Morehouse College, has used his platform to tell compelling stories of the Black experience. Iconic musicians like Erykah Badu (Grambling State University) and P. Diddy (Howard University) also got their start at HBCUs.



These alumni not only showcase the potential of HBCU graduates but also inspire current and future students to dream big and achieve more.

Excellence in Academics Many HBCUs boast degree programs that rank among the best in the nation. For instance:

- **Engineering:** North Carolina A&T State University is recognized as the top producer of Black engineers in the United States.
- **Medicine:** Howard University and Meharry Medical College have long been leaders in producing African American doctors and health professionals.
- **Business:** Florida A&M University's School of Business and Industry is highly regarded for preparing students to excel in corporate America.
- **Arts and Media:** Spelman College and Morehouse College are celebrated for their strong programs in the arts, often collaborating with institutions like the Atlanta University Center to nurture creativity and talent.

One of the defining features of an HBCU education is the cultural immersion. From homecoming celebrations to step shows and marching



bands, HBCUs offer a vibrant campus life steeped in tradition and pride. These experiences create lifelong bonds and a sense of identity that is cherished by graduates.

As the world continues to recognize the importance of diversity and inclusion, supporting HBCUs is more critical than ever. This can be done through donations, attending events, and simply sharing the stories of these remarkable institutions. Every bit of support helps ensure HBCUs can continue their vital mission.

HBCUs are more than colleges; they are catalysts for change, community, and cultural preservation. Choosing to attend an HBCU is not just about academic excellence—it's about being part of a legacy that uplifts and empowers.

Sources:

1. "Historically Black Colleges and Universities Fact Sheet," U.S. Department of Education, www.ed.gov
2. "The Economic Impact of Historically Black Colleges and Universities," UNCF, www.uncf.org
3. "Notable HBCU Alumni," HBCU Lifestyle, www.hbculifestyle.com



WHOMS Youth Missionary Society Extends Generosity to Clinton College Students

By Rev. Roderick J. Josey, Education Editor

Rock Hill, SC – The Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society (WHOMS) Youth Missionary Society, under the compassionate leadership of Ms. Melva Wright, recently exemplified the spirit of giving through a generous donation to Clinton College. This impactful contribution included food, toiletries, and other essential items that will significantly benefit our student body.

The donation comes at a critical time as students prepare to return for the Spring Semester. The thoughtful provisions will not only ease the transition back to campus life but also serve as a testament to the enduring partnership between The A.M.E. Zion Church and its historic institution of higher learning.

Ms. Archinya Ingram, Interim President of Clinton College, expressed heartfelt gratitude for the meaningful support. "We are deeply moved by the kindness and thoughtfulness of Ms. Melva Wright and the

WHOMS Youth Missionary Society. These essential items will go a long way in supporting our students' well-being and ensuring they can focus on their education without unnecessary worries."

The WHOMS Youth Missionary Society has long been dedicated to serving communities and fostering the spirit of Christ's love through action. Their unwavering commitment to students, particularly those attending A.M.E. Zion-affiliated institutions, highlights the vital role of missions in empowering the next generation of leaders.

As Clinton College opens its doors for the Spring Semester, this donation symbolizes hope and encouragement for students navigating the challenges of higher education. The college community is excited to distribute these much-needed supplies and remains thankful for the support that will undoubtedly have a lasting impact.

To the WHOMS Youth Missionary Society, your kindness and generosity mean the world to Clinton College. Thank you for continuing to live out the mission of The A.M.E. Zion Church and for being a beacon of light and support in the lives of our students.





Rev. Dr. Allison Lee
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The Time Is Now: Standing Up for Our Schools and Our Children

By Rev. Roderick J. Josey, Education Editor



The election season has concluded, and Donald Trump is set to serve as the next President of the United States. Among his bold plans for the next four years are sweeping proposals to reform the U.S. education system. While ideas such as expanding school choice, reducing federal oversight, and limiting the scope of educational content appeal to some, they pose significant challenges—particularly for Black communities and underfunded public schools.



However, let's set aside national politics for a moment and focus on where real change begins: in our local schools, with our children, and in our communities.

Trump's education vision includes increasing school voucher programs that redirect public funds to private schools and enforcing strict controls on how topics such as race, gender, and history are taught. While these policies claim to offer "freedom" to parents, they often leave already underfunded public schools struggling to meet the basic needs of students who depend on them.



For many Black families, public schools are more than just educational institutions—they

are pillars of the community. These schools nurture cultural pride, shape future leaders, and preserve Black history. Policies that siphon resources away from public schools or restrict the teaching of diverse histories threaten to dismantle these essential functions.



While national policies shape the broader framework, the real power to influence our schools lies closer to home than we often realize.

Parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and guardians: it's time to step up. Engaging in Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, superintendent forums, and school board hearings is not optional—it's a responsibility. These are the spaces where budgets are decided, curriculums are approved, and community voices have the power to influence decisions.

For too long, many of us have been silent, allowing others to shape policies that directly impact our children's education and future. The stakes are too high for us to remain passive.

Imagine the impact of every Black parent or guardian in your school district showing up to the next PTA meeting. Picture superintendent forums packed with families asking critical questions about resource allocation and curriculum equity. Envision communities demanding transparency in school budgets and advocating for culturally inclusive teaching materials.

1. **Show Up:** Make it a priority to attend PTA meetings and other school-related events. Virtual attendance, where available, can also make a difference.
2. **Ask Questions:** Don't shy away from tough conversations. Inquire about decision-making processes and who benefits from them.
3. **Collaborate:** Build coalitions with other parents, churches, and community organizations. There is strength in numbers.
4. **Hold Leaders Accountable:** Know who serves on your school board and understand their policies. Vote for candidates who prioritize equitable education for all children.

Black congregations have historically been at the forefront of social justice movements, and the fight for educational equity is no exception. Churches can support schools through mentorship programs, resource drives, and encouraging their members to become active participants in educational advocacy.

We often hear the phrase, **"It takes a village to raise a child."** Now, more than ever, the village must answer the call.

Donald Trump's education plans may dominate national headlines, but our greatest power lies in collective local action. Whether we agree with his agenda or not, we cannot wait for someone else to fix the challenges in our schools. Our children deserve the best education possible, and it's up to us to make it happen.

To every parent, grandparent, and guardian reading this: the time is now. Stand up, speak out, and be the change your child's school needs. Together, we can reclaim our power and ensure every Black child has the opportunity to thrive.

When we fight for our schools, we fight for our future.

Veteran Black TV Performers Getting TV Spotlight



Rev. Dierdre R. Parker
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By R. Thomas Umstead
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Black actors and actresses from the baby-boomer and Gen X generations aren't ready to yield all the plum starring roles on the small screen to their younger counterparts.

Several series starring performers aged 50 and over are launching across multiple platforms over the next few months, joining an already impressive list of programs starring seasoned professionals that includes Angela Bassett (ABC's *9-1-1*) Queen Latifah (CBS' *The Equalizer*), and Harold Perrineau (MGM+'s *FROM*).

As streaming services, broadcast, and cable networks look for quality original content to draw viewers and subscribers, older actors are getting the opportunity to create and star in programming that showcases their extraordinary talent, honed by years of hard work and excellence.

While the TV industry is well served by a young generation of Black performers such as recent Golden Globe winner Zoe Saldana, Emmy Award winners Quinta Brunson, Ayo Edebiri, and Zendaya, as well as Donald Glover, Natasha Rothwell, and Issa Rae, it hasn't shunned our veteran actors.

At least three shows will premiere over the next few months featuring Black actors and actresses over 50 in lead roles. Morris Chestnut portrays medical doctor John Watson in CBS' mystery series *Watson*; Lela Rochon stars as a New Orleans nightclub owner in BET+'s original series *The Family Business: New Orleans*, and George Wallace plays a father working to repair his relationship with his estranged child in Prime Video's comedy series *Clean Slate*.

In addition, Forest Whitaker, this Spring, will reprise his role as 1960s New York City gangster Bumpy Johnson in the fourth season of MGM+'s drama *Godfather of Harlem*, while Wanda Sykes, Mike Epps, and Kim Fields return later this year for the final season of Netflix's comedy



series *The Upshaws*.

Not only are older actors and actresses appearing on the small screen, but they are also getting industry props for their performances. Over 30 seasoned actors and actresses will vie for 2025 NAACP Image Awards across several major television categories this February.

In particular, every nominee in the Outstanding Actor in a Comedy Series category is over 50 years of age: Cedric The Entertainer (CBS' *The Neighborhood*), Damon Wayans (CBS' *Poppa's House*), David Alan Grier (NBC's *St. Denis Medical*), Delroy

Lindo (Hulu's *UnPrisoned*), and Mike Epps (Netflix's *The Upshaws*). Greer also received a Critics Choice Award nomination for his starring role in the medical comedy series.

Other limited television shows featuring veteran actors have also garnered NAACP Image Award nominations, including Peacock's *Fight Night: The Million Dollar Heist*, featuring Don Cheadle, Samuel L. Jackson, and Taraji P. Henson, and TV movies including Netflix's *The Piano Lesson*, starring Jackson, Michael Potts, and Erykah Badu.

Supporting the presence of veteran actors on TV is high television consumption among older Black viewers. A 2024 Nielsen Diverse Intelligence Series report concluded that Black adults spend 31.8% more time with TV each week than the general population. Further, according to Nielsen, Black adults 65 and over – the audience more likely to embrace older, Black TV stars – watch a whopping 71 hours a week, higher than any other demographic.

The actors themselves say that the increase in distribution outlets has provided more opportunities to develop and create new projects as well as explore unique, diverse characters.

"Actors love when you can play characters that can trigger a response or provoke conversation, so it's an exciting time now," said veteran actor Blair Underwood, who spoke to me this past September about his starring role in Starz's provocative drama series *Three Women*. "All these platforms, especially streaming services, need content."

HEALTH & Wellness

February: Month of our History & Our Heart!



Mr. Daman De Leon
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By Daman De Leon, Health & Wellness Editor

Black History Month... Valentine's Day... American Donor Month... Lincoln's Birthday, Washington's Birthday, etc. These are some of the recurring themes either acknowledged and/or celebrated annually during the month of February. However, there is one health theme that takes precedence (at least in the world of medicine) over all of the aforementioned, and arguably rightfully so.

February is American Heart Month. To help the millions of Americans currently living with high blood pressure reduce their risk of heart attack and stroke, the American Medical Association (AMA) is offering six tips that Americans can take to improve their heart health. The release of these tips coincides with the start of February's American Heart Month this week.

"In February, American Heart Month, we encourage all Americans to



take control of their heart health by better understanding and monitoring their blood pressure levels and making healthy lifestyle changes that can significantly reduce their risk of serious health consequences associated with high blood pressure," said AMA President Patrice A. Harris, M.D., M.A. "High blood pressure is the nation's leading risk factor for heart attack and stroke, yet an overwhelming number of U.S. adults are living with uncontrolled high blood pressure—placing them at increased risk for both conditions. By empowering more patients to monitor and control their blood pressure, we will continue to improve health outcomes for patients and reduce health care costs."

The AMA's six tips for improving heart health to reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke, include the following:

Know your blood pressure numbers— visit [ManageYourBP.org](https://www.manageyourbp.org) to better understand your blood pressure numbers and take necessary steps

to get your high blood pressure, also known as hypertension, under control. Doing so will reduce your risk of heart attack or stroke.

Commit to a treatment plan to manage high blood pressure—work with your doctor to create an individualized treatment plan that includes healthy lifestyle changes that you can realistically stick to long-term to help you maintain lower blood pressure and lower your risk for negative health consequences.

Be more physically active—not only is the heart our most vital organ, but it's also a muscle, and like any other muscle, it requires exercise and conditioning. Regular physical activity can help reduce the risk of developing high blood pressure. It is recommended that healthy adults 18 to 65 years of age should get at least 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity activity or 75 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity activity.

Reduce your intake of processed foods, especially those with added sodium and sugar—making simple dietary changes can help you manage or prevent high blood pressure, including eating less sodium, red meat, and processed meats, reducing the amount of packaged, processed foods you consume—especially those with added sodium and sugar, and reducing consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages. Eat foods that are rich in potassium and add more plant-based foods, such as olive oil, nuts, and seeds, to your diet.

Maintain or achieve a healthy weight—take steps to lose weight if overweight. Being 20 pounds or more overweight could put you at

increased risk of developing high blood pressure.

If consuming alcohol, do so in moderation as defined by the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans—up to one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men, and only by adults of legal drinking age.

Be committed to improving your health by leading the charge to prevent and reduce the burden of chronic diseases like cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. Organizations like the AMA will continue its efforts aimed at helping the U.S. achieve no new preventable cases of type 2 diabetes and helping all adults meet their blood pressure goals to ensure patients live richer and fuller lives.

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Teen Dating Violence: Hurt Before Healing

By Daman De Leon, Health & Wellness Editor

Serving as a Public Safety Officer, Educator, and Health & Wellness Advocate is not an extracurricular or just a job to me....it is an actual ministry. I have witnessed how abuse (physical, mental, and emotional) can take a toll on us as humans, and those within the body of Christ are not exempt (Romans 5:3-5; John 16:33).

On January 31st, 2024, U.S. President Joe Biden declared February National Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month to raise awareness and diligently work toward the prevention of this phenomenon. Each year in the U.S., nearly 1.5 million high school students fall victim to abuse from a partner. Young women between the ages of 16 and 24 experience abuse at a rate almost 3x the national average and almost half of dating college women experience abusive behavior. Of those between the ages of 11 and 15 who have been in a relationship, 62% know a friend who has been verbally abused by a partner. More than 1 in 4 teenage girls in a relationship are repeatedly verbally abused. And while 80% of teenagers think verbal abuse is a serious issue for people their age 2, only 33% of teens who were in an abusive relationship ever told anyone about the abuse. What's worse is that half of teens who experience dating violence or rape attempt suicide. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), teen dating violence (TDV) — also called “dating violence” — is an adverse childhood experience that affects millions of young people in the U.S.

Teen dating violence can take place in person, online, or through technology. It is a type of intimate partner violence (IPV) that includes four forms of violence that can occur within the dating relationships



of adolescents and young adults:

Physical violence: the intentional use of physical force, which includes hitting, pushing, shoving, grabbing, restraining, or using strength against someone

Sexual violence: forcing someone to take part in a sexual act (e.g., kissing, touching, sexual intercourse) or a non-physical sexual event (e.g., sexting) when the person does not or cannot consent

Psychological aggression: the use of verbal and non-verbal communication with the intent to cause mental or emotional harm, or exert control over someone

Stalking: a pattern of repeated, unwanted attention and contact that causes fear or concern for one's own safety or the safety of someone else (e.g., family member, close friend)

When any form of dating violence is perpetrated using technology, such as messaging and social media, it is referred to as cyber dating violence or digital dating abuse. Examples include sending sexual pictures of a dating partner to others without consent, sending or posting insulting or threatening messages, and sharing negative rumors about the person.

How can we stop teen dating violence before it starts?

Supporting the development of healthy, respectful, and nonviolent relationships has the potential to reduce the occurrence of teen dating violence and prevent its harmful and long-lasting effects on individuals, their families, and the communities where they live. During the pre-teen and teen years, it is critical for youth to begin learning the skills needed to create and maintain healthy relationships. These skills include knowing how to manage feelings and how to communicate in a healthy way.

All relationships exist on a spectrum from healthy to abusive, with unhealthy somewhere in the middle.

Know & share these five important facts:

1. Long-term effects: Teens suffering from dating abuse often end up being victims of long-term problems like alcoholism, eating disorders, suicidal thoughts, violent bouts, and so on.

2. Widely affected: In the



U.S., about 33% of male and female adolescents are victims of sexual, physical, or emotional dating abuse.

3. S.T.D. scares: Teen girls subject to abuse are six times more likely to become pregnant or contract an S.T.D. or S.T.I.

4. Suicidal scares: A shocking 50% of young adults who experience physical or sexual abuse (including rape) attempt to commit suicide.

5. Can't confide: Only a third of teens in an abusive relationship will confide in someone about the abuse and hesitate to seek help since they don't want to expose themselves.

It is important for parents, guardians, and adolescents to diligently work together to not only raise awareness, but supportive measures to

equip our youth with the necessary tools to survive. Don't be a victim!

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Prostate Health and Prostate Cancer – Get the Facts

By Dr. Beysolow, Director of Health Ministry A.M.E. Zion

What is the prostate? The prostate is a part of the male reproductive system. Prostate cancer is a serious disease where cells in the prostate grow out of control.

Symptoms that should cause you to see your doctor right away. They may be caused by prostate cancer or other conditions:

If you have any of the following symptoms, **be sure to see your doctor right away:**

- Difficulty starting urination.
- Weak or interrupted flow of urine.
- Urinating often, especially at night.
- Trouble emptying the bladder completely.
- Pain or burning during urination.
- Blood in the urine or semen.
- Pain in the back, hips, or pelvis that doesn't go away.
- Painful ejaculation.

Remember, if you have any symptoms that concern you, please see your doctor or healthcare provider immediately.

Risk Factors: Prostate cancer is the most common cancer among men in the United States, other than skin cancer.

African American men are more likely to get prostate cancer than other men, are more than twice as likely to die from prostate cancer than other men, are more likely to get prostate cancer at a younger age and tend to have more advanced disease when it is discovered.

Other Risk factors for prostate cancer in the U.S.:

- The older a man gets, the greater the chance of getting prostate cancer
- Having a family history of prostate cancer.

Screening

Early detection is Key! The goal of screening for prostate cancer is to find cancer early before it spreads and when it can be cured through treatment or successfully managed. Two tests commonly used to screen for prostate cancer are the PSA (Prostate Specific Antigen) Test and the Digital Rectal Exam (DRE). For more information about these two tests, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/prostate-cancer/screening/index.html> and <https://phenpsa.com/psa-prostate-cancer-early-detection-facts/>

The CDC has the following recommendations about screening: <https://www.cdc.gov/prostate-cancer/screening/get-screened.html>.

Call to Action: Talk to your doctor today about when you should get screened and how often!

Prevention

- Reducing fat intake
- Eating more fruits and vegetables
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Getting regular exercise
- Quitting smoking

These are just some things you can do to decrease your cancer risk.

Treatment

There are many treatment options for people with prostate cancer. Talk to your doctor about which treatment plan is best for you. Treatment options may vary based on the stage of the cancer, the patient's age, etc.

Sources: CDC, Prostate Health and PHEN, Prostate Health Education Network, Johns Hopkins Medicine, National Cancer Institute

For more information, visit:

PHEN, Prostate Health Education Network: <https://phenpsa.com/>. Education on how prostate cancer early detection screening for African American men and education saves lives! Treatment Options

CDC: information about the prostate and prostate cancer. <https://www.cdc.gov/prostate-cancer/about/index.html>

Johns Hopkins: Prostate Cancer Prevention: <https://www.hopkins-medicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/prostate-cancer/prostate-cancer-prevention>

National Cancer Institute: Treatment Options https://www.cancer.gov/types/prostate/patient/prostate-treatment-pdq#section/_142

Pull out Quote: African American men are more likely to get prostate cancer than other men, are more than twice as likely to die from prostate cancer than other men, are more likely to get prostate cancer at a younger age, and tend to have more advanced disease when it is discovered.





Dr. Dana Stilley
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Schedule Your Insurance Check-Up

By Dana G. Stilley, Financial Freedom Editor

The recent wildfire crisis in Los Angeles County, California has raised a myriad of concerns about the effects of climate change and the enormity of cleanup in the aftermath of this disaster. I suspect that these fires also caused a bit of anxiety for some, as we recently learned that over 1500 residents of the neighborhood where the wildfires burned learned that their fire insurance would not be renewed at the end of 2024, according to California's insurance office.

Insurance is designed to add predictability and security to your financial plan. In exchange for a premium (a fee), the insurance agency agrees to cover all or some of the costs should a covered event occur. In some states, insurance is mandatory by law. The most common types of insurance include life, car, health (including dental and vision), and home.

A large part of attaining financial freedom is planning. Annually, everyone should commit to a careful review of all insurance coverage to determine whether it is sufficient for your needs should your family face a

similar catastrophe. Changes in your income, family size, and marital status may impact your life insurance coverage. Also consider changes in property values, significant purchases of jewelry and electronics, and age of car(s) and drivers when reviewing home and car insurance. While most people in the US have employer-sponsored health insurance or receive Medicare, it is still important to review your plan. Does your plan provide the medical care you may need? Are your preferred doctors included in the plan's network?

Having the appropriate insurance can provide you with peace of mind and protect you from financial disaster. Make your plan, review your plan, and work on your plan. The work to gain financial fortitude is never complete.



The Personnel Committee of the WOMEN'S HOME AND OVERSEAS MISSIONARY SOCIETY

declares that the following positions will be open as of the 31st Quadrennial Convention
July 2027.

OPEN POSTIONS

- International President *
- First Vice President
- Second Vice President
- Recording Secretary
- Treasurer *
- Coordinator Young Adult Missionary Society
- Secretary Youth Missionary Society *
- Superintendent Buds of Promise Juvenile Missionary Society
- Secretary Bureau of Supply *
- Chairman Life Members Council
- Director of Communications

Any person aspiring for office must follow the procedure below:

- Must submit a letter of intent and vitae
- Must submit three letters of reference: from the Episcopal leaders, from the Presiding Elder, and from the Pastor
- Incumbents for the same office must submit a letter of intent to the Office of the Executive Director.

Please note that the office of Treasurer must have all required documents to the Office of the Executive Director no later than July 15, 2026.

The candidate must meet with the WH&OMS Personnel Committee at the site of the July 2026 Connectional Council for an interview and certification.

The office of Treasurer has additional, specific requirements which must be met before being accepted as a candidate and being allowed to campaign.

Candidates for all offices are expected to be thoroughly versed on the description for the office as found in the 2024 WH&OMS Society Constitution and By-Laws.

* Indicates that as of July 2027, the current incumbent will have served two terms and will be retired from this office.



**All required documents must be sent to the Office of the Executive Director:
Mrs. Rosetta J. Dunham,
P.O. Box
26846, Charlotte, NC 28221-6846
by January 1, 2027, the filing deadline.**

**Ms. Melva Wright, Chairman
Personnel Committee
Mrs. Sandra Crowder
International President**



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



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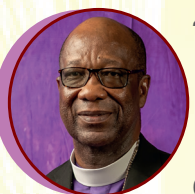
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Betty Bennett Evans

Born August 29, 1948 – December 11, 2024

By Cynthia Brown

Mrs. Betty B. Evans departed this earthly life on 12/11/2024 after receiving a cancer diagnosis in May 2024.

Betty was born on August 29, 1948 in Albemarle, NC. She attended West Badin School, where she graduated from High school in 1966. Betty attended Pfeiffer College, where she earned a degree in business and financial administration. Betty attended A&T State University, where she obtained her master's degree in Adult Education. Betty served in the Navy Reserves in the Personnel Mobilization Team from 1985-1993. Having multiple skills regarding her career choices, her last career was as an elementary school teacher in the Anson County School System, from which she retired.

Betty was united in Holy Matrimony to Herold Junior Evans and had been married for over 30 years.

Betty's church affiliation was as a member of McDonald Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, Badin, North Carolina. Betty served as Church Superintendent, Pastor's Steward, Financial Secretary, and the Local



Lay Council President. On the District Level in the Concord District, she served as District Lay Council President, District Financial Secretary, and on the Budget Committee. On the West Central NC Conference Level, she served as Lay Council 2nd Vice President and served as the Chairman of the S. O. Jones Scholarship Fund. She also served at the Episcopal Level on the Board of Directors for the Walls/Battle Conference and Retreat Center in Black Mountain, NC.

Family members who have preceded her in death are her dad, Clyde Maeso Bennett, her mom, Pauline Baucum Bennett, and Sisters Pearl Bennett Slater, Nancy Bennett Davis, and Shirley Jones Byard.

Left to cherish her memory are her husband, Herold Junior Evans of Badin, NC; her daughter, Brandalyn Javett (Patricia) Grier, Gastonia, NC; her granddaughter Tawanna Caple (Blain) Robinson, College Park, GA; five sisters, Elizabeth Jones Walton, Badin, NC, C. Maxine Bennett Foster, Colfax, NC, Evelyn Bennett (Bobby) Barnes, Silver Spring, MD, Doris Bennett Stanback, Greensboro, NC, Evangeline Bennett Lilly, Willingboro, NJ, brother-in-law, James Byard, Clinton, MD and God sister Katherine J. (Charles) Peoples, Badin, NC and bonus grandson, Marvin Grier, Badin, NC. Betty loved children and adopted Miss MaKenzie Earley in her heart. A special acknowledgment goes to Betty's final caregiver and sister-in-law, Shelia Grier Watkins, Badin, NC, who helped Betty transition to her heavenly body and a host of nieces, nephews, cousins, other relatives, and friends.

WORLD POLITICS

REALIGNMENT OF CONFERENCES IN EAST AFRICA



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

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

At the last General Conference whilst Bishop Dogbe was presiding and the Episcopal Committee had presented its report, a conversation ensued on the floor of the conference to which Bishop Dogbe addressed the house and ended the debate. Among other things, he indicated that once the bishops assigned to the work in East Africa get to visit the area, they will bring forward any recommendations on how the work should be divided, if needed.

The three Bishops assigned the work in East Africa, Bishop Dogbe, Bishop Effiong and Bishop Ngunza have visited, engaged and have assessed the work. We want to suggest that the current permutations are not the best, taking into consideration several factors. Though we understand the rationale, we think to continue as it will put undue stress and strain on the bishops and on the work.

The history of the conferences, location of the countries/conferences and their proximity to each other, geopolitical histories and affinities and cultural identities, etc., all need to be considered for effective work.

After careful consideration and engagement, and having considered the above factors, we have approved a realignment of the conferences as follows:

1. That the conferences of Rwanda, Burundi, North Kivu, and South Kivu be aligned with Western West Africa.
2. That the Uganda Conference and the provisional conferences of Tanzania and Kenya be aligned to Eastern West Africa and
3. That the Provisional Conference of Zambia is aligned with Central South Africa.

Sincerely, the Board of Bishops

Bishop U.U. Effiong, President
Bishop Darryl Starnes, Senior Bishop
Bishop W. Darin Moore
Bishop George D. Crenshaw
Bishop Hilliard Dogbe
Bishop Brian R. Thompson
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WESTERN WEST AFRICA EPISCOPAL DISTRICT

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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February 14, 2025

Greetings in the matchless name of our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The mineral-rich eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has for decades been dogged by conflict between various armed groups and central government for control over its mineral resources. The past few weeks has seen a rapid escalation in this conflict resulting in fighters of the M23 rebel group taking total control of Goma, the largest and most significant city in East of DRC, and also the center of church activities in DRC. Goma is home to over a million people and these include members of the A.M.E. Zion Church.

The recent development has resulted in a major humanitarian crisis with shortage of food and water, health facilities overwhelmed by increased casualties and injured persons, and widespread displacement of people as inhabitants attempt to flee and seek safety and refuge.

Currently, close to 400 registered members of the A.M.E Zion Church are displaced and seeking shelter in overcrowded camps, make-shift places of refuge etc. Two other members, who are breadwinners for their families have unfortunately lost their lives in the ensuing conflict. Our chapels have been looted and stripped of church essentials and musical gadgets.



Beloved, the situation in the DRC is dire and it is imperative that we collectively and urgently reach out to help our brethren there. They have shared with me that the following relief items are most critical and urgently needed:

- Food supplies
- Tents etc for emergency shelter
- Mattresses, Blankets and beddings for basic comfort
- Sanitary Pads, Hygiene kits and various feminine care essentials for displaced women and girls.

In view of the distance and urgency, cash donations may be most appropriate at this time, and we shall make sure the people get some relief and comfort in the midst of this distasteful conflict. You may make donations by **Zelle to bishopwwa@gmail.com (Western West Africa Missions)** or by cashapp to **\$EmileDogbe9**. Kindly note "DRC Relief" in the memo line.

Most importantly, I solicit your prayers for our people and the Church in DRC. It is our Christian obligation to reach out to those in need with our resources and the love of Christ. Let us respond to this urgent call thoughtfully, prayerfully and promptly. May God bless and keep you as you offer your support for His glory. Stay blessed.

With gratitude, I remain.


Rt. Rev. Dr. Hilliard K. Dela Dogbe
Presiding Bishop

Reclaiming Economic Agency - Part 1

By Rev. Ronald A. Nathan, World Politics Editor

Photos By © Johnsadler.net, © Christian Post

Two years ago, Maggie Anderson, a writer for *The Guardian*, caught my attention with a provocative statement: "Buying Black is not racist or even revolutionary. Buying Black is normal and necessary, simple and time-tested. Still, it is so underutilized, trivialized, and radicalized." These words resonate deeply when we consider the long-standing challenges that communities of African descent face in building sustainable wealth. In the spirit of her statement, I am reminded of the fourth principle of Kwanzaa, *Ujamaa*, or cooperative economics. Maulana Karenga, who founded Kwanzaa, embedded this principle in the festival as a call to use our collective cultural and social networks to build and sustain our own businesses. His vision was not just about economic self-reliance but about the shared profits and benefits of working together.

In a broader context, scholars today are increasingly exploring how cultural and ethnic networks have been used by various groups, both within their nations and across borders, to establish robust economic systems. Concepts like "symbolic capital," "ethno-national ties," and "diaspora entrepreneurship" are frequently discussed as models of economic innovation, creativity, and resilience. These frameworks highlight how pre-existing cultural bonds—whether grounded in geography, shared history, or social proximity—can be leveraged for economic gain and mobility.



Why, then, should this approach be any different for people of African descent? If other communities have successfully utilized their shared cultural identities to create wealth and elevate their social

standing, why can't we do the same? The economic empowerment of people of African descent, whether in the Diaspora or on the African continent, must involve not only addressing historical injustices such as colonialism and slavery but also reversing the conditions that have historically constrained or conditioned our economic mobility.

The role of the Black Church in black economic empowerment strategies is therefore of critical importance. The primary reasons for the limited engagement of the Black Church in advancing Black economic empowerment initiatives are theological rather than financial, institutional, legal, or operational.

Ronald A. Nathan is the Star of Zion newspaper's World Politics Editor and an elder in the A.M.E. Zion Church based in the United Kingdom.



Western West Africa Youth Bible Bee

By Dela Amenuku
Photos By Media Team, WWAED

The Western West Africa Episcopal District of The A.M.E. Zion Church youth participated in both the inaugural and second Church Editions of the Bible Bee. In the inaugural Church Edition, the journey ended in the preliminary stages. However, in the second edition, the team soared to new heights, earning second place in the finals. This Bible Bee competition was fierce, involving dynamic rounds against churches across the nation. The journey included competing against the Apostolic Church Ghana in the preliminary round and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church Ghana in the second round. The team then faced the Apostolic Church Ghana again in the wild-card round, the Baptist Church Ghana in the semifinals, and the SDA Church in the grand finale. The competition spanned five months, from June 2024 to October 2024.



The National Bible Bee, an initiative of Seedspring Network and the Bible Society of Ghana, stands as a remarkable Christian religious and inspirational program. Its mission is to educate, develop, inform, and empower while entertaining and nurturing youth. This inter-denominational quiz show tests contestants'

knowledge of the Bible in areas such as scripture memorization, theological interpretation, historical context, and practical application, fostering a deeper understanding of scripture. Now in its third year, the competition began with the Senior School Edition and has since transitioned into the Church Edition.

To celebrate this remarkable achievement, the Bishop invited the Bible Bee Team to the Consultative Forum in recognition of their silver medal win for the church. The team was represented by Millicent Peprah (Team Captain), Vida Sam, Prince Emmanuel Bacciah, and

Ignatius Acheampong. Additionally, the Zion Youth Ministry (ZYM) Ghana Region honored all team members, including Judith Quansah and Timothy Dwomor Opoku, who had participated in the 2023 Bible Bee Team, with a citation of appreciation.



As a testament to the church's commitment to education and excellence, the Bishop presented scholarships to the team members:

• **Prince Emmanuel Bacciah:** A full scholarship package

covering tuition for his four-year undergraduate studies.

• **Millicent Peprah:** A scholarship package toward completing her undergraduate studies.



• **Vida Sam:** A cheque of GHC5,000.00 to complete her Master's program.



• **Ignatius Acheampong:** A cheque of GHC5,000.00 was presented via his Presiding Elder to complete his Master's program.

Participants at the forum also raised an offering to encourage and support the team for their tremendous performance. This spirit of collaboration, celebration, and encouragement exemplifies The A.M.E. Zion Church's dedication to fostering spiritual growth and academic excellence among its youth.



World Methodist Council

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WMC Webinars March 3, 4 and 18, 2025: Council of Nicaea - 1700th Anniversary

To the WMC member churches, partner organizations and ecumenical partners

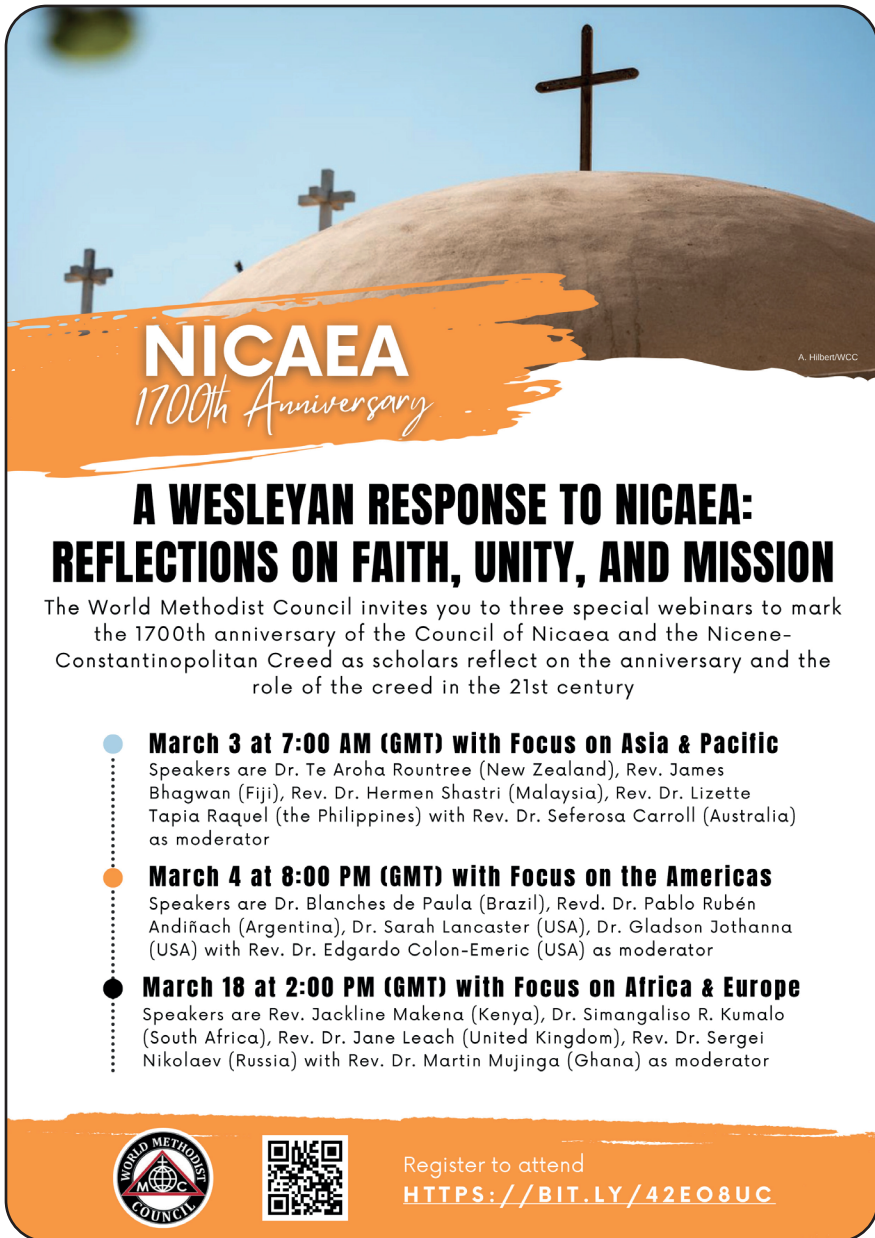
February 5, 2025 - Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
Greetings in the name of Jesus, light of the world!

Today we would like to invite you and the people whom you serve to embark on a unique ecumenical journey:

This year marks the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, a council of church leaders and others called by the Emperor Constantine to reflect on the being of Jesus Christ. Controversy about the exact nature of Christ - human or divine or both? - was threatening to divide the Empire, and Constantine and his imperial colleagues were

concerned. Thus, there were mixed motives for this event - concern for the faith, for the unity of the church, undoubtedly, but also issues of power, ambition, control... However, out of this gathering, and a subsequent gathering at Constantinople in 381AD, emerged one of the great Creeds of the church - the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the creed in the words of which we, together, as the people of God, affirm the Christian faith: "We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty... in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God... in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life.

Several ecumenical events will offer opportunities to reflect on this jubilee, leading to the Sixth World Conference of Faith and Order from October 24-28, 2025 in Egypt. That Conference is for a selected group - however, in the last few months, we have developed an



NICAEA
1700th Anniversary

**A WESLEYAN RESPONSE TO NICAEA:
REFLECTIONS ON FAITH, UNITY, AND MISSION**

The World Methodist Council invites you to three special webinars to mark the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as scholars reflect on the anniversary and the role of the creed in the 21st century

- March 3 at 7:00 AM (GMT) with Focus on Asia & Pacific**
Speakers are Dr. Te Aroha Rountree (New Zealand), Rev. James Bhagwan (Fiji), Rev. Dr. Hermen Shastri (Malaysia), Rev. Dr. Lizette Tapia Raquel (the Philippines) with Rev. Dr. Seferosa Carroll (Australia) as moderator
- March 4 at 8:00 PM (GMT) with Focus on the Americas**
Speakers are Dr. Blanches de Paula (Brazil), Revd. Dr. Pablo Rubén Andinach (Argentina), Dr. Sarah Lancaster (USA), Dr. Gladson Jothanna (USA) with Rev. Dr. Edgardo Colon-Emeric (USA) as moderator
- March 18 at 2:00 PM (GMT) with Focus on Africa & Europe**
Speakers are Rev. Jackline Makena (Kenya), Dr. Simangaliso R. Kumalo (South Africa), Rev. Dr. Jane Leach (United Kingdom), Rev. Dr. Sergei Nikolaev (Russia) with Rev. Dr. Martin Muringa (Ghana) as moderator

Register to attend
[HTTPS://BIT.LY/42E08UC](https://bit.ly/42E08UC)

opportunity for all to learn more about “NICAEA 2025” through three webinars organized by the World Methodist Council.

Under the title “A Wesleyan Response to Nicaea: Reflections on Faith, Unity and Mission”, the speakers will be invited to consider the historical complexity of the 325AD gathering at Nicaea; the Nicene - Constantinopolitan Creed as an agreed statement of faith by Christians of many traditions and denominations; what may be the role, if any, of creeds in the twenty-first century, all of this from a Wesleyan perspective.

Here are the dates and speakers for each of the webinars:

March 3 (Focus on Asia-Pacific) 7 am to 8:30 am GMT (3 pm Manila; 4 pm Seoul; 8 pm Auckland)

Moderator: Revd Dr Seferosa Carroll, United Theological College, North Parramatta, Australia

Speakers:

- Dr. Te Aroha Rountree, Trinity Methodist Theological College, Auckland, New Zealand
- Revd James Bhagwan, Methodist Church in Fiji, General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches
- Revd Dr Hermen Shastri, Methodist Church Malaysia, former vice moderator of the WCC Faith and Order Commission
- Revd Dr Lisette Tapia Raquel, United Methodist Church, Union Theological Seminary, Manila, Philippines

March 4 (Focus on North and South America) 8 pm to 9:30 pm GMT (3 pm EST, 9 am March 5 Auckland) – Translation to Spanish will be available

Moderator: Revd Prof. Dr. Edgardo Colon-Emeric, United Methodist Church, Duke Divinity School, Durham, NC, USA

Speakers:

- Prof. Dr. Blanches de Paula, Methodist Church Brazil, Methodist University Sao Paulo, Brazil
- Revd. Dr. Pablo Rubén Andinach, Methodist Church Argentina, Universidad del Centro Educativo Latinoamericano, Rosario, Argentina
- Prof. Dr. Sarah Lancaster, United Methodist Church, Methodist Theological School in Ohio, Columbus, USA
- Prof. Dr. Gladson Jothanna, Church of South India, Drew University, Madison, NJ, USA

March 18 (Focus on Europe and Africa) 2 pm to 3:30 pm GMT (10 am EDT, 9 am in Peru, 3 pm CEST, 5 pm in Moscow and Nairobi)

Moderator: Revd Dr Martin Muringa, Methodist Church Zimbabwe, General Secretary of the Africa Methodist Council, based in Accra, Ghana

Speakers:

- Revd Jackline Makena, Methodist Church Kenya, St. Paul University, Limuru, Kenya, Vice Moderator of the WCC Faith and Order Commission
- Prof. Dr. Simangaliso R. Kumalo, Methodist Church Southern Africa, University of Kwazulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, SA
- Revd Dr. Jane Leach, Methodist Church Britain, Wesley House, Cambridge
- Revd Dr. Sergei Nikolaev, United Methodist Church, Moscow Theological Seminary

Please use the following Registration Link for all the meetings and indicate which of the meetings you will be able to attend (of course you are invited to attend all three of them):

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/aWYjeb0zTwuuw_akn2l-byA

You will be receiving the Zoom Link to enter the meeting itself after registration!

In addition, we wish to highlight that this year, Christians of all traditions celebrate Easter on the same date (April 20th, 2025). What an opportunity to confess our faith together and to remind ourselves of the source of our hope: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. Stay tuned to receive more information on how to celebrate Easter with ecumenical partners and how to witness to Christ, life of the world, in such a time as this.

As a footnote, we are reminding you of the invitation to send in registrations for the NIFEA GEM School 2025, August 18 to 29, 2025 in Seoul, South Korea. It is a training to explore the intersectionality of theology, economy and ecology. This year, we will be hosted in the Seminar House of Kwanlim Church, which is part of the Korean Methodist Church. Find more information and a registration link here: <https://www.oikoumene.org/events/gem-school-2025-equipping-faith-leaders-for-economic-and-ecological-justice>

Thank you for paying attention to all these invitations and for letting others know of the opportunities to worship, discern and learn together, so that we might be enabled to be beacons of hope wherever we live and serve.

Best regards, also in the name of our General Secretary Revd Dr Reynaldo Ferreira Leão Neto and of the leader of the planning team for the NICAEA 2025 Webinars, Ms Gillian Kingston,

Rosemarie Wenner

Bishop Rosemarie Wenner
Geneva Secretary of the World Methodist Council



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