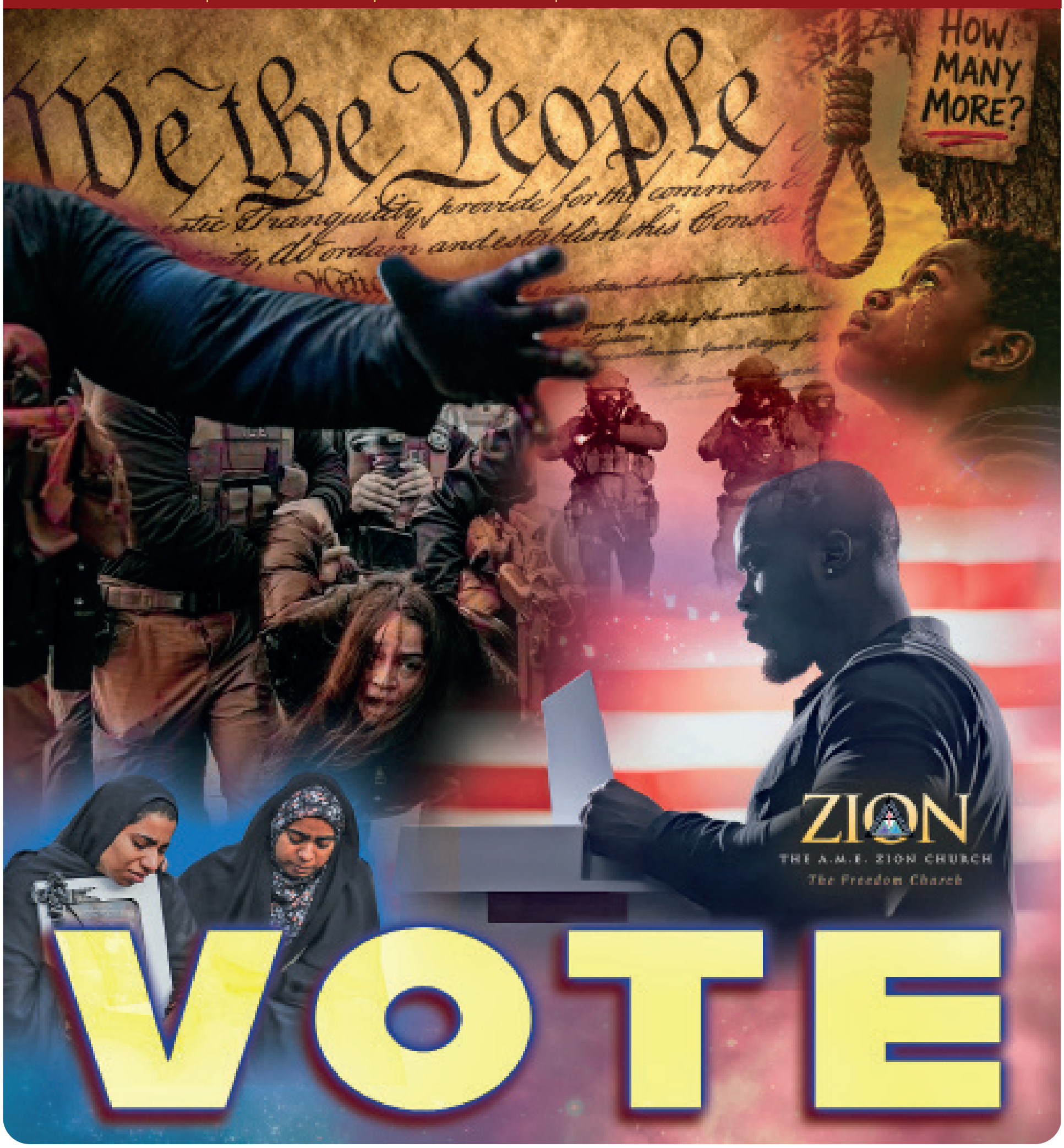
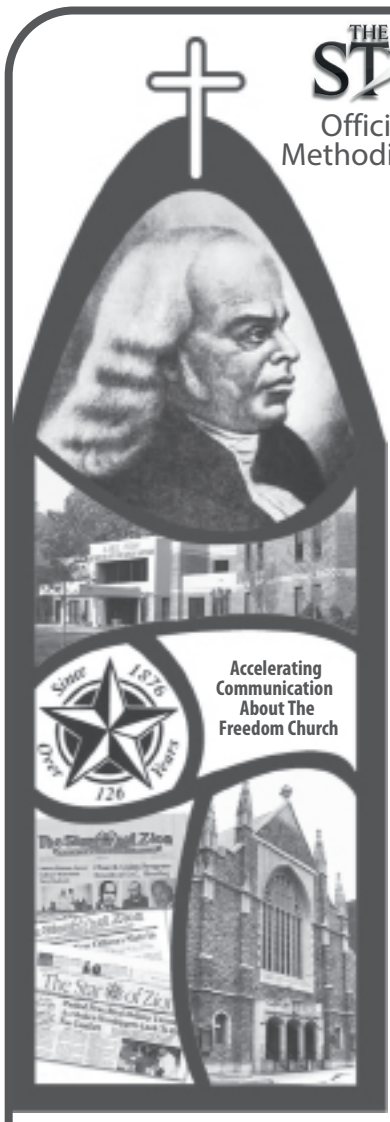
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THE STAR OF ZION

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THE STAR OF ZION

Official Voice of The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

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

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

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Leading In This Season: The Connectional Connection

By Angelia J. Poole

Photos By Ronald Bogan

Zionites gathered from around the world as Connectional Council 2026 convened in Greenville, South Carolina, hosted by Bishop Eric L. Leake, Missionary Supervisor H. Jean McMurray-Leake, and the South Atlantic Episcopal District. Surrounded by Greenville's scenic beauty and Southern hospitality, leaders from across the breadth of The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church came prepared to share reports that enlightened and informed the Church at large about the scope and impact of Zion's ministry. Each report, in its own way, reflected how leaders and their teams have stewarded their assignments in this season.

Although the Church Universal has experienced a myriad of changes since the COVID-19 pandemic began, leading in this season does not require us to choose between tradition and transition. It does, however, require us to rely on God's direction through spiritual discernment - to know what must remain rooted, what must be reimagined, and how to move forward without losing the identity that has carried our beloved Zion this far.

Every generation of Zion has been required to answer the same essential question within a different context: *What does faithfulness require of us now?* The foundation for that mindset was laid in the opening prayer, which helped define this purpose-setting moment. The Connectional Council corporately asked God to grant the Church *"unity, humility, and clarity as we lead Your Church in this season,"* while renewing our passion for evangelism, holiness, and servant leadership.



Through the work of ministry - restructuring, communications, church growth, budgeting, Christian education, social justice, global missions, benefits, records, and other institutional concerns - issues that unmistakably speak to transition and directly impact the denomination's future were before the Connection. Yet all of that work was framed by historic Methodist worship, hymnody, preaching, prayer, and ultimately Holy Communion. As the body worked, the body worshiped!

What does faithfulness to God and His purpose require of *'The Freedom Church'* in this season? Scripture introduces us to a group of Israelite leaders who understood how to navigate transition without surrendering identity: ***"And of the children of Issachar, which were men that***

had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do…" - 1 Chronicles 12:32 *(KJV)* The text offers important insights for leaders navigating change. It is important to understand what is happening around us; it is equally important to know how to respond to what we have discerned.







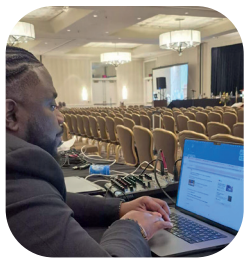


Five qualities emerge as essential for servant leaders who successfully lead through seasons of transition: understanding the times requires **DISCERNMENT**; knowing what to do requires **CLARITY**; acting together requires **UNITY**; admitting that yesterday's methods may not answer today's challenges requires **HUMILITY**; and choosing what serves the people while advancing the mission requires **SERVANT LEADERSHIP**.

Perhaps the answer to *"How do we understand the times without surrendering who we are and then discern what Zion ought to do in response?"* was reflected in the very breadth of the work before the Connectional Council.



Restructuring asks whether the structures that have historically served us are still structured to serve our mission effectively now. Church Growth & Development raises the question of how a historic denomination continues reaching people whose patterns of worship, community, and belonging are changing. Communications points toward our responsibility not only to preserve Zion's story, but also to tell that story effectively through the platforms and languages of this generation.



Budget and Financial Stewardship challenges the Church to consider whether its resources are aligned with our present priorities and future mission. Christian Education reminds us that transition is unsustainable if we fail to form disciples and prepare emerging generations to carry both our faith and our identity forward.

Social Justice & Economic Development keep before the Church Zion's historic commitment to freedom and public witness, while asking what that witness requires amid the social and economic realities of this moment. Global Missions broadens our discernment beyond local contexts, reminding Zion that understanding *"the times"* means recognizing how God is moving across cultures and continents.

Zion Benefits Services brings the question of institutional care into the conversation: How do we sustain and support the people who carry the work? And Statistics, Records & Archives remind us that looking forward does not require forgetting where we have been. Our history, records, and institutional memory can help us distinguish between traditions that preserve our identity and practices that may simply preserve our familiarity.



Together, these areas suggest that leading in this season requires neither the wholesale rejection of the old, nor the unquestioning preservation of it. Rather, it requires prayerful discernment to determine what must be preserved, strengthened, reimagined, or released so that Zion can remain faithful to who God has designed her to be while becoming prepared for where He is leading her.

So how does Zion effectively fulfill her mission in the world as it exists in 2026? Her work is forged in her worship. While the Connection discussed the future, Zion - a Church still rooted - preceded that detailed discussion with worship. Our tradition includes hymnody, and *"We're Marching to Zion"* was the opening hymn that helped set the atmosphere. Tradition was not merely ceremonial nostalgia; it provided theological grounding for the work of transition.



The operative word is *"marching."* Marching means Zion is not stationary. Movement is built into the hymn. Yet the people who are moving are still clearly identified: *"we that love the Lord."* Our destination is still Zion, our center is still the throne, and our movement is still rooted in worship: Progress does not require us to abandon our identity; faithful movement actually begins from identity.

The hymn, with text by Isaac Watts and the familiar refrain associated with Robert Lowry, offers multiple connections to the qualities servant leaders need when navigating seasons of transition.

"Join in a song with sweet accord" evokes the unity named in the opening prayer of the Council - not sameness, but people moving together toward a common purpose.

"And thus surround the throne" establishes the source of our authority. Before Zion determines where she should go, she gathers around God.

And *"We're marching upward to Zion"* introduces directionality.

Change, by itself, is not the goal. The question is whether our movement is upward - toward greater faithfulness, stronger mission, deeper discipleship, and more effective Kingdom witness. Significantly, this hymn opened the Connectional Council worship service, placing the language of movement, unity, and God-centered direction at the threshold of the Council's work.



The hymn also reminds us that once discernment occurs, God's people must be willing to move. Understanding the times without movement becomes observation. Movement without understanding the times becomes reaction. Successful leadership requires both discernment and direction.



Successful transition also positions us within the tension between preservation and purpose. Everything old does not need to be discarded simply because it is old, and everything familiar cannot be preserved simply because it is familiar. The leadership question becomes: "*Does this still serve the mission?"* And, perhaps even more importantly: *"Zion, does this move us closer to that spiritual Zion?"*

What successful leadership requires in this season of transition is much deeper than *"traditional versus contemporary."* We must return to the language of the opening prayer: unity without demanding uniformity; humility enough to listen; clarity about the mission; discernment concerning our methods; and servant leadership that makes institutional decisions in service of Kingdom purpose. Leading in this season means being rooted in tradition and ready for transition.

We are challenged to consider what faithful leadership requires when preserving our identity and preparing for our future must happen at the same time. The question before us is not whether we will change - time guarantees change. The question is whether we will allow prayer, purpose, and spiritual discernment - not preference, fear, or familiarity - to determine how we lead through it.

Zion has never been called merely to stand where she has been… She has been called to faithfully carry the faith forward! The Greenville gathering revealed that Zion IS marching to Zion.



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COMMUNITY PLAYGROUND NAMED IN HONOR OF REV. DR. DENISON D. HARRIELD, JR.

By Debra Chappelle-Polk, Zion Spotlight Editor

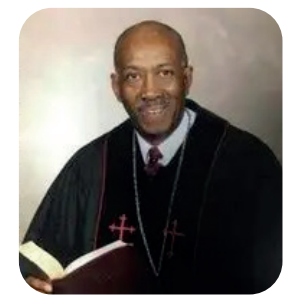
October 2026…, The City of Summit, NJ Common Council passed a Resolution on September 22, 2026, that named the new East Summit Community Center Playground in honor of Reverend Dr. Denison D. Harrield, Jr.

Rev. Harrield, Jr. is pastor at Wallace Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church in Summit, New Jersey, and a longtime Summit resident, whose work has shaped generations of families, neighbors, and civic life in the community. "I am humbled, honored, and thankful to God for this recognition by the City of Summit and am sharing it with you, as all of you have shared in some way in the service that I give, the work that I do, and the life that I live. Pray for me as I continue to serve this present age and do God's will."

"Rev. Dr. Harrield has spent his life showing what service to our community really means," said Council President Claire Toth. "Dedicating this playground in his honor is a way to recognize a leader whose work has strengthened Summit across generations. It will be a place for children, families, and neighbors, which feels especially fitting for the community leader we are celebrating."

Councilmember Michelle Kalmanson, who chairs Summit Council's Community Programs Committee, said, "This dedication is about more than naming a playground; it is about honoring a person who has given so much of himself to Summit and connecting that example of service to a place where our youngest residents can play, grow, and feel part of this community."

The Community Center playground project is funded through donations, nonprofit partnerships, and grants, and is expected to be completed by the end of the year. It will be located on the Summit Community Center campus at 100 Morris Avenue, near Lower Long Field and the Tiny Forest. Designed for children aged 2 to 5, the small-scale neighborhood play space will provide a welcoming outdoor gathering place for young children and their caregivers, with walkable access for nearby families.



"Rev. Dr. Harrield lives his values. With his words and actions, he strengthens Summit by bringing us together in fellowship and service to our neighbors," said Councilmember Jaclyn Lasaracina. "This dedication is a small expression of gratitude for the immeasurable impact Reverend Dr. Harrield continues to have on our community."

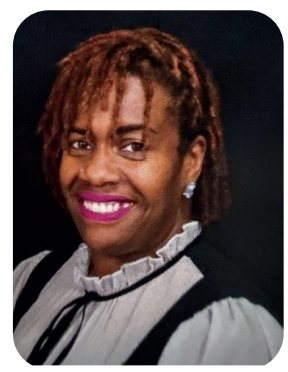
Rev. Dr. Harrield is a U.S. Air Force veteran and former New York Telephone employee. He has been a steady presence in Summit's spiritual, civic, and community life for decades. His volunteer work has included involvement with the Summit Housing Authority, SAGE Eldercare, the Tri-City NAACP, the Summit Interfaith Council, Summit Helping Its People, the Summit Affordable Housing Corporation, and other civic and community organizations. In 2020, he received Summit's annual Volunteer Award in recognition of his decades of dedicated service to the community.

In July 2026, Rev. Dr. Denison D. Harrield Jr. received a proclamation recognizing his 50 years of faith leadership and ministry from Mayor Elizabeth Fagan at the Summit Common Council meeting. Wallace Chapel celebrated its 100th anniversary in September 2023. (Star of Zion Spotlight – January 2024). In his remarks, Rev. Harrield said, "Wallace Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church is thankful to God for His many blessings as we continue to be a shining beacon of light, faith, hope, and love. We are not a mega-church in terms of membership, building, or budget size, etc., but we try to be a mega light that brightly shines in this community to make a difference for good for all people."

Reference Sources: TAPIntoSummit; Star of Zion January 2024

Asheville District Holds Fifth Sunday Fellowship

By Ruth L. Thompson, Reporter



The Asheville District of the Blue Ridge Conference held Fifth Sunday Fellowship Services August 30, 2026 at Young's Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church, New Market, TN. Host pastor was Rev. Alisha Starnes. Presiding Elder was Rev. Dr. Herbert Grant. Music was provided by the Youngs Memorial Church choir. Special selection: "My Soul's Been Anchored by Rev. Marcus Walker.

The message was delivered by Rev. Alisha Starnes. Rev. Starnes delivered a dynamic, moving, and enlightening sermon on "King Kindness." She defined kindness as being intentional and unconditional. She said, "It is a noun-a quality shown as how we speak and act". She spoke of how David demonstrated kindness and listed three points:

1. King kindness is intentional. We should seek opportunities to show kindness.

2. King Kindness is selfless-it does not involve selfish motives. Show kindness for the kingdom's sake. King kindness is unconditional. God shows kindness daily. Kindness is a mandate. It's not an option. God's salvation is an act of kindness. He showed kindness by sending His Son as a sacrifice.

The service was defined as a time of fellowship for brothers and sisters who love the Lord.

From the Order of the FLAME Experience to E3: Igniting a Culture of Everyday Evangelism

By Rev. Solomon McAuley, Rev. Anthony Hardrick, and Rev. Samontra Carter

Evangelism is at the heart of the Great Commission. Every follower of Jesus Christ is called to participate in sharing the Gospel, yet many believers struggle with fear, uncertainty, or simply knowing how to begin. What if evangelism became less about a special event and more about how we live every day?

That question became the catalyst for a collaborative partnership that brought together pastors, churches, and members of the Wesleyan Methodist family for E3: Elements of Everyday Evangelism on August 8, 2026, at Jones Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church in Columbia, South Carolina.

The story of E3 evolved in a matter of just a few months. What may have seemed to happen quickly was really God aligning every detail, every person, and every opportunity in His perfect timing. God was orchestrating it all along.

From the Order of the FLAME to a New Opportunity

In 2026, Bishop Eric L. Leake, Presiding Prelate of the South Atlantic Episcopal District, selected three pastors—Rev. Solomon McAuley, pastor of Jones Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church in Columbia, South Carolina; Rev. Anthony Hardrick, pastor of Mt. Zion A.M.E. Zion Church in Augusta, Georgia; and Rev. Samontra Carter, pastor of Bethesda A.M.E. Zion Church in Winnsboro, South Carolina—to represent the South Atlantic Episcopal District at the 2026 Order of the FLAME (Faithful Leaders As Mission Evangelists) gathering hosted by World Methodist Evangelism (WME).

The gathering took place March 9–13, 2026, at Epworth By the Sea on St. Simons Island, Georgia.

The experience did more than equip three pastors. It ignited a vision for how the principles of evangelism could be shared with others. From that experience came a collaborative partnership between Rev. McAuley, Rev. Hardrick, Rev. Carter, and World Methodist Evangelism, resulting in the launch of E3: Elements of Everyday Evangelism.

E3 is designed as a one-day training experience that equips everyday believers to share their faith in everyday places. The model is intentionally practical, helping participants move beyond the idea that evangelism is complicated or reserved for a select group of people.

A Gathering of the Wesleyan Methodist Family

On August 8, 2026, Jones Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church opened its doors for this historic training opportunity.



This was not simply a South Atlantic Episcopal District event. It was an opportunity for members of the broader Wesleyan Methodist family to come together around a shared mission: equipping believers to live out and share their faith in everyday life.

The E3 model itself encourages local churches to partner with neighboring Wesleyan Methodist churches, creating opportunities to share stories, resources, and relationships, and to affirm a common commitment to the mission of evangelism.

The day was full, engaging, and Holy Spirit-filled. Participants gathered for teaching, fellowship, worship, reflection, and practical equipping as they considered what it means to be an everyday evangelist. One of the most significant aspects of the E3 experience was its approach to evangelism.

The focus was not simply on the person we are trying to reach. The training first challenged us as the evangelists.

Where are we spiritually?

Where are we in our walk with Christ?

Are we surrendered to the work of the Holy Spirit?

Are we allowing God to address the fear, apathy, hesitation, and uncertainty that can hinder our witness?

Before we ask how we can reach someone else, E3 invites us to examine the condition of our own hearts.

This emphasis is reflected in the first E3 session, Heat, which focuses on warming the heart to the work of the Holy Spirit. The training emphasizes that evangelism must first be an inward reality before it becomes an outward action. Participants are challenged toward surrender and encouraged to allow God to deal with fear, apathy, and a sense of legalistic obligation.

This was a powerful reminder that evangelism is not merely about having the right words. It is about being in the right relationship with Christ so that our witness flows from what God is doing within us.

Evangelism begins with the evangelist.

Three Elements. One Fire. The E3 experience is built around the imagery of a fire. Fire requires three elements to burn: Heat, Fuel, and Oxygen. In the same way, an everyday evangelist—and an everyday church—needs all three elements working together.

Heat: Warming the Heart focuses on the work God must do within us. Before evangelism becomes an outward activity, it begins with surrender to the Holy Spirit. Fuel: Equipping the Witness provides practical tools to show the love of Jesus and share our faith story. Participants are equipped with a framework for communicating the Gospel with confidence, clarity, and grace. Oxygen: Sustaining the Mission focuses on accountability and endurance. Evangelism cannot survive in isolation. Participants develop practical plans and accountability structures designed to help sustain the mission beyond the training day. Together, Heat, Fuel, and Oxygen provide a framework for developing a lifestyle of everyday evangelism.

The training featured an outstanding lineup of leaders from across the Wesleyan Methodist family:

Rev. Dr. Bianca Canley-Mays is an Executive Assistant with World Methodist Evangelism. She is an ordained itinerant elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Dr. Canley-Mays serves as Director of Communications for the African Methodist Episcopal

Continued on Next Page

Church. Dr. Canley-Mays presented on Embrace: A Vision for Salvation." God is a seeking and sending God. God seeks us, embraces us with grace, and then sends us to show and share that same love with others. Christian faith was never meant to be kept to ourselves. The question was: how do we share Jesus in a way that actually feels like Jesus? She taught the 4 movements and 6 values of Embrace.

Rev. Luiz Cardoso serves as the Director of Ministries for World Methodist Evangelism. He is a Free Methodist Pastor and currently lives in Glasgow, Scotland, where he is involved in church planting through Glasgow Story Church and in a missional coffee shop, The Story Coffee. Rev. Cardoso presented on Oxygen: The Power of Commitment. He encouraged us to preach the word "in season and out of season," to stay rooted in sound doctrine, and to fulfill our ministry.

Bishop Erika Crawford is a Board Member of World Methodist Evangelism. She made history at the 52nd Quadrennial Session of the General Conference of The African Methodist Episcopal Church in Columbus, Ohio, when 1019 of the 1720 delegates cast their ballots, making her the first woman to lead an episcopal class in the church's history. Bishop Crawford serves as the 143rd elected and consecrated Bishop and is assigned as the Presiding Prelate of the 8th Episcopal District, encompassing the states of Mississippi and Louisiana. In addition to that assignment, she serves as the Commission Chair for the Department of Church Growth for The African Methodist Episcopal Church. Bishop Crawford presented on Warming Our Hearts for the Work: The Holy Spirit, Holy Surrender, and the Work of Evangelism. Her central focus was "before God sends the hands, the Holy Spirit warms the heart. Evangelism is not merely a program or assignment; it is the natural overflow of lives transformed by Jesus Christ." Bishop Crawford also closed us out with a powerful word, "God Just Setting You Up."

Each presentation contributed to a day designed not simply to inform participants, but to challenge and equip them for faithful witness in their everyday contexts.

Evangelism Where We Live

E3 challenges believers to see evangelistic opportunities where they already live and serve—in their homes, workplaces, neighborhoods, communities, and cities.

This is significant because evangelism does not always require a platform, a microphone, or a church program.

Sometimes it looks like a conversation. Sometimes it looks like listening. Sometimes it looks like serving a neighbor. Sometimes it means sharing what Christ has done in our lives. And sometimes it begins with simply being willing to recognize that the Holy Spirit has already placed us in someone's path. The goal is to demystify evangelism and replace fear and hesitation with confidence, clarity, and grace.

The Flame Continues

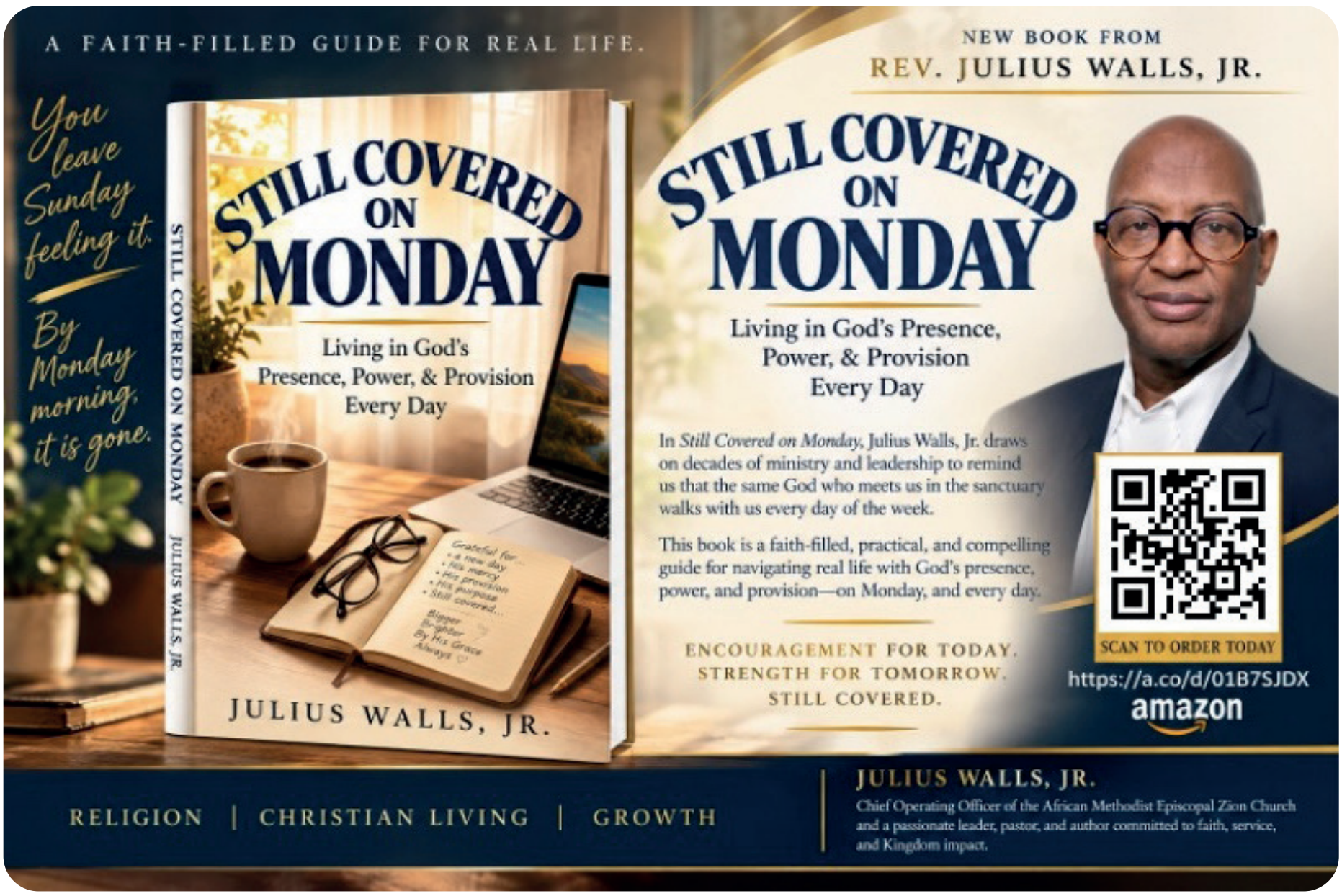
The August 8 gathering was more than a one-day training. It represented the continuation of something that began when three pastors were given the opportunity to attend the Order of the FLAME in 2026. What they received, they brought back. What was ignited in them became an opportunity to equip others. And what began with three representatives of the South Atlantic Episcopal District expanded into a gathering of the broader Wesleyan Methodist family.

Participants were also introduced to opportunities for continued growth through WME's ongoing resources, prayer and fasting community, global connections, and future training opportunities. The hope is that the impact of E3 will extend far beyond August 8. That believers will return to their churches with a renewed passion for the Great Commission. That pastors and leaders will continue creating cultures where evangelism is normal rather than intimidating.

That believers will recognize their everyday lives as mission fields. And most importantly, that we will continue asking the question that E3 placed before us: Where are we in our walk with Christ?

Because before we can effectively invite others into a relationship with Jesus, we must continually allow Him to transform us. The flame that was kindled through the Order of the FLAME in 2026 has now been shared with others through E3 in 2026.

The fire is burning. The mission continues. And the call to everyday evangelism belongs to all of us.



Leading Through Change: Pastors & Presiding Elders – A Regional Perspective!

By Angelia J. Poole



Pastors and Presiding Elders have the unique challenge of working through a plethora of changes within their region while sustaining the authenticity of their calls to ministry and God's command to fulfill the Great Commission. Change may be initiated by leadership transitions, system modifications, discipleship transformations, resource availability, and cultural shifts.

Presiding Elder Andrew B. Smoke recognizes that leaders will rarely have 100% of the people they lead. He shared, *"I tell my pastors to do the will of God, as God spoke it to you."* His Guidance: Recognize the need, make assessments, and move according to God's will. When systems and norms have been in place for many years, it is extremely difficult to initiate change. He believes the key is showing how change will help the church reach the masses. He admonishes us to meet the people – Adults, Young Adults, Youth, and Children – where they are. We lose some of our younger members because we're unwilling to meet them where they are. *"You've got to minister to the whole church!"* Sometimes that requires a change to be brought in and slowly fed to the recipients, giving them the time they need to digest the change.

"Change is challenging!" says Presiding Elder Charles Tillett. *"When it comes to leading change, you must be flexible and transparent."* It is important to remember that not every congregation is the same, so similar situations at different churches within different communities must be approached differently. He also cautioned, *"If you're leading spiritual transformation, you have to be integral to the Biblical narrative – that's imperative!"* He reminded us to be patient because change takes time: The fruit the church is bearing today is related to the seeds sown yesterday. The key: *"We all have to be held accountable."*



Rev. Dr. Carolyn Dewberry spoke of the challenge of change from the perspective of leading as a woman. Change is difficult for everyone, but being a woman leading change in a congregation often exposes a stigma – spoken or unspoken – that challenges the female leader to stand firm in what God has called her to do. There are voices still articulating that women should not be preaching or pastoring; however, Rev. Dr. Dewberry declared, *"I go in and stand on who I know I am in the Lord. Whatever God leads me to do as far as change, I attempt to do as God says."* A working ministry will always present leaders with those who support change wholeheartedly and those who actively resist change.



Rev. Lakeisha McCoy presented a totally different viewpoint. Her perspective provokes pivoting. She stated, *"It's the constant pivot that has really taught me, and it comes off of the negative, but the pivot is what strengthens me from one leg to the other; one situation to another."* Not having the necessary resources but being innovative to replace what you don't have by creating what doesn't exist is the instigator of the pivot.

Having served with or under the leadership of those who participated in my interview, Rev. Lloyd Nivens IV shared that he learned some of the strategies of leading through change by gleaning from more seasoned leaders around him. During Rev. Dr. Dewberry's pastorate at Moore's Chapel, he learned that although the church was more traditional, she fully embraced the worship styles of students from Livingstone College and encouraged parishioners to be receptive to worship styles that weren't as traditional. He also shared, *"Dr. Tillett showed me that sometimes change takes a while, but that doesn't mean that you don't stop trying."* And from his current Presiding Elder, Rev. Dr. Smoke, *"What do you have to lose?"* He stressed that sometimes you must identify what needs to be changed and then come with a plan to fix it.

Rev. Henrico D. White shared the truth that people in church are also part of the world's culture. It is an interesting twist that members want the latest and most up-to-date technology personally, but they want things to change more slowly at church and in the work of ministry. *"Which then makes it difficult and challenging for those who are leading ministries to make that adjustment, to make those pivots, to make those necessary movements for the church to lead the culture and for the culture not to lead the church." "Where we once were leaders in changing culture, we now find ourselves trying to play catch-up to culture."*

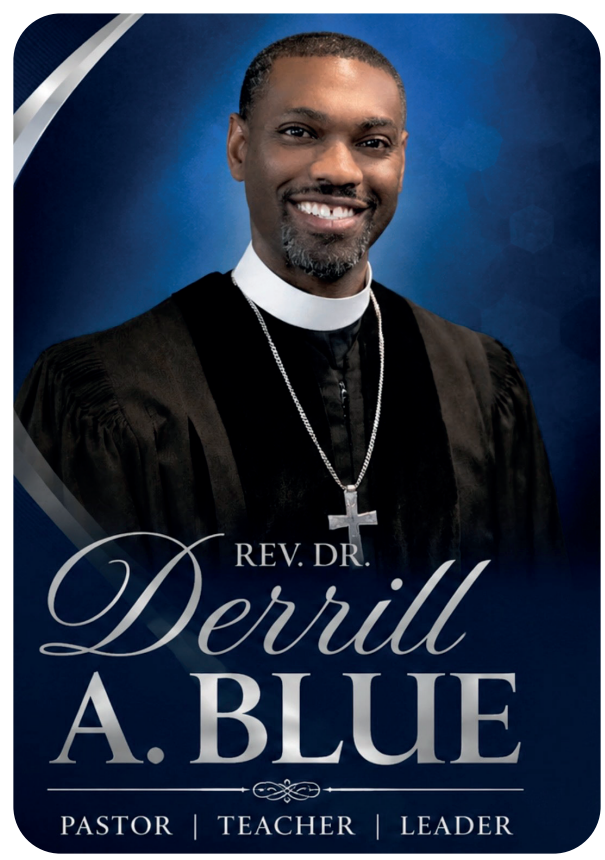
And Rev. Dr. David Williams closed the interview by saying, *"When you start talking about the changing of the culture, from an organizational standpoint for Corporate America, the stakeholders are making the investment."* Without having investors, you don't have the capital needed to fix what needs to be fixed. The church is behind because we need people to make the investment.

Investment fuels change. For us to successfully lead through change, we must consistently commit to utilizing our time, engaging our talents, and injecting our treasures! Change will not occur without righteous perspectives and right investments.

Rev. Dr. Derrill A. Blue - 20 Years of Shepherding God's People

A Journey of Faith, Leadership, and Pastoral Service

By Rev. Simon Ajose & Rev. Dr. Paula Blue



The Reverend Dr. Derrill A. Blue is a devoted servant of God whose pastoral ministry reflects a remarkable journey of faith, leadership, commitment, and service. Since answering the call to pastoral ministry, Dr. Blue has been entrusted with the spiritual leadership of congregations across several states, faithfully serving the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and touching the lives of countless individuals and families along the way.

His ministry has taken him across regions and communities, but the central purpose has remained constant: to preach the Gospel, shepherd God's people, strengthen the Church, and serve the community.

Over the course of his pastoral career, Dr. Blue has served seven congregations over twenty years, beginning in November 2006 and continuing to the present. Each congregation represents a chapter in a larger story—a story of answered calling, perseverance, spiritual leadership, and faithful service.

His pastoral journey began in November 2006, when he was appointed by Bishop Richard K. Thompson as pastor of Erwin Memorial AME Zion Church in Erwin, North Carolina. From November 2006 through December 2007, he began laying the foundation for what would become a nearly two-decade pastoral journey. His service at Erwin Memorial marked the beginning of a ministry characterized by faithfulness, leadership, and a willingness to follow God's call wherever it led.

In December 2007, Dr. Blue, following an appointment by Bishop Louis Hunter, Sr., began his pastorate at Coleman Chapel AME Zion Church in Batesville, Mississippi. He served the Coleman Chapel congregation from December 2007 through November 2010. During these three years, his ministry expanded beyond the Tar Heel State into Mississippi, demonstrating his willingness to embrace new communities and new opportunities for ministry.

In December 2010, Dr. Blue was called to plant a church, New Beginnings AME Zion Church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, receiving the blessing and support of Bishop Darryl B. Starnes, Sr. His pastorate there continued through October 2013. The name "New Beginnings" is particularly fitting when viewed within Dr. Blue's pastoral journey, as this season represented another significant chapter in a ministry that continued to grow in experience, influence, and spiritual maturity.

In October 2013, Dr. Blue returned to Mississippi to pastor Sharon Chapel AME Zion Church in Jackson, Mississippi, upon being appointed by Bishop Mildred Bonnie Hines. Although his tenure was comparatively brief, from October 2013 through June 2014, it represented another opportunity to serve God's people and continue his pastoral calling.
In June 2014, Bishop Hines appointed Dr. Blue to serve as Pastor of the Mount Olive AME Zion Church in Waterbury, Connecticut. He served there from June 2014 through December 2017. This pastorate brought him to New England and further demonstrated the breadth of his ministry. For more than three years, he shepherded the Mount Olive congregation, continuing to build upon the pastoral experience gained through his earlier appointments.

In January 2018, Dr. Blue began a new journey as Pastor of Memorial AME Zion Church in Rochester, New York, where he served until October 2024, having been appointed by Bishop Dennis V. Proctor. This six-year-and-nine-month pastorate stands as one of the longest individual appointments in his pastoral journey. It was a significant period of sustained leadership, pastoral care, and service. It was also in the Western New York Conference where Pastor Blue served as Presiding Elder of the Rochester-Syracuse District for six years.

In October 2024, Dr. Blue entered his current season of ministry, after being appointed by Bishop Darryl B. Starnes, Sr. as pastor of Little Rock AME Zion Church in Charlotte, North Carolina.

His journey reminds us that pastoral ministry is not simply measured by years or appointments, but by the lives touched, souls encouraged, families strengthened, communities served, and faith passed from one generation to another.

Twenty years of pastoral ministry represents thousands of sermons preached, countless prayers prayed, numerous hospital visits and home visits, weddings celebrated, lives mourned, families counseled, young people encouraged, and souls pointed toward Jesus Christ.

It represents early mornings and late nights, moments of celebration and moments of difficulty, victories and challenges, transitions and new beginnings.

Most importantly, it represents twenty years of saying, "Yes, Lord."

Dr. Blue's pastoral ministry reminds us that leadership in the church is not simply about standing in a pulpit. It is about standing with people.
It is about being present when people need prayer.
It is about offering encouragement when the road becomes difficult.
It is about teaching God's Word when answers are needed.
It is about celebrating when blessings come.
It is about grieving when tears fall.
And it is about continually pointing people back to the One who called him in the first place.

The journey continues… The ministry continues… The calling continues… And by the grace of God, the best is still yet to come.

On November 14th and 15th, the Little Rock AME Zion Church will celebrate Dr. Blue's 20th anniversary in pastoral ministry.

On Saturday, November 14th, there will be a Legacy Luncheon at the Carole Hoefner Center in Charlotte, NC. At the Legacy Luncheon, friends and family will come together to recount testimonies of how God has used Dr. Blue to be a blessing to those who have felt the impact of his ministry.

On Sunday, November 15th, the church will gather to give God the glory for how He has guided and kept Dr. Blue over these 20 years of pastoral ministry.
We look forward to the celebration of Pastor Blue's 20 years in pastoral ministry and look even more forward to what God has yet still in store for him.

Congratulations, Reverend Dr. Derrill A. Blue!

SPOTLIGHT ON OCTOBER A MONTH OF SEASONAL & SPIRITUAL TRANSITION

By Debra Chappelle-Polk, Zion Spotlight Editor

October 2026, New York, NY… October is a month of seasonal and spiritual transition and a bridge between summer and winter. October is a time to embrace change, honor the harvest, and prepare for renewal. It's a time to reflect on what we've gained, release what's no longer needed, and step into the next phase with balance and gratitude.

Spiritually, October is often seen as a time of harvest and abundance, symbolizing the end of the agricultural cycle and the need to give thanks for blessings received. The changing leaves and cooler weather invite reflection, renewal, and self-assessment, encouraging us to examine our lives, seek forgiveness, and align with a higher purpose.



Spiritual themes include:

• Gratitude and thanksgiving for God's provision (Proverbs 3:9-10).

• Repentance and forgiveness, letting go of past mistakes to start anew (Acts 3:19).

• Humility and obedience, trusting in God's sovereignty (Micah 6:8).

• Community and generosity, through acts of kindness (Colossians 3:12).

The name/word October is not found in the Bible. However, it is still part of the biblical year's rhythm of reflection and preparation. October also features numerous Christian observances, including major feast days, solemnities, and the commemoration of saints. These observances provide opportunities for prayer, reflection, and community worship throughout the month.

Spiritually and biblically, October represents:

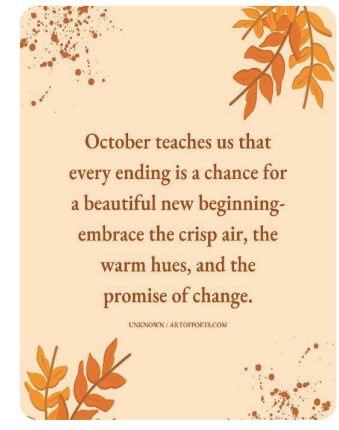
• A **season of harvest** — both literal and spiritual, representing God's blessings and the need to give thanks.

• A **time of renewal**— encouraging believers to reassess their faith, seek forgiveness, and recommit to God's will.

• A **month of community and celebration** — through feasts, prayers, and acts of kindness.

World Communion Sunday, a day of unity in faith, falls on October 4, 2026. It is a global Christian observance that encourages believers from diverse denominations to celebrate Holy Communion together, emphasizing unity in Christ and the shared faith of Christians worldwide. The observance highlights the spiritual and communal aspects of the Lord's Supper, also known as the Eucharist. Participants remember the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples, where bread and wine symbolize Christ's body and blood, forming the biblical basis for Holy Communion (Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

World Communion Day was conceived by Pastor Hugh Thompson Kerr to foster Christian unity in 1933 at Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The practice was adopted by the U.S. Presbyterian Church in 1936 and later promoted internationally by the National Council of Churches. The National Council of Churches (NCC) is an ecumenical body that brings together a wide range of Christian denominations in the United States, including Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, Evangelical, and historically African American churches. Its mission is to foster visible unity among Christian communities, advocate for justice and peace, and engage in ministries of reconciliation and public witness.



OCTOBER AND THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL ZION DENOMINATION

In October 1796, a handful of Black free and enslaved parishioners, James L. Varick among them, walked out of the John Street Methodist Church, a predominantly white church in New York City, and established a separate Black church called "Zion."

Today, the Mother African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, located in the Village of Harlem in New York City, is the Mother Church of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion denomination.

Reference Sources: Merriam-Webster. Google; symbolopedia.com+1; www.spiritualmarker.com; biblicalchronology.com; gospeltodaycatholic.com+1

St. Luke Connects and Empowers with This Lay Academy

Secretary, St. Luke Lay Council

The St. Luke A.M.E. Zion Church's Lay Council hosted its third Lay Academy in the church fellowship hall on Sunday, August 9th, following the morning service. The event was the final one in our series on emotional intelligence, and our theme was "Up Close and Personal." The focused topic for the session was "Emotional Intelligence and Empathy Expanded."





A light lunch was served to approximately 32 attendees. The event included a plenary session for the whole group, followed by two smaller breakout sessions so attendees could choose the topic that best suited them.

General Session

After lunch, First Vice President Ashley Holligan kicked off the general session. She shared a comprehensive refresher of the emotional intelligence concepts from Academies 1 and 2, perfectly setting the stage for the day. A series of thought-provoking questions sparked lively group discussions. Attendees thoroughly enjoyed this time to fellowship, bond, and share insights with one another.

Breakout Sessions

Following the general session, participants broke out into two distinct learning opportunities:

- **The 5-Second Rule**, led by President Janet Williams. This workshop focused on emotional intelligence and introduced the impactful "5-Second Rule," which offers practical tips for maintaining your cool when your

Continued on Next Page



emotions are triggered.

- **Relax and Learn: Watercoloring Activity**, led by First Vice President Ashley Holligan. This creative breakout explored restorative energy and fun through art.

Once again, a heartfelt thank you goes out to the Lay Council, our hard-working volunteers, and the wonderful participants who stayed behind to help us clean up. Your dedication and teamwork are what truly made Lay Academy No. 3 a magnificent success! We also want to give an honorable mention to our wonderful youth helpers, Sophia Holligan and Isis Jones, who stepped up to serve the lunch to our guests.



Join the St. Luke Lay Council

If you are interested in becoming a member of the Lay Council at St. Luke A.M.E. Zion Church and being a part of our upcoming programs, please contact President Janet Williams for further information.

The Connectional Lay Council Motto: "*Come with us to Christ*." In embodying this motto, St. Luke A.M.E. Zion Church Lay Council invites you to journey with us. *Growing in grace, leading with empathy, and living for Christ.*

Blue Ridge Holds 136th Session

By Ms. Ruth L. Thompson

Photography by Rev. Dale Simmons



The 136th Session of the Blue Ridge Annual Conference was held May 20-23, 2026, at the picturesque and scenic Walls/Battle Conference Center in Black Mountain, North Carolina. Bishop Darryl B. Starnes was the Presiding Prelate. Missionary Supervisor was Sister Camille Starnes. Presiding Elders were Reverend Dr. J. Ruth Davis (Hendersonville) and Reverend Dr. Herbert Grant (Asheville). The theme was, The A.M.E. Zion Church-Serving this Present Age: Committed to our mission."

The conference opened with prayers by the Conference prayer Coordinators. Bishop Starnes said, "We gather to invite the Lord to have His way." The opening message was delivered by Rev. Dr. Marguerite Allen, pastor of Matthew Chapel A.M. E. Zion Church, Rutherfordton, North Carolina. Rev Allen delivered a powerful message on "Making a Vow" (Deut. 23:21-23).

Thursday was the official opening of the conference. It began with the rules committee, roll Call, seating of delegates, and election of officers. The Episcopal Address followed. The Bishop's focus was "Our creative motive in light of Kingdom Principles". He spoke of the challenges black Americans face, namely unemployment, home ownership, Federal support, racism, Health care, voting, and civil rights. Bishop Starnes said, "The freedom church must be at the forefront of change." He challenged churches to organize voter-registration stations and encouraged pastors to galvanize their congregations. Bishop Starnes listed four kingdom principles we must communicate. 1. Love children and welcome them. We must make time for our children, 2. Creative Motive is about being willing to forsake everything we have to follow Jesus. 3. With our Creative motive, only through a right relationship with God can we be saved. 4. With our Creative motive, we must communicate temporal benefits and eternal rewards for giving up everything to follow Jesus. He concluded by quoting the words to "I have decided to follow Jesus". Responses to the address were given by the Presiding Elders, clergy, and laity. The address was defined as one that gave direction and encouragement, one that gave marching orders.

Thursday afternoon, the Lay Luncheon was held. The speaker was Dr. Pamela Richardson Wilks. Her subject was "Do not grow weary while God is working" (Galatians 6:9; Rev. 3:7). Dr. Wilks said, "Every NO is not rejection." God is just as present in the open door as in the closed one. We are living in uncertain times. Sometimes God closes doors not to punish us but to preserve us." Speaking of Palm trees, she said, "They are intentionally positioned where storms are expected. During storms, they bend but never break. Storms test us and our resilience. Churches and institutions must remain connected. Keep courage, service, and mentoring. If winds come too strong, bend but don't break". Presiding Elder Dr. Herbert Grant gave the Scholarship appeal.

Following the luncheon, the Sexual Misconduct Prevention Workshop was held. The Reverend Wanda Merriweather was the presenter.

Thursday evening, the message was delivered by Rev. Dr. Freddie Albany, pastor of Hopkins Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, Asheville, North Carolina. Dr. Albany delivered a thought-provoking message on "The best of times-The Worst of times: Praise Your way through it" (Psalms 100).



Friday was the Missionary Convocation. Missionary Supervisor, Sister Camille C. Starnes, gave her address during her moments of sharing. She spoke on "Leadership and Legacy" (Psalms 34:8). She said, "In our prayer closets we hear from God." She challenged the leaders to leave a legacy for others to follow. Sister Starnes spoke of three legacies- prayer, holiness, and the Holy Spirit. She asked, "What kind of legacy will you leave?" The address was defined as powerful, emotional, and uplifting.

Friday afternoon, the Twenty-First Home Mission Luncheon was held. Mrs. Eloise Staley of Zion Grove A.M.E. Zion Church was crowned the 2026 Blue Ridge Conference Queen.

Friday evening, the Missionary Message was delivered by Rev. Mary Scott, Pastor of Mt. Zion A.M.E. Zion Church, Hendersonville District. Rev. Scott delivered a thought-provoking message on, Lions, tigers, and bears (Daniel 7:1-14).

Saturday was the Christian Education Assembly. Miss Jayelle Courtney presided over the youth service. The youth message was delivered by a seventh-grader, Miss Morgan Polk. She gave a powerful and enlightening address on "Can You See Me Now?" The children ministered through song and dance. Conference Director, Rev. William Eric Staley, introduced and recognized all the 2026 graduates from elementary, high school, and college, and presented them with tokens of appreciation.

The closing message and charge were given by Bishop Starnes. He addressed the delegation on "Planting Fruitful Congregations (Acts 11:19-30 and Acts 13:1-3) NLT. The Bishop listed five traits of a Fruitful Congregation: 1. Radical Hospitality-loving compassion with which we welcome strangers to salvation. 2. Passionate Worship-Exalts God, encourages God's people, and shows evidence of God's blessing. 3. Intentional faith development. Cooperative teamwork is the key. Small group discipleship is essential. 4. Extravagant generosity-giving that exceeds expectation. Tithing is foundational. 5. Risk-taking mission, leaving our comfort zone to share the gospel, lead people to Christ, and make new congregations. Inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit. Empowers us to leave things we love. It involves being sent out from one conference to plant new congregations." Bishop Starnes concluded his dynamic message by stating, "the most crucial factor is having Bishops, pastors, general officers, members, etc., who are truly saved. Genuine repentance, saving face, and true commitment. Trust God to make churches Fruitful congregations."

During the conference, three requests were granted the state of retirement. These were Revs Terry Young, Debora Wilkerson, and Cathy Logan.

The highlight of the conference was three youth who dedicated their lives to Christ.

St. Stephen A.M.E. Zion Church Brings Church and Community "Together" Through Inaugural Together Fest

By St. Stephen Media Team

Photos: William Burton @BillyBangz





ASBURY PARK, N.J. — On Sunday, August 30, St. Stephen A.M.E. Zion Church transformed its grounds on Springwood Avenue into a hub of service, connection, and community as hundreds gathered for Together Fest 2026, an initiative designed to take ministry beyond the walls of the church and connect families with tangible resources, relationships, and hope.



Held immediately following a condensed yet powerful Sunday worship experience, Together Fest brought churches, community organizations, businesses, members of the Divine Nine, volunteers, and residents together for an afternoon centered on meeting real needs in the Asbury Park community.

By the close of the event, more than 300 families had received groceries, with families invited to take as much food as they could use. More than 100 children received free back-to-school haircuts and braiding, while hundreds of attendees selected from an extensive distribution of brand-new clothing. More than 40 organizations were present, offering free community resources, information, services, and support.

The afternoon also included food, family activities, entertainment, health and wellness resources, and the inaugural Together Fest Car Show, which featured nearly 30 vehicles.

The vision behind Together Fest, however, extended beyond the numbers.

"We believe the church should be more than a place people come to on Sunday; it should be a presence that makes a difference in the community every day," said the Rev. Dr. Quavon Z. Newton, pastor of St. Stephen. "Together Fest is about bringing the church, community organizations, businesses, and neighbors together to meet real needs and build real relationships. Our prayer is that people leave with more than something in their hands. We want them to know that they are seen, supported, loved, and that God cares about them."



That message began before the congregation ever walked outside. During the church's worship service, Newton preached from Matthew 5:14–16 under the theme "Take the Light Outside," challenging the congregation to understand community service as an expression of its Christian witness.

"Sometimes light looks like preaching, and sometimes light looks like praying," Newton told the congregation. "But sometimes light looks like groceries. Sometimes it looks like a free haircut before a child goes back to school. Sometimes it looks like clothing, resources, or simply looking someone in the eye and asking, 'How can we pray for you?'"

The scale of Together Fest required extensive preparation and coordination. The church grounds were carefully mapped to accommodate dozens of organizations and service stations, the food pantry, barbers and braiders, family activities, entertainment, and the car show while allowing hundreds of residents to move safely throughout the event.





Coach Will Wright reflected on the event as both a community effort and a testament to what can happen when people come together around a shared purpose.

"First of all, God gets the glory for the success of our Community Together Festival," Wright said. "Working and planning together for one common cause reminded me of what God can do when we put Him first. I was overwhelmed with joy watching the smiles on our children's faces and knowing that one day, they will be the ones carrying this work forward."

Wright also expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve alongside leaders who are committed to the community's continued growth.

"I am grateful and thankful to be able to work with someone who truly cares about the growth of our community," he said. "Thank you, Pastor Quavon Newton, for your leadership and commitment to bringing people together."

A significant part of the event's success was the spirit of collaboration that brought organizations from across the community together. Among those supporting Together Fest were members of the National Pan-Hellenic Council of Monmouth and Ocean Counties and Divine Nine organizations, reflecting the longstanding tradition of historically Black fraternities and sororities partnering with churches and community institutions in service to others.

Wayne Autry, Esq., Social Action Chair for the National Pan-Hellenic Council of Monmouth and Ocean Counties, shared, "The National Pan-Hellenic Council of Monmouth and Ocean Counties was honored to partner with St. Stephen A.M.E. Zion Church for Together Fest. The Divine Nine's longstanding commitment to community service calls us to work collaboratively with organizations that are strengthening families and addressing community needs. Together Fest demonstrated the power of bringing residents, service organizations, local businesses, and community leaders together to connect people with valuable resources, build lasting relationships, and create a stronger, more unified community."

The event also placed a particular emphasis on families preparing for the beginning of a new school year. By combining groceries, new clothing, free grooming services, family activities, and access to community organizations in one location, Together Fest sought not only to provide assistance but also to relieve some of the financial pressure families experience during the back-to-school season.

For First Lady Ashley Newton, who played a significant role in coordinating the barbers and braiders, watching more than 100 young people receive complimentary services was one of the most meaningful parts of the day.



"Getting ready to go back to school is about more than having supplies. We wanted our children to walk into school feeling confident, cared for, and prepared," Newton said. "A fresh haircut or a new style can make such a difference in how a child feels about themselves, and if we could also take one thing off a parent's list of things to worry about, that would make it even more meaningful. I'm incredibly grateful to every barber and braider who gave their time and talents to make sure our young people could

Continued on Next Page

start the school year feeling their best."

Together Fest grew out of St. Stephen's continuing commitment to community-centered ministry in Asbury Park. Its theme, "Connecting Families. Connecting Resources. Connecting Hope," captured the church's desire to serve not simply as the host of an annual event, but as a connector between residents and the organizations, services, and relationships that can strengthen families throughout the year.

For Rev. Newton, the day also represented a broader vision of evangelism.





"Our goal was never simply to have a large crowd," Newton said. "We wanted our community to experience the love of Christ in a tangible way. If someone walked away with groceries, clothing, a fresh haircut, a new connection to a resource, or simply the assurance that somebody cared about them, then ministry happened."

The inaugural Together Fest ultimately exceeded the church's expectations, demonstrating what can happen when congregational ministry and community partnership meet around a shared purpose.

For St. Stephen, the message coming out of the day was as simple as the name of the event itself:

When the church and community come together, families can be strengthened, resources can be shared, hope can be restored, and the light of Christ can extend far beyond the walls of the sanctuary.

Together, we're building a stronger community.

New Hope A.M.E. Zion Church Celebrates 140 Years of Faith, Hope, Love, and a Harvest Still Growing

Bishop Darryl B. Starnes Sr. Challenges Congregation to Examine the Condition of the Heart During Historic Anniversary Celebration

By Star of Zion News

SALISBURY, N.C. — Celebrating under the theme "Built by Hope, Strengthened by Faith, and Sustained by Love," New Hope African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church marked 140 years of serving God and the community with a spirit-filled anniversary worship celebration. The historic occasion honored the congregation's rich legacy while challenging its members to prepare their hearts for the work that lies ahead.

The celebration brought together clergy, members, families, friends, and supporters as New Hope reflected on nearly a century and a half of ministry. The church stands as a testament to what can happen when hope takes root, faith grows deep, and love sustains a congregation from one generation to the next.

The Rev. Thomas E. Grinter serves as pastor of New Hope, alongside the Rev. James Milton II, associate pastor.

The Rev. Dr. Grant Harrison Jr., presiding elder of the Salisbury District, participated in the anniversary celebration. The Right Rev. Darryl B. Starnes Sr., presiding prelate of the Piedmont Episcopal District, delivered the anniversary sermon, directing the congregation's attention beyond the longevity of the church to the spiritual condition of its members.

Examining the Condition of the Heart

Preaching from Luke 8:4–15, with particular emphasis on verses 11–15, Bishop Starnes



drew upon Jesus' Parable of the Sower to challenge worshippers to consider what happens after the Word of God has been proclaimed.

"What happens when the Word of God is preached or taught?" Starnes asked. "Will we listen? Will we understand? Will we obey? Our responses determine the conditions of our heart."

Bishop Starnes explained that the seed in the biblical passage represents the Word of God, while the soil represents the human heart. The effectiveness of the seed, he emphasized, is connected to the condition of the ground upon which it falls.

Throughout his sermon, Bishop Starnes identified four conditions of the heart that determine how individuals receive and respond to God's Word.

First, he explained that when hearts are hardened, believers cannot fully understand God's Word. Just as a seed falling along a hardened path cannot take root, the Word cannot flourish in a heart unwilling to receive it.

Second, when hearts are shallow, believers struggle to make a genuine commitment to God. Initial enthusiasm alone cannot sustain discipleship when faith encounters the pressures, challenges, and trials of life.

Third, when hearts are crowded, believers cannot grow to spiritual maturity or produce good fruit. The competing concerns, distractions, and responsibilities of everyday life can hinder spiritual development when they occupy the place that belongs to God.

Finally, Bishop Starnes proclaimed that when hearts are healthy, believers can produce a quality harvest. A receptive and faithful heart not only hears the Word but also embraces it, lives according to it, and ultimately produces lasting spiritual fruit.

One of the sermon's most memorable declarations came when Bishop Starnes reminded the congregation that the present condition of the heart does not have to determine its future.

"What matters is not the heart we are born with, but the hearts we die with," he declared.

His message moved beyond spiritual examination to an invitation for personal transformation. Bishop Starnes emphasized that salvation requires genuine repentance, saving faith, and true commitment. He encouraged those gathered to invite Jesus Christ into their lives as Lord and allow the Word of God to transform their hearts.

The message carried particular significance for a congregation celebrating 140 years of ministry. The anniversary provided an oppor-

tunity not only to reflect upon the church's history but also to consider what New Hope will plant, cultivate, and harvest in the generations ahead.



A Celebration Rooted in Worship and Tradition

The anniversary worship service reflected the traditions of faith, music, and fellowship that have sustained generations of Zionites.

The congregation joined together in singing the beloved hymn "Revive Us Again," offering a familiar prayer for spiritual renewal and a renewed commitment to God's work.

Immediately preceding the sermon, worshippers were prepared to receive the preached Word through the musical selection "Is There a Word From the Lord?"

The selection's message of healing, deliverance, salvation, restoration, and encouragement provided a meaningful transition into Bishop Starnes' sermon. It reinforced the central question of his message: How will believers respond when the Word of God reaches their hearts?



The celebration concluded with the musical selection "Let the Church Say Amen," providing a fitting expression of thanksgiving for 140 years of God's faithfulness.

After generations of prayers, sermons, worship services, transformed lives, nurtured families, and community service, the song carried special significance. God has spoken, and the church continues to answer, "Amen."

Bishop Starnes pronounced the benediction, formally concluding the anniversary worship experience.

Honoring the Past While Preparing for the Harvest Ahead

While the anniversary worship service marked the conclusion of a historic celebration, it also served as a reminder that New Hope's ministry continues.

For 140 years, the congregation has remained a place where faith is nurtured, hope is restored, and love is demonstrated through service to God and the surrounding community.



Bishop Starnes' message challenged the congregation to recognize that preserving such a legacy requires more than celebrating past accomplishments. Each generation must make a renewed commitment to receiving God's Word, strengthening its faith, serving others, and preparing the next generation to continue the work.

New Hope's history reflects the dedication of generations of men and women who have faithfully planted seeds of ministry, cultivated relationships, and worked to advance the Kingdom of God.

As the congregation looks toward the future, its anniversary theme remains both a testimony and a call to continued service: "Built by Hope, Strengthened by Faith, and Sustained by Love."

After 140 years, New Hope A.M.E. Zion Church celebrates not only the harvest of its past but also the promise of a harvest still growing.

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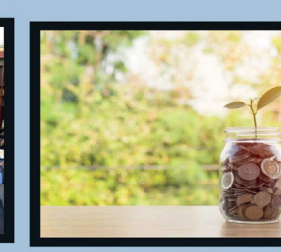


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"Remember Who You Are": Livingstone College Fall Convocation Calls Students to Leadership, Memory, and Purpose

Dr. Michael Eric Dyson Opens his Visiting Scholar Residency as Livingstone Installs its 98th SGA president & Welcomes the Class of 2030

By Star of Zion News

Livingstone College gathered on Friday, September 18, 2026, in historic Bishop James Varick Auditorium for a Fall Convocation steeped in tradition but pointed deliberately toward the future. The morning began with the installation of the 2026–2027 Student Government Association, the College's formal convocation ceremony, and the Class of 2030 Pinning Ceremony, with a provocative message from acclaimed scholar and cultural critic Dr. Michael Eric Dyson: a people moving toward the future must not surrender their memory of the past.

Presiding over the ceremony was Dr. Anthony J. Davis, 13th president of Livingstone College, whose administration continues to frame the institution's forward movement around preparing students to lead, serve, and engage the world beyond the College gates.

The occasion also reflected the historic bond between Livingstone College and The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. Livingstone was founded by and remains affiliated with The A.M.E. Zion Church, and bishops, clergy, and lay leaders of the denomination continue to serve prominently in the governance of the institution.

That connection was visible throughout the convocation.

The Rev. Dr. Malcolm Byrd, pastor of Mother A.M.E. Zion Church in Harlem, New York, and a member of the Livingstone College Board of Trustees, delivered the invocation. Dr. T. Antonio Landers, also a trustee, offered Scripture. Bishop Darryl B. Starnes Sr., Senior Bishop of The A.M.E. Zion Church, Presiding Prelate of the Piedmont Episcopal District, and chairman of Livingstone's Board of Trustees, brought greetings.

The ceremony would ultimately conclude with the benediction by Bishop Hilliard B. Dogbe, Presiding Prelate of the Western West Africa Episcopal District.

Thus, from invocation to benediction, the morning reminded the Livingstone community that the College's academic mission and its Zion heritage remain intertwined.

Leadership Passes to a New Generation

Before Dyson issued his intellectual charge, Livingstone formally entrusted a new generation of students with the responsibility of campus leadership.



Vice President for Student Affairs Rashanda Lowery presented the Student Government Association, followed by Davis' presidential charge and the installation of the organization's officers.

At the center of that ceremony stood Andrew L. Foster V, who accepted the charge as the 98th president of the Livingstone College Student Government Association.

Foster, a senior Business Administration major and Presidential Scholar from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, enters the presidency after serving as a class president for three years. His administration operates under the platform "Fostering F.A.M.I.L.Y.," emphasizing opportunities for students while promoting transparency, accountability, career development, community engagement, and educational success.



His leadership reaches well beyond SGA. Foster is the founder and president of Streetlight Production Company, a nonprofit theater organization providing artistic opportunities for young people. On campus, he serves as president and director of the Julia B. Duncan Players Club and has held leadership roles with the Rotaract Club. Also, he is a spring 2026 initiate and Vice Basileus of the Lambda Psi Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Incorporated.

Foster's position also places the student voice within the governance of the institution: he is listed among the members of the Livingstone College Board of Trustees for 2026–2027.

His installation carried a fitting message for the students who watched from the auditorium. Leadership at Livingstone is not something students must wait until graduation to exercise. They are expected to practice it now.

Music, Faith, and the HBCU Tradition

Music provided a spiritual and cultural thread throughout the morning.

The congregation joined in "Lift Every Voice and Sing," led by Dr. Johngerlyn Young, Vice President for Institutional Advancement. The Livingstone College Concert Choir, directed by Dr. Carlos Brown, offered "My Soul's Been Anchored in De Lord" and later "Walk Together Children."



The Livingstone College Gospel Choir, under the direction of Pastor Christopher Gray, added its ministry through "Encourage Yourself" and "I Will Lift Up Your Name." The selections did more than separate portions of the program. Taken together, they echoed the themes that would emerge from the convocation itself: endurance, encouragement, collective responsibility, and faith.

Then came the morning's featured voice.

Dyson: A Nation Must Remember

Davis introduced Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, Distinguished University Professor at Vanderbilt University and one of the nation's prominent public intellectuals, authors, and cultural commentators. The appearance officially launched Dyson's four-part appointment as a Visiting Scholar in Residence at Livingstone College. The College announced the residency earlier this month as an initiative bringing together Black intellectual thought, faith, hip-hop, politics, culture, and democracy. Dyson's inaugural lecture, "Represent: The Unfinished Fight," was announced as an exploration of Black excellence, the continuing importance of historically Black colleges and universities, and the transformative possibilities of education. Yet, one of the most penetrating ideas running through Dyson's convocation message concerned something deceptively simple:

Memory.

His remarks challenged the audience to consider the consequences of amnesia, what happens when a nation, a culture, or a people forget the history that produced the present.

For Dyson, remembering was not presented



as nostalgia. It was a form of responsibility. His remarks placed contemporary American life within a much longer historical conversation about race, democracy, citizenship, education, and the unfinished pursuit of equality. His political and social observations were unmistakably his own argument, but the larger question he placed before the students transcended a particular political moment: *What happens to a people when they no longer remember how they arrived where they are?*

The question carried particular weight inside an HBCU. Livingstone College exists because generations before its current students understood education as an instrument of liberation and advancement. For students sitting in Varick Auditorium in 2026, Dyson's message transformed history from something merely studied into something inherited. "I loved Dr. Dyson's message," said freshman Presidential Scholar Lavin Savage. "To remember is to understand somebody struggled before you. Today, we know access to classrooms, libraries, laboratories, leadership positions, and college degrees represents the accumulated work of people whose names we may never know. So, to remember is to respect and honor that memory, but also accept an obligation to those who and what will come next," said Savage.



The Class of 2030 Is Called Forward

The morning ultimately belonged as much to Livingstone's newest students as it did to its distinguished speaker. The College announced nearly 500 first-year and new students would be formally welcomed through the convocation and the Pinning Ceremony, joining a student body of approximately 1,300. In the recessional, Liberian drummers helped lead the transition from the solemnity of Varick Auditorium to the Class of 2030 Pinning at Blue Bear Plaza. There, the newest members of the Livingstone family received a visible symbol of belonging to an institution whose story began long before they arrived and whose next chapters they will help write.

The pinning, therefore, carried particular meaning after Dyson's address.

A pin can be worn.

A degree can eventually be earned.

But belonging to a historic institution also requires something less tangible: **memory**.

Students must know whose shoulders they stand upon. They must know the sacrifices that made their opportunities possible. They must understand the privileges of education carry responsibilities of leadership and service.

For an institution born from the educational ministry of The A.M.E. Zion Church, that charge is deeply familiar.

BLUE BEAR PRIDE HAS A NEW HOME: LIVINGSTONE COLLEGE UNVEILS HISTORIC NEW BOOKSTORE AND MERCHANDISING CENTER

First-ever Follett partnership brings an elevated campus shopping experience and Livingstone merchandise to supporters everywhere

By Livingstone College

SALISBURY, N.C. — Livingstone College opened the doors to a new era of Blue Bear pride.

On Tuesday, Sept. 8, at 3 p.m., the College celebrated the grand opening and ribbon-cutting of its newly renovated bookstore and merchandising center inside the W.J. Walls Center — marking another historic first for Livingstone and a major expansion of the College's retail experience.

For the first time in Livingstone College's history, students, alumni, families, fans, and supporters can now shop Livingstone merchandise both on campus and online through a new partnership with Follett Higher Education, one of the nation's leading campus retail providers.

The new space transforms the traditional campus bookstore into a modern destination for Livingstone apparel, spirit wear, merchandise, and more — giving the Blue Bear community an enhanced way to represent the College and stay connected to Livingstone from Salisbury to anywhere in the world.

The grand opening included a ribbon-cutting ceremony, light refreshments, and a first-look shopping experience inside the new merchandising center.

"This is bigger than opening a retail space. It is about expanding the Livingstone experience," said Adreanna Johnson, Sr. Associate Vice-President for Strategic Engagement. "Our students, alumni, and supporters deserve greater access to the Livingstone brand, and this partnership gives Blue Bear pride a new platform and a much broader reach."

Follett serves more than 1,000 campuses across North America, providing campus retail, e-commerce, course materials, and merchandise solutions designed to strengthen the student experience and deepen connections between institutions and their communities.

The opening comes during a period of significant momentum for Livingstone College.

This fall, the College welcomed nearly 500 first-year and new students, the largest incoming enrollment in its history, with an average GPA of 3.30. Overall enrollment has grown to approximately 1,300 students — a roughly 60% increase since 2022.

As Livingstone grows, so does the experience surrounding its students and community. The new bookstore and merchandising center represents another investment in creating a campus environment that reflects the College's momentum, strengthens institutional pride, and gives generations of Blue Bears a new way to wear and share the Livingstone story.

About Livingstone College

Livingstone College is a private, historically Black college rooted in a Christian-based environment that fosters academic excellence, leadership, and service. The College offers undergraduate and graduate programs designed to prepare students for lifelong learning, professional success, and leadership in a global community. For more information, visit **www.livingstone.edu**.

30 LDEA Senior Officers Certified: A.M.E. Zion University and LDEA Deepen Partnership in Professional Training

By Rev. Roderick J. Josey, Education Editor

"Go and serve your nation well."

Those words carried a powerful charge as the Rev. Emmanuel F. Johnson I, Ph.D., President of A.M.E. Zion University, addressed 30 senior officers of the Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency (LDEA) who completed an intensive professional training program through the University's Graduate School of Professional Studies.



On Friday, September 4, 2026, the officers received certificates marking the successful completion of the first batch of the LDEA Senior Officers Intensive Training Program. The occasion represented more than another graduation or certification ceremony. It demonstrated the growing partnership between A.M.E. Zion University and the LDEA and the University's continued commitment to educating professionals who serve Liberia.

Throughout the intensive program, officers received focused instruction in areas directly connected to the responsibilities they encounter in law enforcement. Training included evidence gathering and handling, investigative procedures under Liberia's Criminal Procedure Law, intelligence gathering, professional reporting, case-file management and courtroom presentation, use of force, and constitutional safeguards governing investigative practices.



These subjects carry consequences far beyond the classroom.

For law enforcement professionals, properly gathering and preserving evidence can determine whether a case successfully moves through the judicial system. Investigative procedures must operate within the boundaries of the law, and effective case-file management and reporting help ensure that the work conducted in the field can withstand examination in the courtroom.

President Johnson reminded the officers that receiving their certificates represented not the conclusion of their work, but another level of responsibility.



"Your certificate today is not a trophy. It is a tool, a tool for service," Johnson told the graduates.

His message challenged the officers to return to their respective assignments with a deeper understanding of what their uniforms represent and the responsibility that comes with exercising authority on behalf of the state.

President Johnson framed that responsibility through what he described as the **3Cs of Service: No Complaining. No Compromising. No Complacency.**

He further challenged the officers to embrace **V4 Determination: Vision, Valor, Virtue, and Victory.**

Together, these principles served as a reminder that professional development cannot end when a certificate is placed in one's hands. The effectiveness of the training will ultimately be demonstrated through how these officers investigate cases, exercise judgment, handle evidence, prepare reports, interact with the public, and carry out their responsibilities under the law.

A Partnership With Purpose

The certification also highlights the expanding role of A.M.E. Zion University in professional education and institutional development in Liberia.

The University expressed appreciation to the leadership of the Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency for entrusting A.M.E. Zion University with an opportunity to contribute to the professional development of its senior personnel.

Most importantly, this first cohort is not expected to represent the end of the relationship. The LDEA has expressed its commitment to continue training its officers through the A.M.E. Zion University Graduate School of Professional Studies. Such a commitment provides an opportunity for the partnership to develop beyond a single training cohort and become a sustained investment in professional development and institutional capacity.

Special recognition was also extended to former Officer-in-Charge Director Fitzgerald T. M. Bago, whose vision for strengthening the capacity of LDEA personnel helped establish the foundation for the initiative.

Strong institutions require trained and prepared people. By recognizing the importance of continuing education for law enforcement personnel, the partnership demonstrates how educational institutions can work alongside public agencies to strengthen professional service.

President Johnson also congratulated the new Executive Director of the LDEA and his deputies and assured the new leadership of A.M.E. Zion University's continued commitment to the partnership and to helping build the professional capacity of the agency.

Appreciation was further extended to President Johnson, the Dean's Office of the Graduate School and Professional Studies, the Graduate School Criminal Justice College, and Cllr. Arthur T. Johnson Jr. for the vision, coordination, and work that helped make the training program possible.

For The A.M.E. Zion Church, this moment also offers another opportunity to recognize the ministry and mission of one of Zion's educational institutions beyond the borders of the United States. A.M.E. Zion University continues a tradition of connecting education with service, preparing individuals not simply to obtain credentials but to use their education to strengthen communities and institutions.

For these 30 LDEA senior officers, the certificate ceremony was therefore both a celebration and a commissioning.

The charge given to them was clear:

Do not complain. Do not compromise. Do not become complacent.

Have vision. Have valor. Have virtue. Pursue victory.

Their certificates are now in their hands, but the true measure of the training will be demonstrated through their service to the people of Liberia.

As President Johnson reminded them:

"Go and serve your nation well."

Congratulations to the 30 senior officers comprising the LDEA First Batch of 2026 and to A.M.E. Zion University for continuing its work of educating professionals, strengthening institutions, and serving Liberia.

Livingstone Excellence: The Future Starts Here

By Rev. Roderick J. Josey, Education Editor

SALISBURY, N.C. — There is exciting news coming from Livingstone College. The historic institution welcomed the **largest incoming freshman class in the College's history** for the Fall 2026 semester.



The College announced the milestone on August 7 as it prepared to welcome the Class of 2030 to Salisbury. The record incoming class represents continued growth for Livingstone and growing confidence among students and families who are choosing the College for their higher education.

Livingstone College President and CEO **Dr. Anthony J. Davis** described the historic class as an important sign of the College's progress.

"The arrival of our largest freshman class ever is a testament to the confidence students and families have placed in Livingstone College," Davis said in the College's announcement.

That confidence is important.

At a time when colleges and universities across the country are competing to recruit and retain students, Livingstone is experiencing growth. More students are making the decision to become Blue Bears, creating new energy and opportunity for the College.



The incoming students represent communities throughout North Carolina and across the nation. As they arrive in Salisbury, they will become part of an institution that continues to focus on academic achievement, leadership development, and preparing students for lives of purpose and service.

Livingstone is also preparing for what growth means for the campus. According to the College, departments have worked together in preparation for the 2026-2027 academic year to expand academic support, student engagement opportunities, residence life programming, and wellness resources.



These investments are important because successful growth involves more than increasing enrollment. It also means ensuring that students have the resources and support necessary to succeed after they arrive.

Continued enrollment growth can also create new opportunities for Livingstone to consider its future needs, including additional housing and residential opportunities as the student population expands. These are positive challenges that come when more students want to call Livingstone home.

For members of the **African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church**, this is news worth celebrating.



Livingstone College has a longstanding relationship with The A.M.E. Zion Church and remains an important part of Zion's educational legacy. The growth underway today represents another generation of students who will have the opportunity to benefit from that legacy.

The record freshman class also provides an opportunity for alumni, churches, supporters, and friends of Livingstone to continue investing in the College. Growing institutions require growing support, and Livingstone's momentum provides another reason for the Zion family to remain connected to its progress.

The largest incoming freshman class in college history is more than a record. It is a sign that students are choosing Livingstone, that families are placing their confidence in the institution, and that Livingstone continues to move forward.

A new generation of Blue Bears is coming to Salisbury.

There is growth at Livingstone. There is momentum at Livingstone. And there is reason to be excited about what comes next.

Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society Initiative Strengthens the Connection Between Church, College, and Students

By Star of Zion News

SALISBURY, N.C. — Just days before Livingstone College's Fall Convocation, the historic relationship between The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and Livingstone College was brought to life through an initiative rooted in missionary service, generosity, and a shared commitment to student success.

On September 17, 2026, Melva Polk Wright, Secretary of the Youth Missionary Society of The A.M.E. Zion Church, visited Livingstone College to present contributions from the Y Department of the Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society (WH&OMS). The contributions supported the Dorm Room Project, an initiative designed to provide incoming Livingstone College students with essential items as they begin their collegiate journeys.



Under Wright's leadership, the Y Department mobilized members throughout the denomination, encouraging congregations and Presiding Elder Districts to contribute toward providing students with the necessities of residence hall life.

The response demonstrated the generosity and collective commitment of the Zion connection.

Through the contributions of missionaries and supporters across the denomination, Livingstone College received an abundance of dormitory supplies and personal-care items intended to provide students with comfort, dignity, and a tangible reminder that their Church stands behind them.

The Dorm Room Project focused on providing essential items, including full-size comforters, twin XL sheet sets, bed pillows, bath towels, washcloths, shower curtains, laundry detergent pods, dryer sheets, toiletries, and other necessities.

However, the significance of the initiative extends beyond furnishing residence hall rooms.



For students transitioning into college life, particularly those navigating financial challenges or living away from home for the first time, access to everyday necessities can make a meaningful difference. By addressing these practical needs, the Y Department is helping students establish a

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foundation that allows them to concentrate on their education, personal development, and future aspirations.

The initiative also reflects the longstanding relationship between The A.M.E. Zion Church and Livingstone College. Founded through the Church's commitment to education and the advancement of African Americans, Livingstone College continues to represent the denomination's enduring investment in developing future generations of leaders.



That historic commitment remains evident when members of the Zion connection recognize the needs of students and respond through meaningful service.

Promoted under the theme **"Standing on the Stone: Building Strong Foundations for Livingstone Students,"** the Dorm Room Project challenged every Presiding Elder District to contribute at least one dorm-room bundle. The broader initiative established a goal of supporting 100 students during the Fall 2026 semester.

Wright's visit carried additional significance as Livingstone College prepared for its Fall Convocation, a ceremonial occasion marking the beginning of another academic year.

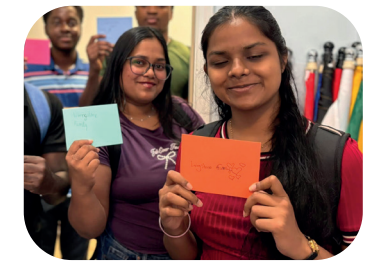
While convocation traditionally challenges students to pursue academic excellence, embrace leadership, and fulfill their potential, the Dorm Room Project delivered a complementary message: student achievement is strengthened when young people know they have a community committed to their success.

"The project demonstrates the power of connectionalism within Zion," said Wright. "A contribution made by a missionary in one congregation or Presiding Elder District can ultimately reach a student at Livingstone College and become part of that student's educational journey."

Her words capture the spirit of connectionalism that continues to unite The A.M.E. Zion Church across congregations, districts, conferences, and educational institutions.

For generations, the Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society has demonstrated its commitment to Christian stewardship, missionary outreach, education, and service. Through the Y Department's Dorm Room Project, that legacy continues as missionaries translate their faith into practical expressions of compassion and support for a new generation.

Each contribution represents more than a donated item. A comforter provides warmth. A towel offers dignity. A set of sheets creates a welcoming place for a student to rest after a demanding day of classes. Together, these seemingly simple gifts communicate a powerful message of encouragement and belonging.



As Livingstone College begins another academic year, the Dorm Room Project serves as a reminder that the foundation supporting its students extends far beyond classrooms and residence halls.

It is a foundation built upon generations of faith, sacrifice, education, and service.

Through initiatives such as this, the Women's Home and Overseas Missionary Society continues to demonstrate that the connection between the Church and its educational institutions is not merely historical. It is a living partnership, sustained through generosity and a shared responsibility to prepare the next generation for success.

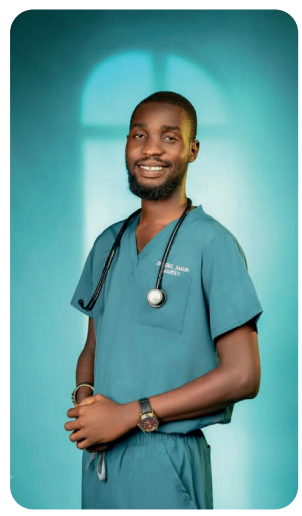
Indeed, through the collective efforts of the Zion connection, Livingstone College students are being equipped not only to begin their academic journeys but also to stand firmly upon the stone.

From the Pulpit to the Hospital: A.M.E. Zion Celebrates Dr. Eric Amarh Ashitey

By Rev. Roderick J. Josey, Education Editor

GHANA — The Grace L. Holmes Society, together with The A.M.E. Zion Church family in Ghana and across the connection, celebrates a remarkable achievement in the life of **Local Preacher Dr. (Med) Eric Amarh Ashitey**, who has successfully completed medical school and become a medical doctor.

This accomplishment represents an important milestone in Dr. Ashitey's journey of faith, education, service, and commitment to helping others. As both a Local Preacher and a newly trained physician, he stands at the intersection of two important callings: caring for the spiritual needs of people through ministry and caring for their physical well-being through medicine.



His journey is a reminder that Christian service extends beyond the walls of the church. Whether standing behind the pulpit proclaiming the Word of God or serving patients in a medical setting, Dr. Ashitey has an opportunity to demonstrate compassion, excellence, integrity, and a heart for people.



The Grace L. Holmes Society expressed great joy in celebrating one of its own and recognizing the dedication required to successfully complete medical training. Becoming a physician requires years of study, discipline, sacrifice, and perseverance. Accomplishing this while remaining connected to Christian ministry makes the occasion especially meaningful for The A.M.E. Zion Church family.

The celebration also reflects the importance of encouraging young adults throughout the denomination to pursue excellence in education and professional service while remaining committed to their faith. Dr. Ashitey's achievement demonstrates that ministry and professional vocation can work together as avenues through which individuals serve God and their communities.

The words of Exodus 23:25 provide a fitting scriptural foundation for this moment: **"You shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And will take sickness away from the midst of you."**

For Dr. Ashitey, the connection between faith and healing carries special significance. His ministry allows him to speak words of faith, hope, and encouragement, while his medical profession provides another opportunity to care for people during some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives.

His accomplishment is also a source of pride for **ZISAM Ghana, the A.M.E. Zion Church in the Western West Africa Episcopal District, and ZYM Ghana Region**. It represents another example of A.M.E. Zion members using their gifts and education to make meaningful contributions within their communities and beyond.

As Dr. Ashitey begins this new chapter, The A.M.E. Zion Church family celebrates what God has already accomplished in his life while praying for continued wisdom, strength, compassion, and success in the years ahead.

From the pulpit to the hospital, the mission remains one of service. Through preaching and medicine, Dr. Ashitey now carries the responsibility and privilege of touching lives in powerful ways.

Congratulations, **Dr. (Med) Eric Amarh Ashitey**, on this outstanding achievement.

The Grace L. Holmes Society and the entire A.M.E. Zion Church family celebrate you. May God continue to guide your ministry, your medical career, and your service to humanity.

To God be the glory!

Hood Theological Seminary Welcomes Rev. Lawrence Ganzy, Jr. as New Graduate Recruiting and Admissions Coordinator

By Dierdre' R. Parker, Submitted By Rev. Roderick J. Josey, Education Editor

Hood Theological Seminary is pleased to announce the appointment of the Rev. Lawrence Ganzy, Jr., a Hood alumnus, as its new Graduate Recruiting and Admissions Coordinator, effective October 1, 2026. Rev. Ganzy succeeds Dr. Reginald Boyd, who has transitioned into a new role as Accounts Payable Specialist and Assistant to the Chief Financial Officer (CFO).

Dr. Boyd's transition follows 10 years of dedicated service in recruiting and admitting students to Hood Theological Seminary. The institution extends its sincere appreciation for his contributions to student recruitment, admissions, and the continued growth of the seminary.

A native of Gibson, North Carolina, Rev. Ganzy is an educator, pastor, and advocate for expanding access and opportunity in higher education. As a first-generation college graduate, he understands the importance of educational access and the transformative opportunities that higher education provides.

Rev. Ganzy earned his Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and his Master of Divinity from Hood Theological Seminary,



where he completed dual concentrations in Pastoral Care and Counseling and Christian Education.

With more than a decade of professional experience in higher education, student success, and college access, Rev. Ganzy brings extensive knowledge and a passion for helping students achieve their academic and professional goals. Most recently, he served as a Student Career Coach with Road to Hire, supporting students from Title I high schools as they transitioned into college and began their professional careers.

His commitment to education and ministry extends to his continued involvement with Hood Theological Seminary. He currently serves as an Outreach Advocate for FaithLearnThrive at Hood and is a member of its Council of Advisors. Additionally, he serves as Parliamentarian for the Hood Theological Seminary National Alumni Association (HTSNAA).

Beyond his work in higher education, Rev. Ganzy is an ordained Elder in The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. He has served in pastoral ministry since 2018 and currently serves as Pastor of Mt. Moriah A.M.E. Zion Church in Richburg, South Carolina.

Rev. Ganzy's appointment brings together his experiences as a Hood alumnus, educator, and pastor as he prepares to support prospective students seeking theological education and preparation for ministry.

Guided by his personal motto, "Where you come from does not determine where you can go," Rev. Ganzy continues to demonstrate his belief that one's beginnings do not define one's possibilities and that, with God, all things are possible.

As he prepares to assume his new position, Rev. Ganzy brings a commitment to educational opportunity, student development, and theological education to his work at Hood Theological Seminary.

Livingstone College Students Make Their Mark Through National Internship Opportunities

By Star of Zion News

SALISBURY, N.C. — From scientific research laboratories and major corporations to government agencies and health care institutions, Livingstone College students are expanding their professional horizons through competitive internships and development opportunities that showcase the talent emerging from the historic institution.

During the summer of 2026, students secured opportunities across multiple industries, putting their classroom knowledge into practice while building professional networks and gaining valuable career experience. Among them were members of the Anthony J. Davis Presidential Scholars program, whose collaborative approach to career preparation reflects Livingstone College's commitment to developing graduates who are Resilient, Relevant, and Ready.

Six students featured among these accomplishments are Kuwa-Salama Mbetwa, who secured a paid internship with Mathnasium; Kamari Scales, who worked with Freedom School Partners, Inc.; Jamia Mathis, who gained experience with the Virginia Department of Corrections; Te'J Rodriguez, who was selected as a John R. Lewis CDC Public Health Undergraduate Scholar at the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health; Jephter Ofori, who interned with agricultural technology company Syngenta; and Francis Adom, who served as a BRAID Fellow with Interfaith America and secured a paid internship with Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, commonly known as Fermilab.

Their achievements represent a broader group of Livingstone students who spent the summer developing professional skills and gaining experience in agriculture, transportation, public health, education, business, technology, medicine, and scientific research.

Preparing Students for Professional Success

The Anthony J. Davis Presidential Scholars program brings together a diverse community of domestic and international students committed to academic excellence, leadership, and professional development.

Throughout the academic year, scholars worked collaboratively to strengthen résumés, practice interviewing techniques, review applications, and encourage one another to pursue competitive internships and career opportunities. Their collective dedication to preparation helped posi-

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tion them for professional experiences across the country.

“An internship is about much more than having something to add to a résumé,” said Dr. Anthony J. Davis, president and CEO of Livingstone College. “It is an opportunity for students to see themselves as professionals. They learn how to communicate, how to navigate a workplace, how to contribute to a team, and most importantly, how much they have to offer. We want our students to graduate from Livingstone not only with a degree, but with the professional posture to walk into any room knowing they are competent enough to effectively compete and contribute.”



The range of opportunities secured by Livingstone students demonstrates the breadth of academic talent and career interests represented on campus.

Students Gain Experience Across Major Industries

In agriculture and transportation, Jephter Ofori and Darryl Fisher secured internships with Syngenta, gaining experience with a major agricultural technology company. Madalyn Jones expanded her professional experience at Charlotte Motor Speedway, while Yves Kwawu worked with the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

Joel Thompson gained financial-sector experience through a paid internship with Self-Help Credit Union, while Jamia Mathis worked with the Virginia Department of Corrections.

Students interested in health care, medicine, and scientific research also secured opportunities to advance their professional development.

Aidatu Razak participated in the Developing Future Biologists program, while Robert Osei gained clinical exposure through Carolina QuickCare.

Francis Boadu expanded his scientific and medical experience through opportunities involving Davidson College and Duke University School of Medicine, demonstrating the importance of undergraduate research and experiential learning for students pursuing careers in medicine and the sciences.

Francis Adom served as a BRAID Fellow with Interfaith America and earned a paid internship with Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory. His experience at Fermilab provided an opportunity to work within one of the nation’s leading scientific research environments.

Te’J Rodriguez was selected as a John R. Lewis CDC Public Health Undergraduate Scholar at the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health. The opportunity is designed to strengthen the development of emerging professionals prepared to address public health needs.

Mya Dalpiaz continued preparing for a career in health care as an NC AHEC Scholar, gaining experience that connects academic preparation with the health needs of communities.

Other Livingstone students dedicated their summers to education, recreation, and community development.

Aleah Mattis served with the City of Salisbury Parks and Recreation Department, extending Livingstone College’s impact within the local community. Kamari Scales worked with Freedom School Partners, Inc., while Kuwa-Salama Mbetwa strengthened his instructional and professional skills through a paid internship with Mathnasium.

Additionally, Ellis Dogbe-Gakpetor gained professional experience with AxessPointe Health Centers, while Shambhabi Sinha worked with TOSOT Comfort.

Together, these opportunities illustrate how Livingstone students are applying their academic preparation in professional environments while gaining the knowledge and experience necessary for their future careers.

Building a Culture of Collaboration and Achievement

Beyond their individual accomplishments, the students’ achievements reflect a culture of collaboration in which professional development is viewed as a shared responsibility rather than an individual competition.

Joel Thompson, a junior majoring in Computer Information Systems at Livingstone College, emphasized the importance of beginning career preparation early and supporting fellow students throughout the process.

“We know preparation for a career does not begin during the senior year. It begins early, with the first résumé, the first application, the first mock interview, and sometimes the first rejection. When we meet and share our experiences, we also push through them together,” Thompson said.

That commitment to collective success is particularly evident within the Anthony J. Davis Presidential Scholars program.

The program includes students from the United States and 26 nations around the world. Although their backgrounds, academic interests, and professional aspirations differ, the scholars have developed a supportive environment where students exchange information about internships and scholarships, critique application materials, practice interviewing, and encourage their peers to pursue new opportunities.

Nailah McDowell, vice president for Strategic Programs and Partnerships at Livingstone College, emphasized that the students’ achievements extend beyond their individual professional development.

“These students are proof that talent is here,” McDowell said. “They are learning that excellence is not simply about what you accomplish for yourself. It is also about reaching back, sharing the opportunity, and helping the next student become prepared. When one scholar learns how to build a stronger résumé, that knowledge is shared. When one student finds an internship, they tell someone else where to look. That is how we build a culture of achievement.”

Resilient, Relevant and Ready

The accomplishments of these students reinforce Livingstone College’s commitment to preparing graduates who are Resilient, Relevant, and Ready to meet the demands of an evolving workforce.

Through internships, research opportunities, and professional partnerships, students are developing technical knowledge, interpersonal skills, and practical experience that will serve them throughout their careers.

For Salisbury and Rowan County, these achievements carry additional significance. Although students spend their summers gaining experience in laboratories, corporate offices, government agencies, health care systems, and nonprofit organizations across the country, they return to Livingstone with new skills, expanded professional networks, and a greater understanding of how their education can benefit the communities they serve.

Their experiences also demonstrate the continuing importance of historically Black colleges and universities in developing talented professionals and creating pathways to opportunity.

As Livingstone College continues its mission of academic excellence and student development, these summer accomplishments illustrate the impact of intentional preparation, institutional support, and student collaboration.

From the historic campus in Salisbury to professional environments across the nation, Livingstone College students are demonstrating what it means to be **Resilient, Relevant, and Ready**, while creating opportunities for future generations of scholars to follow.

Dr. Michael Eric Dyson Joins Livingstone College as a Visiting Scholar in Residence

Renowned scholar, professor, author, and cultural critic joins Livingstone for a four-part residency exploring Black thought, faith, hip-hop, politics, and democracy

By The Office of Strategic Engagement, Integrated Marketing and Communications, Livingstone College

SALISBURY, N.C. — Livingstone College is emerging as a powerful destination for Black intellectual thought, cultural expression, and academic excellence — and this fall, one of the nation's most recognizable public intellectuals joined that movement.

Renowned author, scholar, activist, and cultural critic Dr. Michael Eric Dyson joined Livingstone College as a Visiting Scholar in Residence, launching a four-part residency designed to place some of the most consequential conversations shaping Black America at the center of the collegiate experience.

Through a series of lectures, student engagement opportunities, and academic experiences, Dyson will bring together urban education, faith, hip-hop, politics, culture, and democracy — creating a dynamic intellectual space where scholarship meets lived experience and where students are challenged to examine not only the world around them, but their responsibility to shape it.

Dyson's residency began during Livingstone College's Opening Convocation on Friday, September 18, at 10 a.m. in Varick Auditorium.

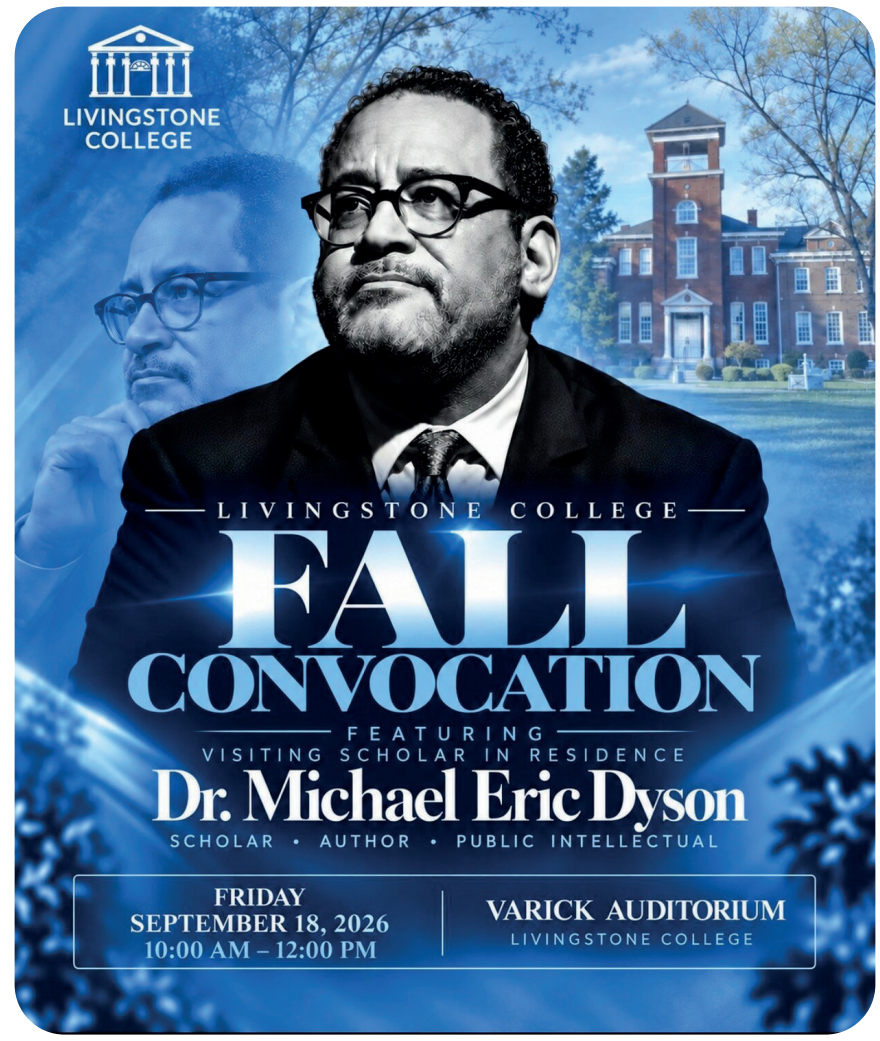
His inaugural lecture, "Represent: The Unfinished Fight," explored Black excellence, the enduring importance of HBCUs, and the transformative power of an educated mind.

The moment carried added significance as Livingstone welcomes one of the largest and most academically competitive incoming classes in its history. The Convocation included the College's First-Year Pinning Ceremony, formally welcoming nearly 500 first-year and new students into a student body of approximately 1300.

The academic profile of Livingstone's student body reflects the College's growing momentum. More than 40 percent of students currently hold a GPA of 3.0 or higher, and approximately 450 students have earned recognition as Presidential Scholars, entering the college with a 3.7 GPA or above and maintaining this distinction during their academic journey.

"Having Dr. Michael Eric Dyson as a Visiting Scholar in Residence speaks directly to my vision for Livingstone College as a relevant, regarded, and respected HBCU, where we are developing and deploying change agents who are thoroughly immersed in civic engagement, cultural content, and environmental justice," said Livingstone College President Dr. Anthony J. Davis.

Dyson's presence at Livingstone extends far beyond a traditional lecture series. Known for his ability to move seamlessly between the academy, the church, popular culture, and public discourse, Dyson has built a career translating complex questions of race, politics, faith, and identity for broad audiences. His acclaimed body of work includes *JAY-Z: Made in America*, featuring a foreword by Pharrell Williams, and *Represent: The Unfinished Fight for the Vote*.



His residency at Livingstone will continue with sessions examining faith and leadership, hip-hop and cultural identity, and race and democracy, positioning the College as a gathering place for rigorous scholarship and fearless conversation about the forces shaping life in America.

The residency will be housed within Livingstone College's Political Science Division and will also establish the Dyson Fellows, a selected cohort of 10 to 20 students who will engage directly with themes from the residency through research, scholarship, and capstone projects.

The Fellows program will ensure that Dyson's residency does more than bring conversation to campus — it will create opportunities for Livingstone students to produce scholarship, develop their own voices, and contribute to the intellectual traditions they are studying.

"I am honored to spend quality time with some of the smartest students at one of our nation's most distinguished HBCUs as we explore important issues and ideas that will shape the future of our nation," said Dr. Dyson.

At Livingstone, the classroom has never been confined by four walls.

The arrival of Michael Eric Dyson represents a broader institutional commitment to creating spaces where ideas are studied, challenged, amplified, and transformed into action. It reflects a Livingstone College that is growing in enrollment, strengthening its academic profile, and intentionally positioning itself at the intersection of education, culture, and leadership.

This is more than a visiting scholar residency.

It is an invitation to the intellectual cypher.

A place where scholars, students, faith leaders, artists, and thinkers come together. A place where ideas move. A place where voices are not simply heard, but sharpened, developed, and prepared to influence the world beyond campus.

It is another defining step in Livingstone College's commitment to being Resilient, Relevant, and Ready — and to preparing a new generation of thinkers and leaders who understand that their intellect is not only an asset, but a powerful resource for change.

Hood Theological Seminary Welcomes New Academic Year with Learning, Scholarship and Community Engagement

By Hood Theological Seminary

SALISBURY, N.C. — A new academic year at Hood Theological Seminary brings renewed opportunities for theological education, scholarly conversation and meaningful engagement with the Salisbury community and surrounding region.

As Hood begins the 2026–2027 academic year, the seminary is opening its doors not only to students pursuing theological education but also to clergy, faith leaders, scholars, and community members who want to explore the intersection of faith, learning, and contemporary life.

The academic year begins with **Hood Theological Seminary's Opening Convocation**



on Friday, September 18, 2026. The annual gathering marks the beginning of a new academic year and provides an opportunity for the Hood community to come together in worship, reflection, and anticipation of the work ahead.

This year's convocation speaker is **Bishop Michael A. Frencher**, Hood's A.M.E. Zion Bishop-in-Residence. Bishop Frencher brings extensive experience in pastoral ministry, preaching, and denominational leadership.



Opening Convocation represents more than the beginning of another academic year. It is a time to celebrate the vocation of theological education and to reaffirm Hood's commitment to preparing women and men for bold and creative leadership in the Christian church and for a diverse world.

The fall calendar continues with one of Hood's signature scholarly events, the **Ruben L. Speaks Lecture Series, October 2–3, 2026**.

This year's featured speaker is **Dr. Musa W. Dube**, an internationally recognized biblical scholar and theologian whose work engages the New Testament, postcolonial biblical interpretation, gender, HIV and AIDS, and the intersection of biblical scholarship with questions of justice and contemporary life.

Dr. Dube previously served as Professor of New Testament in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Botswana and has held academic and ecumenical leadership roles, including work with the World Council of Churches. She currently serves on the faculty of Candler School of Theology at Emory University.

The Ruben L. Speaks Lecture Series brings distinguished scholars into conversation with students, faculty, clergy, faith leaders and members of the public. Through lectures and opportunities for dialogue, the series reflects Hood's commitment to scholarship that reaches beyond the classroom and engages important questions facing the church and society.

The fall programming continues just days later with the **Messinger-Williams Community Education Initiative**, beginning **October 5** with *"Am I Just a Brain?"* by **Sharon Dickx**.

The Messinger-Williams Community Education Initiative extends theological education beyond Hood's degree programs by offering free educational opportunities to the general public. Connected to Hood's Messinger and Williams Family Chair in Theology and Ethics, the initiative creates space for community members to explore questions of faith, ethics, community, and meaning in life.

"Am I Just a Brain?" invites participants into a thoughtful exploration of questions surrounding human identity, consciousness, and what it means to be human. Beginning October 5, the offering provides another avenue for people in Salisbury and beyond to engage theological and philosophical questions in an accessible educational setting.

The initiative reflects Hood's belief that theological education should not be confined to those pursuing academic degrees. By opening educational opportunities to the public, Hood creates spaces where people from different backgrounds can learn together, ask questions, and engage in meaningful dialogue.

Taken together, these fall events demonstrate the breadth of Hood Theological Seminary's vision for the new academic year. **Opening Convocation** gathers the Hood community



around its shared mission. The **Ruben L. Speaks Lecture Series** brings an internationally respected scholar into conversation with the community. The **Messinger-Williams Community Education Initiative** creates an ongoing opportunity for accessible theological education and public engagement.

Each represents a different expression of Hood's commitment to **education, scholarship, faith, and service**.

Hood Theological Seminary is located at 1810 Lutheran Synod Drive in Salisbury, North Carolina. For information about academic programs, upcoming events, and community initiatives, visit www.hoodseminary.edu.





STAY LIT!

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EVERY VOTE COUNTS



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By Debra Chappelle-Polk, Zion Spotlight Editor



October 2026, New York, N.Y. — On Tuesday, November 3, 2026, millions of Americans will go to the polls and vote, the results of which will determine who controls Congress and elect governors and other officials across the country. Most of the attention of midterm elections is focused on the two chambers of Congress: the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives. Members of the House are elected for two-year terms, and all 435 seats are decided during the midterm elections. Senators are elected to staggered six-year terms. A third of the 100 seats are up for grabs in any midterm election. All 435 U.S. House seats, 35 U.S. Senate contests, and 36 governor races are on the ballot in 2026.

So, why is voting so important? Currently, one party controls the executive branch, the legislative branch, and the judicial branch and intends to retain control by any means necessary. "Whoever controls the House or the Senate controls the agenda. The majority party determines who leads important congressional committees. ***A president's ability to accomplish his agenda has everything to do with whether his party controls the two houses of Congress,"*** says Gary Nordlinger, a professor of politics at George Washington University. **(Emphasis added)**

We must vote. "Democracy is at stake" is more than a campaign slogan. It is not hyperbole. It is a sobering reality that cannot be ignored. Partisanship rules; compromise is a dirty word, and civil discourse no longer exists. Gerrymandering, redistricting, and disenfranchisement aren't just $10 words; they are political tactics and strategies designed to make it harder, and in some cases, prevent people from exercising their right to vote.

FOREARMED IS FOREWARNED

Small details matter when it comes to making sure your voice is heard at the polls. Voting laws and procedures can vary significantly from state to state. Always check with your local election office or official state election website for the most current and accurate information specific to your area.

New York State Attorney General Letitia James' website offers tips on how to detect and report fake AI content about the elections. "AI-generated misinformation is spreading. AI tools have become inexpensive, widely available, and easy to use. Although AI tools can be used for a variety of beneficial purposes, they can also be misused. If you receive a phone call with information about voting or elections, be mindful that the information may be inaccurate or fake. Remember to verify information with official sources." Visit the website for more information.



First-time voters can find help navigating the voting process on YouTube. Voteus.com provides information on how to check your registration status. Be sure to check the location of your poll site. One of the tactics in the voter suppression arsenal is to change poll site locations, including early voting poll sites as well as same-day election sites.

The lines at the election sites may be long, so pack your patience. If an ID is needed in your state, make sure your name and address on your voter registration form match your name and address on your ID. In some places, a current utility bill, paycheck, or other document that includes your name and street address may be sufficient.

Study the issues. Research candidates and their platforms. An informed vote is a powerful vote. I cannot tell you who to vote for; however, I can tell you to vote. I pray that you will vote for those who will do the right thing for you, your family, and your community.

EVERY VOTE COUNTS!

Reference Sources: Google; Voteus.com; Share America.com.

A.M.E. Zion Voting Resources and Social Justice Toolkits

By The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church · PROJECT 100

Beloved Zion, as The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, we affirm that voting is a sacred act of stewardship, a way we honor God's image in every person and protect the communities entrusted to our care. When we vote, we speak for those whose voices are too often pushed to the margins. When we organize, we strengthen the moral fabric of our democracy. And when we equip our clergy and laity with voting resources and advocacy toolkits, we empower our beloved Zion to stand boldly for justice, equity, and the common good.

In this season, we call our churches to teach, share, and mobilize: distribute votereducation guides, host registration Sundays, and use our A.M.E. Zion toolkits to help every member understand what's at stake, from voting rights to health care access, living wages, and the moral urgency of ending policies and conflicts that harm the most vulnerable.

Beloved, democracy is strongest when Zion shows up. Let us vote, let us advocate, and let us lead with conviction and compassion.

Why We Engage

A people formed by covenant, sent to love our neighbor

THE CALL, STATED PLAINLY

Project 100 is the call of our Zion to plant faithful engagement in one hundred congregations and the communities they serve — not one great gathering in one place, but a people at work in every neighborhood where a church stands. If your congregation does only one thing, let it be this: **find the neighbor who has been forgotten, and go to them.**

The Widow, the Orphan, the Stranger

The oldest teaching of our faith is also the plainest: care for the widow, the orphan, the child, and the stranger. Scripture returns to them again and again — not because they are the only ones who matter, but because they are the ones most easily forgotten. To do good, to seek justice, to defend the one who has no defender: this is the work faith has always asked of us. The question for the church today is not whether to care, but who these neighbors are now. They are still among us, under different names.

WHO THEY ARE TODAY

The widow — the elder who lives alone, the caregiver holding a household together by herself, the family that has lost the one who provided.

The orphan — the child in foster care, the young person aging out of the system, the student with no one to guide them.

The stranger — the immigrant and the refugee, the newcomer without a community, the returning citizen, the neighbor no one has yet welcomed.

These are the neighbors whose lives are most shaped by who governs, and who are most often left out when the decisions get made. To care for them is not only to feed and to visit — it is to make sure they are counted, registered, and carried to the ballot when the season comes.



Organize the Body

Call your class meeting, Christian Education ministry, Lay Council, missionary society, Sunday school, usher board, choir, young people, and elders into this work together. The body of Christ has many members, and everyone is needed.

The math of faithfulness is simple: if ten members each invite twenty-five neighbors and ten say yes, you will have gathered one hundred people ready to serve. This is how a congregation becomes a movement of care.

Souls to the polls, beyond Sunday. The old tradition carried the faithful from the pew to the polls on Sunday; Project 100 carries it further, every day, early voting is open.

• Run early-voting caravans — fill the church vans and carry your neighbors across every day of early voting, not Sunday alone.

• Never leave the elder, the first-time voter, or the neighbor without a ride behind. A seat in the van is a seat at the table of democracy.

• Meet people where they gather — ball games, cookouts, and community festivals.

• Build a fellowship of partners: any person or group ready to love the neighbor with you.

Canvassing: How to Go Door to Door

Going door to door is how the church tells its neighbors, one porch at a time, that they are seen and that the season to be counted has come. Keep it warm, brief, and always nonpartisan.

Before you go. Go in pairs, in daylight. Bring a nonpartisan script, a walk list, registration forms, and cards with the early-voting dates, the polling site, vote.gov, and the church ride number. Leave every candidate and party opinion at home.

At the door. Introduce yourself and your church. Say why you are there: "We're helping neighbors make a plan to vote — whoever they support." Then listen.

What to ask. Are you registered at your current address? Do you know your early-voting dates and site? Do you need a ride? Is there anyone else in the home who should be counted?

What to leave. A nonpartisan card with the dates, the site, vote.gov, and the ride number —never a candidate or party message.

Respect and safety. Honor every "no." Never argue or pressure. Do not enter homes. Note accessibility and ride needs. Thank everyone.

After the walk. Record who needs follow-up — a ride, help registering, a reminder — and circle back before the deadline. Every door is for everyone; no litmus test.

A LINE TO PREACH

"The church that stops at the sanctuary door is only half a church. The Lord we praise on Sunday is served on Monday — in the feeding of the hungry, the visiting of the sick, the welcome of the stranger, and the neighbor carried to the ballot who would not have gone alone."

Our covenant. No exceptions. FAITHFUL — we serve in the name of Christ, grounded in Scripture and answerable to God. NONPARTISAN — we serve people, not parties; no candidate's name, no party's name, from the pulpit or the porch. DIGNIFIED — we protect the vulnerable, honor the elder and the child, and welcome the stranger as we would welcome the Lord.

LOVE GOD. LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR. LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND.

Why the Midterm Matters

A nonpartisan word for the church · Election Day: November 3, 2026

THE FACTS, STATED PLAINLY

The midterms are November 3, 2026. This year the ballot decides all 435 U.S. House seats, 35 of the 100 Senate seats, and 39 governorships. In 2022, only about 46% of eligible voters cast ballots in the midterms, compared to 66% in the 2020 presidential election. Midterm elections often see lower turnout than presidential elections, which means **your vote carries even more weight.**

The Moral Case

1. The forgotten offices govern the neighbor. The seats people skip in the midterms are the ones closest to the widow, the child, and the stranger. Governors and state officials shape whether a hungry family is fed, whether the sick are covered, whether the school down the street is funded. A campaign about voting is never only about voting. It is about who answers for the least of these between now and the next presidential year.

2. Silence is a choice too. Say it plainly from the pulpit: to stay home is not to stay neutral. When the faithful sit out, they hand the decision to someone else and call it rest. Scripture does not let us love the neighbor in word and abandon them at the ballot. The vote is one of the instruments of that love.

3. This is why the caravan runs. Fewer than half will vote in a midterm, which means the elder you carry, the first-time voter you register, and the neighbor without a ride you seat in the church van, each one counts double against that low tide. In a low-turnout election, the church that shows up does not just add votes. It changes the weight of who gets heard.

A LINE TO PREACH

"The presidential year draws the crowd. The midterm reveals the faithful. In the year the world looks away, the church looks harder, because the widow, the orphan, and the stranger do not stop needing a government that answers to them just because the cameras have gone home."

Remember our covenant: We serve people, not parties. This word urges the faithful to vote and tells them why it is a matter of faith. It never tells them how to vote. No candidate's name, no party's name, from the pulpit or the porch.

View Toolkit Here:

https://amezion.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/Project100_Toolkit_.pdf

The Journey Continues: The Karmelo Anthony Trial, Justice, and the Road Ahead

By Rev. Roderick J. Josey, Education Editor



The legal journey for Karmelo Anthony continues in Texas. Just months after the 19-year-old was convicted of murder and sentenced to 35 years in prison, the case returned to the courtroom, not for another trial, but over serious questions raised by Anthony's new legal team about how his original trial was handled.

Those post-trial proceedings brought two major developments. First, Judge John Roach Jr., who presided over Anthony's murder trial, was removed from further proceedings after another judge determined that his impartiality "might reasonably be questioned."[1] Then, just days later, a different judge denied Anthony's request for a new trial.[2]

Anthony's conviction remains in place, but his legal battle is not over. His attorneys have indicated that they intend to continue challenging the conviction through the appellate process.[2]

For those who have followed this case since the April 2025 death of 17-year-old Austin Metcalf at a high school track meet in Frisco, Texas, these latest developments are important. They do not erase the jury's verdict, and they do not establish that Anthony's conviction was wrongful. But they do raise important questions about judicial impartiality, due process, and the safeguards that exist when concerns are raised about how justice is administered.

Judge Roach Removed From Further Proceedings

On August 19, Visiting Judge Sid Harle granted a request from Anthony's attorneys to recuse Judge John Roach Jr. from further proceedings in the case.[1]

The defense had questioned whether Roach should continue overseeing Anthony's post-trial proceedings following public comments he made after the murder trial.

During a television interview following Anthony's conviction, Roach was asked whether the jury had reached the correct decision. Roach responded that it had, adding, "Whatever they say, they got it right."[1]

Anthony's new legal team argued that those comments, along with other concerns raised by the defense, called into question whether Roach should be the judge deciding Anthony's motion for a new trial.

Judge Harle agreed that recusal was appropriate. In his written order, he determined that Roach's impartiality "might reasonably be questioned."[1]

That ruling was significant, but we must be careful about what it actually means.

Judge Roach's removal did **not** overturn Anthony's murder conviction. The court did not declare Anthony innocent. Nor did Judge Harle rule that Anthony's entire trial had been unfair.

The ruling meant that Judge Roach would no longer preside over Anthony's post-trial proceedings and that another judge would consider the defense's request for a new trial.

A New Judge, but No New Trial

Retired District Judge Michael Chitty was assigned to hear Anthony's motion for a new trial.[1]

During a two-day hearing, Anthony's new attorneys raised several concerns about the original proceedings.

One involved an off-the-record agreement between prosecutors and Anthony's original defense attorneys concerning potentially damaging character evidence involving both Anthony and Metcalf. Anthony's new legal team argued that uncertainty surrounding that agreement affected Anthony's decision about whether to testify in his own defense.[3]

Anthony did not testify during his murder trial.

His attorneys also raised concerns about courtroom restrictions and argued that constitutional and legal errors affected the proceedings. Prosecutors disputed those claims and maintained that Anthony had received a fair trial.[3]

After considering the arguments, Judge Chitty denied Anthony's request for a new trial on August 22.[2]

In his written order, Chitty stated that he had reviewed the motion, record, evidence, arguments, briefs, and relevant law before determining that the request should be denied.[2]

The decision means Anthony's murder conviction and 35-year sentence remain in effect.

His attorneys, however, have indicated that they intend to continue pursuing the case through the appellate process.[2]

And that is why the journey continues.

What Happens When Questions Are Raised About the Process?

For me, one of the most important lessons from these latest developments is that our justice system must be willing to examine itself.

A judge was challenged.

Another judge reviewed that challenge.

The judge was recused.

A different judge reviewed the request for a new trial.

That request was denied.

And now the defense has another legal avenue through the appellate process.

We should neither exaggerate nor minimize any part of that process.

The removal of Judge Roach does not prove Anthony was wrongfully convicted. Likewise, the denial of a new trial does not mean questions about the proceedings can never be raised again.

That is precisely why appeals exist.

Due process should never depend upon whether we personally like a defendant, agree with a verdict, or believe someone deserves sympathy.

An impartial judge matters.
Competent legal representation matters.
The right to challenge alleged legal errors matters. The ability to appeal matters.
And the rights of victims and their families matter.

Austin Metcalf was 17 years old when his life was taken. His family continues to carry a loss that no verdict, appeal, hearing, or sentence can reverse. Their grief deserves our compassion and prayers.

At the same time, recognizing their pain does not require us to stop caring about whether every defendant receives the constitutional protections guaranteed by law.

Justice requires us to care about the outcome and the process.

What Are We Teaching Our Black Boys?

As a Black man, pastor, and educator, these developments also lead me to another conversation—one that must extend beyond the courthouse.

What are we teaching our Black boys before they ever encounter the criminal justice system?

Too often, our communities become intensely involved after the arrest.

After the mugshot.
After the trial.
After the sentence.
But what happens before?

Our boys need to understand conflict resolution. They need emotional regulation. They need to understand that walking away from a confrontation is sometimes the strongest decision they can make.

They need mentors who can help them navigate anger, rejection, fear, embarrassment, peer pressure, and the pressure to prove themselves.

They also need legal literacy.

Our young people should understand what their constitutional rights are. They should understand how the criminal justice system works. They should understand what to do during an encounter with law enforcement and why competent legal representation matters.

Protecting our Black boys does not mean excusing wrongdoing.

It does not mean automatically assuming that every Black defendant has been treated unfairly.

It means preparing them to make responsible decisions while also making certain that they understand the rights afforded to them under the law.

The Black Church Has a Role

This is where I believe the Black Church must continue stepping forward.

Historically, our churches have never been only places for Sunday morning worship. We have educated our children, developed leaders, advocated for justice, provided scholarships, mentored young people, supported families, and created safe spaces within our communities.

That work remains necessary.

Imagine churches partnering with Black attorneys and judges to host youth legal-literacy programs.

Imagine men's ministries intentionally pairing young boys with mentors.

Imagine Christian Education departments incorporating conflict resolution, emotional wellness, decision-making, and leadership development alongside biblical education.

Imagine our churches creating safe spaces where young men can talk openly about anger, rejection, identity, fear, and the pressures they experience.

We cannot wait until another young Black man's picture appears on television before we decide he needs us.

We cannot wait until the courtroom.
We cannot wait until the sentence.

We have to reach our boys before the crisis.

The Journey Continues

Today, Karmelo Anthony remains convicted of murder and sentenced to 35 years in prison. His request for a new trial has been denied. Judge John Roach Jr. is no longer presiding over further proceedings in the case, and Anthony's attorneys have indicated that their legal challenge will continue.[1] [2]

Whatever happens next, this case deserves careful reporting rather than social-media speculation.

We can remember Austin Metcalf and recognize the unimaginable grief his family continues to carry.

We can acknowledge the jury's verdict.

We can follow Anthony's appeal without assuming what its outcome should be.

And we can insist that fairness, impartiality, and due process remain essential components of our justice system.

Meanwhile, the work outside the courtroom belongs to us.

Let us teach our boys. Let us mentor them. Let us correct them when necessary. Let us listen to them. Let us hold them accountable. Let us teach them their rights.

And above all, let us reach them before the world knows their names for all the wrong reasons.

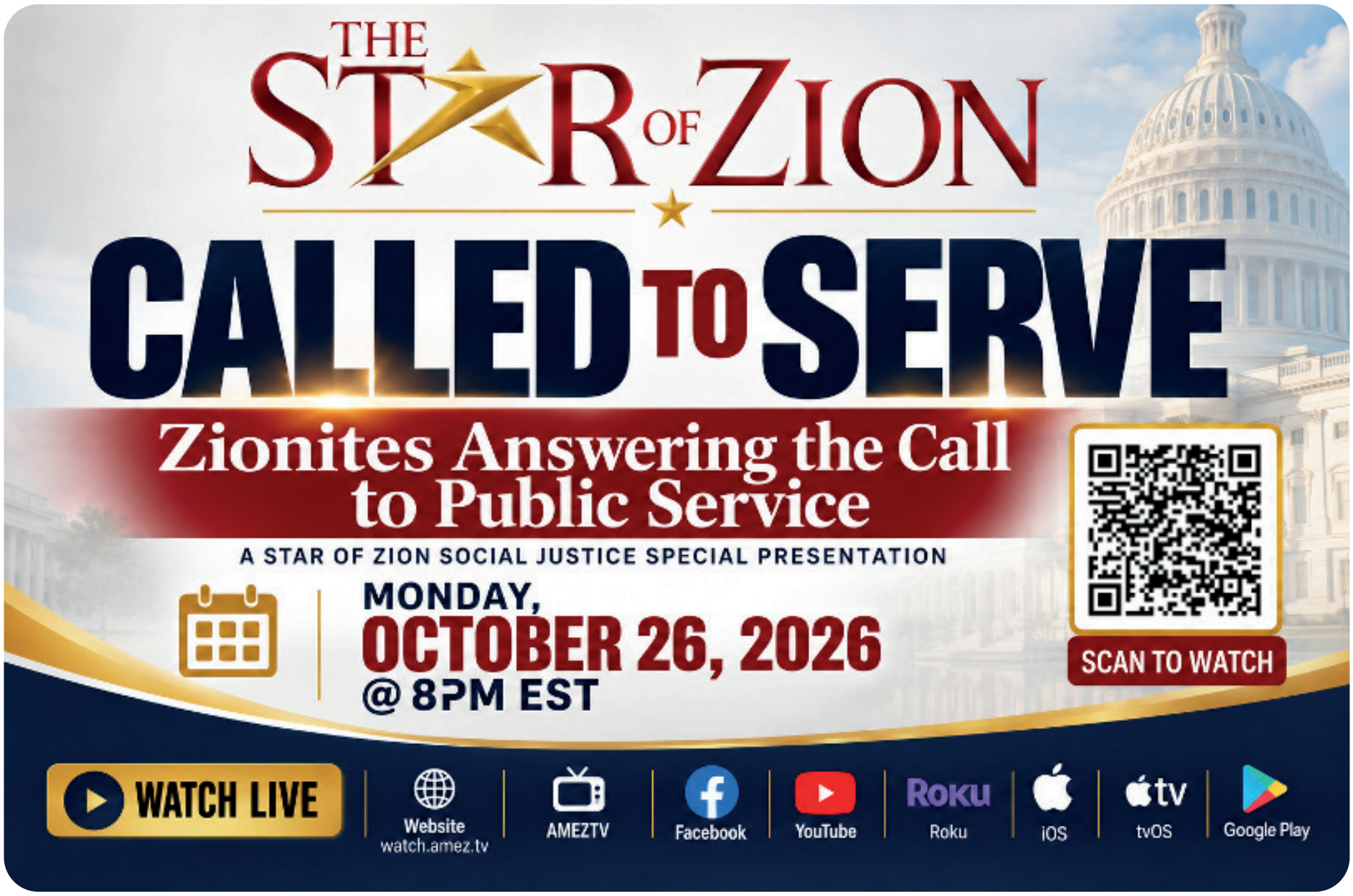
The legal journey for Karmelo Anthony continues. Our responsibility to the next generation must continue as well.

Footnotes

1. Jamie Stengle, "Judge Removed from Texas Track Meet Killing Case as Karmelo Anthony Seeks New Trial," *Associated Press*, August 19, 2026.

2. "Texas Judge Denies Karmelo Anthony's Request for New Trial in Deadly Stabbing at Track Meet," *Associated Press*, August 22, 2026.

3. "Karmelo Anthony Dropped Plans to Testify Over Track Stabbing, Lawyer Says as Teen Seeks Retrial," *Associated Press*, August 21, 2026.



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



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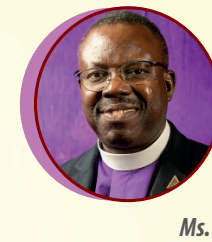
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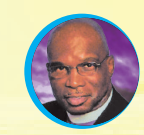
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MEASLES - I thought it was a thing of the past

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

Many of us never thought we would see measles outbreaks in the United States (U.S.) like this again. Measles was declared eliminated in the U.S. in 2000. However, since the beginning of 2025, there have been over 3300 cases of measles across the United States[1]. The highest number of cases seen in over 30 years[3]. Unfortunately, deaths due to measles have also been reported.[2,3]

Reference: Johns Hopkins Univ Measles Tracker, accessed online 9/13/26

The good news is that measles can be prevented – by getting vaccinated. We will discuss this in more detail shortly.

Unfortunately, the majority of those who contracted measles in the U.S. in 2026 were not previously vaccinated[1,2], which could have protected them against measles. Some of these unfortunately had no choice; they were babies who were too young to get the measles vaccine (under 12 months old). Babies rely on the rest of us to be vaccinated and keep them safe.

What is measles?

Measles is caused by a virus. It is one of the most contagious infections. It spreads through the air when a person infected with measles coughs or sneezes. The droplets land on surfaces, and someone nearby inhales (breathes in) the infected droplets. It can also be spread by direct contact with fluids from the nose or mouth of someone who is infected with measles. It is so contagious that if one person has it in a room, 9 out of 10 people around that person will also become infected if they are not protected (vaccinated). [2] The measles virus can remain infectious in the air for up to 2 hours after an infected person leaves an area.

What does it mean when we say 'immune or protected' from measles?

It means that you are already ***immune to*** or protected from measles. This can mean that you either received your recommended measles vaccination in the past or had measles disease when you were younger, so you are now immune.

Your immune system makes memory cells after infections. Vaccines can also stimulate the making of memory cells (see section below on how Vaccines work). These memory cells, whether from infection or vaccination, remember the germ. If your child is exposed to the germ in the future, their memory cells can quickly make antibodies (fighting cells) to keep them from getting infected.

Most people born in the U.S. before 1957 are immune to measles (meaning they either had measles as children or were exposed to measles and developed protective ***antibodies***). However, it is always safer to find out if you are immune:

- Locate your vaccine records and see if you received your MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine in the past.
- If you cannot locate your vaccine records, or you are not sure you are immune, ask your healthcare provider (HCP)/doctor. Your HCP can order blood tests to see whether you have antibodies (protection) against measles.
- If you cannot locate your vaccine records, and you do not wish to get the blood test, you and your doctor may decide to just give you 1 dose of MMR vaccine instead – it will not harm you to get that one dose, even if it is an extra dose.
- Bottom line, talk to your healthcare provider (HCP) first.
- For decades, all children in the U.S. have been recommended to receive the MMR vaccine to protect them against measles, mumps, and rubella. Currently, 2 doses of the MMR vaccine are recommended: the first at 12 months of age and the second at 4 years of age.

What does measles look like, and what are the symptoms?

Measles symptoms typically start to appear 7 to 14 days after being in contact with the virus. Measles infection starts with a high fever (may get as high as 104 degrees F), cough, runny nose, and red, watery eyes. Next, people with measles develop red/brownish flat spots that become bumpy and blotchy. The rash starts on the face and then spreads down the body. The rash usually shows up about 3-4 days after the other symptoms begin. This means a person can be contagious and spread measles to someone else even before they know they have it. The contagious period typically lasts from 4 days before the rash appears until 4 days after it shows up.[2,3]

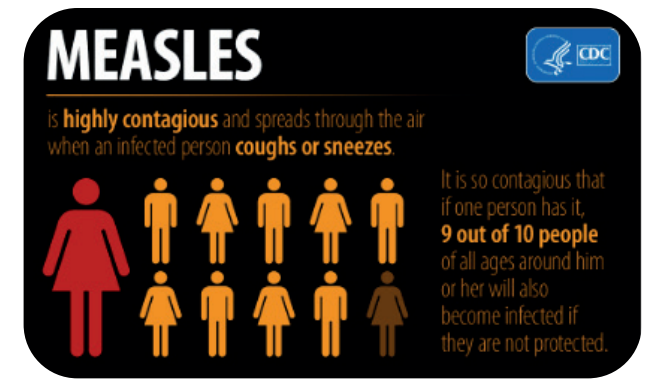
Visit https://www.cdc.gov/measles/signs-symptoms/photos.html for pictures of how measles looks.

Is measles really that serious?

Yes. It surely is. It can have lots of severe complications.

Kids who get measles may develop mild infections like diarrhea or an ear infection, but more serious infections can happen, like pneumonia. 1 out of every 20 kids who get measles may develop pneumonia. This pneumonia can be very serious and may lead to death. Children who have a weakened immune system, like cancer, are more susceptible to getting very sick from measles.

Remember, measles is caused by a virus. It is



not like strep throat, which is caused by bacteria and can be treated with an antibiotic so it goes away. There is no medicine or antiviral to cure measles. Doctors will try to give you supportive care, like fluids to keep you hydrated and other medications to help keep you stable until your body heals.[4]

What is scary is that some kids develop a condition called **SSPE,** subacute sclerosing panencephalitis. It is rare but deadly. 7 to 10 years after having measles, the virus that has been hiding in the body starts to attack the nervous system, and the child's brain begins to deteriorate, eventually leading to death.[2,3]

Adults can get measles also. It is not a disease we see in kids only.

Unfortunately, about 1 out of every 1000 people infected with measles will die even with the best of care.

Another disturbing complication from measles is something called immune amnesia[7].

This means the measles virus causes your immune system to forget how to fight infections. Immune amnesia occurs only after a measles infection. It is not caused by the measles vaccine. The measles virus can wipe out immune memory—memory of other harmful viruses and bacteria. This side effect, known as immune amnesia, can affect anyone who gets measles. It happens when the measles virus attacks the memory cells in the immune system.

The measles virus can find and destroy helpful memory cells. This immune amnesia can erase up to 73% of your child's immune memory. When some or all of the memory cells are gone, it becomes harder for your child's immune system to remember germs and fight off infections. Your child will still be immune to measles, but immunity to other diseases will be lower. Vaccines and new infections are the only ways to restore this immunity.

What's happening now? Why are we seeing so many measles cases and outbreaks?

Quote: Healthychildren.org[5] "Despite billions of life-saving vaccines given worldwide, disinformation continues to spread. Routine vaccination rates have dropped to dangerous levels. Measles outbreaks have surged, spreading within schools and communities where false

claims have led some parents to refuse vaccines for their children".

One reason that we are seeing more of these outbreaks is that we have many people in the U.S. now who are not vaccinated and protected from measles, and so they can spread it to others in their community who are also not vaccinated. The reason we could say in 2000 that measles was eliminated was because we had so many people vaccinated and because we had protocols in place, like school entry guidelines, travel guidelines, and more, that were being closely monitored to ensure that we were keeping our communities safe from these deadly diseases. Thanks to vaccines, we no longer see diseases like polio, tetanus, or chickenpox in our communities. Before the measles vaccine was available in the U.S., each year, an average of 450 people died from measles; most of them were previously healthy children. Thanks to the measles vaccine, we can now protect children from measles.

There is something called **community (herd) immunity.** Community immunity happens when enough people in a community are protected from a contagious disease through vaccination or previous illness (getting vaccinated is always safer), so the disease can't spread easily. When you reduce the number of people who are susceptible to infection, you limit the ability of the disease to spread. Community immunity protects those who cannot be vaccinated, like newborns or people with certain medical conditions.[6]

From: Voices for Vaccines: https://www.voicesforvaccines.org/content/uploads/2026/04/Community-Immunity-26.pdf

For diseases like measles and whooping cough, we consider a 92-95% [10] vaccination rate in a community as the threshold to say, okay, now we have community immunity.

But let's talk about measles vaccination rates. Recent data show that in many states, those rates have fallen to 91-92% in some communities, not the 92-95% needed to provide us with community immunity. MMR vaccine coverage among kindergartners was 92.4% in the 2025–2026 school year [2], meaning m**ore than a quarter of a million children, 280,000 in the U.S., started kindergarten in the 2025-26 school year without protection from the MMR vaccine.**

So now those kindergarteners are at risk of contracting and spreading measles, and many people in their community who are not vaccinated may be at risk as well. For example, other kids in the classroom with weaker immune systems may be sitting next to unvaccinated children (e.g., a child with sickle cell disease or a child with cancer who has just finished chemo/radiation treatment). These more vulnerable children are also at risk of contracting measles, even if they had their measles vaccines in the past.

Also, the earliest age you can get the measles vaccine is 1 year (12 months) old. So, if babies under a year old come into contact with someone with measles, they are very likely to get it.

As of September 11, 2026, there is an ongoing measles outbreak linked to a metro Atlanta daycare. https://dph.georgia.gov/press-releases/2026-09-11/dph-measles-update

Remember, choosing not to vaccinate children leaves them vulnerable to measles but also increases the risk of exposing others around them to the measles virus.

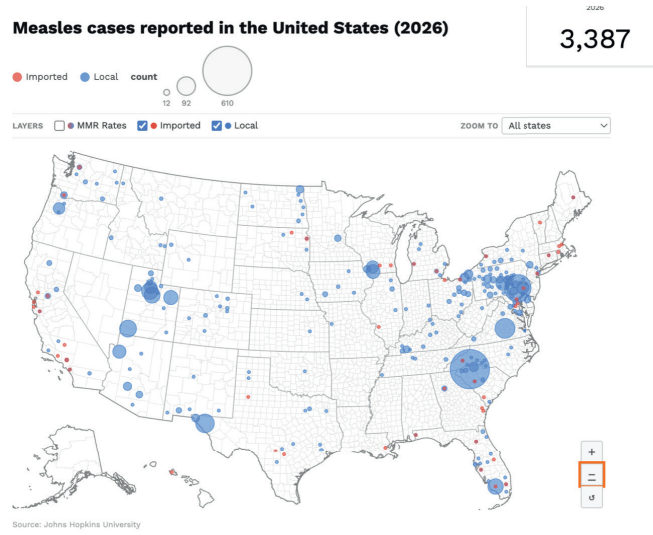
So how can I keep my family protected from measles?

Make sure that all children have received their MMR vaccine.

• 1st dose – 12 months old

• 2nd dose – kindergarten dose (age 4-6 years old)

Adults - try to locate your vaccine records and make sure you have a record of having had a measles vaccine. If you were born in the US prior to 1957, you are probably immune. If you are not sure, or cannot find those records,



then talk to your healthcare provider right away. They will advise you on whether to get a blood test to see if you are immune, or they may give you an MMR shot now to protect you.

If you live in an outbreak area, additional doses of the MMR vaccine may be recommended.

If you are traveling internationally, make sure everyone traveling has a record of having had their MMR vaccine.

Note: Measles is a live (but weakened) vaccine, so children with immune problems or who take medications that suppress the immune system should not receive the measles vaccine.[5.] Their doctor will advise on the best options to protect them.

Where can I get the measles vaccine?

The MMR vaccine and all other vaccines may be obtained at:

• Your healthcare provider's office

• Your local health department or Federally Qualified Health Center

• Your local pharmacy.

Will it cost me to get vaccines?

• If you have health insurance coverage, most health insurance plans will cover the cost of vaccines, so you do not have to pay anything.

• If you do not have health insurance or your health insurance plan does not cover vaccines, then it is important to first: o Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist for free or no-cost vaccines.

• The Vaccines for Children Program (VFC) provides free vaccines to all children in the U.S. who do not have insurance, or whose insurance may not cover vaccines: https://vaccinateyourfamily.org/vaccinesforchildren/.

• For adults, there may be free or low-cost vaccines at nearby state and local health departments and community health centers. Each state has different options. Visit healthcare.gov.

Remember, always ask!! Do not let fear of potential costs be a factor.

Are there side effects from the measles (MMR) vaccine or other vaccines?

Nothing, no medicine (not even aspirin), no vaccine is 100% safe. There may always be a side effect or a reaction. Luckily, most side effects are very mild (sore arm, 1 to 2 days of fever/chills, mild swelling) in the area where you got the shot. Serious side effects are extremely rare.

• Why do I get mild side effects like a sore arm (redness and swelling), fever/chills, mild swelling in the area, after I get a shot?

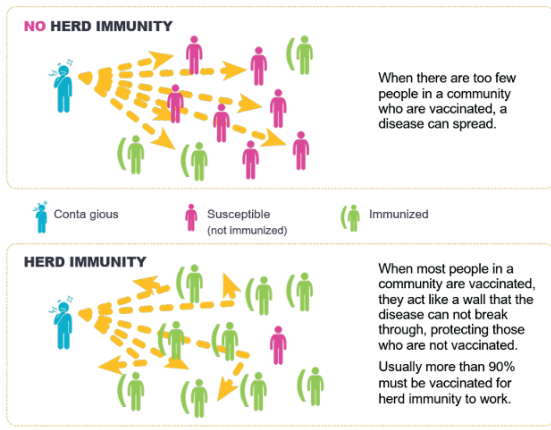
These mild side effects are expected. They are very common. These are signs that your immune system is reacting to what it thinks is a germ when you get vaccinated. Your immune system sees the vaccine as something foreign to your body and tries to get rid of it – that's why you get the fever/chills, the sore arm, and so forth. (Please note that there are some people who don't have any of these side effects and their immune system is still working; it just depends on the person).

These mild side effects are easily treated, for example, by massaging the area with a warm, wet towel, or by taking medicines to reduce your fever or pain. Always check with your healthcare provider first to see which fever/pain-reducing medicine is the right one for you, based on your health conditions and age.

The risk of the disease itself and complications from the disease is far greater and far more common than serious reactions from vaccines.

Remember, the mild side effects we experience are what babies go through when they get their shots. We are much older now, so of course we don't remember what it was like when we got our shots as babies. These mild side effects after getting shots are normal and expected. It is NOT a sign that you have the disease or got sick from the vaccine. A vaccine does not cause disease. If the virus or bacteria

Continued on Next Page



is used as an ingredient in the vaccine, it is either not alive, or it is very, very weak and cannot cause the disease it is meant to protect you from.

By the way, many people don't get the flu shot now because they may have had redness, swelling, a sore arm, or a fever after getting the flu shot in the past. Now you can tell them that these reactions were probably normal and were expected side effects, and advise them to keep getting the flu shot every year to protect themselves and their families from the flu.

What about other shots? What other shots should I be taking now?

Well, as we enter the flu and cold season, remember to get your:

• 2026-27 Flu vaccine (everyone 6 months of age and older is eligible). o A flu nasal spray vaccine is also available for people ages 2 through 49 years of age if they prefer not to get the shot, but you must meet the criteria. See https://www.cdc.gov/flu/vaccine-types/nasalspray.html for details.o Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist which option is best for you.oOlder adults (65 years and older) are recommended to receive a higher-dose or adjuvanted flu shot instead of the standard dose for that extra protection: https://www.cdc.gov/flu/highrisk/65over.htm.

• 026-27 COVID shot (everyone 6 months of age and older is eligible). Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist which option is best for you.

There are other vaccines your family needs as well:

Vaccines for Babies, Toddlers, Children and Teens:

Childhood and Teen Vaccines: See the recommended childhood vaccine schedule from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP, at https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Recommended-Immunization-Schedules.aspx.

Adults need shots too – not just children: There are vaccines to protect you from shingles, pneumonia, tetanus, meningitis, polio, RSV (respiratory syncytial virus), and many other diseases.

Follow the Adult vaccine schedule from the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) at https://www.aafp.org/clinical-insights/immunizations-and-vaccines/immunizations-schedules-resources/adult-immunization-schedules.

Remember, vaccines protect you as an individual, but they also keep our communities safe. Some people cannot get a vaccine because of their health condition, or even if they do get vaccinated, their immune system is weak, so they rely on all of us to help protect them.

Encourage your family and friends to all get vaccinated.

Definitions:

Healthcare provider (doctor, nurse, physician assistant/PA, nurse practitioner/NP) – someone who can diagnose and treat your medical condition.

Immune to infection/disease: To be immune means your body is protected or resistant to a specific disease or harmful germ so that it cannot make you sick. You are no longer susceptible to that disease.

Antibodies: substances that protect you against a germ. Your immune system makes antibodies when it comes into contact with a germ, or something that appears foreign to the body, like a vaccine shot. Antibodies protect your body. Some of the antibodies are called memory cells – they stick around in your body after you get infected with a germ, so that next time you come in contact with that germ, you are armed and ready to fight off the germ.

What is a vaccine? How do vaccines work?

There are many types of vaccines. Some vaccines include a weakened or killed piece of the germ that it is trying to protect you from. Remember: if the germ (virus or bacteria) is used as an ingredient in the vaccine, it has first been killed; it is not alive, or it has been made very, very weak.

"Vaccines have active ingredients that give information to your child's immune system, so it knows how to create its own antibodies. Here's how that works. Just like a child learns to read, their immune system learns, too. A vaccine is like a book that teaches the immune system to recognize and resist a disease. All it takes is a tiny amount of active ingredients in each vaccine for the immune system to understand and remember what to do when it sees the actual virus or bacteria .[8]

When you receive a vaccine, your immune system sees the vaccine as something that should not be in your body. Remember, the vaccine may contain a killed piece of the germ or an extremely weakened piece of the germ. Your immune system says, "This should not be here," and it makes antibodies and memory cells. This way, in the future, if your body comes into contact with the real germ the vaccine is protecting you from, your body recognizes it and is armed and ready to protect you. Now, you are less likely to get the infection, or if you do get infected, it will not make you as sick.

There are some vaccines that use a live, weakened virus. This type of vaccine can very rarely cause disease in people with illnesses that affect their immune system, such as cancer, or who require medicine that affects their immune system. Because of this, their doctor may instead provide a different form of the vaccine or advise them not to get that vaccine.

Here are a couple of short videos describing how vaccines work; visit:

the American Academy of Pediatrics: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8fewK2Vxes and from PBS: https://www.pbs.org/video/nova-immunity-and-vaccines-explained/

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WATCH PRESCRIBING POSITIVITY:

What's going on out there, and how do we protect ourselves?"

Don’t Wait Too Late: Learn the Facts, Get the Results!

By Daman De Leon, Health and Wellness Editor



Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer among women in the US, after non-melanoma skin cancer. It mostly affects women aged 50 and older, who develop about 83% of new breast cancer cases and represent 91% of deaths from breast cancer. Half of the women who die from breast cancer in the US are age 70 or older.

Men can get breast cancer, too, but this is much less common. In 2022, an estimated 287,850 women and 2,710 men were diagnosed with breast cancer. An estimated 43,250 women and 530 men were predicted to die from the disease.

Breast cancer incidence rates have risen slowly in most of the past 40 years. During the most recent decade of data, 2010 through 2019, the rate increased by 0.5% a year. The increase is likely due at least in part to more women having excess body weight and the declining fertility rate of women in the US.



The total fertility rate of a population is the average number of children born to a woman over her lifetime, and it’s been found to be related to the risk of developing breast cancer. Women who have not given birth to children or who gave birth to their first child after age 30 have a slightly higher overall risk for developing breast cancer later in life. Having many pregnancies and becoming pregnant before age 30 reduces a woman’s risk of developing breast cancer. The effect of weight and fertility rates seems to be limited to an increased risk of hormone receptor-positive breast cancer (HR+)—the most common type of breast cancer and the largest driver of increasing incidence rates. HR+ tumors are more likely to be detected early through mammography compared to HR- tumors, and they have higher survival.

Most new breast cancer cases are diagnosed at a localized stage, meaning they have not spread outside of the breast. These early-stage cancers are most often found during breast cancer screening and typically have a high rate of survival because treatment is more effective at this stage. Overall, the pace of the reduction in female breast cancer death rates is slower than it was during the 1990s and 2000s. Still, the 43% overall decline in mortality translates to 460,000 deaths avoided between 1989 and 2020. This decline is attributed to earlier detection through breast cancer screening and increased awareness of the disease, as well as improvements in treatment.

The racial disparity in deaths from breast cancer has remained at 40% or higher for a decade.

• Black women younger than age 50 had a death rate that was twice as high as that of White women of the same age. Plus, Black women are more likely than White women to die of breast cancer at any age.

• AIAN women were 17% less likely to be diagnosed with breast cancer than White women, but 4% more likely to die from the disease.

Part of the reason the breast cancer death rate is not dropping as fast as it has in previous years is that screening rates aren’t increasing, and too few women are receiving timely and high-quality treatment after they’re diagnosed with breast cancer.

On January 1, 2025, more than 4 million women were living in the US with a history of invasive breast cancer. Some of them were cancer-free, while others still had evidence of cancer and may have been undergoing treatment.

• Black women have the lowest 5-year relative breast cancer survival rate compared to all other racial/ethnic groups for every stage of diagnosis and every breast cancer subtype.

• The largest disparities in 5-year relative survival are for regional and distant stage breast cancer. Only 78% of Black women are living at least 5 years after their diagnosis of regional stage breast cancer compared to 88% of White women. For the distant stage, the gap is slightly larger – 21% versus 32%

• There is a 6% to 8% gap in 5-year survival between Black and White women for every breast cancer subtype.

About 30% of breast cancer diagnoses are linked to risk factors that women may be able to change—such as excess body weight, physical inactivity, and alcohol intake. Women can help lower their risk for developing breast cancer by being active, maintaining a healthy body weight, and limiting alcohol. They can also help lower their risk of death from breast cancer by talking with their doctor about how often to get a mammogram, sticking with that schedule, and promptly following up on any abnormal results. Following American Cancer Society guidelines for breast cancer screening can help women find breast cancer earlier, when treatments are more likely to be effective.

The Black Church and Domestic Violence: Silence Is Never Ok

By Daman De Leon, Health and Wellness Editor



October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and one in four women will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime - and Christian women are not exempt. In 2023, an interview was conducted of 35 survivors for the ‘Spirit and Solace’ project, funded by a BA/Levenshulme Small Research Grant out of London, UK. Victims often reported that perpetrators of abuse in church settings are protected, especially if they were members of a church leadership team. One person commented: “The church is a powerful institution where most believers value the voices of the leaders. The pulpit has been used to intimidate, harass, enable, and justify abuse, while perpetrators have been empowered and victims blamed and condemned. When the congregation is aware that the leaders are not enablers, victims, and potential victims will be reassured the church is a safe place, and perpetrators will be aware the church is not a place to hide.”

Respondents to the survey said it was the responsibility of church leaders to manage and lead on domestic abuse. When church leaders address do-

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mestic abuse in sermons, more survivors are likely to report abuse to church leadership teams. The leaders of Black majority churches need to identify and understand domestic abuse and its racial and cultural relevance to them. Silence cannot be an option. There is a tendency in Black majority churches to protect the abuser when they are a church leader. Trying to protect marriage without clarifying the unacceptability of domestic abuse can lead to ineffective and dangerous teaching. One respondent who was married to a leader shared, "When I was going through domestic abuse in my marriage, the church was not there for me; they made me feel worse, and I found no support as some of the saints took sides." Another shared, "We started to hear from other people, other couples, in situations where it has been similar; the favor is always towards the man. They want the woman to stay basically and put up with it… very misogynistic."

Carolyn Morgan, chairperson of the Women of Color Task Force for the Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence, explains how, while the church has proven to be the supportive, healing place as promised, it has the tendency to commit some unforgivable sins when it comes to IPV (Intimate Partner Violence).

"Women in the Black church are most often the victims of DV and abuse, and women comprise the majority count of Black church membership," Morgan wrote. "Men in the Black church are most often the perpetrators of DV and abuse, and men comprise the majority of Black church leadership. In part, this dynamic contributes to what commonly follows for Black women seeking help from the Black church."

Morgan ultimately suggested to Black church helpers:

- Do not advise her to stay and pray and allow God to work it out
- Do not meet with her and her spouse or partner together
- Do not tell her to keep the abuse a secret
- Do not suggest to her what has worked for you

Also, do not blame the victim because she hasn't changed her abuser's behavior.

The hope is that as we use our collective voice as the body of Christ, and these findings continue to shed light and innovate preventive measures, it will encourage greater discussion about domestic abuse and violence in Black majority churches, and that more will be done to support victims in these environments.

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ENTERTAINMENT & THE ARTS

'Daniel and the Fiery Furnace' Brings a Story of Faith and Courage to the Big Screen



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By R. Thomas Umstead, Entertainment and Arts Editor



The Biblical story of Daniel aims to reach faith-based audiences in movie theaters with the recent release of Daniel and the Fiery Furnace, according to the film's producers and stars.

Based on the Old Testament book of Daniel, the movie chronicles the Israelites' experiences during their exile in Babylon and details the prophet Daniel's ascension under King Nebuchadnezzar. The film also focuses on the famous tale of his companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who stood firm in their devotion to God and emerged unharmed from a blazing furnace after refusing to worship the King's golden image.

The film's co-producer, Daniel Kooman, believes its themes extend far beyond its Biblical teachings. "Daniel and the Fiery Furnace is a powerful and timeless biblical story about faith, courage, conviction, and entering into the fiery trials that we have in our lives," he said. "It's a timeless story for audiences."

To adapt the story for the big screen, Daniel Kooman and his brother and co-producer, Matthew, said they had to strike a delicate balance between creating a traditional cinematic film and respecting the biblical text.

"The challenge is whether we can accurately depict scripture on screen and stand behind the accuracy of the storytelling itself," Daniel Kooman said.

Matthew Kooman said the cast and crew experienced God's presence several times while filming in northern India. During a scene in which Daniel interprets King Nebuchadnezzar's troubling dream, Matthew Kooman said an unexpected thunderstorm hit the film's location.

"We experienced the full presence of God," he said. "Everybody was blown away by this change of the atmosphere. It was a centerpiece of experiencing God moving through story for the purpose of this movie."

Actor Mena Massoud, who plays Daniel in the film, said prayer played a significant role in bringing the cast and crew together each day. "The set was a special place because we really led every day with faith and prayer," he said. "The Kooman brothers did an amazing job gathering everybody during particular times of the day and leading the experience with prayer."
Massoud expressed confidence that the movie's message will strike a chord with true believers. "I think it's a film that will resonate with everybody of faith," he noted. "As life gets more difficult and challenging, you can look to your faith as a pillar of strength."

The film also challenges viewers to recognize their own internal courage, according to actor Elijah Alexander, who depicts King Nebuchadnezzar.
"This is a film that encourages each of us to become heroes of our own stories and look inside instead of outside for the answers," he said.

"DRAMA" AT THE MOTHER CHURCH

By Debra Chappelle-Polk, Spotlight Editor



October 2026, New York, NY. — The drama began at Mother Zion when The Lily White Board was created. It was not a pearl-clutching event, and there was no need for panic. The "drama" was not in the pews or the pulpit (LOL). It was on the stage.

The Lily White Board (LWB) is a series of plays written by yours truly that follows the antics of the members of Liberty Church, a fictional church dealing with very real-life issues.

The first play, entitled "The Lily White Board," centers on the Board's reaction when Board Chair Lily White, an ambitious, power-hungry woman with a gambling problem, appoints Ramona Simmons—also known as Velvet the Stripper and the widow of Henry Simmons—to the Board.

Bro. Leon and Bro. John are overjoyed that Ramona will be sitting beside them on the Board. Sis. Gloria, however, is not at all pleased. She believes Ramona is responsible for Henry's demise and vows to make Ramona's tenure on the Board a short one. And so, begins a chain of hilarious, albeit scandalous, events.

The subsequent plays capture the chaos, comedy, and drama when church politics intersect with local and state politics, and plenty of surprises as the characters' personal agendas unfold.

To date, there are six plays in the series: *The Lily White Board, Power Play, The Plot Thickens, The Anniversary Party,* and *Follow the Money.* While the plays are sequels in nature, each is artfully written so audiences can fully enjoy them as stand-alone productions.

Promises, Promises, the seventh play in the series, was performed at Mother Zion Church in October 2026. Lily White is engaged to marry the first Black governor of New York, and only the crème de la crème is invited to the wedding of the century. Lily is ecstatic and cannot wait to become First Lady. Her past, however, is rearing its ugly head, and it is time for her to make good on promises she has made over the years to some very unsavory characters.

Meanwhile, Bro. Leon Sanders is running to unseat Sandy Johnson, the first Black gay female mayor of New York City and has found financial backing from an unlikely source. Things really heat up when Bro. John unleashes skeletons in Lily's closet that threatens her future. Like the other plays in the series, *Promises, Promises* ends with a cliffhanger.

Plays Only Productions

By way of background, several years ago, I co-founded Plays Only Productions, a theatrical production company, with Avis Denise Stafford. Together, we have written, produced, and directed plays that are topical and engaging, dramatic and funny. There is also singing and dancing. *Lady Armstrong* is a touching love story about Lucille Armstrong, the first "dark-skinned" Black woman to dance at the famed New York Cotton Club and the fourth wife of the legendary trumpet player Louis Armstrong.

We have brought our productions to churches, libraries, and Off-Broadway theaters. The plays are travel-friendly, making them perfect for fundraising events and special programs.

For a full listing of our plays and more information, please contact me at polkdebra27@gmail.com

Financial Freedom & Democracy



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By Dana G. Stilley, Financial Freedom Editor



As the country prepares to cast ballots for the upcoming midterm elections, I find myself thinking about the struggle to gain–and maintain– the right to vote. History reminds us of what women and people of color endured to secure the right to vote. Today, while the right to vote seems to be equal on paper, the costs associated with exercising that right are often grossly disproportionate.

We know that financial freedom is not solely about the amount of money one has. We also know that financial freedom includes the ability to make choices. But what if we extend our knowledge and understanding of financial freedom beyond personal choice to civic engagement?

Civic engagement includes activism, advocacy, community service, and political participation. It is an active process centered on addressing concerns and improving the quality of life in our communities through both non-political and political actions. Civic engagement strengthens our communities and supports our democracy. The question is, can democracy truly flourish when financial insecurity keeps people from fully participating?

Consider the hourly worker who simply can't afford to miss time at work to stand in a long line to vote and doesn't trust the system to deliver their ballot in a timely fashion. Think about the limitations placed on a family that can't bear any additional childcare costs, so the father opts out of advocating for change at the school board meeting, and the mother decides that she can't run for an elected office. And consider the individual who doesn't have the time, access, or resources to become fully informed about who is on the ballot, what is on the ballot, and whether the values of the candidates align with their own.

Each of these persons has the same fundamental right to participate in our democracy, but at what costs?

When financial concerns limit our choices, the consequences extend beyond the individual. Our community organizations are affected, advocacy is diminished, and voices are unheard. Ultimately, our democracy is weakened when the ability to participate depends, even in part, on one's ability to afford the cost of participation.

Yes, financial freedom includes what our financial resources allow us to control—our time, our schedule, our priorities, our values, and our purpose. But perhaps we should expand our definition even further. Financial freedom should also be understood as the freedom to participate–to show up, speak out, serve, advocate, and help shape the decisions that govern our lives.

Correct the Map, Correct the Narrative



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

There is an ancient African proverb, "Until the lion tells his own story, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the hunter." It comes to mind that on the 4th of September, the United Nations General Assembly gathered in New York to meet for its 80th session, facing a question that may appear deceptively simple: What should the world map look like?

But this is not merely a question for cartographers. It is a question about **knowledge, perception, power, and identity**.

At the center of the debate is the 16th-century Mercator projection. Created by Flemish cartographer Gerardus Mercator in 1569 primarily as a navigational tool, it has become one of the most familiar representations of the world. Yet its mathematical design dramatically enlarges territories the further they are from the equator.

The consequence is striking. On the familiar Mercator map, Greenland appears comparable in size to Africa. Africa is approximately fourteen times larger than Greenland. Africa is not small. The map makes it look small. That distinction matters.

Togo, with the backing of the African Union, has taken the issue to the United Nations, advocating greater use of the Equal Earth projection, which more accurately preserves the relative areas of continents. The African Union itself has already supported the adoption of the projection map and encouraged its incorporation into national educational curricula.

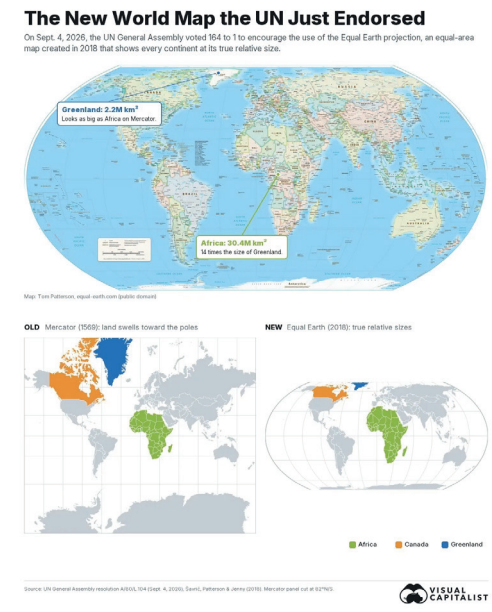
Some will ask: *Why should Africans care? We have bigger problems.* Indeed, we do.

Africa has poverty, unemployment, conflict, debt, infrastructure deficits, unequal trade relationships, and a continuing struggle for greater representation in global institutions.

But that is precisely why these matters.

Before people change the world, they must first be able to imagine themselves differently within it. For generations, African children have looked at maps in classrooms and seen a visual representation in which Europe, North America, and parts of the Northern Hemisphere appear disproportionately large. In contrast, Africa, the world's second-largest continent, appears diminished.

The Mercator projection map was not designed as an anti-African conspiracy. That needs to be said. But the fact that a projection was created for navigation does not mean we should ignore the consequences of allowing one representation to dominate education and public consciousness for centuries.



Maps teach. Maps communicate importance. Maps establish mental geography, and mental geography can become political geography.

This is why Togo's initiative should not be dismissed as symbolic. It belongs within the larger African struggle to decolonize knowledge. The question is not whether Africa needs to pretend to be bigger than it is. The question is whether the world is prepared to see Africa as it is. And the African Church has a role in this conversation.

Hosea's warning, *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge"*, reminds us that ignorance can become a form of bondage.

We cannot preach liberation while teaching distorted histories. We cannot proclaim African dignity while reproducing images that unconsciously diminish Africa.

We cannot speak of an African Renaissance while allowing others to define the mental map through which African children understand their place in the world.

Correcting the map will not solve Africa's problems**,** but it can be part of correcting the narrative. And correcting the narrative can help create a generation that understands that Africa is not peripheral to the world. Africa is central. The lion must tell the story.

And today, at the United Nations, Africa is beginning to redraw not the world but the world's understanding of Africa.

Ronald A. Nathan is an ordained elder of the A.M.E. Zion Church, resident in the United Kingdom, and the World Politics Editor of the Star of Zion.

One Church, Many Nations: Reimagining Connectional Governance

By Ronald A. Nathan, World Politics Editor

The prospect of travel restrictions that could prevent some African delegates from attending the 2028 General Conference should concern every member of The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (A.M.E.Z.). While immigration policies are matters for sovereign governments, their unintended consequences can profoundly affect the life of a global Church.

For African travellers seeking to visit the United States, high visa costs, lengthy and uncertain processing, limited consular capacity, stringent vetting, and, for citizens of some countries, outright or partial visa restrictions can make international travel increasingly difficult. These barriers can affect participation in conferences, education, business, family visits, and church engagements, creating financial and administrative obstacles before delegates can even reach the United States.



The issue before us is larger than visas. It is about representation, participation, and our understanding of what it means to be a truly connexional Church.

The A.M.E. Zion Church was born out of a struggle against exclusion. Our founders refused to accept structures that denied the full participation of God's people. That same spirit should guide us today. If delegates are unable to participate in the Church's highest decision-making body because of a host nation's immigration policies, then our governance is being shaped by circumstances beyond our control.

Rather than viewing this as a temporary inconvenience, we should recognise it as an opportunity to strengthen our Connection for generations to come.



The 2028 General Conference could become the catalyst for a comprehensive constitutional and organisational review, with the possible theme "One Church, Many Nations: Reimagining Connectional Governance for a Global A.M.E. Zion Church."

Such a review should explore practical questions. Should the General Conference always be held in one country? Is the time right to rotate the General Conference among the continents where The A.M.E. Zion Church is established? Can secure digital participa-

tion ensure that every duly elected delegate has both a voice and a vote when unforeseen political or humanitarian circumstances arise? How might our governing structures better reflect the increasingly global character of our denomination?

These are not merely administrative questions. They are theological ones. The Apostle Paul reminds us that the Church is one body with many members, each indispensable to the whole. No member should find their participation diminished because of geography or international politics.

Africa is no longer simply a mission field of The A.M.E. Zion Church; it is an essential partner in shaping our shared future. The gifts, wisdom, and leadership of African bishops, clergy, and laity enrich the entire Connexion. Our structures should reflect that reality.

The challenge before us is not simply how to convene the next General Conference. It is about ensuring that no government, however influential, inadvertently determines who has a voice in the Church's councils. If we respond with wisdom and vision, this moment could become a defining chapter in the continuing story of the Freedom Church, a Church that belongs to many nations, yet remains one in Christ.

Serving the Present Age: A.M.E. Zion West Africa Looks to 2035

By Ronald A. Nathan, World Politics Editor

The Third Biennial Conference of the Western West Africa Episcopal District of The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (A.M.E. Zion) convened from Tuesday, 18 August to Sunday, 23 August 2026, under the theme "Serving the Present Age: Concentrating on Our Ministries." Approximately 500 ministers and delegates registered from across Ghana. Observers attended from Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Rwanda, Togo, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

Presiding Bishop, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Hilliard K. Dele Dogbe presided over a gathering that was both a celebration of the Church's journey and a serious conversation about its future. An appropriate African wisdom tradition framed the conference: "It is not wrong to go back for what you have forgotten." The Akan principle of Sankofa reminds us that understanding where we are going requires us to recover, examine, and learn from where we have come. For the Western West Africa Episcopal District, the conference provided an opportunity to do precisely that.

In a stirring Episcopal Address, Bishop Dogbe reflected on ten years of indigenous leadership, highlighting developments in pastoral leadership, lay education, youth ministry, healthcare and environmental concerns. He also celebrated the strengthening of ecumenical relationships and the growing profile of The A.M.E. Zion Church across West Africa.

Among the achievements identified were ten years of church-building construction, progress in ministers' pensions and retirement lump-sum provisions, and efforts to strengthen the institutional foundations of the Episcopal District. These accomplishments represented more than administrative milestones; they reflected a Church seeking to care for its ministers, members, and communities.

The conference also engaged department heads, administrators of schools and hospitals, traditional and political leaders, and women and youth leaders. Such engagement was particularly significant as the Church considers its ministry within societies experiencing profound economic, demographic, technological and social change.

The conference took place against the backdrop of Ghana's changing economic circumstances. While consumer inflation had eased significantly, economic pressures continue to shape the lives of ordinary families and communities. The Church, therefore, cannot concentrate on ministry in isolation from the realities confronting the people it serves.



But the most challenging question was not simply what the Church has accomplished. It was: What must the Western West Africa Episcopal District become over the next ten years?

By 2035, West Africa is projected to experience unprecedented urbanization, regional integration, and economic transformation. The emerging Abidjan-Lagos corridor could become one of Africa's great interconnected urban and economic zones, linking communities across Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria. A younger, more mobile and digitally connected population will demand new approaches to evangelism, education, healthcare, economic empowerment, and community engagement.

Against this backdrop, Bishop Dogbe looked beyond the present, establishing a Strategic Planning Commission to develop the Kingdom Transformation Strategic Plan 2026–2035.

The challenge is therefore clear: *How do we build a Church capable of serving the West Africa of 2035 while remaining faithful to its mission today?*

The answer will require concentrating on ministries that are both grounded in the realities of the people and visionary enough to anticipate the future. The Church must preserve its pastoral presence while developing new models of leadership, discipleship, youth engagement, education, healthcare, technology, and community transformation.

Bishop Dogbe's vision for an Episcopal District with its own conference and retreat centre provides one tangible expression of this future. More fundamentally, the Kingdom Transformation process calls the Church to imagine what transformation could look like over the next decade.

The Third Biennial Conference thus ended not merely with a review of the past but with a mandate for the future: to serve the present age faithfully, concentrate on the ministries that matter, and prepare a Church capable of witnessing to Christ in the West Africa of 2035.

Sankofa reminds us that going back is not retreating. It is retrieving the wisdom necessary to move forward. For the Western West Africa Episcopal District, the journey toward 2035 has begun.



sankofa

Looking Back to Move Forward

Black Suicide: Lynching By Any Other Name Is Still Lynching

By Bobby E. Wright, Ph.D., Submitted by Rev. Dr. Sarah Fleming

One of the most difficult tasks of a Black scholar is to analyze the influence of the irresistible protective barrier of Western scholarship, "the analysis of the victim." This "analysis of the victim" methodology (which involves seeing the victim as the cause of his own problems) has been a major "scientific" development of White scientists because it effectively leads away from the cause of Blacks' condition: White pathology. One result is the position taken by some that the Black masses should not be informed of our truly weak condition for fear of immobilization (a situation that already exists). The confusion is caused by the powerful yet subtle White Concept of "free will." This concept insists that because people always have choices, they can be held responsible for their behavior.

The author is fully aware of the danger in exposing the human personality to threatening emotional stimuli, which endangers its existence. However, there comes a time when the risk of exposure is insignificant when compared to the alternative. To paraphrase a mental health truth, the greatest pathology in the world is for people to believe in something just because they wish it to be true.'

In the not-too-distant past, suicide in the Black community was virtually non-existent. In fact, considering all possibilities of life and death, suicide for Blacks was not an option. Further, all the traditional reasons that have been projected as enhancing the suicide dynamic did not manifest in the Black community. On the contrary, the conditions that produced the feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and powerlessness --- which create havoc for European people --- seemed to have strengthened the resolve of Blacks who considered them part of our destiny.

Therefore, suffering for Blacks was and is a way of life, *not death.* It was out of this cultural imperative that the "Blues" and is now being stolen) and revealed the incomparable "Soul of Black Folks." Centuries before White "discovered" existentialism, Blacks had accepted (unfortunately) that "to live is to suffer and the ultimate test is the meaning a people find in that suffering which dictates the way they live and die."

The historical reality introduces the question, "How could a people, who in the worst of times endured, now *allegedly* reflect one of the highest suicide rates in the United States?" Black and White scientists alike generally assume that traditional research analysis can be applied to the alleged Black suicide phenomena in order to understand its dynamics. However, as this author and colleagues have warned time and time again, the most serious error a Black scientist can make is to utilize European definitions and analysis; there is no denying the fact that "they who have the power to define, rule."

To remove any element of doubt, what is termed Black suicide is really deliberate Black race murder committed by the Whites in the United States. Whites in the United States have achieved their "special environment" as postulated by Watson and Skinner. Therefore, they must be held accountable for the behavior of their inhabitants. There is little disagreement among behavioral scientists who attest to the fact that situations can be contrived in a manner that will influence people to engage in self-destructive behavior. Further, once it is determined that such a condition caused the behavior, the focus of attention shifts from the victim to the perpetrator --- except where Blacks are involved.



Political brainwashing is a violation of the Geneva Convention rules for the treatment of prisoners of war. There is little doubt that a psychotherapist would be charged with a criminal act if it were determined that a patient, even one who had consented, had been encouraged to commit a self-destructive act which led to injury.

Blacks are subjected to far more serious psychological attacks than those permitted to prisoners of war. To deliberately prevent a people from developing life-sustaining options and to promote conditions of self-destruction is an act of genocide. Therefore, Black suicide is a method of genocide promoted and controlled worldwide by the White race. Consequently, there is no such phenomenon as "Black suicide" when suicide is defined as the willful and deliberate act of taking one's own life.

Clearly, this is a non-traditional approach for examining "Black suicide." It is based on a very simple premise: that *Black suicide is a political dynamic.* For political reasons, Blacks are being programmed for self-destruction, and "Black suicide" is one of the results. Lynching by any other name is still lynching. The method that has been developed and is now being implemented cannot be found in any of the literature or in any research data, but is one of the greatest discoveries of psychology. The author has classified this process as "menaced" (Wright, 1976), which is defined as the "deliberate and systematic destruction of a group's minds with the ultimate objective being the extirpation of the group." For example, Blacks' acceptance of the concept of "free will" absolves Whites of any responsibility for their victims' condition. In fact, Whites have developed an effective defense mechanism, "the guilt of the victim." It is so effective that their victims accept their plight as being "God's will."

"Mentacide" is a worldwide phenomenon being implemented against the entire Black race. Therefore, Blacks in Africa will begin to manifest the behavior of Blacks in the United States. Also, it is clear that there is a direct correlation between the level of White involvement and control of Black institutions and Black self-destruction.

The analysis should not be surprising to anyone who has studied European history and is familiar with the European objectives of world domination. Due to the rising level of consciousness and Black Nationalism, which threatens that process, mentacide was developed. Approximately fifty-five years ago, a White Professor of psychology at the University of Chicago proclaimed to the world this prophecy:

Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-informed, and my own specified world to bring them up in, and I'll guarantee to take anyone at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select --- doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant, chief, and yes, beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and the race of his ancestors (Watson, 1924).

The popularly called "behavior modification' is a highly complex 'science" which is underrated and generally ignored by Black behavioral scientists. Yet, any Black with a cursory knowledge of B.F. Skinner's "experimental analysis of behavior" should recognize its potential danger to our community, where every situation is under the control of the White race. It also clearly defines the Black community as still enslaved. The prophecy of B.F. Skinner in *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* is now a reality (Skinner, 1971). Skinner articulated that it is possible to "delude" people into believing that they have the essence of life — freedom and dignity—*and still control them.*

There cannot be an analysis of 'Black suicide' using traditional White techniques because to do so would assume an inherent equality between Blacks and Whites. Such an analysis ignores the prevention of opportunity, options,

and control by Blacks over their own destiny. In fact, a critical analysis of even White suicide would raise serious questions concerning the validity of Durkheim's (the penultimate, White "God" of suicide theory) basic premise that the suicide rate for any given social-area population varies inversely with the "stability and durability" of social relationships within the population (Durkheim, 1951). For example, the death of a U.S. soldier who threw himself on a grenade would be classified as an "altruistic" suicide by Durkheim. The soldier would be considered a person who has lost his personal identity as a result of the group's authority becoming dominant. Therefore, he sacrificed his life for the group. Yet the U.S. Army does not treat or identify a soldier who commits such an act as suicide. On the contrary, he is considered a hero and given the highest honors. However, a kamikaze Japanese pilot who crashes his plane into an American ship is considered "crazy" and "suicidal." Further, scientists then propose and receive research grants with the stated purpose of attempting to understand the "Asian" mind.

In view of this discussion, the problem of so-called Black suicide cannot be resolved at this time. To believe otherwise presupposes a sense of direction and level of power that does not exist in the Black community. This is not to imply that our situation is hopeless. A solution is readily available: the creation of an African world-wide through the development of a Black Social Theory. A social theory determines the destiny of a people by establishing objectives and guidelines for their existence. It defines their relationship with other living things, values and rituals, and methods of child-rearing and education. The ultimate goal of a Black Social Theory would be the reintegration of a worldwide Black culture.

Numerous examples can be cited to demonstrate how Blacks have attempted to resolve problems through a variety of efforts, only to end up in a weaker position. For example, the aftermath of the 1960s was divided along White social theoretical lines, only to end up with the same pre-60s choices: White capitalism or White Marxism. Without a Black Social Theory, we will continue to stumble through history. It is time for us to heed that profound African proverb, "If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there." Black social Theory will not only tell us where we are going but will also explain what to expect once we achieve our goal. It will not be self-destructive!

A Luta continua—a vioria e certa
(The struggle will continue and victory is certain.)

AMERICA! OH, MY AMERICA

By The Rev. Deforest L. Raphael



October 2026, New York, NY…, America! Oh, my America! You think you have nothing for which you need to be ashamed. Nothing for which you need to repent. To beg forgiveness. To pay restitution. Do you think, because you did not strike the blow, your hands are clean? That because your darker brothers and sisters weren't to be found on your chattel rolls, the wealth their black bodies produced cannot be traced to your ledger sheet? Does your "I didn't know" exculpate you? The Negro poses a question in song, "Were you there?" Their mournful admission convicts each of us with an ounce of sympathy. None is innocent. Else, there would have been no need for that dreadful whisper, "Oh, sometimes, it causes me to tremble…". No need for the repetition, "…tremble, tremble." No need for the fear, the apprehension. The inconceivable grief.

So, it was not a question. They knew. Those who filled the pews of our invisible institutions knew. Those whose failings *brought them low* and they *sat themselves down* on Mourner's Benches in one-room, dirt-floor, clapboard churches knew. They knew then; they know now. To them, it may have begun as a question. But to them, it became a testimony. You see, America forced them (us) to ask those dreadful questions. And to answer them as well. That is the cost of being black in white America. Having to ask questions and provide answers for people determined to remain blissfully ignorant of truths staring them in the face. Questions and the answers with which they have no intention of grappling. That is the privilege of whiteness. The cost of which far exceeds a gallon of gas or a dozen eggs. In fact, I categorically refuse to engage in any conversation regarding high prices until somebody calculates what 350-400 years of slavery, well over 100 years of Jim Crow, and untold millions of indignities heaped upon black people, cost me and mine! Not to mention assessing what MY promised 40 Acres and MY Mule are worth in 2026.

Likewise, America … knows. She's always known. She pretends not to know. She feigns ignorance. White America, that is. Why? Because ignorance shields her from having to respond to far more pejorative inquiries. How can she not know? Charles W. Mills' book, "The Racial Contract," investigates the system of white supremacy and proffers this salient observation. His diagnosis of America's amnesia is a condition that he calls, "epistemological ignorance." Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that studies knowledge. The analysis of knowledge asks what knowledge is and how we find it. Simply, how do we know what we know? Where white supremacy is concerned, white people "pretend" or are stricken with a condition that keeps them woefully unaware of the very condition that affords them such spectacular comfort. Mills argues that the method by which they process knowledge is defective. Hear what Jesus says:

Matthew 6: 22-23: "[22] The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, [23] but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"

The "eye" in this text is what Mills might call "epistemology"; if your eye is bad, Mills suggests, you are "ignorant."

How can America not know? The suspicions that call her ignorance into question are ubiquitous. Practically everything America rails against, are truths they want hidden. A nation that refuses to examine itself is a greater danger to itself than all of its enemies combined. You can ban books, but you can't ban truth. You can manufacture lie after lie, in futile attempts to deceive the people, but you are only lying to yourself if you count it successful.

Come November, history is again offering America an opportunity to reflect upon herself. This reflection is coming in the form of the Mid-Term Election. And America, specifically white America, is being charged with the responsibility of asking herself, "Who are we?" It is precisely at this moment that America is being challenged to reflect upon herself, "What kind of nation is she?" My experience of white America is that while she is both self-absorbed and self-involved, she is not self-reflective, worth a damn! America is so determined to point an accusing finger at anyone/everyone else that she is blinded by her own pride and willfulness. Yes, it is an election, but it is so much more than a mere election. It is a moment where reflection can crack open a door to repentance, and that can lead to redemption.

Every American citizen of voting age must cast a ballot in November's midterm election. I know this might be a hard lift for some, but it is absolutely essential that we turn out in huge numbers. We can make a difference in this world if we work together. There is nothing magical about the ballot. It is just one of the pillars of our democracy. Voting alone won't do the trick. But when we don't vote, we do serious damage to our ability to be effective, and those who we send to represent us suffer as well. If 60% of the people vote in one representative's district, and less than 20% of the people vote in another, that erodes the effectiveness of that representative. We must turn out in massive numbers all across the nation. We, as black people in particular, and this nation as a whole, are in grave danger. The forces that are arrayed against us are not stopping. It often seems as if the forces of darkness are better organized and more focused than the forces of light. I make no apologies for the tenor of this communication. We are in grave danger, and we must be at our posts this coming November. I know we may be exhausted, but I am reminded of another Negro who sang, "I don't feel no ways tired."

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


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