

From Walk Out to Now



The AMEC grew out of the Free African Society (FAS) which Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and others established in Philadelphia in 1787. When officials at St. George's MEC pulled blacks off their knees while praying, FAS members discovered just how far American Methodists Hence, these members of St. George's made plans to transform their mutual aid society into an African congregation. Although most wanted to affiliate with the Protestant Episcopal Church, Allen led a small group who resolved to remain Methodists. In 1794 Bethel AME was dedicated with Allen as pastor. To establish Bethel's independence from interfering white Methodists, Allen, a former Delaware slave, successfully sued in the Pennsylvania courts in 1807 and 1815 for the right of his congregation to exist as an independent institution. Because black Methodists in other middle Atlantic communities encountered racism and desired religious autonomy, Allen called them to meet in Philadelphia to form a new Wesleyan denomination, the AME.x



The geographical spread of the AMEC prior to the Civil War was mainly restricted to the Northeast and Midwest. Major congregations were established in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Washington, DC, Cincinnati, Chicago, Detroit, and other large Blacksmith's Shop cities. Numerous northern communities also gained a substantial AME presence.

Remarkably, the slave states of Maryland, Kentucky, Missouri, Louisiana, and, for a few years, South Carolina, became additional locations for AME congregations. The denomination reached the Pacific Coast in the early 1850's with churches in Stockton, Sacramento, San Francisco, and other places in California. Moreover, Bishop Morris Brown established the Canada Annual Conference.



The most significant era of denominational development occurred during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Oftentimes, with the permission of Union army officials AME clergy moved into the states of the collapsing Confederacy to pull newly freed slaves into their denomination. "*I Seek My Brethren*," the title of an often-repeated sermon that Theophilus G. Steward preached in South Carolina, became a clarion call to evangelize fellow blacks in Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Texas, and many other parts of the south.

Hence, in 1880 AME membership reached 400,000 because of its rapid spread below the Mason-Dixon line. When Bishop Henry M. Turner pushed African Methodism across the Atlantic into Liberia and Sierra Leone in 1891 and into South Africa in 1896, the AME now laid claim to adherents on two continents.

While the AME is doctrinally Methodist, clergy, scholars, and lay persons have written important works which demonstrate the distinctive theology and praxis which have defined this Wesleyan body. Bishop Benjamin W. Arnett, in an address to the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, reminded the audience of the presence of blacks in the formation of Christianity. Bishop Benjamin T. Tanner wrote in 1895 in *The Color of Solomon -*

What? - What? that biblical scholars wrongly portrayed the son of David as a white man.

In the post-civil rights era theologians James H. Cone, Cecil W. Cone, and Jacqueline Grant who came out of the AME tradition critiqued Euro-centric Christianity and African American churches for their shortcomings in fully impacting the plight of those oppressed by racism, sexism, and economic disadvantage.

Today, the African Methodist Episcopal Church has membership in twenty Episcopal Districts in thirty-nine countries on five continents. The work of the Church is administered by twenty-one active bishops, and nine General Officers who manage the departments of the Church.



Dennis C. Dickerson

Retired General Officer

SUMMARY

The African Methodist Episcopal Church has been at the center of the struggle for justice for all people.

In 1787, worshippers of African descent left St George's Methodist Episcopal Church in protest of treatment from European church leaders who attempted to pull them from their knees at the altar while asking them to wait until others completed altar prayer. Upon rising, led by a millennial named Richard Allen (age 26), they walked out to found the Free Africa Society, a mutual benefit, self-help movement to better the plight of freed Africans. It later became the AME Church and represents the first civil rights movement by persons of African descent on US soils.

During reconstruction, 9 of every 10 Africans in USA claimed membership in the AME Church. Its base during Reconstruction era leadership, symbolized by elected members of the US Congress and state houses. Even revolutionary leaders like John Brown, the abolitionist claimed membership.

On December 1, 1955, Mrs. Rosa Parks refused to leave her seat on a public bus in Montgomery, Alabama sparking a national protest that led to the end of segregation in public transportation in the USA. Mrs. Parks (then a gen-xer) credits her tenacity to her faith and teachings in the church of her birth – the AME Church.

The Selma Bridge Encounter March began at Brown chapel AME Church. Other activist in membership include Congressman Harvey Cain, Bayard Rustin, A. Phillip Randolph, Roy Wilkins, Benjamin Banneker, Daisy Bates, Madam C J Walker, plaintiff in Brown vs Bd of Education, Mayor Tom Bradley, Vernon Jordan, and current 116th session Congress members James Clyburn, Alcee Hastings, Gregory Meeks, Terri Sewell, and Val Demings.

In 2015, the world became re-acquainted with the AME Church with the murder of 9 prayer warriors who were attending mid-week Prayer meeting at Mother Emanuel in Charleston, South Carolina. Their senseless deaths, after welcoming a stranger into their midst, and the resulting forgiveness expressed by their surviving family members brought global attention to the history of the AME Church in the struggle for liberation and freedom in the USA. The Emanuel 9 serve to remind us of lingering racism, yet a hope for the future.

Today's commitment to community empowerment is legacy driven. Its leadership and membership have committed that working with the poor and disenfranchised is not an addendum to an already crowded agenda, but the essence of what we must be about. We believe that faith and "works" are intricately connected.

The AME Church welcomes partnership and collaboration to achieve the goal of liberty and justice for all.

**For more information and to connect
with the official website go to:**

www.ame-church.com