



African American Methodist Heritage Center
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Advance Code #3020514

Annual Report of the African American Methodist Heritage Center
To
The 57nd Annual Meeting of the Black Methodist for Church Renewal
Cincinnati, Ohio, March 6-9, 2024

No tree can flourish without its roots. African proverb

Twenty-three years ago, the importance of recovering and preserving the heritage of African Americans in Methodism was a need that was strongly pushed by Anne Fleming Williams as President, of Black Methodists for Church Renewal, (BMCR). She pressed Bishop Forrest C. Stith to take leadership in helping to establish a means for African Americans in the United Methodist church to reach back and recover the stories of their journey in Methodism. Anne, Barbara Ricks and Bishop Stith gathered a few other people who were willing to help pursue the realization of that vision. So this was our beginning.

African Americans in America have been proud participants in the Methodist movement since its inception. We have navigated our way through the many “dangers, toils and snares” of Jim Crow, lynching, segregation, and the shame of the Central Jurisdiction. The road has been stony, but God has brought us safely on this journey. According to *A Lewis Center Report* (January 16, 2024), disaffiliating Churches are disproportionately white.” There have been a relatively few Black churches which have chosen to disaffiliate. Black Methodist have come this far by faith, and the AAMHC strives to preserve this history. The Center will continue to retrieve, retain and research the presence and participation of Black Methodists in the United Methodist Church. So, in the words of James Welden Johnson, let us continue to “sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us.” We helped to plant the crop, till and water the crop, and we continue to participate in the harvest.

During this past year, the Center awarded its second Bishop Forrest C. Stith Grant to Ms. Elinor L. Thompson of Frankin UMC in Churchton, Maryland, in the Baltimore Washington Conference, for the presentation of the history of African American Congregations. Of the 14 submissions from all over the United States and Nigeria, Africa, the selection committee chose her proposal of Saving Sacred Spaces and Places in African American Church Communities.

According to Ms. Thompson, “much of the historical interconnections lie in sacred spaces and places of African American churches and cemeteries. This project poses a great opportunity to confirm and consolidate a rich collaborative history before it is lost forever.” Retired Bishop Forrest C. Stith, states ‘when the Heritage Center was conceived over twenty years ago, we dreamed of the day when every African American United Methodist congregation would find creative ways to celebrate, preserve and secure its rich legacy and story” This grant is a step in that direction

There are many initiatives AAMHC seeks to undertake. However, financial constraints are major roadblocks. The Center no longer receives funding from the general church, except the grant from the General Commission on Archives and History. The limited resources seriously hamper the Center’s ability to get out to where people are; to make personal contacts; to build the historical collection. We understand that memorabilia are personal, almost sacred to people. So it is essential to encourage people to share their artifacts with “history” so the future will be informed; it is a challenging endeavor that exceeds our limited resources. Yet, the AAMHC presses on trusting in God to direct our work so our plans will succeed

Most importantly, AAMHC needs to supported by a gift of any size to help our ministry to continue. The African American Methodist Heritage organized and incorporated in 2001 with an independent Board of Directors and was granted IRS status as a 501 (c) (3) status not-for-profit organization.

The AAMHC is available to you as a resource as you plan historical events in your local church or jurisdiction. We can offer consultations, print and media materials. Contact us via the e-mail address below.

Please share with us any ideas on how we might better protect the future because we have not forgotten our past. We welcome your suggestions, and need your continued support. Our ministry is not yet complete!

Your prayers and support will continue to sustain us.

Sincerely,

Ms. Mollie M. Stewart, President

Bishop Forrest C. Stith, President Emeritus

Carol L. Travis, Executive Assistant

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