



**African American Methodist Heritage Center**  
**36 Madison Avenue • PO Box 127 • Madison, NJ 07940**  
**(973) 408-3862 • aamhc@aol.com • Web site: aamhc-umc.org**  
**Advance Code #3020514**

Annual Report of  
The African American Methodist Heritage Center  
To the General Commission on Archives and History (GCAH)  
July 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 Thompson, 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 Methodists 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 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.

Since last year, we have accomplished the following:

- Quarter time support from Executive Assistant who supports remotely, this responsibility includes inquiries from individuals across the connection.
- Quarterly articles in *By Faith Magazine*, a quarterly publication of *Closer Walk Ministries* that is mailed to 2,000 African American churches, individuals and friends.
- Work is continuing to transfer approximately 40 recorded interviews of African American persons in the Central Jurisdiction. The current plan is to have them available for general viewing in 2024. Several of the interviewees, the late Rev. James Lawson, and Dr. Joseph Lowery and others, are valuable resources that soon will be available
- Resumed attendance to in-person meetings at BMCR (Black Methodists for Church Renewal), General Conference, and other key gatherings across the jurisdictions.
- Contributions continue from private donations to AAMHC UMC Foundation account housed at the UM Foundation of West Virginia, Inc.
- Continue to gather histories of African American Churches over 100 years old for AAMHC archives.
- Partnered with GCAH to have presence at UMC General Conference in Charlotte, NC.
- Research started on obtaining additional copies, either print or digital of some of the books that are vital to our history, such as “The Central Jurisdiction Recovery Project” and “Our Time Under God is Now”, that are currently out of print.

We are grateful to the General Commission for Archives and History (GCAH) for their continuing support of the Center with grant funds as we have no longer receive funding from the UMC General Conference since 2016. Dr. Ashley Boggan D. and her team of professionals, Michelle Merkel Brunskill, Mark Shenise, Frances Lyons and Kevin Dusenberry. go out of their way to provide consistent, outstanding support. The addition of Crystal Caviness, from UM Communications, has been extremely helpful with providing support for our communication needs.

There are many initiatives AAMHC seeks to undertake. However, financial constraints are major roadblocks. 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. We, African Americans and other Methodists interested in this ministry must help us find the necessary financial resources to continue this vital ministry. Your generous donations are welcome, and you may donate through our website, via PayPal, CashApp, though the Advance, or by direct mail.

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 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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*Our mission is to preserve, protect and promote the rich history of African Americans in Methodism*