



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
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Annual Report of
The African American Methodist Heritage Center
To The General Commission on Archives and History (GCAH)
July 2022

To forget the past is to rob the future. Anonymous

Greetings in the name of God our Creator, Jesus Christ our Redeemer and The Holy Spirit our Protector.

The concept for the African American Methodist Heritage Center (AAMHC) originated with Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR) in 2001. Bishop Forrest C. Stith was asked to take the leadership in providing a way for assuring that the contributions of African Americans to Methodism were not lost, but recovered and remembered. At Bishops Stith's invitation, the late Anne F. Williams, President of BMCR, Betty Henderson, Executive Director of BMCR, and Barbara Ricks Thompson gathered to consider developing a way to respond to the challenge. With Barbara Ricks Thompson as co-chair, Bishop Stith assembled a Task Force to think through the possibilities and to develop a plan of action. With the blessings of BMCR, the African American Methodist Heritage Center (AAMHC) was organized and incorporated in 2001 with an independent Board of Directors. AAMHC was granted IRS status as a 501 (c) (3) status not-for-profit organization.

The Board adopted as the mission statement: *The African American Methodist Heritage Center provides research, preserves artifacts and other memorabilia, and protects and promotes the stories of African American people in Methodism.* It should be noted that the organization intentionally chose the generic name Methodist. It was in the hopes that there may come a time when the Methodist denominations of African Americans which split with The Methodist Church because of issues of racism may choose to work with AAMHC in this historic effort. There have been some endeavors in this direction.

From the very beginning, we have been supported by the General Secretaries and the staff at GCAH. A debt of gratitude is due to the late Rev. Charles Yrigoyen, General Secretary Emeritus who served from 1982-2006, and was a source of valuable guidance, direction and support during our early years. He was followed by Rev. Robert Williams, who served from 2006-June 2014, and by Rev. Fred Day from July 2014-2020. The support staff of Michelle Merzell Brunskill, Mark Shenise, Jay Rollins, Frances Lyons and Brian Shetler go out of their way to provide consistent, outstanding support. Dale Patterson, who served for years as the main archivist was instrumental in helping us set up processes and procedures that we still follow today.

We are particularly indebted to Dr. Dreff and the Board for their generous financial support of our efforts since 2021. Yet, the AAMHC is confronting severe financial challenges. Funding is no longer available from the United Methodist Church general fund. There have been contributions through the United Methodist Advance and through grants, and individual and church contributions. Additional sources of funding are mandatory in order for this ministry to continue. In light of that, AAMHC initiated an aggressive membership drive to encourage both individual and local church memberships in the AAMHC. The onset of COVID -19 and the long period of self-isolation has delayed the full implementation of this initiative, and we hope to regain some of this momentum during the coming year. Information about the membership drive is available on our website (aamhc-umc.org) and on our Facebook page.

Since our last report, significant accomplishments have included:

- Center celebrated 20 years of continuous service and support to the UMC in 2021.
- Addition of Dr. Larry Hygh, Jr., an experienced UMC communicator, located in the Western Jurisdiction, to the Board of Trustees
- Article in UM News Digest by Jim Patterson celebrating 20 years of service
- Interviews with Fisk Radio, Nashville, TN and WAOK Atlanta Radio to promote the work of the Center
- Meeting with Kelly Taylor, VP of Religious Life and Community Engagement at Methodist University with Dreff and Travis
- Membership on History Makers Committee, national organization recognizing the significant accomplishments of African American religious persons, offered the names of Barbara Thompson, Bishop Stith and Angella Current Felder
- Visit of GS, Dr. Dreff to Asbury UMC, DC and set up visit at Mt Zion UMC for data for GCAH Online History Course.
- Zoom interview between Dreff and Travis to provide information on work in DMV area .
- Establishment of AAMHC UMC Foundation account housed at the UM Foundation of West Virginia, Inc
- Brokered the donation of portrait of Katherine Johnson, the NASA mathematician, who was born in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, and attended a UMC in her youth, to GCAH office in Madison, NJ. Worked with BMCR West Virginia Chapter for the donation
- Continuous work to transfer approximately 40 recorded interviews of African American persons active in the Central Jurisdiction. Plan is to have them available for general viewing by the end of 2022.
- Quarterly ad in *ByFaith* Magazine, a quarterly publication of *Closer Walk Ministries* that is mailed to over 2000 AA Churches, individuals and friends

We are confident that this ministry is important to the United Methodist Church and to African Americans within the denomination. It is recognized that there is much uncertainty ahead for the denomination. But we are confident that the African American Methodist Heritage Center will survive whatever transition occurs in the future. Our heritage is strong enough to create a resilient legacy as the inheritance for persons in ministry yet to come.

Board of Trustees 2022: Rev. David W. Brown, Dr. Ashley Bogan Dreff, Dr. Angella Current Felder, Dr. Cynthia Bond Hopson, Dr. Larry Hygh, Jr., Ms. Ruth Lawson, Dr. Tamara Lewis, Rev. Tony Love, Mr. Donald Lusk, Member Emeritus, Bishop Ernest Lyght, Dr. Arnold Parks, Ms. Mollie Stewart, Bishop Forrest Stith, President Emeritus, Dr. Ian Straker, Dr. John Wright.

Sincerely,

Ms. Mollie C. Stewart, President

Bishop Forrest C. Stith, President Emeritus

Carol L. Travis, Executive Assistant