



**African American Methodist Heritage Center**  
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**Advance Code #3020514**

Annual Report of  
The African American Methodist Heritage Center  
To  
The 55<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of the Black Methodist for Church Renewal

## **Looking Back to Go Forward**

***To forget the past is to rob the future. Anonymous***

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.

We have been sustained by your prayers and God's grace through these 20 years. We have worked with you in regional training sessions; consulted with various local churches, and provided information and updates through a periodic AAMHC Journal. We also have shared ideas and resources with you through countless hours of tears, meals and fellowship.

AAMHC continues to encourage local congregations to seek out their beginnings, to recover their treasures and to preserve them for posterity. Congregations are encouraged, first to determine if they have the capacity to provide state of the art protection for their documents. They are encouraged to consider sharing their collections with the AAMHC for preservation in the Center's collection in the state-of-the-art facilities at the General Commission on Archives and History (GCAH). At least one notable addition to the collection were the papers of William Jason, one of the great patriarchs of the former Delaware Conference of the Central Jurisdiction.

Some of our accomplishments: Produced 3 African American historical calendars; Produced 5 DVD's "We've Come this Far by Faith", highlighting UMC Black history accomplishments in the 5 jurisdictions. Established and distributed 2 Forrest C. Stith Grants to Mother African Zoar UMC, and to Dr. Rosetta Ross, Spelman College to tell the story of Ruby Ruffin Hawkins Hurley, an unsung heroine of the denomination, Conducted Oral History interviews of 40 individuals active in the Central Jurisdiction.

This ministry has required that we work cooperatively with all of the agencies of denomination at various levels. Special thanks to General Commission on Archives and History (GCAH) who has provided space for our collection, outstanding staff support and much needed funds for the permanent establishment of our Center.

For two quadrennia the General Conference of the United Methodist Church, through the General Commission on Archives and History (GCAH) allocated \$100,000 to support this ministry which is related to the denomination through GCAH. However, beginning in 2017, The General Conference is no longer providing financial support, and our funding has decreased until in 2021, we are no longer receiving any funding. We are faced with an acute fiscal crisis so much that terminating our mission for lack of resources is a distinct possibility. While we understand that funding streams from The United Methodist Church have been severely cut due to ongoing denominational uncertainties compounded by COVID-19 related financial strains, the Board of Trustees of AAMHC have used every possible means to stretch its limited resources toward enabling it to continue our vital work. Membership campaigns have not produced sufficient results.

The Center's Board of Trustees' is working on a strategic planning process to affirm and assess missional need as well as set forth action plans to determine future viability and effective service.

Please consider prayerfully and thoughtfully how you can best support the African American Methodist Heritage Center. Effective support might be financial, via in kind services, sharing items for the collection, sharing information and contacts, etc.

Remember that just as a day that passes cannot be recovered, so the self-told stories of our elders cannot be recovered after they join our ancestors. For more information, please feel free to contact Ms. Travis at [aamhc@aol.com](mailto:aamhc@aol.com) or at 301-908-6501 (cell).

Sincerely

Mollie M. Steward President, Board of Trustees Bishop Forrest C. Stith, President Emeritus  
Carol L. Travis, Executive Assistant

Board members: Rev. David Brown, Dr. Angella Current-Felders, Dr. Ashley Dreff, Dr. Cynthia Bond Hopson, Ms. Ruth Lawson, Dr. Tamara Lewis, Rev. Tony Love, Bishop Ernesy Lyght, Dr. Arnold Parks, Rev. Dr. Ian Straker, Dr. John Wright