



African American Methodist Heritage Center
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Advance Code #3020514

Annual Report

The African American Methodist Heritage Center (AAMHC)
58th Session of Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR)
February 2025

Celebrating 25 years of Ministry to the United Methodist Church

No tree can flourish without its roots. African proverb

The year 2025 marks fifty-seven years since the 1968 Uniting Conference of the Evangelical United Brethren Church and the Methodist Church met to unite and become The United Methodist Church. An important aspect of the uniting agreement was the approval of a resolution that by 1972, the Central Jurisdiction structure of the Methodist Church would be eliminated and the previously all African American annual conferences would be merged with the appropriate geographical annual conferences. In retrospect there is much to learn about the process and the results of that momentous action. Such a "look-back" is essential if the denomination is not to forget the past struggles that gave birth to the present reality.

The concept for the African American Methodist Heritage Center (AAMHC) originated with BMCR shortly after its establishment in 1968. In 2000, 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 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.

During our 25 years of ministry to the United Methodist Church, some of our accomplishments have been:

- Established website and social media presence with creative content available on an as needed basis.
- Created 3 AAMHC yearly calendars and 2 years of AAMHC Journals
- Produced the ‘We’ve Come this Far by Faith’ DVD series of 5 disks that tell our history story from the beginning. Each DVD ends with specific reference to each of the five jurisdictions.
- Quarter-time support from Executive Assistant who supports remotely,
- 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.
- Dedication of Claflin University African American Heritage Center on Methodist Clergy and Laity in May 2017 at Claflin University, Orangeburg, South Carolina.
- Established Endowment Fund at the UM Foundation of West Virginia with private donations.
- Continued acquisition of sacred materials from across the jurisdictions housed at state-of-the-art facility at GCAH.
- Awarded Three (3) Bishop Forrest C. Stith grants to Mother African Zoar UMC in Philadelphia, PA, Rosetta Ross at Spelman College, and Elinor Thompson, a local historian, in Baltimore, MD.
- Maintain a library of over 40 oral history interviews with UM Bishops and wives, and other lay and clergy active during the Central Jurisdictions at GCAH office in New Jersey.

We are grateful to Discipleship Ministries, GBHEM (General Board of Higher Education and Ministry), Black Methodists for Church Renewal and other agencies for support through the years. We are especially grateful to the General Commission for Archives and History (GCAH) for their continuing support of the Center with grant funds as we 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.

In September 2024, the AAMHC Board of Trustees voted that” its ministry, records and storage be fully incorporated under GCAH as of “January 1, 2025”. This motion was enthusiastically received by the board of GCAH in their meeting later in September.

A planning retreat will be held in April 2025 to flesh out specific details of this important decision, and more information will be forthcoming. A celebratory event commemorating the 25th anniversary will be held in the fall of 2025.

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.

Please share any ideas on how we might better protect the future because we have not forgotten our past. Please contact Executive Assistant, Carol Travis, on 301-908-6501 (cell) if there are any questions. We are grateful for your support through the years, and we welcome your suggestions and feedback. 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

Board of Trustees 2025-26: Ms. Deborah Bass, Dr. Ashley Boggan D., Dr. Cynthia Bond Hopson, Dr. Angella Current Felder, Treasurer, Dr. Larry Hygh, Jr., Ms. Ruth Lawson, Secretary, Dr. Tamara Lewis, Mr. Donald Lusk, Member Emeritus, Bishop Ernest Lyght, Dr. Arnold Parks, Rev. Dr. Ian Straker, Dr. John Wright

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