

151<sup>st</sup> Session Kentucky Annual Conference  
Embry Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church  
401 Skyline Dr.  
Elizabethtown, Kentucky 42701

Bishop Jeffrey Nathaniel Leath, Presiding

State of the Church

To Bishop Jeffrey N. Leath, Presiding Prelate, Dr. William Easley, Host Presiding Elder, the Reverend James Smith, Associate Presiding Elder, the Reverend Stephanie M. Raglin, Host Pastor, Members and Delegates of the 151<sup>st</sup> Session of the Kentucky Annual Conference, greetings!

Since the roots of its inception in 1787 in the Free African Society the African Methodist Episcopal Church has been at the forefront of empowering the powerless, especially to those of African descent, but in actuality to all peoples in need of feeling the presence of God's love. From the Yellow Fever epidemic in Philadelphia to the AIDs epidemic in Africa, the United States, and across the world; from the fight for religious freedom from the then Methodist Episcopal Church, to the modern Civil Rights Era, to the modern day pressures from the so-called "religious right", the African Methodist Episcopal Church has always stood for exemplifying what the recently deceased son of the church, the Reverend Dr. James Cone, defined as "Black Liberation Theology", a theology that identifies God with oppressed peoples.

Connectionally

In past year the African Methodist Episcopal Church through its Council of Bishops and its Social Action Commission has stepped forward in the United States by speaking out on issues such as the condemnation of the Trump Administration policy of separating immigrant families and the discrimination of the same administration against refugees (defined by the United Nations Refugee Agency as "...person(s) forced to flee their country because of violence or persecution."). Other statements include the Council of Bishops response to the violence in Charlottesville, Virginia as well as a general statement concerning President Trump. The Social Action Commission and the Connectional Lay Organization are leading in Voter Action with voter information and registration drives and statements on Climate Change, Mass Incarceration, and Education as well as the recent rally in Washington DC to call attention to administration policies detrimental to the underserved. In the Caribbean the AME

Church has been actively in the forefront responding weather disasters that have disproportionately affected the poor and least served. In Africa the Church has responded to disease, war, and oppression. And yet, the church is moving on! The state of the Connectional Church is one of maintaining the traditions that brought us into existence in the first place!

## Conference

According to CensusViewer.com the African American population of the Commonwealth of Kentucky has increased by 14% from 2000 to 2010. This increase is not reflected in the populations of our churches. Indeed, the aggregate Pastors' Reports will show that with the closing of congregations in our Conference our membership numbers are static if not declining. This indicate we are not reaching the masses effectively. To be sure, ministries to those who are outside our Zion are active in several if not most of our congregations; yet this is not reflecting church growth. Pewforum.org shows that of those adults (all) who say they attend church at all, frequently or infrequently, less than 1% in Kentucky attend a Historically Black Methodist Church (AME, AMEZ, CME, other). Additionally, out of a total African American population of 337,520, the projected number of black voters in the Commonwealth is 145,841. This suggests our work is cut out for us. The Kentucky Conference must find ways to address our population decline, or risk seeing our churches close their doors, losing access to performing organized ministry, including but not limited to other than worship. This is not to suggest at all our situation is hopeless. According to the National Congregations Study (<http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/>) the median church in the United States has 75 regular participants in worship on Sunday mornings. Now, this is NOT the average, which is 186, but the median, the "point at which half the churches are smaller, and half the churches are larger." The study also shows that while most churchgoers (50%) attend the largest 10% of congregations (350 and up), only 11% of those who worship attend small churches. This means the remaining 39% are in moderate size churches. We seem to have a lot of the smaller congregations which, if we approach ministry realistically, can yet be sustained. Therefore we would suggest the state of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Kentucky may be, as a whole, struggling, but with corrective approaches can still be sustainable. We would inform those who may not know that the same research shows that sustainability is interdenominational.

## Recommendations

More of our churches consider combining resources where available to access strength in numbers. We must become a people who recognize the need to do church in nontraditional fashions if we are to survive.

More of our churches consider combining with each other to regain strength through numbers. Are we being good stewards holding on to buildings we cannot maintain, that are draining financial resources that could be put to use meeting the mandates of Matthew 25:31-46?

Create/fashion ministries to those other than African American, to include Hispanic, Asian, and European American. This can and should be done without losing our African American flavor.

Look to other denominations dealing with the same sustainability issues and draw from their expertise.

Humbly and with hope submitted by your committee:

### The Reverends

Kenneth J. Golphin, Chair  
McArthur Pendleton  
Louis Haynes  
Revonda Bright

### Brothers

Lemuel Coffey  
Derrick Graham

### Sisters

Mary Raglin  
Robin Harris