

Report of the Commission on Health and Wellness
153rd Session of the Tennessee Annual Conference
October 21-25, 2020
Payne Chapel AME Church
Nashville, Tennessee

To the Right Reverend Jeffrey N. Leath, Presiding Prelate of the 13th Episcopal District, Dr. Susan J. Leath, Supervisor of Missions, Rev. Alexander Gatson, Presiding Elder of the North Nashville District, Rev. Troy Merritt, Presiding Elder of the Nashville District, Rev. Sidney F. Bryant, Presiding Elder of the South Nashville District and Rev. W. Antoni Sinkfield, Host Pastor and members of the 153rd Session of the Tennessee Annual Conference.

The Health and Wellness Commission of the Tennessee Annual Conference submits the following statement:

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic called attention to the significant racial and ethnic differences in health outcomes. Data has suggested that people of color have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and have a worse clinical course. In fact, in some communities, over 70% of COVID-19 deaths have been in people of color also involving our Latino and Native American brothers and sisters. It has been pointed out that COVID has called attention to the health disparities in our community which we know occur in almost every other disease process. Some of the issues that may contribute to these disparities include lack of access to care, lack of proper insurance, delay in seeking care and bias in the health care system that often does not provide the care that we need. More importantly, people of color are more likely to have pre-existing medical conditions that put us at risk for poorer health outcomes.

We have also seen in this season a distortion of the information and of the science. We have seen policies that are aimed to protect our community ignored, for example, the lack of implementation of the CDC recommendation to require masks on public transportation. And we have seen forces trying to turn back the healthcare we have received through the Affordable Health Care Act. We cannot allow health and wellness to become a political issue, however, must involve ourselves in the political process to ensure that appropriate public health measures are being put in place to protect our community to ensure that the health of all people regard less of age, race and gender are respected.

This year, the AME Church entered into partnership with Coalition for a Strong Tennessee along with the United Methodist Church and the Catholic Dioceses to send a message to Governor Bill Lee that the health care of citizens in our communities must be considered an important issue and that we are looking for changes in policies and that we intended to hold our leaders responsible to help implement this change.

The members of the Health and Wellness Committee participated in the following activities:

- Virtual lecturing and education
- Obtaining state and national grants to improve cardiovascular health and knowledge in women and to address obesity in our population
- Education in conjunction with the Tennessee Hospital Association
- Participation at the CDC regarding Bias in Maternal Mortality
- Providing education to our local congregations regarding COVID-19

The members of the Health and Wellness Commission would like to especially thank all of our frontline healthcare workers for their bravery and sacrifice as they have gone to work every day to help to care and relieve suffering for patients affected in this pandemic

20/20 means perfect vision. It is prayer of this Commission that we have used our new found time in prayer, meditation, preparing of healthier meals, and developing a personal exercise program. For now, more than ever God is reminding us that we are the church and our bodies are the temple, not the brick and mortar that we have come to so highly regard as the “church.” It is also our hope that we have taken time to educate ourselves on issues that affect our health and make our voice heard at the polls with our vote. The survival of our churches, communities and families are at stake.

Respectfully submitted,

Cornelia R. Graves MD on behalf of The Health Commission of the Tennessee Annual Conference