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Bishop Jeffrey N. Leath, Presiding Prelate

State of the Church Report

Submitted By: The Committee on the State of the Church
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State of the Church Report

The African Methodist Episcopal Church marked its 200th year with the 50th Quadrennial Session of the General Conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in July. The denomination had its beginnings in Philadelphia in 1816 led by its founder Richard Allen. God has blessed the church of Allen but where do we find ourselves at the beginning of our fifty first quadrennial. Some of the issues we face today were unimaginable a century ago. But the God that showed them the way forward and sustained the AME’S of yesteryear is ever present, all wise and almighty. By looking back we can see and say, “Look where He brought me from”. By looking forward we can resolve that if God be for us, who can be against us.

Our organizational structure serves us well today as in the past. Our focus on education is one of our strengths as well. Our long continuous history is one of our strong points. The AME Church has endured through slavery, wars, the great depression, Jim Crow, and seemingly incessant institutional racism.

We are surrounded by encroaching secularism, Humanism, moral relativism and situational ethics. The church must continue to be a light bearer, a city on a hill that cannot be hid, because spiritual darkness will give way to light. The worldliness of the church must cease. Cultural norms must not take the place of God’s Word in the life of the Church and the churched. Today’s church is faced with declining membership, particularly with youth and young adults. Paul’s admonition to Timothy that the time will come that they will not endure sound doctrine has seemingly come. Pride in the length of membership must be replaced with desire for increased spiritual maturity.

The classical spiritual disciplines of solitude, meditation, prayer, study, fasting, simplicity, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance and celebration must be employed in the development of spiritually mature believers. We must begin again to win souls for and to Christ, Not to the pastor or the church. The church of today must fulfill the great commission with a return to the evangelistic fervor of the past.
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The AME Church must persist in fighting for justice and in reforming the American justice system.

The number of Americans that attend church today is small as compared to the number of church goers of the recent past. Teaching and preaching must be pertinent to the lives of parishioners. It is not enough to tell of the miracles of two thousand years ago, people must be taught how to apply the word of God to have victory in their own lives. The Word of God does not change. The way it is presented can and should change to pique the interest of congregants. Jesus, the master teacher, used parables, object lessons, questioning and inductive reasoning in teaching his followers. We must do more.

Believers must model Christian character. We must be imitators of God as dear children. We should be as Christian as our facebook pages show us to be. We are a people of faith. We must add to our faith as the apostle Peter states in 2 Peter 1:5-9. “...add to you faith virtue and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge self-control; and to self-control patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, love. The apostle goes on to say if we add these and they are increasing, they will keep us from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus the Christ”.

Tithes, offerings and first fruits must be supplemented with other streams of income to finance ministries, build and maintain facilities, and to support the connectional church

The church must endeavor to make membership more culturally diverse to (1) foster church membership and discipleship growth and (2) to become more relevant to a larger segment of the communities it serves.

We must as in the past model our mission through action. We must meet the needs of people by feeding, housing, clothing, advocating, and addressing the
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socials ills of our communities. We must meet crises with resolve, planning and concerted action.

Moreover, we should evaluate programs and procedures. Improve where needed and celebrate successes. Jesus the Christ is the head of the Church and it will be triumphant. The gates of hell may come against the church but it will certainly not prevail, as our Lord has said. Muslims, Hindus, orthodox Jews and countless others of other religions are coming to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Christians are more biblical literate. Clergy and Lay are better trained. Christian Broadcast media is spreading the good news of Jesus the Christ to places that heretofore had not heard the name of Jesus. Technological advances aid the dissemination of the gospel in ways wholly unknown decades ago. Countries that outlaw the gospel can do nothing with satellites.

As in the past, there are Christian Martyrs giving there all for the cause of Christ.

The African Methodist Episcopal Church persists by the Love, Grace and Purposes of God.

Recommendations:

1. Read the book, Celebration of Discipline, by Richard J. Foster or some other book on Christian Spirituality or Spiritual Disciplines

1. Teach people how to have victory in their personal lives by the exposition of scripture.

2. Ask God in prayer to send a Great Awakening to your church, community and nation.

3. Make and implement security procedures for your church

4. Teach the classical disciplines of meditation, prayer, solitude, fasting, study, simplicity, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance and celebration to develop spiritual maturity.
5. Work to address injustice and to reform the American “Justice” system

Respectfully Submitted: The Committee on State of the Church
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