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And Are We Yet Alive? Conception, Actualization and Vitality of the African Methodist Episcopal Church

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July 2018 marked the two hundredth anniversary of the incorporation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Birthed by a small band of thirty persons in social justice protest and a desire to be considered fully human, contemporarily the AMEC is composed a membership of approximately 3.5 million members in twenty episcopal districts located thirty-five countries on five continents. Ironically, there are many in Wesleyan Methodism unaware of the existence of the denomination or its connection to other branches of Methodism. It is often as if African Methodism is the product of a hidden relationship who rarely is invited to the family reunion or comes to the funeral and everyone speculates on how they are related to the deceased. The Ghanaian principle of “Sankofa” means to go back and fetch”. It is remembering where one has been to go forward. This article will provide a brief review of significant events and persons in the early history of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and its relationality to Wesleyan Methodism.

Conception

Born a child of enslavement on February 14, 1760,” the Negro Boy Richard, was the property of Benjamin Chew in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Allen, his parents and three siblings were sold in 1777 to Stokely Sturgis, who lived near Dover, Delaware to pay Chew’s debts. They received permission from his master to join the Methodist Society in Philadelphia. Teaching himself to read and write, he began preaching at age 22, including a signature sermon “Thou Are Weighed in the Balance and Found Wanting”.

Sturgis, having listened to this sermon, was convinced that slavery was morally wrong and offered a plan for his slaves to work and buy their freedom. Allen preached at times four sermons in one serving as a Methodist minister to rural black and white communities in Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey while earning wages for his freedom. He purchased his freedom in 1780 and changed his name to Richard Allen.

In 1784, he was qualified to preach at the first conference of the Methodist Church held in Baltimore, Maryland and he moved back to Philadelphia, which was a center for freed blacks. Richard Allen was ordained by Bishop Asbury a deacon in the Methodist Episcopal Church June 11, 1799. He was the first ordained person of color in the Methodist Episcopal Church which had begun dividing over the issue of enslavement. Allen’s theology revolved around two key

beliefs: Christian moralism (piety, sobriety, cleanliness, humility, and charity) and liberation theology. Allen implored black and white Americans to “do good and . . . hope for nothing” in return, except heavenly reward. Allen began and ended each day with prayer.

Allen believed in the words and works of John Wesley

“God raised the people called Methodists "to reform the nation, particularly the Church, and to spread scriptural holiness over the land." It was a two pronged gospel of personal assurance and social witness. Wesley preached no holiness apart from a social holiness, no Gospel apart from a social gospel.

Thus, in 1786, Allen returned to the city of his birth. In Philadelphia, Allen found a city where almost 70 percent of the blacks were free. Philadelphia's St. George's Methodist Church invited Allen to preach. Drawn by the Methodist Episcopal Church's anti-slavery stand, blacks (slave and free) make up 20 percent of the 57,631 American Methodists. He started preaching regularly at Sunday 5 A.M. services, though he found this an uncomfortable time to be at the pulpit. Allen would then preach three or four more sermons at different churches every Sunday.

Allen's preaching was so successful that new members joined St. George's weekly, building particularly the black portion of the congregation. He vigorously studied biblical exegesis, owning two big sets of biblical commentaries. He favored extemporaneous preaching that was faithful to the Word of God. His sermon content was bibliocentric (i.e., Psalm 37, Exodus accounts, Luke 4: 18-19) steeped in personal piety/responsibility (faith and good works), spiritual conversion, love ethic, philanthropy, socio-political activism, liberation theology (self-sufficiency, abolitionist, global, holistic, benevolence), and Quaker (influenced by the Society of Friends 1600s “speaking truth to power”).

Speaking of Wesleyan preaching, Allen is quoted as saying *“The plain simple gospel suites best for any people.”* He preached at various churches in Philadelphia and remained true to the principles of Methodism, even though, in some white churches when kneeling at the altar in prayer, he was interrupted and asked to go to the back of the church.

As numbers of black members of St George's grew, white church leaders began more rigid worship segregation including altar prayer. Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, William Witcher, William Gray, Sussex Countean, Williams White, Dorian Ginnings, and two other men, a number of women including Flora Allen and Sarah Bass and children walked out of St George's in 1787, seeking their “own vine and fig tree” .

Richard Allen and Absalom Jones (Who would leave Methodism to become the first Black Bishop in the Episcopal Church.) founded the nondenominational Free African Society to assist fugitive slaves and free black migrant in Philadelphia. Allen purchased a lot on Sixth and Lombard Street, moved a blacksmith shop to the site and erected what would become Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. The symbol of the AMEC is an anvil for this

reason. The Free African Society (April 2, 1787) yielded the mission of the AME church plainly states “minister to the spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional, environmental needs of ALL people by spreading Christ’s liberating gospel. Allen exhorted blacks to demonstrate their capacity for free responsibility, by cultivating the virtues of industry, frugality, and thrift but acting generously to aid the less fortunate among his people through racial solidarity and abolitionism

The rupturing relationship between Bethel Church and St. George’s stemmed from court battles 1794 to 1816. St. George’s leadership sought to take the books and keys of the church, insisting that the congregation and all property belonged to them. At times, things were so bad that the members of Bethel sat in the aisles of the church to prevent the pastors of St. George’s from taking the pulpit to preach. St. George claimed that in 1807 the Methodist Conference requested information from Bethel’s trustees on the state of the church but they refused to comply.

The Methodist lawyers challenged the legality of Allen’s “African Supplement” which was the initial AME polity, an informal incorporation of Bethel church, and dissolution of “overseeing” by preachers the Methodist Church¹. The result was a court ruling to seize Bethel, auction it back to Allen. Judge ruled against Bethel, “I would recommend that the corporation go on exerting their powers originally given as if the Supplement had never been obtained”.

It was this rocky interaction that led Allen and the officers to amend the articles of incorporation to include the “African Supplement” in 1807. Rather than set them free, the supplement led to a final showdown in the Pennsylvania courts. In 1815, St. George’s successfully managed to auction off Bethel, and Allen was required to buy back his own church for \$10,125 (\$9600 plus \$525 for adjacent rental property). A series of rulings in lower courts led to an 1816 hearing before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, where Richard Allen and the members of Bethel were declared free from Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) control.

It is critical to remember there was this twenty nine year gap between the walkout and the establishment of the denomination. The seventeen-year ministerial journey between Allen’s ordination as a Methodist minister in 1799 and the uniting of four congregations in Philadelphia founding the African Methodist Episcopal Church in April 9, 1816 is a period that calls for singing “And Are We Yet Alive?”.

The initial AME General Convention met in Philadelphia, with sixteen persons represented the infancy of African Methodism. Reverends Daniel Coker, Richard Williams, Harry Harden, Edward Williamson, Stephen Hill, and Nicholas Gillard represented Baltimore. Reverends Richard Allen, Clayton Durham, Jacob Tapisco, James Champion, Thomas Webster represented Philadelphia. Peter Spencer represented Wilmington, Delaware. Jacob March, William Anderson, Edward Jackson represented Attleborough, PA and Ruben Cuff represented Salem, NJ.

The church in Charleston (Morris Brown, Henry Dayton, et al, was unable to attend the convention. Daniel Coker was elected chair and Richard Allen, Jr (age 14) was secretary.

The election of bishops resulted in the elevation of Richard Allen who was absent and Daniel Coker. Allen believed the church did not need two bishops. In the midst of a contentious conference, Allen was elected and consecrated under the imposition of five ordained Elders one of whom was Absalom Jones on April 11, 1816. Report of the first meeting was read and affirmed at the Baltimore Conference in 1817.

An excerpt from *The Life, Experience, And Gospel Labours Of The Rt. Rev. Richard Allen. To Which Is Annexed The Rise And Progress Of The African Methodist Episcopal Church In The United States Of America. Containing A Narrative Of The Yellow Fever In The Year Of Our Lord 1793: With An Address To The People Of Colour In The United States.* (Philadelphia: Martin & Boden Printers: Philadelphia, (1833) provided the foundations for the contemporary AME Church.

Many of the colored people in other places were in a situation nearly like those of Philadelphia and Baltimore, which induced us in April 1816 to call a general meeting, by way of Conference. Delegates from Baltimore and other places which met those of Philadelphia, and taking into consideration their grievances, and in order to secure the privileges, promote union and harmony among themselves, it was resolved, "That the people of Philadelphia, Baltimore, &c. &c., should become one body, under the name of the African Methodist Episcopal Church."

We deemed it expedient to have a form of discipline, whereby we may guide our people in the fear of God, in the unity of the Spirit, and in the bonds of peace, and preserve us from that spiritual despotism which we have so recently experienced--remembering that we are not to lord it over God's heritage, as greedy dogs that can never have enough. But with long suffering, and bowels of compassion to bear each other's burthens, and so fulfil the Law of Christ, praying that our mutual striving together for the promulgation of the Gospel may be crowned with abundant success.

*The God of Bethel heard her cries,
He let his power be seen;
He stop'd the proud oppressors frown,
And proved himself a King.*

*Thou sav'd them in the trying hour,
Ministers and councils joined
And all stood ready to retain
That helpless church of thine.*

*Bethel surrounded by her foes,
But not yet in despair,*

*Christ heard her supplicating cries;
The God of Bethel heard.*

This conference and celebration was convened in recognition of the Article 7 of the *African Supplement to the Articles of Association* passed April 6, 1791.

And it is hereby agreed, provided, and declared, that any article or provision in the "articles of association," of the trustees and members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, called Bethel church, heretofore made and agreed on, inconsistent with, or altered by these present articles, shall be deemed and taken to be repealed and absolutely void, so far as they may be inconsistent or altered.

The subscribing trustees and members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, called Bethel church, heretofore incorporated under the style and title of The African Methodist Episcopal Church, of the city of Philadelphia, in the Commonwealth, which the said corporation as aforesaid, formed and established, having herein specified the improvements, amendments, and alterations which are desired, respectfully exhibit and present the same, to Joseph B . McKean, Esq. Attorney General of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and to the honourable Judges of the Supreme Court of the said Commonwealth; in pursuance of an act of Assembly, entitled, "An act to confer on certain Associations of the citizens of this Commonwealth, the powers and immunities of corporation, or bodies politic in law."

Liberating Labor

Bishop Richard Allen was a bi-vocational minister earning a living as a wagoner, shoemaker, and chimney sweep. He recognized the importance of education to the future of the African-American community. In 1795, he opened a day school for sixty children and in 1804 founded the "Society of Free People of Colour for Promoting the Instruction and School Education of Children of African Descent." By 1811 there were no fewer than 11 black schools in Philadelphia.

Richard Allen married a freedwoman and property owner, Flora, on October 19, 1790. They became leaders of Philadelphia's African-American Christian community, attended church school classes together on Monday evenings, purchased plots of land, which eventually became church lots. One of their contemporaries shared, "I dined with my good Black friend, Richard Allen's wife. I believe if there is a Christian in Philadelphia, this old Black woman is one." Flora Allen passed away following a nine-month illness on March 11, 1801.

Richard Allen married, widow, Sarah Bass in 1805. They raised four sons, Richard, James, John and Peter and two daughters Sara and Ann in their home at 150 Spruce Street. Sarah Allen supported women's issues, purchasing one of the first copies of a female minister's biography

when it was published. She was active in the Underground Railroad, aiding many in their escapes to freedom. Sarah Allen rented out houses to people who lived in the community. She organized the Daughters of Conference in 1827 to feed and clothe AME ministers and provide them with the material support they needed to survive. At her funeral in 1849, she was lauded as "a pillar of the building, a mother in Israel."

AMEC Historian Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne had a lifelong commitment to education. He opened a school for "colored" children in Charleston, South Carolina in 1830 when he was only nineteen years old. Although it grew "from *three children* at fifty cents apiece, to *sixty children* at from three dollars to six dollars per quarter" (*Recollections of Seventy Years*, 34), the school was closed in 1835 when the South Carolina General Assembly passed Bill No. 2639. This effectively banned teaching blacks to read and write. He was devastated. Teetering between dreams state and reality he wrote a twenty three stanza poem entitled *The Mournful Lute, Or The Preceptor's Farewell* the ends:

*Farewell! farewell! ye children of my love;
May joys abundant flow ye from above!
May peace celestial crown your useful days,
To bliss transported, sing eternal lays;
For sacred wisdom give a golden world,
And when foul vice his charming folds unfurl,
O spurn the monster, though his crystal eyes
Be like bright sunbeams streaming from the skies!
And I! O whither shall your tutor fly?
Guide thou my feet, great Sovereign of the sky.*

*A useful life by sacred wisdom crowned,
Is all I ask, let weal or woe abound!*

Additionally, he was given powerful words of tribute and encouragement by supporter, John Bach as he prepared to close the school. "*Pursue knowledge wherever it is to be found. Like the air you breathe, it may be inhaled everywhere; like gold, it passes current among all classes. Perform all your duties faithfully. God is on the side of virtue*

The AMEC sought to educate its membership through the development of tools to inform and enhance lives in a country that proffered laws to prohibit Blacks from reading and writing and often penalized the educated. Now the oldest continuous Black owned and operated newspaper in the Western Hemisphere,

The Christian Recorder, was initially published July 1, 1852, by its first editor Reverend Molliston Madison Clark. Its purpose statement is to be "faithful voice for the disenfranchised and the oppressed...various issues confronting the black community and has been an advocate

for justice and equal rights”. Its seventh editor, Bishop Benjamin T. Tanner believed in informing the church about current affairs (Editor of the *Christian Recorder* 1868-1884) and the preservation and dissemination of the history of the church (Editor of the *AME Review* 1884-1888). He additionally wrote *The Origins of the Negroe*, *The Color of Solomon-What?*, *Apologetics for African Methodism*, and “The Elements of Pulpit Effectiveness”.

The *AME Review* is the longest continuous scholarly journal published by Blacks in the Western Hemisphere. Its first editor, Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne was elected the Historiographer of the AME Church in 1848. He is often referenced as the “most influential African-American Christian in the 19th century”. He was a minister, an educator who founded Wilberforce University. He persuaded the AME church to purchase it in 1863 from the Methodist Episcopal Church who established it for Black children in 1856.), an abolitionist, and a historian (authoring the first history of the AME Church (1888, *Recollections of Seventy Years*; 1891, *The History of the A. M. E. Church*). Payne believed the tasks of the church was “to improve the ministry; the second to improve the people”.ⁱⁱ In 1842, he recommended a full program of study for ministers, to include English grammar, geography, arithmetic, ancient history, modern history, ecclesiastical history, and theology. By the 1844 AME General Conference, he recommended a “regular course of study for prospective ordainees”.

Throughout his life, Richard Allen participated in numerous organizations that focused on the betterment of humanity, including schools, charity and reform associations, and anti-slavery societies. Allen and Absalom Jones published the first copyrighted document by a black author in the United States: “A Narrative of the Black People,” printed in January 1794. Allen wrote in *Freedom's Journal*, America's first black newspaper: “*This land, which we have watered with our tears and our blood, is now our mother country, and we are well satisfied to stay where wisdom abounds and the gospel is free.*” In 1817, he helped draft a petition against the American Colonization Society. He was the first Black leader to write his autobiography.

In speaking about the importance of remembering Bishop Richard Allen, his successor, Bishop Morris Brown had these words to share with the Church:

This patriarch and founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, though his body is reposed in the silent tomb, yet his memory is still fresh in the minds of thousands, and millions yet unborn will rise up and call him blessed. It requires some one more con-versant without venerable father in his early days than we are, to wield a pen in a manner sufficient to do that justice which belongs to him. Not only the members of our church should feel an interest in the history of this man of God, but every person of color in these United States, for he was the first among us in this country that ever moved and succeeded in obtaining spiritual freedom from under the sanctimonial (sic) yoke of our enemies, who, under the garb of religion, held our people in a most abject servitude, by taking advantage of their ignorance. Will not some one who is acquainted with the life and early pursuits of our beloved father, take up his pen and give us a

brief sketch of them for our next number? We feel satisfied that it will be read with interest by every Christian and friend of the colored man.

Boston activist David Walker wrote in 1829, “Richard Allen! Oh my God!!, The bare recollection of the labors of this man fills my soul with all those very high emotions which would take the pen of Addison to portray.”

The AME Church was born in the crucible of struggle against racial injustice. Throughout its history members and clergy have worked to level the ground of social, economic, spiritual, psychological and physical justice. The names of justice workers are legend not only in the church but also in world history.

Using Luke 4:18-19 as a centering point the early members of the “Church of Allen” committed themselves to self-help and holistic ministry. They understood that one could care for others if one places oneself under the unction of the Spirit of God. Preaching the gospel, establishing food banks, providing wearable clothing, assisting with adequate housing, ministering in prisons, counseling those in spiritual and emotional crisis, providing employment services, investing capital, visiting those in hospitals and care facilities, and educational programs predated our formal founding. The official motto of African Methodist Episcopal Church, "God our Father, Christ our Redeemer, Holy Spirit our Comforter, Humankind Our Family" embodies the beliefs of the founders of the church and current members who engage and live the directives of the biblical text and the call to disciple the world.

Jarena Lee, was one of first black women to speak out publicly against slavery, who was given permission by Bishop Richard Allen in 1816 to exhort and evangelize.

“For as unseemly as it may appear now-a-days for a woman to preach, it should be remembered that nothing is impossible with God. Indeed, it was not even improbable that God would call a woman to preach”

She led the sacred sphere, own vine and fig tree, God called and spirit anointed "church mothers" became pastors, evangelists, pastor's wives, and leaders of organized women's religious groups, missionaries, deaconesses, administrators, teachers, and financial support for the church, community and world. Biddy Mason, a lay woman, was a founder of the First African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church in Los Angeles in 1872. Concerted efforts of the Women’s Missionary Society led to the ordination of Rebecca Glover, as a Local Deacon in 1948 and a Local Elder in 1956. Their actions opened the door for women’s itinerate ordination in 1960, Rev. Carrie Hooper as the first female candidate for bishop in 1964, and the first female presiding elder, Rev. Dorothy Morris in 1973.

"God is a Negro" was preached often by Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, startling Black Methodist and Baptist congregations in the nineteenth century. Turner was an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church leader, Reconstruction-era Georgia politician, a staunch defender of

the Civil Rights Act of 1875, an outspoken defender of African American rights, prominent leader of 1870s back-to-Africa and Haiti movements, and supporter of the American Colonization Society. He served briefly as postmaster in Macon, Georgia, and in 1870 he was again elected to the state legislature. He worked with President Lincoln to establish the first black regiment in the Civil War and served as the first black chaplain in the military.

An advocate of black pride, Bishop Turner argued that blacks should reject any and all teachings by whites that blacks were inferior. He said that black people needed to reflect on their identity as people made in God's image, therefore God was black. He believed the Genesis account of God's creative purpose. God created Adam and Eve, male and female, in God's image. We were conceived as mirror images of God, to think about God, to love like God, to act by God's direction.

Turner wrote and preached and taught that each person, particularly Black people look like God. We are each hand made, God breathed, earthen miniatures of God-short, tall, young, older, full figured, thin figured, athletic, disabled, Black, White, Brown, Red, Yellow, striped or speckled-just like God. In a world where people evaluated the worth others by skin color, Turner was a voice crying in the wilderness. His controversial statements impacted his popularity and eventually undermined his move toward national leadership but he never backed down.

Living Legacy

The legacy of AME freedom fighting, social justice and equality before the law is evident in perusal of the lived faith of Sarah Allen who was a "conductor" of the freedom train or Underground Railroad, a network of barns, churches, houses, boats, carts, wagons, trains and footpaths, used any means necessary to assist between 40,000 and 100,000 runaway enslaved persons to freedom in the North and Canada.

Bishop Richard Harvey Cain was elected member of U.S. House of Representatives from South Carolina during Reconstruction era. Bishop Reverdy Cassius Ransom an advocate of the social gospel was a founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (NAACP). Bishop William Heard was appointed "Minister Resident/Consul General" to Republic of Liberia. Rev. Henry Aaron Joubert was a leader of Cape Town, South Africa. Rosa Parks is called the Mother of the Modern Civil Rights Movement. Rev Oliver Brown, was the lead plaintiff in the historic Brown vs. Board of Education case. Rev. Dr. Floyd H. Flake is a former U.S. Congressman from New York State. First AME, Los Angeles, St. Paul AME Cambridge, Big Bethel, Atlanta, Mother Bethel Philadelphia, and Brown Chapel in Selma were names heard often in the late 1950 and 1960s. They followed the path charted by Bishop Henry McNeil Turner in working for justice.

Richard Allen was a self-named, self-sufficient, self-educated, prophetic voice for religious and social emancipation, justice and reform. He was an activist, abolitionist, hymnologist, organizer,

church planter, popular preacher, and eulogist for President George Washington, liturgist, psalmist, chimney sweep, shoemaker, wagoner, author, publisher, realtor, philanthropist, and entrepreneur to support spouse and six children and the church. He and Sarah Allen are interred in the basement of Mother Bethel.

In 1801 Richard Allen's fifty four song hymnal, *A Collection of Spiritual Songs and Hymns Selected from Various Authors by Richard Allen, African Minister*, was printed. It was the first printed collection of songs by Blacks. Drawn primarily from the compositions of Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley and Spirituals this pocket-sized edition evolved into the 1818 first *AME Hymnal* with 314 hymns

*And are we yet live? And see each other's face...
What troubles have we seen, What conflicts have we passed...
But out of all the Lord, Hath brought us by His love...
Let us take up the cross, 'Till we the crown obtain.*

*Preserved by power divine
To full salvation here,
Again in Jesus' praise we join,
And in his sight appear.*

Poet and lyricist Charles Wesley published a four stanza poem in the section, "Hymns for Christian Friends" in a collection entitled, *Hymns and Sacred Poem* in 1749 addressing the Wesleyan "way of salvation" and sanctification. Thirty one years later John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, included it in *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodist* (1780) at the beginning of the section titled, "For the Society... at meeting." And began using it at annual meetings of Methodist societies/"holy conference" to thank God for safely bringing the church through the intervening year.

*What troubles have we seen,
What mighty conflicts past,
Fightings without, and fears within,
Since we assembled last!*

*Yet out of all the Lord
hath brought us by His love;
and still he doth his help afford,
and hides our life above.*

Richard Allen's "With an Address to the People of Colour in the United States. A short Address to the friends of him who hath no helper.

We are to do good and lend, hoping for nothing again. In its extent, it is unlimited and universal; and though it requires that an especial regard be had to our fellow Christians, is confined to no

persons, countries, or places, but takes in all mankind, strangers as well as relations or acquaintances, enemies as well as friends, the evil and unthankful, as well as the good and grateful. It has no other measure than the love of God to us, who gave his only begotten Son, and the love of our Saviour, who laid down his life for us, even whilst we were his enemies. It reaches not only to the good of the soul, but also to such assistance as may be necessary for the supply of the bodily wants of our fellow creatures.

And the absolute necessity of practicing this duty is the very same with that of being Christians; this being the only sure mark by which we may be known and distinguished from such as are not Christians or disciples of Christ. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Yet Alive

The summative lessons of our founders and foreparents which will insure our continued “aliveness” include:

Lift up the world mission of Jesus. Jesus said to go and teach everyone about the good news of the kingdom. Our mission continues to be one of sharing the news yet also learning from others about the good news in their lives.

Speak to the deeper needs of people through our unique heritage and ministry. We are a “called out people, members of the royal priesthood. We do not brag about our heritage just recognize that God is the architect and root of all that we are or will come. As people of the African Diaspora, we need to dig into our history and heritage to mine the richness that has made us who we are today.

Use liturgy and worship rituals that reflect, reinforce, and reaffirm our authenticity and legitimacy. The worship life of the church is essential to its relevance. We cannot be so quick to discard the theology of the hymns in favor of replacement with vain repetitions and catchy rhythms. We must explain the meaning of the rituals, create contemporary renditions and not go about them with blind abandon or routine blandness.

Affirm the personhood and peoplehood of all believers regardless of their age, gender, residence, health status, education, or economic level. The village suffers when homogeneity is the standard. God created a diverse group of residents in the village for a purpose. Our proclivity to judge the “other” as not worthy will be answerable in the judgment.

Have a strong commitment to the liberation and reconciliation of people to God, people to people, people to the environment, people to their history, and people to communities. All of God’s creation is in our care. We cannot afford to omit even the earth beneath us in our stewardship.

Unequivocally stand against the dehumanization, objectification or negation of persons—systemically, ideologically, culturally or economically. No place for waffling. No option to defend a few. We are to stand with, connect with all the people who are deferred as nothing and nobodies.

Live in full identification with the poor and oppressed and their struggle for human dignity. We often blithely say “there but for the grace of God go I”. This is a serious statement. We are to help others not because we have and they have not. We are challenged to take action because we have been or could be in their state in the “moment and in the twinkling of an eye”.

Use global vision—locally, nationally, and internationally—to cooperate with the economic and social injustices of the world. Think of who makes up the village. Our neighbors are not just the people next door but the people of on every speck of dirt God created.

Commit to identify with God. Think about your image of God. If we believe we are made in God’s image, who are we?

And are We Yet Alive? Yes! And are We Yet Alive? Yes, since 1787 due to the infectious nature of social injustice. And Are We Yet Alive? Yes, despite a twenty-nine-year legal journey towards independence. And Are We Yet Alive? Yes, two hundred years and counting of activism, education and global mission. And Are We Yet Alive? Yes, the African Methodist Episcopal Church continues the legacy of John Wesley and Richard Allen through the belief in and practices of holiness, sanctification, piety, moral responsibility, education, worship and the arts, individual freedom and social transformation. Regardless of the contentious beginning and the enduring invisibility to other Methodist bodies, the African Methodist Episcopal Church is yet live.

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