

STATE OF THE CHURCH

Central Annual Conference ~ Eleventh Episcopal District

TO: Bishop Adam Jefferson Richardson, Jr.
Mrs. Connie Speights Richardson, Episcopal Supervisor
Presiding Elders Henry L. Postell, II, Hartford Lee, and Valarie J. Walker,
Pastors, Ministers, and Members of the 118th Session of the Central Conference

The Committee on State of the Church submits the following report:

As we examine the state of our church in the Central Annual Conference, our community of faith finds itself at an inflection point.

Many cities in the Central Florida area are experiencing a growth explosion as more people and business are calling this area home. The Central Florida area in general, and Orlando, in particular, is making a swift transition from a rural upstart to a metropolitan area with a global impact. This explosion of population is expected to increase in the wake of Hurricane Maria's devastation on the island of Puerto Rico, a territory of the United States. The devastation is such that many of the inhabitants of Puerto Rico are forced to abandon their homes and relocate to the Central Florida area where they have family. In light of this, phenomenon, there is a need and an opportunity of the African Methodist Episcopal Church to make a considerable impact in the Latino community. To that end, this committee is proposing that this Conference begin to have a series of discussions as to how new works can be planted in Latino communities to minister to the needs of the growing population. There are two such members of the clergy that should be included in these conversations as they are Spanish-speaking, the Reverends Griselle Velez-Davis and Shelia De Los Angeles Hamilton.

How Firm a Foundation?! While hurricane Irma was more destructive in Southern region of the State, the Central Florida area did not escape her wrath. Some churches were closed for anywhere between 2-3 Sundays, but our churches collectively sustained little to no damage. To God be the Glory. Saint Mark, Orlando (the Reverend Terence R. Gray I, Pastor), and Allen Chapel, New Smyrna Beach (the Reverend Jeffrey Dove, Pastor) opened the doors of the church to serve as shelters for their respective communities. In the wake of hurricane Irma many of the churches, large and small, opened their doors to feed those without food as the hurricane left the area with a shortage of food and fuel. Allen Chapel, Sanford (the Reverend Octavius L. Smith, Pastor), New Bethel, Altamonte Springs (the Reverend Arnold A. Porter, Pastor), Saint Lawrence, Eatonville (the Reverend LaFiesta Cox-Brown, Pastor) partnered with AME Star Scout Jacob Cuthbert III and Boy Scout Troop 263 (Lake Mary, Florida) and Hearts, Hands and Hope, Inc. to help replenish the food pantries of the Seminole County Public School System (SCPS) that were left bare after Irma. The food collected by these three churches replenished the food pantry of Lake Bentley Elementary School, Lake Mary, Florida. The SCPS food pantries ensure that homeless children have food to eat over the weekends when school

is not in session. These three churches have covenant to make ongoing donations of food to the SCPS food pantry program.

During hurricane Irma, two of the Central Conference Chaplains, Chaplains Arnold A. Porter and Missouri McPhee served as members of HERT (Hurricane Evacuation Response Team) for Orlando Health as well as for the Seminole County Community. They worked tirelessly to keep the sick and community at large safe until the storm had passed over and in the immediate aftermath.

How Firm a Foundation?! The churches in the Central Conference continue to demonstrate their commitment to futuring and youthenizing our church. The Central Conference registered a total of 780 persons for the 2017 Christian Education Youth & Leadership Congress (CEYLC) with approximately 80% of those registered being youth, an increase of 6% from the previous year. With the approval and support of Bishop and Supervisor Richardson, and the Reverend James C. Givens, Episcopal Director of the Department of Christian Education, the Central Conference partnered with the Central Florida Council of the Boy Scouts of America and the Citrus Council of the Girl Scout U.S.A. to present a Merit Badge University and a G.I.R.L. Power program. This inaugural program of the CEYLC yield contact with over 120 Boy Scouts and 33 Girl Scouts from across Central Florida and the Bahamas, 90% of whom were not in the AME fellowship. This unique experience provided an opportunity to introduce scouting to the AME Church as Youth Ministry as well as to introduced to the AME Church persons of other faith and ethnic persuasions. It should be noted that the Reverend Dr. Marcia Allen Owens and the Reverend Dr. A. Nevell Owens taught the Environment Science Merit Badge through funding provided by Florida A&M University, Tallahassee, FL. Further, during the scouting program offered at the CEYLC, the Florida Circuit Court Judges Convention was going on at the same time. Senior Circuit Court Judge, the Honorable John Adams, an Eagle Scout himself, took time to give high commendations to the AME Church for this investment in youth and pledged his support the next year's program. The Reverend Dr. Missouri McPhee served as the coordinator for this initiative.

Further, the Central Conference was privileged to have a boy scout, Star Scout Jacob Cuthbert, III, (Troop 263 – Lake Mary, FL) attend 2017 National Boy Scout Jamboree in West Virginia with 40,000 other Scout and Scouters. Jacob was privileged to serve as the Chaplain Aide for the Central Florida Contingent. Of the 200 plus Boy Scout participants from the Central Florida Council of BSA, Jacob was the lone AME. He represented his faith and the AME Church well. The support and prayers of many of the pastors, ministers, and laity of the Conference help to fund this 10-day unparalleled experience.

How Firm a Foundation?! The social justice ministry presence in the Central Conference, spearheaded by the Reverend Jeffrey Dove, remains second to none. The *Third Party Voter Organization* initiative boast over 100 AME churches as members, making the AME Church in Florida the number one denomination participating in this

social justice engagement. The Reverend Dove remains passionate about the restoration of Civil Rights for convicted felons who have paid their debt to society and is endeavoring to collect 700,000 signatures to get this initiative on the 2018 ballot. The Reverend Dove and the Allen Chapel, New Smyrna Beach congregation also have a phenomenal ministry to the homeless. The Reverend Dove is affectionately referred to as “the homeless pastor”. The Central Conference also had a national presence in terms of social activism as the Reverend Courtney Jamal Mackey was among the 5,000 marchers at the Ministers’ March for Justice held in Washington, D.C. on August 28, 2017.

The Reverend Richard King also lead a civil protest at Eustis City Hall speaking out against a sitting City Commissioner who offered Eustis as a home to house Confederate monuments. The Reverend Bettye J. Watson was recognized by the Democratic Black Caucus of Lake County, Florida for her dedication and service to the Citizens of Lake County; and the Reverend Dr. Rhella Murdaugh has been appointed to Ocala (FL) Historic Preservation Advisory Board.

The Central Conference continues to be actively engaged in civic and social justice activities to the extent that several of our laity were elected to public office in November 2016 and these are they: Valdez Butler Demings (U.S. House: District 10); Tiffany Moore Russell (Clerk of the Court, Orange County); and Jerry L. Demings (Sheriff, Orange County); All of these persons are members of Saint Mark, Orlando. Further, Reginald B. McGill was elected to serve as a delegate to the Democratic Black Caucus of Florida’s Convention in June 2017 where Russel Drake was elected as its First Vice President. Both persons are also members of Saint Mark, Orlando.

How Firm a Foundation?! Sadly, several of the stalwarts of the Central Conference, Presiding Elder Leroy Kennon, Jr. (Ret.)(Orlando District); Deaconess Bettye Ann Howard Hillman (New Bethel, Orlando); Deaconess Naomi Lee Curry (Mount Olive, Merritt Island); Deaconess Ida Mae Smith (Saint James, Titusville); Deaconess Verna Collier Mann received their permanent transfers from the Church Militant to the Church Triumphant. We honor God for their many dedicated years of ministry in our fellowship and commend their spirits unto Almighty God.

The Conference also formally superannuated two clergy members; the Reverends Willie Bell Coleman-Smith and Jiles J. Smith; ordained five Itinerant Deacons: the Reverends Shalon Monique Chambers, Shelia De Los Angeles Hamilton, Mikel Jere James, Chloe Jeanique Lyals, and Frederick Lee Pennington; and ordained four Itinerant Elders: the Reverends Dr. Ida Stephens Andrews, Pamela Kaye Harrison Bivins, Gregory Louis Brown, Jr., and Courtney Jamal Mackey.

How Firm a Foundation?! Because of the dynamic leadership and resilience of our Presiding Elders, the Reverends Hartford Lee, Henry L. Postell II, and Valarie J. Walker; the faithfulness and dogged determination of our pastors, ministers, and laity; the Central

Conference can boldly exclaim that we live out our calling through a myriad of ministries in the church gathered and the church scattered by loving all of God's people. We have consecrated ourselves for the work and ministry of being a friend to the friendless, a mother to the motherless, and to bring hope to those dark corners of our part of the world. We have been commissioned to lift Christ and expand His Church by demonstrating a social justice and liberating faith. It is therefore, the contention of this committee that the State of the Church in the Central Annual Conference remains strong and vibrant and pregnant with the possibilities of new birth and growth. The State of the Church is also active in and relevant to the life of community. The church's foundation is firm!

Humbly submitted on this 6th day of October, 2017

The Reverend Bettye J. Watson, Chair
The Reverend Dr. Falecia D. Williams
The Reverend Dr. Missouri L. McPhee
The Reverend W. Damone Johnson
The Reverend Lorenzo Laws
The Reverend Omega Collier
The Reverend Terrell L. Blair, Sr.
The Reverend Will McCoy
Mr. Clyde Mitchell
Mr. Earl Curry
Mrs. Mary Adams