

**THE MISSION AND PURPOSE
OF
BETHEL AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE**

The Mission of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church is to minister to the spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional, and environmental needs of all the people by spreading Christ's liberating gospel through word and deed. Bethel shall engage in carrying out the spirit of the original Free African Society, out of which the African Methodist Episcopal Church evolved: that is to seek out and save the lost, and serve the needy through a continuing program of (1) preaching the gospel, (2) feeding the hungry, (3) clothing the naked, (4) housing the homeless, (5) cheering the fallen, (6) providing jobs for the jobless, (7) administering to the needs of those in prisons, hospitals, nursing homes, asylums and mental institutions, senior citizens' homes; caring for the sick, the shut-in, the mentally and socially disturbed, and (8) encouraging thrift and economic advancement.

The scripture reads in the gospel according to Luke, chapter 4, verses 18-19; "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord." These are words that Jesus, the Christ of Nazareth read from the Old Testament book of Isaiah, chapter 61, verse 1-2a.

This is the goal of Bethel as well as the Christian church.

In order that you might have a clear understanding of what each word in the name of our church means, the following brief descriptions are offered:

AFRICAN

The word "African" means that our church was organized by people of African descent and heritage. It does not mean that our church was founded in Africa, or that it is for only people of African descent, and we proudly recognize this fact.

In the year 1787, Richard Allen, our founder, and a group of dark-skinned Americans of African descent were forced to organize themselves into a separate group for their own spiritual, social, educational, and general growth and development.

At that time, the word "Negro" or "Colored" had not yet come into a general use in reference to those of us who are now called "African-Americans." All of our ancestors of the day were referred to as Africans. This particular group of Americans of African descent, under the leadership of Richard Allen, constituted the first and founding members of our church. The group was then called, "The Free African Society," until they were formally organized as the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816.

METHODIST

Our church is a member of the family of Methodist churches. Richard Allen, our founder and first active bishop, felt that no religious group or denomination would suit the capacity of his people as well as did Methodism. He was impressed with its emphasis upon the plain and simple gospel which the unlearned could understand, and its orderly system of rules and regulations which the under-developed needed. He felt that Methodism has what we needed to encourage us to make progress, to worship God freely, and to fill every office which was available in the church and our total community.

EPISCOPAL

The word "Episcopal" refers to the form of government under which it operates. The Episcopal form of government means that the chief executive and administrative officers of our denomination are our bishops. Their authority is given them by the General Conference which meets every (quadrennial) four years.

Stating briefly, their responsibilities are to oversee the spiritual and temporal affairs of our church, including presiding over annual conference, making pastoral appointments, ordaining clergy (deacons and elders), organizing missions, and generally promoting the interests of the denomination.

CHURCH

The Christian church is a community of people who believe in God and who have accepted Jesus Christ as the Guide and Master of their lives. We who make up the Christian faith, believe that God, through Jesus Christ, can transform individuals in such a way as to cause them to want to be like, think like, and act like Christ in every area of their daily lives. We also believe that there is a divine power, referred to as the Holy Spirit, which enables the willing person to become a true and effective servant of God, as Jesus was a true and effective servant.

Jesus Christ is the spiritual head of the Christian church, the African Methodist Episcopal denomination, and the local church of which you are a member, that represents an organized group of believers who are studying, learning, growing, serving, and further developing themselves into effective Christian servants. Thus, we are known as disciples, (followers) of Christ; having surrendered all for Him, striving toward the perfection of Christ as we walk earnestly in His ways. We believe that in order to be a genuine Christian, we must acquire the attributes of Christ. In other words, taking on the personality of Christ. This is a part of what it means to be a Christian.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

"Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." I Corinthians 12:27. The true Christian church is referred to by Paul in this passage as "...the body of Christ," and as persons "called to be saints" in I Corinthians 1:2. It is the instrument for making the will of God known effectively operating in the world. Just as the human body is the home of every living personality in the world, so the church is the home of the Spirit of Christ. Just as the human body and spirit are intimately joined together, so are Christ and the church intimately joined together.

All of this is to say that the Christian church is the body of Christ and possesses the Spirit of Christ. We who make up the church are the voices, the hands, and the feet in action of God, seeking to bring about a new world under God.

WHY WE UNITE WITH THE CHURCH

We unite with or 'join the church' in order that through participation in the many activities, we may grow in spiritual understanding and character as well as grace. We strive to become better able to more effectively serve both God and humankind.

The proper term for uniting with the church is "being born into the church." When we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior, we are "born again," and are born into the "Church" or "the body of Christ."

ORGANIZATION

Since the church is "the body of Christ," we expect it to be organized. A body cannot function effectively unless the various parts are properly related to each other. An effectively functioning church must be an organized church. It must be knitted together as the various parts of our body are knitted together. No single part of our body is isolated or self-sufficient. Each part is a member of the whole. I Corinthians 12:20-21.

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The church is organized into groups, clubs, boards, and classes in such a way as to have the members serve the needs of each other. Each group is separate from the other, yet absolutely related to one another, bound together in one fellowship of worship, activity, and service.

The church might be described as a body of lively organized believers in action. A body without life is ready only to be buried. A body with life is ready for action. A church that is not active is not Christian, because Christianity represents life. This life is a gift of God.

The Spirit of God is what brings life. When the Spirit of God is present in the church organizations, the whole church becomes a lively instrument of God, crusading for the Kingdom of God on earth.

Jesus Christ is the head of the church, which is the body of Christ. The entire body is under the control of the head. When any part of the body ignores its head, the members suffer. We, who make up the church, organize ourselves to serve divine needs. God gives life and power to the organization, provided the parts of the organization do not separate themselves from God.

The membership roll of the church represents the human materials out of which the church must be built. Whatever else we might say about the church, we must never ignore the fact that the church is people. It cannot exist without people. It is more than people, however it is nothing without people.

ABOUT THIS MINISTRY

The Bethel Outreach Ministry is being established in an effort to ease the plight of hardship, hunger, homelessness, and loneliness in the communities within Hamilton and the surrounding counties. This ministry's primary goal is to minister to those who are in need. It is the prayer of the church that this Outreach Ministry serves as a beacon of light in the midst of hopelessness.

There are many services and activities that Bethel will be doing to bring God's Kingdom here on earth. These programs will deal exclusively with the major goals of Bethel to fulfill its mission.

Worship Program

Worship is the act of the people of God giving praise, thanksgiving, and adoration to God. Therefore, worship should go on every day and every hour of the believers' life. However, it is pointed out here to corporate worship: a time and place when all the believers of Bethel come together, and with one act and voice of unity, give praises and adoration to God. There should be many opportunities during the week and month for corporate worship such as: two (2) or three (3) times on Sundays, weekday services prayer meeting and Bible study), religious holidays, Love Feasts, Revival Meetings, etc. Choirs and ushers are very important to the worship program. They should meet and rehearse weekly and with a spiritual fervor. Uniformity of appearance, of actions, and voice should be emphasized among the choirs, ushers, stewardesses, and congregation. Colors of uniforms should be wisely selected so as to enhance worship and not distract from worship.

As worship leader, I am seeking to encourage all to participate in the act of worship with the aim to produce, with God's help, a worshipful atmosphere, and from this atmosphere, a preaching temperature, making people responsive to God's Word. This year, our annual days will allow us to have an ecumenical taste of fellowship, within the confines of Christianity, as well as with our own Zion.

Evangelistic Program

Evangelism comes from the word “evangel” meaning to reach out with a message. If a church loses the drive to reach the un-churched and save the lost, it will cease to be the Church. Just as the churches rally for dollars to build physical plants, Bethel should, with more fervor, rally for souls. To witness is to tell others what God has done for you, but to evangelize is to tell others what God can do for them. To produce an effective evangelistic program, I will organize the following committees:

The Outreach Committee: go door to door surveying and seeking the un-churched and the unsaved.

The Publicity and Literature Committee: Publish and announce the services, activities and programs of the church in the newspapers, on the radio, television, billboards, etc. for exposure to the vast community.

The Worship Committee: plan the worship and select the minister.

The Music Committee: produce a mass choir and soloists to enhance worship. The mass choir shall include the Angelic Choir, the Voices of Bethel, and the Celestial Chancel Choir.

The Telephone Committee: constantly telephone the unsaved about a meeting. Telephone persons to invite them to the various events and activities.

The Follow-up Committee: when persons commit themselves to Christ, this committee instructs them, gets basic information about each, and places them in a class after consultation with the pastor.

The Christian Education Program.

The teaching ministry of Bethel could never be over-emphasized. As one grows in the knowledge of Christ, one also grows in faith and in good works for the Kingdom of God. Although the Sunday School is the official teaching and learning workshop of the church, the teaching ministry must find other avenues in the church to exercise its mission such as:

The Class Meeting: topics dealing with the faith and doctrine of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and Christianity should be discussed by the class leaders to members in their class.

The Auxiliary Monthly Meetings: the pastor will teach and discuss topics of our faith and doctrine with auxiliary presidents and officers, and they can teach and discuss the topics with their auxiliary during its regular meetings.

Youth Groups: many youth don't come to Sunday School, but they are active in other church activities. Teaching can take place at these youth organization meetings. The meeting of the Richard Allen Youth Council, Young People's Division of the Women's Missionary Society, Allen Christian Fellowship will be combined periodically to discuss strategies for the interests and growth of our youth. This is to be done in conjunction with the Christian Education Commission.