



The Seventh Episcopal District African Methodist Episcopal Church

The Rt. Reverend Preston Warren Williams II
Presiding Bishop

Dr. Wilma Delores Webb-Williams
Episcopal Supervisor

Annual
Conferences

PALMETTO

NORTHEAST

COLUMBIA

SOUTH CAROLINA

PIEDMONT

CENTRAL

America's Three Largest Black Methodist Denominations Convene in Seventh District
for

The Great Gathering

(www.greatgathering.org)

March 1-3, 2010, America's three largest Black Methodist denominations, the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.), African Methodist Episcopal Zion (A.M.E.Z.), and Christian Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.) Churches, with combined memberships of more than 7 million worldwide, convened at a historic gathering in the Seventh Episcopal District. This strategic summit was entitled "The Great Gathering" and was conducted in the Carolina Coliseum in downtown Columbia, South Carolina, U.S.A. This was the first time in more than 45 years that these three Black Methodist denominations have come together to collaborate on a major initiative designed to address a crisis in their communities.

The central concern which brought these denominations together is the plight of the Black male. Noticeably absent in the church and in the home, disproportionately represented in the ranks of the unemployed and incarcerated, and poorly educated and in ill-health, the three Churches convened to seek answers to what is going wrong with Black males and devise solutions which will have a positive impact on Black family life. In essence, the ultimate goal of The Great Gathering is to alter the troubling history of Black males by identifying, developing and implementing unified solutions to the key issues that are devastating the Black family and community.

Leading The Great Gathering were A.M.E. Senior Bishop John R. Bryant, A.M.E.Z. Senior Bishop George W.C. Walker, and C.M.E. Senior Bishop William H. Graves. This momentous event brought together all bishops of each denomination, clergy and laity on all levels, politicians, civic leaders, and educators from throughout the nation. Rev. Dr. Staccato Powell, Pastor of Grace A.M.E.Z. Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, U.S.A., should be commended for his excellent service as Chair of The Gathering.

Between 5,000-10,000 people attended The Gathering daily and its activities included morning prayer sessions, Bible study sessions, congregant caucuses, worship services, and evening gospel concerts. There were daily sermons, seminars and panel discussions with nationally renowned ministers and lecturers including Senior A.M.E. Bishop John R. Bryant, Presiding Prelate of the Fourth Episcopal District; Dr. Marian Wright Edelman, Founder and President of the Children's Defense Fund, (<http://edelman.sfsu.edu>); Dr. James H. Johnson, Jr., William R. Kenan, Jr. Distinguished Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship in the University of North Carolina Kenan-Flagler Business School, and Director of the Urban Investment Strategies Center in the Frank Hawkins Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise; Dr. Cornel West, Class of 1943 University Professor in the Center for African American Studies at Princeton University, and one of America's most provocative intellectuals on race and

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politics, (www.cornelwest.com); Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu, author, activist, lecturer and perhaps America's leading authority on the Black male, (www.africanamericanimages.com); Rev. Dr. William Watley, Pastor of St. James A.M.E. Church, Newark, New Jersey; and Rev. Dr. Charley Hames, Jr., Pastor of Beebe Memorial Cathedral C.M.E. Church, Oakland, California. Additionally, the close of each evening's activities featured sensational musical concerts from Grammy award winning artists Hezekiah Walker, Byron Cage, and Marvin Sapp.

In what is called The Great Gathering Rationale, Church leadership explains that, "This gathering of three powerful denominations will be a major signal to all that the Church will now take an even more proactive and aggressive role in addressing the critical problems that are hurting our communities nationwide... [T]o date, there has not been a nationwide effort created and implemented by one of the most influential and powerful segments of the African American community, the Church. Such a movement to address the many issues affecting and influencing Black men would indeed have a major impact." Thus, Church leadership has established this Great Gathering as the beginning of a new tri-denominational partnership through which the Churches' collective strength is utilized to effect positive change for Black males in America and ultimately around the world.

A.M.E. Host Bishop Preston W. Williams II, Presiding Prelate of the Seventh Episcopal District, stated, "What a joy and a blessing to host thousands of A.M.E.'s, A.M.E.Z.'s and C.M.E.'s all coming together for a single positive purpose here in the great state of South Carolina. I pray that each and every person's experience here was comfortable, enlightening and inspiring and that the Holy Spirit has refreshed and renewed each of your minds and souls for the great work that lies ahead of us all, which we will accomplish together."

Between Monday morning's opening session and Wednesday evening's closing session, the Holy Spirit of God filled the Carolina Coliseum and all those within. During those three joyous days a divinely inspired transformation took place whereby A.M.E.'s, A.M.E.Z.'s, and C.M.E.'s planned and prayed, sang and strategized, loved and learned, and focused and fellowshiped together, not as individual denominations, but as a singularly united Methodist body of Christ. Thousands initially came to Columbia, S.C. as individual members of separate denominations, but all left with a greater awareness of the connectedness of Black Methodism.

During the event, Mayor Robert D. Coble of Columbia, South Carolina, presented the three denominations' Senior Bishops with keys to the city. South Carolina Senators Vincent Shaheen and Clementa Pinckney presented the Senior Bishops with a resolution on behalf of the S.C. Senate and House of Representatives. Additionally, United States President Barak H. Obama delivered a video address to all Great Gathering attendees which can be viewed at (www.greatgathering.org). The majesty and magnitude of the event generated national media coverage, a list of which can also be viewed at the event's aforementioned website. So strong was the spirit of togetherness that, due to the fact that the A.M.E.Z. Church does not

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currently have mission work in Haiti, it decided to give \$100,000 dollars to the A.M.E. Church and \$100,000 dollars to the C.M.E. Church to assist those two denominations with their ministries in Haiti.

After three days of meeting and greeting, preaching and teaching, singing and praising God, a solid plan of action was developed and presented. On the final day of The Great Gathering, Church leadership offered a plan designed to bring significant change to the future of the Black male and Black community entitled the “Black Methodist Coalition - Male Investment Plan.” In it, the primary needs of the Black community are identified as “economic, education, health and wellness, and spiritual enrichment.” The Plan states its initial focus as Black males ages 5-25 who will be recruited into Saturday Academies where they will be partnered with mentors who will assist participants in discovering and developing their own God-given gifts and abilities. Through workshops on a variety of essential life skills such as educational, career, health, and spiritual wellness, mentors seek to uplift participants and assist them in reaching their divine potential. For further details, the full Male Investment Plan can be viewed at (www.greatgathering.org).

The following are excerpts taken from the sermons and lectures presented by The Great Gathering’s featured speakers:

** (All statistics are specific to America.) **

Dr. Marian Wright Edelman – “From the Cradle to Prison” – (Monday at 12:00 noon)
Founder and President of the Children’s Defense Fund, (<http://edelman.sfsu.edu>).

“We are facing a new kind of slavery – what I call the cradle to prison pipeline. And if we don’t see it and name it and change it, we’re going to lose all the social and racial progress of the last 50 years.”

“We need a new movement and we need it urgently, and that’s where the Black church has to become the locomotive of the new movement to save our children.”

“Michelle Alexander says, in her book The New Jim Crow, that there are more African Americans under correctional control today, in prison or jail, on probation or parole, than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War.”

“As of 2004, more African American men were disenfranchised due to felony disenfranchisement laws than in 1870, the year that the 15th Amendment was ratified prohibiting laws that explicitly deny the right to vote on the basis of race.”

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“There are 14 million children living in poverty and 40% of them are living in extreme poverty.”

“Every 10 seconds of every day a child drops out of school ... every 32 seconds, in a country with a Gross Domestic Product of 14 trillion dollars, we let a child be born into poverty ... every 39 seconds a child is neglected or abused ... every minute a child has a child ... and every 2 hours and 45 minutes a child is killed by guns.”

“We’ve got to have a strategy that addresses the needs of the whole child.”

“One in three Black boys born in 2001 is at risk of going to prison in his lifetime.”

“The [cradle to prison] pipeline is driven by poverty and racial disparities still.”

“More than 40% of Black children are born poor.”

“Black fathers are twice as likely as White fathers to be unemployed.”

“When Black men do find work they earn \$197 dollars per week less than White men.”

“70% of Black babies are born to unmarried mothers.”

“46% of Black students attend 2,000 high schools labeled drop-out factories.”

“In 4th grade, 88% of Black boys cannot read at grade level and 84% cannot do math at grade level ... in the 12th grade, 84% of Black boys cannot read at grade level and 92% cannot do math at grade level.”

“Black youths are 5 times as likely as White youths to be arrested for a violent offense.”

“We need to reweave the fabric of family and community and it needs to start in the church – open up those doors!”

“The first thing I hope you [churches] will do is ... I have committed the Children’s Defense Fund to training 5,000 new leaders over the next 5 years ... I want you all to give us 1,000 [new leaders we can train] ... [Secondly] Freedom Schools are making a big difference ... I would like 1% of each of your denominations to sponsor Freedom Schools ... [Thirdly] I hope I can call on you for one [children’s defense] campaign a year.”

“We need to let our children know that we’re going to fight for them.”

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“Incarceration is the new American apartheid ... It threatens all the progress of the last 50 years.”

“We’ve got to figure it out. We can’t go backwards. We can’t go back to slavery and that’s what prisons are today.”

“So I hope we’ll leave here saying we’re going to build a movement. Because nothing short of a transformative movement is going to do it. And I hope that each of us here who’ve come, and I’m so grateful for your leadership, will say, ‘God use me as you will, to save our children today and tomorrow, and to build a nation and a world where every child is welcome, has a level playing field, and knows they are a child of God, because we adults have instilled that.’”

Dr. James H. Johnson, Jr. – “Disruptive Demographics” – (Monday at 1:30 pm)
Director, Urban Investment Strategies Center, Frank Hawkins Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise; William R. Kenan, Jr. Distinguished Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship, University of North Carolina Kenan-Flagler Business School.

“This nation is in the midst of an unprecedented demographic transformation that will radically transform all of our social, economic and political institutions, including the faith community.”

“The Browning of America refers to the growing role that people of color and immigrants are going to play in transforming the racial and ethnic complexion of our society in the years to come... The Greying of America refers to the aging of our native born population... Our ability to thrive and prosper and compete in the years ahead is going to hinge upon the degree to which we manage this transition from the Greying of America to the Browning of America.”

“Today the majority of immigrants coming to this country are people of color primarily coming from Asia and Latin America, and to a lesser extent Africa and the like.”

“What I’m talking about with the Browning of America is the fundamental shift in the origins of the people who come in this country.”

“What’s under girding this immigration driven shift and the growing role of African Americans in society is we’re in the midst of one heck of a color adjustment in our society.”

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“In 1995, Whites constituted about 74% of our total population. Projections are that number, by the year 2050, is going to drop to about 47%, Blacks are going to grow to about 13%, Hispanics 29%, and Asians about 9%.”

“What I’m talking about with the Browning of America is the fundamental shift in the composition of our population where we are going to be the numerical majority. So the whole language and the way we think about ourselves and society and the economy has to change, because we’re becoming the numerical majority.”

“Between 1990 and 2000, we added 33 million people to our population in this country; 65% of that 33 million people were people of color. For the period 2000–20004, we added another 12 million people to our population; 82% of that 12 million people were people of color.”

Dr. Cornel West – (Monday at 3:00 pm)

Class of 1943 University Professor in the Center for African American Studies, Princeton University, and one of America’s most provocative intellectuals on race and politics, (www.cornelwest.com).

“The great W.E.B. DuBois talked about in The Souls of Black Folk, that classic of 1903 on pg. 124, he said, ‘The greatest Negro organizations in the world – the African Methodists.’ That’s what the greatest Black scholar in the history of the country, that’s what he had to say about you all. That’s in part why this gathering is so very important.”

“If I have a chance to play a small part in this kind of wake up call, that’s what it is, it’s a prophetic wake up call ya’ll. It’s an awakening taking place in Black America, in this case led by the Black Methodists.”

“And we’re here for one fundamental reason and that is we want the world to know that we have an unconditional and unequivocal love of our priceless and precious Black brothers.”

“We understand justice is what love looks like in public.”

“This Gathering is about a love renaissance. It’s a renaissance of self-respect; it’s a renaissance of protection; it’s a renaissance of correction.”

“And we want the world to know beginning with the state government, national government, city councils, that we love our young people and want a lime light cast on this situation. We want the world to know there is a national emergency taking place right now in chocolate cities and it’s a part of a national security emergency.”

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“We want the world to know that we came out of a tradition that says when we love, when we talk about being protected, respected and corrected, it starts with us, but it spills over across the board because the Black Agenda has never been some narrow, ghetto-ized, marginalized, peripheral agenda. It starts on the chocolate side of town and spills over to every corner of the globe. That’s what it is to be part of a Black freedom struggle.”

“We are wrestling with spiritual malnutrition when it comes to our young Black brothers.”

“Spiritual malnutrition is inseparable from moral constipation – when you know what’s right but you just can’t get it out.”

“How do we galvanize that in such a way that that moral outrage and righteous indignation, like Jesus in the temple, can have some effects and consequences touching these young folks and touching the powers that be?”

“We must never ever give up on our precious priceless young Black brothers.”

“I pray to God that we get this word out through the media, the newspapers, with your friends, ‘The Methodists love; the Methodists care; they’re focusing on the young folk and they are leading a renaissance.’”

“In the age of Obama, churches have begun to wake up in a way we haven’t before and it’s a beautiful thing to witness.”

“The Black Agenda has always been the best agenda for America.”

“We, at our best, constitute the moral conscience of the nation, the prophetic voice of the nation. We are the incarnate voice of justice when it is rooted in a love that begins on the chocolate side of town and spills over across the board.”

“We have to be honest about this and do it in such a way that we are bearing witness to the best of those who came before and were targeting those folk who are usually rendered invisible, overlooked, ignored.”

“And we also know, quite candidly and honestly, that if 50% of our beloved White brothers and sisters between 18 and 30 were unemployed, we wouldn’t have to have a conference like this – it would already be a national emergency!”

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Bishop Mildred B. Hines, A.M.E.Z. Church – (Monday at 7:00 pm)

“We’ve spent too much time plotting and planning on how to separate ourselves, when our young boys are dying and our young girls’ lives are being destroyed. We’re arguing over gender issues when our prayer should be, ‘Lord make us one.’”

“We’ve come in our diversity, we’ve come with our differences, but we’ve come with the potential of being one.”

“For these next few days, yes our agenda is to look at the opportunities for young boys and young girls, we’ve come yes together, united in Christ, to sit down at a common table, put it on the table, face it, and then ask the question, ‘What will we do from here?’ But whatever we do, we can’t do it until we become one.”

Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu – “The Plight of the Black Male” – (Tuesday at 10:00 am)

Author, activist, lecturer and perhaps America’s leading authority on the Black male, (www.africanamericanimages.com).

“In 2009, 5,000 Black boys in America were expelled from preschool.”

“Blacks comprise 17% of the children in public schools, but are 41% of the children in special education... And if a Black child is in special ed, 80% of the time it’s the male child, not the girls, it’s the boys.”

“The nationwide drop-out rate for Black boys from high school is 52%.”

“78% of inmates dropped out of high school.”

“In 1980 only 100,000 Black men were incarcerated ... In 2010 there are 1.5 million Black males in prison and the major reason is crack cocaine.”

“If you’re an Asian child, 90% of the time you’re daddy stayed. If you’re a White child in America, 75% of the time your daddy stayed. If you’re an Hispanic child there’s a 59% chance your daddy stayed. Can anybody tell me what percent of Black youth have their fathers in the home? 32%.”

“There is good news about Black men, 484,000 are single parents.”

“There are 816, 000 African American males who are in college.”

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“We say we want young Black men in our church, but be honest, have you designed your worship service for the 65 year old female or for the 16 year old brother?”

“What percent of your budget goes to the youth? What percent of your space goes to the youth? What percent of your ministries go to the youth?”

“On the SAT’s, as an average, Asians score 1600, Whites score 1582, Hispanics score 1371, and Blacks score 1291.”

“If a child gets saved, 44% of the family will give their lives to Christ. If the mother gets saved, 17% of the family will give their lives to Christ. But if the man gets saved, 93% of the family will give their lives to Christ. When you save a man, you save a family.”

Senior Bishop John R. Bryant, A.M.E. Church – (Wednesday at 7:00 pm)

“On one corner was Brother C.M.E., on the second corner was Brother A.M.E. Zion, on the third corner was Joshua Generation A.M.E. ... God said for me to tell you that if the three of us get together and work this situation out, he’ll dispatch the Holy Ghost to hold up the fourth side!”

“C.M.E., A.M.E. Zion, A.M.E., and the Holy Ghost together, we can do this!”

“Do you want to save the Black man? We’ve got the power! Do you want to save the Black woman? We’ve got the power! Do you want to save our children? We’ve got the power! Walk together children, don’t get weary, walk together, pray together, build together, plan together!”

“The Lord wants to do something new for Black Methodism. Let the Lord be Lord. He will show you stuff that we’ve never seen before!”

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