

*Welcome!*  
*To*  
*Bridge Street*



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*Rev. David B. Cousin, Sr., Pastor*  
*Rev. Valerie E. Cousin, Executive Minister*

## *Greeting from Pastor & Rev. Val*



Beloved,

It is with the joy of Jesus that we welcome you to Bridge Street AME Church. We are so excited to have you as a part of our fellowship. We pray that you have enjoyed the worship service, and that you will consider using your spiritual gifts and talents in our fellowship to not only serve God, but to serve humanity; the greatest commandment given by God to believers.

This pamphlet contains information about our doctrinal and denominational beliefs. We pray that this information is helpful to your making a decision about joining our church family. If you desire prayer, spiritual guidance, or simply to reconnect with Christ, please feel free to speak with any of the ministers on staff.

Again, we welcome you to Bridge Street Church, and we look forward to serving you through the many ministries of our fellowship.

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### **OUR MISSION**

The Mission of the AME Church is to minister to the social, spiritual, and physical development of all people.

### **OUR NAME**

The word *African* means that the AME church was organized by people of African descent and heritage. It does not mean that the church was founded in Africa, or that it was for persons of African descent only. The church's roots are of the family of *Methodist* churches. Methodism provides an orderly system of rules and regulations and places emphasis on a plain and simple gospel. *Episcopal* refers to the form of government under which the church operates. It means that the church is governed by bishops; the chief executive and administrative officers of the African Methodist Episcopal denomination.

### **OUR STRUCTURE**

Bridge Street is part of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. The AME Church is a Connectional Organization, which simply means that local AME Churches across the continental US and abroad are connected through our doctrine, governance and liturgy. The Bishops are the Chief Officers of the Connectional Organization. Pastors of AME Churches are appointed annually by the Presiding Bishop to serve their local congregations. Bridge Street is part of the Brooklyn Westchester District of

the New York Annual Conference of the First Episcopal District. Our presiding bishop is the Rt. Rev. Gregory Gerald McKinley Ingram, and our Presiding Elder is Rev. Melvin Eugene Wilson.

The Connectional AME Church comprises over 2.5 million members across the continental US and abroad (Africa, India and the West Indies). The AME Church is proud to have founded many institutions of higher education including colleges and seminaries such as: Allen University, Wilberforce University, Paul Quinn College, Payne Theological Seminary, Shorter College, Edward Waters College, Turner Theological Seminary, and more.

## **OUR BELIEFS**

The Apostles' Creed is one of two basic foundations of the beliefs of Methodists. Most AME Churches recite the Apostles' Creed during Sunday school or worship services. Because the Apostles' Creed is important to members' understanding and contextualization their faith, it is typically taught during baptism class or new member class. Please read and study the Apostles' Creed so that you are able to speak confidently about your faith beliefs with others including people of other denominations.

The 25 Articles of Religion is another foundational belief of Methodists. These 25 Articles of Religion were John Wesley's adaptation of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion from the Anglican Church in which Wesley had been a priest. Several of the Articles are aimed directly at distinguishing the beliefs held by Wesley, as well as by Anglicans, from Roman Catholicism. These especially relate to the basis of religious authority (Articles 5-6), justification by grace through faith (Articles 9-11), the nature of the church (Articles 13, 22), the rejection of the doctrine of purgatory (Article 14), the rejection of services in Latin (Article 15), the nature of the sacraments and the rejection of the concept of the Mass (Articles 16-20), and the rejection of a celibate clergy (Article 21).

**FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO: [WWW.AME-CHURCH.COM](http://WWW.AME-CHURCH.COM)**



## History of Bridge Street African Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal Church

The African Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal Church, also known as Bridge Street African Methodist Episcopal Church, has been documented as the oldest black congregation in the Brooklyn-Long Island area.

The earliest records date back to 1766 when a British captain named Thomas Webb began holding open air services in downtown Brooklyn. Captain Webb was a convert of John Wesley, the father of Methodism in America. He attracted a small following and was later succeeded by Woolman Hickson, a local preacher. In 1794 the congregation purchased the land on which they held these open-air services from a wealthy Brooklyn landowner named Joshua Sands. Later a small church was built, and as it was the custom in those days to name streets and buildings after wealthy landowners, the church was named **The Sands Street Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal Church**. The congregation consisted of Caucasians, free Negroes, and ex-slaves.

By 1804, under the pastorate of the Rev. Cyrus Stebbins, the Sands Street congregation increased so rapidly that a larger place of worship became a necessity. In 1810, a new church was completed. The church was named **The First Methodist Episcopal Church of Brooklyn** and had a mixed number of fifteen hundred members.

Between 1810 and 1817, the Black church membership increased rapidly causing relations between Blacks and Whites to deteriorate. The Whites wanted Blacks to pay \$10 a quarter to worship in galleries which had been allotted to them. This monetary burden was the determining factor in their decision to get a place of their own to worship. They withdrew from The First Methodist Episcopal Church of Brooklyn and temporarily worshipped in each others homes.

At a meeting held May 14, 1817, they formed a society to raise funds to buy land on which to build a church, agreeing to pay 50 cents a month into a treasure for a building fund. In the fall of 1817, a grand rally was held and the amount of \$130 was collected towards the building fund.

**On January 12, 1818**, after being legally notified, the **“male”** members of the society met for the purpose of choosing trustees, whose duties were to take care of the temporal affairs of the church or religious instruction. A delegation was appointed to go to Philadelphia to see **Bishop Richard Allen of The AME Church** about sending a preacher for the new church and to ordain several of the delegates as local preachers. **This began Bridge Street’s affiliation with the AME Church.**

On July 21, 1819, the church corporation purchased land located on the east side of High Street near Jay Street, and here was built the first **African Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal Church** in Brooklyn.

In 1827, the men of the AWME Church set up an educational system for colored youngsters. On September 25, 1827 the cornerstone of The African Free School (known as Colored School #1) was laid under the direction of Henry C. Thompson, an AWME Church Trustee.

By 1840, the membership of High Street had grown to 195 members and it was time to secure a larger place to worship. On July 12, 1854, the AWME Church bought from the trustees of The First Congregational Church the property at 309 Bridge Street for \$12,000. On the first Sunday in August 1854, The Rev. James Morris Williams, the twenty-first pastor of the AWME Church, marched his congregation from High Street to their new church home at 309 Bridge Street.

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On Sunday, December 4, 1938, the Rev. Mansfield E. Jackson, the fifty-second pastor of the AWME Church, marched his congregation from 309 Bridge Street to their new church home at 277 Stuyvesant Avenue, which was purchased from the Grace Presbyterian Church. From its pulpit at Sands Street, High Street, Bridge Street and Stuyvesant Avenue, some of the greatest preachers and orators of the last two centuries have championed the cause for the right of the people of African descent to exist as a child of God and equal to his brother.

Source:

248<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Souvenir Journal (2014). Bridge Street AWME Church, pg 15-20.



## History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church

The African Methodist Episcopal Church is among the oldest Protestant denominations established on American soil. Though founded in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the A.M.E. Church, in existence for over two centuries, is a global religious body. Throughout the Americas, Africa, Europe, and India are congregations where the legacy of Richard Allen (1760-1831), the founder is revered and hallowed among 2.5 million members in over 6,000 congregations in 20 Episcopal Districts.

Allen, born a slave in Philadelphia in 1760 and sold, with his family, to a farm near Dover, Delaware, was converted in 1777 and immediately rejoiced in his freedom from sin and sought manumission from slavery. His recently converted slave-owner, Stokeley Sturgis, allowed him to purchase his freedom. Now a free man in 1783 Allen became an itinerant Methodist preacher until he re-settled in Philadelphia to preach to African Americans at St. George Church. His success in attracting increased number of blacks disturbed white church officials. They interrupted Allen's followers while they were praying and pulled them up from their knees. They exited the church and retreated to their already established Free African Society (FAS). Allen led a minority within the FAS to build in 1794 the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church and in 1816 to found the African Methodist Episcopal Church in which he was elected and consecrated as the first Bishop. His first wife, Flora Allen, another former slave who died in 1801, assisted him in laying the foundations of Bethel Church, and his second wife, Sarah Bass Allen, aided him in establishing the denomination.

African Methodism spread rapidly through the Northeast, Midwest, and briefly to Charleston, South Carolina where a local A.M.E. preacher, Denmark Vesey, planned a slave insurrection. The plot was uncovered, Vesey and his co-conspirators were hanged, and his pastor, Morris Brown, fled to Philadelphia. Allen gave him asylum and Brown became in 1828 the second Bishop in this growing religious body. Though the A.M.E. Church was banned, missionaries returned after the Civil War and the denomination expanded throughout the former Confederacy. In Haiti since 1824, African Methodism also extended to Liberia and Sierra Leone in 1891 and to South Africa in 1896.

In the 20th century the A.M.E. Church, drawing from its liberationist legacy that Richard Allen, Denmark Vesey, and others developed, became a frontline advocate of black civil rights. The landmark Brown decision of 1954 which outlawed public school segregation owed much to foundational law suits from Oliver L. Brown, a pastor in Topeka, Kansas and J. A. De Laine, a pastor in Clarendon County, South Carolina. The denomination, challenged itself on gender equality, authorized the full ordination of women at the 1960 General Conference in Los Angeles. Carrie T. Hooper, a New York City pastor, ran as the first female for the episcopacy at the 1964 General Conference in Cincinnati, and Vashti Murphy McKenzie, a Baltimore pastor, succeeded at the 2000 General Conference in Cincinnati to be elected and consecrated as the church's first woman Bishop. Carolyn Tyler-Guidry of Los Angeles and the late Sarah F. Davis of Houston joined her as Bishops at the 2004 General Conference in Indianapolis.

Twenty-one active Bishops including one Ecumenical Officer lead the worldwide African Methodist Episcopal Church and there are nine General Officers who supervise administrative and programmatic departments. Several colleges, universities, seminaries, elementary and secondary schools operate under A.M.E. auspices in North and South America, the Caribbean, and Africa.

Sources:

<http://www.ame-church.com/our-church/our-history/>

<http://www.socialwelfarehistory.com/eras/african-methodist-episcopal-a-m-e-church/>

