

WHY AN A.M.E. AND A METHODIST?

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Many writers on religion today say that we are now living in the “post denominational” era. Studies have shown that there is less likelihood today that those seeking a church will do so because of loyalty to the “family denomination.” Those seeking a church are more likely to look beyond denomination to the style of worship, spirit of Christian unity, and available ministries and programs when choosing a church home. The inevitable questions in the current climate are:

1. Why should one be a member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church? and,
2. Should the A.M.E. Church abandon its traditional worship and change its polity and doctrine and adopt a more “nondenominational” orientation?

We believe that the African Methodist Episcopal Church is still the best choice for those who seek:

1. A well-organized and structural church.
2. A church that is faithful to and sensitive to our heritage as people of the African diaspora.
3. A clear and Spirit-filled system of worship.
4. A clear hierarchy and system of government.
5. A continuing emphasis on education.
6. A commitment to self-sufficiency.
7. A commitment to the pursuit of freedom and justice.
8. An emphasis on education as an element of spirituality.

We hold to the position that the African Methodist Episcopal Church still provides a unique and viable Christian witness in the mosaic of today’s Christian community. Our roots go back to John Wesley’s quest for “personal holiness” that led him in the Spirit to the “method” that is at the heart of the A.M.E. Church. Wesley’s quadrilateral pillars: Scripture, reason, experience, and tradition are the foundation that led to the Christmas Conference of 1784 in Baltimore, Maryland, and gave birth to American Methodism. From its beginnings, Methodism appealed to Americans of African origin. Methodism’s emphasis on order, structure and accountability was dear to a people torn from their native shores and forced to cope with a tumultuous existence. A theology of liberation was added to those elements, when Richard Allen and his followers rejected second-class Christian status and created the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The spirit of Wesley and Allen is as meaningful today as it was two hundred years ago. The conditions of our world and our people cry out for the personal holiness, order, structure and accountability offered by the A.M.E. Church. We as a people are still in need of the liberation, dignity, respect and self-sufficiency that led a band of former slaves, moved by the Spirit, to establish an institution that still endures today. While there can be no doubt that we are all one in Christ Jesus, the A.M.E. Church still fills a role that cannot be fully filled in concert with the children of our captors. Our children and young people can still find direction, dignity, and Christian role models in the A.M.E. Church. The present direction of the A.M.E. Church is well stated in *The Episcopal Salutation* on pages 1 through 4 of *The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1996 edition.

Our task is not to abandon our worship, polity, and doctrine, but to see that the A.M.E. Church speaks to the present age. We would do well to remember the words of the Savior to the Christians of Ephesus. In Revelation 2:2-3, Christ commended them for their works, their labor, their patience, and their zeal to preserve the purity of the faith, but in Revelation 2:4, Christ said, “Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy *first love*.” As is the case with any vintage religious institution, we are quick to “rattle the bones” of those who have gone before us, but often fail to maintain their spirit and devotion to Christian growth and service. As a result, we spend more time in maintenance of our buildings and structures than we do in missions to the world beyond our doors.

Our 13th Article of Religion reminds us that the church is not an aggregation of buildings, but is a congregation of faithful and committed people. It is incumbent upon those of us who are the church to see that the Church returns to the Great Commission — to carry the Good News to all the world. We must demand adherence to our doctrines and polity so that they can be instruments of the Holy Spirit as we seek to carry the Good News to all the world. We must teach our children who we are and what we believe, for if we leave a spiritual vacuum, it will be filled by others. We must use the tools that are in our hands today to change the world for the better, just as Wesley and Allen did with the tools available to them.

Finally, we must be authentic and instructive in our worship. We must do so with a clear understanding that authentic Methodist worship is not by its nature dull, boring, routine, or overly ritualistic. Methodism is at its heart evangelistic in nature, with great emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit. Our foreparents knew this and affirmed that our worship should be both standard enough for one to know that one is in an A.M.E. Church, but flexible enough to allow for the working of the Holy Spirit.

The challenge before us today is not to become complacent, but to be active participants in what has been called the “Unfinished Reformation.” When we let the Holy Spirit guide our worship, our lives, and our witness, then we can be faithful members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and faithful vessels from which the fruits of the spirit can flow freely. We can then affirm our faith — not by rejecting the bridges that brought us over as a people, but by seeing that they are strong, sturdy, and designed under God’s hand for the roads that we travel today.