

“FIRST IN TOUCH”

FIRST DISTRICT LAY NEWSLETTER

July 2021

Annual Meeting Edition

“The purpose of this organization shall be to organize and train the laity of the African Methodist Episcopal Church so that each layperson may utilize to the maximum the abilities and skills granted by God, in assisting with the improvement and extension of God’s kingdom, and creating happiness, peace, and harmony among its members.”

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*First Episcopal District Lay President
Cheryl Hammond Hopewell*

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I am thankful to Almighty God for His many, many blessings and I am grateful to each of you for all you do for African Methodism and the Lay Organization. We had a fantastic Virtual Mid-Year Meeting in February. We thank President Marcus Burnett, DOLA Elizabeth Clark and the New Jersey Conference Lay Organization for being our host. We know hosting looked a lot different this year, but we still thank you. We cannot thank enough our DOLA Thomas Davis

who worked tremendously hard on our Mid-Year Meeting. It was top-notch and we commend him for all the planning and preparation that went into it. Although he wasn’t able to be with us due to a death in the family, we thank him and want him to know his efforts were not in vain. Our presenters were excellent, and we thank them all: Rev. Natalie Mitchem, Dr. Dennis Dickerson, Mrs. Wanda Sims, and Rev. Dr. Erika Crawford. We also thank our worship preacher, Rev. Zina Thompkins.

By the time this newsletter is printed, we will have been through the General Conference and the Biennial. We pray that God will bless both meetings and that His will be done.

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Greetings from the First Episcopal District Lay President

(Continued)



We look forward to working with our new Bishop and Supervisor and look forward to working with the new cabinet for the Connectional Lay Organization.

We were hoping we would be in person for this Annual Meeting but again that has not worked out. We know that God will still bless, and we turn this meeting over to Him. I thank each of you for all you do to make the First District Lay Organization something we can be proud of. Your efforts are very much appreciated.

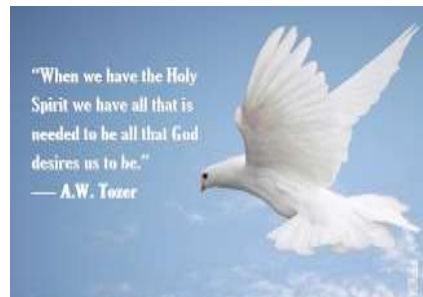
We enjoyed our monthly “Know Your Church Challenge” zoom meetings, our conferences are still having great virtual workshops, you have had virtual Awards Events,

and each conference had an outstanding virtual Lay Witness Night.

Special thanks to our elected officers, conference presidents, committee chairpersons and our advisors. We appreciate your reports and the account of your stewardship. None of it is possible without You.

Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

*“We can do all things through Christ who gives us strength”.
Philippians 4:13*



First Episcopal District Mid-Year Meeting February 26, 2021

Submitted by Sister Sharon Carmichael - DoPR



President Cheryl Hammond Hopewell

Continuing 2021 in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic which struck in 2020, our extraordinary President Cheryl Hammond Hopewell was not to be outdone. She convened a wonderful First Episcopal District Lay Mid-Year Meeting on a Virtual Zoom Platform on Friday, February 26, 2021.

The theme was “Know Your Church: Back To Basics” – Sometimes You Need to Go Back To Go Forward.

The meeting did not disappoint, as President Hopewell and Director of Lay Activities (DOLA) Brother Thomas Davis provided a re-imagined, well-organized agenda that succeeded in the Lay Organization’s goals of teaching, training, and worship, all in a 1- day meeting that once was 3 days.



Terri Fisher, First District Lay Chaplain

We began with a Black History Trivia followed by morning devotion and bible study led by First District Lay Chaplain Terri Fisher. President Hopewell gave opening remarks, including a review of zoom etiquette. Host New Jersey Conference Lay President Marcus Burnett extended the welcome on behalf of DOLA Thomas Davis who could not be present due to the passing of his Mother-in-Law.



Marcus Burnett, New Jersey Conference Lay Host President

The morning session featured two extremely inciteful workshops:

- **“Nutrition and Health”** by Reverend Natalie Mitchem, M.Div., Registered Dietitian and Executive Director of International Health Commission of the AME Church.
- **“Parliamentary Procedures”** by Wanda M. Sims, Professional Registered Parliamentarian.

President Hopewell then convened the Business Meeting with roll call, minutes, reports,

and updates by selected First District Lay officers. New business discussion included the CLO Biennial (July 11-12, 2021), the 2022 Mid-Year Meeting to be hosted by the New York Conference Lay, and the Bishop and Supervisor Ingram Retirement in June 2021.

Bishop E. Earl McCloud greeted us, followed by visiting clergy, CLO officers, Connectional officers, Conference officers, Episcopal District Presidents and Officers, several other out of district visitors, and candidates for CLO offices.

The afternoon workshops were equally enlightening with:

- **“The Role of Methodism in the Progression of the AME Church”** by Rev. Dr. Dennis C. Dickerson, Sr., Ph.D.
- **“Membership”** Rev. Dr. Erika D. Crawford, D. Min., and Connectional (International) President of the AME Church Women in Ministry (AME/WIM).

Rounding out the day, meeting participants were spiritually fed by a joyous evening worship led by Brother Marcus Burnett, Host Conference President, and Brother Earl Knight, III serving as Music Director. Program participants featured laity from the seven First District Conferences and introduction of the preacher by Bishop Gregory G.M. Ingram, Presiding Prelate.

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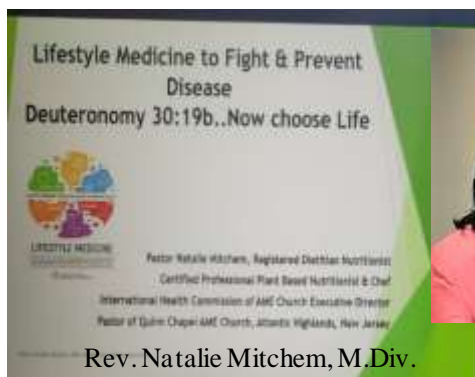
First Episcopal District Mid-Year Meeting *"Know Your Church: Back to Basics - Sometimes you have to go back to go forward."*

(Continued)

A powerful preached word was delivered by Reverend Zina Thompkins, Pastor of Bethel AME Church in Millville, New Jersey.

President Hopewell gave reflections, acknowledgements, and announcements, followed by reflections from Episcopal Supervisor Rev. Dr. Jessica Kendall Ingram and Bishop Gregory G.M. Ingram.

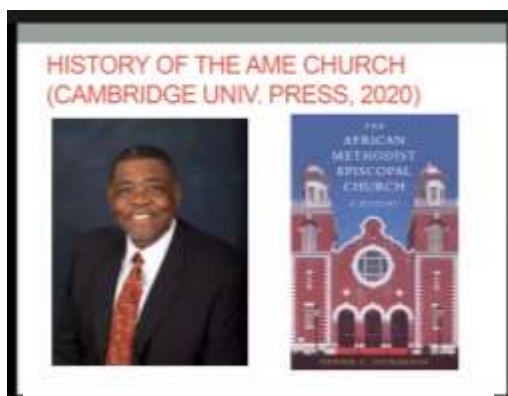
The meeting adjourned with closing prayer and the Lay benediction. To God be the glory!



Rev. Natalie Mitchem, M.Div.



Wanda M. Sims, PRP



Rev. Dr. Dennis C. Dickerson, Ph.D



Bishop Gregory G.M. Ingram and
 Rev. Dr. Jessica Ingram



Rev. Dr. Erika Crawford, D. Min.



Brother Earl Knight, III, Music Director



Mr. Thomas Davis, DOLA



Rev. Zina Thompkins –
 Annual Meeting Preacher

Our Conference Happenings

What's the News from the Delaware Conference Lay Organization

Sharon Drew, President

*Submitted by Sister Denise Hope –
Director of Public Relations*



Well, hello everyone! Welcome to “What’s the News from the Delaware Conference Lay Organization”. The Conference has been navigating the Zoom platform to continue the work of the Lay Organization during this pandemic.

We have missed seeing everyone in person. Like everyone else, we have been doing everything on Zoom and like everyone else we feel zoomed out, too.

It is Annual Conference Season, and we have been attending every conference and Lay Witness Night Service. From Bermuda to every other conference, many of us have attended other conference services as well. In many ways, Zoom has been very convenient in this way because it has allowed us to participate with the other Annual Conferences.

The Delaware Conference held their Annual Lay Witness Night on Friday, March 19, 2021.

Our Director of Lay Activities, Sister Terri Fisher, planned a marvelous service. The Worship Leader was Sister RogJenea’ Fisher, who is the Young Adult Representative for the Delaware Conference Lay Organization. She did a wonderful job. The Music for the evening was supplied by Rev. Justin Powell and Adoration.



Brother Shawn Lee

Our guest speaker was none other than Brother Shawn Lee from Bethel AME Church in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania where he serves as the Lay President. He is also the 2nd Vice President in the Philadelphia Conference Lay Organization and is presently serving as the Historiographer for the First Episcopal District Lay Organization.

Brother Shawn preached from Micah 6:8, which is our Connectional Lay theme scripture. He also used two other scriptures: Proverbs 31:8-9 and Genesis 32:34-36. His theme was “The Danger of Standing Back and Standing By”. Shawn gave a mighty word. He talked about the first Presidential Debate and the farce that it was, comparing it to the church members who want to say something but are too afraid to speak up because of their positions. He really spoke with power and authority.

The most surprising part of the night was the Bishop singing the Lay Benediction solo. Then, he directed the rest of us to help him sing it again together.

It was a wonderful night filled with fun, good word, and great guests from all over our Zion! More news coming later. Tata for now!

Our Conference Happenings

New England Conference Lay Organization

Linda Gant, President

Submitted by Linda Gant



“For in Him we live, move and have our being.” Acts 17:28

“Re-Imagining Ministry” appears to be the talk of the First Episcopal District. This prompted the New England Conference Lay Organization to begin 2021 with a workshop on the theme *“Are We Yet Alive?”* We thank Rev. Kevin T. Taylor, Pastor of Allen Chapel A.M.E. Church, Hartford, CT, for his workshop on *“Let’s Get Inventive”* which identified means and ways of thinking outside the box as it relates to worship, scholarship and fellowship. Followed by the workshop, our Conference Lay President Linda Gant facilitated answering the question that *“Yes, We Are Alive,”* focusing on the scripture Acts 17:28, “For in Him we live, move and have our being.”

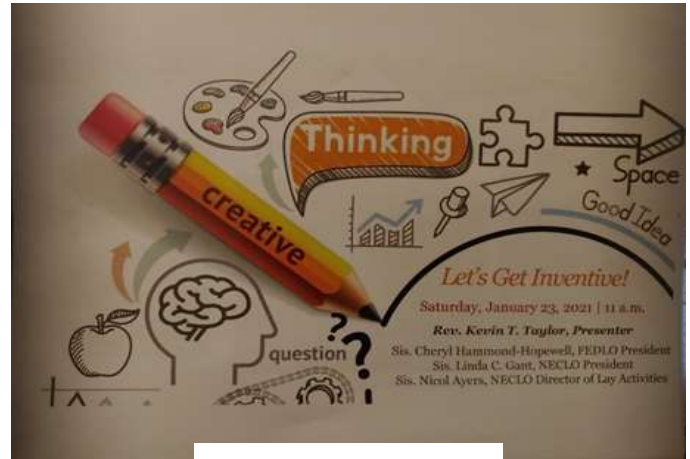


Figure 1 - Re-Imagining

It's Time to Celebrate - New England Conference Lay Organization (NECLO) held its first “Virtual Award Luncheon” celebrating the service of our Ushers and Nurses with the theme “Laborers of Love” on Saturday, March 21, 2021 via Zoom. The program began with a PowerPoint Presentation introducing each of our Honorees and their respective churches. As well as consisting of encouraging songs by Bro. Delbert Collins, Minister of Music, an inspiring message by Sis. LouAnn Bradley of Bethel A.M.E. Church, Providence, RI, and greetings brought by the best Presiding Elder, Jocelyn K. Hart Lovelace and our First District Lay President Cheryl Hammond Hopewell. As the roll call of each of the honorees was read, a slideshow was presented with the honoree, the Conference Lay President, Presiding Elder and the local Church Pastor, along with the plaque.



Figure 2 - It's Time to Celebrate

Continued on page 7

Laborers of Love Honorees

<u>Church</u>	<u>Honoree Name</u>
Allen A.M. E. Church - Providence	Sis. Bethalene Monteiro
Allen Chapel A.M.E. Church	Sis. Darkies M. Hall
Bethel A.M.E. Church - Bloomfield	Sis. Charlean Ceasar
Bethel A.M.E. Church - Boston	Sis. Bertha L. Cunningham
Bethel A.M.E. Church - Bridgeport	Sis. Marjorie Perry
Bethel A.M.E. Church - Fall River	Sis. Linda Baker
Bethel A.M.E. Church - Lynn	Bro. Elbert Porter
Bethel A.M.E. Church - New Bedford	Bro. Seymour Merkman
Bethel A.M.E. Church - New Haven	Sis. Eva Bryant Smith
Bethel A.M.E. Church - Norwalk	Sis. Lourene Antley
Bethel A.M.E. Church - Plymouth	Sis. Marilyn Gentry
Bethel A.M.E. Church - Providence	Sis. LouAnn Bradley
Bethel A.M.E. Church - Springfield	Sis. Diane Craig
Bethel A.M.E. Church - Stamford	Sis. Jeanette McDonald Mace
Bethel Community A.M.E. Church	Bro. William Vance Montgomery
Historic Charles Street A.M.E. Church	Sis. Lorene Mundy
Grant A.M.E. Church	Sis. Roberta Young-Jackson
Peoples Chelsea A.M.E. Church	Sis. Patricia M. Wilson
St. James A.M.E. Church	Sis. Ceciley Robinson
St. Paul A.M.E. Church	Bro. Oneal Rawlins

"It's Time to Witness" – We certainly experienced the Holy Spirit moving throughout our Lay Witness Service beginning with the Doxology, Nickolas Clark Durham being our worship leader, Bro. Cyrus Henry giving our invocation, Bro. Christian Williams reading the Scripture, and let's not forget Bro. Delbert Collins and the music ministry.

The spirit continued to shift upward as Bro. Omari Aaron introduced our Bishop Gregory Ingram and the mighty Word of God was delivered by Bro. Michael A. Cousin, Jr., the 4th Episcopal District Director of Lay Activities. His subject was "Do the Right Thing" as his words touched our hearts and challenged us to Stand Up, Speak Up and Do Justice. Rev. Marcus McCullough took us even higher in the Spirit with the Invitation to Discipleship! My soul shouted Hallelujah!!! And let's not forget that with the Spirit being so high, when Rev. Dr. Ellis Washington called for the offering, the Chat lit up with giving. This was truly an awesome experience and we were basking in God's glory.

"It's Time for another Lay Learning!" First Episcopal District Lay President Cheryl Hammond Hopewell created and presented a workshop in New Jersey entitled "Lay Organization 101". President Gant attended and thought it was such a wonderful workshop that she chose to use it for our lay learning at our April 2021 meeting (of course giving credit to its creator 😊). To our surprise President Cheryl joined in the meeting and also participated in the lay learning. The laughs were shared as the members had difficulty answering some of the questions, recognizing the need to always go back to basics from time to time. A good time was had by all.

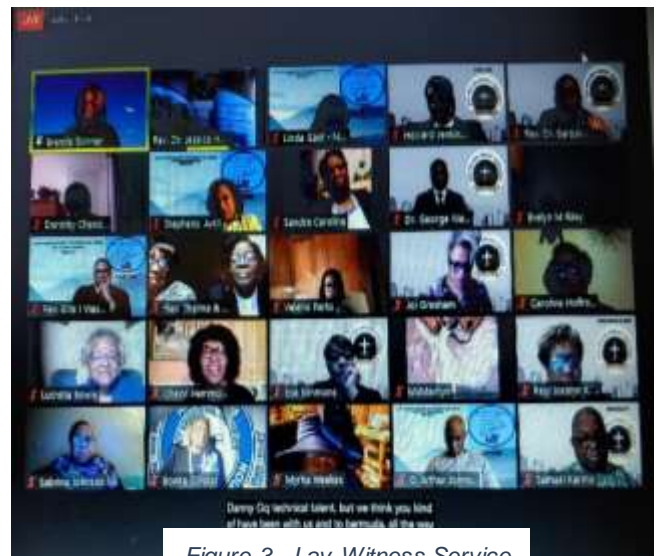


Figure 3 - Lay Witness Service



Figure 4 - It's Time for Another Workshop

Our Conference Happenings

New Jersey Conference Lay Organization (NJCLO) Annual Lay Witness Night

Marcus Burnett, President

*Submitted by Sister Elizabeth Clark –
Director of Lay Activities*



On Friday, April 9th, 2021, the New Jersey Conference Lay Organization held their Annual Lay Witness night. This was our first service under the leadership of our newly appointed President, Marcus Burnett.

Music was rendered by Shaylan Richardson of Phoenix, Arizona. One of the selections was led by Marcus Beckett of Saint Mathew AME Church, Orange, New Jersey.

Our keynote speaker was the Connectional Lay Organization Young Adult Representative (YAR) Sister Jamesha Williams of South Carolina. Her scripture was taken from 2 Corinthians, chapter 4, verses 1-9. Her topic was entitled “Rising Above”.

We were blessed to have over 500 people attend our virtual Lay Witness Night via zoom.

To God be the Glory.



Jamesha Williams
Connectional Lay Organization
Young Adult Representative



Sister Elizabeth Clark, NJ Conference Lay
Director of Lay Activities



Brother Marcus Burnett, President, NJ Conference Lay
and First District Lay Young Adult Representative

Our Conference Happenings

New Jersey Conference Lay Organization (NJCLO) Annual Lay Witness Night

Marcus Burnett, President

*Submitted by Sister Elizabeth Clark –
Director of Lay Activities*

(Continued)



Reflections by Bishop Gregory G.M. Ingram,
First District Presiding Prelate



Brother Marcel Ringold, Worship Leader,
St. James AMEC, Newark



Sister Sharon Carmichael, First District Lay DoPR



Sister Elfrieda Johnson, NJ Conference Lay Chaplain



Sister Wanda Duckett, 2nd VP, First District Lay



Brother Shaylan Richardson, Historic Tanner Chapel AMEC, Phoenix, AZ

Our Conference Happenings

Philadelphia Conference Lay Organization (PCLO)

"No Justice, No Peace" Brother Lamb Alerts PCLO Lay Witness Night

Andree A. Turner, Sr., President

*Submitted by Sis. Constance Williams -
Director of Public Relations*



Lay Witness Night at the Philadelphia Annual Conference was held on Friday, May 21, 2021 at 7:01 PM. The words of the prophet Micah and the message offered by Brother Kevin Lamb bridged a gap that instantly connected with the congregation. Both Micah and Brother Lamb delivered a message of warning for God's people about the dangers of not following God's instruction. Brother Lamb's electrifying message titled "No Justice, No Peace", verifies that some aspects of our lives and how we serve God in America are rampant. People focus on getting ahead by any means, often at the expense and detriment of others. Even Christians profess to love God and follow Christ, but find it hard to forgive, to be just, or to show love and kindness. We often try to pay our way to God's grace and mercy and escape consequences of our sin with what we consider "sacrifice" instead of being

obedient to His word.

So, the question posed by Micah and emphasized by Brother Kevin remains the same: "and what does the Lord require of you, to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God?".

Brother Lamb focused on keeping a spirit of hope that will overcome our disobedience and enable peace through faith. The best solution is to do as God has instructed. We suffer the consequences of our actions that are in opposition to God's Word. Brother Lamb's appeal to the congregation was centered on actions that are most compatible with how God wants His people to live. We honor Him when we care and love each other and have compassion for all, especially those who are less fortunate. This includes "standing up, speaking up and paying up for those in need". We must "love mercy, not sometime, but all the time". God requires us to dispense "justice with kindness and fairness to all with no limitations for strangers, the poor or the guilty". To do otherwise is against our duty as Christians. We must show mercy

and grace to others as God has shown to us. We are to walk humbly with God, submitting to His will and not our own. This is how we reach a higher level of intimacy with Christ. The closeness with Christ will "drive the vision for your life..." and allows a stronger walk of faith that is not just works, but worship which is God's plan. Live for God! Get to know Jesus and humbly experience His justice. In conclusion, Brother Lamb asked God's blessings on the congregation and expressed his prayer that all will follow Jesus and "do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God". Amen.

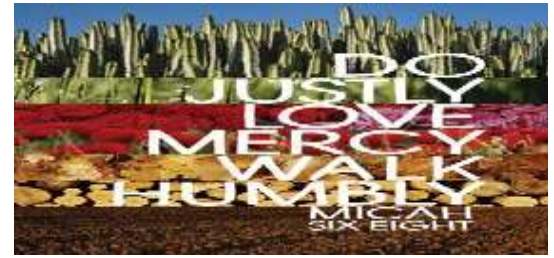


Our Conference Happenings

Philadelphia Conference Lay Organization (PCLO)

Lay Witness Night

(Continued)



The message was the highlight of the service, but other participants framed, accented, and prepared for the Word in a mighty way. Sister Yvette Howell-Bayne, Lay President at Mother Bethel, served as the Worship Leader and offered the Call to Worship. The Invocation was provided by Sister Juanita Bryant, Lay President of Mt. Tabor AME Church. The Scripture, Micah 6:1-8, was read by Sister Marie Butler, Lay President of Campbell Frankford AME Church. The Lay Litany written by Brother Shawn Lee, Lay President of Bethel AME Church, Bryn Mawr, was led by Sister

Marion Bolton, Lay President of St. Matthew AME Church. The Litany Response was read by Sister Daysha Smith, Lay President of Bethel AME Church of Downingtown. Worship through Music selections were provided by the Philadelphia Annual Conference Music Ministry under the direction of Brother Earl R. Knight, III, of St. Matthew AME Church. The honor of presenting the Bishop fell well on Brother Carl Bell, Lay President of Bethel AME Church of Carlisle, PA. Bishop Gregory G. M. Ingram presented the ready and powerful speaker, Brother Kevin Lamb, Lay

President of Jones Tabernacle AME Church. The Host Pastor, Reverend Dr. Mark Tyler of Mother Bethel AME Church, provided the Invitation to Christian Discipleship and Worship Through Giving. Remarks were given by PCLO President Andree A. Turner, Sr., First Episcopal District Lay President Cheryl Hammond Hopewell, Reverend Dr. Jessica Kendall Ingram, Episcopal Supervisor and Bishop Ingram. At the end of this inspiring and memorable service, Brother Kevin Lamb sang The Lay Benediction with enthusiastic exaltation.



Cheryl Hammond Hopewell,
First District Lay President



Andree A. Turner, Sr.,
PCLO President



Brother Kevin Lamb

Our Conference Happenings

Western New York Conference Lay Organization (WNYCLO)

Caroline Hoffman- Veasey,
President



“Through it all we have learned to trust in Jesus. We have learned to trust in God.”

We have been in this Pandemic from March 15, 2020 to this present time, approximately 430 days, The pandemic has slowed us down, but it hasn't stopped us.

The Annual Lay Day was held virtually on April 18th at St. John's AME Church in Niagara Falls, NY. The Reverend Markeeda Brooks, Pastor, Sister Rosemary Bass Mims, and Local President (Yours truly) gave the welcome. The messenger of the hour was

Rev. Dr. Ronierre Robinson, Pastor of Bethel AME Church in Smyrna, DE.

At St. Mark's AME Church in Kingston, NY, the Rev. Dr. Faye Banks Taylor, Pastor, and Sister Marjorie Wright, Local President held their Lay Sunday virtually. Every fifth Sunday at St. Mark is Lay Sunday and the laity participate in the Worship Service. I was blessed to be the speaker for Sunday, April 25th. My message, entitled "Waking By Faith", came from Matthew 14:25-31. My question was, how much faith do you have to walk with God and not by sight?

The Lay Witness Night of the WNY Annual Conference was a virtual experience with representation from all seven conferences. Our guest speaker for the evening was Dr. Cephas Archie, Chief Equality Officer for the city of Rochester, NY. Dr. Archie's message was "Forgiveness": the action and process of forgiving and being forgiven.

We thank Bro. Thomas Davis, DOLA, for his teaching and training. We continue to stay connected and in contact with each other. You pray for us and we'll pray for you. Stay healthy, blessed and safe. ❤️



WNYLO President Carolyn Hoffman-Veasey



Dr. Cephas Archie – Rochester, NY Chief Equality Officer

Congratulations to Our Spring 2021 "Know Your Church Challenge" Winners!



*1st place - **Danielle Lewis** –
New Jersey Conference

*2nd place - **Daysha Smith** –
Philadelphia Conference (YA)

*3rd place - **Sharon Carmichael** -
New Jersey Conference

*4th place - **Katrina Smith** –
Delaware Conference

(4 winners due to tie for 3rd
place going into Final
Jeopardy)



*1st Place – **Deborah Stancil** -
Philadelphia Conference

*2nd Place - **Denise Hope** -
Delaware Conference

*3rd Place - **Marie Butler** –
Philadelphia Conference



*1st Place - **Rev. Carolyn C. Cavaness** -
Pastor of Bethel AME,
Ardmore, PA,
Philadelphia Conference

*2nd Place - **Danielle Lewis** –
New Jersey Conference

*3rd Place - **Linda Gant** –
New England Conference
Lay President

Reflections From the Director of Public Relations (DoPR)



Sharon Carmichael - DoPR

Greetings First Episcopal District Lay Organization,

Reflecting on the stories that were shared in this edition of “First in Touch” by our Conference Lay Presidents, DOPRs, and DOLAs, there are several intertwining themes: Do justly, Love mercy, Walk humbly with God; Forgiveness; Faith; Rising Above; Celebrating one another; Witnessing to others; Focusing on Learning; Fun and Fellowship with each other, and of course, Re-imagining our ministries.

These themes in your stories are more encouragement to me that there “ain’t no stopping us now!”. Nothing can keep us from going forward, not even the big ol’ bad COVID. We just keep on believing, and trusting, and doing, and talking

about God’s goodness in the midst of it all. How proud and grateful I am to be a part of this First District Lay AME family.

I also reflected on some of my own personal experiences and am thankful to God for all He has done for me in 2021. My sister had COVID and was in the hospital and rehab for 6 weeks, but my God delivered her and brought us closer that we had been in years.

I was blessed to keep my job and I’ve been working at home since March 16, 2020, sometimes even in my jammies. That’s a blessing. As an actor, my daughter was devastated by the shutdown of her industry at the beginning of COVID. But then God blessed her with unexpected opportunities in her field, so much so that she is juggling. What a mighty God we serve! I always say that God gives

you just what you need.

What’s all of this got to do with Public Relations? Everything! Use your platform, whatever it may be to share the goodness of God and what He has done. Keep on telling your news about your virtual programs, and services, and workshops, and fellowships, and missions work, and community programs, and self-help services, and tips for living healthier lives, and social activism, and your great AME church, and so on and so forth!

You don’t know what good your story may do for someone else. So keep the sharing coming!

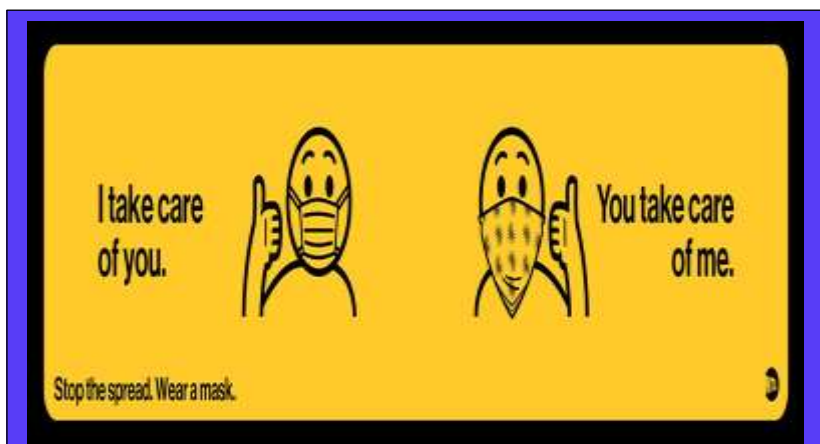
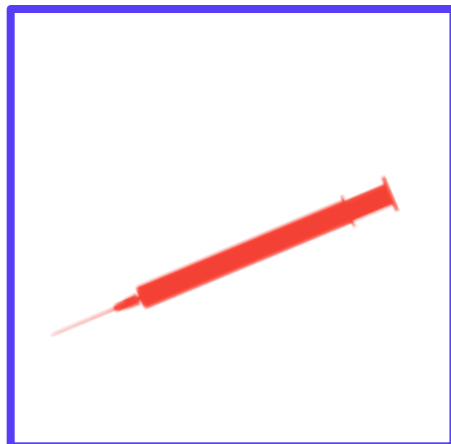
Pray for me as I pray for you. Your feedback is welcome.

Thank you again for your support and the opportunity to serve.

Sister Sharon



Stronger Together!



***“Laity Walking Humbly
With God
To Do Justice
And To Love Kindness.”
Micah 6:8***

"First in Touch"



First Episcopal District Lay

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**"First in Touch" is a
First Episcopal District Lay Organization
Publication.**

Mrs. Cheryl Hammond Hopewell
President
First Episcopal District
Lay Organization

Sister Sharon Carmichael
Director of Public Relations
First Episcopal District
Lay Organization

"Share your good news with us!"