

CONNECTIONAL LAY COUNCIL
DEPARTMENT OF LAY MINISTRY
OF THE
CHRISTIAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH



DECEMBER 2006

PROGRAM OF STUDY

***“THE HISTORY
OF
THE CME CHURCH”***

PREPARED BY:
CLIFFORD L. HARRIS, PRESIDENT
CONNECTIONAL LAY COUNCIL

DR. VICTOR TAYLOR, GENERAL SECRETARY
BISHOP THOMAS L. HOYT, JR., CHAIRMAN

INTRODUCTION

As we embark upon the One-Hundred and Thirty-Sixth Anniversary of the CME Church, I feel it fitting and appropriate for the December 2006 Connectional Lay Council Program of Study to focus on our rich beginning.

For some, it may be “old hat”, remembering and talking about our early church and how Methodism had its beginning with John Wesley. It is for others, however, a story untold and facts not yet heard. *One may ask, what CME does not know the story of John Wesley or about the faithful ride of Isaac Lane? What member of our Great Zion does not know about the legacy of our educational institutions that have opened the doors of opportunity for countless thousands, regardless of religious denomination?* I stated in the introduction of the October Program of Study, how our church has become very diverse in terms of those who did not grow up in the CME tradition. This being true, it stands to reason that *there are many who may not know!* So, let us join together all over the connection and educate those who do not know and remind those who do know but may have forgotten! With one voice and with like minds, let's celebrate who we are as God's people! Let's appreciate those who laid a solid foundation, building and supporting churches, many of which are still alive and well.

In our celebrating, we should not leave anyone out. Let's be sure that our children, youth, and young adults come to know, love, and appreciate the history of our church. We must, therefore, be sure to provide innovative ways to *share the facts that have meant so much to so many.*

The brief overview that follows contains facts that every CME ought to know about. In December 2006 let us, therefore, celebrate Jesus and the CME Church like we never have before!

WHAT EVERY CME SHOULD KNOW AND APPRECIATE

THE BEGINNING OF METHODISM

- ❖ John Wesley, who became known as the father of Methodism, was born June 17, 1703 and died March 2, 1791. The name “Methodist” was first given to Wesley, his brother Charles and two other men, all of whom were students at the University of Oxford in Oxford, England.

- ❖ In November of 1729, John and Charles and the others begin to meet together regularly for study, prayer, and communion. They named themselves the “Holy Club” and arranged a **daily schedule** of duties, which they faithfully followed.

- ❖ Because of their precise ways of worship, the regularity of their lives and studies, they and those who followed them were designated as the “people called Methodist”.

- ❖ John Wesley described a **Methodist** as: “**One who has the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him, one who loves the Lord his God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind, with all his strength.**” Methodism, therefore, embraces both the spiritual and the intellectual.

- ❖ In 1735 John and his brother Charles sailed to America as missionaries to Georgia. On their return trip they were impressed with a group of Moravians whose religious faith provided an inner assurance amidst the terrible storms on the sea. Upon their arrival back in London in February 1738, John sought out Peter Bohler, a Moravian leader, who taught both he and his brother about self-surrender, instantaneous conversion, and joy in conscious salvation. As a result, John Wesley determined he would strive for the ultimate holiness experience.

A HEART STRANGELY WARM

- ❖ On Wednesday, May 24, 1738, with much heaviness, John Wesley went to St. Paul's Church. There he listened to the anthem, Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord—O Israel, trust in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption, and He shall redeem Israel from all her sins." Later in the evening he went (he almost decided against it) to a Society in Aldergate Street where **a layman was reading Martin Luther's preface to the epistle to the Romans** describing faith. Possessed of such faith, that preface had said the heart is cheered, elevated and transported with sweet affection toward God. History says that at this point it was about a quarter before nine, and **as the layman read, John Wesley felt his heart strangely warm.** He said of this, I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sin, even mine and saved me from the law of sin and death. **This marked the true beginning of Methodism.** It became known as the "**religion with the warm heart.**"
-
-
-
-

METHODISM IN AMERICA AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CME CHURCH

- ❖ During the years following the birth of Methodism, our denomination grew rapidly. The Methodist Episcopal Church North and South was an outgrowth of Wesley's Methodism. After the experience of Aldergate, new zeal was kindled and young evangelist began to appear on the American scene. In late 1784, John Wesley sent ordained ministers, Dr. Thomas Coke as general superintendent, and Richard Whitcoat and Thomas Vasey to the newly formed nation to take charge of the Methodist work.
-
-
-
-
-
- ❖ From 1784 to 1844 American Methodism enjoyed phenomenal growth. Evangelists and circuit riders fanned out into the states and territories, into New England, down south and across the Alleghenies. Wherever people went, they followed. The greatest growth was among the colonies and states south of Pennsylvania.
-
-
-
-

SLAVES ARE EXPOSED TO CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES

- ❖ As Methodism spread through the southern states it soon came into contact with the Negro slaves. The preaching of the gospel and teaching of Christian principles were not denied them. **John Wesley and the early Methodist, from the beginning, were opposed to slavery.** By 1830, however, the Methodist Episcopal Church had become a slave holding church. Methodists were very effective in preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to slaves. It was as slaves that Blacks heard the preaching of the Gospel, were converted to Jesus Christ, and became devout Christians and faithful Methodists. Many of them were licensed to preach.
-
-
-

- ❖ As the abolitionist movement picked up momentum, it forced the church to face up to the question of the rightness or wrongness of slavery. Meeting from May 1 to June 11, 1844, the General Conference struggled over the issue of slavery. **Consequently a plan of separation was adopted June 8, 1844.**
-
-
-

- ❖ Blacks living in the areas of northern Methodism known as The Methodist Episcopal Church, stayed with them. The Blacks living in the South and members of, or attenders of the Church of their Masters stayed in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. When the Civil War closed in 1865 and Blacks were set free, there was great agitation on the part of some whites to have Blacks remain in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Accordingly there was a great desire, and a request on the part of Blacks for their own churches. **Isaac Lane, a black Methodist preacher,** said that they requested their own separate and independent church, “patterned after our own ideas and notions.”
-
-
-

THE SEPARATION TAKES PLACE

- ❖ The General Conference of the M.E. Church South, meeting in New Orleans, in 1866, granted the request of the “Colored” members. It authorized the establishment of those Colored members into a separate, General Conference jurisdiction.” Pursuant to the action, the Organizing General Conference for the Colored Members was set for December 16, 1870.
-
-
-

“THE PREACHER’S EVENTFUL RIDE”

❖ Bishop Othal H. Lakey in his book, “The History of The CME Church”, put it this way: “It was Thursday morning. **The black preacher rose from his prayers.** He went outside and saddled his horse for the familiar ride into town. **That morning his soul was filled with eager anticipation.** He would not, as he had on so many other occasions, guide his horse to Liberty Street where the Colored church was located. Rather he would head toward 2nd Street—to the white church. On that day, **the preacher was on his way to join 40 other Black men (The preacher and those who gathered with him were former slaves). Representing eight Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. They were coming to establish their own church.** The town was *Jackson, Tennessee.* The date was December 15 and the year was 1870. That evening they devoted themselves to prayer and commitment to God. The next day, December 16, 1870, they organized the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America. Senior Bishop Robert Paine of the M.E. Church, South presided. **It was to this meeting that the preacher took his eventful ride.** - The preacher was Isaac Lane, the pastor of Liberty CME Church (who later became the fifth Bishop of the CME Church).”

THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE IS PUT IN PLACE

❖ Thus, the 1870 General Conference chose as the name of the new church the *Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America*. (In 1954 the term “Colored” was changed to “Christian.”) That conference adopted portions of the Discipline of the M.E. Church, South, as its polity; approved the Articles of Religion as its doctrine; and accepted the General Rules for its standard of conduct. It established The Christian Index as the official publication and set the boundaries of ten (10) Annual Conferences. Significantly, the delegates elected two of their preachers – William Henry Miles of Kentucky and Richard H. Vanderhost of Georgia – as their bishops. On December 21, Bishop Paine ordained them the first two bishops of the CME Church.

FROM WHENCE WE HAVE COME

- ❖ From such humble beginning, the CME Church has become a major denomination among the Christian churches of the world. Today it is divided into ten Episcopal Districts with ten active bishops. Its boundaries reach from the United States to Africa, Haiti, and Jamaica. It has General Departments and General Secretaries to administer the ministry and mission of the church.

A HERITAGE GROUNDED IN EDUCATION

- ❖ Bishop C.D. Coleman (now deceased) noted in the publication, “Christian Methodist Episcopal Primer”, “Our church has always been known for three things: 1) Good bi-racial relations; 2) Interdenominational and ecumenical activities; 3) Our contribution to education. Bishop Coleman wrote, “Our church was born of an act illustrative of bi-racial relations. It was nourished in a cradle of interracial goodwill, and grew up in an atmosphere of mutual respect of one race for the other. This seen in the fact that the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, gave us all the property, which we had formerly used before our separation from them. In 1881, Bishop L. H. Holsey of our church and a committee from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, began plans for establishing a school in Augusta, Georgia, to be operated jointly by them and us. Out of this planning, Paine College was founded”.

- ❖ Interdenominational and ecumenical activities (inter-church activities) have always claimed our deep and abiding interest, according to Bishop Coleman. When our church was only ten years old, we sent a delegation headed by Bishop Holsey, to the First Ecumenical Conference, which met in London, England. We have had representatives at every Ecumenical or World Council meeting since.

- ❖ Bishop Coleman lets us know that from the very beginning there was a hurry and hunger for knowledge. The training of the clergy was felt to be imperative. **The lay people too, were hungry for education.** Thus, the Bishops were petitioned to lead out in the building of schools:
- ❖ In 1873, land was purchased by Bishop W.H. Miles, the first Bishop of the CME Church, for the purpose of establishing a school in Louisville, Kentucky. As a result, he started a school in Sardis, Mississippi.
 - Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee evolved from a CME High School that had its beginning in the fall of 1882.
 - In 1894, Texas College at Tyler, Texas began operation.
 - Mississippi Industrial College (MIT), at Holly Springs was founded in 1905.
 - Miles College was founded in 1905 at Birmingham, Alabama.
 - Holsey-Cobb Institute was established a few years later in Cordele, Georgia.

- ❖ Other institutions of learning that were established but have since ceased operation are:
 - A high school at Docena and Thomasville, Alabama. These two schools eventually merged, moved to the outskirts of Birmingham, Alabama, and became Miles College.
 - Boley Institute-Boley, Oklahoma.
 - Haywood Institute-Haywood, Arkansas.
 - Homer College-Homer, Louisiana.
 - South Boston Virginia Institute-South Boston, Virginia.

- ❖ **Those who established these schools did so with the training of ministers and religious workers primarily in mind.** Consequently, in 1944 Phillips School of Theology was established at Jackson, Tennessee. Colleges still in operation are:
 - Lane College, Jackson, TN.
 - Paine College, Augusta, GA.
 - Texas College, Tyler, TX.
 - Miles College, Birmingham, AL.
 - Phillips School of Theology (part of the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia).

WORDS AND TERMS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

As this study is taught and shared, especially when youngsters are the focus or part of the audience, the definitions that follow may be helpful.

Christian - A person who believes in Jesus Christ; a person who exemplifies (shows) in his/her life the teachings of Christ; believers were first called Christians at Antioch. (Acts 11: 26)

Methodist - A member of a Protestant denomination that developed out of John Wesley's religious revival and has a modified Episcopal polity (a particular form or system.)

Episcopal - Pertaining to a bishop; based on or recognizing a governing order of bishops; form of government under which a church operates.

Church - "An assembly or called out ones"; the **body of believers** gathered to worship God.

Roots - The source of life; a person's original or ancestral home, environment, and culture.

Conversion - The state of being converted; change in character, form or function. A change from indifference or disbelief to acceptance, faith, or enthusiastic support.

Salvation - The act of protecting from harm, risk or loss. Deliverance from the power and penalty of sin.

Epistle - A letter, especially a formal one. One of the apostolic letters in the New Testament.

Denomination - A religious group usually including many local churches.

Ordained - To appoint someone to a specific duty or office.

Phenomenal - Extremely unusual; extraordinary; highly remarkable.

Alleghenies - Allegheny Mountains; mountain range of the Appalachian system in Central Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia, and Virginia.

Abolitionist - One who favored the abolishment of slavery in the United States.

Agitation – A discussion meant to stir up people and produce changes.

Emancipation - To set free; release from bondage or servitude.

Pursuant - To follow in order; in accordance with.

Polity - A society or institution with an organized government; a specific form of church government.

Communicant - A person who receives Holy Communion or belongs to a church that celebrates this sacrament.

Stewardship - Exercising and engaging in the activity of caring for what one has been put in charge of.

Ecumenical - Concerning the Christian Church as a whole; furthering or intended to further the unity or unification of Christian Churches.

REFERENCES:

The History of The CME Church, Bishop Othal H. Lakey
The CME Primer, Bishop Caesar D. Coleman, (Deceased)