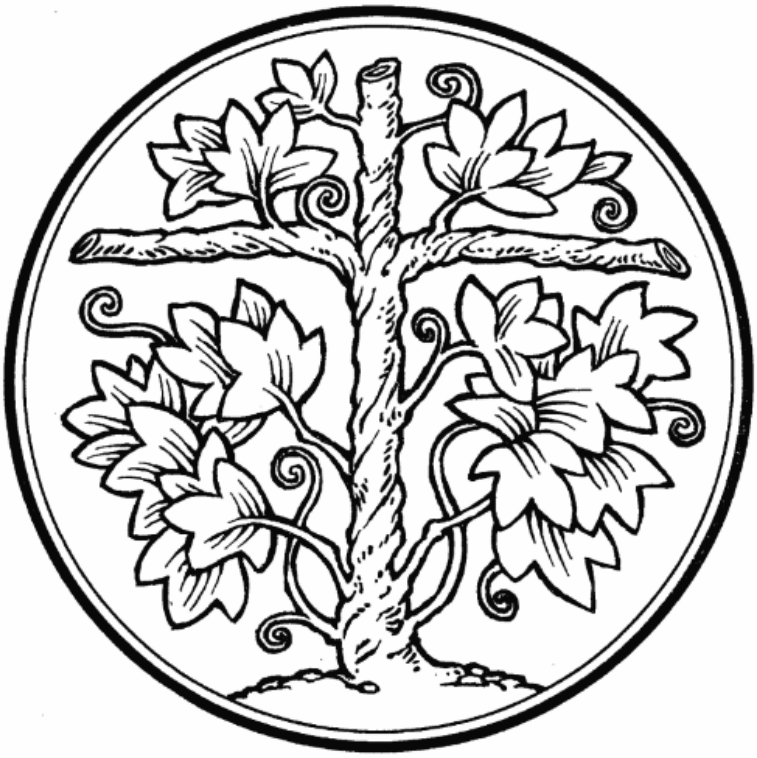


A Service of Rededication and Reconciliation

HONORING THE SACRED MEMORY OF THE ANCESTORS

NOVEMBER 1, 2026
2:00 P.M.

Saint Michael Lutheran Church African American Cemetery
Windward Point Road & Arwen Lane
Columbia, South Carolina

We gather today on the ancestral, traditional, and unceded lands of the Congaree, Catawba, and Cherokee peoples, who have stewarded this land throughout generations. We honor and respect the enduring relationship that exists between these Indigenous communities and their traditional territories.

GATHERING

The service begins in silence.

Leader: We gather today on sacred ground.

We come to remember those whose names may have been lost, whose stories may have gone untold, and whose lives were too often denied the dignity, freedom, and respect that belong to every human being.

We stand on ground that holds memories deeper than the eye can see. Beneath these trees and within this earth rest men, women, and children whose lives mattered, whose souls were precious, and whose humanity was never diminished by the chains imposed upon them.

Today, we do not come to erase the past. We come to tell the truth about it.

We do not come to claim that every wound has been healed. We come to begin, renew, and strengthen the work of healing.

We do not come merely to restore a cemetery. We come to restore honor, to renew our commitment to justice, and to rededicate this sacred place as a witness to remembrance, reconciliation, and hope.

People: **We come to remember. We come to honor.**
We come to seek reconciliation.
And we come to dedicate ourselves anew to truth, justice, and love.

OPENING PRAYER

L: God of our ancestors, God of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar; Isaac and Rebekah; Jacob, Leah, and Rachel - God who heard the cries of your people in bondage and remembered your covenant with them, we come before you with humble hearts.
We acknowledge the lives of those who rest in this sacred place. We remember those who endured enslavement, those separated from their families, those whose labor was taken without just reward, and those whose names and stories were denied a place in our written history.
P: **Yet You knew them.**

L: You knew their names, even when others refused to speak them. You knew their dreams, even when others denied them freedom. You knew their prayers, their tears, their laughter, and their love.
P: **Receive our gratitude for their lives.**

L: Forgive us where we have forgotten, where we have remained silent, where we have failed to protect sacred places, and where we have allowed prejudice, indifference, or fear to stand in the way of reconciliation.
Give us courage to speak truthfully about the past, humility to listen to those whose experiences differ from our own, and wisdom to pursue a reconciliation grounded not in forgetfulness, but in honesty, accountability, and compassion.
May this gathering honor the dead, strengthen the living, and bless generations yet to come.
In the name of the God of mercy, justice, and everlasting love, we pray.
P: Amen.

LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE

Read responsively.

L: We remember the men and women who were brought into bondage and denied the freedom God intended for every human being.
P: We remember them, and we honor their humanity.
L: We remember the children who deserved protection, the mothers and fathers who loved their families, and the generations whose lives were shaped by slavery.
P: We remember them, and we honor their dignity.
L: We remember those whose names were recorded, those whose names were forgotten, and those whose names may never be known to us.
P: Though their names may be unknown to us, they are not forgotten before God.
L: We remember the cruelty of slavery, the pain of separation, the denial of freedom, and the injustices that continued long after emancipation.
P: We will not hide the truth, and we will not turn away from the work of justice.
L: We remember also the faith, courage, endurance, and hope of our ancestors, who created families, nurtured communities, worshiped God, and preserved their humanity in the face of oppression.
P: Their lives are worthy of honor. Their memory is worthy of protection. Their legacy calls us forward.

READINGS

Galatians 3:26-28
”For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

2 Corinthians 5:18
“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.”

MEDITATION

Reconciliation Begins with Remembering

L: Today, we stand in a place where memory and responsibility meet.
A cemetery is more than a resting place. It is a declaration that the lives of those buried here mattered. It is a reminder that every person deserves dignity in life and honor in death.
For too long, many African American burial grounds have suffered neglect, obscurity, and disregard. Some graves were left unmarked. Some family histories were interrupted. Some sacred places disappeared beneath brush, development, or the silence of generations.
Yet the absence of a headstone does not mean the absence of a life. The absence of a written name does not mean the absence of a story. And the neglect of a burial ground does not diminish the holiness of those who rest within it.
P: But remembrance is not our only calling.

L: We are also called to reconciliation.
Reconciliation is not pretending that the past was less painful than it was. It is not asking descendants to forget the suffering of their ancestors. It is not offering easy words where meaningful action is needed.
True reconciliation begins with truth. It makes room for grief. It listens to the voices of descendants. It acknowledges wrongdoing. It seeks justice where injustice has endured. And it creates relationships in which dignity, trust, and mutual responsibility can grow.

Today, as we rededicate this cemetery, we affirm that this sacred ground will not be treated as forgotten land. We affirm that the people buried here deserve our respect, our protection, and our care.
May this place become a classroom for truth, a sanctuary for remembrance, a meeting ground for reconciliation, and a sacred trust for generations to come.
May those who visit here leave with deeper understanding. May those who grieve here find comfort. May those who have been separated by history find the courage to listen to one another. And may all who gather here discover that reconciliation is not merely a ceremony we perform, but a responsibility we carry.
P: Amen.

CONFESSION

The leader invites a moment of silence.

L: Before we rededicate this ground, we acknowledge the truth of its history.
We acknowledge the ways African American lives, labor, families, and burial places have been disregarded, and the ways historical memory has sometimes excluded the voices of those who suffered.
We acknowledge that reconciliation cannot be demanded of those who have been harmed. It must be approached with humility, honesty, and patience.

We acknowledge that we cannot change what happened to those who rest here. We can, however, change how we remember them, how we care for their resting place, and how we treat one another in the present.

L: God of mercy,
C: **Where there has been silence, teach us to speak truth.**
Where there has been neglect, teach us to restore.
Where there has been division, teach us to listen.
Where there has been injustice, teach us to pursue what is right.
Where trust has been broken, guide us toward accountability and healing.

L: May our words be sincere, our actions be faithful, and our commitment to reconciliation endure beyond this day.
C: **Amen.**

REDEDICATION OF THE CEMETERY

L: We have come to rededicate this sacred burial ground.
We dedicate this cemetery anew to the honorable remembrance of those who rest here.
We dedicate it to the preservation of their memory, the protection of their graves, and the telling of their stories.
We dedicate it to truth, that the history of slavery and its consequences may neither be concealed nor forgotten.
We dedicate it to justice, that the dignity of the deceased and the concerns of their descendants may be treated with respect.
We dedicate it to reconciliation, that people divided by history may come together in honesty, humility, mutual understanding, and a shared commitment to human dignity.
We dedicate it to education, that future generations may learn about the strength, faith, culture, and resilience of those who rest here.
And we dedicate it to hope, that this sacred ground may inspire a more compassionate and just community.
Therefore, in the presence of Almighty God and this gathered community, we rededicate this cemetery as a sacred place of remembrance, reflection, reconciliation, and peace.
P: **May it be protected from neglect.**
May it be preserved from desecration.
May it be honored by all who enter.

L: May it remain a place where descendants can remember, where neighbors can learn, where truth can be spoken, and where reconciliation can take root.
P: **We receive this sacred responsibility.**
We pledge to honor those who rest here.
We pledge to preserve their memory.
We pledge to tell the truth about the past.
We pledge to work for justice in the present.
And we pledge to nurture reconciliation for the future.
With humility and hope, we rededicate this sacred ground. Amen.

BLESSING OF THE SACRED GROUND

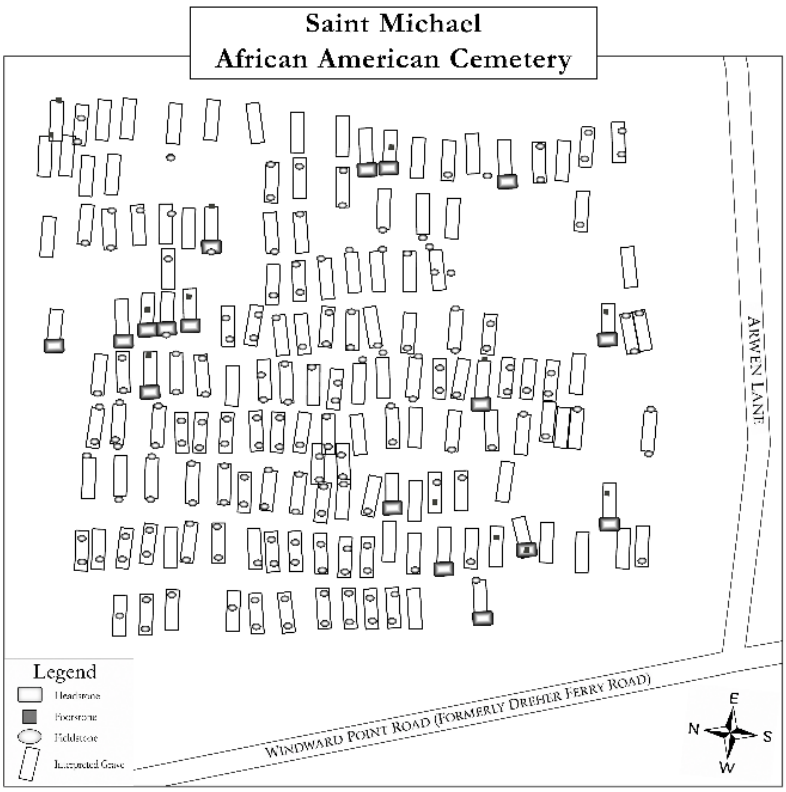
All may extend their hands toward the cemetery.

L: Holy God, we ask Your blessing upon this sacred ground.
Bless the earth that holds the remains of those who labored, loved, suffered, worshiped, and hoped.
Bless the graves, marked and unmarked, known and unknown.
Bless the descendants who come seeking connection, remembrance, and peace.
Bless those who care for this place and those who will inherit the responsibility of its preservation.
May those who enter with sorrow find comfort.
May those who enter with questions find opportunities to learn.
May those who enter with a desire to serve find meaningful ways to contribute.
And may all who stand here remember that reconciliation is sacred work: work that calls for truth, requires humility, demands justice, and is sustained by love.
We rededicate this cemetery to the honor of the ancestors, the healing of the living, and the hope of generations yet unborn.
May the peace of God rest upon this place.
In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
P: Amen.

SENDING

L: Today, we have remembered those who were too often forgotten.
We have acknowledged a history that must be faced honestly.
We have honored the humanity of those who rest in this sacred ground.
And we have renewed our commitment to reconciliation.
As we leave this place, let us remember that we cannot change the past, but we can refuse to forget it. We cannot undo every injustice, but we can work to prevent injustice from continuing. We cannot force reconciliation, but we can create conditions in which truth, trust, accountability, and healing may grow.
Let this cemetery stand as a witness to the lives of our ancestors and as a reminder of our responsibility to one another.
May we leave with reverence in our hearts, truth upon our lips, justice in our hands, and reconciliation as our continuing work.
Go in peace, and let your lives bear witness to the dignity of every human being.
P: We will remember. We will honor.
We will preserve. We will seek justice.
We will work for reconciliation.
And we will carry the legacy of the ancestors forward.
Amen.

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With gratitude to:

The Conder Family

Windward Point Road Neighbors

State of South Carolina

Archeo-Geophysical Associates, LLC
Aundrea S. Thompson, MSc
Chester "Chet" Walker, PhD

South Carolina Institute of Archeology and Anthropology
McCausland College of Arts and Sciences, University of South Carolina
Adam King, PhD

To all those who have worked these past ten years

Pleasant Spring African Methodist Episcopal Church
The Rev'd Marion F. Reeves Sr., Pastor

Saint Michael Evangelical Lutheran Church
The Rev'd Frank W. Anderson, Pastor

Redeemer Lutheran Church for the use of their van

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SAINT MICHAEL
AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERY

1814 - 1922

This burial ground has historic connections to Saint Michael Lutheran Church (Founded 1814) and Pleasant Spring A.M.E. Church (Founded 1869).
From the beginning, Saint Michael included enslaved persons in worship, accessing the balcony of the Blue Church (1814-1880) through a separate door for their use.
In 1842 the congregation listed 27 men and 31 women on their 'Names of Coloured Members' roll, all of them enslaved.
In 1869, five men purchased 2 acres of land from J. R. Shuler to found Pleasant Spring A.M.E., with July Spence (buried here) as one of the Founding Elders.
After Emancipation, the cemetery, known also as the 'Dreher Cemetery', continued to be used until 1922.
There are 16 headstones that have full names on them and 13 footstones, some with initials, some without. There is one fieldstone with hand-inscribed initials.
A survey of the cemetery estimates there are over 160 graves in all.
This stone is erected to the glory of God and in loving memory of all laid to rest here: young and old, male and female, enslaved and free.

"There's just one last favor I'll ask of you
See that my grave is kept clean."
Blind Lemon Jefferson

Thank you for treating this sacred space with dignity and respect.