



*Standing United. Moving Forward. Stronger Together*



*And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: The daughters of Zelophehad are right in what they are saying; you shall indeed let them possess an inheritance among their father's brothers and pass the inheritance of their father on to them.*

Numbers 27:6-7 (NRSV)

Working and Moving Towards Gender Justice, Parity and Equality in the AME Church

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## About AME/WIM?



AME/WIM is the official professional organization for women pursuing excellence in ministry in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church.

We are an international organization serving the continental United States, Africa, India, the Caribbean, and Europe.

We are the prophetic voice for parity and justice through advocacy and activism for women in ministry. We operate within each of the 20 Episcopal Districts that define the African Methodist Episcopal Church and led by an Executive Board elected by its active membership; women preachers from across the Connectional Church. At each level (Episcopal District, Annual Conference and Presiding Elder District) AME/WIM has officers who serve, encourage and support the work of women in Christian ministry. Currently over four thousand women serve in ministerial capacities throughout the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

## The 2016-2020 Theme

In August of 2016, the Executive Board met to discuss the way forward and establish the Quadrennial Theme. After much prayer and discussion, the board emerged with hearts and heads centered around:

**“Standing United. Moving Forward. Stronger Together.”**

The Quadrennial Theme is based on Numbers 27:1-11 (NRSV) with a concentration on Numbers 27:6-7:

*<sup>6</sup> And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>7</sup> The daughters of Zelophehad [the women] are right in what they are saying; you shall indeed let them possess an inheritance among their father's brothers and pass the inheritance of their father on to them.*

The Bible mentions Zelophehad's daughters by name five times (Numbers 26:33; 27:1-7; 36:1-12; Joshua 17:1-6; and 1 Chronicles 7:15) giving legitimacy to their pursuit of justice – gender justice.

## History of AME/WIM

**Women with callings to ministry emerged soon after the inception of the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church in 1787. Jarena Lee, the first preaching woman, was allowed by Richard Allen to preach and was licensed but was refused ordination.** Both women and men sought to persuade the church to recognize the call of women to the preaching ministry. **In 1844, 1848 and 1852, petitions to the General Conference to license women were rejected, and in 1864 the General Conference let a resolution to license women die. In 1888, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner's 1885 ordination of Sarah A. Hughes as a Deacon in the North Carolina Conference was overturned by the General Conference, but the licensing of women as local preachers was approved though it prohibited them being assigned and defined their role as evangelists.** The Church began ordaining women as **Local Deacon in 1948 and Local Elder in 1956 but not until 1960 were women ordained to Itinerant orders.**

Efforts since then to affirm the role and equality of women in the A.M.E. Church and to address the need for eliminating discrimination and injustices based on gender were initiated at the **1976 General Conference in Atlanta, Georgia when a position paper written by Rev. Dr. Jacquelyn Grant was presented on the status of women, and the female ministers of the A.M.E.** Church met to voice their concerns about the lack both of representative participation in the governing process of the Church and of incentives for females to enter A.M.E. ministry.

When a delegation of women took these issues before the **1977 session of the Council of Bishops in Atlantic City, New Jersey, the Council reaffirmed its interest in women's concerns and supported the creation of an Ad Hoc Committee on Women in Ministry which conducted research on the herstory of women in ministry in the A.M.E. Church** and compiled information on the location of women across the Connection. During the 1980-84 Quadrennium, the Committee began working with the Bishops to have Coordinators appointed to represent the female clergy in their Episcopal Districts.

During the 1984-88 Quadrennium, drafting of Bylaws for AME/WIM was initiated. The General Board at its 1989 meeting in Houston, Texas voted to establish a 19-member Commission on Women in Ministry. In 1992 at

Orlando, Florida, the 44th Session of the General Conference took the herstoric step of adopting a resolution establishing the Commission on Women in Ministry as a Standing Committee of the General Board responsible for overseeing the Connectional AME/WIM, and approved the Connectional President of Women in Ministry to be seated as an ex-officio member of the General Board. It also accepted the By-laws governing and empowering the organization to meet and further its objectives which as listed below reflect the revisions proposed for submission to and approval by the General Conference in 2016:

- 1. To recognize and support women in ministry as an integral part of the AME Church.**
- 2. To raise the consciousness of the AME Church on women's issues.**
- 3. To address the issue of sexism in the AME Church.**
- 4. To work to expand leadership opportunities for women in ministry in leadership in the AME Church.**
- 5. To support women in the pastoral ministry.**
- 6. To affirm specialized ministries including but not limited to: chaplaincy, writing, teaching, counseling, research, prison, youth, geriatric, singles, street, health care, family/life relations, music, homeless, HIV/AIDS and religious education ministries.**
- 7. To encourage academic training for the ministry.**
- 8. To sponsor an International conference at least once during each quadrennial.**
- 9. To support and provide assistance and outreach to women in ministry in the Fourteenth through Twentieth Episcopal Districts.**
- 10. To compile a complete an accurate record of all women in ministry in the AME church.**
- 11. To foster and develop relationships with people and entities that will assist in furthering the objectives described herein.**

Over the past four decades, AME/WIM has pursued its mission of defining, enhancing, supporting and expanding the presence of women in ministry in the leadership of the A.M.E. Church. Initiatives have included: strengthening the internal structure and fiscal accountability of AME/WIM; increasing modes of communication, dialogue and interaction with WIM across the Episcopal Districts; instituting monthly teleconferences with the Executive Board and with the Episcopal District Presidents; disseminating and gathering news and information through an interactive website and social media; restructuring reporting forms and procedures; development of a report card to measure the inclusion of women in ministry on all levels of the Church; publishing updated directories of women in ministry; sponsoring quadrennial conferences; preparing publications, including a reprint of the journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee, as well as documentary herstories of the organization and of individual women in ministry; contributing to the April-June 2010 edition of the *AME Church Review* which was dedicated to A.M.E. Women in Ministry and Leadership; printing newsletters which are now in digital format; By-law revisions; taking leadership in developing legislation revising the Church's Clergy Misconduct Policy and including it in the *Doctrine and Discipline*, as well as increasing the age of persons entering the itineracy; inclusion by legislation of the Connectional President in the *Doctrine and Discipline* as a voting member of the General Conference as well as listing AME/WIM among the General Conference Committees; initiation of the Jarena Lee Foundation to offer support and assistance on a global level; commissioning of two official AME/WIM hymns and an image of Jarena Lee; establishing a campus chapter at Payne Theological Seminary; pilgrimages to the grave site of Mrs. Jarena Lee in Lawnside, New Jersey; and membership on the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA/Women in Ministry, and the United Methodist Church Commission on the Status and Role of Women.

AME/WIM celebrates the increasing number of women in ministry in the AMEC; the diversities of ministries which they are performing; the appointment of women to the pastorate, and to major charges; the number of women clergy holding Annual Conference offices such as Dean of the Board of Examiners and serving on the Board; membership on committees such as the Finance Committee; the inclusion of women as worship leaders, preachers and teachers at Conferences and Connectional meetings; the growing number of female Presiding Elders; the seating of women in the General Board; and the greater presence of women in the Episcopal District delegations to the General Conference. We were proud to support and participate in the herstoric elections of Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie (117) in 2000; of Bishop Carolyn Tyler Guidry (122) and Bishop Sarah Frances Davis (126) in 2004; and of Rev. Dr. Teresa Fry Brown as Historiographer/Executive Director, Department of Research and Scholarship in 2012.

Yet we recognize that our mission calls us to keep pressing to eliminate sexist and discriminatory practices, and that we must continue to raise our voices until there is full equity and inclusion of women in ministry in the life, ministry and leadership of the A.M.E. Church. To this end, AME/WIM calls for the 50<sup>th</sup> Quadrennial Session of the General Conference, during this commemoration of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the A.M.E. Church, to elect to the Episcopacy in 2016 female candidates who have demonstrated their call, aspiration and qualifications to serve in

the highest office in the A.M.E. Church.

## Why Do We STILL Need WIM?



Because in 2016 as part of our commitment to just, AME/WIM surveyed its membership, both male and female. Data from 17 of the 20 Episcopal Districts revealed the following:

- 65% of Episcopal District Finance Committees have no female clergy members
- 97% of Annual Conference Finance Committees are chaired by male clergy
- 88% of Annual Conference Trustee Boards are chaired by male clergy
- 71% of Annual Conference Trustee Boards have no female clergy members
- 87% of Annual Conference Board of Examiners are chaired by male clergy
- 78% of Annual Conference Ministerial Efficiency Committees are chaired by male clergy
- 69% of Deans of the Annual Conference Ministerial Institute are male clergy
- 69% of Annual Conferences have all male Presiding Elders
- 76% of “#1 churches” in Presiding Elder Districts have male clergy
- 83% of Chairs of the Committee on Ministerial orders are chaired by male clergy

## What is Gender Privilege?

**At the General Board meeting held in December 2016, the General Board voted to adopt a resolution on Gender Justice and Equality. The resolution, presented by the Commission on Women in Ministry, dealt with the collective commitment of the AME Church to confront issues around equity and gender justice in our churches, communities, and politics. This unanimously adopted resolution wasn't another invitation for us to say that there are gender injustices and disparities but rather was an invitation for us to give serious reflection on how they impact the church and reflect our Christian witness.**

Over the last 200 years, from the licensing of Jarena Lee in 1819 to the election of Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie in 2000, many have worked to move us progressively forward. However, we still find ourselves challenged by **cultural expectations, oppressive systems, and discriminative policies and protocols that work to sustain a hierarchy that places men in key positions of leadership, influence, and power. This is privilege, more specifically male privilege.**

The origins of the term “privilege” can be traced back to the 1930s when W.E.B. DuBois wrote about the “psychological wage” which allowed whites to feel superior to blacks. Privilege comes in a myriad of forms including race, gender, wealth, physical fitness, safety, educational attainment, and height. However, the people who have those things are usually unaware of their power and influence.

Privilege, at its pith, is the advantage or benefit of an individual based solely on their social status. **It is not conferred upon a person as an individual but rather on a larger societal group, which may make it difficult for one to own their privilege. Privilege is about accommodations that work in your favor without you even asking. The challenge with privilege particularly in the church is that it often requires that we conform or subscribe to a toxic norm that contradicts the gospel.**

Benefiting from privilege doesn't make one a “bad person.” According to Peggy McIntosh, an American feminist, anti-racist, and scholar, privilege may not be “the result of a concerted effort to oppress those of the opposite gender, however, the inherent benefits that males gain from the systemic bias put women at an innate disadvantage... The benefits of this unspoken privilege are often described as special provisions, tools, relationships, or various other opportunities.” Thus, we must look circumspectly at how we as a community of faith work for gender justice in the same ways we are working for political justice, criminal justice, environmental justice, and economic justice.

If you've never given the concept of privilege any thought, we close by challenging you to look through a different lens with hopes that it will be a gateway for future dialogue. Change starts with awareness and it is our hope that the examples below help lead to change.

Ten examples of privilege:

1. If I don't get the promotions, I can be reasonably sure that it's not because of my gender.
2. In my local church, you saw people in leadership like you.
3. I've never felt that I was put on a program or invited to a meeting just because they needed a "token" man.
4. I have the privilege of being unaware of my male privilege.
5. People have never assumed that I am the church secretary or the pastor's spouse.
6. I've never had to defend my call because of my gender.
7. I've never walked into a room and thought to count how many men were there.
8. I've been invited to preach for days other than gender days, e.g., Men's Day.
9. I can expect to see your gender *represented* at all levels of leadership in the church.
10. You don't have to take a special class to hear about your gender contribution.

## What does it mean to be sexist?

Being sexist means that you believe the sexes should behave in stereotypical ways. It also means that you judge people according to whether they conform to these stereotypes.

## What is Gender Bias?

Gender bias rarely stems from hatred or disdain but from the perceived mismatch between the "typical woman" and the requirements of jobs that historically were held by men such as professor, scientist, and investment banker. Essentially, it is when men and women are treated differently in a way that is unfair. Gender bias takes many forms, some obvious and others subtle.

## Regarding Women In Leadership:

**The Bible endorses women in leadership.** Paul's first epistle to Timothy seems to limit women's roles in leadership (see 1 Tim. 2:12). Yet Paul also gushed with praise for the women who served with him as co-laborers—women such as Phoebe (Rom. 16:1-2), Junia (Rom. 16:7) and Priscilla, who helped lay foundations in the early church (see 1 Cor. 16:19). In Phil. 4:2-3, Paul expresses solidarity with two women leaders, Euodia and Syntyche. And he refers to other women who obviously led churches, such as Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11) and Nympha (Col. 4:15), and he does not try to silence or restrict them.

Traditionalists who insist on barring women from leadership positions always refer to 1 Tim. 2:12 as an ironclad rule—yet they ignore the women who served with Paul. The obvious question is: Why did Paul tell Timothy to clamp down on the women in Ephesus when he allowed Priscilla to teach? The most sensible interpretation is that the Ephesian women were teaching heresy. They had no business teaching the Bible or leading the church, yet Paul encouraged faithful women.

## Commission on Women In Ministry -Resolution on Women

The following resolution was presented to and adopted by The Commission on Women In Ministry

**WHEREAS**, it is asked in Micah 6:8 "...*what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?*" We stand in solidarity with the Church, fully committed to the Quadrennial Theme "***The African Methodist Episcopal Church: A Social Justice and Liberating Faith***" and;

**WHEREAS**, justice is a human right that must encompass the indispensable right for persons to live and work in our churches, communities and countries with dignity and pride free from oppression; and

**WHEREAS**, our pursuit of justice should include an intentional commitment to gender justice, so that we might live in a world where everybody, women and men, boys and girls are equally valued and able to share equitably in the distribution of power, knowledge, resources and access; and

**WHEREAS**, AME/WIM challenges the African Methodist Episcopal church to recognize that in addition to addressing Political Justice, Criminal Justice, Environmental Justice, and Economic Justice, A Social Justice and Liberating Faith must also address Gender Justice, both in the world and in the church; and

**WHEREAS**, it is our desire to see the sons and daughters of God, free from cultural, religious, institutional and interpersonal systems of privilege which have long oppressed persons through violence, imperceptions, oppression and repression based on gender; and

**WHEREAS**, as the adverse impact of gender injustice is primarily and most severely experienced by women and girls, who are discriminated against in the home, work place, community and church; and

**WHEREAS**, it is imperative that we consciously and intentionally work for equitable and impartial treatment of all in accordance with the word of God which says to us God created them male and female, and God blessed them and called them "human" Genesis 5:2; and

**WHEREAS**, our Sister Communion, the United Methodist Church, having apologized to the AME Church for its injustice to people of color and desiring not to repeat a similar injustice to women has begun to address gender justice issues stating that:

*"reliability as an agency of God's love assumes that we are paying attention to one another and we are seeking to empower, to unshackle, to raise up those who are still oppressed, repressed, derided and treated as "less than"; and*

**WHEREAS**, the African Methodist Episcopal Church is, still on the journey towards fully respecting and valuing the gifts and call of all persons; and

**WHEREAS**, we trust that the AME Church will:

- Affirm the right of women to live free from violence and abuse,
- Affirm the importance of women by placing them in key leadership decision-making positions at all levels of the Church, our institutions and society,
- Urge our elected officials and government agencies to retain and enact legislation and policies that protect women against all forms of violence, economic injustice and discrimination,
- Eliminate gender-role stereotypes in all aspects of voluntary and compensatory participation in the Church and society,
- Affirm the right of women to equal treatment through employment, promotions, economic parity and justice.

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that AME/WIM comes before you, ***"Standing United, Moving Forward, Stronger Together;"*** in support of human rights and asks The Commission on Women In Ministry to request of the General Board the following:

1. The adoption of this policy/statement regarding the equality and the value of women:

*We, The African Methodist Episcopal Church, affirm that all men and women are created equal by God and therefore, entitled to value of personhood, parity in employment, equal distribution of responsibility and promotion in ministry.*

*We the African Methodist Episcopal Church-will work to eliminate gender-role stereotypes and discrimination in all aspects of voluntary and compensatory participation in the Church and society.*

*We will champion economic parity and justice by affirming the right of women to equal treatment and placement in key leadership decision-making positions at all levels of our Church, our Institutions and our communities.*

2. That the General Board urge our elected officials and government agencies to retain and enact legislation and policies that protect women against all forms of misogyny, violence and discrimination.
3. That the General Board recognize March as International Women's History Month and strongly encourage local churches to recognize and celebrate the work of women in our Zion.

## Now What?

As we continue to work to address three encumbrances facing clergywomen today; the **affirmation** of our call; **access** to information, resources and seats of power, influence and authority; and **advocacy**, identifying persons – male and female, clergy and lay - who are willing to be bold, intentional and purposeful advocates. **So what can you do to support the churches commitment to Gender Justice, Parity and Equality?**

1. Stop saying we don't want a female pastor
2. Be willing to sit in the discomfort of your privilege pressing hard against the reality of oppression.
3. Show intentionality in whom you invite to speak, read, sing, and pray.
4. Allow the silenced to have their own voice.
5. Pray for boldness to break the status quo.
6. Accept your responsibility, without assuming you have ALL the responsibility.
7. Normalize women's involvement at all levels.
8. Choose faith over fear
9. In church leadership, men occupy a position of default; women occupy a position of difference, so recognize you have blind spots.
10. Be aware of the patriarchal structures in your setting.
11. Be a GOOD partner
12. Use gender inclusive language - As you review your writing and your communications, ask yourself the following questions:
  - a. Have you used "man" or "men" or words containing them to refer to people who may not be men?
  - b. Have you used "he," "him," "his," or "himself" to refer to people who may not be men?
  - c. If you have mentioned someone's sex or gender, was it necessary to do so?
  - d. Do you use any occupational (or other) stereotypes?
  - e. Do you provide the same kinds of information and descriptions when writing about people of different genders?