



*Historic St. George's  
United Methodist Church*

# Messenger



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235 North Fourth Street • Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106 • 215-925-7788 • www.historicstgeorges.org

## History in the Moment: Mother Bethel Joins St. George's for Sunday Worship



*Reverends Day and Tyler Prepare for the Service*

Reconnecting with African American churches that emerged from St. George's has been a special part of the 240th Anniversary Celebration. Beginning on September 27th, the **Rev. David Cassidy, Mother Zoar UMC**, brought a rousing sermon, thankful for the Anniversary invitation, appreciative of efforts to reconnect St. George's and Mother Zoar, "removing the taint" of our difficult shared past.

By Suzy Keenan  
Oct. 27, 2009 | Philadelphia (UMNS)

The first members of their congregation marched out of St. George's United Methodist Church more than two centuries ago to protest a segregated sanctuary.

On Oct. 25, hundreds of congregants from Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church poured into St. George's for a combined worship service, the first since the breakup.

"This is beyond a historical moment; it is a day of rejoicing, of true enlightenment, and of gratitude – of moving from the past into the future," said Veronica Saunders, a member of Mother Bethel AME who welcomed worshippers at the door dressed in her starched white usher's uniform and cap.

Pausing to smile, she added, "Mother Bethel has so much history, love, and light, it brings chills to me to think of this day - of bringing us together in a new unity."

Laticia Stauffer, who was one of St. George's representatives to the combined team that helped plan the worship, also welcomed worshippers. "This event came together effortlessly, like it was meant to be," she said. "This is a great step to building new history."



*Passing the Peace*

*Mother Bethel: continued from page 1*

That history began in the 1780's. Richard Allen and Absalom Jones became the first African-American lay preachers at St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church, licensed by Francis Asbury, Methodism's first bishop in America. The growing number of African members brought in by Allen and Jones led to the building of a balcony, completed in 1792. With the balcony came segregated seating.

One Sunday when Jones was forcibly moved by a church trustee from where he was praying, Allen and Jones led a walk out of the African-American members. Allen began Mother Bethel Church, whose struggles with the overseeing church, St. George's, continued with a "long, distressing and expensive lawsuit" over rights to self-determination. In 1816, the Supreme Court decided in favor of Mother Bethel, and Allen founded the African Methodist Episcopal denomination.

### **Hope from hurt**

The Rev. Alfred Day, pastor of St. George's, welcomed the brimming sanctuary to the special Sunday worship. "We're here today because God's Spirit is full of surprises," he said. The combined worship resulted from an invitation to the Rev. Mark Kelly Tyler, pastor of Mother Bethel AME Church, to preach as part of St. George's 240th anniversary. Tyler's response was, "Sure, but how about if I bring Mother Bethel with me?"

In asking why the churches were coming together, Day said, "The God of our mothers and fathers is busy pointing to the Promised Land more than back to Egypt."

He added, "Why do we keep coming back to something that happened so long ago? Because in church and community there are still people pushed into balconies or as far to the edges as we can push them... because we must never forget—God's people of St. George's and Mother Bethel – the story our ancestors have lived, hope can rise from it amidst the hurt. The work overcoming racism, discrimination and division is work that every generation must do in and for its own time."

### **Two stories**

Day presented a gift to Tyler, a cross made of the original nails taken from the very balcony that had led ra-



*The cross made from balcony nails*

cial segregation and division. The cross, shown above, was made by local blacksmith, Andy Upright.

Tyler preached from Genesis, when two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, bury their father, Abraham. He pointed out that there are always two stories at a funeral – the one in the bulletin and the one in the parking lot, and that the story of Hagar and Ishmael is part of the latter.

He paraphrased what Ishmael might have said, "Mama, the bitterness is your stuff. Maybe I can go back and get rid of my hate and say thank you. I return because my brother needs me to stand with him." The text shows a new way, he pointed out -- that the children get past the anger, and that blood is thicker than water.

Mother Bethel and St. George's shared a common father, John Wesley. "The same blood that runs through our veins is thicker than what divides us," Tyler said.

But he admitted that he did not know how he would end his sermon until the moment Day handed him the



cross -- "until Fred put the nails in my hand, and I remembered it's all about the blood -- that Jesus' blood is thicker than water!"

The congregation shared in communion using a chalice (shown in inset) sent by John Wesley to the Methodists in America, and is thought to have been used to served Richard Allen and Absalom Jones communion.

The service was accompanied by the noise of jack hammers and air hoses from crews working on repairs to the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, which lies only 14 feet from St. George's walls: "Here is a message that will not be silenced!" Day quipped at the end.

### Church universal

Fourteen-year-old James Bradley surveyed the gathering from the balcony. He faithfully attends worship at Mother Bethel every Sunday and looks forward to becoming a member in the near future. "This is a beauti-

ful church and a great day today, in the joining of the two churches together," he declared.

Also sitting in the balcony was Melissa Miller McGinn, a member of St. George's. As a young professional in the city, she has friends of all backgrounds, and found it "a big deal" to sit where, 200 years ago, the African-Americans had been forced to sit, and look down upon the congregation where everybody was mixed together.

Florimel Brown, a 72-year member of Mother Bethel, centers her life around the congregation. She was so excited that she called her family in South Carolina to tell them of the historic coming together of the two churches.

"The world is in such turmoil," she said. "At a time when we really need it, maybe this will bring peace to our city, our country, and the world."

Following the service, worshippers were invited to have refreshments and tour St. George's museum. This was of special interest to retired United Methodist Bishop Forrest Stith, president of the African American Methodist Heritage Center located at Drew University.

"Old St. George's will never be the same again," Stith said. "They were the greatest hosts one could ever imagine. The persons who were visitors from Mother Bethel and the AME churches in Washington, D.C. and New York all felt extremely welcome and well





received. The joy was real – not artificial – and this was the time to do it – right now.”

A tour guide in St. George’s museum, Vicki Lock also serves as the church’s lay leader, parish relations chairperson and trustee and had participated in a reconciliation service held at St. George’s with Mother Bethel in 2001. “Rev. Tyler’s sermon was great – that we’re all one in God and the rest doesn’t really matter – that is the ultimate message,” she said.

Vanessa Thomas Smith has been a member of Mother Bethel for nine years. Her sister, Jacqueline King, is a United Methodist Church planter in Houston. The

two had recently walked from Mother Bethel to St. George’s to take in the history of the two churches.

“Today, there is historic significance of the church being universal,” she said. “There are times when you have to separate and go where your heart goes, and times to come together in remembrance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. It is a highlight for us at Mother Bethel to be a part of this gathering. I am hoping we do more together in the future.”

Suzy Keenan is the conference communicator for the denomination’s Philadelphia Area. Article originally appeared on [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org). Photos by David Fonda, Jon Goldberg and Suzy Keenan.

Our web site has links to other stories written about this spirit-filled day.

The world-renowned Gospel Choir of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas reconnects St. George’s with the historic congregation that grew from Absalom Jones. The choir will join the 29th Annual Christmas Musical at St. George’s December 6th. Crosses identical to the one given Mother Bethel will be presented to Mother Zoar and the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas.

## PARISH REGISTER

### *Baptisms*

Destiny McKayla Jones, November 1

Jake Ryan Kolody, November 1

### *Weddings*

Kathy Hibbs & Dino Necci, September 5

Rachel Forrester Dufresne & Jerry Jones, October 3

Nicole Eickhoff & Christopher Bradley, October 24

Rebekah Cintolo & Sunil Reddi, November 7

### *Settling into New Homes*

Jenny Whalen

Adam Millngton

### *In Loving Memory*

Dr. Edward Raffensperger, October 13

Rev. Elaine Barnes, October 14

(Memorial Service, November 15 at St. George’s)

*Memorial gifts may be sent to St. George’s*



## DVDs & CDs of the Historic Service and Prints of Historic St. George’s Available

Experience the power of the day. Order a DVD (\$20) or an audio CD (\$10). Price includes shipping.

High quality prints of St. George’s Church painting shown above in 8 x 10 matted format available (\$35) includes shipping.

Order form available on page 8.

A PLACE IN HISTORY, A PATH TO THE FUTURE. JOIN US FOR THE JOURNEY.

Drama Sermon  
– “Out of the  
Shadows”

Special Music –  
Bruce Adams

Festive Reunion  
Coffee Hour

# 240<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Historic St. George's United Methodist Church

JOIN US! ANNIVERSARY SERVICE: NOVEMBER 22ND, 11:00 A.M.

## We're Still Making History

### *What's Happening in the Congregation*

Fall brings thoughts of the gathering in the harvest. What bundles of blessing St. George's has reaped since summer's end... the **Mid Week Study Group** is surveying the Hebrew scriptures via Dr. Amy-Jill Levine's DVD course. The group enjoys a wide range of ecumenical and neighborhood participation. 10 - 15 attending... one Wednesday a month the group joins a wider **Old Philadelphia Congregations Interfaith Group**, attending presentations about Islam by the Dialogue Forum, (tasting a post Ramadan Feast); about Judaism by Society Hill Synagogue, (learning about the High Holidays); and about Advent at Old St. Joseph's RC Church. All are welcome... The 2nd Year of shared eucharist services with **Gloria Dei-Old Swedes Episcopal Church** in September / October were quite "moving" having nothing to do with trekking back and forth from South Philly... the 3rd year participating in **Smithsonian Museum Day** in September introduced our museum to dozens of new friends who shared the privilege of viewing *The St. John's Bible*, a hand copied version of Holy Scripture – the first of its kind since the 15th century. See [www.saintjohnsbible.org](http://www.saintjohnsbible.org). The Philadelphia Calligraphy Society joined in, providing instruction in the art of penmanship with goose quill... the annual **St. Francis Day Pet Blessing** in October drew the largest crowd of people and



Abby Miller

critters ever. Dogs, cats and a new denomination – ferrets! Good fellowship with neighbor pet-lovers and benefits to our local PAWS Animal Shelter... **All Saints Day** brought an interesting and amazing combination: baptizing 2 new saints AND tolling the Cokesbury bell for 4 church member saints departed in death, 2009.... We're still shocked and reeling from the **Rev. Elaine Barnes** (Associate Pastor) sudden death October 14. Conference wide Memorial Services will be held here November 15... You know it's time for the calendar to turn to a new year when **Charge Conference** rolls around. St. George's annual church meeting for electing officers, adopting the 2010 budget, reviewing the year past and looking ahead will be Sunday December 13 immediately following services that day... Our Architect, **Mary DeNadai of John Milner Architects**, gave St George's a complimentary membership to *Partners for Sacred Places*. Partners is a national organization assisting houses of worship in strategic planning and development... Thanks to Amy Sinclair for her creative work in designing our Anniversary logo and Abby Miller for the painting of St. George's adorning our weekly bulletin cover ...

# The Healthcare Debate ...

*a Wesleyan point of view by Rev. Dr. Robert Williams, Gen. Secretary, General Commission on Archives and History*

In the midst of the debate over health care reform in the United States, what would John Wesley say if he were alive today? Maybe the prior question is: why would we care what John Wesley would say? I care because as a spiritual heir of Wesley, I find in his writings and in his life a valid transmission of the gospel message and a guide for holy living. He has shaped my thinking, attitudes, beliefs, and actions. While he would not be able to speak to the intricacies of public policy positions because we can't transfer an eighteenth century figure into the twenty-first century, and I would not try to comment on that either, I am certain he would say that health care should be available to all persons regardless of the ability to pay or get health insurance. His practice was to help the poor be well in body and in soul.

Wesley and his spiritual descendants have been concerned about health. In an essay entitled, "John Wesley on Holistic Health and Healing," Randy Maddox wrote, "I hope to demonstrate that, far from being an amusing avocation, Wesley's interest in health and healing was a central dimension of his ministry and of the mission of early Methodism." (*Methodist History*, XLVI, 1, October 2007, p. 4). Wesley published *Primitive Physick* in order to provide an inexpensive publication of home remedies and organized clinics for those who could not afford doctors. Dr. Maddox concluded his essay with these words, "Likewise, as we seek to honor the precedent of Wesley's concern to provide 'physick for the poor' we will surely need to consider alternatives beyond simply publishing an up-to-date self-care health manual. But while our specific actions might differ from those of Wesley, we can only hope that our goal will be the same—to realize as fully as possible in the present the healing of body and soul that God longs to provide to all!" (page 27) In the above referenced issue of *Methodist History* there were also articles on medical missionaries to Korea and the founding of Methodist hospitals to provide

medical care for the poor.

Whether it is improving global health by eliminating the diseases of poverty as one of the Four Areas of Focus shaping mission today, or the historical record of the church, those in the Wesleyan tradition care about health care being available to all. Any policy that does not enable or enhance availability of health to all is contrary to this tradition. The how can be left to others wiser than I, but I am confident that our history can inform the debate.

**Editor's Note:** You can view a copy of the 10th edition of Wesley's *Primitive Physick* in our museum, or purchase a replica copy of the 25th edition for \$30, including shipping.

## Confirmation Classes Take Note!

*Time Traveler dates for 2010: Saturday, March 13, Saturday, April 10 and Saturday, May 8*

### This Could Be Your Time!

#### Planned Giving

No doubt about it, times are tough. Yet, for all the downs, there are some ups. Someone among us has come into an unexpected financial blessing. If that's you, why not share a special gift with Historic St. George's?



Might you consider a charitable gift annuity, or might your Women's or Men's group consider supporting Historic St. George's among your benevolences?

Thanks for your support. Our goal is to raise \$20,000 by the end of the year. Your generosity keeps this treasure of a place a touchstone to early Methodist spirit and tradition.

For more information about planned giving, contact Pastor Day at 215-925-7788 or e-mail him at: [pastor@historicstgeorges.org](mailto:pastor@historicstgeorges.org)



Sandy Clay Bauer

## Opening the Vault:

*What's Up at the Museum & Archives*



**Crude Words.** The vault's Bishop Matthew Simpson collection has an 1862 letter offering interesting insight about another hot topic in church and secular media – oil and evangelism. Bishop Simpson received word from the faithful around oil boom town, Titusville, PA, that Methodists were “below par” in attracting people. Worrying our church was “running behind” other denominations, a certain A.S. Dobbs wrote the good bishop in 1863 hoping an episcopal visit would stem the disturbing tide. Dobbs implored Simpson to speak at the Titusville Lyceum, which had hosted such luminaries as Mark Twain. In addition to being an oil man, Dobbs was a Methodist minister who preached at missions in Oil City Lusher Chapel and Cooperstown ME churches in the 1850's. (Thanks to historian Susan Beates, The Drake Well Museum, for this info.) Interestingly enough, the name listed with Dobbs, “Archbold” may well be related to John D. Archbold, of Standard Oil fame. What we could do with some of that oil\$\$\$ today.

*“To Your Tents, O Israel.”* Using the archives here, the Rev. Joe DiPaolo, E. Pa. Conference Historical Society President, has written this title on the life of the Rev. Andrew Manship, Delaware Valley Methodist evangelist and entrepreneur. Native of Maryland's eastern shore, Manship's vision for the Methodist Church and his relationships with African Americans, slave and free transcend the norms of his day. His story captures the spirit of risk-taking Methodists who built America, and shaped the evangelical faith of the mid-19th century. DiPaolo is the pastor of the Wayne United Methodist Church. The book was given as a gift to our library.

**Justice or Just Us.** Professor F. Douglas Powe, Jr. sent this book he just wrote about common tracks in

Wesleyan and African American theology. The book was sent in celebration of the Mother Bethel and St. George's reunion service October 25. Professor Powe's Youtheology program has sent groups to visit St. George's for the past two summers.

**Ancestors.** Most days, opening the vault is about assisting families deepening their roots through records pertaining to baptism, marriages, membership, funerals and burials from closed Eastern PA Conference churches. Recent inquiries have included a 19th journalist and poet named Selleck Osborn buried in the former St. George's burial ground, and a Dr. Jean Baptiste Clement Rousseau, a colonial era Philadelphian who died in a shipwreck fleeing St. Dominique. Interesting stuff here!

**Medals.** Among the treasures in our vault are various commemorate keepsakes marking important moments in history. Thanks to Mr. R. J Fenner of New Jersey, we received a medal marking the centennial of American Methodism celebrated in Baltimore, Md. The medal depicts John Wesley and his famous quote “The world is my parish.”



## Christmas Musical December 6th

Prelude at 3 pm. Joining us this year: The Gospel Choir of St. Thomas African Episcopal Church, as well as many past favorites: The Rutgers Collegium Musicum, The Germantown Academy Patriot Singers, Celtic Women, Stanford Thompson and his Brass Ensemble, and our own Dominic Silla on organ. Our 29th year of Musical Celebration!

# Safety Tops Trustee Agenda

The Trustee's punch-list of 2009 accomplishments includes surge and lightning protection devices installed on all Church House circuits, protecting the computer network. An uninterrupted power supply has also been installed.

New security and safety features have also been installed, including 24/7 closed circuit TV, electronic lock and intercom system enabling visitors to be remotely "buzzed" into the building. The double doors on the east end of the Sanctuary have been repaired and refinished. A gate has been installed across the double doors nearest the bridge, allowing improved ventilation, safety, and view of the garden. Exterior doors in the Fellowship Hall and the Gift Shop have been further secured. The front doors are next!

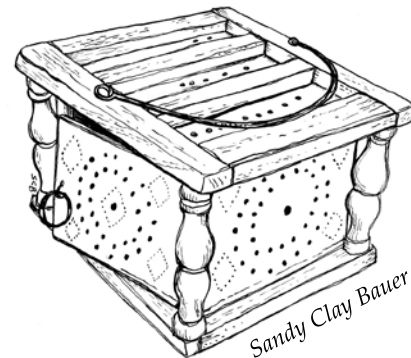
Other upgrades include a panic bar and outward opening exit door in the main stairwell of the Church House and emergency lighting to facilitate safe egress. Additional electronic devices have also been installed to facilitate early detection and alarm in the event of smoke or fire throughout the Church House building. The photocopy machine in the Church Office has been replaced with a new copier/printer. This newsletter

was printed on the new machine, which allows improved management and lower production cost.

Extensive repairs to the roof mentioned in the last issue are set to begin.

These projects are made possible because of the contributions of church members and associates to St. George's annual and endowment funds.

Thank you!



*Stay warm over the coming months,  
and keep St. George's in your prayers.*



**GUIDES NEEDED** Are you in the area? Consider being a tour guide at Historic St. George's. We'll train you to share the stories of this Cradle of American Methodism.

## Yes, I would like to make a gift to St. George's ...

Level:  \$25     \$50     \$75     \$100     \$150     \$500     Other

Additional Order (see page four):

DVD, Mother Bethel Service, \$20     CD of Service, \$10     Print of St. George's, \$35

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