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**AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
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**OPEN LETTER**

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*Bishop Robert Thomas, Jr.*

*Bishop Zedekiah L. Grady*

*(D) Deceased*

March 4, 2005

Dear Colleague:

Several months ago a “scam alert” was issued by the General Secretary and Chief Information Officer of the African Methodist Episcopal Church apprising our constituency of suspects who are illegally using the names of, and/or posing as relatives of officers of the A.M.E. Church. The officers’ names are being used to steal money from A.M.E. churches and church members.

In recent weeks, the fraudulent scheme has reoccurred nationally at an accelerated rate. This time the name of **Bishop Adam Jefferson Richardson**, presiding Bishop of the Second Episcopal District is the name that is being illegally used. The suspects contact an A.M.E. church and then request financial aid or relief on behalf of one of Bishop Richardson’s relatives (usually a niece) who is stranded while in the company of small children, or the caller actually poses as Bishop Richardson himself. **The suspects use Bishop Richardson’s name (or any church official’s name) to gain the confidence of the victim church staff member.** Neither Bishop Richardson nor any member of his family is involved in this act of deception and theft of money. This is an illegal fraudulent confidence scheme to steal money and is classified as **criminal identity theft.**

We need your help to bring these criminals to justice.

Our first defense is education. Share information! Please notify each of your pastors and congregations of the above fraud scheme. This is best done through open letters, pastoral letters and public announcements.

Next, help us track their activity. Persons and congregations who have been victimized should report each incident to their local law enforcement agency and **obtain a unique law enforcement case number for each separate and distinct incident.**

Once the crime has been reported and a case number obtained, please inform the agency that took the report that the Tallahassee Police Department (TPD) Financial Crimes Unit in Tallahassee, Florida is coordinating efforts to track, investigate and arrest the perpetrators. Ask the investigating agency to contact the police investigator listed below and send him a copy of the report. The A.M.E. Church is working closely with the TPD to coordinate this investigation nationally with the hope of stopping this crime

The contact person at the Tallahassee Police Department is:

Investigator W. Stewart Clendinen  
Tallahassee Police Department  
Finance Crime Unit  
234 East 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Tallahassee, Florida 32303  
Phone: 850-891-4509  
Fax: 850-891-4685  
E-mail: [Clendins@talgov.com](mailto:Clendins@talgov.com)  
TPD Case No. 05-7005

Finally, if something sounds suspicious, check it out. Try to contact the church official whose name is being used. Do not be rushed into action. If you do not hear from the church official, then do not respond and deny the suspects the opportunity to victimize you or your church!

Respectfully,

*Vashti Murphy McKenzie*

Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie  
President, Council of Bishops

VMM:bdi