

# African Methodist Episcopal Church International Health Commission

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## International Health Commission Report to the General Conference of the AME Church June 20 to June 21, 2017

It is with great pleasure that we provide this summary of the work of the International Health Commission.

We would first like to express our gratitude for the support of our Chairman, Bishop Harry Seawright.

The International Health Commission promoted and hosted a variety of wellness activities, events, programs and planning at all levels of the Connection. Collaborations and partnerships continue and have been developed or expanded with the following organizations the National Kidney Foundation, American Heart Association/American Stroke Association (AHA/ASA), American Cancer Society, Prostate Health Education Network (PHEN), Girl Trek (a walking program for women of all ages) and the American Red Cross. Work with the US Department of Health and Human Services and CDC continues. Partnerships with other AME Departments and Commissions were expanded, including working with Social Action Commission to promote environmental wellness and solar energy.

Several local churches hosted walks, CPR training, HIV/AIDS information sessions, started Girl Trek Walking programs and participated in the American Heart Association Healthy for Life Project, Prostate Cancer Father Day Rallies and Symposiums, Disaster Preparation and Men Walking for Wellness. Several Episcopal Districts, Presiding Elder Districts and Local churches still do not have appointed Health Directors. This is of great concern because for almost every “preventable” disease condition (diabetes type 2, high blood pressures, heart disease, stroke and some cancers) people of color rank the highest for people suffering and dying from “preventable diseases”.

Monthly conference calls are held with the Executive Director on the last Friday of every month at 8 PM EST. The Health Commission writes a bi-monthly article for The Christian Recorder.

### **Website and Social Media – [www.AMEHealth.org](http://www.AMEHealth.org)**

The Health Commission is a “One Stop Shop” website ([amehealth.org](http://amehealth.org)) provides a wealth of information on a variety of topics in Active Shooter Guidelines, Disaster Preparation, Men Walking for Wellness, Mental Health, Environmental Wellness and more. The Facebook group has grown and has many dedicated followers. The Twitter account has linked to the website and the Facebook page. Health Commission app and online store contains fitness, disaster preparedness, first aid and solar energy supplies. The company that manages the online store will make a donation to Health Commission for each purchase in support of the ministry of the Health Commission. We encourage all Episcopal Districts and churches to create a link to [www.AMEHealth.org](http://www.AMEHealth.org) to provide health resources and information.

### **Text Wellness Program**

Text4Wellness, is a free health messaging campaign, offered by our technology partner, UPRISCorp that seeks to improve the healthy lifestyle choices of participants by leveraging mobile technology to deliver culturally appropriate informational and motivational health messages to members of participating churches. Through a two-way text messaging campaign, Text4Wellness will encourage participants to make healthier nutrition, exercise and wellness choices for themselves and their families.

## **International Health Commission Committee Information and Updates:**

### **HIV/AIDS**

The Commission seeks to provide information for persons living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. We encourage screening throughout the Connection as well as provide health education through seminars and workshops. We have continued to recommend and encourage the AME Church internationally to support World AIDS Day on Dec 1<sup>st</sup> and other national days of recognition like National Black HIV/AIDS Day (February 7) and Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS held during the 2nd week of March.

### **Caregivers**

We have provided information to assist the caregivers to access resources available in the community. We encouraged the development of support groups for caregivers. We encourage the incorporation of sermons and other moments of support for caregivers during worship and other activities. In addition, Roslyn Thibodeaux Goodall has provided articles for our section of the Christian Recorder related to caring for those with Alzheimer's Disease.

### **Spiritual Health**

We encourage and recommend that provisions be made for spiritual support and referrals for counseling to members of the congregation as requested. We encourage moments for meditation and rest during meetings. Members of the Spiritual Health Committee must be certified counselors, psychologists, social workers, or human service workers, both clergy and lay.

### **Nutrition and Exercise**

Nutrition and exercise is information on AMEHealth.org website and on the Health Calendar. We continue to recommend and encourage the AME Church internationally to participate, support and promote the Annual July Faith Based Health, Wellness, Nutrition and Fitness month established by the International Health Commission of the AME Church, Men Walking for Wellness and Girl Trek. Men Walking for Wellness also known as M.W.W. was created by Rev. Natalie Mitchem at the request of Bishop Seawright for the commission to develop a walking group for men of all ages. We also continue to recommend all meals served at all church related events offer healthy food choices and healthy beverages in order to prevent and fight disease. We promote the continuation or development of fitness programs and stretch breaks at programs to promote blood circulation, clear thinking and good health, at levels.

### **Mental Health**

We provide support and referral resources on AMEHealth.org website and on the Health Calendar. Free resources are made available via Mental Health organizations for all levels and in particular for local church congregations. We desire the development of Mental Health Committees of the Health Commission at all levels with a goal of expansion of the support and referral resources that are available. Presently, toward this effort, we have identified several practitioners in several Episcopal Districts and seek the expansion of the same. We are partners in the SAMHSA National Dialogue on Mental Health. We have partnered with The National Association of Mental Illness (NAMI) to provide Mental Health First Aid courses across the US. "Mental Health First Aid is an 8-hour course that teaches you how to help someone who is developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. The training helps one identify, understand, and respond to signs of addictions and mental illnesses." They offer courses that target the needs of adults, as well as adolescents (ages 12-18). We encourage all clergy and lay to enroll in a Mental Health First Aid Course offered by NAMI. We continue to seek international partnerships.

### **Ministry to those who are differently challenged**

This committee is led by the Rev. Marion Crayton, ED. We therefore lift the following: how to sensitize congregations and increase awareness; AMEC models of inclusive ministries; and means of addressing bullying. We provide information on making our churches and worship welcoming and accessible for all people including those who are differently challenged. We provide resources that will support churches in their effort to include persons who are differentially challenged. and information on emergency evacuation and ensuring all persons can safely exit the building.

### **Clergy and Family Health**

We have supported and continue to recommend and encourage all Clergy to participate in the Annual August Clergy and Clergy Family Wellness month (see further in the report) created to promote physical and mental health, reduce stress, and encourage sabbatical and clergy self-care. We provide, support and offer resources that address family

wellness which include, but are not limited to: blended families (i.e. stepchildren and stepparents), marriage, divorce, widows, single life, domestic violence, sexual abuse, child abuse, sexuality and financial wellness.

**Communicable Diseases and Immunizations.** Provide information of immunizations. Provide information and updates on communicable diseases that arise during certain times of the year, outbreaks or epidemics, travel health advisories and precautions, recommendations and prevention on [AMEHealth.org](http://AMEHealth.org). This quadrennium we have been plagued with the outbreak of many communicable diseases globally. We continue to monitor CDC, FDA, WHO alerts so that we may have a rapid response as well as educate and provide direction for interventions, prevention of spread, and the need for immunizations. Please consider using immunization literature available on the WHO, CDC, and NIH websites. These websites also contain travel related information and vaccines required and/or recommended for international travel.

In an effort to maintain an atmosphere of prevention and preparation there are some basic things that must be undertaken:

- Maintain good hygiene like proper hand washing techniques
- Keep up healthy habits that will boost your immune system: keep immunizations current, eat healthy, exercise, rest and attempt to reduce stress
- Evaluate and education regarding local and regional considerations for churches and communities: understand what social distancing means and how it affects worship, visitation, mutual aid and fiscal management; how to maintain and continue the provision of community based services during an outbreak; how to maintain timely and pertinent information dissemination (pulpit, flyers, bulletin inserts, phone tree, class leaders, social media, etc.); how to maintain and utilize existing or acquire necessary resources (volunteers, kitchens, shelters, drivers, food and water); and consider worship and bible study alternatives during periods of social distancing.

**Chronic Diseases.** Recommend and encourage all churches to provide and support a smoke free environment. Provide a variety of wellness pamphlets and brochures at church and workshops at major meetings, invite health professionals to speak at district meetings and Episcopal meetings. Promote annual physicals prevention and treatment options in order to equip and empower the church to make important health decisions. Encourage all Episcopal Districts and Connection components to use utilize the Health Calendar and resources available on [AMEHealth.org](http://AMEHealth.org).

Partnerships (new or expanded partnerships are highlighted below):

- 1) American Cancer Society
- 2) American Heart Association
- 3) American Red Cross
- 4) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- 5) Million Hearts
- 6) PHEN - Prostate Health Education Network
- 7) PROMETRA
- 8) US Department of Health and Human Services
- 9) Sickle Cell Association of America
- 10) World Health Organization

11) I Am AME (Collaboration with Life Point, MUSC Donor List, MUSC Transplant and the National Kidney Foundation). During the General Conference, they offered free screenings and information regarding kidney disease and its causes as well as the need for organ donation with commitment to the same. The expansion of this program represents a resurgence of a partnership with the National Kidney Foundation KEEP Program that was initially created in the early 2000's with the 11th Episcopal District with further expansion to the 6th, 7th, and 8th Episcopal Districts. 422 were screened during the 50<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Conference.

12) **Chronic Disease Best Practice example for local church work**

- Bishop Seawright and Tammy Davis - 9<sup>th</sup> District HIV/AIDS training for Ministerial Institute and Prostate Cancer Symposium
- First Lady Health Program -with Dr. Pamela Middleton
- American Heart Association Healthy Life Project in San Antonio, Texas with Pastor Rev. Dr. W. Raymond Bryan and Sybil Hunter
- All White Sarcoidosis and Fitness Sunday at St Philips AME in Georgia with Pastor Watley and Dr. Cathy Hogan.

- HIV/AIDS Family to Family Program in New Jersey -Presiding Elder Leak, Rev. Lynda T. Rassmann and Rev. Stanley Justice
- Solar Energy Program – Rev. Mariama Hammond-White – Bethel AME Church Boston, MA
- Girl Trek National Church Challenge Winners – The New Mt. Moriah African Methodist Episcopal Church's Faith Trekkers in Jacksonville, Florida

**Collaboration with other Connectional Agendas.** We have partnered and supported other Connectional organizations that have mutual interest and concerns in order to expand the outreach or scope of the agenda.

- 1) Christian Education Department – Exhorter Gwen Williams, Executive Director Emeritus and Consultant of the Health Commission, and Rev. Marion Crayton, ED presented workshops at the Ministries in Christian Education meetings.
- 2) Service and Development Agency (SADA) - We have partnered to address global health and disaster concerns through educational, financial (Annual SADA Day) and resource collaborations.
- 3) Social Action Commission - The main efforts have surrounded the collaborative support of efforts to support Health Marketplace, Environmental Wellness and Solar Energy.
- 4) WMS/YPD - “Let’s Move” and Girl Trek.
- 5) Wellness Stations (First Aid Stations are now called Wellness Stations) were provided at General Board, Connectional, Episcopal District and Presiding Elder District meetings. The Wellness Station offers more than First Aid. Wellness stations offer information of prevention and how to stay well at major meetings.

### **Death, Dying and Hospice**

Although this topic has been addressed in a variety of ways, this area has been added as a new area of intentional focus. It seeks to provide information and resources on existing programs; encourage Clergy and Lay to become trained support members or teams and recommends that churches provide free resources in electronic or pamphlet form to congregants and communities that they serve.

### **Disaster Preparedness and Response**

We recommend and encourage all Episcopal Districts and Churches to participate in the Annual September Disaster Preparedness Month fire drills and evacuation drills. We provide information on preparedness, First Aid and CPR training, Earthquake and other Natural disaster responses through the Health Commission website ([amechealth.org](http://amechealth.org)), Twitter and Facebook page as well as through the Christian Recorder. In addition, we provide information on partnerships with the Red Cross, SADA and Medical Corps. Through the American Red Cross, we have partnered to support and encourage Blood Drives and Disaster Preparedness and Response efforts. Information regarding the means of screening as well as the potential complications of lead contaminated water were disseminated. The partnership with the American Heart Association provides CPR-Hands Only training at all levels.

**Substance Abuse, Addictions and Recovery.** Although this topic has been addressed in a variety of ways. It seeks to provide information and resources on substance abuse, workshops, Clergy and Lay certification programs.

### **Monthly Awareness Calendars**

The Monthly Health Awareness calendar is available on the Health Commission website and provides scriptural references as well as resources for each topic. The calendar selects one of the several options available in a rotational manner.

Examples included:

#### **May is National Mental Health Awareness**

Mental Health First Aid - [mentalhealth.gov](http://mentalhealth.gov). The American Psychiatric Association has a Mental Health and Faith Community Partnership has *A Mental Health: A Guide for Faith Leaders* ([psychiatry.org/faith](http://psychiatry.org/faith)). In addition, please refer to the information about NAMI above.

Please access the websites, and engage behavioral health providers to assist with addressing Mental Health awareness objectives in the Annual Conference, Presiding Elder Districts, and the local church levels.

- Include a message about mental health in a worship service or other event, and provide congregants with bulletin inserts on mental health issues.
- Disseminate toolkits with resources such as discussion starters to help members continue the conversation about mental health outside of worship services.

- Organize a session on mental health awareness.

### **June is Men's Health Month and Prostate Health Awareness Month**

**Men Walking for Wellness -M.W.W.** – a walking program created by Health Commission Executive Director to promote the health benefits of walking for men and encourage local churches to start walking groups for men. The health commission website states the benefits of walking, suggestions for walking and encourages all churches to start a walking group. (The Health Commission recommends all meeting offer breaks for standing. In addition, for every hour people sit, everyone should walk for 5 minutes. According to research sitting for long a time is as dangerous as smoking.)

**PHEN** ([prostatehealth.org](http://prostatehealth.org) or [rapcancer.org](http://rapcancer.org)) each year partners with churches to host the Annual Father's Day Rally Against Prostate Cancer. The annual rally is conducted within each participating church during regular Father's Day services:

- Prostate cancer survivors with their family members, along with family members of those who have been victims of the disease are recognized and join hands in a special prayer for support and healing.
- This recognition and spiritual support helps remove the silence and isolation for those who may be suffering with the disease, or from having lost a loved one.
- This prayer service creates a spirit of togetherness and cooperation among those directly impacted which becomes a powerful step towards overall healing.
- Free resources and an opportunity to host a symposium with financial support is available at [rapcancer.org](http://rapcancer.org).

### **July is Faith Based Health, Wellness, Nutrition and Fitness Month and August is Clergy & Clergy Family Wellness Month**

The purpose of this annual event is to encourage Clergy and Leaders to preach, teach and conduct bible studies focusing on physical, mental and spiritual wellness. The mission of this initiative is fourfold:

- To encourage Clergy and Leaders to participate in self-care, healthier food choices and daily fitness activities
- To equip Clergy and Leaders with resources designed to promote wellness within the congregation and community
- To inform Clergy and Leaders about the importance of healthy food preparation, portion control and nutritious food including fresh fruits, vegetables and water at all church events and conferences to prevent disease
- To encourage Clergy and Leaders to partner with health organizations to provide a variety of health resources, education and programs for the congregation and community each year during the month of July.

#### **How can you help promote July Faith Based Health, Wellness, Nutrition and Fitness Month?**

- Announce and acknowledge July as Faith Based Health, Wellness, Nutrition and Fitness Month on your websites and outreach materials in partnership with International Health Commission of the AME Church. Materials may be obtained from [www.AMEHealth.org](http://www.AMEHealth.org) or by contacting Rev. Natalie Mitchem, Rev. Dr. Miriam Burnett or your Presiding Elder District Health Coordinator.
- Promote the last Saturday and Sunday in July as Faith Based Health, Wellness, Nutrition and Fitness *Weekend* - where we encourage churches to plan activities, and submit pictures and testimonials to [www.amehealth.org](http://www.amehealth.org) and Rev. Natalie Mitchem.
- Access the 40 Day P.S.A.L.M. Kingdom Wellness Meal Journey Guide, which includes basic guidelines, meal plans and recipes at [ww.AMEHealth.org](http://ww.AMEHealth.org).
- Promote online training, information and upcoming healthy cooking classes.

#### **How can you help promote August Clergy and Clergy Family Month?**

- Episcopal Districts and Presiding Elder Districts can host a Clergy weekend that provides an opportunity to Clergy and their families to attend seminars that address financial wellness, self-care, family wellness, marriage wellness, single life wellness, end of life planning, life insurance planning, retirement planning and other seminars that focus more on clergy personal wellness and personal success in every area of life and not only church growth or church issues. Healthy Clergy and healthy clergy families equals healthy and growing churches worldwide.

## Recommendations

1. Adoption and support the International Health Commission calendar at all levels located on [www.AMEHealth.org](http://www.AMEHealth.org)
2. Link District websites to [www.AMEHealth.org](http://www.AMEHealth.org) for online health calendar, store and ongoing health information and resources. Support the International Health Commission Facebook page and Twitter account.
3. Ensure a Health Commission Director is in place at all levels and in all Episcopal Districts to promote health calendar activities, programs and resources available from community partners.
4. Promote the Annual July Faith Based Wellness, Health, Nutrition and Fitness month established by the IHC in partnership with The Association of Black Cardiologist, Prostate Cancer Awareness Network, Heart and Soul Magazine and American Heart Association/American Stroke Association
  - Support July Annual Faith Based Wellness, Health, Nutrition and Fitness month in the African Methodist Episcopal Church
  - Support the last weekend of July Annual Faith Based Wellness, Health, Nutrition and Fitness Weekend. On Saturday and Sunday in the last weekend of July Pastors and churches are encouraged to host walks, health screenings, healthy food contests, jogging suit and sneaker day, sermons and bibles study focused on health and wellness.
  - Promote walking groups: M.W.W. Men Walking for Wellness and Girl Trek for Women Enrollment available online at [www.AMEHealth.org](http://www.AMEHealth.org). Get Fit and Healthy with the AME church worldwide!
  - Promote the various wellness, health, disaster preparedness, solar, fitness, nutrition resources and training tools available on [www.AMEHealth.org](http://www.AMEHealth.org).
5. Promote the Annual August Clergy and Clergy Family Wellness Month established by the IHC.
  - Clergy is encourage to participate retreats, sabbaths, family vacations, personal vacations, time of rest, self-reflection, annual doctor visits, marriage enrichment, single life enrichment and events to promote wellness mind, body and spirit. Clergy that makes time for self-care will experience a more fruitful and productive ministry both professionally and personally.
6. Heath Commission Directors at all levels promote the trainings available to Health Directors on [www.AMEHealth.org](http://www.AMEHealth.org). Encourage all Nursing Units to be active members of their church health commission.
7. Reaffirm the Health Commissions advocacy for the implementation of Disaster Preparedness protocols, including Preparedness Drills and Safety Checks. The Health Commission website [www.AMEHealth.org](http://www.AMEHealth.org) store provides disaster preparedness first aid kits, disaster kits, portal solar backpacks, water testing kits and more. Church Safety Tips can be found on [www.amehealth.org](http://www.amehealth.org) as well as links to the FBI Active Shooter Event Quick Reference Guide.
8. Encourage all Episcopal Districts to actively support the resolutions that were approved in July 2016 regarding persons who are differently challenged; healthy food and beverage toolkit and smoke-free campuses.
9. Promote Prostate Cancer Awareness programs including PHEN annual Father's Day Prostate Rally, PHEN Symposiums, Prostate Cancer PSA screenings events, M.W.W. = Men Walking for Wellness and June Men's Health Month events.

Respectfully submitted,  
Bishop Harry Seawright, Chairman  
Reverend Natalie Mitchem, RDN, Executive Director  
Reverend Miriam Burnett, MD, MPH, Medical Director