

# CONVO VIII

AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

ATLANTA AIRPORT HILTON HOTEL

Atlanta, Georgia  
December 5-6, 2018

**“BELIEVING IN OUR INCREDIBLE FUTURE”**

**BISHOP REGINALD T. JACKSON**  
Chairman and Host Bishop

**BISHOP MCKINLEY YOUNG**  
Senior Bishop

**DR. RICHARD ALLEN LEWIS**  
Treasurer/CFO

**DR. JEFFERY B. COOPER, SR.**  
General Secretary/CIO

December 5, 2018

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

On behalf of the Convo Committee welcome to CONVO VIII. The CONVO's have become an opportunity for the African Methodist Episcopal Church, clergy and lay to come together and reflect, discuss and prepare legislation for the forthcoming General Conference. It has become a very worthwhile contribution to our Zion. It is the hope of the CONVO Committee that CONVO VIII will add to this contribution.

In July 2016 we assembled in Philadelphia, PA for the 50<sup>th</sup> Quadrennial Session of our General Conference. The theme for the General Conference was "An Extraordinary History, An Incredible Future." It is important that this theme be more than words. As we begin the third century of African Methodism, the question and challenge before the church is, "Do we believe we have an incredible future?" The discussions we have and the legislation we propose will say much about whether the theme was words that sound good, or something we really believe. We have said little about "our incredible future" since the General Conference.

If we are going to have an incredible future there are a number of things we must face and act on. The agenda for this CONVO VIII focuses on these things. They are:

1. Church Growth
2. Connectional Budget
3. Ministers Bill of Rights
4. Social Media
5. Church and Millennials

From our discussions there may come legislation that could be presented, ideas to be considered and plans that could be implemented. But none of this will matter unless we "believe in our incredible future."

A special word of thanks is extended to our General Secretary, Dr. Jeffery Cooper, the CONVO Committee and all who gave input in preparation for our coming together.

Yours and His,

Reginald T. Jackson

Chairman

# CONVO VIII

December 5-6, 2018

Atlanta Airport Hilton  
Atlanta, GA

Wednesday, December 5, 2018

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10AM Devotions – Presiding Elder David Rhone, Sixth Episcopal District Grand BCD

10:15AM Opening Plenary – Ronnie E. Brailsford, Presiding Grand BCD

Welcome and Felicitations

Bishop Reginald T. Jackson, Host and CONVO Chairman

Bishop McKinley Young, Senior Bishop

Keynote Address – Rev. Olu Brown, Pastor, Impact U M Church, Atlanta, GA

Respondent – Bishop Adam J. Richardson, Jr.

Directives

12Noon Lunch Chattanooga Promenade

1:30PM Breakout Groups A and B

Group A – Church Growth Grand D

Group B – Budget Grand BC

3:30PM Breakout Groups C and D

Group C – Ministers’ Bill of Rights

Group D – Social Media Grand D

Group E – Church and Millennials Grand BC

5:30PM Dinner

7PM Group A – Church Growth Grand D

Group B – Budget Grand BC

8PM Group C – Ministers’ Bill of Rights

Group D – Social Media

Group E – Church and Millennials

**Thursday, December 6, 2018**

**9AM Devotions Grand BCD**

**9:15AM Bishop Reginald T. Jackson, Presiding  
Reports/Discussion from Groups Grand BCD**

**Group A – Church Growth – 9:30AM – 10AM**

**Break – 10AM – 10:15AM**

**Group B – Budget – 10:15AM – 11AM**

**Group C – Ministers’ Bill of Rights – 11AM – 11:45AM**

**Group D – Social Media – 11:45 – 12:30PM**

**Group E – Church and Millennials – 12:30PM – 1:15PM**

**1:15PM Wrap Up and Closing**

**Breakout Groups**

**Group A – Church Growth**

**Bishop James L. Davis, Moderator**

**Rev. Dr. Ronald Slaughter, Facilitator**

**Ms. Ametta Reeves, Facilitator**

**Group B – Budget**

**Bishop Vashti M. McKenzie, Moderator**

**Bishop Clement W. Fugh, Facilitator (Chair Statistics and Finance)**

**Dr. Richard Allen Lewis, Facilitator (Treasurer, CFO, AME Church)**

**Group C – Ministers’ Bill of Rights**

**Bishop Michael L. Mitchell, Moderator**

**Bishop John F. White, Facilitator**

**Mrs. Valerie Bell, Facilitator (Conn. Lay President)**

**Group D – Social Media**

**Bishop Michael L. Mitchell, Moderator**

**Rev. Samuel Green, Jr., Facilitator**

**Group E – Church and Millennials**

**Bishop E. Anne Henning Byfield, Moderator**

**Rev. Katrese Kirk, Facilitator**

**Ms. Martinique Mix (Conn. RAYC Pres.)**

# Group A

## Church Growth

We are living in a post-denominational period, where mainline denominations are in decline. Over the last quarter century, the United States population has increased by 69 million people. During that same period, the membership of mainline denominations has decreased by more than 17 million people. And today only 1 out of every 33 people in the United States attends a Protestant church on a regular basis. The fact is that our churches are not growing. This is particularly true for the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The membership and attendance in our churches today is about one fourth what it was more than thirty years ago. There are more empty pews than there are people in the pews. Most of our churches during annual conference report no conversions and no accessions. Yet there are more unsaved and unchurched people in the world and nation than there have ever been.

The lack of church growth is a problem all of us see. We see it every Sunday. Yet, it is a problem we as a denomination refuse to address. It is as if we are in denial. Some of us have developed a mindset that this is not our problem, the next generation will have to deal with it. This mindset exists because the average age of our congregations is over 67. Let us be real, there will be no “incredible future” if the African Methodist Episcopal Church membership does not grow.

Within much of Protestantism, specifically African Methodism, there is a demonic mindset which is prevalent and increasing. This mindset is not to grow but “to maintain the church.” There is little or no passion for the saving of souls, or to bring people into a relationship with the Lord, Jesus Christ. The same crowd meets for two to three hours on Sunday, goes through the order of service, and we are finished until next Sunday. We have maintained our habit. There is no mission or ministry, no vision or aspiration. We have become “caretakers.” Problem is, “caretakers” soon become “undertakers.”

There are too many reasons why Protestant churches, specifically the AME Church, is not growing to be detailed here. However, there are a few that must be mentioned:

1. The number one priority of most of our churches is not mission or ministry, but survival. Most of our churches are struggling to survive, to pay the bills, to pay the budget. The church has turned inward, as opposed to outward. Most churches do not minister to the community outside their doors. As a result very few people in the community belong to our churches. If you have something people need, they will come and get it.
2. Church growth, bringing people to Christ, is not only, not our first priority, it may not be a priority at all. If the church is going to grow, the church, beginning with its leadership, must make an intentional and deliberate decision, that the church is going to grow, that we are going to bring the unsaved and the unchurched to Christ. If the church leadership has not made a commitment to grow, the church will not grow. Churches do not grow by accident or coincidence.

3. There is a mindset that bringing people to Christ, or growing the church, is the responsibility of the pastor. In other words, “That’s the pastor’s job.” This mindset is incorrect. It is the pastor’s responsibility to make church growth the priority of the church, to teach and train members how to evangelize and bring people to Christ, and to join the church. Very few pastors are doing this teaching and training.
4. The evidence of this failing is seen in the fact that more than 80% of members in the church have never brought one person to Christ, or to join His church.
5. There is no connectional or strategic plan to grow the church. No plan for the AME Church to embrace.
6. The most important measure of church growth is not numerical but spiritual. If the members already in the church aren’t growing spiritually, the church will not grow numerically. Only two out of every ten members who join the church remain.
7. The average age of a Black person in the United States today is 31. The average age of our congregations is 67. We have very few members in our churches 31 and under.
8. A nationwide survey of millennials who at one time were in the church were asked why they don’t belong or attend church anymore. A majority, 59%, said, “Because the focus is no longer Jesus.”

While the membership of Protestant denominations is declining, the membership of Non-Denominational churches is growing, with people who use to belong to our churches. When Pew Research Center and General Social Survey interviewed and asked Non-Denominational members, many of them Black, why they left Protestant churches a majority of them said, “Because Protestants have abandoned central doctrines and teachings that were considered offensive to present day culture. Beliefs that put the protest in Protestantism have been compromised to appease society. The Protestant Church today isn’t much different from mainstream culture.”

The failure of our churches to grow is having detrimental consequences at every level of African Methodism.

1. Many of our churches are slowly dying. What used to be connectional churches are now no more than reputations.
2. Church expansion is obsolete. We are starting few new churches. Instead, we have an explosion of abandoned properties.
3. Church financial strength is decreasing, as churches are unable to keep up their facilities and maintain operations.

4. Churches struggle to fulfill their Connectional and Episcopal District responsibilities. A church that used to have 200 or 100 members paying these responsibilities now has 75 or 50 paying what the 200 or 100 used to pay.
5. Little or no ministry is taking place. No after school programs, feeding ministries, senior programs, et.... Church priority is survival, not mission or ministry.
6. Churches cannot adequately compensate pastors or staff.
7. The connectional church will only be as strong as the strength of the local church. If local churches are weak, Connection, Episcopal District and Annual Conferences will be weak.

As we prepare for the 2020 General Conference, the African Methodist Episcopal Church must make an intentional and deliberate decision whether Church Growth is going to be our number one priority, or a priority at all. If yes, we should consider legislation to buttress that decision.

#### Possible legislation

1. Legislation shall be passed which will state that the number one priority of the African Methodist Episcopal Church is to persuade people to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, and to lead them to become His Disciples. This shall be communicated by the bishops to the presiding elders, pastors and churches in their Episcopal Districts.
2. The Executive Director of Church Growth and Development shall submit to the Council of Bishops and the General Board a connectional plan for Church Growth at the beginning of each quadrennial. This plan shall include training for clergy and lay, with the approval of the bishop in each annual conference, other forums, publications, and be discussed and approved for implementation. It will not prohibit any District or local church from its own additional plans, based on local demographics and needs.
3. The Executive Director of Christian Education shall prepare a booklet/manual to assist local churches in educating and training new members, and present members to grow in their relationship to Christ, understand the doctrine and beliefs of African Methodism, and their responsibility as Christians.
4. Each Episcopal District shall provide to the General Secretary/CIO annually, at the conclusion of its Annual Conferences, a statistical report on conversions, accessions and active members in each Episcopal District. This report shall be provided to the Council of Bishops, General Board and general church through its publications. This will provide an ongoing report on whether the church is growing.

# Group B

## The Budget

### Connectional Budget

With the exception of the election and assignment of bishops, nothing generates more discussion during the General Conference than action regarding the connectional budget of the AME Church. At almost every General Conference the cry coming into the General Conference is either to hold the budget flat or cut the budget. At the local church level the complaint is that “we can’t do anything in the local church because we are paying too much money to the AME Church.” All of this sounds true but is inaccurate.

The connectional budget of the AME Church has not increased in at least sixteen (16) years. In 2004, 2008 and 2016 the connectional budget remained flat. In 2012 the connectional budget was cut. Keeping the budget flat and cutting the budget was in response to the outcry heard around the connection. As we prepare for the 2020 General Conference the cry is already the same, leave the budget flat or cut the budget. While this sounds prudent and beneficial to local churches, it is doing great harm to the AME Church. While the connectional budget has remained flat or cut, the cost of nothing else during these sixteen (16) years has remained the same or been cut. The budgets the General Conference has approved for the last 16 years are budgets which could be viewed as downsizing or not expecting to grow. As we begin to prepare the budget for the next quadrennial, the question is do we “believe in our incredible future?” The budget we approve will demonstrate whether we do.

A look at the budget of the AME Church reveals that twenty two (22) percent of the connectional budget of the AME Church goes for our colleges, universities and seminaries, forty one (41) percent goes for salaries, and the remainder for operations of the church. As is the case with most of our local churches, our connectional budget provides very, very little funding for ministry. Often members ask why isn’t the church doing something on this or that. The fact is, there is no money in the budget for it. Consciously or sub-consciously we have approved a budget for operations, not for ministry. Our mindset is that we are helping the church if we cut spending or leave it flat. There is no money in the budget for church growth, no money for Christian Education, no money for Research and Scholarship. The money for our educational institutions hasn’t been increased in sixteen (16) years. The cost to our schools has increased each of those sixteen years. No church can cut its way to growth and productivity.

Yet, the cry remains “leave the budget flat,” “cut the budget,” we can’t do anything in our local church, because we are paying too much money to the AME Church.” Let’s look at the facts. Episcopal Districts, Annual Conferences and local churches are paying in 2018 for the connectional budget what they paid in 2004. The budget didn’t increase. The problem is not with the budget, the problem is that most of our local churches aren’t growing. Churches that used to have 200 members, today have 50. So today 50 members are paying what 200 used to pay, or 100 paying what 500 or 600 used to pay. The needs continue to increase, while our churches continue to get smaller. And while we keep the budget flat, or cut the budget, a flat budget or cut budget is not going to grow the church. The greatest period of growth in the life of the Black Church, was when the Black



Church was socially active. For example, the Civil Rights Movement. You couldn't get a seat in a Black Church. With all that is going on in the nation, and around the world today, there is little money in the budget for Social Action. Tragically, no Black denomination has a salaried Social Action Director. There is no money in the budget for a media person. Members ask why doesn't the AME Church say something or do something. The fact is, we do say something, and try to do something, but few people know, because we have no media budget or presence.

## Episcopal District Budget

Like the Connectional Budget, the Episcopal District Budget is to be approved at the beginning of each quadrennial by the Annual Conferences in the Episcopal District. *The AMEC Discipline* 2016, pgs. 268-269, details the process for preparation and approval of the Episcopal District Budget; however, if there is a lack of knowledge or information regarding the Episcopal District Budget, that is a problem which can be resolved by the Episcopal District(s) in question. There is no need for new legislation regarding the Episcopal District Budget, but to enforce the laws that are already in the *Book of Discipline*.

As we prepare for the 2020 General Conference, the African Methodist Episcopal Church must decide if the budget we present and adopt will reflect our belief in "our incredible future," or whether we will again adopt a budget that only funds the employees and operation of the AME Church. If we "believe in our incredible future" we may consider the following as part of the Connectional budget:

Funding for Director and Office of Social Action

Funding for Media and Operations

Programmatic Funding for Church Growth

Programmatic Funding for Christian Education

Fund the above by:

Eliminate spending for items in budget that are not in existence

Eliminate spending for items in budget that are not spent or item does not need funding

# Group C

## Ministers' Bill of Rights

The African Methodist Episcopal Church is the only Methodist denomination which has a “Ministers’ Bill of Rights.” This is because there were some bishops who abused and mistreated pastors in our Zion. To address the problem the General Conference passed the Ministers’ Bill of Rights. To the General Conference’s credit, it addressed a problem that needed to be faced. None of the servants or members of the church should be harmed or mistreated.

While the Ministers’ Bill of Rights is needed, it also needs to be revised. The unintended consequence of the Ministers’ Bill of Rights is that it protects mediocrity, and does harm to our churches. It does not encourage or motivate ministers to be productive. Additionally, it creates delay, or prohibits the bishop from making a pastoral adjustment, when such adjustment needs to be made quickly.

If the African Methodist Episcopal Church is going to achieve “our incredible future,” it must not protect mediocrity in ministry, but instead encourage and reward productivity. To do so there needs to be legislation at the forthcoming General Conference that addresses much needed flaws in this well intentioned and much needed Ministers’ Bill of Rights. Needed legislation may:

1. Clarify “shall be comparable to or better than the previous one”
2. Clarify “that reflects the church’s current standing at the time of his/her departure”
3. Clarify Section 3 on page 141 regarding salary and benefits
4. Address evaluation of pastors

# Group D

## Social Media

Social media has changed the world, including the church. It requires the church to embrace it, if it is going to be effective and relevant. Social media is a threat to some, for some don’t understand it, others don’t know how to use it, and others feel it undermines the ministry and undermines the work of the church. The fact is that social media can be both a blessing and a burden to the church. It primarily depends upon the church’s use or lack of use of social media.

Social media does not change the gospel, but how we communicate the gospel. It does not change the intent of ministry, but how we minister. Social media impacts the church, it’s attendance, administration, giving, communication, participation, every aspect of the life of the church. If we are not aware of the potential and opportunities made available because of social media, it will become a burden, rather than a blessing. Unfortunately, many of us are burdened already. The age of social media has left us behind. So, if we are doing church the way we have been doing church, we need to change it.

Far too many of our churches don't have a website, don't use social media to communicate with the congregation, don't stream our services and other events, aren't on facebook or other online social media, or even email. Again, social media has changed the world and the church. For example, today a member doesn't have to come to church, to have church, to hear the preached Word, or to give. Some churches have more people who stream the service than are in the pews in Sunday morning. Some churches receive as much as forty percent of their income online, rather than in the offering plate or basket on Sunday morning. There are even those who give their life to Christ online rather than in the sanctuary.

Social media is extremely important as it relates to winning and keeping millennials in the church. Many in this age group gain an impression or perception of a church, based on whether the church is on social media, has a website or streams.

If the African Methodist Episcopal Church is going to "believe in our incredible future," we are going to have to embrace and use social media. Social media must become a ministry of the church. However, with the ascent of social media also comes the need for legislation to regulate, protect, and provide standards for the church and its members. We live in a very litigious society, so legislation regarding social media and its use will be necessary.

## **Group E**

### **Church and Millennials**

The average age of our congregations today is 67, while the average age of Blacks in the United States today is 31. There are very few members in our congregations today under the age of 31. There are even less under the age of 18. This is very problematic for the future of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. It speaks to the failure of the church to grow, and the consequences it brings. It also raises several questions, "Why aren't millennials joining the church" and "Why are millennials who use to be in the church, no longer in the church?" The website "FaithIt.com" did a survey last year which revealed that 59% of millennials who used to belong to the church, no longer belong to the church. When asked why, a majority of them responded, "Because Jesus is no longer the focus." Others responded, "Because members don't realize the church has left the building."

Millennials are serious about Jesus, and want to be His disciples, to "follow Him." They look for a church whose focus is on Jesus. This focus is not only on the worship of Jesus, but also mission and ministry. They want the church to move beyond the walls of the church and be involved in the world. They care about poverty and issues of justice. They want the church to be relevant. The perception that they don't give, or have nothing to give, is inaccurate. Millennials give to a cause, to a purpose. In a word, millennials seek to impact the world, not impress the world.

It is also important for millennials that the church, especially in preaching, speak to issues that impact and are important to them. "Is there a word from the Lord," for the living of these days? They want the church to speak to current issues, topics and life.

Millennials also wonder where do they fit in, in the church? They do not want token involvement,

and they don't want to have to wait until people pass to be involved in the life of the church. Not only are most of our members senior citizens, but so is the leadership, whether it be connectional, Episcopal District, Annual Conference or local church. Again, where do they fit in? It is telling that the Christian Education Department is centered around youth and young adults, yet so few of them attend anything related to Christian Education. There are not 100 youth or millennials who attend Christian Education events. Is the structure and purpose of our church organizations functional and relevant? Are we treating young adults and millennials like they are children, when they are legally adults, college graduates, have careers and families?

If the African Methodist Episcopal Church “believes in our incredible future” it must hear and act on the input of young adults and millennials in shaping the “incredible future.” Legislation will be needed to encourage and draw young adults and millennials back and into African Methodism, to ensure that they have a vital role in the life and future of the church. Legislation should be considered to:

1. Define and structure the work of Christian Education at every level of the church.
2. The place of millennials in the local church, as well as the Annual Conference, Episcopal District and Connectional level.

