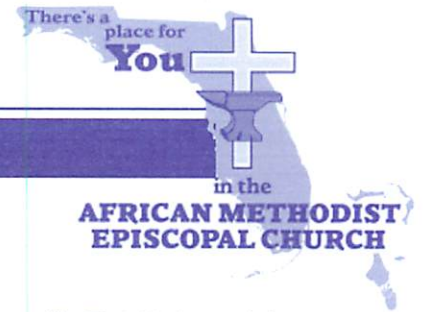


Office of the Bishop

AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH - 11TH EPISCOPAL DISTRICT



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So far, it seems, we have “dodged a bullet” as the saying goes. Only by God’s grace, no one has gotten sick and thankfully no one has died for having attended a worship service or a funeral in one of our churches. We have been blessed. Only Dr. Judson Eneas, faithful member of Cousin-McPhee in Nassau, passed away after caring for one of his patients with coronavirus, according to the press.

Some weeks ago, I asked that for safety and legal considerations, that churches in the 11th Episcopal District **NOT** hold in-person worship services until further notice. However, we indicated that it would be permissible for selected church personnel/volunteers to gather for purposes of live-streaming or broadcasting prerecorded worship services. At the time, we believed that pastors would encourage “safe-distancing” between the people in the choir and/or praise team members. However, this is NOT happening, as I have observed from watching the services online. It’s dangerous!

Last week, I shared a TMZ article about Bishop Gerald O. Glenn who pastored the New Deliverance Evangelistic Church in Virginia. I listened to the bishop’s daughter, Mar-Gerie Crawley, being interviewed by Chris Cuomo on CNN a few nights ago. She and her family, and the whole congregation, are now under quarantine. They couldn’t even make arrangements for a funeral, or go view the body.

In that same posting, I mentioned the heavy price being paid by the Church of God in Christ, especially in the Michigan Jurisdiction. I meant no ill-will. Our own Council of Bishops has lifted the COGIC Family in our Council Conference Calls. Now, the Washington Post and other news outlets have reported the heavy toll among the ranks of COGIC leaders now deceased. We extend our sympathy to the COGIC Family.

DANGER LURKS CLOSER TO HOME. The Rev. Dr. Quan Glover was pastor of the Young Zion Baptist Church in St. Mary’s, Georgia (just over the Florida/Georgia line). He and his family made their home in Jacksonville. On March 29, he preached at his church; fewer than ten people were present. They practiced social distancing. Yet, two days later he became ill with COVID-19. He died on April 17 leaving a grieving wife, children and congregation. I am now asking YOU — Is it worth the risk?

Out of my heartfelt love for you, I am requiring that you no longer meet at the church for in-person worship events. Please find a different way to connect with congregants. Use previously recorded services. Use FaceBook Live from your home or from your office. Use Zoom or Skype or some other social media platform that will give people access to you and the ministry. But for legal and public health considerations meeting in-person is off-limits. Ask the people to contribute through the mail or through the various apps currently in vogue. But until the storm passes over, let’s be safe rather than sorry.

Concerning funerals, Graveside Services should be the norm, for the time being, allowing only ten persons to sit underneath the canopy. Perhaps family-only Memorials can be held in the church (if safe-distancing protocols can be observed — six feet apart). However, even in the cemetery, social-distancing should be strictly observed. If desired, families should consider having a more elaborate memorial service once the pandemic has passed to permit the community to celebrate the life of a loved one and to allow family members to travel from distances considered too far during the crisis. Some may consider this an overreaction and too extreme. Please allow me to remind you that Albany, Georgia is a hotspot because the community

turned out for two funerals served by the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Funeral Chapel. According to the media, Dougherty County officials believe that coronavirus was spread at the funerals.

Someone will ask, "Where's our faith?" Well, take another look at the story of the Passover as recorded in the Book of Exodus. In the moment of crisis, the night of pestilence, there were no Hebrew people wandering around outdoors, testing the limits of their faith. There was nothing to prove by being at the place of assembly in Goshen. Everyone was inside; at home; with family; *sheltering in place*.

Yours in His Service,

A. J. Richardson

Adam J. Richardson

Senior Bishop