

African Methodist Episcopal Church Connectional Lay *Organization*

104 Years Timeline

Highlights of Accomplishments by Laity in and for the AME Church, Developed by Dr. Paulette Coleman
Timeline updated May 2022 by CLO Historiographer William "Bill" Ayers

- 1908** Elected Plummer Austin Richardson, a layman who became North Carolina's first black millionaire, the chief recording secretary of the general conference.
- 1909** Publication by the AME Book Concern of a small eight-page booklet entitled, "Constitution and By-Laws of the Lay Members' Association of the AME Church" which suggests the existence of a developing organization.
- 1912** Merger of the Laymen's Missionary League and the Laymen's Organization into the Laymen's League legislatively established the lay movement of the AME Church. Elected John R. Hawkins, the first layman to become Financial Secretary of the AME (General) Church. Re-elected Plummer Austin Richardson chief recording secretary of the general conference.
- 1916** The new Laymen's League re-organized as the Connectional Lay College Laymen.
- 1928** Secured equal representation of laypeople in the General Conference.
- 1932** Granted the right for laypeople to serve on the Episcopal Committee.
- 1936** Permanently re-established the right of laypeople to serve in equal numbers on the Episcopal Committee.
- 1939** Elected a layman, Professor A.S. Jackson, Financial Secretary, AME Church.
- 1940** Achieved equal representation of the laity in the Annual Conference.
- 1944** Won equal representation of the laity on all departmental boards and commissions of the AME Church. Advocated successfully for the creation of the Pension Department through the power of the increased representation of the laity.
- 1946** Abolished the Lay College and organized the Connectional Laymen's Organization because it was determined that, "An organization that meets only every four years, composed of a constant changing membership could not do a good job of mobilizing the laity for efficient service in the Church...."
- 1948** Secured the right of the laity to organize in the local churches. Enacted legislation that permitted the President of the Connectional Laymen's Organization to be a member of the General Conference by virtue of his or her official position. Integrated the Lay Organization at all levels (local churches, presiding elder districts, Annual conferences, Episcopal Districts, and Connection) into the organic law and structure of the AME Church. Replaced the quadrennial meeting schedule with a biennial meeting schedule.
- 1949** Convened the first biennial lay convention in Chicago, IL.
- 1954** Elected a layman, R.W. Mance, Financial Secretary, AME Church.
- 1968**
- Elected a layman, Dr. A.G. Gaston, Treasurer, AME Church. Advocated successfully for the use of voting machines in elections at the General Conference.
 - The 15th Episcopal District was started in Southern Africa.
- 1969** Approved by the Eleventh Biennial Session that the second Sunday in October is the officially designated Connectional Lay Day to be observed by all AME Churches. Sponsored the "Seminar at Sea" following the Eleventh Biennial Session that included a cruise to Bermuda.
- 1971** Sponsored the first Connectional meeting outside the Continental US in Kingston, Jamaica, Sixteenth Episcopal District.
- 1972** Elected a layman, Dr. Joseph C. McKinney, Treasurer AME Church.
- 1975** Elected Mrs. Leona Hubbard Butler Secretary of the Laymen's Organization, for the first time in over 30 years in keeping with the 1970s thrust toward greater women's rights.
- 1981** Mr. Wilfred Noel Nduna, President of the 15th Episcopal District attended the Connectional Lay Biennial meeting in Birmingham, AL, as a delegate.
- 1983** Convened meeting of those "interested in money and finance at the 18th Biennial Convention that led to the organization of the first connectional economic development program in the AME Church, the Connectional Lay Economic Development Corporation (CLEDC). Approved legislation for submission to the General

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- conference that designated all Episcopal District Presidents and selected officers of the Connectional Lay Organization as members of the General Conference.
- 1984** Elected Dr. Jamye C. Williams, editor of the AME Church Review, the first woman elected a major General Officer.
- 1985** Adopted in the Biennial Convention rules the policy of holding the election of officers on the first business day following the organization of the Connectional Lay Biennial Convention.
- 1987** Convened the first AME Church Connectional Day of Prayer in Philadelphia, PA at the First Episcopal District headquarters.
- 1992** Elected Dr. Paulette Coleman, a laywoman editor of the AME Church Review.
- 1993** Mr. Masala Moloko Phefadu, a President from the 19th Episcopal District was recognized as an Outstanding Lay Person at the Lay Biennial in Cincinnati, OH.
- 1995** Donated \$18,000 to the General Church for debt retirement. Established the J.D. Williams (late CLO President) and Dr. Jamye C. Williams (first female major General Officer) Scholarship Program. Appointed the first young adult as a member of the connectional Lay Organization's Executive Board and provided financial support for travel to the meetings.
- 1996** Elected Mr. Richard A. Lewis, a layman, Treasurer AME Church.
- 1997** Mr. Simon R. Letsoka, a former 19th Episcopal District President was a delegate to the 1997, 1999, 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2009 CLO Biennial Conventions. He was also elected a General Conference Delegate from 1992-2008 (did not attend in 2004.)
- 2000** Initiated Connectional HIV/AIDS Awareness Day as a special emphasis of the Connectional Lay Organization to promote education, awareness, and testing in African and African-American communities about HIV/AIDS and its world-wide devastation.
- 2003** Mr. Weldon A. Schuman from the 15th Episcopal District was elected Second Vice President of the CLO.
- 2005** Inaugurated the Black-Tie Gala, the Connectional Lay Organization's premier fundraiser, in support of the AME colleges and universities with a \$53,000 donation to Morris Brown College.
- 2006** Convened Connectional Lay Empowerment Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa March 2 – 7, 2006.
- 2007**
- Donated \$23,000 in proceeds from the Black-Tie Gala to Shorter College.
 - Mr. Matikane Abendeneo Makiti, a President from the 19th Episcopal District was selected to succeed Mr. Weldon A. Schuman as a CLO 2nd Vice President. Mr. Schuman who died while in office, was the first layperson from the African Continent to be elected to the CLO Executive Board.
- 2009**
- Mr. Makiti was elected Second Vice President of the CLO. He also served as chair of the Time and Place and Strategic Planning Committees.
 - Donated \$38,000 in proceeds from the Black-Tie Gala to Allen University. Renamed the Black-Tie Gala, the Jesse L. Burns, Jr., Black Tie Gala, in honor of its organizer, the late CLO President. Organized India Conference Lay Organization in Chennai, India during mission and evangelization trip led by the Fourth Episcopal District. Changed from Appointment to election of the Young Adult Representative (YAR) of the Connectional Lay Organization. John Thomas, III, became the first elected YAR.
- 2010** Rededicated and renamed the building housing the Financial Department of the AME Church in Washington, DC. The Joseph Columbus McKinney Office Building of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.
- 2011** Mrs. Ferryneias Benjamin (16th District), served as chairperson for the newly established Disaster Relief Committee.
- 2012** Celebrated the CLO centenary with three Connectional events: CLO Steering Committee – Kick-off luncheon (2011) was held at the Lay Biennial Convention in Detroit, MI; a leadership summit and centennial celebration in Lusaka, Zambia; culmination of the centennial celebration with a breakfast at the General Conference in

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Nashville, TN. Planted a time capsule with memorabilia from the Connectional Lay Organization Centennial on the campus of St. Phillip AME Church, Decatur, GA.

~This listing of selected highlights of the accomplishments of the Connectional Lay Organization is by no means comprehensive or exhaustive. It is a work in progress by Dr. Paulette Coleman. The CLO Steering Committee solicits input and further documentation to update these highlights. Special thanks to Toby and David Ward, Frank Gilyard, Pam Tilley, Tyrone Presley, J.L. Williams, Bernetta Ghist, Norman Deas, Leona Butler, David Fielding, William (Bill) Ayers, Madge White, and Dr. Dennis Dickerson for their contributions to these selected highlights of accomplishments of the Connectional Lay Organization.

~Mr. Raymond R. Davis' 1977 publication, A History of the Connectional Laymen's Organization of the African Methodist Episcopal Church was an invaluable information source in compiling this listing of highlights of accomplishments.