

*"The purpose of this organization shall be to organize and train the laity of the African Methodist Episcopal Church so that each layperson may utilize to the maximum the abilities and skills granted by God, in assisting with the improvement and extension of God's kingdom, and creating happiness, peace, and harmony among its members."*

# **"FIRST IN TOUCH"**



## **FIRST EPISCOPAL DISTRICT LAY NEWSLETTER**

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**July 2025**

**Annual Meeting Edition**

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### ***Greetings from the First Episcopal District Lay President***

***Linda C. Gant***



Greetings to the Laity of the First Episcopal District, Grateful! Grateful! I am so thankful to serve as President of the First Episcopal District Lay Organization, and the work is truly divine. I can't thank God enough for this enormous opportunity, and I am excited and feel purposeful as we continue this journey together.

The Mid-Year Convention was held successfully, and recognition is given to Dr. Eyerce Armstrong-Poston, the DOLA, for her diligent work and dedication to the event. Appreciation

is extended to the presenters and panelists: Bro. Kevin Lamb, Bro. Shawn Lee, Rev. Dr. Jacquita Wright-Henderson, Sis. Daysha Smith, Sis. Susan Butler, Bro. Terrill Carney, Sis. Marie Butler, Sis. Aaronica Burrell, and Rev. Alberta Jones. Thanks are also due to Bishop Samuel L. Green, who served as the conversationalist during the workshop and delivered the sermon, titled "But I Never Stopped Praying," at the worship service. Additionally, gratitude is expressed to President Kevin Lamb and the Philadelphia Conference Lay Organization for their excellent hosting of the event.

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## *Greetings from the First Episcopal District*

### *Lay President*

*(continued)*

Our organization continues to grow stronger, and it is because of the dedication and commitment of members like you, and for that, I say “**thank you**.” We are grateful for the lives of those who served alongside us and have been called from labor to reward. Sis. Wanda Duckett, who served as the First Vice President and Sis. Pearline Harris, who served as the past Lay Awareness Chairperson, gave of themselves to ensure the relevance of this organization was recognized, and for that, we also say, **thank you**.

As we move forward, our goal is to use collaboration amongst the laity and clergy, while exploring new opportunities that will elevate us further, building on our legacy.

Our continual prayer is, “*May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us, yes, establish the work of our hands,*” as stated in Psalm 90:17.

Below are highlights of activities this journey has brought me on thus far:

**January** – I attended the Bermuda Conference Lay Organization Annual Meeting and conducted the election and installation of officers. Congratulations to President W. Anthoni Lightbourne and elected officers. I also facilitated a workshop on “*Spiritual Gifts – What God Has Given You and How To Use It.*”

**February** – I attended First Episcopal District Founder’s Day. Held the Mid-Year Convention; Participated in the First Episcopal District Component Meeting; Held a Chat with the Conference Presidents and attended the Connectional Lay Organization Virtual Executive Board.

**March** – Attended Bishop Henry A. Belin’s Luncheon in New York; Attended Rev. Roland McCall’s Memorial Service in Boston, MA; Attended the Bermuda Annual Conference and the Delaware Annual Conference from the pre-

conference services to the closing service. Attended the New England Conference Annual Award Luncheon.

**April** – Attended the New Jersey Annual Conference, the New England Annual Conference, and the New York Annual Conference, from the pre-conference services to the closing services. Worshipped with Mount Zion A.M.E. Church, where Rev. Kahlii James is Pastor. Attended the Connectional Lay Organization’s Virtual Executive Board Meeting, where I made my first report as the President of the First Episcopal District Lay Organization. To God be the glory!

**May** – Attended the Western New York Annual Conference from the pre-conference services to the closing service and conducted the election of officers and the officers’ installation. Congratulations to the newly elected President, Keith Young, and officers. I was the guest speaker for the Jennie Vincent Lay Organization of Bethel A.M.E. Church in Norwalk, Connecticut, where the local President is Sis. Johnnie Mae Weldon. I attended the Memorial Service for Presiding Elder Lanel D. Guyton in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and participated in the New Elizabeth A.M.E. Church’s Lay Organization’s Unsung Hero Recognition Banquet in Delaware City, Delaware, given the distinct honor to introduce the speaker Senator Lisa Blunt Rochester.

Upcoming activities include attending the Philadelphia Annual Conference and the First Episcopal District Planning Meeting in June. We are currently preparing for our Virtual Annual Meeting being held July 25 – 26, 2025.

Let this scripture be our guiding light and inspire us always: “*And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*” Colossians 3:17.

Blessings,

**Linda C. Gant**

Sis. Linda C. Gant - President

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*Greetings from the First Episcopal District  
Lay President*

*(continued)*



L to R: Bermuda Annual Conference PE  
Howard Dill, President Linda Gant, Sis. Lynell  
Furbert



President Gant Greeting 1<sup>st</sup> District  
Lay Org Mid - Year Convention



L to R: Corr. Sec. Keith Arrington, Sis. LaSean Shelton,  
Pres. Gant, DCLO Pres. Sharon Drew, and DOLA Eyerce  
Armstrong-Poston at Delaware Annual Conference New  
Elizabeth Unsung Hero Luncheon



President Gant (Right Front) at First Episcopal  
District Founder's Day Celebration with Lay  
Members from various conferences



President Gant and Bishop Green (Center) with Conference  
Presidents at 1<sup>st</sup> District Lay Mid-Year Convention.



L to R: Bishop Henry Belin III, Sis. Jacqueline Sibblias,  
President Linda Gant, Sis. Mary Mootoo, DCLO President  
Sharon Drew, DOPR Sharon Carmichael.

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*Greetings from the First Episcopal District  
Lay President  
(continued)*



President Gant Presiding over Election of Officers  
At Western New York Annual Conference



President Gant (Center) at Western NY  
Annual Conference with laity from Western NY, New  
England, New Jersey, & Philadelphia Conferences



President Gant with Senator Lisa Blount at Western NY Annual Conference (Rochester)



President Gant with Rev.  
Kevin Taylor at Western  
NY Annual Conference



President Gant, guest speaker at Jennie Lee  
Vincent Lay Organization Annual Day



Center: President Gant with and Pastor Kahili  
James (Top Center) and members of the Mount  
Zion A.M.E. Church Lay Organization



Center: President Gant with the Jennie  
Vincent Lay Organization of Bethel  
A.M.E. Church in Norwalk,  
Connecticut.

## First Episcopal District Lay Mid-Year Meeting Highlights - February 21 - 22, 2025

Submitted by Sister Sharon Carmichael – DOPR

In her first Mid-Year Convention as the new First Episcopal District Lay Organization (FEDLO) President, Sister Linda Gant and the also new Director of Lay Activities (DOLA) Dr. Eyerce Armstrong-Poston, delivered a well-planned, inspirational, motivational meeting. Joined by Philadelphia Conference Lay Organization (PCLO) host President, Kevin D. Lamb (also newly elected), they delivered two power-packed days of workshops and worship, emphasizing the theme “Next Level Laity: Embrace, Encourage, and Empower”. The Convention was held on February 21 – 22, 2025 at the Marriott Delta Airport Hotel, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Beginning the mornings was “First Fitness” exercise for those so inclined to take the challenge with Dr. Cheryl Hammond Hopewell.

Devotion and Bible Study followed with FEDLO Chaplain Catherine Combs-Smith. With a bubbly and energetic style, Sister Combs-Smith conducted the sessions with powerful prayer, combined with songs of inspiration from Brother Earl Knight, FEDLO Director of Music. She engaged attendees in the reading and interactive discussion of the scriptures focused on the



“Embrace, Encourage, and Empower” theme as well as the CLO Theme, “Living a Global

Witness Ministry that Transforms, Transcends and Liberates”.

With a passion for first-time Lay convention



attendees, FEDLO Second Vice President Robin Batson, conducted the First Timers’ Seminar. She gave an in-depth overview of the Connectional Lay Organization, First Episcopal District Lay Organization, and First Episcopal District history, structure, leadership, mission, purpose, objectives, themes, and logos. The First Timers were so engaged with their learning session with Sister Batson, they wanted to continue past the allotted time. Kudos to Sister Batson.

The attendees experienced a reinforced understanding, appreciation, and purpose of the theme through four enlightening workshops that featured several young adults over the two days:

- “Embrace the Vision: General Conference & Beyond”, Moderated by PCLO President Kevin Lamb. The parliamentary procedures utilized by the different bishops presiding over the sessions were examined by Panelists Rev. Dr. Jaquita W. Henderson (Pastor of Mt. Zion AME Church, Darby, PA; Parliamentarian; 2nd Vice President of Women in Ministry), Sister Daysha Smith (Bethel AME Church, Downingtown, PA Local Lay President) and Brother Shawn James Lee (Bethel AME Church, Bryn Mawr, PA Local Lay President; 3rd Vice President of the PCLO; FEDLO Third Vice President).

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## Mid-Year Convention Highlights

(continued)



- “Encourage Laity Participation: We Are the Total Church”, Moderated by Sister Susan Butler (Campbell AME Church, Frankford, PA; First Episcopal District Director of the YPD). Demonstrating the varied music and worship styles across the generations down through the years, Sister Butler highlighted the different characteristics of generations and how we can connect more



effectively. Attendees enjoyed a lively, engaging dialogue among the panelists Brother Terrill Carney (Jones Tabernacle AME Church, Philadelphia, PA Local Lay President), Sister Marie L. Butler (Campbell AME Church, Frankford, PA; Marshal - FEDLO), and Sister Sis. Aaronica Burrell (Philadelphia Conference).

- “Encourage Laity and Clergy To Work Together: A Unified Body”, presenter Reverend Alberta Jones, Pastor of Bethel AME Church, Reading, Pennsylvania,

emphasized inclusion as a major key to empowering laity and leadership for growth and service.

- “Empower Next Level Laity: Where Do We Go From Here?”, presented by Sister Starsha Frierson who is the Philadelphia Conference Young Adult Representative and a member of Grimes AME Church, Phoenixville, PA. Sister Frierson taught us that in order to go to the next level, we need to: be self-aware and accountable, manage personal bias, be



careful of micro-aggression, recognize that each person is of value.

To top off the phenomenal workshops, Bishop Samuel L. Green, Sr., Presiding Prelate of the First Episcopal District joined the attendees for a “Conversation with the Bishop” 60-minute session. Attendees raised various questions regarding components meeting during the bishop’s meetings, including parliamentary procedures during the General Conference, the future of the First Episcopal District Headquarters, being heard as young adults, and being included in Connectional AME Church organizations. Bishop Green was open, candid, and gracious in addressing all questions.

Our souls were spiritually fed in the Friday evening worship as Bishop Green taught the packed Delta Hotel ballroom with the powerful, thought-provoking, soul-searching sermon “But I Never Stopped Praying”, taken from Samuel’s story in Judges 16:27-28. We must not be people of a “seasoned faith”. Regardless of your season, don’t forget about “I will praise God at all times, and His praise shall continually be in my mouth.” Thank you, Bishop, for reminding us to always praise the Lord and never stop praying.



# ***“FIRST IN TOUCH”***





## 2025 Delaware Conference Lay Organization (DCLO) Annual Lay Witness Night

*Submitted by Sharon Drew, President*

It was March 13, 2025 at Mt. Zion AME Church, the Seat of the 102<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference, at 7:00 p.m. in Dover, Delaware, members, and friends of the First Episcopal District Lay Organization gathered to enjoy the fellowship and spirit filled worship for the evening.

The service was led by Sister Jolisa Baker, the Young Adult from Bethel AME Church in Wilmington, DE. She did a wonderful job. Other members of the Delaware Conference Lay rounded out the program with their participation.

Sister Sandra Griffin of Emmanuel AME Hartly, DE offered the Invocation. The Old and New Testament scriptures were read by Brother William Majett of Bethel AME, Wilmington and Sister Karen Lewis of Antioch, Frankford.

The Bethel Smyrna Praise Team ushered in the presence of the Lord with their moving and uplifting musical selections, beginning with “Praise and Worship.”

The highpoint of the evening was a very spirited message preached by Rev. Dr. Ronniere Robinson, who is the Senior Pastor of Bethel AME Church in Smyrna, Delaware. He took his message from 2 Timothy 1:6, entitled “I Still Believe.” A few highlights were:

- He reminded us that we are all made for a purpose.
- A purpose gives us something to believe in.
- Believe in what you are doing.
- We are the Light of the World, and we must tell the world our good news about God.

- We must believe in our Doctrine and Discipline, but must also believe in Salvation.
- Good will always reign over Evil.
- We must believe, because God is Real.

The sermon ended with the singing of “Yes, God is Real” by the entire congregation. We had an audience that far exceeded any Lay Night Service in the past.

Keep Delaware in your prayers, as we are continuing to thrive.



Guest Preacher, Reverend Dr. Ronniere Robinson



## **New Jersey Conference Lay Organization (NJCLO) Annual Lay Witness Night**

**Submitted by Sister Francine Davis**

The New Jersey Annual Conference Lay Witness Night was held at the Double Tree Hotel in Cherry Hill, New Jersey on April 3, 2025, at 7:pm.

The worship service began with uplifting music by the Worship Praise Team under the direction of Brother Kyle Smith. Their opening song, “I Just Want to Praise You”, helped engaged the congregation in connecting with the Holy Spirit singing joyfully.



The preacher for the evening was Reverend Justin B. Anderson, who is an ordained Itinerant Elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and a native of Saint Louis, Missouri.

He has earned an Associates of Applied Science in Biblical

Studies and a Bachelor of Science of Bible and Christian Ministry from Saint Louis Christian College. In addition, He has completed both a Bachelor of Pastoral Theology & Care and a Bachelor of Religious Studies in Christian Education from the Historic Western Baptist Bible College. In addition, he has received a Master of Theology from The Anchor Theological Seminary, graduating ***Summa Cum Laude***, and a Certificate of Ministry Studies from Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

Reverend Anderson is currently a mortuary science student at SUNY Canton and is completing a Bachelor of Technology in Funeral Service Administration. He enjoys serving families and caring for loved ones entrusted to him as a student embalmer.

Presently Reverend Anderson is serving as the Senior Pastor at the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Woodbury, New Jersey and Bethel A.M.E. Church of Paulsboro, NJ.

The Theme of his sermon was taken from Matthew 9:36-39, “Pray Ye to the Lord of the Harvest”.

As the Holy Spirit moved upon Reverend Anderson, we were able to see his fervent preaching style and his precise treatment of the biblical text by highlighting the Matthew 9:38 passage.

In his sermon he conveys a message, why it is important to pray to the Lord of the harvest. It is because God wants our priorities to align with his purpose.

Reverend Anderson’s word touched and left the conference rejoicing and praising God.

Along with the New Jersey Conference clergy and delegates, out of town Lay Organization guests from Delaware, New York, New England and Philadelphia Conferences supported The New Jersey Lay.



## **New York Conference Lay Organization (NYCLO) Luncheon**

**Submitted by D'Yonce Williamson, New York Conference Lay Organization  
Dr. Alicia Collins-Dennis, President**

**Because You Served Well!**

**1 Thessalonians 5:12–13 (NIV) states:**

***“Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.”***

On March 15, 2025, four hundred and forty-three faithful witnesses gathered to celebrate the good and hard work that has been, and continues to be, carried out by both the clergy and laity of the New York Annual Conference. The fourteen honorees embodied the Word of God in action, proving that meaningful work can be accomplished at any stage of life, from your twenties to posthumously, as long as it is aligned with His will and plan for our lives.

We believe in honoring those who inspire and encourage us to keep moving forward in the Kingdom of God and within our church. In recognition of their ongoing contributions, we came together for a luncheon at Maestro's in the Bronx, a place near and dear to the hearts of our conference, filled with memories for many of us. It felt only right to uplift the members of our Zion in such a heartfelt and familiar setting and our vivacious Mistress of Ceremonies, the Rev. Alicia Bailey, helped us to accomplish this goal.

This was our first luncheon since 2020, and it provided a meaningful opportunity to remember and recognize those we have lost. Though they are no longer with us, the impact of their labor

still echoes throughout our church, reminding us that faithful work never dies — it multiplies.

The three Presiding Elder Districts of the New York Annual Conference: Brooklyn-Westchester, Jamaica-Long Island, and Manhattan joined together to support the NY Conference Lay Organization in recognizing members from their districts for their outstanding service to their local churches and ministries. We are truly grateful for the continued support of each district's leadership and look forward to making greater strides in unity as one conference.

This year's honorees demonstrate that ministry doesn't only happen in the pulpit. From organizing community drives to leading prayer groups, their faithfulness shows that God uses every gift for His glory. They have reminded us that we can worship God through serving His people, whether as a church treasurer, a Sunday School teacher, or a faithful volunteer behind the scenes.

We had the privilege of honoring Sister Pearline Harris, a devoted servant of St. John AME Church in Harlem, who was called home to the Lord on December 23, 2024, just a few months before the luncheon. We are deeply moved by her unwavering commitment to this organization

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## NYCLO Luncheon

(continued)

The following individuals were honored for their dedication and outstanding service:

*Esther Delaney - Calvary Fellowship AME Brooklyn*

and are truly blessed to have witnessed God's will so beautifully unfold in her life.

*Mary Whitis - St. John AME Brooklyn*

*Patricia Thornhill - Greater Allen AME Cathedral*

*Kimberly Myers - St. Luke AME Harlem*

*Pearline Harris - St. John A.M.E. Harlem*

*Nia Hodnett - Bethel AME Copiague*

*Margaret Esco - St. Mark's Jackson Heights.*

*Phillip Russell - Bethel AME Babylon*

*Betty Sherrill - Bridge Street AME Brooklyn*

*Lisa McClain - St. Paul AME Brooklyn*

*Rev Leon Bradley - Allen Memorial Brooklyn*

*Daisy Lewis - Macedonia AME*

*Jesse Thatcher - Allen Temple AME Mt. Vernon*

*Genitha Brown - Mt. Zion AME NYC*

As we look ahead, the New York Conference Lay Organization- under the leadership of our conference president, Dr. Alicia Collins-Dennis- remains committed to equipping and encouraging members to serve boldly. Whether through mentorship, ministry leadership, or community outreach, we believe our future is bright because it is rooted in faith and built on the shoulders of those who have served well.

We want to thank the Director of Lay Activities, Sis. Idamae Campbell and her committee for putting on this magnificent event. To all who have served, thank you. Your legacy lives on in every heart you've touched and, in every hand, now lifted to carry the work forward. Because you served well, we are better. And because you served well, we will continue to see



L to R: Sis. Bonita O' Neal, honoree Sis. Mary Whitis and her sister Sylvia at Maestro's



Calvary Fellowship AME Church in Brooklyn celebrating their honoree, Sis. Esther Delaney



L to R: Sis. Francina Simmons and the late Sis. Pearline Harris selling Lay Pins and Masks



# "FIRST IN TOUCH"



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## *First Episcopal District Lay Organization*

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