



**RESOLUTION AND PROTOCOL
FOR THE VOLUNTARY MERGER OF LOCAL CONGREGATIONS
AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

RESOLUTION FOR THE VOLUNTARY MERGER OF LOCAL CONGREGATIONS

WHEREAS, The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church provides for the **Voluntary Merging of Small Congregations** under episcopal leadership in order to strengthen ministry, stewardship, witness, and sustainability (Discipline, Section II, pp. 192–195); and

WHEREAS, demographic shifts, declining memberships, financial constraints, and overlapping geographic proximity may render continued independent operation of certain congregations imprudent or unsustainable; and

WHEREAS, it is the responsibility of Episcopal leadership, in consultation with Presiding Elders and local church leadership, to act in the best interest of the Church, its members, and its mission; and

WHEREAS, voluntary mergers provide an opportunity for renewal, shared resources, expanded ministry capacity, and faithful stewardship of people, property, and legacy;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Episcopal District hereby adopts the following **Protocol for the Voluntary Merger of Local Congregations**, to be followed when two or more congregations are identified for merger consideration; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this protocol shall govern the process from initial discernment through final merger, including worship integration, governance alignment, property disposition, pastoral assignment, fiscal realignment, and ritual closure; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that all mergers undertaken pursuant to this Resolution shall remain subject to episcopal authority, Annual Conference approval where required, and full compliance with civil law and denominational polity.

PROTOCOL FOR THE VOLUNTARY MERGER OF LOCAL CONGREGATIONS

I. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

1. Identification of Congregations

Episcopal leadership shall identify congregations that:

- Are in close geographic proximity; and
- Have memberships ranging from **one (1)** to **fifty (50)** persons.

2. Initial Leadership Consultation

A joint meeting shall be convened by Episcopal leadership and shall include:

- The designated Presiding Elder(s);

- Pastors of the affected congregations;
- Stewards and Trustees of each congregation.

The purpose of this meeting is to:

- Present the rationale for merger consideration;
- Outline the required process and timelines; and
- Answer questions related to governance, property, pastoral care, and future ministry.

II. CHURCH CONFERENCE AT EACH MERGING CHURCH

Timeline: Three (3) Months

1. If preliminary leadership discussions indicate consensus, each Pastor shall call a **Church Conference** of their respective congregation.
2. The merger proposal shall be presented in full, including:
 - Rationale and benefits of merging;
 - Anticipated timeline;
 - Assurances regarding leadership roles, property, and legacy.
3. A record of the Church Conference action shall be entered into the official minutes and reported through the appropriate Quarterly Conference process.

III. RESEARCH ON PROPERTY ISSUES

Timeline: Six (6) Months

1. Joint Committees Established

Committees shall be formed consisting of members from each congregation to research and report on:

- Physical condition of each property;
- Capacity for growth, renovation, and expansion;
- Historic, cultural, and community significance of each structure.

2. Professional Evaluation

The committee shall identify and engage appropriate professionals (e.g., contractors, architects, inspectors) to assess which structure:

- Has the best long-term potential for ministry; or
- Should be sold in the best interest of the merged congregation.

3. Cemetery Considerations

Special consideration must be given to cemetery properties, including:

- Legal ownership and maintenance responsibilities;
- Ongoing care obligations to families and descendants;
- Long-term management plans if the worshiping congregation relocates or dissolves.

The merging congregations must clearly determine how all cemeteries will be preserved, maintained, and administered in perpetuity.

IV. JOINT WORSHIP SERVICES

Timeline: Twelve (12) Months

1. The congregations shall worship together regularly for the duration of the next Conference Year.
2. Facilities shall be exchanged **at least twice per month**, allowing members to:
 - Experience shared worship;
 - Build relational trust;
 - Discern the spiritual and practical benefits of unification.
3. The goal of joint worship is mutual acclimation and spiritual discernment, not merely logistical convenience.

V. FUTURE ASSIGNMENTS FOR PASTORS

1. Episcopal leadership, in consultation with the Presiding Elder, shall ensure that:
 - Pastors of merging congregations are treated with fairness, dignity, and pastoral sensitivity; and
 - Each pastor receives a future assignment within the upcoming Conference Year, as deemed appropriate under episcopal authority.

VI. ISSUES TO BE RESOLVED BY MERGING CONGREGATIONS

A. Combining Boards

Timeline: Twelve (12) Months

1. Boards and organizations (Trustees, Stewards, Stewardesses, etc.) shall merge in accordance with numerical requirements set forth in The Discipline.
2. No officer shall lose his or her position during the transition period.
3. After one (1) year as a combined congregation, the Pastor may make adjustments consistent with The Discipline as the church grows and stabilizes.

B. Location and Structure

1. At the conclusion of the joint worship year, the combined congregation shall decide:
 - Which existing structure shall serve as the permanent location; or
 - Whether the sale of one or both properties best serves the mission; or
 - Whether relocation to a new, neutral site is advisable.
2. All property actions shall follow denominational trust provisions, Annual Conference authorization, and applicable civil law.

C. Name of the New Congregation

1. To honor legacy and generational continuity, congregations may:
 - o Combine existing names (e.g., *Smith Chapel–Bearden Temple AME Church*); or
 - o Select an entirely new name to symbolize a fresh beginning.
2. Final naming authority rests with the merged congregation, subject to episcopal approval and the vote of the annual conference.

D. Training of Officers

1. Prior to finalizing the merger, training sessions shall be conducted to prepare officers to function as a **station church**, including:
 - o Governance;
 - o Financial administration;
 - o Reporting requirements;
 - o Operational best practices.

E. Redistribution of Fiscal Encumbrances

1. The Annual Conference shall redistribute the fiscal encumbrances of the merged congregations in a manner that:
 - o Is equitable;
 - o Protects the viability of the new congregation; and
 - o Reflects responsible stewardship.

VII. RITUAL FOR THE MERGER

1. Prior to the final merger, the congregations may participate in a **ritual of closure and union**, which may include:
 - o Liturgical acknowledgment of shared history;
 - o Prayer and thanksgiving for faithful witness;
 - o Symbolic acts marking the transition into new life together.

EFFECTIVE DATE

This Resolution and Protocol shall take effect immediately upon adoption and shall govern all voluntary mergers undertaken within the jurisdiction unless otherwise directed by episcopal authority or amended by the Annual Conference.

**RESOLUTION REQUESTING APPROVAL
FOR THE VOLUNTARY MERGER OF TWO LOCAL CONGREGATIONS
AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

WHEREAS, _____ African Methodist Episcopal Church, located in _____, and _____ African Methodist Episcopal Church, located in _____, are duly organized local congregations of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, operating under the authority of the _____ Annual Conference; and

WHEREAS, The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (2021), Section II, provides a process for the **Voluntary Merging of Small Congregations** under episcopal leadership (pp. 192–195); and

WHEREAS, both congregations have prayerfully discerned their present and future viability, considering factors including but not limited to membership size, financial sustainability, proximity, facilities, and capacity for effective ministry; and

WHEREAS, Episcopal leadership, in consultation with the Presiding Elder, Pastors, Stewards, and Trustees of both congregations, has engaged in preliminary discussions regarding the benefits and feasibility of merging; and

WHEREAS, each congregation has duly called and held a **Church Conference**, at which the proposal to merge was presented, discussed, and approved by the members in accordance with the Discipline; and

WHEREAS, the congregations desire to merge in order to strengthen their collective witness, stewardship, ministry effectiveness, and long-term sustainability, while honoring their respective histories, legacies, and obligations; and

WHEREAS, the congregations acknowledge that the merger process includes shared worship, governance alignment, property evaluation (including any cemetery obligations), officer training, fiscal realignment, and final episcopal and Annual Conference approval;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that _____ African Methodist Episcopal Church and _____ African Methodist Episcopal Church hereby jointly request that the _____ Annual Conference approve their **Voluntary Merger** in accordance with The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the congregations commit to fully participating in the merger protocol as prescribed by the Discipline and as directed by Episcopal leadership, including but not limited to:

- Joint worship services for the prescribed period;
- Cooperative research and recommendations concerning property and facilities;
- Clear determination and preservation of any cemetery responsibilities;
- The orderly merging of boards, officers, and organizations; and

- Compliance with all denominational and civil legal requirements; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the congregations affirm their willingness to accept episcopal direction regarding pastoral assignments, governance structure, fiscal encumbrances, property disposition, and the naming of the merged congregation; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that upon approval by the Annual Conference, the congregations shall proceed toward full unification within the timeline established by Episcopal leadership, culminating in the formal recognition of the merged congregation as a single African Methodist Episcopal Church.

ADOPTION AND CERTIFICATION

Adopted by the Church Conference of:

African Methodist Episcopal Church

Date of Church Conference: _____

Pastor: _____

Signature: _____

Church Conference Secretary: _____

Signature: _____

Adopted by the Church Conference of:

African Methodist Episcopal Church

Date of Church Conference: _____

Pastor: _____

Signature: _____

Church Conference Secretary: _____

Signature: _____

QUARTERLY CONFERENCE CERTIFICATION

Received and certified by the Quarterly Conference of the above-named congregations on:

Date: _____

Presiding Elder: _____

Signature: _____

Quarterly Conference Secretary: _____

Signature: _____