



### **POLICY ON THE NAMING OR RENAMING OF LOCAL CONGREGATIONS** **African Methodist Episcopal Church**

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#### **I. AUTHORITY AND GOVERNANCE**

The authority to name a new congregation or to approve any change to the name of an existing congregation within the African Methodist Episcopal Church rests solely with the **Annual Conference**, under episcopal leadership. This authority is connectional in nature and shall not be assumed, delegated, or exercised by a local congregation, board, committee, or individual apart from Annual Conference action.

Accordingly, no local congregation shall unilaterally adopt, alter, or begin using a new name—formally or informally—prior to receiving official approval from the Annual Conference.

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#### **II. PROHIBITION ON PREMATURE LEGAL OR ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION**

Under no circumstances shall any of the following actions take place **before** Annual Conference approval of a congregation's name or name change:

- Filing or amending documents with the Secretary of State or any civil authority
- Updating bank accounts, financial instruments, tax records, insurance policies, deeds, titles, or contracts
- Changing signage, letterhead, publications, digital platforms, websites, or public representations
- Executing legal documents, agreements, or financial transactions under an unapproved name

Any action taken in advance of Annual Conference approval shall be considered unauthorized and subject to correction and possible disciplinary review.

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#### **III. THEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL, AND CONNECTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The name of a congregation is not merely administrative; it is theological, historical, and testimonial in nature. Congregational names are tied to:

- The witness of the founders and early laborers in the vineyard
- Historical documents, deeds, and ecclesiastical records
- The spiritual legacy and communal memory of the church and surrounding community

For these reasons, names shall not be changed lightly. A request for a name or name change must demonstrate careful discernment, respect for those who labored before, and an understanding of the broader implications for the connection.

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## IV. PROHIBITED AND RESTRICTED NAMING PRACTICES

To preserve theological integrity, historical accuracy, and connectional unity, the following naming practices are expressly prohibited or restricted:

### A. Prohibited Modifiers

Under no circumstances shall the following terms be added to a congregation's name merely to appease sentiment, membership preference, perception, or branding considerations:

- Greater
- First
- Second
- Historic
- New

### B. Use of "Historic"

A congregation shall not be deemed *historic* solely because of age, longevity, or the presence of an older building. The designation *historic* must be clearly tied to:

- A verifiable and significant historical moment in the life of the congregation, and/or
- A documented contribution of substantial historical importance to the broader community, denomination, or movement

### C. Use of "Greater"

The term *Greater* shall not be used merely because a congregation has grown numerically, financially, or programmatically. By its very nature, the term implies comparison and superiority and may be interpreted as diminishing the faithful labor of those who came before. Its use must be supported by a substantial and transformative change in the congregation's mission, scope, or impact.

### D. Use of "New"

The term *New* shall not be used solely because a congregation has:

- Constructed or moved into a new building
- Relocated to a different site
- Undergone cosmetic renovation, expansion, or modernization

A change in physical structure does not constitute the creation of a new congregation. Absent a demonstrable reconstitution of ecclesial identity, the use of *New* is prohibited, as it implies discontinuity with the congregation's legacy and the work of those who labored faithfully in prior generations.

## V. REQUIRED INTERNAL PROCESS FOR NAMING OR RENAMING A CONGREGATION

Any proposal to name or rename a congregation must follow the established connectional process outlined below. Requests that bypass or alter this order shall not be considered by the Annual Conference.

1. **Steward Board Review**

The process shall begin with formal consideration by the Steward Board, which shall review the theological, historical, financial, and pastoral implications of the proposed name.

2. **Official Board Action**

Upon favorable recommendation of the Steward Board, the proposal shall be presented to the Official Board for discussion and vote. Official Board minutes must reflect the action taken.

3. **Church Conference Approval**

Following Official Board approval, the Pastor shall call a duly announced Church Conference, at which the congregation shall prayerfully consider and vote on the proposed name or name change.

4. **Quarterly Conference Recommendation**

If approved by the Church Conference, the request shall be submitted to the Quarterly Conference for review, recommendation, and official action. Quarterly Conference minutes must clearly record the recommendation.

5. **Presentation to the Annual Conference**

Only after completion of the above steps may the request be formally presented to the Annual Conference for final consideration and approval.

Completion of these steps does not guarantee approval. The Annual Conference retains full authority to approve, deny, defer, or request further study.

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## VI. REQUIRED JUSTIFICATION FOR NAME CHANGES

Any request to name or rename a congregation must include more than a preference or desire. A complete request shall provide:

- A clear theological, historical, missional, or organizational rationale
- An explanation of why the existing name no longer faithfully reflects the congregation's identity or calling
- Evidence of prayerful discernment and congregational consultation
- Assurance that the request honors the legacy of prior generations

Requests lacking significant justification may be denied or returned without action.

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## VII. FINAL APPROVAL AND RECORDING

No congregational name shall be considered official unless and until it has been:

- Approved by vote of the Annual Conference
- Properly recorded in the Conference Journal

Only after such approval may legal, financial, administrative, or public records be updated to reflect the new name.

**ANNUAL CONFERENCE REQUEST FORM**  
**NAMING OR RENAMING OF A LOCAL CONGREGATION**  
**African Methodist Episcopal Church**

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**SECTION I: IDENTIFYING INFORMATION**

Current Legal Name of Congregation:

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Physical Address:

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City / State / ZIP:

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Presiding Elder District:

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Annual Conference:

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Pastor:

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**SECTION II: PROPOSED NAME**

Proposed Name of Congregation:

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☐ New Congregation Name

☐ Change to Existing Congregation Name

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**SECTION III: REQUIRED JUSTIFICATION**

(Attach additional pages as necessary)

Provide a clear and substantive justification for the proposed name or name change. The justification must address theological, historical, missional, or organizational considerations.

Justification Narrative:

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#### SECTION IV: PROCESS CERTIFICATION

By initialing below, the undersigned certify that the required process has been followed in the order prescribed.

Steward Board Review Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Initial: \_\_\_\_\_  
Official Board Approval Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Initial: \_\_\_\_\_  
Church Conference Vote Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Initial: \_\_\_\_\_  
Quarterly Conference Recommendation Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Initial: \_\_\_\_\_

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#### SECTION V: AFFIRMATIONS

By submitting this request, we affirm that:

- The authority to name or rename a congregation rests solely with the Annual Conference.
- No legal, financial, administrative, or public changes have been made or will be made prior to approval.
- The proposed name does not improperly employ prohibited modifiers absent substantial justification.
- This request honors the legacy, witness, and labor of those who preceded us.

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#### SECTION VI: REQUIRED SIGNATURES

Pastor  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Chair, Steward Board  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Chair, Trustee Board

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Presiding Elder

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## SECTION VII: ANNUAL CONFERENCE ACTION

(For Conference Use Only)

- ☐ Approved  
☐ Denied  
☐ Deferred

Date of Annual Conference Action: \_\_\_\_\_

Recorded in Conference Journal: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Authorized Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Title: \_\_\_\_\_

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## NOTICE

No legal, financial, administrative, or public action may be taken to implement a congregational name until approval is granted by the Annual Conference and properly recorded.