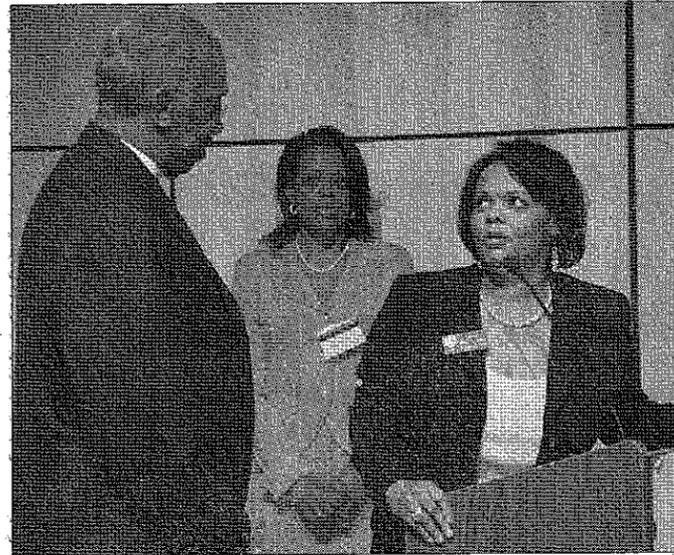


Faith in Action

Thousands gather for AME 191st Annual Baltimore Convention



Photos by John Moore

Sen. Verna Jones makes a statement on behalf of the Legislative Black Caucus to Bishop Adam J. Richardson, presiding prelate of the Second Episcopal District of the AME Church. Bethel member and city comptroller, Joan Pratt, is in the background.

By Beverly Richards
Special to the AFRO

More than 10,000 people from across the state and the nation assembled at Bethel AME Church for the 191st Annual Baltimore Convention. The 2007 meeting was a considerable milestone for the 2nd District. The first general conference was held here in 1816.

"The AME Annual Conference system started at Bethel by founder Richard Allen," said Dr. Frank M. Reid

III, pastor of Bethel. "He did that because Baltimore was one of the strongest cities for Black people in the 19th century. And 191 years later, we are still going strong with churches like the Empowerment Temple, and with the election of the first woman bishop almost 12 years ago, Bishop Vashti McKenzie," he said.

The six-day gathering convened in Baltimore City from March 25-31. AME leaders and church members assembled to



Del. Jon Sarbanes presents the Governor's Citation to Bishop Richardson and his wife, Episcopal Supervisor Connie S. Richardson.

worship as a collective body and discussed the state of the church, the communities they serve and issues affecting the world. During the week, AME leaders addressed various social issues from local and state politics to the genocide in Darfur. They also examined the AME policy on sexual misconduct and their process for discipline.

"Much of what we are doing is related to housekeeping concerns for the denomination," said Presiding Bishop Adam J. Richardson Jr.

"This is an exciting time because it says to us that

African-American Methodism isn't just a museum, but it's a movement. After all of these years, we're still relevant, we're still practical. We're still meeting needs. Under the leadership of Bishop Richardson, Dr. Frank Reid, we're seeing a church that's still active and not passive," said the Rev. Dr. Jamal H. Bryant, pastor of Empowerment Temple.

This Annual Conference, explained Bethel First Lady Marlaa Reid, is a precursor to the quadrennial. Every four years 18 districts converge in one place and they deal with



The Rev. Dr. Frank Madison Reid III and First Lady Marlaa Reid, of Bethel AME Church served as hosts for the opening reception at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum.

the business of the church. "This conference is a preliminary meeting to make sure the Baltimore Annual Conference, the 2nd Episcopal District, handles their business," she said.

"This is our year to hold elections for our General Conference. We have a mandate to reduce our delegation by 35 percent. Additionally, this will be the first time we will have elections by electronic means. So we're trying something new. Hopefully it will save us a little bit of time," said Richardson.

The Conference opened with a reception to honor sponsors at the historical Reginald Lewis Museum. Attendees were treated to various and sundry culi-

nary delights, song performed in sign, a song by the young daughter of vocalist and recording artist Maurette Brown Clark, and an opportunity to fellowship.

"The Annual Baltimore Conference is great for the city. It gives our visitors an opportunity to visit. It's great for revenue. There are people staying in hotels and visiting restaurants and other attractions we have," said Joan Pratt, comptroller and Bethel AME member.

Keynote speakers included Dr. Reid, Dr. Dennis Proctor, Dr. Jamal Bryant, Dr. Clement Fugh and the Rev. Cynthia Laurie.