

African American Congregations

in the West Virginia Conference

Asbury United Methodist Church, Moorefield, Potomac Highlands District



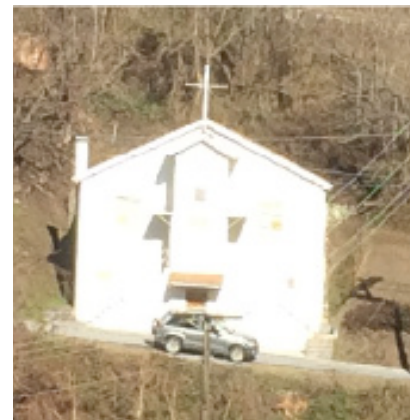
Asbury United Methodist Church in Moorefield, WV originated as Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church in the 1870s. In November of 1887, the first building was situated on land that the trustees purchased. The congregation experienced spiritual growth through class meetings, prayer meetings and revivals. The trustees and members of Asbury worked with various ministers for the spiritual growth of the community despite being in a very old building. In October of 1921, Asbury's leaders pledged to build a new place of worship on the same site. The old building was torn down and services were held in the Community Hall until the present building was partially completed. The new church building was made possible by a lot of hard work, unselfish giving by Asbury members and

large donations from other community members. The current building was dedicated in 1926. Nearly 50 years later, Asbury became a member of the West Virginia Conference, Romney District and Moorefield Charge. Asbury United Methodist Church has celebrated God's grace through worship, special programs, inspirational services known as the Four Nights for God, community involvement, special concerts of sacred music, mission work in Jamaica, Sunday School, youth groups, an active unit of United Methodist Women, and joint Bible Schools, baptisms, professions of faith, congregational reaffirmations of faith, prayer blanket ministry, assisting the local food pantry, supporting Burlington Children's Home in various ways, donate supplies to schools, and assisting terminally ill people. Asbury has learned to embrace change and the promises of God.

Court Street United Methodist Church, Welch, Southern District

Early in the 20th century, a small group of people gathered to organize the Methodist Episcopal Church (now known as The Court Street United Methodist Church) in Welch, McDowell County, West Virginia. For a few years, the small congregation shared a place of worship with the Baptist congregation in the community, alternating Sundays for worship services. On May 26, 1911, a deed was made and signed between the Welch Land Improvement Company and the trustees of the Church for a parcel of land on which to erect a church building. This lot, situated high on the hillside above Court Street, was purchased for the sum of thirty dollars (\$30.00).

In 1914, the congregation moved into the new church home in the steep terrain in the heart of McDowell County. Other families were added to the church membership roster. In a few years, more families joined the congregation with each person making valuable contributions of time and service to support the growing church and Sunday School.



The congregation at Court Street United Methodist Church has experienced and celebrated God's love, mercy and grace in many ways. By grace, Court Street UMC has enjoyed the leadership of many gifted pastors who faithfully attended to the spiritual disposition of church members and friends in the surrounding communities. Court Street UMC also witnessed grace in action with lay leadership gains in the Methodist Men, the Women's Society of Christian Service (WSCS) and youth groups. These lay leaders won outstanding awards for participating in the local church and in conference activities while in the East Tennessee Conference.

Janes United Methodist Church, Keyser, Potomac Highlands District

Janes United Methodist Church, Keyser, West Virginia, had its beginning in 1873 in a structure known as the hospital building, on the bank of the Potomac River where the Patchett Woolen Mill once stood. It was accessible by a narrow path which led from Main Street. Planning for Janes Memorial Church began in 1874. Meetings were held in various homes until, through unwavering faith and untiring labors, dedicated leaders completed the building. Located on the corner of Church and Piedmont Streets, the house of worship was erected on property acquired by Trustees on October 10, 1875 and named in honor of Bishop Edmund Storer Janes (1807-1876).



The congregation grew rapidly in the early years, reaching a glorious spiritual and moral climax in 1908.

In 1923, the building needed repairs and refurbishing. The congregation raised \$1500 for the renovation project. New floors were laid, new plastering was done, and beautiful new stained glass windows were installed. Various donors' and honorees' names are still visible on the windows. Note that one window was contributed by the pupils of Lincoln Elementary School during an era of non-integrated education in Keyser. The windows still grace the edifice. The completion of this project made Janes one of the most beautiful small churches in the Conference. Janes Church celebrated the Centennial Anniversary during the week of May 30 through June 5, 1976 with special music. In addition, members have shared days filled with worship services, and church-related events, surrounded by loving pastors, extended family and friends. The ministries at Janes Church brought drama productions, choirs, a Ladies Aide Committee, tent revivals, and a multitude of other activities to the congregation and the local community.

Unity in purpose and ministry established a sense of belonging to something beautiful and powerful in the lives of choir members. At Janes, gifts can be expressed and offered back to God in praise and thanksgiving. The unity of the congregation is enriched through the diversity, as all who enter are embraced with acceptance, love, and as family with open hearts and arms. A diverse congregation, Janes UMC embraces all who wish to worship!

Janes has a small group of young children who regularly attend. Janes offers spiritual formation to its young children's group and strongly believe "We offer them Hope!" The Janes congregation is committed to offering love, encouragement, and guidance to the young children in the congregation, as well as the young adults who attend. With a renewed vision to teach the children to have a strong faith in God through Jesus Christ and to have faith in themselves, the congregation is prepared to embrace each other and the community, in love and hope. Without that commitment to a renewed vision, the children might not have a church in which to worship in the future. At Janes Church, the disciple-making vision remains strong. The Holy task ahead is to continue being a vital congregation and a beacon of hope to the African American community in the Keyser, WV area. Steadfast and unwavering faith received through worship services, prayer, and Bible reading, as well as personal Christian growth, has brought this congregation a long way. Since its inception in 1873, Janes United Methodist Church has played a vital role in the community by sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed; by caring for the needy; and by making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

We Remember and give thanks for the ministry and witness of these churches that have closed



Ebenezer United Methodist Church
Huntington



St James UMC
White Sulphur Springs



Warren United Methodist Church
Grafton

John Stewart United Methodist Church, Bluefield, Southern District



John Stewart United Methodist Church was organized in 1888 as The Bluefield Church with 12 members; the same year the territory of Virginia, now the East Tennessee Conference became a part of the Washington Conference. By 1897 the membership had grown to 97. The church met in several different locations in the downtown area until purchasing a building on what is now Raleigh Street. The property on Raleigh Street was sold and building began on the lots on Jones Street where John Stewart is located today. When the congregation moved into the new edifice in 1922, it was the best equipped church building for Blacks in the State of West Virginia. The church included an incredible sanctuary for worship, class rooms, office, library, kitchen and an assembly hall.

In 1919, the Methodist Church had celebrated the Centenary of Methodist home missionary endeavors, lead by African American missionary John Stewart. He spent much of his time with the Wyandott Indians in Northern Ohio. He became a household name in the Methodist Church throughout America. The Bluefield congregation and pastor wanted to create a lasting tribute to John Stewart and thus named their church John Stewart Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church. The cornerstone of the church bears the name of the great missionary to the Wyandott Indians.

For years, John Stewart was one of the leading churches in the East Tennessee Conference. The church hosted the Annual Conference in 1922, 1942, 1950 and 1957. John Stewart joined the West Virginia Conference in 1965, transferring from the former Central District Washington Conference.

John Stewart has always placed a high emphasis on community. Throughout the years, there has been an emphasis on civic responsibility, civil rights, child development, youth, family, and education. During the period referred to by many members as the “golden era” John Stewart had approximately 500 members. Today membership is 90.



John Wesley United Methodist Church, Lewisburg, Greenbrier Wesleyan District

On May 19, 1939, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the Methodist Protestant Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church joined to form the Methodist Church creating five regional jurisdictions. In addition, the Central Jurisdiction was established to include all the black conferences. The Central Jurisdiction was opposed by most blacks because it was written into the church's Constitution and it was segregated. Dr. Ramsey Bridges was one of many black leaders who labored in the Central Jurisdiction. He was District Superintendent of the Charleston District of the Washington Annual Conference in the Central Jurisdiction.

In April, 1968, at Dallas, Texas, the Methodist Church united with the Evangelical United Brethren to form the United Methodist Church. The new Constitution did not provide for the Central Jurisdiction. Black conferences were transferred into the regional jurisdictions. By 1974, all Black conferences had merged with the white conferences. The present membership of John Wesley United Methodist Church includes the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of people who worshiped in the “slave gallery.”



Jones United Methodist Church, Morgantown, MonValley District

The history of Jones United Methodist church began in 1869. A bishop told the Methodist Episcopal Church on Pleasant Street that former slaves and whites were not to worship together. Shortly after that point, the Jones African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church was established on Chestnut Street. The church survived a separation two years later. The church was involved in educational and cultural programs for the African American community, mirroring these emphases of the AME church during the period. Jones continued at the Chestnut Street location for nearly a century.



Fast-forwarding 100 years, the congregation desired something more which led to the purchase of a house with a sizable yard on Green Street in the Greenmont neighborhood of the town in 1966. In the first year, the plan was to build a new sanctuary on the lot that would be powered by solar panels, a plan developed by parishioner. After raising funds for a period, ground was broken in 1980 on the new sanctuary. Due to inadequate funding, the new addition took some time; the sanctuary was completed and finally opened in 1988. Jones UMC has provided outreach to the greater Morgantown community over its history, currently providing meeting space for two different support groups and affordable counseling services, as well as reaching out through Scott's Run Settlement House and through a well-attended Vacation Bible School that feeds the children both spiritually and nutritionally; the congregation's members are fed spiritually by the annual event and are quite proud of the event. Jones UMC continues to serve the spiritual needs of all who enter the sanctuary, regardless of their appearance.

Logan Memorial United Methodist Church, Parkersburg, Little Kanawha District



Logan Memorial United Methodist Church, located on the corner of Sixth and Ann Streets in Parkersburg, started as a Methodist Episcopal congregation in 1866. A wealthy business owner purchased property and donated it to the congregation on December 20, 1871. In less than 20 years, they began a construction project. They completed the new brick structure and dedicated it on February 13, 1892, naming it the Henry Logan Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church.

“By 1915, the membership of the church had grown to 170, and in 1916, stained glass windows were installed in the sanctuary. Over the next 70 years, the church continued as a black congregation. In 1968, two major changes took place within the church. A new pastor arrived, Rev. Margaret Marshall, a white woman, who embraced the history and culture of the church. At the same time, the congregation was open to all races, which continues today. Also, during that time period, the Methodists and Evangelical United Brethren churches merged, and has been known as Logan Memorial United Methodist Church. The declares itself as one welcoming people of all colors, ethnic groups, and sexual preferences.” Logan Memorial United Methodist Church celebrated 150 years of fellowship in December of 2016. To commemorate this occasion, the congregation enjoyed an evening of Christmas music.

Main Street United Methodist Church, Ronceverte, Greenbrier-Wesleyan District



The Black Methodist Church was first started in the late 1870's in the office of the Bowman Lumber Company, located on the upper Island Park of Ronceverte, West Virginia. When Trinity Methodist Church in Ronceverte moved, a committee from the Black Methodist Church started negotiations with the Washington Conference and the Trinity Church. The cost of purchasing the old church on Main Street was \$3,000.

In 1919, a church committee was established to raise funds for the purchase of the church. The church members planned a celebration to commemorate the landing of the African slaves at Jamestown in 1719. The celebration began with a long parade. Included in the parade was a wagon, pulled by oxen, carrying people that had been slaves. Harry Lacy drove one of the first FWD Standard Oil trucks in the parade. A large tent was erected on the brick yard grounds and visitors from Hinton, Alderson, White Sulphur, Lewisburg and other neighboring communities attended. Guest speakers were from Chicago, Illinois and local areas. Dinner was served, followed by a community sing. The highlight of the day was the burning of the mortgage for the purchase of our church building.

From 1880 to 1926, Main Street Methodist Church remained in the Washington Conference of the Central Jurisdiction. In 1920, the corner stone for the Main Street Methodist Church was laid. In 1965, due to the transition period, most Black Methodist churches in West Virginia became a part of the West Virginia Conference. In 1968, the Evangelical United Brethren and the Methodist Conference merged to become the United Methodist Church of the West Virginia Annual Conference. Consequently, Main Street Methodist Church became known as Main Street United Methodist Church in 1968. Thirty-seven ministers have served the congregation in its one hundred thirty-six years.

Mt. Pisgah United Methodist Church, Romney, Potomac Highlands District

Mt. Pisgah began with worship services as early as 1853. While property deeds were conveyed to Mt. Pisgah in 1869 and 1882, the church was built in 1886. Mt. Pisgah has maintained and made many improvements to the property. Mt. Pisgah implemented plans to upgrade the exterior with vinyl siding beginning on October 18, 1985. In the early 1990s, a heating system was donated and installed. A dining hall and bathrooms were added in 1998. Subsequent renovation plans included a tree removal project and a roof replacement. Mt. Pisgah has shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ and served as a vital witness of God's grace in the surrounding community. The congregation experienced spiritual growth under the leadership of numerous pastors. The ministries of Mt. Pisgah changed lives through worship services, baptisms, Holy Communion, Bible study, the celebration of marriage, and events. By faith, Mt. Pisgah weathered the storms of life bearing witness that with Christ, all things are possible.



St. Paul United Methodist Church, Williamsport, Potomac Highlands District



The African American Methodist congregation located at Williamsport in Grant County, have held services at least since 1872, initially in a log structure known as Waugh Chapel located near the bottom of the hill where the present church structure known as Christ Church is situated. Christ Church, a sandstone structure with horse-hair plaster interior, was constructed in 1869 for the Methodist Episcopal Church South; however, political changes in the valley following the Civil War diminished that congregation and in 1906, Trustees of the Waugh Chapel Church, purchased Christ Church along with the surrounding 2.3 acres for the sum of \$350.00, renaming the church St. Paul. St Paul is the State's only extant example of a sandstone church. It was following that purchase that a porch was added to the structure.

As was common to the three area African American Methodist churches located at Williamsport, Moorefield, Petersburg, annual all-day Camp Meetings were held at each church during the summer months. Two worship services (morning and afternoon) were held with guest ministers, special choirs, soloists, music and an enormous picnic lunch. Family members who had relocated and local people from as far as 50 miles away would return to celebrate their heritage.

In 1978, when the Grant County Board of Education decided to demolish the former segregated "Colored School," the St. Paul Trustees, all of whom had attended the school, arranged to move the frame school building, which was constructed in the 1800's using wooden pegs, to the Church lot for use as a church hall. To preserve the original construction, the building was sawn in half and set on a new foundation behind the Chapel.

Over the years the St. Paul church family has worked to preserve the original integrity of church structure by repointing the sandstone exterior and re-plastering the interior. The hardwood floors, pews and oil lighting fixtures are also original to the building. The congregation of St. Paul remains committed to providing a welcome place to worship.

Simpson Memorial United Methodist Church, Charleston, Nine Rivers District

Simpson Memorial United Methodist Church, historically known as the Simpson Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church, originated in Charleston, West Virginia. The Washington Conference (Black) of the Methodist Church was organized in 1864, one year before the Simpson group began worship services and there is no record that Simpson had an organized congregation before 1865. The Washington Conference sent Simpson its first minister in 1866 and the congregation continued to worship in the church basement of Asbury. Around 1869 the congregation moved into a building on Quarrier Street near Capitol Street. By 1870, the congregation had grown in sufficient numbers to erect a church home. Thus, the church officials purchased a lot near the corner of Quarrier and Dickinson Streets and built the first church building, a frame structure.



In January 1887, this structure, the third church home of Simpson was destroyed by fire. The reconstruction of a stately edifice began immediately on the same site and was completed in 1888, becoming one of the most outstanding Black Churches in the state and in the Washington Conference. In 1888 the church was officially named Simpson Methodist Episcopal Church in honor of Bishop Simpson.

Simpson Memorial United Methodist Church stands as a landmark to a significant era in Charleston and the Kanawha Valley. In the first half of this century, an abundant African-American population occupied the neighborhood surrounding this church building. Businesses that successfully supplied the needs of this community were housed nearby: pharmacies, grocery stores, hair salons, funeral homes, schools and other churches. Most of these institutions exist no more. Simpson Memorial is a tangible reminder of those prosperous times between 1914 and 1941.

Simpson Memorial Church survived the era of change within the community and within Methodism. On June 9, 1965, Simpson was among the congregations that transferred from the Washington Conference to the West Virginia Conference. It remains a vital congregation in the West Virginia Conference. In 2016, Simpson celebrated its 150 years of faithful service. Simpson glorified the Lord throughout 2016 with a revival, an Anniversary Banquet, concerts, special guest speakers, picnics, a Praisefest, and more. Indeed, 2016 was a year of jubilee and a time of holy conferencing at Simpson.

Trinity Unity Methodist Church, Fairmont, MonValley District

In 1869, four years after the Emancipation Proclamation, the John Wesley Methodist Episcopal Church for Negroes was organized in Fairmont, West Virginia. The church was located on Monroe Street at the site of the former Jones Chapel, where Negroes had worshiped as early as 1865. In 1911, the congregation constructed a new sanctuary at the present location on Cleveland Avenue, and the church was renamed Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church. The cornerstone of the present church edifice was laid during ceremonies on July 30, 1911 with Meridian Lodge No. 34, A.F. and A.M. The present church building, one of three Methodist Episcopal churches constructed in Fairmont in 1911, was dedicated on Sunday, October 10, 1911.



Following the unification of the three largest branches of Methodism, during the period between 1939 and 1965, the name of the church became Trinity Methodist Church (deleting Episcopal), with membership in the Central Jurisdiction, the Washington Conference, and the Charleston (WV) District. In 1964, the Washington Conference was abolished and Trinity became a member of the Northeastern Jurisdiction, West Virginia Conference, and Fairmont District. During that period, the parsonage at 11 Spence Street was sold. A parsonage (112 High Street) was purchased and some renovations made. In 1968, the church name was changed to Trinity United Methodist Church to reflect the uniting of the Evangelical United Brethren denomination with the Methodist denomination. In 1977, the church sanctuary was remodeled, with new carpet and pews being installed. In 1983, new light fixtures were installed and the vestibule was remodeled.

Since its organization in 1869, Trinity has been an important voice in the community and in the life of the Christian church. In 1978, Trinity received recognition for its leadership and contributions when it was named a Co-Church of the year by the WVUM Conference. In 1979, Trinity organized and hosted the reunion of the abolished Washington Conference Board of Education. It was a glorious occasion. Trinity continues to be concerned and involved in the struggles against hunger, racism, economic oppression, spiritual depression, educational deprivation, political apathy, defeatist attitudes, and poor self-esteem. The present-day members and worshipers, through the examples of former members, remain dedicated to the Christian vision held by those Charter members and by all of those who have called Trinity their Church home.

These are interesting times in which we live, and we remain anchored deep in God's love and care. We face the future with a clarity of vision, with confidence that we can and shall work, tirelessly and deliberately, for God's Kingdom, with faith and trust in our God "who hast brought us thus far on our way." Trinity boldly accepts the challenge of the future, with the strength of the past to push us on!

Waldon United Methodist Church, Piedmont, Potomac Highlands District



In January 1888, Trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church bought land for the church for \$150. They built a one-room wooden building on the Water Street lot. The deed stated the property would be "used, kept and maintained as a place of worship," and so it has. The church was in the Washington Conference that had been created in 1864 for African American churches.

Waldon was a part of the Central Jurisdiction, created with the 1939 merger, until the 1968 merger when it became a part of the West Virginia Conference. In 1980 it became a part of the Piedmont Charge with Trinity Church across town. Over the years, bathrooms, a kitchen, porch and entrance areas were added. Since then the church has been updated with painting, paneling, heating and cooling systems, new pews, a communion table, piano, and an outside sign.

A mini park is adjacent to Waldon Church. It provides area for numerous activities. The pavilion on that spot is the setting for many gatherings throughout the year. The Waldon Cemetery, adjacent to Philos Cemetery in Westernport, MD, was purchased about the same time as the church property. It was a wilderness, but through the labor of many people it was revived and is today a very presentable burial ground. Since becoming part of a charge with Trinity Church across town, the congregation has been served by several pastors.

St. Stephens United Methodist Church, Charleston, Nine Rivers District



St. Stephens United Methodist Church is situated in the Coal Branch Heights area of Charleston, WV. The church began as a mission project in a largely unchurched neighborhood where the population approximated 50% white and 50% black with several mixed unions. Decisions about offering a ministry in the neighborhood were based on data collected from the white population. It should be noted that many people, black or white, were not initially receptive to the outsiders coming into the community to start a new church. On September 1, 1948, the West Virginia Conference recognized and established the charge on Coal Branch. The newly created charge was named St. Stephens Methodist Church. Records from the Charleston District Conference in 1949 specify “St. Stephens will be a modest little church

in the Coal Branch Community serving 67 families” which neglected half of the community. When the building had not been constructed in 1950, many people became discouraged and lost interest in the project. After a rocky start, the project finally began to form in 1953. However, repeated attempts to start as a white congregation failed and one attempt to start as a black congregation also failed under the segregated church model. In retrospect, it failed in part because the outside organizers disrespected the culture of the community.

In 1968 and 1969, a true cross-section of the population gathered at the table of grace, black and white together but still as an outpost coordinated by a ministry team from another church. By the fall of 1969 the average Sunday School and worship attendance was 50, a sharp increase from the segregated era. Much of the gap was bridged by one African American male resident of Coal Branch Heights who became the community’s patriarch and the St. Stephens church family began to find its own path. He bridged the gap by networking with the ministries at Christ Church UMC and thereby became St. Stephens’ envoy who lived the importance of being in ministry with people in contrast to ministering to people. He also participated in the ministry at Simpson Memorial UMC and established connections with other congregations in the parish. He became the lay leader that Coal Branch Heights needed to usher them into Spirit-filled praise, true worship and a closer walk with God at St. Stephens United Methodist Church. Hence, putting the “united” in the church became St. Stephens’ epiphany, the climactic moment of revelation, change, and insight: the people needed to worship God together.

So, when people challenge St. Stephens as an African American congregation, remind them that the real birth of the congregation happened when the true nature of the community was reflected in the congregation. To this day, St. Stephens United Methodist Church remains true to the community’s DNA as a faith community, indeed a “light on a hill,” where ALL people are accepted.



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