

African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church ^[1]

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by Allyson C. Criner, 2006

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African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church is a Christian denomination dating back to 1787, when a number of black worshippers withdrew from the interracial St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia after the removal of a Black member, Absalom Jones, while he was praying. Led by Richard Allen, a local black preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church, the group formed the Free African Society and, in 1793, established the Bethel AME Church in Philadelphia. In 1816 representatives from the Bethel AME Church and African American churches in four other cities officially organized the AME Church in Philadelphia, elected Allen their bishop, and adopted the doctrine and form of government of the Methodist Episcopal Church with minimal changes.

As a result of its active role in the [antislavery movement](#) ^[5], the AME Church was restricted almost entirely to northern states during its first 50 years. After South Carolina whites came to suspect the AME Church of masterminding the thwarted Denmark Vesey plot of 1822--in which Vesey, a wealthy, formerly enslaved man, had attempted to organize a massive slave revolt to kill whites in Charleston and burn the city--slaveholders did not allow the church to operate among enslaved people in the South. Not until the Civil War and [emancipation](#) ^[6] did the AME Church advance into North Carolina and other southern states. Through its work with recently liberated Black people after the war, the denomination grew considerably. The North Carolina Annual Conference of the AME Church, organized in [Wilmington](#) ^[7] in 1868, enlarged to such an extent that the Western North Carolina Conference branch was added in 1900. In 1886 the AME Church established [Kittrell College](#) ^[8] in [Vance County](#) ^[9]; the institution provided higher education to Black people until 1975.

The *Christian Recorder*, the official organ of the AME Church, is the oldest newspaper in the United States continuously circulated by people of African descent. North Carolina, located in the church's Second Episcopal District, hosts two annual conferences: the North Carolina Conference and the Western North Carolina Conference. In the early 2000s there were more than 150 active AME churches in the state.

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