

**Commission on Black Ministries  
Report to Diocesan Convention March 2-3, 2018**

In 2015, eight of the eleven Black congregations in the Diocese of NJ were without permanent clergy, an urgent situation. Many of these congregations in their 100+ year history were regular contributors financially to the life of the Diocese. Bishop Stokes was asked to positively intervene in this situation by concerned Black Episcopalians (lay and clergy).

In response, Bishop Stokes chartered this commission with priorities to include support for recruiting the new Canon Missioner for Historically Black Churches, assessment of Black congregations needs, developing vocations and supporting Black ministries within the Diocese. The initial meeting of the Commission on Black Ministries was held on April 9, 2015. Committee members appointed to serve includes Canon Annette Buchanan as Chair, Ms. Wendy Blackman, Mr. Marcus Gales, Ms. Nataliece Moore, the Rev. Martin Oguike, the Rev. Dcn. Clive Sang, Ms. Linda Shomo, the Rev. Leroy Saunders and the Rev. Canon James Wynn.

The eleven historically Black congregations to whom these initiatives were being addressed include: St. Marks - Plainfield, St. Augustine- Atlantic City, St. Mary's - Pleasantville, St. Elizabeth- Elizabeth, St. Albans- New Brunswick, Christ the King - Willingboro, St. Augustine - Camden, St. Wilfrid – Camden, St. Thomas – Red Bank, St. Augustine, Asbury Park and Church of the Annunciation - Lawnside.

Bishop Stokes and the 2016 Diocesan Convention approved the creation of and funding for a new full-time staff position, Canon Missioner for Black Ministry to address this critical issue.

After a nationwide search, the first Canon Missioner for Black Ministry, the Rev. Brian Jemmott, began his ministry within the Diocese on February 1, 2016. In January 2017, the position of Canon Missioner for Black Ministry was eliminated as a full-time position due to diocesan budget cuts. To ensure the critical initiatives of this ministry continued, the responsibilities of Canon Missioner for Black Ministry was staffed in a volunteer role beginning March 2017 by the Rev. Deacon Clive Sang.

With the dedication and hard work of both Canon Missioners as well as the support and creativity of the Diocesan Bishop and senior staff of the diocese, 1 of the 11 Black churches is without permanent clergy (St. Wilfrid) and 1 church voluntarily closed (Church of the Annunciation). Many of the other churches, even with clergy, are struggling with issues of vitality and are in need of support.

The Commission hosted two forums within the diocese in April and October of 2017 titled "Meeting the Challenge of Church Transformation". They were developed primarily to address the needs of the historically Black congregations. Both forum were facilitated by the Very Rev. Ron Byrd Sr. and the Rev. Dr. Sandye Wilson. Topics addressed included: Stewardship, Managing Conflict, Developing Lay Leaders, Understanding the Episcopal Church. They were well attended and received positive feedback, plans are to offer additional forum in the spring and fall of 2018.