



Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME)

Headquarters

First Memphis Plaza
4466 Elvis Presley Blvd.
Memphis, TN 38116

Websites: www.c-m-e.org, www.cme-church.org, www.cmesonline.org

Statistics 2002
Source: *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches 2005*
In the United States:
850,000 Members
3,300 Congregations
34 Annual Conferences
(40 Worldwide)
9 Episcopal Districts
(10 Worldwide)

Ministry
3407 clergy
3001 serving parishes

Financial Data—
Not available.

Women in Ministry
Can women be ministers?
Yes. In 1987, the Rev. Versie P. Easter became the first woman to be appointed as a presiding elder. At this time, there are no female bishops.

Brief History

The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME) arose out of the **Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS)** during the Reformation Period after the Civil War. In 1870, 41 black leaders, many of whom were former slaves, met in Jackson, Tennessee, and with the support and guidance of the MECS voted to establish the **Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America**. In 1930, they dropped the name "in America", and in 1954 the name was changed to the **Christian Methodist Episcopal Church**. Throughout its history, the CME has retained close ties with the MECS, and its organizational structure and theology are very similar to those of the other Methodist churches.

One of the original emphases of the CME was education. During 1950s and 1960s, the CME played a major role in the struggle for civil rights. In the 1970s, community outreach emerged as another significant emphasis.

Organization

The organization of the CME is very similar to that of other Methodist denominations. The primary unit of governance of the CME is the **Annual Conference**, which is both a geographical region and an annual meeting which is presided over by a **Bishop**. These are subdivided into **Districts**, which are in turn composed of individual congregations. The CME as a whole is governed by the **General Conference**, which meets quadrennially. Delegates include both laity and ordained clergy who are elected by the Annual Conferences. Its decisions are published as the *Book of Discipline*. The judicial branch of the CME is the Judicial Council, which is elected by the General Conference to interpret the Book of Discipline and guarantee "due process" to laity and clergy. The executive branch of the CME is represented by the bishops.

District Conferences are also held once a year, and are chaired by a Presiding Elder. The local church is governed by a **Quarterly Conference**, as well as the **General Assembly** (church conference), which meets monthly.

There are two levels of ordination in the CME: the **deacon** and the **elder**. They are appointed by the Bishop and usually itinerate, or move from church to church.

1730s John and Charles Wesley begin a reform movement of the Church of England that becomes known as **Methodism**. During the 1760s, several lay Methodist groups are formed in the American Colonies, which become **The Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC)** in 1784.

1845 The MEC splits over the issue of slavery, creating the **Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS)**

1870 MECS helps African American members (mostly former slaves) to create a new denomination, called the **Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America**.

1954 Name is changed to the **Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME)**.

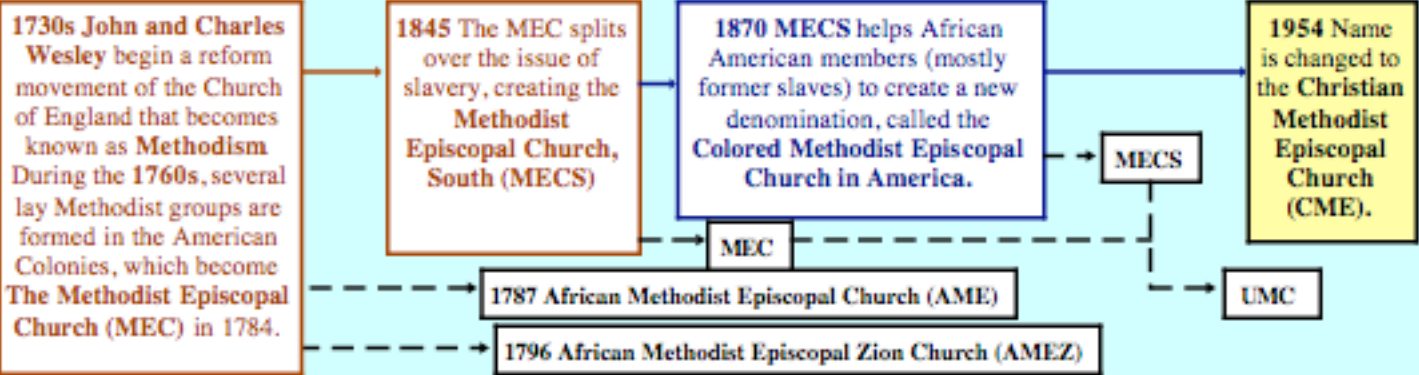
1787 African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME)

1796 African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ)

MECS

UMC

MEC



Major Doctrines/Theology

The doctrine and theology of the CME are firmly based on the theology of **John Wesley**, with its emphasis on practical divinity and personal piety. In addition, it is based in the slavery experience of African Americans, and the need to help them to adjust to life as freepersons after the Civil War. Thus it has a strong emphasis on education, spirituality, liberation, and community outreach.

The basis of the doctrine of the CME is found in the *25 Articles of Religion* which were adapted from the *39 Articles of Religion of the Church of England* and sent by Wesley to the United States. The CME recognizes four sacred creeds: the **Nicene Creed**, the **Apostle's Creed**, the **Korean Creed** (1928), and the **Modern Creed**.

Another hallmark of the CME is its emphasis on social justice. The CME **Social Creed**, adopted in 1966, reflects the understanding of God's call to minister to the needs of all people. It is considered to be as important as are the sacred creeds in terms of ministry to all human life. It addresses such issues as economics and working conditions, poverty, peace and justice, crime, social problems, and human rights from a theological perspective.

Some of the beliefs that the CME holds in common with other Methodist churches include:

- **Christian perfection** as an attainable and appropriate goal.
- **Universal Redemption**—Jesus died for all, and acceptance by Jesus is not based on status or economics or other worldly trappings.
- **Justification by Faith**—Christians are saved by faith in the grace of Jesus Christ alone, not through works. Service is an appropriate response and expression of faith.
- **The Witness of the Holy Spirit**—God is present and at work in the world, and all are children of God.
- **Falling from Grace**—It is possible for Christians to reject the grace that is given by God.
- **The Sacraments** of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Worship and Sacrament

Worship in a Christian Methodist Episcopal church is often what is considered traditional black worship, with an emphasis on preaching, ritual, and music. There is active, often vocal participation by the congregation through call and response, responsive Scripture readings, prayer, song, recitation of the creed, the shout, and testimony.

The CME church celebrates two Sacraments: **Baptism** and **Holy Communion**. Infants, youth, and adults may be baptized by pouring, sprinkling, or immersion. Holy Communion, or Lord's Supper, is celebrated monthly.

Ecumenical Involvement

The CME is an active member of the **National Council of Churches of Christ (NCCC)** and the **World Council of Churches (WCC)**.

In addition, the CME is active in the **Congress of National Black Churches**, an organization which seeks to promote unity and social issues between churches of eight historically African-American denominations.

They are also active on the **World Methodist Council**, a body that seeks to bring together Methodist and Wesleyan churches around the world. In the U.S., they are engaged in ongoing dialogues with the Pan Methodist Council. This includes the **African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME)**, the **African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ)**, and the **United Methodist Church (UMC)**.

Since 1986 the CME has been involved in ongoing dialog talks with the **AMEZ**.

Important CME Resources

The Book of Discipline of the CME Church 2002 (Memphis, Tennessee: CME Publishing House, 2002).

Book of Ritual, New and Revised, (Memphis, Tennessee: CME Publishing House).

Revised History of the C.M.E. Church, (Memphis, Tennessee: CME Publishing House).