

African American faith leaders responding to the call of creating healthy communities

Editorial

Since prior to the issued of the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), African American faith leaders have been steadfast in their pursuit of eliminating negative social determinants of health to help elevate the quality of life of the communities in which they serve. Black mutual aid societies operating during the Antebellum era promoted the importance of African Americans adhering to positive social determinants of health to enhance the overall wellbeing of each and every member, for example: The Free African Society founded by the Black faith leaders Richard Allen and Absalom Jones in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania was a non-denominational religious organization attending to the physical, spiritual, economic, educational, and social needs of the African American community. Membership in the Free African Society provided a support system for African Americans to adequately attend to their overall welfare since they were barred from the main stream society in receiving assistance. These progressive visionary Black faith leaders Richard Allen and Absalom Jones apparently understood the importance of the various contributing factors needed to achieve complete health in all aspects of life as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) which was released to the world over sesquicentennial (150) years later after the conclusion of the operations of the Free African Society. In addition to attending to the needs of the African American community, the Free African Society received notoriety for its' benevolent work as nurses and aides while assisting the Philadelphia community-at-large during the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793 which had a mortality rate of over five thousand individuals; this plague led to over twenty thousand individuals fleeing the region instead staying to help those in need. Despite attending to the welfare of the Philadelphia African American community as well as the Philadelphia community-at-large, the operations of the Free African Society were always viewed with suspicion, distain, and racism from individuals of mainstream America throughout its years of operation from 1787 to 1794. Subsequent to the Free African Society running its' course, Absalom Jones became the first African American ordained as a priest in the Episcopal Church in the United States. Richard Allen founded the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church as a result of desiring to organize a religious denomination where free Blacks could freely worship without racial oppression and Black slaves could attain a measure of dignity; subsequently, Richard Allen became the first elected and consecrated bishop in the African Methodism domination.

Currently, the AME Connectional Health Commission is a vital component of the African Methodist Episcopal Church which has a national as well as global presence. The mission statement includes the need of "promoting health as part of our faith and to care for our congregations by advocating health as a right not a privilege." The AME health ministry operating in local AME churches reflect the mission of the AME Connectional Health Commission, for example: an AME Itinerant Elder who is also a social worker founded the HOPE

Volume 5 Issue 2 - 2017

Apryl Brown

Department of Science, MPH, Wayne County Community College District, USA

Correspondence: Apryl Brown, Second Year Candidate for Itinerant Ministry, Michigan Annual Conference, African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, USA,
 Email aprylrbrown@gmail.com

Received: January 30, 2017 | **Published:** February 08, 2017

(Hope and Outreach=Powerful Expectations) ministry at Bethel AME Church in Detroit, Michigan whose purpose involves support services for care providers of loved ones with mental/behavioral health matters of concern. The Henry Ford Health Systems in Detroit, Michigan connected the members of the HOPE ministry team to the Interfaith Health & Hope Coalition who subsequently provided excellent information pertaining to educational opportunities in learning how to address mental/behavioral health concerns to those in need. Presently, the members of HOPE ministry team are preparing to receive training and certification to be properly qualified to be of service to their parishioners as well as individuals of the surrounding community. Many faith leaders including members of the clergy, missionaries, or laity who are also health care and/or public health specialists may form a health ministry to educate their parishioners as well as the community-at-large on how to engage in health related initiatives pertaining to health promotion and/or disease detection through endeavors such as health fairs, community lectures, and awareness programs of particular disorders such as diabetes mellitus, obesity, nutrition, cardiovascular diseases, or breast cancer. Furthermore, churches should not forget the dire need to address the public health matters of concern affecting the infrastructure of their communities including housing, environmental conditions, educational attainment, health, financial assistance and/or resources, and social needs through endeavors such as community outreach initiatives. It is imperative for African American faith leaders who are viewed as entrusted leaders within the African American community to continue diligently working to address the needs pertaining to the quality of life of their parishioners as well as their community-at-large.

Acknowledgements

None.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.