

Historic Churches Divided By Race In 1700's Reunite For First Time



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MOTHER BETHEL MEMBERS 'GO BACK' TO ST. GEORGE'S FOR HISTORIC JOINT SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP REUNION

TWO HISTORIC CONGREGATIONS, DIVIDED BY RACE MORE THAN 200 YEARS AGO, WILL WORSHIP TOGETHER AGAIN DURING THE “MOST SEGREGATED HOUR” IN AMERICA. On Sunday October 25th at 10:45am, members of Mother Bethel AME Church will return to St. George’s United Methodist Church, located at 235 N. Fourth Street in Philadelphia. Mother Bethel’s members are predominantly African-American and St. George’s members are mostly white and the two congregations were divided by race more than two centuries ago. This is the first time they’ve come together in over 200 years for a Sunday morning worship experience. “The incidents that pulled us apart so many years ago do not have to be as powerful as the things that brought the first black and white Methodists together,” says Rev. Alfred Day, pastor of Historic St. George’s United Methodist Church. “The experience of God’s Spirit is breaking down barriers instead of erecting them.” Rev. Mark Kelly Tyler, pastor of Mother Bethel AME church agrees. “It’s tragic that many of the divisions that led to the splitting of these two congregations over 200 years ago are still alive and well,” says Pastor Tyler. “This worship service is not just about remembering what happened, but we gather in the hope that one day such a service will not even be newsworthy because we have overcome issues of racism, sexism, classism, and all other -isms that separate us from one another and God.”

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The reunion is a part of St. George's 240th Church Anniversary Celebration and the 250th Birthday Celebration of Bishop Richard Allen, Mother Bethel's founder. In the late 1700s, Bishop Allen and other African American members walked out of St. George's and founded Mother Bethel in 1794. Mother Bethel, located at the corner of Lombard and South 6th Streets, sits on the oldest property continuously owned by African Americans. St. George's was founded in 1769 and is the nation's oldest Methodist congregation. While there have been occasions when the two churches have held ceremonial exchanges, this is the first time the congregations have actually planned a "reunion" on a Sunday morning when members of both churches will worship together at the same time. "It's a reunion, but more than that, Pastor Day said. It's COMMunion, Holy Communion, people coming together, differences and all, together at the Lord's Table, seeking peace and harmony with God and one another. You can't have one without the other."

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